BEHOLD MY SERVANT
A MESSIANIC STUDY OF
ISAIAH

Raymond Miller
ServantsPlace.org
BEHOLD MY SERVANT
A MESSIANIC STUDY OF ISAIAH

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Electronic Version (E-Book)

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BEHOLD MY SERVANT
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PREFACE

The “work” of writing a study on Isaiah is both daunting and humbling. It is daunting because of the amount of content that is in the prophecy that needs to be properly understood and accurately explained so that students of the Scriptures will have a right understanding of the message of this “prince of prophets.” It is humbling because no person, neither scholar or student, has the ability to grasp the meaning of all that Isaiah has written. Most importantly, it is humbling because those who would seek to write a study or commentary on Isaiah or any other biblical book stand in sinful shoes on holy ground. In reading the text and in writing study notes on the text, it is most apparent that the Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, calls each one of us to repent of trusting in ourselves, or others or something else and begin wholeheartedly to trust in the One who Isaiah calls with deep worship, the Holy One of Israel. We are to be holy because God is holy, and God most emphatically calls all who read the writings of His servant Isaiah to a life of holiness by “wholly” trusting in Him and seeking Him with their whole heart.

This is somewhat of a unique study. It is not a commentary in the typical way or approach that commentators (scholars) take when writing their commentaries. Scholars often write their commentaries with the intent of interacting with other scholarly works with which they agree, debate or refute. Many commentaries are written for use by the seminary student or for reference by other scholars. Other commentaries that are not directed to the academy are often called devotional or pastoral. This study of Isaiah is definitely not intended to be a scholarly work and also may not be so accurately defined as devotional or pastoral. It is somewhat exegetical and most certainly Biblical and stands as a beacon proclaiming that the Servant of the Lord is the Messiah of whom all the Scriptures confirm. It contains a great amount of Scriptural passages fully stated, rather than just having their reference noted. It also is unique in that the words of only a few Biblical scholars are quoted in a length that is not common in other publications. These lengthy excerpts are used by the kind permission of the publishers of the works cited by these scholars. They all have a common eschatological and hermeneutical viewpoint. They are first premillennial in their eschatological understanding of the Scriptures. They are second, those who hold to the highest opinion of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah and understand that the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament contain much more messianic content than many other scholars attest, even if these others are conservative and evangelical in their approach to the Scriptures. They are third, authors of excellent and highly recommended commentaries on Isaiah. Other scholars are cited in this study, but not all could be classified as dispensational in their hermeneutic approach, but their works are cited due to their value in understanding the text of Isaiah.

The Suggested Resources section of the Introduction is provided as a guide for those who would like to and have the means to acquire trusted volumes for their church or home library. Stated within the pages of the study are references to the works that are of the highest recommendation for students of Isaiah to acquire. Building a Biblical library takes many years, but trusted volumes provide a lifetime of valued resources that will aid in the proper understanding of the Scriptures. It is the prayer of this author that this study of Isaiah will be worthy enough to stand alongside those resources that are recommended and that this study will spur those who prayerfully read it and study Isaiah to trust whole heartedly in the Messiah who will most certainly come to deliver His people and establish His kingdom which will last for a thousand years on earth and then forever in the newly created heavens and earth.
INTRODUCTION

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This version was selected because of the copyright limitations from other versions that restrict the total amount of Biblical text that can be reproduced in a single published work. It is with thanks and gratitude to Dr. Ted Hildebrandt that the DASV could be used extensively in this study of Isaiah.

Studying Isaiah is one of the most uplifting, encouraging and inspiring activities a student of God’s word will ever undertake. Isaiah is the premier prophet of the Old Testament who was led by God to reveal wonderful truths about the Messiah who we come to know in the New Testament as our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. Isaiah unfolds the plan of God for the Jewish nation and for all peoples. This plan eternally conceived and marvelous in scope, involves an amazing rescue of sinful and rebellious humans who have no hope and are under the judgment of a holy and sovereign God who has decreed eternal punishment on those who have turned away from Him by worshipping worthless and false gods and have trusted in mortal man rather in the Eternal God. This plan of God involves the willing sacrifice of His humble Servant who takes upon Himself the sins of all mankind and redeems for Himself a people who will live eternally in blessed peace and safety with their Savior.

This study is called messianic because it emphasizes the messianic content of the prophecy of Isaiah. All chapters and verses of Isaiah will be carefully studied and the passages of the prophecy that are messianic in content will be covered in more detail than non-messianic content. This is not to say that the non-messianic content is not important. All Scripture is inspired by God, 2 Timothy 3:16 and every word of Isaiah is important for the student to consider. This study is designed to give emphasis on the messianic content because this emphasis is sadly overlooked by many studies and commentaries on Isaiah. This study seeks to “right the ship” by an intentional weight of comment to be given to the messianic passages.

Messianic and Messiah
For the purposes of this study, “messianic” is understood as the statements of Scripture that have to do with the Messiah. Who is the Messiah? In the Old Testament, the word used for Messiah, is mashiach, which has the meaning of “anointed.” Not all of the thirty-nine occurrences of mashiach in the Old Testament refer to the Messiah but some certainly do refer to Him. For example, a commonly understood reference to the Messiah occurs in Psalm 2:2: “The kings of the earth take their battle positions and the rulers take counsel together, against the L ORD, and against his anointed.” The context of the second psalm is royal and the King who is God’s anointed, is also called God’ Son who is to be given the nations as His inheritance and the earth as His possession. All kings are to “kiss the son” which is to honor Him; “lest he become angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath can quickly ignite. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” This could not refer to any king of Israel who would have the power to put the kings of the world to death, although some, who do not see any messianic references in the Old Testament, without any proof assign this Son as David’s son Solomon. Note: Words in bold in this paragraph and in the paragraphs below in this Introduction Section are intentional.
Michael Rydelnik, a Jewish scholar and professor of Jewish Studies at Moody Bible Institute has written an excellent book on the issue of the messianic content on the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). He rightly comments on the Old Testament’s use of the word anointed as referring to the Messiah in contrast to those who do not recognize this connection. He also acknowledges the contribution to this field of study by Walter C. Kaiser and finds additional references to the Messiah, beyond that listed by Dr. Kaiser:

“Alternatively, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. correctly asserts that the Old Testament does indeed use the word “anointed” in its technical sense of “Messiah” at least nine times out of its thirty-nine usages, citing 1 Sam 2:10, 35; Ps 2:2; 20:6; 28:8; 84:9; Hab 3:13; Dan 9:25, 26. I would also add 2 Sam 22:51; 23:1; and Ps 89:51 to Kaiser’s list. Moreover, “Messiah” is not the only or most common designation for this future royal figure. Some of the other terms used for this king include “the Branch,” “the Holy One,” and “the Servant of the Lord.” In this work, I am not limiting the discussion of the Messiah only to those passages that use the exact Hebrew term masiah, but I include all terms and passages relating to that royal figure as “messianic.” (note: Rydelnik cites the above excerpt from Walter C. Kaiser Jr. from The Messiah in the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 16. (Michael Rydelnik, The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic? B & H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2010. Page 2)

The New Testament convincingly settles the matter of this Son’s identity. Luke quotes from the second psalm as recorded in Acts 4:23-28 and reveals that the Holy Spirit spoke these words through the mouth of David and these words from Psalm 2 speak of God’s holy servant Jesus. There are many other words which refer to the Messiah including those listed below as the titles for Messiah recorded in the Book of Isaiah. Each of these titles will be studied in detail in the context of the passage where these titles occur.

The One who is the Lord’s anointed, the Messiah was born as a son to a virgin young woman Mary, as recorded in Matthew 1:18-25, thus confirming Isaiah’s prophecy about Him recorded in Isaiah 7:14. The human lineage of the Messiah is recorded in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38. The name ascribed to this Son in the New Testament is Jesus Christ. Jesus (the Lord is salvation) and Christ (the anointed One).

Matthew wrote his gospel with the purpose of explaining that this virgin born Son was the promised Messiah spoken about in the Old Testament. Just after His resurrection, Jesus explained who He was, to two men whom He met walking on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-45. Jesus answered their doubt about Him and explained, “O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?” Then beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25-27). Therefore, we can confidently and boldly declare that the Messiah spoken about in the Old Testament is the Lord Jesus Christ, the One whom God sent to be the savior of the world, (John 3:16). As noted above, an excellent discussion of the Messiah in the Old Testament is, The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic? B & H Publishing Group, 2010, by author Michael Rydelnik.

This study will emphasize the Scriptural texts in Isaiah that relate to all Messianic content in Isaiah including the Messiah’s first and second comings and all the particulars of the Messiah’s kingdom: land, blessings, peoples, government, spiritual and physical elements, promises about and all other aspects of this coming earthly kingdom. This study will also highlight the role the chosen people of God, the Jews have in the long years of their scattering among the nations while they wait for their Messiah to come. This study will also extensively cover the eschatological (end times) statements including the prophecies of the tribulation period, the millennial rule of the Messiah and the eternal state.

This study is not to be understood as a scholarly commentary or critical analysis of the content of the book of Isaiah. It also does not attempt to confront, refute or debate with any scholarly works about Isaiah except
where differences of opinion may need clarification. Those who may want to criticize this study for its messianic and premillennial perspective, should note that criticisms directed to the author of this study from those holding to non-messianic, amillennial, preterist, historic premillennial and other viewpoints will not receive response for it is decidedly not the intent of the author to engage in such debates.

This study is specifically designed to aid students and readers of the Scriptures in their grasp of the content of the book of Isaiah. References to works cited within this study are noted as: Author, Title of Resource, and page number, or for on-line works, Internet. For a full reference to the work cited, refer to the Suggested Resources section of this Introduction. This study is also not intended for use in a seminary classroom or for use by a professional Biblical scholar. It is best suited for an individual study or a study group wanting to consult a non-technical but comprehensive resource on this prophetic book. The resources stated in the Suggested Resources (see below) are stated for those individuals or churches, who, if they have the available funds, to consider acquiring as many of these resources as is practical. They should provide a life-time benefit as reference materials for their study of Isaiah and other Biblical books.

A helpful addition to this outline study is the teaching outlines that will be presented following the verse notes for each chapter and sometimes sections within a chapter. These teaching outlines will be useful for those who are leading a class or small group study on Isaiah. Pastors may want to expand and improve on them if they use these outlines when preparing sermons on the prophecy of Isaiah.

1. THE PROMINENCE OF THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH

Isaiah is perhaps the highest regarded prophet in the Old Testament. His writings embrace the status of Judah and Israel during his life on the earth which was approximately 765-685 B.C. and include prophecies of the first and second advents of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Isaiah by name is mentioned 54 times in the Bible, 32 times in the Old Testament and 22 times in the New Testament.

Isaiah is mentioned 14 times in the Gospel books, 3 times in Acts and 5 times in Romans. Jesus Christ makes reference to Isaiah in Matthew 13:14 and 15:7; Mark 7:6 and Luke 4:17-21. The Apostle Paul references Isaiah six times, Acts 28: 25-27; Romans 9:27; 9:29; 10:16; 10:20 and 15:12. One of the most significant references to Isaiah occurs in the Gospel of John. In the 12th chapter, John is discussing the disbelief of the Jews in Jesus as their Messiah. In 12:37-41, John cites Isaiah’s words from Isaiah chapters 6 and 53 thus authenticating Isaiah as the author of the entire book of Isaiah but most importantly in 12:41, John is clearly stating that Isaiah, who saw God, as recorded in Isaiah chapter 6, actually saw Jesus Christ thus giving direct Scriptural evidence that Messiah, Jesus Christ is God.

Isaiah makes prophetical mention of both the first and second appearances on earth of Jesus Christ. The first was at His birth and during His life, death and resurrection. The second appearance encompasses His return and millennial reign on earth. No other prophetic book in Scripture is as proficient in detail as Isaiah in providing direct and clear references to both of the advents of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah did not just make prophetic statements of such great importance from his own thought and ideas. In Acts 28:25 the Apostle Paul commented that it was the Holy Spirit who spoke through Isaiah. In this statement, Paul is declaring that Isaiah was writing the very words of the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture.

God often called his prophetical spokesmen as “My servants the prophets”. References: 2 Kings 9:7 and 17:13; Jeremiah 7:25, 26:5, 29:19, 35:15; 44:4; Ezekiel 38:17; and Zechariah 1:6 and “his servants the
"prophets" in Revelation 10:7. These prophets spoke the very words of God as God’s Spirit breathed into them the words that He wanted to be recorded as Scripture, as 2 Peter 1:19-21 and 2 Timothy 3:16 affirm.

2. THE AUTHOR OF THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH

Isaiah identifies himself, Isaiah 1:1 as one who had a vision which he wrote and that this vision covered the reigns of four kings of Judah, beginning in the year that king Uzziah died and that he was the son of Amoz. Other Scriptures also state that Isaiah was the son of Amoz. This is recorded 13 times, 7 times in Isaiah, 3 times in 2 Kings and 3 times in 2 Chronicles. This undoubtedly was to authenticate the prophet as a true historical figure and to remove any doubt of his stature within the ranks of Judah’s prophets. Isaiah knew the kings of Judah during his life time. He met with Ahaz, Isaiah 7:3-25. He met more often with Hezekiah and was that king’s trusted confidant. See Isaiah chapters 36 to 39. Some scholars suggest that Isaiah was related to the kingly line of Judah and may explain why he had access to kings such as Ahaz and Hezekiah. But as the significance of his lineage and of his acquaintances with the kings of Judah were and as critical as the words of Jesus Christ authenticating Isaiah as the writer of the earlier and later chapters of his prophecy, it is hard to conceive why critical Biblical scholars attest that the prophecy of Isaiah was not the work of just one individual but likely two or more different persons writing over long time periods.

It is the viewpoint of this study, that the prophet Isaiah, as he is known in Scripture, was indeed the single author under the Holy Spirit of the entire sixty-six chapters of his prophecy. It is not the intent of this study to engage in a scholarly debate of the authorship of Isaiah. For an in-depth discussion on this issue, it is best to consult the commentaries listed in the Suggested Resources of this Introduction. It should also be stated that the great scroll of Isaiah as discovered in a cave near the Dead Sea was just one continual scroll without any column break (start of new column) between what is known as chapters 39 and 40. If chapters 1-39 and 40-66 were different books the ancient scroll dated to 150 BC would surely have indicated it. But as no such break occurs in the scroll, it should be a key indicator that indeed Isaiah wrote the entire prophecy.

The New Testament writers affirm that Isaiah was the author of the prophecy bearing his name and mentioned him by name while quoting from his book, Matthew 3:3-4; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15; 15:7-9; Mark 1:2-3; 7:6-7; Luke 3:4-6; 4:17-19; John 1:23; 12:37-41; Acts 8:26-35; 28:25-27; Romans 9:27-29; 10:16, 20-21; and 15:12. One very significant quotation regarding Isaiah in the New Testament is John 12:41, “Isaiah said these things, because he saw his glory and spoke about him.” Not only does John affirm that Isaiah was the author of his prophecy but that when Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple He saw the glory of Christ (his glory) which meant that it was the second person of the trinity that Isaiah saw in the temple. If Jesus Christ believed Isaiah was the sole author of his prophecy, see verses above, then by what authority do men who are critical of the Bible have in publishing that he did not? Who do we trust, Jesus Christ or the schemes of men? This question could also be used as a statement of the theme of the prophecy of Isaiah.

Regarding the prophet, a little is revealed to us in his writings. As stated above, Isaiah was the son of Amoz and lived most likely within the walls of Jerusalem. Isaiah’s name had the meaning of “the Lord is salvation” which sets the title for his prophetic writings. Isaiah was married and called his wife “the prophetess” in Isaiah 8:3. It is not known if Isaiah’s wife also held the office of a prophet or if this was a designated name with the meaning that she was married to a prophet. Isaiah and his wife had at least two sons. The first was named “Shear-jashub” which had the meaning of “a remnant will return,” Isaiah 7:3. This name had great significance for it spoke of the great care of God in preserving the lineage of His chosen people and in particular of those who are faithful to Him.
The second child was named “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” which was a name given to this boy by the Lord, Isaiah 8:1-4. The name had the meaning of “swift to the booty-speedy is the prey” which related to the destruction by Assyria of the Syria-Israel alliance which was threatening to defeat Judah and remove king Ahaz from the Davidic throne. Isaiah recognized the special significance of the names of his family, “Look, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and harbingers in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion,” Isaiah 8:18.

Specific details of Isaiah’s life are recorded in chapter 6, in which it is described where he met the Lord, the Messiah. Chapter 7 describes Isaiah’s meeting with king Ahaz. In Isaiah, 20:1-6, the prophet was requested to be “naked and barefoot” for three years as a sign against Egypt and Ethiopia (Cush). Isaiah sent a written note to king Hezekiah, Chapter 37, to inform the king of the Lord’s answer to the king’s prayer for preservation in the face of the impending assault by the Assyrians. In chapter 38, (chapters 38-39 chronologically occurred before chapters 36-37), Isaiah met with king Hezekiah during the king’s illness. Finally, in chapter 39, (in Isaiah’s chapter renderings but not chronologically) Isaiah met with king Hezekiah again regarding the king’s most unfortunate meeting with the envos from Babylon.

3. THEMES OF THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH

One of the questions someone may ask is: what is Isaiah’s prophecy all about? A very brief statement should include that, Isaiah is about the judgment of God on the sinful rebellion of the Jews and the Gentiles and God’s graceful provision of a Savior and great King to all peoples, so that all who repent and trust in this Savior will live in His earthly messianic kingdom and then eternally with Him. Isaiah could rightfully be entitled, the Gospel according to Isaiah. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy these words, “from early childhood (you) have known the Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15. Paul is referring to the Old Testament writings and no more clearer statement of salvation can be found in the Old Testament than in the prophecies of Isaiah. One of the great delights of studying Isaiah is to be introduced to the beloved Servant of God and sense the care and concern that the Father has for His Son.

The reason this study of Isaiah is entitled Behold My Servant is that in Isaiah, God the Father reveals to the world the person and ministry of His Son, the Messiah, whom God calls His Servant. Four significant passages in Isaiah speak specifically about the person and ministry of the Servant: Isaiah 42:1-13; 49:1-13; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12. Many other passages and verses also contain prophetic details about the Servant, the Messiah, including His role, His ministry and His kingdom.

Some Suggested Comparative and Contrasting Themes of Isaiah:
1a: The holiness of God
1b: The sinfulness of God’s covenant people (and all peoples)

2a: God the only God to be worshiped
2b: The idolatry of God’s covenant people (and all peoples)

3a: God alone to be trusted for salvation.
3b: Judah and Israel seeking pagan nations for help

4a: The blessings of God on the faithful
4b: The judgment of God on the wicked
5a: The calling and ministry of the prophet Isaiah
5b: The calling and ministry of the Servant Messiah

6a: The promised blessings from the sacrifice of the Messiah
6b: The promised blessings in the kingdom of the Messiah

A few selected major theological themes are discussed briefly below. This discussion is not intended to highlight all of the significant themes of Isaiah. For a comprehensive discussion, refer to Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, New American Commentary, 2 Volumes, B&H Publishing Group, Vol. 1: 2007; Vol. 2: 2009. The few selected themes discussed below are intended as an introduction to the greatness of the theological content of Isaiah. Further discussion on all major themes will be provided as the study proceeds from chapter 1 to chapter 66 of the prophecy of Isaiah.

**Sin**
The word sin can be understood as representing the evil thoughts and acts of those who are not faithful to God. There are several Hebrew words for sin in the Old Testament and if distilled into a few words they have the meaning of “missing the mark,” “rebellion,” “disobedience,” and “corruption.” Isaiah describes the sinfulness of God’s covenant people with numerous words that portray just how far they have wandered away from the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah begins and ends his prophetic writings with the theme of sinfulness. In the first chapter the prophet provides a listing of several sins of God’s people and in the last verse of the last chapter, the final solution to those who never repent from their sins is described. In the first chapter alone at least nineteen descriptive words are given to describe the sinfulness of the children of God. This first chapter acts as a catalog of the evil thoughts and actions of God’s covenant people.

Their sinfulness causes God to lament that He had had enough of their sacrifices, offerings, attendance for worship in the temple courts and observances of feasts and festivals and the calling of assemblies. The first chapter also describes God’s judgment on those who do not repent and turn to Him and His merciful purpose in redeeming His people so they will walk in righteousness.

Throughout the remainder of the book, Isaiah repeats this grand contrast. A passage of judgment and retribution for sinfulness is often followed by a beautiful description of salvation. Although sinful and disobedient to Him, God does not forsake or reject His chosen people. He denounces their actions with righteous indignation and tells them these actions will have the most severe consequences, but He does not leave them without hope. The hope He gives them is another of the great theological themes of the book of Isaiah: salvation.

**Salvation**
Beginning with the name of Isaiah, meaning: *The Lord is Salvation*, the great theme of salvation is interwoven throughout the Book of Isaiah. The theme of salvation in Isaiah is expressed with several words: salvation, save, saved, Savior, redeemed, Redeemer, redemption, ransom, ransomed, rescue, rescued, protect, protection, deliver, deliverance, delivered, delivers, trust, trusts, believe, believed. Other related words are faithful, faithfully, faithfulness, and truth. While many words refer to God’s protection from the enemies of His people, a great many references are clearly salvific in the eternal sense of salvation as fully developed in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul was likely referring to the Book of Isaiah when he reminded his young protégé Timothy: “that from early childhood have known the Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15.
The word “Redeemer” ga-al is a precious word referring to the saving acts of the Messiah as a kinsmen-redeemer (family redeemer) to His people. This word occurs in 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16 and 63:16. The word “redeemed,” also translated from ga-al is closely related and occurs in 35:9; 43:1; 44:22, 23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 62:12 and 63:9. All words referring to the salvific works of the Messiah occurring in Isaiah will be discussed in their context within this study.

The Holy One of Israel

One of the most noted themes of Isaiah is the title of the Lord as “the Holy One of Israel.” This name that God ascribes to Himself points to His holiness as being descriptive of God Himself. It is almost impossible to describe God for no one can see Him for He is a Spirit but if there is one descriptive term that is allowed, holiness would most likely be chosen as the most appropriate choice. In designating this title for Himself, God thereby sets a standard for His people to follow as Leviticus 11:44-45 states, “For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy because I am holy. You must not defile yourselves with any manner of swarming thing that creeps on the ground. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. Therefore you are to be holy, because I am holy.” This great theme of the holiness of God is most pronounced in Isaiah 6, where the meeting between the Lord (Messiah) and Isaiah took place. Isaiah witnessed a life-changing event. Standing above the Lord were Seraphim (angelic beings), crying out to each other, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3).

This descriptive title for the Lord, The Holy One of Israel is first recorded in Isaiah 1:4 and occurs 25 times in the prophetic writing of Isaiah: 1:4; 5:1, 19; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14. God is also described as the “Holy One of Jacob” in 29:23; the “Holy One” in 10:17; 40:25; 43:15 and 49:7; and “whose name is holy” in 57:15.

The Remnant

It is critically important for those who study Isaiah to understand the importance Isaiah gives to the faithful remnant who are those who remain faithful to their Messiah and who have faith in Him. The remnant can be understood as those, like their father Abraham who “believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6), and those whom the Prophet Habakkuk described in Habakkuk 2:4 as righteous: “the righteous will live by his faithfulness” (or live by his faith).

The first mention of the remnant in Isaiah occurs in 1:9: “Unless the LORD of hosts had left us a few survivors” The word “survivors” in Isaiah 1:9 is discussed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9:29 where he expresses it as “descendants” with the implication that these people are the faithful remnant that the Lord has preserved for Himself. The first mention in the Scriptures of these faithful people occurs in 1 Kings 19:18. In Isaiah, the word “remnant” occurs in 10:20, 21 (twice), 22; 11:11, 16; 28:5; 37:31, 32; and 46:3. One of the most significant occurrences of the word “remnant” is recorded in Isaiah 10:20-22 in which Isaiah explains that although the people of Israel may be numerous, only a remnant within them will return to God. The Apostle Paul explains within the context of saving faith, “Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel, “If the number of the children of Israel are as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved,” Romans 9:27.

The Kingdom of the Messiah

More is revealed about the coming Messianic kingdom in Isaiah than in any other book in the Bible. Isaiah could rightfully be called the “Book of the Kingdom.” Many aspects of the Messianic kingdom are revealed in Isaiah that are not recorded in any other Scriptural book. Isaiah, throughout his book, reveals grand themes and minute details about Messiah’s kingdom. Beginning as early as the second chapter, Isaiah seemingly was eager to tell his audience about their glorious future in the last days.
Entire chapters and significant parts of other chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy are devoted to describing the details of the kingdom. These descriptions of the kingdom include: the gathering of the faithful remnant from the nations of the world to live and worship in the kingdom; the peacefulness and safety of the kingdom including the taming of wild beasts, the righteous government of the kingdom; the place of Gentiles within the kingdom; the absence of any sorrow or mourning by kingdom residents; the giving of long life to those who are faithful kingdom citizens; the place of Jerusalem and Mount Zion as the capital of the kingdom; everyone in the kingdom will know their Messiah; and there are many other descriptions. But, the most important description by Isaiah of this kingdom is that the Head of the kingdom is the Messiah. Isaiah presents the Messiah throughout His book so that all who read or study His prophecy will be presented with a most profound truth which is, the need to trust and have faith in the Messiah for salvation.

Covenant
Dispensational Bible scholars usually identify five or six covenants: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, (Priestly), Davidic, and New. Some understand that the priestly covenant is incorporated in the mosaic covenant and others attest that it should be understood as a separate covenant. The word covenant, Hebrew Berit, occurs 12 times in the prophecy of Isaiah, 24:5; 28:15; 28:18; 33:8; 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 56:4; 56:6; 59:21; and 61:8. Nine of these occurrences can be identified with the covenants stated above, while three, 28:15, 18 and 33:8 have nothing to do with God’s covenants. It is important for the student of the Scriptures to understand that God framed His relationship with His people based upon the covenants He made with them. That is why throughout this study, the chosen people of God, the Hebrews, often referred to in the Old Testament as Israel or Jacob, are referred to as God’s covenant people. Thus, the covenants are God’s foundational “documents” which state first, His relationship with His people; second, the promises made to them and blessings for them, third, what is required of them; and fourth, a covenant formula, “they shall be my people and I shall be their God.” The Noahic, Abrahamic, Priestly, Davidic and New covenants are understood as “unconditional” in the sense that God will be faithful to fulfill His covenant promise even though His covenant people would be unfaithful to Him. The Mosaic Covenant was “conditional” and God’s covenant people were unable to faithfully adhere to its provisions and regulations. The Mosaic covenant was “replaced” by the New Covenant which was to be eternal in its duration. Specific mention of each covenant and its importance will be discussed throughout this study.

Of particular importance to understanding the “theology” of Scripture is God’s promise of the New Covenant. God stated in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8, in speaking to His Servant, the Messiah that “I will give you as a covenant for the people.” The central teaching of the New Covenant in the Old Testament is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-34. During His first advent, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ declared, as recorded in Luke 22:20, that “This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.” The apostle Paul also referenced this saying of Christ in 1 Corinthians 11:25. See also 2 Corinthians 3:6. The writer of Hebrews also discussed the new covenant and called Christ as the believer’s High Priest the “Mediator of a better covenant.” (NKJV). The only possible way for humans to have an eternal relationship with the triune God and have their sins forgiven and have a righteous standing before God, is for them to participate in the New Covenant is by believing (having faith) in Christ as the Son of God who shed His blood as an atoning sacrifice for their sins, Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Overarching Theme of Isaiah and the Bible: God’s Glory
As discussed often in this study the reason why God created the heavens and the earth was so that His glory would be displayed and declared in the heavens and the earth. Some people may conclude from this statement, that God is totally self-absorbed and self-glorifying. When a contemplative study of the Scriptures is conducted, the fact of God’s seeking to have His glory displayed and declared becomes apparent. For example, see John 8:50. God seeks to glorify the highest and most exalted One and the One most worthy of praise who has ever lived. Since God is absolutely holy and righteous and does not sin and cannot sin, it is
not wrong or sinful for God to glorify the One who is most exalted and worthy of praise, Himself. To achieve this purpose, God spread out the heavens above to declare His glory, Psalm 19:1. Humans were also created for His glory, Isaiah 43:7. Humans were created as God’s image bearers to subdue and rule over the earth, Genesis 1:27-28. God desired that His image bearers would willingly trust in Him for guidance in all aspects of their lives and would willingly and passionately obey, worship, praise and glorify Him. The fall of man into sin, Genesis 3 was not a surprise to God. Sinful humanity could not righteously do all that God desired from His image bearers including the righteous display and declaration of God’s glory. God’s eternal plan involved a kingdom from which He could control all aspects of His creation including the actions of His image bearers. God’s eternal plan involved the provision of eternal spiritual salvation for His image bearers, so they could be declared righteous and thus righteously fulfill all God desired for them. God’s eternal plan also involved an eternal state, called heaven in which God would live with His image bearers forever and also in which His image bearers could forever display and declare His glory.

Many may state that salvation is the grandest and overarching purpose of God’s creative acts. Although salvation is absolutely critical and necessary for humans to enjoy God’s presence forever, its purpose serves God’s greater plan for creation. One way to look at this is to ask “why?” for several aspects of God’s creation. For example, why did God create humans? Why did God provide salvation, sufficient for eternal life for fallen humanity? Why did God create an eternal state in which redeemed humanity could exist with Him forever? The ultimate and most God honoring answer to these “why” questions is that God created them so that His glory could be righteously displayed and declared to all creation by His image bearers, forever. Another important question is “what?” What did it “cost” God to accomplish this plan? The Scriptures are full of the answer to this question. It cost God the giving and sacrificing of His only and unique Son. God’s Son needed to be born in the humble form of a human and live a short life during which He was put to death (slaughtered) as an atoning sacrifice, carrying upon Himself the sins of all humans forever, as a just and righteous appeasement of God’s wrath upon those who committed sin. This sacrificial atoning sacrifice of God’s Son was necessary so that any of God’s image bearers, who had faith in the Son’s atoning sacrifice on their behalf, would be declared righteous by God, so they could live with God forever and fulfill their role of righteously displaying and declaring God’s glory to all creation forever.

**Comprehensive and Unifying Theme: God Himself**

Complementing the overarching theme in Isaiah, discussed above, is the revelation of God Himself who is described in a great variety of majestic names and acts on behalf of His chosen people and all humanity. God elected to select one people from all the peoples of the earth, to be the people through whom He would reveal His glory, His name and His loving salvific purposes to all peoples of the earth. The names for God, as recorded in Isaiah, reveal much about His characteristics (attributes). One of the most sacred names, as described above is “the Holy One of Israel” which both is a descriptive name for who He is (His holy nature) and a calling for His people to be holy. The sad reality of the people of Judah in Isaiah’s day is that they were most unholy and had rebelled against God and scorned His loving care for them.

Other descriptive names for God are listed below and each of these names will be studied in detail as this study of Isaiah proceeds from the first chapter to the last. The most exalted name for God is undoubtedly “Yahweh” translated as LORD in English versions of Isaiah. This most sacred name depicts God as Israel’s covenant keeping Sovereign who will never forsake His people nor forget to keep all of His promises to them. Many of the promises (of all the Scriptures) are recorded in Isaiah to the praise of God the Messiah.

4. **MESSIANIC PROPHECIES IN ISAIAH**

The Book of Isaiah is rich in prophecies regarding the first and second advents of the Messiah.
Major Prophecies fulfilled at the First Advent of the Messiah:

Applied and Fulfilled Prophecies:
When considering what prophetic statements in Isaiah were fulfilled at the time of Messiah’s birth, His first earthly ministry, His death, resurrection and ascension, it is necessary to determine if the New Testament writers gave an actual fulfillment of the prophecy or applied the prophecy to the subject they were discussing. Some authors see a “double fulfillment” of an Old Testament prophecy relating both to the first and second advents of the Messiah. Others would not necessarily agree with the hermeneutical understanding of a “double fulfillment” but would describe some citations in the New Testament as applying to a specific event such as a sermon, speech or a discussion but realizing the fulfillment of the prophecy would come at a far future time, or last days, in what many scholars describe as the eschaton.

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<td>6:10</td>
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<td>11:1</td>
<td>A shoot from Jesse (David’s lineage)</td>
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<td>11:2</td>
<td>Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him (Also, during the Messianic Kingdom, the Spirit will rest upon the Messiah)</td>
<td>Matthew 3:16; 12:18; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22, John 1:32-34</td>
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<td>28:16</td>
<td>The Corner Stone, rejected</td>
<td>Matthew 21:42-44</td>
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<td>29:18</td>
<td>The deaf to hear, the blind to see (this will also occur in the Messianic Kingdom: Isaiah 35:5)</td>
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<td>Preaching: Prepare the way for Messiah (this will be completely fulfilled by Elijah)</td>
<td>Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23</td>
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<td>Prior to the Messiah’s second advent Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6</td>
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<td>The Messiah’s calling and Ministry</td>
<td>Applied by Matthew 12:18-21 but will be completely fulfilled in the Messianic Kingdom.</td>
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<td>42:1</td>
<td>I have put my Spirit upon Him</td>
<td>Matthew 12:18; Also, see above for Isaiah 11:2</td>
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<td>50:7</td>
<td>set His face light flint (determined)</td>
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<td>message about Messiah not believed</td>
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<td>53:4</td>
<td>carried our griefs and sorrows</td>
<td>applied by Matthew for healing: Matthew 8:16-17</td>
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<td>53:4-6</td>
<td>put to death for the world’s sins declared: Matthew 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31:34</td>
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<td>53:5</td>
<td>by His stripes, we are healed 1 Peter 2:24.</td>
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<td>53:6</td>
<td>(salvation from sin, not physical healing) world’s iniquities upon the Messiah 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 1 John 2:2</td>
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<td>53:7-8</td>
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<td>Matthew 26:63; 27:12; Mark 14:61; 15:5; Luke 23:9; John 19:19</td>
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<td>53:7</td>
<td>Messiah silent before accusers 1 Peter 2:23</td>
<td>John 19:9; 1 Peter 2:23</td>
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<td>53:9</td>
<td>no deceit in Messiah 1 Peter 2:22</td>
<td>1 Peter 2:22</td>
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<td>53:10</td>
<td>Father’s will to put His Son to death Messiah’s death a guilt offering Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42; John 12:27; Acts 2:23</td>
<td>John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7</td>
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53:10 Messiah will prolong His days Mark 16;19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9; 5:31; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; 20-28
53:11 Satisfaction of the Messiah Hebrews 1:1-4
53:11 The Servant (Messiah) to justify the many by bearing their sins. Romans 3:21-26; 5:17-21; 2 Corinthians 5:21
53:12 Messiah’s glorious future Hebrews 1:1-4
53:12 Messiah’s willing death Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 10:11-18
53:12 Messiah bore people’s sins see above: Isaiah 53:11
55:3 Messiah to be resurrected Acts 13:34

Major Prophecies Relating to the Second Advent of the Messiah

The prophecies in the Book of Isaiah regarding the events just prior to, regarding the return of the Messiah, and all that follow that event are very numerous. Often there is no corresponding reference in the New Testament as Isaiah was given prophetic truth about these events that was not repeated in the New Testament. Prophecies in Isaiah regarding the “last days” cover many topics including: the tribulation period, the events surrounding the return to the earth of the Messiah, the destruction of the enemies of Israel, the procession of the liberated Jews to Mount Zion, the gathering of the Jews (the faithful remnant) from all nations to go to Jerusalem, the establishment of the government of the Messianic kingdom, life and worship in the Messianic kingdom, and descriptions of the eternal heavenly state. Instead of describing every minute detail about these yet-to-be fulfilled prophecies a general description will be provided as this short study proceeds through the Book of Isaiah. It should be noted that not all scholars or students of Scripture agree with the following future Messianic description of Isaiah’s prophecy. Many apply the “returning” passages of the remnant to the return to Jerusalem of the exiles in Babylon. The context of each passage must be studied to discern the intent of the prophetic message that was given to Isaiah by the Lord.

Isaiah Description of the “last days” Prophecy

1:9 Survivors (first mention of the remnant in Isaiah)
1:24-27 Zion to have righteous rulers and judges and a faithful people
2:1-4 The Messiah to rule in His peaceful kingdom from Zion, the mountain of the Lord
2:5-3:26 God will purge Judah the earth of the wicked and He will be exalted “in that day”
4:2-4 The Branch of the Lord, the holy remnant and the glory over Mount Zion
6:11-13 Desolation of the cities and a promise of a remaining “holy seed”
8:9-22 Destruction of Israel’s enemies and a sanctuary for the remnant of Israel
9:1-7 The righteous everlasting reign of the Son (the Messiah)
10:20-22 A remnant will return to Israel
11:1-10 The Messiah and His peaceful and righteous kingdom
11:11-16 The return of the faithful remnant
12:1-6 The remnant praise God for His salvation and comfort
13:6-16 Judgement of God of the earth during the “day of the Lord”
14:1-3 God’s people to be settled in their own land
14:4-23 Death of the king of Babylon (Antichrist) and destruction of his kingdom
17:7-8 All will have regard for the Holy One of Israel
18:4-7 Peoples of Cush to bring gifts to Mount Zion
19:1-17 Destruction of Egypt
19:18-24 Egypt to be saved and will (with Assyria and Israel) worship the Lord of hosts
21:1-10 The fall of Babylon
24:1-23 God’s judgement on the earth
25:1-12 Praise for the Lord’s salvation
26:1-21 Protection of God’s people during the tribulation and promises of resurrection
27:1-13 Restoration of Israel and gathering of the remnant
28:14-29 The righteous rule of the Messiah and Israel’s pact with the Antichrist
29:1-24 Future blessings and discipline of Ariel (Jerusalem)
30:19-26 Removal of idols and Restoration of the land
32:1-20 The righteous and peaceful reign of the King (Messiah)
33:1-24 God’s future judgement and blessings to Zion
34:1-15 The day of the Lord’s vengeance for the cause of Zion
34:16-17 Those who will live forever in the land
35:1-10 The joyful future of Zion
40:1-2 Comfort for all in Messiah’s kingdom
40:3-5 A way cleared for God – His glory to be revealed (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6)
40:9-11 Preaching the Gospel to the Jews, God will come with might, As a shepherd, The Messiah will gather His people and care for them (in His kingdom)
40:31 Those who wait – for the Lord’s return – will be strong
41:1 The nations will be judged
41:2-5 The coming of Messiah (Some ascribe these verses to Cyrus)
41:8-16 The Jews called by God will defeat their enemies by His strength
41:17-20 The blessing of God on the natural world in the Messianic kingdom
42:1-4 The Messiah will establish justice in His future kingdom
42:5-7 The Messiah will be a light and a covenant to the people
42:10-13 Praise to the Lord who will come as a warrior and defeat His enemies
43:1-2 The remnant will be protected when they return to Zion
43:3-4 Other nations given as a ransom for the remnant
43:5-7 The remnant will be gathered from the nations
43:14 Babylon to be defeated
43:19-21 The desert and barren places will be watered, the remnant to praise God’s praise
44:1-5 Nature refreshed and the remnant will belong to the Lord
44:21-23 The redemption of the remnant
45:8 The earth to receive righteousness
45:22-25 The remnant to be justified and will glory in the Messiah
46:13 The Messiah’s salvation for Zion and glory for Israel
49:2 The Messiah’s mouth like a sharp sword
49:5-6 The Messiah to gather the remnant, to restore them
49:6 The Messiah to be a light to the nations so that His salvation reaches to the all the earth
49:7 The Messiah will receive the worship of kings and princes
49:8 The Messiah to be a covenant to His people, to restore the land for the remnant
49:9-13 The remnant will safely come to Zion
49:14-26 Zion to be populated; the land crowded; Gentiles to bring the remnant to Zion, The Messiah will protect the remnant from their enemies
51:1-5 Blessings of the Messianic kingdom
51:6 The earth and sky to be removed but Messiah’s salvation and righteousness to last forever
51:7-11 Promises of God’s protection, the remnant to return to Zion
51:12-23 The remnant set free from the horrors of the tribulation, Zion to be the people of God
52:1-3 The holy to inhabit Zion
52:7-12 The Messiah to restore and will reign in Zion
52:13 The exaltation and honor of the Messiah
52:15 The rulers of the world will understand God’s purposes and be silent before the Messiah
53:10 The rewards of Messiah’s sacrificial work
53:12 The rewards of Messiah’s sacrificial work
54:1-6 The expansion of the land of Israel in the Messianic kingdom
54:7-17 The Messiah’s love and protection for His people during the Messianic kingdom
55:1-13 Blessings of the Messianic kingdom, the accomplishment of God’s Word
56:1-9 Blessings in the Messianic Kingdom to all who love and obey the Messiah
59:17b-21 The Messiah to come in vengeance. The Messiah as Redeemer will come to Zion.
60:1-9 Blessings in the Messianic kingdom, the sons of the remnant to be taken to Zion.
60:10-22 Peace and security in the Messianic kingdom, the remnant to be righteous
61:2-3 The Messiah to proclaim the day of vengeance of the Lord, to comfort those who mourn
61:4-9 The remnant to have a double portion in the land and have everlasting joy
61:10-11 The remnant to rejoice in their Messiah and exult in Him
62:1-5 Zion to be a delight to the Lord
62:6-12 Blessings of the Messianic kingdom. The remnant to be called the holy people.
63:1-6 The return of the Messiah as a victorious warrior in the day of vengeance.
65:9-10 The remnant to inherit the Messianic kingdom
65:11-16 The remnant to be blessed but the wicked to be destroyed
65:17-18 The new heavens and the new earth
65:19-25 Blessings: gladness, long life and peace in the Messianic kingdom
66:10-14a Blessings in the Messianic kingdom: joy, comfort, peace, gladness
66:14b-17 The Messiah to execute judgment on His enemies
66:18-21 The remnant to declare the Messiah’s glory and worship on the holy mountain
66:22-24 The remnant and name of Israel to endure forever, all will bow before the Messiah

5. NAMES FOR GOD IN ISAIAH

One of the most beloved and notable characteristics of the prophecy of Isaiah is the names God and others designate for God. Each name has a specific meaning. Some describe God’s attributes while others describe his acts on behalf of His people and all peoples of the earth. Of these names, perhaps the most exalted is “Holy” for it designates His essential being. Other distinctive names are Creator, Redeemer (kinsmen to Israel), Savior and King. The meanings for the names listed below are provided in the notes.

**Names for God** include (not an exhaustive list):
Creator, Creator of Israel, Creator of the ends of the earth, Everlasting God, Everlasting Rock, Exalted One, Father, God, God of all the earth, God of Israel, God of justice, God of truth, God of your father David. God of your salvation, God the Lord, Holy God, Holy One, Holy One of Israel, Holy One of Jacob, King, King of Israel, King of Jacob, Lord, Lord God, Lord God of hosts, Lord God of Israel Lord God the Holy One, Lord of hosts, Lord the Redeemer of Israel, Lord your God, Lord your Maker, Lord your Redeemer, Maker of Israel, Mighty God, Mighty One of Israel, Redeemer, Rock of Israel, Rock of your refuge, Savior, The Majestic One The Rock from which you were hewn. (An Exhaustive Concordance will readily reveal the verses where these names for God are recorded by Isaiah).

**Names for the Messiah the Son of God in Isaiah** include:
Branch of the Lord: 4:2
The King: 6:5
The Lord of hosts: 6:5
Eternal Father: 9:6
Immanuel: 7:14; 8:8
Mighty God: Isaiah 9:6, 10:21
Light of Israel: 10:17
His Holy One: 10:17
Holy One of Israel: 10:20
Mighty to save: 63:2
My Servant: Isaiah 42:1
Prince of Peace: 9:6
Redeemer: 41:14
Savior: 43:3
Servant: 49:5-7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11
Wonderful Counselor: 9:6

**Other descriptive terms and active phrases for the Messiah**
(not an exhaustive list):
The God of Jacob: 2:3
A great light: 9:2
A righteous judge: 11:4
Righteous and faithful: 11:5
The root of Jesse: 11:10
A signal for the peoples: 11:10
A righteous king: 32:1
The first and the last: 44:6
The maker of all things: 44:24
His mouth like a sharp sword: 49:2
A select arrow: 49:2
God’s glory: 49:3
Honored in the sight of the Lord: 49:5
My God is my strength: 49:5
A light to the nations: 49:5
The despised One: 49:7
The One abhorred by the nation: 49:7
The Servant of rulers: 49:7
A covenant to the people: 49:8
A comfort to His people: 49:13
A compassion to His afflicted: 49:13
Sustainer of the weary: 50:4
High and lifted up and greatly exalted: 52:13
To sprinkle (startle) many nations: 52:15
Despised and forsaken by men: 53:3
A man of sorrows: 53:3
He bore our griefs: 53:4
He carried our sorrows: 53:4
Smitten of God and afflicted: 53:4
Pierced through for our transgressions: 53:5
Crushed for our iniquities: 53:5
By His scourging, we are healed: 53:5
Oppressed and afflicted: 53:7
Cut off from the land of the living: 53:8
No deceit in His mouth: 53:9
A guilt offering: 53:10
Will justify many: 53:11
Will bear their iniquities: 53:11
He bore the sin of many: 53:12
Interceded for the transgressors: 53:13
The anointed One: 61:1
The One who is majestic in His apparel: 63:1
His own arm brought salvation: 63:5

Names for the Spirit include:
His Spirit: 134:16; 48:16
Holy Spirit: 63:10-11
My Spirit: 30:1; 42:1; 44:3; 59:21
Spirit of the Lord: 11:2; 40:13; 61:1; 63:14
the Spirit: 32:15
6. ISAIAH QUOTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Many New Testament writers quoted from the Book of Isaiah. The list below contains the direct quotes from Isaiah that are found in the New Testament and there are many others (not listed below) where the writers of the New Testament have alluded to Isaiah without a direct quote. The letters LXX refer to the Old Greek Version of the Old Testament, often known as the Septuagint from which some quotes in the New Testament were derived. The New Testament writers often applied the text from Isaiah which is why the translation from the O.T. in Hebrew does not always appear to be the exact same when it is written in the N.T. Greek.

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<td>22:13</td>
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<td>25:8</td>
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<td>26:20</td>
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<td>27:9</td>
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<td>28:16</td>
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<td>Matthew 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7</td>
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<td>Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25</td>
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<td>52:7</td>
<td>Romans 10:15</td>
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7. HISTORICAL

Isaiah’s prophetic ministry began during the reign of Judean king Uzziah, (in the year king Uzziah died, 740 B.C.) and continued during the reigns of Judean kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. By recording the incident of the death of king Sennacherib of Assyria, in 681 B.C. it is evident that he lived into the days of the Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah. Manasseh ruled from 695-642 B.C and it is quite likely that Isaiah met his death during Manasseh’s reign. Tradition asserts that Isaiah was killed by being sawn in two while hiding in a hollow tree. It may be possible that Hebrews 11:37 is a reference to the manner of Isaiah’s death but this is uncertain.

Isaiah received his call to a prophetic ministry in the year, king Uzziah died in 740 B.C. He may have continued this ministry up until the death of king Hezekiah in 686 B.C. Isaiah’s prophecy contains reference to Persian king Cyrus (44:28; 45:1) whose army defeated Babylon in 539 B.C. and to the release of the exiles from Babylon, who were allowed to return to Jerusalem, following the decree from Cyrus in 538 B.C. For a time-line chart of important dates in Isaiah, refer to Thomas Constable, *Dr. Constable’s Notes on Isaiah*, Historical Background and Date, Introduction Section. (Internet Version: www.soniclight.com)

Isaiah was not alone as God’s spokesman to His people during the eventful times of the eighth century B.C. In Judah, Micah ministered from (approximately) 735-710 B.C. Some of Micah’s prophetic words were very similar to that of Isaiah as a comparison between Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 reveal. Two other prophets were God’s voice to the northern kingdom during this period. Amos ministered to Israel (approximately) from 763 to 755 B.C. and Hosea (approximately) from 755 to 710 B.C. When studying Isaiah, it is helpful to also read these three other prophets to discern God’s concern for and His message to His people. God spoke to His chosen people through His servants the prophets with a unified message: Turn from your sinful practices including worshiping idols and trusting in men to worshiping the One true God and trusting only in Him.
The days of Isaiah were ripe for imperialistic designs by neighboring kingdoms. The power of Egypt was waning while Assyria was ascending. Assyria was the dominant threat to Israel and Judah. The Assyrian army defeated the early Babylonian empire in 729 B.C. The Assyrians conquered Syria in 732 B.C. which effectively brought an end to the Syria-Israel coalition. After a three-year campaign, Assyria also conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722-721 B.C. Earlier the Syria-Israel alliance had wanted king Ahaz to join them in their rebellion against Assyria. (734-732 B.C.) When Ahaz refused their request, the coalition armies attacked Judah in an attempt to remove the Davidic king, Ahaz from his rule of Judah. (Isaiah 7:1-6). 2 Chronicles 28:6-8 records the significant loss of life from this attack (120,000 Judean soldiers).

Instead of calling on the Lord in faith for His help, (Isaiah 7:1-25) king Ahaz called upon the king of Assyria, Tiglath-pileser III which brought relief from the Syria-Israel threat but disaster to Judah. King Ahaz was thereafter a underling to the king of Assyria and was required to pay a massive payment to him. (2 Chronicles 28:20-21). During this same period, an Edomite and Philistine advance on Judah was troublesome to the king Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:17-18). The Assyrians also sought to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. They conquered Egypt and much of Judah (Isaiah 36:1) in 701 B.C. and threatened to demolish Jerusalem. It was only the miraculous intervention by God that saved Jerusalem from certain defeat. (Isaiah 37:36).

But even the strongest earthly kingdoms do not last forever. Following the defeat of the Assyrian army by the angel of the Lord, the emphasis of Isaiah turns to the rise of the Babylonian empire. (Isaiah 39:5-7). Although the Assyrians under king Sennacherib defeated Babylon in 689 B.C. the Assyrian empire was on the wane. Seventy-seven years later a rising Babylonian empire under king Nabopolassar, conquered the Assyrian capital of Nineveh and then in 612 B.C. the Assyrian empire was brought to complete defeat in 609 B.C. again under the leadership of king Nabopolassar. A few years later, in 605 B.C. under the new king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar began his campaign against Jerusalem. In 586 Nebuchadnezzar’s assault on Jerusalem was complete. The once proud capital of the Israelites, was in complete ruin and most of its prominent citizens were deported to Babylon which for that time was the most powerful kingdom in the ancient near east.

But even the mighty Babylonians did not keep this status forever or even for a few generations. The Medo-Persian alliance was on the rise during this period. In 539 B.C., only 47 years after its defeat of Jerusalem, the Babylonians were defeated by the army of Persian king Cyrus. In 538 B.C., King Cyrus issued his decree to allow the Jewish people who were exiled in Babylon, to return to their homeland, so they could rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Babylon continued to be a nuisance for a few more years until the army of Darius Hystaspes of Persia convincingly destroyed the city in 518 B.C. Only a partial number of Jewish exiles decided to return to Jerusalem and Judah. Many decided to stay in Babylon. The return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem was accomplished in three occurrences, the second being led by Ezra in 458 B.C and the third taking place in in 445 B.C. under the direction of Nehemiah.

The prophetic writings of Isaiah encompassed the ancient historical period from 740 B.C. to 445 B.C. but also contained prophecies relating to the first advent of the Messiah (approximately,.5 B.C. to 30 A.D. (B.C.E.), and also relating to the second advent of the Messiah, His victorious defeat of Israel’s enemies, the establishment and rule of His Messianic kingdom and then His rule with His father in the eternal state. During all of this time and into the timeless infinity of the eternal state, there has been and there always will be a prominent place and position for God’s chosen people to whom He has not and will never forsake nor fail to keep His promises. Our Messiah has a Jewish heritage that will never fade or disappear. For an excellent overview of the history of the days of Isaiah, refer to A History of Israel, Revised Edition, by Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Paul D. Wegner, B & H Academic, 2016.
8. SUGGESTED RESOURCES (BIBLIOGRAPHY)

This suggested listing of resources is provided for so that those who desire and have the funds to do so, can purchase as many of these resources as is practical for a home or church library. This listing also includes the works cited (referenced) in the study, however there are more suggested resources listed than those that are referenced in the study. This list also acts as a Bibliography for works cited in this study.

A. Study Bibles (alphabetical order not recommended order)

*Scofield Study Bible, NIV*, Oxford University Press, 2004
*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, 2002

B. Commentaries on Isaiah

Caution should be taken in considering which commentaries are best for the home or church library. Some commentaries, even some of those listed below, contain kingdom-now viewpoints, while others do not interpret Scripture from a dispensational hermeneutic. For the church library and for home use, seek the advice of a Pastor, leading Elder or Bible teacher prior to purchasing any of these books.


*Constable, Thomas, L.* *Dr. Constable’s Notes on Isaiah*, 2017 Edition. (www.soniclight.com)

*Cooper, David L.* *Commentary on Isaiah*, in Expounding the Word Section of the Biblical Research Website: (biblicalresearch.info)


Also, advanced Biblical students may desire to consult commentaries on Isaiah by J. N. Oswalt and E. J. Young. They are amillennial in eschatology viewpoints yet are scholarly and well researched.

**C. Other Suggested Resources (In Print and Online)**


*Detroit Baptist Theological Journal*, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Online link: http://www.dbts.edu/journal/


Haynie, Burl. *Time of Jacob’s Trouble: Approaching: Israel – God’s Timepiece*, Online publication:

Biblical Research Studies Group. Website at time of publication of this study: 
http://www.biblicalresearch.info/index.html


*Journal of Dispensational Theology*, Tyndale Theological Seminary and Biblical Institute, Online Archive: https://www.tyndale.edu/jodt/


Larkin, Clarence, *Rightly Dividing the Word*, Clarence Larkin Estate, 1920

Larkin, Clarence, *The Second Coming of Christ*, Clarence Larkin Estate, 1918


MacArthur, John F. (et al.), *The Masters Seminary Journal*, Archive Internet location as at the time of the writing of this Study: https://www.tms.edu/msj/


9. A SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

The Basic Outline:
1. The Judgment and Blessings of God: Chapters 1-35
2. The Protection of God and the Foolishness of Hezekiah:  Chapter 36-39
3. God’s Servant and Salvation: Chapters 40-66

The basic outline of the prophecy of Isaiah may seem simplistic but it is suggested as a method of picturing the overall content of the book. As a study of Isaiah is undertaken it does appear that Isaiah may have had this three-part outline in mind when he compiled the written record under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When studying Isaiah, look for sections of blessings mixed among the strong words of warning and judgment. During the period of Isaiah’s ministry God called other prophets to be His spokesmen to both Judah and Israel. Amos, Hosea, Jonah, and Micah were God’s prophets during the turmoil of the Eighth century. They were called to warn Judah and Israel and other nations and peoples including Nineveh (capital of Assyria) about God’s impending judgment for their failure to consider and worship Him and His gracious promise of mercy and salvation if they repent and trust in Him.

1. The Judgment and Blessings of God: Chapters 1-35
As recorded in chapters 1-35, Isaiah is dealing with a sinful people who have rebelled against the Lord. Warnings of impending judgment are the main message of these chapters yet sprinkled among the indictments are wonderful promises of redemption in the future when a child, who will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace will sit on the throne of David in His eternal kingdom. Isaiah offers hope for those who repent of their sins and turn to the Lord so that they can live with their Lord in this kingdom. Additional information about this kingdom unfolds to the reader as each chapter progresses to the end of the first section of the book. The historical background of this first section is the threat and then invasion of Judah by the armies of Aram (Syria) and Ephraim (Israel) and call by the king of Judah, Ahaz, to Assyria for assistance against these two invading nations. This call by Ahaz demonstrates his disbelief in God by rebelling against Him by not trusting in Him for the protection of the people of Judah. Instead of saving Judah, Assyria (as God’s instrument of judgment) invades Judah and threatens to destroy Jerusalem. A critical theme of this section is the prophecy of the demise and destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel for their continual rejection of God and their vile practice of idol worship.

2. The Protection of God and the Foolishness of Hezekiah: Chapter 36-39
The middle section of Isaiah’s prophecy, chapters 36-39 is where the lessons the Lord is teaching the Jewish nation through Isaiah are applied. A terrifying threat against Jerusalem has arrived on the city’s doorstep by means of the Assyrian Army who through their spokesman, Rabshakeh, mocks the ability of the Lord and their king Hezekiah to save them. The drama as events unfold is unforgettable.

The king seeks the Lord’s prophet and prays to the Lord for help. The Lord answers this prayer through the words of the prophet and without any intervention by human means, the Assyrian army is destroyed and the threat to Jerusalem is abolished. The great question Hezekiah faced is still relevant today: Who will you trust, the Lord or the schemes of men?
3. God’s Servant and Salvation: Chapters 40-66

The third section, chapters 40-66 contain words of comfort and hope to the Jewish nation as well as the introduction of an individual who will be their means of salvation by being crushed for their iniquities and by having all the iniquity of the people to fall upon this individual. The section chapter 52:13 to 53:12 is the core passage to the message of salvation. Later revelation in the New Testament makes it clear that this individual, called His Servant in Isaiah, is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Following the Servant passages, contained within specific parts of chapters 42 to 53, Isaiah concentrates on the future kingdom of the Lord where His people will live on the earth in peace with Him as King. As was noted in the first great section of Isaiah, chapters 1-39, the latter section, chapters 40-66 also contain warnings and judgments mixed with blessings and promises of hope and comfort. This combination of judgments and blessings is the method Isaiah has chosen to bring impact to his message and it keeps the reader alert to the holiness, love and justice of the Lord. The writer of Hebrews has captured this aspect of the Lord’s message to mankind well in the last two verses of chapter 12: “Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, so that we may offer worship pleasing to God with reverence and awe. For our God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 12: 28-29.

These chapters have a clearly divisible outline of three sections of nine chapters each: 40-48, 49-57 and 58-66. The main theme of chapters 40-48 is the sovereignty of God who demonstrates that He alone is the One who controls the destiny of the nations. God chooses whomever He solely decrees will accomplish His purposes for Israel and the nations. The nation Israel is declared to be God’s servant and an unnamed individual is also introduced as God’s Servant whom God has put His Spirit upon and who will bring justice to the nations. (This servant will have a prominent position in chapters 49-57). God also reveals the name of Cyrus who will be used of God as His servant to release the captives of Judah from their exile so they can return to the land of their forefathers. The main theme of chapters 49-57 is the Servant of the Lord who although is not named is a messianic figure who takes upon Himself the sins of the world to bring salvation.

This messianic figure, rightly known as the Messiah, is introduced in the first section of the great prophecy of Isaiah: see 7:14; 9:1-7; and 11:1-10. The main theme of chapters 58-66 is the return of the Messiah and establishment of His reign on the earth and finally the creation of a new heavens and new earth. This period is superintended by the Holy Spirit whom is in the midst of the peoples of God: 63:7-14. It is significant that Isaiah uses the words: “There is no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked.” as a dividing statement between each of these sections. See 48:22 and 57:21. For an expanded description of each of these three sections see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., The Promise Plan of God, Zondervan, 2008, pages 182-188.

Outline of the Prophecy of Isaiah

The Basic Outline:
1. The Judgment and Blessings of God: Chapters 1-39
2. The Protection of God and the Foolishness of Hezekiah: Chapter 36-39
3. God’s Servant and Salvation: Chapters 40-66

I The Judgment and Blessings of God: Chapters 1-39
A. The Sinful Nation: Chapters 1-5
1. The Lord’s Charge Against the Nation: Chapter 1
2. Messiah’s Kingdom in the Last Days: Chapter 2:1-4
3. Sin Revealed and Judgment Declared: 2:5-4:1
4. Messiah, the Branch and His Kingdom: 4:2-6
5. Parable of the Vineyard: 5:1-7
6. Woes on the Wicked 5:8-30

B. Isaiah’s Vision of the Lord: Chapter 6
1. The Contrition of the Prophet: 6:1-7
2. The Commissioning of the Prophet: 6:8-13

C. Messiah and the Remnant: Chapters 7-12
1. The Threat to the Nation: 7:1-9
2. The Sign of Immanuel: 7:10-16
3. The Plunder of the Nation: 7:17-25
4. The Fall of the Nation’s Enemies: 8:1-8
5. The Future of the Remnant: 8:9-22
7. The Anger of the Lord: 9:8-10:4
8. Assyria: God’s Choice for Punishing the Nation: 10:5-19
10. The Kingdom of the Righteous Branch: 11:1-10
11. The Victory of the Remnant: 11:11-16
12. The Praise of the Remnant: Chapter 12

D. The Nations Judged: Chapters 13-23
2. Judgment against Assyria: 14:24-27
5. Judgment against Damascus and Ephraim: 17:1-14
8. Egypt, Assyria and Israel to Worship the Lord: 19:16-25
9. No escape for Egypt and Ethiopia: 20:1-6
10. Prophecy of Babylon’s Fall: 21:1-10
15. Prophecy of David’s Key and the Peg: 22:20-25
16. Prophecy of Tyre’s Fall: 23:1-18

E. Worldwide Judgment and Protection for Israel: Chapters 24-27
2. Praise for Israel’s Salvation: 25:1 – 26:21

F. Warnings, Woes and Wrath: Chapters 28-33
1. Woe to Wicked Leaders: 28:1-29
2. Warnings and Woes to Jerusalem 29:1-16
3. Rejoicing and Blessings to Jacob: 29:17-24
4. Warnings to Judah: No safety in Egypt: 30:1-17
5. God’s Graciousness to Jerusalem: 30:18-33
6. The Sons of Israel Need to Return to the Lord: 31:1-9
7. Future Blessings on the Nation: 32:1-20
8. Prayer for Zion to take Refuge in the Lord: 33:1-24

G: The Wrath and Blessings of God: Chapters 34-35
1. The Wrath of God on the Nations: 34:1-17
2. The Blessing of the Future Kingdom: 35:1-10

II The Protection of God and the Foolishness of Hezekiah: Chapter 36-39
(An historical application of God’s promised blessings to Judah)
A: God Protects Judah from Assyria: Chapters 36-37
1. The Invasion of Judah by Assyria: 36:1-22
2. The Prophet is Summoned: 37:1-13
3. The King’s Prayer: 37:14-20
5. The Assyrian Army Destroyed: 37:36-38

B: The Illness and Healing of Hezekiah: Chapter 38

C: The Foolishness of Hezekiah: Chapter 39

III God’s Servant and Salvation: Chapters 40-66
A: God’s Promises to Provide Protection for His People: Chapters 40-48
1. The Comfort and Greatness of God: 40:1-31
2. God is With the People of Israel: 41:1-29
5. God’s Promise to Redeem Jacob: 43:1-7
7. Further Blessings to Israel: 44:1-8
8. The Futility of Idolatry and the Forgiveness of God: 44:9-22

B: Israel’s Redemption Through the Suffering Servant: Chapters 49-57
2. God Promises Blessings to Zion: 49:14-26
4. God’s Comfort for His People: 51:1-23
5. God Promises Good News to His People: 52:1-12
7. God’s Everlasting Compassion for His People 54:1-17
8. God calls His People to Seek Him: 55:1-13
9. God’s Promises of Salvation and Blessings to His People and Others: 56:1-8
10. God judgment and ultimate forgiveness for iniquity: 56:9-57:21

C. The Promises of the Future Messianic Kingdom: Chapters 58-66
1. God’s Blessings for Observing Righteous Fasts and Sabbaths 58:1-14
2. God to Bring Salvation through His Own Arm: 59:1-21
4. The Messiah to Heal and Comfort the Afflicted: 61:1-11
5. The Beautiful Land of the Messiah: 62:1-12
6. The Return of the Messiah Who is Mighty to Save: 63:1-6
8. Isaiah’s Prayer for Mercy from God: 63:15-64:12
10. Future Blessings on the Remnant: 65:8-12
15. Destinies of the Faithful and the Wicked: 66:15-24

A Note on the scholarly opinions on the background issues of Isaiah chapters 40-66:

Many evangelical and conservative scholars understand that the major historical background to Isaiah chapters 40-66 is the return of the exiles from their captivity in Babylon. The Babylonians, under the direction of King Nebuchadnezzar, had captured and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. A great many Jewish captives were taken to Babylon. Following an edict by King Cyrus of the Medo-Persian alliance which had captured Babylon, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Less than 40,000 Jews actually returned to their homeland and many others decided to stay in Babylon. While it is certain, that some of the laments and promises contained in Isaiah chapters 40-66, refer to the Jews captivity in Babylon and their return to Judah, not all of the material in these chapters could or should be understood as referring to these events. When the context of each section and chapter in Isaiah chapters 40-66 is carefully examined, there is undoubtedly a great deal of reference in them to the far future messianic kingdom. This is particularly evident when many of these chapters refer to those being gathered by God from the nations of the earth, to a restored and peaceful kingdom. Those who accompany God’s people from these nations are often described as the leaders of these nations who bring their wealth to Zion where a righteous leader rules. Thus, this study of Isaiah recognizes that the grand theme of Isaiah chapters 40-66 is the gathering of God’s people to Zion following the end of the future tribulation period. These people will leave nations that have held them captive and have oppressed them. They will come to Zion, to meet and worship their Messiah, who will rule over them from the Davidic throne. The new kingdom will be glorious, prosperous and peaceful and many inhabitants of the kingdom will live long lives well beyond one hundred years in length. This kingdom will transition into the eternal state as God will create a new heavens and earth.
ISAIAH STUDY: CHAPTERS 1-6

Unless otherwise stated, the Bible version used throughout this study is: The Digital American Standard Version, © DASV Bible, Ted Hildebrandt, 2011.

There are about as many suggested outlines of the book of Isaiah as there are commentators and scholars who have written a study or commentary on Isaiah. The outline stated below is provided, not to improve upon existing outlines, but as a guide for this study and as a quick snapshot of the content of this section of Isaiah’s prophecy.

A. The Sinful Nation: Chapters 1-5
1. The Lord’s Charge Against the Nation: Chapter 1
2. Messiah’s Kingdom in the Last Days: Chapter 2:1-4
3. Sin Revealed and Judgment Declared: 2:5-4:1
4. Messiah, the Branch and His Kingdom: 4:2-6
5. Parable of the Vineyard: 5:1-7
6. Woes on the Wicked 5:8-30

B. Isaiah’s Vision of the Lord: Chapter 6
1. The Contrition of the Prophet: 6:1-7
2. The Commissioning of the Prophet: 6:8-13

Word Studies and Listings
While some scholars may not approve of listings of word occurrences or word studies in studies and commentaries, they are included in this study, so the student can examine them in their context and garner insights as to why a particular Hebrew word was translated by different English words. By this examination, the student can appreciate the work accomplished by the translation teams for each major English Version. The English Versions most cited in this study of Isaiah are the DASV, KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV and ESV. The context of each usage must be examined as an aid in the determination of the appropriate English word. Although this study of Isaiah is not “academic” or within the scope of scholarly commentaries, it is somewhat exegetical in that the occurrences of significant Hebrew words will be noted in each of their occurrences in the text of Isaiah. As the text of the DASV is an “updated” revision of the old ASV, it often is in agreement with the other major English Versions. However, where significant differences occur, they will be described in the verse text notes.

Introduction to Chapters 1-6

Chapters 1 to 6 can be understood as an introduction to the entire prophetic book of Isaiah. To better understand these introductory chapters, they are divided in this study into two greater sections, Chapters 1-5 entitled, “The Sinful Nation” and Chapter 6 entitled, “Isaiah’s Vision of the Lord”. Each of these greater sections are further sub-divided into passages that seem to best reflect the thought of the prophet as he wrote about the sinful state of the nation of Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem. A majority of the content of these chapters are the Words of God given to Isaiah that expresses God’s righteous indignation against His sinful people and remarkably, His wonderful offer of mercy and grace to restore them if they would only repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith and obedience. In many instances, this restoration would be in the far future, during the coming Messianic kingdom, which is still future in our day.
To understand God’s (and Isaiah’s) perspective on the sinfulness of the chosen people, it is important to grasp the full impact of what it meant for God and the Jews to function within the most unique relationship ever imagined.

First, for His own purposes and plans for His creation, God chose a people to have a unique relationship with Himself. God chose them, not because this people were more numerous than any others on the earth or had made an outstanding contribution to the welfare of the earth’s peoples, or because they were worthy in any way of God’s special attention, but His choice began with one man. This man Abram who lived, not in what became known as the land of Israel, but within a pagan culture, in Ur of the Chaldeans and later in Haran (Genesis 11:31) far from the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. God had called Abram to leave his people and his father’s household to settle in a land of God’s choice (Genesis 12:1). God had preserved the lineage of Abraham, through Noah and going as far back as Adam. There should be no doubt that when God created Adam and Eve, He knew that they would eventually become parents to His chosen man who would become the father of His chosen people and through whom, God would bless the nations through Abram’s (later Abraham’s) greater seed, the One who is the Messiah.

Second, God revealed some of the reasons why He chose Abraham and his descendants to be His people. Through the prayer of king David, one of these reasons is described, “What other nation on the earth is like your people Israel? Is there another nation whom God redeemed as a people for Himself, to make a name for himself, by performing great wonders and awesome deeds and by driving out nations and gods for those whom you redeemed from Egypt? You established your people Israel to be your people forever, and you, O LORD, became their God.” 2 Samuel 7:23-24. The core reason God chose this particular people was to “make a name for Himself.” This is in complete agreement with the overarching purpose of God in creating the heavens and the earth. This study of Isaiah unfolds this purpose as being the display of His glory in creation itself, the heavens, Psalm 19:1, and the display and declaration of His glory by His image bearers.

Moses earlier had observed, “The LORD did not set his love on you or choose you because you were more numerous than any other people, for you were the fewest of all peoples. Rather it was because the LORD loved you and was keeping the oath he promised to your forefathers when the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of slavery from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 7:6-8. See also Deuteronomy 33:26-29. Also, the prophet Samuel explained: “For the LORD will not abandon his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you his very own people.” 1 Samuel 12:22. Isaiah declared that God performed the miracle of dividing the waters of the Red Sea “to gain for Himself everlasting renown,” Isaiah 63:12. God, through the prophet Ezekiel declared, “Therefore, tell the house of Israel, ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: I did not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name…. I will sanctify my great name….then the nations will know that I am the LORD, says the sovereign LORD, when I am sanctified in you right before their eyes…It is not for your sake that I am doing it.” (Excerpts from Ezekiel 36: 22-38). See also Jeremiah 32:20-21.

Third, what advantage was it to be God’s chosen people? The Apostle Paul lists nine advantages: “Who are Israelites. To them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from whom Christ came according to the flesh, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” Romans 9:4-5. A brief explanation of these advantages will help in gleaning Paul’s meaning.

(1) Israelites: God’s chosen people, to whom God chose, have a unique relationship among all peoples of the earth.
(2) Adoption: God chose them to be adopted as His children, to become members of His family and for whom, they would have a Father, who would love and protect them.

(3) Glory: The Israelites were recipients of the divine shekinah glory which was evidenced in visible clouds by day and night during their wilderness wanderings and at other times and will again be seen in the messianic kingdom (Isaiah 4:5).

(4) Covenants: The unique relationship between God and the Jews had a legal framework in the form of covenants He initiated. All but one of the covenants were unconditional. There are seven covenants: first: Adamic (or Edenic): promise of a savior who will defeat Satan: Genesis 3:15; second: Noahic: promise to not destroy the world again by water: Genesis 8:20-22 and 9:8-17; third: Abrahamic: God’s promise to make from Abraham a great nation, to bless him and give him a great name, to bless all the peoples of the earth through him, to give him a land, to have kings proceed from him, to be his God and the God of his descendants and to establish this covenant through the child of promise, Isaac. Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-21; 26:2-5 and 28:10-17; fourth: Mosaic (Law: a conditional covenant): God dictated to Moses, an extensive code which governed the Israelites worship and social relationships. There is no other written code from God given to any other people except Israel in all the earth. Exodus chapter 20: the ten commandments (known as ten words), and the complete Pentateuch: Genesis to Deuteronomy; fifth: Land: God promised to restore to the land, that their fathers possessed, to the Israelites that have been scattered to all nations because of their unbelief. God also promised to renew their heart and prosper them in the land. Deuteronomy 30: 1-10; sixth: Davidaic: to king David, God made a promise to establish an everlasting kingdom ruled by a descendant of David who will rule on David’s throne, forever. 2 Samuel 7:8-17; seventh: New Covenant: God promised to His chosen people that He would establish a new covenant in which God will put His law within them which will be written on their hearts. He will be their God and they will be His people. All of them will know Him and He will forgive their sins and will not remember these sins. Jeremiah 3:31-34; Ezekiel 31:31-37; 36:25-27; 37:26-28. The New Testament reveals that Jesus Christ is the mediator of the new covenant, Hebrews 8:6. The new covenant is also represented in His shed blood. See: Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25.

Note: Some also recognize a “Priestly Covenant” which is described in Numbers 25:10-13. This covenant was described as a “covenant of peace” in which God promised a covenant of a perpetual priesthood. This was a covenant God made with Phinehas, a grandson of Aaron. As it is considered a perpetual covenant, the priestly ministry in Aaron’s line (through Phinehas) will last into the Messianic kingdom.

The Mosaic covenant was conditional upon the obedience of the Israelites to God’s prescribed written code. Some may argue that the land covenant was also conditional but as understood in the new covenant, it is God who will create a new heart in His people (the faithful remnant) so that they will trust in Him and love Him with all their hearts and God will restore the land to them. It is God’s intended purpose to fulfil all these wonderful promises made through His covenants with His people. It is very important to understand that He is a covenant keeping God and it is the covenants that define God’s relationship with His people. In this study the Jews are called God’s covenant people.

(5) Giving of the Law: God, through Moses, gave written requirements that governed the worship and social life of the Israelites. No other people in all of history had such a unique and specific written code dictated from God.
(6) Temple Worship: God graciously allowed the Israelites to have a temple in which so many of the objects and furniture contained in it pointed to the coming to the ministry of the coming Messiah. The temple was originally filled with the glory of God who blessed it with His presence specifically over the “mercy seat,” the covering of the Ark of the Covenant (known also the Ark of the testimony). In the days of the first advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, He called the temple, His House, Matthew 21:13 (Mark 11:17; Luke 19:45) quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

(7) The Promises: This is a vast advantage for the Jew. Contained within the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh: or TNK: Torah (the law); Nebi’im (the prophets); and Kethubim (the writings); were many hundreds of promises relating to their Messiah. Some of these promises were fulfilled absolutely accurately during the first coming of the Messiah and the others will be fulfilled just as accurately upon the second advent of the Messiah to establish His kingdom on the earth and during the eternal state.

(8) The Patriarchs: The Jews were rightly proud of their lineage which originated with “their” father Abraham and included Isaac and Jacob. It was Jacob whom God changed his name to Israel and Jacob’s sons became the “fathers” of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Scriptures reveal however, that the true sons of Abraham are those who believe in the Messiah, who is now in heaven and will return again.

(9) The line of Christ: Jesus the Messiah was born a Jew and this point Paul leaves to the last as it is the most significant. The Israelites have a most blessed family member in their Messiah. The world should take notice of this for any who would disparage the Jews are bringing shame to the entire family of Jews including the Messiah, Jesus Christ whom Paul affirms is “God over all, blessed forever, Amen”. (Romans 9:5). The greatest advantage of being a Jew is that the Savior of the world, their blessed Messiah belongs to them as a family member. The Jews, not only can boast in this but must trust in their “family” Messiah for their salvation, for: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among humans, by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.

1. The Lord’s Charge Against the Nation: Chapter 1

In one sense, the first chapter of Isaiah could be entitled “Salvation in the Manger.” Following the introduction of the Prophet and the time frame he prophesied, the chapter opens with an indictment against His people from the Lord before a heavenly and earthly audience that even animals in a manger know their master, yet His people do not know Him and have revolted against Him. In this context, the chapter progresses to a listing of the sins of the nation and then a most remarkable proclamation: These same sins, now like scarlet will be white as snow and though these sins are red like crimson they shall be like wool. The sins of the people are like scarlet and red like crimson because of the nature of their sins. The end of vs. 15 states: “your hands are covered with blood.” The Lord requires repentance in vss. 16 and 17 so that the people can have a right relationship with the Him and so that they can again “eat the best of the land”, vs. 19. It may not be coincidence that Isaiah opens with the theme of salvation in the manager just as the New Testament opens with the same theme. The salvation offered in chapter 1 of Isaiah will later be revealed to be made possible to the people of Israel through the crushing of the promised Suffering Servant who will have the sins of the people fall on Him.

In the second section of chapter 1, vss. 21 to 31, Isaiah reveals how the Lord will deal with the sinful people of Jerusalem and after the purge of the evil doers, the Lord will restore the city so that it will be called, “the City of Righteousness,” vs. 26. The chapter ends with a common judgment of evil throughout the Scriptures. Transgressors and sinners will “both burn together, with no one able to extinguish the fire,” vs. 31.
The esteemed Biblical scholar, Victor Buksbazen has provided these general comments to this chapter:

“The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw.” In Hebrew the words “haza” – to see, and “hazon” vision, are expressions which describe spiritual perception. The root is a technical term which refers to a revelation imparted by God to His chosen servants, the prophets. Therefore in our text “the vision of Isaiah” means the revelation which God vouchsafed to the prophet Isaiah. Its meaning is similar to the expression in Revelation 1:1 “The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him (John)....”

“Concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” As a native of Jerusalem and citizen of Judah, Isaiah’s prophecies are directed primarily to his own native land Judah and its spiritual and political capital Jerusalem. Looking out from the lofty position of the Holy City, Isaiah perceived the destiny of Judah and of her sister state Samaria.

However, Isaiah’s vision ranged far beyond the borders of the two states of Judah and Israel and included all mankind as seen from the standpoint of God’s eternal purpose and of His future Kingdom. Nevertheless Israel’s ultimate destiny was always in the center of Isaiah’s vision. He saw the restoration and redemption of Israel as having redemptive significance for all nations.

This is why Isaiah is important, not only for Israel or the generation of the prophet, but for all nations and all times.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 96-97).

1:1-9 Rebellion Revealed

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

Isaiah opens his book of prophecy with an introduction of himself and the historical scope of his prophetic ministry. He states that his father’s name was Amoz. One scholar notes that, “According to Jewish tradition Isaiah’s father, Amoz (not the prophet Amos), was the brother of King Amaziah, Uzziah’s father, which would have made Isaiah, King Uzziah’s cousin.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 18). Names have a very significant place in this prophecy. The name Isaiah has the meaning of “The Lord is salvation”. Two sons of Isaiah are mentioned, Shear-jashub meaning “a remnant shall return” and Maher-shalal-hash-baz meaning “hasten to the spoil, hurrying to the prey.” Isaiah states the significance of himself and his sons to Israel: “Look, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and harbingers in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.” Isaiah 8:18.

The entire prophecy of the book of Isaiah can be understood by Isaiah’s introduction of the word “vision” which is the Hebrew hazon. Isaiah also uses the word vision in 21:1; 22:1, 5; 29:7 and 11. A similar word, “oracle”, Hebrew: massa, is used by Isaiah in 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6 and has the meaning of “burden” or “utterance”. Isaiah often introduces a distinct prophetic message from God with either the words vision or oracle.

The historical timeline of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry is introduced in vs. 1. His prophecies are about Judah and Jerusalem (and often their relationships with the surrounding nations) and the vision Isaiah saw occurred during the reigns of Uzziah, (in the year of his death in 740 B.C.); Jotham: (750-731 B.C. Jotham co-ruled with Uzziah for about 10 years); Ahaz: (735-715 B.C. Ahaz co-ruled with Jotham for about 4 years); and Hezekiah: (715-686 B.C.). A Jewish tradition suggests that Isaiah was martyred during the reign of King Manasseh. A possible reference to the way Isaiah was killed (sawn in two) is mentioned in Hebrews 11:37.
1:2 Listen, O heavens, hear, O earth, 
    for the LORD has spoken: 
"I have reared children and brought them up, 
    but they have rebelled against me."

Isaiah begins his vision with a call from God for the universe (heavens and earth) to listen to His words. God wants the entire cosmos to know about His rebellious children (sons) whom He has reared, which is the Hebrew word gadal which has the meaning to bring up to become great. God is referring to His chosen people who are the children of Israel being the descendants of Abraham, Genesis 12:2; 18:18-19. Refer to Romans 4:11, 16 and Galatians 3:6-8 and 29 for the application of God’s intention to bless all those who have faith in Him and their connection to Abraham. Compare also Genesis 22:18. Isaiah in 19:24-25 and 42:6 speaks about the role of the God’s people whom He has called to be a blessing and a light to the nations.

The rebellion, Hebrew: pasha, of God’s people included their sins against God, listed in detail in chapter 1 and their refusal to be witness to the nations on God’s behalf. The “Song of Moses”, Deuteronomy 32:1-43, has a similar lament about the children of Israel’s rebellion against God. In Isaiah pasha occurs 8 times: rebelled: 1:2; rebellious: 1:28; rebelled: 43:27; rebels: 46:8; rebel: 48:8; transgressors: 53:12 (twice); and rebelling: 59:13. Isaiah 53:12 is very significant as Isaiah prophesies about the Messiah, “Therefore I will assign him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” Even though the Jewish religious leaders and the Romans counted or numbered the Messiah with the transgressors (by hanging on a cross with convicted thieves hanging on either side of Him), the love and mercy of the Messiah was such that He made intercession for those many whose sins He bore. There is both a past sense and present sense to His ministry of intercession. See notes on Isaiah 53:12.

1:3 The ox knows its owner, 
    and the donkey its master’s feeding trough, 
but Israel does not know, 
    my people do not consider.

God compares His rebellious children with animals who know their master and the manger of their master. God’s sons, His covenant people have no understanding of Him or His blessings. God’s lament could be likened to children who have been raised in a home full of love and nurturing who have walked away and have forgotten both their parents and their home life. These children are estranged from their parental care and treat their past lives as if it did not exist. The use of irony by Isaiah, suggesting dumb animals know more than the children of Israel, is a strong statement about the woeful spiritual condition of the people of Judah. A confession of the sins of the people of God is recorded by Isaiah in 59:9-15a following another listing of their sins by God in 59:1-8.

It is certainly not coincidence that in the same context of God’s description of His people as not knowing Him as their master in contrast to an ox and donkey who know both their master and their master’s feeding trough (manger), that an offer of salvation is made to these ignorant people. Those who contemplate the mysteries of God and consider the birth place of the Messiah who is the savior of the world, would not miss the connection with Isaiah 1:3 and 1:18. The Messiah was born in the very place where an ox and a donkey would take refuge from the weather and where they would be fed by their master. The fact that the world’s Savior was born in a manger should have directed many to consider the offer of salvation recorded in the eighteenth verse of Isaiah chapter 1.
1:4 O sinful nation,
a people loaded down with iniquity,
an offspring of evildoers,
children who act corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have despised the Holy One of Israel;
they have turned their backs on him.

The word “O’ (ah, alas) may also be understood as “woe” depicting judgment. Thus, if understood as a judgement term, it acts as an introduction to the description of the sins of the people in this verse and those which follow. God diagnosed the spiritual state of His chosen people and describes them with many words depicting their evil and rebellious nature. The first adjective describing God’s people, stated in 1:4, is sinful, which is the Hebrew word chata which has the meaning of missing the mark. The mark of being holy, which God has declared (Leviticus 11:44-45) was missed, but they did not miss the mark of being sinful. The word chata occurs six times in Isaiah: sinful: 1:4; convict: 29:21; sinned: 42:24; 43:27 and 64:5; and the phrase: who does not live out their full days: 65:20. The KJV for 65:20 states “but the sinner (being) an hundred years old shall be accursed.” See notes on Isaiah 65:20.

The second descriptive term in 1:4 is “loaded down with iniquity”. Iniquity is the Hebrew word avon which has the meaning of both guilt and sinfulness. It is the word Isaiah used in Isaiah 53:6: “the LORD has laid on him, the sin of us all.” Other occurrences of avon in Isaiah: iniquity: 5:18; 6:7; 13:11; 22:14; 27:9; 30:13; 40:2; 59:3; and 64:9; iniquities: 53:5; 59:2; 59:12; and 64:7; sin: 26:21; and 33:24; sins: 14:21; 50:1; 53:11; 64:6 and 65:7 (twice). In the KJV and NASB avon is translated as iniquity, and in the NIV it is translated as sinful.

The third descriptive term in 1:4 is “offspring of evildoers” Evildoers is the Hebrew word ra’a which has the meaning in the Old Testament of breaking up, ruin, spoil, calamity or wicked. Several English words are used as translations of ra’a in Isaiah: 1:16: evil; 8:9: be broken; 9:17: evildoer; 11:9: will not hurt; 14:20: evildoers; 24:19: broken up; 31:2: evildoers; 41:23: do evil; 59:15: displeased; and 65:25: not hurt. An often-misunderstood usage in Isaiah of a related word ra (evil) is recorded in 45:7: “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create calamity.” The word “calamity” can be translated as evil (ra) but in the context of 45:7 it may be better to translate it as “disaster” in contrast to the word “peace” in the same sentence.

The fourth descriptive term in 1:4 is “children who act corruptly.” Not only are they descendants of evil doers but they themselves continue in the same evil behavior. The English word “corruptly” is the Hebrew word shachath and has the meaning of “to go to ruin” or “destroy”. In Isaiah, it is most often translated as “destroy.” Other occurrences of shachath are found in: 11:9: destroy; 14:20: destroyed; 36:10 destroy (twice); 37:12 delivered; 51:13: destroy; 54:16: destroyer; 65:8: destroy (twice); and 65:25 destroy.

The fifth descriptive term in 1:4 is “abandoned the LORD.” Abandoned is the Hebrew word azab and has the meaning in the Old Testament of forsaken also: forsake, forsakes, forsaking, forsook (123 times in the O.T.); leave, leaves, leaving, left (56 times in the O.T.) and abandon, abandons, abandoned (15 times in the O.T.) and other words such as loose, neglect, free, failed and deserted. In Isaiah azab translated as: 1:4: abandoned; 1:28: forsake; 7:16: deserted (NASB: forsaken); 10:3: leave; 10:14: abandoned; 17:2: forsaken; 17:9: abandoned; 18:6: left; 27:10: forsaken; 32:14: deserted (or: forsaken); 41:17: abandon; 42:16: forsake; 49:14: forsaken; 54:7: abandoned; 55:7: forsake; 58:2: rejected (or: forsaken); 62:12: forsaken; and 65:11: forsake.
A related Hebrew word *natah* (to forsake, leave, abandon) which can be translated as “abandoned” is translated in the DASV as rejected in Isaiah 2:6 and as forsaken in 32:14.

The *sixth* descriptive term in 1:4 is “**despised the Holy One of Israel.**” The English words despise(s) and despised in Isaiah translates a few Hebrew words. The word “despised in 1:4 is the Hebrew word *naats* (to spurn, treat with contempt, to blaspheme) also occurs in 5:24 as “despised” in 52:5 as blasphemed; and in 60:14 as “despised”. *Other Hebrew words:* In 16:14, the DASV translates *qalah* (dishonored, lightly esteemed) as “despised.” The Hebrew word *qalal* (cursed, contempt) can be translated as “despise” in 23:9, is translated in the DASV as “bring to shame.” The Hebrew word *maas* (to reject and to cast off) is translated as “despise” in 30:12, as “despised” in 33:8 and as “despis es” in 33:15. The Hebrew word *bazah* (despise, distain, contempt) is translated in the DASV as “despises” in 37:22 and as “despised” in 53:3 (twice), Finally, the Hebrew word is *bazoh* (scorned) is translated as “despised” in 49:7.

From the various usages in Isaiah of these Hebrew words to describe “despised,” the student can ascertain its primary meaning of to reject, treat with contempt and to spurn “the Holy One of Israel.” It is a scathing indictment against the people of God who have known Him as their creator, Lord, provider, the mighty One, caregiver and many other descriptive terms yet have without shame, rejected Him and treated Him with contempt.

Isaiah’s name for God in 1:4 is “**the Holy One of Israel**” which is a most revered and sacred descriptive title for the nation’s sovereign Lord and one of Isaiah’s favorite names of God. This sacred name both exalts the Lord as a being who is: absolutely holy, totally-other, transcendent and unlike any other being in all creation and whom in Himself, is a stunning contrast to the sinfulness of His chosen people. Not only have the people of God defiled themselves in sin but what is far worse, they have “**turned their backs on Him,**” by returning to the vile worship of pagan idols. They have rejected and treated with scorn the very One who loved them and among all other peoples of the world, chose them to be His unique covenant people, to whom He desires to have an eternal relationship and from whom, His beloved, unique Son would be born to become their Messiah.

The sacred name for God, the **Holy One of Israel**, occurs several times in Isaiah and is often coupled with other beautiful names for Israel’s Creator and Redeemer. In Isaiah see: 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14. This name occurs only 6 times in the rest of the OT: 2Ki 19:22; Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Jer 50:29; 51:5. Isaiah also uses “Holy One” as a title 4 times: 10:17; 40:25; 43:15; 49:7; and “Holy One of Jacob” once: 29:23.

The *seventh* descriptive term in 1:4 is “**turned their backs on Him.**” The words “**turned their backs**” is the translation of the Hebrew word *zur* which has the meaning of “to be a stranger”, or “foreigner”. This Hebrew word in the Old Testament is also translated as estranged, alien, an adulteress and a few other words. It is only translated in the O.T. as “turned their backs,” or “turned away.” In other verses in Isaiah the DASV translates *zur* as: 1:7: foreigners (twice); 17:10: foreign; 25:2: strangers; 28:21: unusual; 29:5: foes; 43:12: foreign; and 61:5 foreigners.

The *eighth* descriptive term describing the spiritual condition of the people of God (vs. 5a) is “**rebel**”. It is the translation of the Hebrew word *sarah* which has the meaning of defection, revolt and turning aside. *Sarah* also occurs in Isaiah, translated in 31:6 as: rebelled and 59:13 as: rebelling. Isaiah uses many other Hebrew words to describe rebellion including *pasha* to denote rebellion (see notes on 1:2 above). Isaiah uses *marah* (rebel, rebellious, defying) in 1:20; 3:8; 50:5 and 63:10. *Sarar* (rebellious, stubborn) is used in 1:23, 30:1 and 65:2 translated as rebellious). In 30:9, the prophet uses the Hebrew word *meri* and the word *marad* in 36:5
translated as rebellious. Isaiah also uses *pesha*, usually translated as “transgression,” but the DASV translates the word in 53:8 as “rebellion” and in 57:4 and 59:20 as “sin.”

**Results of their sins: 1:5-9**

The Lord turns from addressing the heavens and the earth, 1:2-4 and directs His attention to His people. He states that there is no place remaining within their physical bodies that does not bear the consequences of their sin. The immediate consequences come from the invasion of their land. The invasion of Judah and capture of most of its towns and cities is best understood as the campaign of the Assyrians under Sennacherib whom Isaiah later describes in detail in chapters 36-37. Because of the Assyrian invasion, the people are physically suffering, 1:5-6; and their land is desolate, and their crops have been devoured, vss. 7-9. The prophet directly warned the people of Judah about the Assyrians, Isaiah 10:1-11, who would trample their land as a judgment from the Lord and destroy their idols just as God, through the Assyrians, had done to Samaria, 10:11. In vss. 5-6, the Lord rhetorically asks: *Why should you be beaten anymore?*

1:5 Why should you be beaten anymore?
   Why do you just rebel more and more?

*The whole head is sick,*

*and the whole heart faint.*

Because of their continual and persistent sinfulness, 1:2-4, God has brought judgment upon His covenant people in the form of foreign nations who have destroyed their land and burned their cities, 1:7. As the opening chapters, 1-6 of Isaiah are an introduction to his prophetic writings, this destruction of Judah is likely a reference to the invasion of Judah by Assyria which is described later in chapters 36-37, and a more distant invasion and complete destruction, including Jerusalem by the Babylonians which happened in a few initial incursions and completed in 586 B.C. Another earlier but brief invasion of Judah by Aram and Israel is described in 2 Chronicles 28 which came about because of the wickedness of king Ahaz of Judah. The beginning word of Isaiah 1:5, “why” could also be translated as “upon which place” or “where else” as explained by Victor Buksbazen:

> “Many ancient and modern translators have rendered this passage in a similar fashion. However the Hebrew word “al-me” is best translated “upon which place” or “where else,” because Isaiah views the whole nation as one body. “Why” would have been more naturally expressed in Hebrew with the word “Lamah,” as in Isaiah 1:11.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 102).

In addition to the description of the destruction of the land of Judah, the prophet declares God’s depiction of the people’s sinful nature as “*the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint.*” There is nothing wholesome, sound or healthy about them. When they confess their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during His first advent, and plead for Him to return, the Messiah will return and establish His kingdom and heal the land and the people. Isaiah will later describe this in 33:24: “*The resident of Zion will not say, ‘I am sick.’ The people who live there will have their sin forgiven.*” See also Ezekiel 34:11-16. But until that far future time, the condition of God’s people remains as Isaiah describes it in this first chapter of his prophecy.

1:6 From the sole of the foot to the top of the head
   there is nowhere that is undamaged in it.

*There are wounds, welts, and open sores;*

*they have not been cleansed,*

*or bandaged up,*

*or softened with olive oil.*
Isaiah 1:6 describes God’s viewpoint of the condition of His covenant people. Not only has their land been destroyed because of their continual wickedness and rebellion against God, but they bear in themselves the judgment of God which the prophet had introduced in 1:5. God is describing their spiritual condition which is depicted as having physical characteristics. Their entire spiritual “bodies” are ravaged with unwholesome “wounds, welts, and open sores.” See Jeremiah 8:14-22. Jeremiah laments that his people have not been healed, Jeremiah 8:21-22, “For I am broken because of the brokenness of my people; I mourn; dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why has the wound of my people not been healed?” King David had described a similar situation in Psalm 38:3-8

3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger;
   there is no health in my bones because of my sin.
4 For my sins overwhelm my head,
   as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.
5 My wounds are infected and stink,
   because of my foolish sins.
6 I am bent over and totally bowed down;
   I go around crying all day long.
7 For my sides are filled with fever;
   there is no soundness in my flesh.
8 I am faint and severely bruised;
   I groan because of the moaning of my heart.

1:7 Your country is desolate;
   your cities are burned with fire;
   foreigners are devouring your land right in front of you,
   and it is desolate, as when overthrown by foreigners.

The spiritual condition of God’s covenant people, 1:6 is similar to the physical condition of their land which is described as a desolation. The word “desolate” is the Hebrew word shemamah, a noun similar in meaning to the Hebrew verb shamem. The noun shemamah occurs in Isaiah: translated in the DASV in 1:7 twice as “desolate”’ in 6:11 as “devastated;” in 17:9 as “desolation;” and 62:4 as “Desolate.” The related verb shamem occurs in Isaiah in 33:8 translated in the DASV in 33:8 as “vacant;” in 49:8 as “desolate;” in 49:19 as “desolate;” 52:14 as “astonished;” in 54:1 as “desolate;” in 54:3 as “deserted;” in 59:16 as “amazed;” in 61:4 as “destroyed” and “wrecked;” and in 63:5 as “shocked.” It is a valuable exercise for the student to review the various English versions for their translations of the verb shamem in Isaiah 52:14; 59:16 and 63:5 and if time permits for the other occurrences of this verb in the references stated above.

1:8 The daughter of Zion is left like a hut in a vineyard,
   like a watchman’s shelter in a field of cucumbers,
   like a besieged city.

Because of the desolation of their land, 1:7, in which their cities had been burned with fire and the (produce of their) fields have been devoured by foreigners (perhaps the invading Assyrians), the people of Judah are suffering from hunger and its accompanying harm to their bodies. The armed campaign by these foreigners have also left them unprotected and open to abuse and death just as an unprotected shelter in a vineyard or like a vegetable (cucumber) garden during an invasion. In a later passage, 5:1-7, Isaiah described God’s care for His covenant people in what could be called the parable of the vineyard. Due to their wickedness which
led to a lack of justice and righteousness in the land, God described His judgment upon the vineyard which God describes as “the house of Israel,” Isaiah 5:7. God also declared that the elders and princes of the people of Judah, had “ruined the vineyard,” Isaiah 3:14. God’s judgment upon the people would result in a very poor harvest from the vineyard, 5:10. However, days will come when God will bring blessings to His people and He will sing about the delightful vineyard in Zion, and the land will take root and with bud and blossom a to fill the entire world with fruit, 27:2-6. See also 38:30-31. Foreigners will even tend to the vineyards of the faithful remnant who have been gathered to Zion at the beginning of the Messianic kingdom, 61:5 and during the days of this kingdom, God’s covenant people will eat the fruit of their own vineyards, 65:21.

The descriptive term, “daughter of Zion,” 1:8 is a common reference by Isaiah to God’s beloved people of Jerusalem who are in need of His protective care. See also 10:32; 16:1; 37:22; 52:2; and 62:11. Because of their wickedness the people of Zion, (Jerusalem) will also be “like a besieged city.” They faced the unsuccessful attempt by the Assyrians to seize Jerusalem in 701 B.C. during the days of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry. Later the Babylonians besieged the city and eventually destroyed it in 586 B.C. due to the continual and persistent acts of God’s covenant people who refused to repent of their rebellion against Him by worshipping idols and practicing pagan religious rites that God abhorred.

1:9 Unless the LORD of hosts had left us a few survivors,
we would have been like Sodom,
we would have become like Gomorrah.

In 1:9, Isaiah describes God’s merciful provision for His people. In spite of the scorn the people had for God in rejecting Him as their Sovereign Lord and gracious care giver, the Lord remembers His unconditional covenant with them and will preserve to Himself a faithful remnant so that His promise to Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-21; and to Isaac, Genesis 26:2-5; and to Jacob, Genesis 28:10-17, will be fulfilled. For a detailed study on the remnant of Israel, refer to Ariel Ministries’ Study MBS191: The Remnant of Israel: Past, Present and Future, by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. Other references in Isaiah to this remnant include, 1:27 (repentant ones); 4:1-2; 7:3 (Isaiah’s son Shear-jashub meaning: “a remnant will return”); 10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 28:5; 37:31-32; 46:3 and 66:19. God’s verdict upon them is condemnation for they would have been left just like Sodom and Gomorrah (also Isaiah 1:10) if He had not intervened and mercifully granted that a few survivors would be left to proclaim His glorious name and be a light for Him to the nations. For the story of Sodom and Gomorrah see Genesis 18:16-19:29. The Apostle Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:29. Other Biblical references to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah also include, Deuteronomy 29:23; 32:32; Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Zephaniah 2:9; Matthew 10:15; 2 Peter 2:6 and Jude vs. 7.

Also, in 1:9, Isaiah introduces a significant title for God. Isaiah refers to God as “LORD of hosts.” This title refers to God as, LORD (YHWH) of armies, a conquering warrior who will never be defeated in whom the people of God can put their complete trust. Isaiah, in his prophecy, contrasts the trustworthy character of their God who is a mighty warrior to Judah’s rebellious trust in the surrounding nations who are powerless to help them. The divine name, “LORD of hosts” is recorded in Isaiah (DASV), 62 times, 1:9; 1:24; 2:12; 3:1; 3:15; 5:7, 9, 16, 24; 6:3, 5; 8:13, 18; 9:7, 13, 19; 10:16, 23, 24, 26, 33; 13:4, 13; 14:22, 23, 24, 27; 17:3; 18:7 (twice); 19:4, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 25; 21:10; 22:5, 12, 14 (twice), 25; 23:9; 24:23; 25:6; 28:5, 22, 29; 29:6; 31:4, 5; 37:16, 32; 39:5; 44:6; 45:13; 47:4; 48:2; 51:15; and 54:5. This is a favorite term for the Lord in Isaiah. The prophet also uses a related term, Lord GOD of hosts which has two significant titles for God: Lord, the Hebrew word Adonay which has the primary meaning of Sovereign; and GOD (Hebrew YHWH) often transliterated as Yahweh which has the primary meaning of “I am who I am,” Exodus 3:14.

**1:10-15 Worthless Worship Condemned**

1:10 Listen to the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; hear the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah emphatically calls His people to listen to His word. After describing their woeful condition brought about because of their evil rebellion against Him, God calls them rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah. This double reference, also 1:9, to the cities He long ago obliterated because of loathsome sin is a startling warning to Judah that judgment not only has arrived due to the invasion of a foreign army, but their plight could be far worse in that they could possibly suffer the same punishment as these cities of old.

1:11 "What do your many sacrifices mean to me?" says the LORD.

"I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of well fed cattle; I delight not in the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats.

God declares to His people that their rituals of worship described as sacrifices, burnt offerings of rams, the fat of cattle and the blood from bulls, lambs or goats, do not bring Him any pleasure for He has had enough of them. God is not casting aside the worship requirements of the law which He had prescribed for His people. He is however refusing to accept the worship of those who have committed the catalog of sins He has just denounced, 1:2-5. God’s indictment of King Saul, after his disobedience, 1 Samuel 15, is a similar incident where obedience to God is better than sacrificing to God. See 1 Samuel 15:22-23. God’s judgment upon Saul was to reject him as king. Isaiah declared that God will judge the people of Judah and Jerusalem because of their detestable sins. God’s judgment would result in the destruction of their nation and their removal from it. See also Isaiah 3:1-26; 5:1-30; and 22:1-14.

1:12-14 When you come to appear before me, who has required this from your hand, this trampling of my courts?

13 Do not bring any more worthless offerings; your incense is detestable to me. New moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, -- I cannot stand such sinful assemblies.

14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts I hate; they have become a burden to me; I am tired of putting up with them.

God calls the attendance of worshipers at the temple a trampling of His courts for they are not welcome. Their offerings are called worthless and even the fragrant odor of incense, the unique recipe of the Lord’s choosing, Exodus 30:34-38, is now an abomination to Him. Their observance of solemn assemblies,
consecrated days, new moon festivals, appointed feasts and Sabbaths had become a burden for God to endure and recognize because of their evil hearts. God was not abolishing these observances that He had designed for them: Exodus 12:14-20; 23:14-19; 29:10-30:38; 31:12-17; 34:18-26; Leviticus chapters 1-7 and 23-27; Numbers 9:1-14; 10:10; 28:1-29:40; and Deuteronomy 16:1-17. He was, however, declaring His righteous indignation against the evilness in their hearts and their wicked actions which they did not repent of when they came to worship Him. God would not and still does not accept worship from those whose inward thoughts and outward actions are full of sinfulness.

1:15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are full of blood.

As a result of their evilness in worship, God declares that when they spread out their hands in prayer, and when they multiply their prayers, He will refuse to listen to them because their hands are covered in blood. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The usual stance of the Israelite at prayer was to spread forth his hands, palms upward. However when these praying hands were covered with blood, God could not hearken to their prayers, but only see innocent blood dripping from their palms. Their very display of piety with blood-stained hands, was itself blasphemy. By their “pious activities,” they were unconsciously seeking to reduce Jehovah to the level of the deities of their pagan neighbors, who were as immoral and unconcerned about righteousness as their devotees. All these gods expected of their worshipers was bloody sacrifices and homage. Not so the God of Israel. He who would approach Him must do so with clean hands and a pure heart.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 105).

1:16-20 Repentance Required and Redemption Realized

1:16-17: Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil deeds from before my eyes; stop doing evil.

17 Learn to do good. Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

Having denounced the worship of the evil hearted who have blood dripping from their upraised hands in hypocritical prayer, God demands a change. God desires to keep His covenant relationship with His chosen nation. There is only one possible way for this to happen. The hearts of the people must be made clean. God starts the process with a list of demands for repentance that would have been rapidly and dramatically spoken by the prophet. There are three sets of three demands in 1:16-17. The first set (trio) of demands call for the cleansing and removal of evil. It is an internal activity in which impurity of heart is and willfulness is decidedly removed from their consciousness. It is an act of the will to no longer contemplate and consider wicked behavior. Thomas Constable depicts washing as indicative to repenting. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 20).
By “washing away” their sinfulness they can stand before God ready for the next set of commands. God demands that they cease their evil actions, learn good (acceptable to God) behavior and seek justice. These are external activities which are self-related. They have to do with personal actions that can only be realized after having an inward cleansing. The third set of demands (if obeyed) proves that internal and external changes have occurred in the repentant ones. God calls them to outward righteous actions in the community: reprove (correct) the ruthless, defend the orphan and plead for the widow. James in his epistle pleads for the same actions to follow inward faith. The central teaching of James’ letter is that works must accompany faith. Those who obey God’s word by righteous actions will be blessed. James 1:27 states, “Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD.  
"Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red like crimson,  
they shall be like wool.

This is an often quoted and beloved verse by those who have put their trust in God. It is God’s explanation of how He views the transformation of the penitent from acts of blood stained hands to a soul who has been washed and cleansed by the intervention of God. Later revelation by Isaiah, chapter 53, will explain how God accomplishes this intervention. God calls His people to listen to Him (come now) and hear His declaration (reason together). It was not a call for a conference of peers collaborating on a considered action. It was a gracious and caring demonstration of sacrificial love by God to His beloved people. Although they repeatedly spurned Him by rebellious deeds, He repeatedly reached out His arm to comfort them and offer His salvation. He did this at the greatest of all costs to Himself. God’s intervening action to restore His people to godliness cost the life of His beloved Son who was put to death following excruciating suffering and abuse by the very people He came to rescue from an eternity of torment.

It wasn’t as if this was a reactionary move by God following an unforeseen fall into sin by those whom He had created. God’s provision of salvation with the crucified Son being mankind’s kinsmen redeemer was planned in eternity past before the creation of the heavens and the earth. A careful study of Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 5:9-12; and 13:8 reveals God’s eternal purpose in creation which is for His glory and to have His image bearers righteously praise Him for the glory of His grace (Ephesians 1:6,12 and 14). God brought salvation to those who will righteously display and declare His glory to all creation.

God describes their sins as being like scarlet and red like crimson, 1:18, for their hands, 1:15, were “full of blood.” By God’s intervention, their sins would be seen as white as snow and like wool. This was also the description of what David, in repentant and humble contrition following his rebuke by the prophet Nathan, due to David’s sin with Bathsheba, called God to perform in him as recorded in Psalm 51:7, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”

This verse and chapter 53 of Isaiah may have been on the mind of the Apostle Paul when he wrote to his young protégé, Timothy, “But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and are convinced of, knowing from whom you learned them. And that from early childhood have known the Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:14-15. Hebrews chapter 11 discusses the faith of many Old Testament saints including Abraham. Also, Paul in Galatians 3:1-9 discusses the faith of Abraham as an example of how those who lived before Christ had faith. Paul, quoting Genesis 15:6, states in Galatians 3:6, “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.”
So, it is quite reasonable from the witness of Scripture to understand Isaiah 1:18 as a message from God explaining how someone who has been lost in their sins could have their lives transformed to be clean and righteous before Him. David L. Cooper explains:

“The mercy of the Lord shows forth in a luminous manner in the promise that the prophet made to Israel: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." God is eager to blot out our sins. No matter how dark they may be, He is very eager to forgive them. But He must be just at the time that He justifies one. Because of this fundamental characteristic of the Divine Being--His holiness--He has provided an atonement for us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If one's sins, which are as scarlet or as red as crimson, are to be washed and made white as wool, one must accept Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, bringing Him to God as his offering of atonement in the spirit of the song, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, 0 Lamb of God, I come." He who comes to Christ, the Lord will in nowise cast out.” (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-September 1943).

1:19-20 *If you are willing and obedient,*

    you will eat the good of the land.

20 *But if you refuse and rebel,*

    you will be devoured with the sword,”

    *for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.*

To have sins cleansed to be white as snow and as wool required an act of consent and obedience by the sinner. It is not that people must perform a work to earn their righteous standing before God. As stated above, Genesis 15:6 records the action of belief by Abraham by which God reckoned (put to his account) to him as righteousness. God in Isaiah 1:19 states the sinner must first consent to God’s word regarding the transformation of the sinner from unrighteous to righteous. In 1:19, the word “willing” (consent) is the Hebrew word *abah*, literally meaning to “breathe after” or “to acquiesce”. It has a passive sense not having the same force as volition but when coupled with “obey;” which is the Hebrew word *shama*, which has the meaning of hearing with the intent to obey. The meaning, therefore, is clear that God intended the people to hear, listen to His word and obey Him. By their obedience they demonstrate their faith in Him. Obedience is a consequence of their internal decision to listen to God. The reward for their obedience to God was that they would “eat the best of the land” implying God’s protection and provision for them. The consequence of disobedience was that their land would be conquered, and the people would be devoured (eaten) by the sword of their conquerors. God would send a powerful nation to destroy them. See also Deuteronomy 28:1-68 and 30:15-20.

1: 21-31 Evil Removed and Righteousness Restored

1:21 *How the faithful city has become a whore!*

*She was once full of justice,*

    *righteousness inhabited her,*

    *but now only murderers.*

The Lord describes the woeful condition of His beloved city. The word “How” according to Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 108, sounds like a sigh in the Hebrew and it is the first word of the book of Lamentations. God is lamenting that the city, which was once a place of justice, has sunk so low as to be described as a harlot. The city which also was the residence for righteousness was now the home for murderers. Victor Buksbazen also notes (ibid) that the Hebrew word for “murderers” is *merachetzim* having the meaning of “professional murderers” – killers for hire.
1:22 Your silver has become dross, 
your wine diluted with water.

The Lord also described the city as a precious metal (silver) that has become diluted with pollution and therefore has lost its value and usefulness. The city was also likened to drink, fine wine or other fermented liquid, that had been diluted with water to cheapen it and make it unpalatable and worthless for its intended use. This description of the corruption of silver and wine is a metaphor for the rulers of Jerusalem, 1:23, who have become so corrupt, as 1:21 so graphically avows, that the once faithful city has become a whore!

1:23 Your princes are rebellious, 
and companions of thieves. 
Everyone loves bribes, 
and chases after payoffs. 
They refuse to defend the orphan, 
and the widow's cause does not come before them.

The Lord next describes the leaders of the city. They are rebels who love a bribe and who prefer the companionship of thieves to fellowship with their Creator. They prove they have not repented and have not removed their evil deeds from God’s sight for they have not, as required by God, 1:17, defended the orphan nor have they plead (as in court) for the widows. Their internal consciousness and will and their external behavior is thoroughly corrupt and without hope of restoration nor can they have a righteous relationship with God unless He takes drastic action to discipline them, by punitive action, and cleanse them. And this is exactly what God now states He will do for His people.

1:24 Therefore the Lord, the LORD of hosts, 
the Mighty One of Israel, says, 
"I will take vengeance on my enemies, 
and avenge myself on my foes."

The Lord announces His intention to be relieved of His adversaries and He will avenge Himself of His foes. His intentions are introduced by His self-declarative titles. God describes Himself as “the LORD of hosts” (see study notes on 1:9 above) and “the Mighty One of Israel.” This later name occurs only in this verse. The title “Mighty One of Jacob” occurs in Genesis 49:24; Psalm 132:2, 5; Isaiah 49:26 and 60:16. Both of the Isaiah references have the full title of, “your savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” These descriptive titles of the Lord are His announcement by sacred decree that He alone has the authority and ability to accomplish His will. He alone is the Lord of the universe who is absolutely free to do what He wants without any obstruction by those who would oppose Him. For God’s opinion of His enemies, see Psalm 2.

1:25 I will turn my hand on you, 
and skim off your dross, 
and will remove all your impurities.

God announces His intention to deal with the obstinate and sinful people of Jerusalem. The dross and dilution (that which pollutes the spiritual condition of His people) that God mentioned in 1:22 would now be skimmed (smelted) away implying a cleansing purpose. The process of refining or smelting metal requires
intense heat. As applied to God’s people it would mean hardship and suffering. The fourth stanza of a beloved hymn, *How Firm a Foundation*, by an anonymous author speaks to this work of God:

“When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
my grace all sufficient, shall be your supply;
the flame shall not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine.”

A thoughtful study on this hymn is given by David Powlison in chapter 7 of the book, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*. John Piper, Justin Taylor, General Editors, Crossway Books, Wheaton, 2006. See notes on Isaiah 41:10. The intent of this old hymn and more importantly of the word of God in Isaiah 1:25, is that God refines His beloved children so that they will be purified and prepared to undertake the work God has intended them to accomplish. Proverbs 3:11-12, also quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6, describes a similar action of God for the purposes of correction and restoration.

1:26 *I will restore your judges as at the first,*

and your counselors as at the beginning.

*Afterward you will be called,*

'the City of Righteousness,`

'a Faithful Town.'

Following the refining process, which will include suffering by His children, God will restore Jerusalem’s judges and counselors, who by implication will be faithful to Him and treat fairly His people. The city will also be called “the city of righteousness, a faithful city.” This promise of restoration and revival of the spiritual leaders of Jerusalem is very typical of Isaiah’s writing style. Consistently throughout his prophecy, Isaiah depicts judgment on the people of God from their holy and just Sovereign Lord, followed by a promise of a future kingdom where peace, justice and righteousness will exist, and this kingdom will be ruled by the Messiah. Thomas Constable explains:

“God would subject His people to fires of adversity, but only to purify them, not destroy them. Just rulers would emerge and the city would once again enjoy a reputation for righteousness and faithfulness to God. This is the first allusion in Isaiah to a coming Judge who will establish justice and create righteous conditions, about whom the prophet revealed much more later. The restoration described here will find fulfillment in the millennial reign of Christ.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 21).

1:27 *Zion will be redeemed with justice,*

and her repentant ones with righteousness.

The city of Jerusalem, often called “Zion” by Isaiah, will experience redemption by means of justice. This certainly is a reference to God’s work of redemption through His Servant, the Messiah, whom Isaiah will later describe in 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12. This is God’s righteous and holy work of redemption by God’s appointed Redeemer who is the holy Judge who will administer righteous judgment. Redemption is a major theme is Isaiah. The word “redeemed” occurs thirteen times, 1:17; 29:22; 35:9; 43:1; 44:22, 23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 62:12; 63:4 and 9. The One who secures redemption, is called the “Redeemer” also occurring thirteen times in Isaiah, 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16 and 63:16. See notes on each of these verses for an expanded discussion.

The people of God’s beloved city, Zion will experience redemption by the righteous work of their coming Messiah. These ones, the faithful remnant, are described in Isaiah 1:27 as “repentant ones.” See comments on
1:9. Zion, the Hebrew word Tsiyyon, is first mentioned in 1:8, is the beloved hill of God. It was one of the mountains in the land of Moriah to which God had directed Abraham to perform the test of sacrificing Isaac as described in Genesis 22. David later purchased this mountain, 2 Samuel 24:18-25 and the temple was built upon it by Solomon, 2 Chronicles 3:1. It was and still is, a sacred place for the Lord and His people. Zion will have a very prominent place in the future messianic kingdom. See, Isaiah chapter 2:1-11; 4:1-6; 24:23; 35:10; 51:11; 59:20; Joel chapter 2; 3:18-21; Micah 4:1-13; and Zechariah 8:1-8.

1:28 But the rebellious and sinners will be crushed, and those who forsake the LORD will be consumed.

In stark contrast to the redeemed people of God, who were repentant and obeyed Him and had their future assured by their Redeemer, the Messiah, those who refused to repent and remained rebellious and sinful will be crushed together and will come to an end. They will have no glorious future with their God nor will they have any hope of restoration. For most of the people of Judah and Jerusalem who were the recipients of Isaiah’s prophetic messages, this verse is a sad commentary on their lives. God had foretold Isaiah that his audience would have hard hearts, deaf ears and blind eyes, not just for a short time but until the land is “absolutely devastated,” Isaiah 6:8-13.

Woven throughout his prophecy is Isaiah’s many discussions on the judgment of God on those who have rebelled against Him and have scorned His loving care for them. In vivid detail, Isaiah describes the final end of these sinful people such as “crushed” and “consumed” in 1:28, and “burn” in 1:31. Among a multitude of other depictions of the retribution God will enact on His people for despising Him, chapter 5:25, is a representative sample, “Therefore the anger of the LORD burns against his people; he has stretched out his hand against them, and has struck them. The mountains tremble, and their corpses are strewn like garbage in the streets.” When studying Isaiah, one has to keep in mind that, even though God often talks of judgment, He also talks of comfort, salvation and of a future peaceable kingdom which will be ruled by His beloved Son, the Messiah to come.

1:29-30 For you will be ashamed of the sacred oaks in which you delighted, and you will be embarrassed for the gardens that you have chosen.
30 For you will be like an oak whose leaf withers, and like a garden that has no water.
31 The strong will be like tinder, and his work like a spark. They will both burn together, with no one able to extinguish the fire.

One of the most detestable practices of the people of God in Judah was participating in pagan Canaanite fertility rites which included lewd and profane acts under the cover of trees (oaks or terebinth) and gardens specifically selected for these purposes. These rites included prostitution committed next to Asherah poles and incense altars and the despicable action of sacrificing children to the pagan god Molech. They also ate pigs flesh which was cooked in broth that included many things that were an abomination to God. The Israelites were told by God to tear down the pagan altars, sacred pillars and the Asherim of the inhabitants of Canaan when they took possession of the promised land. They were not to make any covenant with the pagan peoples of this land nor to unite with any of them in marriage, Exodus 34:12-17. See also Deuteronomy 12:2-4 and 16:21-22.
However, the Israelites disobeyed God and began to worship Baal and his female consort, Asherah. This worship involved the carving of a wooden pole (called Asherah) and planting it in selected groves (gardens with oak and terebinth trees). In these groves, the hideous practices described above took place. Some leaders (Gideon) and kings (Hezekiah and Josiah) removed the Asherah poles. King Ahab, however had built an Asherah and worshipped Baal, 1Kings 16:29-33, and king Manasseh brought a carved image of Asherah into the temple, 2 Kings 21:2-9. Selected additional references to this pagan worship include, Judges 3:7; 6:25-32; 1Kings 18:19; Isaiah 27:9; 57:3-13; 65:2-7; Jeremiah 17:1-4; Ezekiel 6:11-14 and Micah 5:13-14.

But, their devotion to pagan religious practices and their worship of false gods would prove to be of no benefit or profit. These worthless deities could not comfort them or save them when the One true God brings upon them their destruction. This destruction will devour both the pagan idol and those who worship it. Many depictions of judgment in Isaiah involves burning. See also: 4:4; 10:17; 26:11; 34:9-10; and 66:24. This descriptive portrayal of their final doom is no more vividly displayed than in the last verse of the prophecy of Isaiah in which the righteous ones will look upon the never-ending punishment of the wicked, “They will go out, and look on the corpses of those who have rebelled against me; for their worms will not die, neither will their fire be extinguished. They will be abhorred by all humanity.” Isaiah 66:24.

As is evident from a study of this first chapter, many of the issues introduced by Isaiah are discussed in greater detail as his prophecy proceeds to its final conclusion. Isaiah organized his writings into the format that has been preserved by God and placed in its prominent position in the Old Testament. Isaiah did not write haphazardly but compiled his writings in such a way as to present thematically and logically the vision he received from God. The remaining chapters 2-6 of the lengthy introduction to his prophetical writings also introduce issues that will be discussed in greater detail in later sections of his book.

Teaching Outline of Isaiah Chapter 1:
1:1-9 Rebellion Revealed
1:10-15 Worthless Worship Condemned
1:16-20 Repentance Required and Redemption Realized
1:21-31 Evil Removed and Righteousness Restored

Isaiah Chapters 2-4

This portion of Isaiah contains an indictment from the Lord on the wickedness of the nation’s rulers, its men, its women and inclusively all who have committed idolatry and have been influenced by other nations which resulted in open rebellion against God. Specific verses from this section are prophetically linked to the time of tribulation as revealed in the book of Revelation. The wickedness of the human race and notably for the Jewish nation will not gradually turn to righteousness, nor will mankind’s morals or ethics evolve from evil mindedness to purity over a long period of time. Just as Isaiah witnessed the iniquities practiced by the Jewish people during his life, so will the angels of God witness the iniquities of mankind unfold unabated and unrepentant until the time of the great white throne judgment recorded in Revelation chapter 20. The long sad history of the Jewish nation is marked with episodes of open rebellion against their covenant keeping God who desired that they repent of their sins and return whole heartedly to Him. At the end of the Tribulation in the future, and just prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom, a remnant of faithful Jews will repent and turn to God.

Chapters 2-4 form a cohesive unit in which Isaiah speaks of the glories of the days when the Messiah will rule on the earth with Jerusalem as His capital. David L. Cooper comments:
“THE SECOND recorded sermon of Isaiah appears as chapters 2, 3, and 4 of his book. These chapters must be studied as a whole. He began his sermon with a vision of Jerusalem as the capital of the earth during the Millennial Age and concluded it with a like vision recorded in chapter 4. Between these glimpses of glory, he spoke of the corrupt customs and manners which had been imported into the country from foreign, pagan lands. Then he foretold the terrific judgments of the great day of Jehovah when every high thing that is exalted against God will be brought low, and when God alone shall be exalted. This prediction is followed by a description of the low spiritual, ethical, and moral tone of the people of Israel during the time of the Tribulation. We might compare the first and last visions of this sermon to mountain peaks and the material presented in the body of the sermon to the valley separating them.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly - October 1943.)

2. Messiah’s Kingdom in the Last Days: Chapter 2:1-4

The first four verses of chapter 2 of Isaiah provide a prophetic vision of the future kingdom of God in which the Lord Himself will be a judge over and a teacher to the nations. The vision concerns Judah and Jerusalem, vs.1; and the specific location is called the mountain of the LORD’s house which will be established as the highest of the earth’s mountains and all nations will flow (stream) to it, vs. 2. The Lord will issue His word and law from Zion and many peoples will desire to go up to the mountain of the LORD to be taught by Him, so they can walk in His paths, vs. 3. The LORD will be the judge between the nations in this kingdom which will be peaceful and in which the nations on earth will never again learn war or rise up against each other, vs. 4.

There is no indication whatsoever that this is a parable or a literary interlude within the prophecy of Isaiah. If Isaiah is to be understood clearly, the words must be taken as they are stated. The vision concerns Judah and Jerusalem in the last days. So, it is in the far future from Isaiah’s time. The last days must mean a future time when nations never again will learn war. Even a cursory study of history will reveal that so far this has not taken place, so the last days must still be in the future in our time. Therefore, Isaiah is stating clearly that Judah, Jerusalem and Mount Zion will be inhabited, and the Lord will be in residence and that there will be other nations on the earth whose citizens will go to Zion for teaching, so they can walk in His paths.

There is also no indication from this passage or from any other passage in all of Scripture that these verses are a prophecy of a future church age. To render it so would be an indication that any passage in Isaiah or in the Old Testament cannot be taken at face value. To read “church” into this passage is purely allegorical speculation. What we can know for certain is that in the future, in the last days, the Lord Himself will be resident on Mount Zion in the City of Jerusalem in the nation of Judah. If the Lord is present, it will be as ruler of His kingdom. No other person would be suitable or worthy.

Micah 4:1-4 is a parallel passage to Isaiah 2:1-4. It may be that Micah incorporated the words of Isaiah into his prophecy or that he received the same message from the Holy Spirit. It is significant however that when the same words from God are proclaimed a second time, it cannot be ignored as just coincidence. Every word of God in the Scriptures has its purpose as Isaiah will later record, “So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it,” Isaiah 55:11.

2:1 The message that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
Isaiah begins another major declaration of prophetic truth with the words, “The word Isaiah, the son of Amoz saw.” He uses a similar phrase in 1:1 and 13:1. How Isaiah “saw” the word (2:1), vision (1:1), and oracle (13:1) from God is not revealed to us. It does however indicate that the prophet was allowed by God to “see” the future as if it had already happened. The Apostle John was given the same prophetic sight regarding the end times and his record of it is preserved for us in the last book of the Scriptures. The “message” Isaiah saw concerns the future glory for the covenant people of God, who are his main audience, those who will be the faithful residents of Judah and Jerusalem.

2:2 In the latter days,
the mountain of the LORD's house will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will flow unto it.

The message (word) or vision Isaiah saw, concerns the last days. This is a literal reference to the days that concern the “days’ of second coming of the Lord. Victor Buksbazen observes:

“At the end of the days” or “in the last days,” in Hebrew “be-aharit ha-yamin,” is an expression which, as a rule, refers to the Messianic times. The word “eschatology” is derived from the Greek word “eschaton” – “the last,” which, in turn, is a translation of the above Hebrew phrase.

The end of the days is that period of time which closes human history. It is the era which inaugurates the Kingdom of God, when the Lord Himself will rule the nations, as well as the hearts and minds of men. It will be the realization of true theocracy, not the rule of priests or religious functionaries, but of God Himself. The end of times bridges time and eternity.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 114.)

David M Levy, in his commentary on the Prophet Joel, comments:

“Joel described this awesome day as the day of the Lord (Jehovah). The phrase day of the Lord is used some five times in Joel (1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14). Although it has reference to the local judgment God would bring on Judah through this plague, it speaks of a future day when God will intervene in judgment upon the world. For example, Joel 2:31 must be speaking of a future day of judgment, because the sun was not darkened, nor the moon turned into blood during Joel’s day. Again, Joel 3:14 does not speak of Joel’s day but a future day of judgment upon the enemies of Israel. The plague in Joel’s day was a prototype of an awesome day of the Lord yet future.

To understand what is meant by the day of the Lord, one must understand the difference between man’s day and the Lord’s day. There are four key days mentioned in Scripture. First is man’s day. This phrase is used in 1 Corinthians 4:3 in reference to “man’s judgment.” Paul said: “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment ....” This “man’s judgment” is literally man’s day, having reference to the day which now is, when men have control over human government.

Second is the day of Christ, mentioned six times in Scripture (1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16). It refers to the time when Christ will come to rapture the Church (1 Th. 4:13–18) out of the earth, taking Christians to be with Him (Jn. 14:1–3) forever.

Third is the day of the Lord, which speaks of a dark gloomy day (2:1)—a time of judgment. The day of the Lord refers to the direct intervention of God in the affairs of man after the Rapture of the Church. It covers the Tribulation (Rev. 6–19), Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1–10), and the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15). It is not only a time of judgment on the wicked, but a time of great blessing for the redeemed of Israel and the Church.
Fourth is the day of God, mentioned in 2 Peter 3:12, which has reference to the heavens passing away, the elements melting, the earth being renovated by fire, and the establishment of a new heaven and earth, ushering in the eternal state.” (Notes on Joel 1:15 by David M Levy, Joel: The Day of the Lord: A Chronology of Israel’s Prophetic History, Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1987, Logos Edition).

The first important detail Isaiah mentions about these latter (last) days regards the mountain upon which the house of the Lord will reside. This mountain, Zion will be, at that time, the “highest,” Hebrew: rosh, which has the meaning of “head” “top” or “first.” The word occurs 598 times in the O.T. and is translated as “head” 349 times, as “chief” 91 times and as “top” 73 times.

The second detail about this mountain is that it will be “exalted above the hills,” giving it the most esteemed status among all the mountains and hills of the earth. One possible understanding of this mountain that is exalted (raised) above the hills is that, due to the cataclysm described in Revelation 16:17-21 near the end of the great tribulation, all other mountains and hills have been leveled and according to Isaiah 2:2, it is Zion alone which will be raised and be the exalted mountain of God. Another possibility is that due to its exalted and majestic ruler who resides upon it, Zion is described as the chief of mountains and raised above the hills. See also, Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, page 129. Thomas Constable adds:

“...The term "mountain" is sometimes a symbol of a kingdom, nation, authority, or rule elsewhere in the prophetic writings (e.g., Dan. 2:35, 44-45; Amos 4:1; Rev. 17:9-11). The ancients also regarded mountains as the homes of the gods. If Isaiah was using "mountain" as a figure of speech, he meant that Israel and her God would be the most highly exalted in the earth eventually. This will be the case during Messiah's earthly reign. The reference to "the mountain of the house of Yahweh" (v. 2), however, may indicate that the prophet had a more literal meaning in mind. He may have meant that the actual mountain on which the temple stood would be thrust higher in elevation. This may happen (cf. Ezek. 40:2; Zech. 14:4, 10), but the primary implication seems to be that Israel and Yahweh will be exalted in the world.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 23).

The God who lives on this mountain will have the greatest supremacy over any other so-called gods or pagan deities. In fact, there is no comparison whatsoever among the world’s so-called deities to God, as there is only one true God as Isaiah so emphatically declares, Isaiah 43:10; 44:8; 45:5, 14, 18, 21, 22; 46:9. In the ancient world, mythical pagan deities were said to have resided on high mountains.

Isaiah dispels any doubts about the pre-eminence, supremacy and exaltation of the existence and dominance of the One true God over any of those that mankind could invent or imagine. There really is no competition or any real comparison. How can the only true God compare with imagined and non-existent gods? Isaiah will make this point with scorning irony later when he discusses the complete folly of those who craft idols from perishable materials.

The third detail in Isaiah 2:2 about these latter (last) days is that all nations (peoples) will flow (stream) to it (the “mountain of the LORD, 2:3). The identification of the mountain is Zion, the Lord’s beloved dwelling place on earth. Its location is in His capital city, Jerusalem. The time frame is at the beginning of the Lord’s messianic earthly kingdom when all rebellion against God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ has been destroyed. The Son, who is the Suffering Servant described by Isaiah, and is the long-awaited Messiah will be preparing His administration to rule the earth in justice and peace.

Peoples from all nations who have survived the great tribulation and who will not worship the beast (the antichrist) but will remain faithful to the Lord, will come to Zion to worship their Lord in person. Among them will be the scattered remnant, the faithful Jews, who will have believed in their Messiah for salvation, and who will also come from all the nations to worship their Messiah. This is one of the marvelous themes of the prophetical books of the Old Testament, Isaiah 11:11-12; 14:1-2; 27:12; 43:1-7; 49:1-26; 54:7; 56:6-7;
2:3 Many peoples will come and say,
"Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us of his ways,
and we will walk in his paths."
For out of Zion the law will go forth,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

During this time, the messianic reign of Christ, the peoples of the earth who have survived the horrors of the great tribulation will be those who seek the Lord. They will have a desire to travel to Mount Zion to learn from the Messiah, who is described in Isaiah 2:3, as the God of Jacob. Not only will they receive instruction from the Lord, but they will heed His word and walk in His ways. As Mount Zion will be the residence (house) of the Lord, He will make decrees and His word will be dispensed as law to all the nations of the earth. Often, Zion as the holy mountain is recorded in the Scriptures. See Psalm 2:6; 3:4; 48:1; 87:1; Isaiah 11:9; 27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25 and 66:20; Ezekiel 20:40; 43:12; Daniel 9:16, 20; 11:45; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Obadiah vs. 16; Zephaniah 3:11 and Zechariah 8:3.

2:4 He will judge between the nations,
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation;
they will not train for war anymore.

During the millennial kingdom, the Messiah, will rule the earth and will be the supreme judge between the nations rendering righteous judgment. Isaiah refers to this righteous Judge in 11:14; 16:5; 33:22 and 51:5. The Lord is concerned with justice as Isaiah reveals in 1:27; 9:7; 16:5; 28:17; 30:18; 32:16; 33:5; 42:1, 3, 4; 51:4 and 61:8. The Messiah will rule in peace and nations will no longer arm themselves for war. One of the great titles for the Messiah is Prince of Peace, Isaiah 9:6. The establishment of peace and the Lord’s desire to bring peace to His people is another of the grand themes of Isaiah, 9:7; 26:3, 12; 27:5; 32:17, 18; 52:7; 54:10; 55:12; 57:2, 19; 60:17 and 66:12. In contrast the wicked will not be recipients of peace: 48:22 and 57:21.

Michael Rydelnik, and James Spencer, authors of Isaiah in The Moody Bible Commentary, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2014 comment on verses 1-5 of Isaiah chapter 2:

“Verse 1 is not described as a “vision,” but as a word (“message”) depicting the glorious eschatological future for Israel and Jerusalem. The prophet announced what he had seen concerning Jerusalem and Judah. The picture of Israel in chap. 2 inspires hope that God will bring about His promised blessing by making the temple mount, or the mountain of the house of the LORD (v. 2, cf. v. 3), the highest of the mountains. The height of the mountain was a significant factor because of the ancient Near Eastern perspective suggesting that the peaks of the mountains were associated with the presence of the gods. Mountains, in particular the temple mount, were viewed as the junction between heaven and earth. That the mountain of the house of the Lord will be higher than any other mountain speaks to its prominence and, in this context, the glory of the temple and truthfulness of the worship that occurs there.
As the law is proclaimed from Zion (v. 3), the mountain of the Lord, the nations will call one another to worship at the temple so that they may learn God’s ways and live obediently (v. 3). Although God’s law is eternal, it has various expressions. This likely does not indicate that the law of Moses will be reinstated in the messianic kingdom. More likely, the word law should be translated “instruction” (HCSB) and refer to the laws God establishes for the future eschatological kingdom. The nations will finally recognize God as the true God who will judge the world with righteousness and bring peace to the nations, signified by turning their implements of war into agricultural tools. While the first four verses of the chapter present the glorious future of Zion without reference to the sin and rebellion of Israel, v. 5 appears to be a call for the house of Jacob to return to Zion. The depiction of the nations streaming to Zion in vv. 5-4 is utilized to motivate Judah to walk obediently in the light of the LORD (v. 5).” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2014, page 1013).

Teaching Outline of Isaiah Chapter 2:1-4

1-2 Where: The Location of the Prophecy
1-4 Who: The Peoples of the Prophecy
2 When: The Time of the Prophecy
3-4 What: The Teaching and Judgment of the Lord
4 Why: The Promised Peace of the Prophecy

3. Sin Revealed and Judgment Declared: 2:5-4:1

Walk in the Light of the Lord: Chapter 2:5-9

In this brief passage, Isaiah 2:5-9, the prophet exhorts his nation to walk in the light of the LORD, vs. 5; for God has rejected His covenant people because they have practiced the pagan religious rites (that are an abomination to Him), vs. 6. The land of Judah was prosperous, full of silver, gold and treasures, horses and chariots, vs. 7. The land was also full of idols which the people had made, and they worshipped the work of their hands, vs. 8. Because of this attention to wealth and idol worship, the prophet asks God not to forgive them, vs. 9.

2:5 O house of Jacob, come,
       let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Following the declaration of a glorious vision of the Kingdom of the Messiah, Isaiah calls upon the people of God, “house of Jacob” to walk in the light of the LORD. In the New Testament, a similar exhortation is pronounced by Paul in Ephesians 5:8-20. Paul states in verses 8-10 of Ephesians 5, “for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” John chapter 1:4-5 identifies Jesus Christ as the source of the light. In the verses that follow 2:6-9, the prophet explains why the people of God need to walk in the light of the Lord.

2:6 For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob,
       because they are filled with fortunetellers from the east,
       and soothsayers like the Philistines,
       and they shake hands in agreement with foreigners.

Isaiah states that the judgment of God is upon His people. God had rejected (or abandoned) His people because, first, they have allowed themselves to be deluded from eastern influences by filling the land with “fortunetellers” or filled with the customs of these eastern countries. This indictment likely included
influences from nations to the north-east, Assyria and Babylonia. Second, they also have become “soothsayers like the Philistines” which is pagan superstitious divination which was expressly forbidden by God as stated in the Torah: Leviticus 19:26 and Deuteronomy 18:9-14. Third, God’s abandonment also came as a result of the bargains (covenants, pacts, agreements, treaties) they made with foreigners for “they shake hands in agreement with foreigners”. To this God had also forbidden, as stated in Deuteronomy chapter 7.

2:7 Their land is full of silver and gold;  
there is no end to their treasures.  
Their land is full of horses;  
there is no end of their chariots.

Isaiah continues with his listing of why God had rejected (abandoned) the people of Judah. Fourth, the people, during prosperous times, had accumulated wealth “silver and gold” and they had devoted themselves to the development of their own personal treasuries. The Lord as recorded in Matthew 6:19-21, warns against this accumulation of earthly wealth which was still a persistent problem with the Israelites in the first century A.D. The irony of all this accumulation of wealth by the kings of Judah during Isaiah’s times was that it was soon to be removed. Payment to Assyria for an agreement for Judah’s protection was made by Ahaz, 2 Kings 16: 8 and later the Babylonians completely stripped the temple, the house of the Lord, of all its valuable metals during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, 2 Kings 25:8-17. Fifth, as well as accumulated wealth, the people had great resources in livestock including horses which they depended upon for military strength. Isaiah explains in later passages the futility of trusting in them, 30:16 and 31:1. However, in the later days they will be put to much better use as Isaiah states in 66:20. Sixth, not only were they amassing horses but also chariots which was a sign of military superiority. Under king Uzziah, Judah had an elite army which was ready for battle as described in 2 Chronicles 26: 6-15. The Lord had abandoned His people for they had ignored His word and placed their trust in possessions that could not save them. In contrast to the trust the people of Judah placed in their horses and chariots, was the declaration by the Psalmist in Psalm 33:16-22:

16 No king is saved by his great army;  
no warrior is delivered by his great strength.  
17 It is false to trust a horse for victory,  
for it cannot deliver even by its great strength.  
18 Look, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his loyal love,  
to deliver their soul from death,  
and keep them alive in famine.  
20 Our soul expectantly waits for the LORD;  
he is our help and our shield.  
21 For our heart rejoices in him,  
because we trust in his holy name.  
22 Let your loyal love, O LORD, be upon us,  
just as we expectantly wait for you.

2:8 Their land also is full of idols;  
they worship the work of their own hands,  
that which their own fingers have made.
Seventh, the final reason in this passage why the Lord had rejected (abandoned) the people of Judah, was the most blasphemous. If trusting in covenants with pagans and in their own wealth and possessions was reason enough for God to judge them, their crafting and worship of idols was a practice that would guarantee God’s strongest retribution. Making and worshiping idols was condemned from the beginning of God’s relationship with His people whom He brought out of Egypt. It was while God was speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai and dictating to him the laws that would define God’s relationship with His people, that these very people were engaging in the casting and worship of a pagan idol. Refer to Exodus chapter 32. Idol worship was not new. The first mention in the Scriptures of idols was the household idols of Laban that his daughter Rachel who was married to Jacob, had stolen from Laban’s home. When the people of God had close association with pagans, idol worship was certain to result as many passages in the Old Testament sadly testify. Isaiah mentions idol worship nineteen times in his prophecy. The Lord did not tolerate idol worship. Isaiah would later state the judgment of God on His people because of their resistance to eliminate this pagan practice. Isaiah 10:10-11. Geoffrey W. Grogan suggests a link exists between verses Isaiah 2: 6-9 and Micah 5:10-14. (Geoffrey W. Grogan, Isaiah, page 37).

The word idol, elil in Hebrew, means worthless, vain, or nothing. Its implication is stunning. The people of God turned from worshiping the One true God to the worship of nothing, thus replacing the inestimable worth and glory of God with something that was worthless. This insult to God was and remains to this day the cause of a great chasm between the Creator and His created peoples. God cannot and will not leave it without consequence. The great problem for humans is that they are incapable of mending this rift between God and themselves. The greater praise is that God alone has made reconciliation between Himself and His created people by providing a righteous, once for all, substitutionary atonement for the sins of mankind through the death and resurrection of His Son whom He had eternally decreed to be the sin-bearer on behalf of mankind. Those who trust in the provision of salvation through the sin-bearer, the Messiah, the Son of God, would have their relationship with their Creator restored. Those who rebel and refuse to trust in the Son, will live forever in judgment separated from God’s gracious presence.

2:9 So the people are humbled, each one is brought low. Do not forgive them.

Those who have trusted in worthless idols and in their own possessions and in covenants with pagan nations rather than trusting in God, will be abased and humbled whatever their earthly status has been. God is not a respecter of persons but will judge all people equally. The attainment of earthly wealth, great power or high position is of no importance to one’s eternal destiny. Trusting in anyone or anything rather than in God is absolute folly and will result in tragic and horrific eternal consequences. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The prophet reaches the climax of outrage when he cries out in an apparent fit of anger and frustration “Forgive them not!” Somehow the human quality of the prophet comes through to us very clearly in spite of the twenty-six centuries which separate us from his times. This momentary lapse of Isaiah’s usual compassion for his people can only be explained by the depths of the prophet’s anguish as he looked on helplessly at the growing spread of injustice, idolatry and the corroding influence of wealth, side by side with the increasing arrogance and smug self-assurance of the leaders of Judah.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 118).

Alternatively, regarding the phrase “do not forgive them” Gary V. Smith comments:

“An alternative approach that seems more consistent with the surrounding statement about humbling the proud would not understand these words as an abrupt prayer by Isaiah, but a simple concluding statement that “you (God) should not lift up/exalt them.” In light of what was said about the sinfulness of these people, it is logical to
reach the conclusion that the sinful person should not be exalted. This interpretation avoids the difficulty of having a one-line, fragmentary prayer and removes the theological idea that Isaiah did not want God to forgive these people. It also fits the contextual emphasis that God has humbled the proud and will not lift them up again. Isaiah indicates that there is no hope for restoration or an eventual healing for proud people like Uzziah. People can avoid this fate only (a) by not trusting in mankind and all their earthly achievements (2:7–8, 13–16, 22), and (b) by exalting God alone (2:11, 12, 17).” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, page 138).

In a footnote to this excerpt, Smith explains some of the alternate meanings of the Hebrew word nasa, which may have been added to bolster his suggestion that the words in many English versions, “do not forgive them” or “forgive them not” have a possible alternative interpretation that these people are not to be exalted.

The Day of Reckoning: Chapter 2:10-22

Isaiah in these verses declares that because of the sins of the people of Judah that have been identified in chapter 1 and up to verse 9 of chapter 2, God will not allow their sinful actions to continue forever without a holy and just recompense. The prophet begins this section with a call for his people to hide from the terror of the LORD and from the glory of His majesty, vs. 10. Human arrogance and haughtiness will be humbled, but the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, vs. 11. The Lord will have a day of reckoning, against all that is exalted upon the earth, and He alone will be exalted, on that day, vss. 12-17. Eventually all the idols will vanish, vs. 18. Men will hide from the LORD and will throw their idols to the “moles and bats,” when God arises to make the earth tremble, vss. 19-21. In conclusion, the prophet declares, that God’s people are to stop trusting in mere humans, vs. 22.

In these verses, the prophet declares that the Lord will have His day of reckoning in which all who are proud, lofty and lifted up will be abased. The specific time period for this day of reckoning is the tribulation described in Revelation chapters 6-19. One of the most pernicious evils of God’s chosen people was their continual practice of worshiping idols. This practice was eliminated somewhat when the Jewish people who had been taken captive to Babylon returned to their land of promise. Yet it was not removed forever. In the last days, during the time period of the “day of the Lord” this practice will still be a rebellious activity of man. In Revelation 9:20-21 following several months of judgment by the Lord resulting in great turmoil on the earth and perhaps billions killed it is recorded that, “The rest of humankind, who were not killed with these plagues, refused to repent of the works of their hands or to give up worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood; which cannot see, hear, or walk. They refused to repent of their murders, or their sorceries, or their sexual immorality, or their thefts.”

2:10 Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust from the terror of the LORD and from the glory of his majesty.

The Lord will humble those who have spurned Him by turning to idols. He will do so by appearing in “the glory (splendor) of His majesty” and the terror that will seize His created beings at His appearance. Mankind will seek caves and the dust of the earth when the Lord arises “to make the earth tremble” Isaiah 2:19-21. A similar description is recorded by the Apostle John in Revelation 6:12-17 regarding these events that will occur during the days of the sixth seal of the Tribulation period. The phrase, “the glory of His majesty” can be understood at the revealed visible display of God’s brilliant splendor. Isaiah repeats the phrase, “glory of His majesty” in Isaiah 2:19 and 21. This tri-fold repetition, 2:10, 19, 21; is not incidental. When describing the wondrous portrayal of the Lord, Isaiah recorded the words describing the Lord as “holy, holy, holy in 6:3. The emphatic repetition of the glory of the Lord’s majesty is set in stunning contrast to the humble position
of mankind whose arrogant looks will be abased or brought low, 2:11, and who will be driven to holes of the ground, 2:19 and into the caverns of the rocks, 2:21. Isaiah 2:22 aptly summarizes prophet’s message, “Stop trusting in human beings, whose breath is in their nostrils.” See also 2:17.

Glory is the Hebrew word hadar, which has the meaning of glorious brilliance, magnificence and honor. The Old Testament occurrences of glory (splendor) and majesty describing the Lord are, 1 Chronicles 16:27; Job 37:22; Psalm 8:1; 96:6; 104:1; 145:5 and in Isaiah 2:10, 19 and 21. Majesty, Hebrew: gaown, has the meaning of excellence and exaltation. It occurs also in Isaiah 24:14. Also the word Majesty, Hebrew: geuwth, meaning excellence and lifted up occurs in Isaiah 26:10. Also majesty (Hebrew hadar) meaning splendor, glory and dignity occurs in Isaiah 35:2. More comment on these words will be made within the notes for the verses. In the New Testament, the majestic glory of God is described in Hebrews 1:3; and 8:12. This majesty referring to Christ’s transfiguration is described in 2 Peter 1:16-17. See also Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-13; and Luke 9:28-36. Other references of the glory of God occur Jude vs. 25 and Revelation 4:11 and 5:12-13. Another Hebrew word for glory is kabod, which has the meaning of weight and worthiness and is often translated in the O.T. as abundance and honor.

2:11-12 The arrogant looks of humans will be brought low, and the haughtiness of people will be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

12 For there will be a day of the LORD of hosts against all the proud and haughty, and against all that is lifted up, and they will be brought low,

The Lord will have a day when mankind will be humbled, and their proud look will be brought low. The Hebrew word for humbled is shaphel which also means to be abased, and to be brought low. It occurs also in the DASV translated in Isaiah 2:9 as “brought low;” in 2:12 as “brought low;” in 2:17 as “brought low;” in 5:15 as “brought down” and “humbled;” and in 10:33 as “brought low.” The phrase in 2:11, “in that day” is of vital importance in understanding how far reaching the prophecy of Isaiah extends. This “day” has not yet occurred but will certainly arrive in a time of great calamity for the earth and its inhabitants including the Jewish people who have not repented of their sins of worshiping idols and rejecting their Messiah. In the New Testament, this time is referred to as the time of testing, Revelation 3:10, which is the Tribulation described in Revelation chapters 6 to 19.

The phrase “in that day” is an oft repeated warning in the Old Testament referring to the “day of the Lord.” Old Testament references to this day are recorded in. Isaiah 2:12, 13:6 and 13:9; Ezekiel 13:5 and 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 2:11, 2:31 and 3:14; Amos 5:18 and 5:20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7 and 1:14; Zechariah 14:1 and Malachi 4:5. New Testament references are Acts 2:20; 1Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 2 Peter 3:10. See also the notes of this study for Isaiah 4:2-6. David L. Cooper explains:

“THE great day of Jehovah, which is the Tribulation Period, is described in Isaiah 2:12-22. The prophets constantly foretold this day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. Joel, one of the earliest writing prophets, spoke in the most graphic manner in the second and third chapters of his prophecy concerning this period. Amos also described this time of judgment. Zephaniah and Zechariah also foretold it. The Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew, chapters 24 and 25—the Olivet Discourse—enlarged upon it. In Revelation, chapters 6-19, we find the fullest description of the judgments of the great day of Jehovah.” (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-October 1943).
against all the cedars of Lebanon,
that are high and lifted up,
against all the oaks of Bashan,

The prophet continues the declaration of how widely distributed will be the abasement of created things when the Lord has His day of reckoning, 2:12. In the list of created things that shall be abased, 2:13, the great trees are first mentioned. The cedars of Lebanon were of great value as building materials for Solomon’s temple, I Kings chapters 5-7. They were compared to the growth of the righteous, Psalm 92:12. They were planted by the Lord, Psalm 104:6 and often mentioned in judgment, Isaiah 14:8, 37:24; Jeremiah 22:23; Ezekiel 27:5, 31:3; and Zechariah 11:1. These trees were depicted as a description of blessing in the future for Israel, Hosea 14:6. The oaks of Bashan are mentioned next. These oaks are mentioned along with the cypress and cedars of Lebanon as “the majestic ones are destroyed,” in Zechariah 11:1-2, which may be understood as a parallel passage with Isaiah 2:13-16.

against all the high mountains,
against all the high hills,

The second created things mentioned are the high mountains and the high hills. These obvious symbols of height and grandeur will be brought low and leveled when the Lord arises to make the earth tremble, 2:19. This may have a reference to the great earthquake described in Revelation 16:18-20. The pagan peoples of the ancient world concocted myths regarding false “gods” and the worship of these “gods” and idols on high mountains. See Deuteronomy 12:2; 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 16:4; 17:10-11; 2 Chronicles 21:11; Isaiah 57:7, 65:7; Ezekiel 6:3, 13; 18: 6, 11, 15; 22:9; and Hosea 4:13. Scripture also declares God’s judgment on the mountains, Deuteronomy 32:22; Psalm 18:7, 97:5; Isaiah 41:15, 42:15, Jeremiah 4:24; Ezekiel 38:20; Micah 1:4; Habakkuk 3:6; and Revelation 6:14-16;

against every lofty tower,
against every fortified wall,

The third created things mentioned are lofty (high) towers and walls built by mankind which also shall be destroyed and brought low in the day the Lord arises to make the earth tremble. There is no structure, tower, wall, building, or anything crafted by mankind that will be able to withstand the great humbling of the earth when God decides to bring His judgment upon all of His creation. The people of the earth had an early reminder of this when they were building the tower and city of Babel, Genesis 11:1-9. See also Isaiah 30:25. When the Lord brings His judgment in His great wrath, the people of the earth will not seek to hide from Him in their buildings and grand structures they have built, but in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. See Revelation 6:12-17.

against all the ships of Tarshish,
and against every beautiful boat.

The fourth things mentioned are the ships and water craft mankind has built to conduct trade. Like the sixth item, 2:18, these things are created by man and not by God. These also will be destroyed in God’s day of wrath. The “ships of Tarshish” refer to trading vessels likely going to or returning from Tarshish and representing trade between the ancient nations of Isaiah’s day. Tarshish may have been a trading port in Spain.
2:17 People’s pride will be humbled,
    and human haughtiness will be brought low;
    the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

For emphasis, Isaiah 2:17 repeats the thought of 2:11. The fifth created thing mentioned that will be humbled and abased is the pride and lofty self-elevation (pride and haughtiness) of mankind. It is indicative of mankind’s fallen condition that humans are placed near the end of this list rather than in first place. Yet the overall emphasis of the longer passage, Isaiah 2:5-22, is the judgment of God on mankind’s elevated and self-centered pride and position after they have rejected the rule of the Lord and have thrown off any obedience to Him. Thomas Constable comments on verses 12-17:

“Everyone, not just the Israelites, who exalts himself against the Lord will suffer humiliation. The Lord's day of reckoning (v. 12) is any day in which He humbles the haughty, but it is particularly the Tribulation—in which He will humble haughty unbelievers. Isaiah used nature and the works of man to symbolize people (cf. 1:30; 6:13; 9:10; 10:33—11:1; 44:14; 60:16). Here several of these symbols represent the spiritual pride of Israel (cf. Rom. 12:3; Eph. 4:2).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 26).

2:18 Idols will completely vanish.

The sixth and final “thing’ mentioned is not something created by God but by man, see also Isaiah 2:16. The placement of idols at the end of the list is perhaps for dramatic intent and may be a literary device by the prophet to emphasize God’s wrath in ascending order. God will have a day of reckoning on His created order and it appears from Scripture that the forming and worshipping of idols is a most persistent plague on God’s creation which had been “subjected to futility” since the fall of humans from their innocence in the Garden of Eden. See Romans 8:20-22. Isaiah states in 2:18 that “the idols will completely vanish” when the Lord has His day of reckoning. The fact of idol worship was one of the main reasons the Lord caused the people of Judah to be taken captive to Babylon for seventy years and the people of the northern nation of Israel to be purged from the land by the Assyrians. Yet in the New Testament those who are followers of Christ are admonished by the Apostle John: “My dear children, guard yourselves from idols.” 1 John 5:21. Idol worship has not diminished and will not until the Lord has His day of reckoning. See also Revelation 9:20. The prophet had commented on idols in 2:8 and continues his prophetic declaration against them in the verses that follow Isaiah 2:18.

2:19 They will enter the caves of the rocks
    and into the holes in the ground
    from the terror of LORD
    and from the glory of his majesty,
    when he arises to terrify the earth.

When God’s day of reckoning finally comes, when He arises to make the earth tremble, humans will seek refuge against His wrath. Instead of running to Him in repentance and humility, they will run into “caves of the rocks and into holes in the ground.” See also Isaiah 2:21. Their prideful self-exaltation will finally be brought low, even to beneath the surface of the earth. The Lord will rise up with terror but yet with the glory of His majesty, as also stated in 2:10. The timing of this event is during the Great Tribulation as described in similar words in Revelation 6:12-17. This is not an allegorical prophetic utterance by the prophet nor is it a type of representative judgment. Isaiah uses plain language to describe a coming historical event that will happen literally just as he described it. These words, which the Lord gave Isaiah to proclaim, are meant to bring humans to repentance from their rejection of the majestic and magnificent God of creation. They are to
turn to Him in humble worship and praise. God is extending an opportunity for His chosen people to repent and turn to Him in faith. God still extends this opportunity to all humans today if they will only listen and obey Him.

2:20 *In that day people will throw away their idols of silver, and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats.*

As a direct result of “the day,” when the Lord arises “to terrify the earth,” 2:19 and 21, humans will finally be in great dread and fear of the Lord. They will throw away their idols which they have made by themselves and which they had worshipped. Some may wonder why the worship of idols crafted from costly metals, silver and gold would be so prevalent in the Tribulation period, just before the return of the Lord. It is popular to explain away the worship of hand crafted idols by describing anything that would replace man’s devotion and attention to the Lord as an idol of worship. Yet Scripture is very clear that in the last days the worship of hand crafted idols will be widespread, Revelation 9:20. As the world descends into paganism as the last days quickly approach, the so-called sophistication and liberation of humans, in rejecting any influence of God in their lives, will result in the most blasphemous activity humans can conceive. The worship of the true God will be rejected. The Apostle Paul comments, “For even though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, or give thanks to him; but became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images resembling corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:22-23). The idols man will craft will look like images of humans, birds, animals and insects which they will worship.

2:21 *They will enter the caverns of the rocks, and into the crevices of the rocky cliffs, from the terror of the LORD and from the glory of his majesty, when he arises to terrify the earth.*

Isaiah 2:21 is a re-emphasis of Isaiah’s previous declaration stated in 2:19-20. Not only will humans “cast away” their worthless idols which they have been worshiping to the creatures that inhabit caves and holes but they themselves will seek refuge from the dread of the Lord’s appearance in these dark places. These things will occur during the latter part of the tribulation period when mankind will flee from the Lord’s presence and from His great wrath. See Revelation 6:12-17.

2:22 *Stop trusting in human beings, whose breath is in their nostrils. For why would you even give them a thought?*

This final verse of chapter 2 is one of the great thematic verses summing up the teaching of the entire book of Isaiah: “Stop trusting in human beings, whose breath is in their nostrils. For why would you even give them a thought? Refer to Isaiah 17:7-8, “In that day a person will look to their Maker, and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither will they look to what their fingers have made, the Asherah poles or incense altars. Also consider, Isaiah 50:10, “Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of his servant? Anyone who walks in darkness, and has no light, let them trust in the name of the LORD, and rely upon his God.” Another verse to consider with this theme is,
“I, even I, am he who comforts you. So why are you afraid of mere mortals, and of the son of man who is as fleeting as grass”? Isaiah 51:12

Isaiah repeatedly warned the people of Judah to trust in God rather than in man. When a national crisis occurred, and the nation was threatened by military force from a much larger kingdom, the kings of Judah (and Israel) would turn to seek military aid from the surrounding pagan nations. Isaiah recorded a single incident, when Jerusalem was facing certain doom from the army of the Assyrians, king Hezekiah finally turned in faith to the Lord. See Isaiah chapters 36-37. Isaiah’s message of trusting alone in the One true God was for all people in Judah and applies to all peoples today. In what some consider to be the very middle verses of the Bible, Psalm 118:8-9, the Psalmist declares: “It is better to take refuge in the LORD, than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the LORD, than to trust in princes.”

Introduction: 3:1-7:

The prophet warns that along with the bread and water, the leaders of the people will be removed from the land. Without adult leadership, capricious children will rule over them and no adult will desire to be a leader. This passage, 3:1-7, and the remainder of chapter 3 is a far future prophecy of the anarchy that will be prevalent in Israel during the tribulation period of the last days. The context of the extended passage of Isaiah, from chapter 2:5 to 3:26, most certainly applies to the tribulation period when the Lord will have His day of reckoning and when He will arise to terrify the earth. This passage is positioned within two beautiful depictions of the kingdom of Messiah, Isaiah 2:1-4 and 4:1-6. The Messianic kingdom will follow the tribulation period. An extended discussion of both the tribulation period and the kingdom of the Messiah will be provided in the specific passages in Isaiah relating to these two periods. For example, see notes on Isaiah 2:1-4 for the first great section of Isaiah on the kingdom of the Messiah.

As declared by the prophet in 3:1-7; the LORD, in judgment will remove food and water from Judah and will also remove its army, community, legal and religious leaders, and all honorable people and skillful workers vss. 1-3. The very young will rule over them, vs. 4. Everyone will oppress their neighbor with no one willing to take leadership responsibility as the land descends into poverty and despair, vss.5-7.

3:1 For look, the sovereign LORD of hosts,
is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah
support and supply,
every piece of bread and drop of water,

The introductory words of 3:1 are translated “For look.” These words link the message of the prophet recorded in chapter 2 and continues the narrative so that the reader understands that God is continuing His declaration of judgment on the people of Judah and specifically Jerusalem. The message of judgment in chapter 3 and chapter 2:5-22, is proclaimed by “the sovereign LORD of hosts”. It is the same title of God that Isaiah will state again in 3:15, 10:16, 23, 24, 33; 19:4; and 28:22. The notes on Isaiah 1:9 contain a brief explanation of the meaning of these titles.

The first thing to be taken away from Jerusalem and Judah, as a result of God’s judgment upon his people during the days of tribulation, will be “supply and support.” This is likely a reference to the removal of military support and leadership for Israel during the horrific days of the great Tribulation when any nations who had previously supported Israel will have withdrawn their support and promised protection. Those who have leadership of the military forces of Israel will also be removed leaving the Jewish people vulnerable and without protection from their enemies who will unite to assault them. These enemies will descend upon Israel
during the tribulation period with the evil intent to annihilate the Jewish people from the earth. These enemies will be gathered together “to the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon” during the days of the pouring out of the sixth bowl judgment, Revelation 16:12-16. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum explains:

> “While the term “Battle of Armageddon” has been commonly used, it is really a misnomer, for more than one battle will be taking place. For this reason, many prophetic teachers have stopped employing that term and are using the term “Campaign of Armageddon.”…. But this too is a misnomer because there will be no fighting in Armageddon itself; all of the fighting will take place elsewhere. A more biblical name for this final conflict is found in the closing words of verse 14: the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. This is a more accurate description of the nature and extent of this final conflict.” (Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, The Footsteps of the Messiah, page 311).

The second thing to be taken away from Jerusalem and Judah will be “every piece of bread and every drop of water.” While many scholars may want to reduce the significance of these words by alluding to a time of want where food and water will be scarce, there is nothing in the context of 3:1 that would indicate that Isaiah was overstating the extent of the complete removal of these essential needs for sustaining life. In Revelation 16:19-20, it is recorded that the judgment of God against the earth, including Babylon will be so great that the cities of the nations will be destroyed along with islands and mountains of the earth. It is within this context that Isaiah could prophesy that no life sustaining source would survive.

3:2-3 the mighty man and the warrior, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, the captain of fifty and the honorable person, the counselor and the expert craftsman, and the skilful enchanter.

Not only will the land be bereft of its food supply, but the Lord will also remove many aspects of its human leadership: mighty man, warrior, judge, prophet, diviner, elder, army captain, honorable person, counselor, expert craftsman and skilful enchanter. In providing this list it is helpful to consider the intent of the Lord’s meaning. It is obvious that not every possible leader is mentioned yet a wide spectrum of society is stated so the meaning of the Lord is clearly understood. Victor Buksbazen comments:

> “The Lord will also remove all military and civil authority, whether duly appointed, or even unlawfully established. The work of the Lord will be so complete in its devastation that it will reach down to the lowest ranks of the military establishment and civil authorities.

> “The commander of fifty” is the equivalent of a junior officer or sergeant in our modern military order. The judge and the prophet and the elder represent established and legitimate authority; the diviner, the skilled magician and the expert enchanter, are the popular but forbidden and unlawful counselors to whom the mass of the people have so frequently resorted, in defiance of Jehovah Himself, and of His law (Deut. 18:9-14).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 121).

3:4 I will make the young to be their princes, and infants will rule over them.

Because of the removal by God of the leaders of society in all respects, there will only be capricious children left to rule them. Some attest that the more immediate context of this prophecy was the conquering of Jerusalem and Judah by the Babylonians which started in 605 B.C and was completed in 586 B.C. However,
it is best to understand that this prophecy concerns the time of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7) which will be the period of tribulation just prior to the return of the Messiah to rescue the remnant of His people. The Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. Isaiah and the people of Jerusalem and Judah had knowledge of what it was like for a foreign nation to devastate the land and remove by death and deportation, its leaders and influential citizens. As the words of chapter 3 are addressed to Jerusalem and Judah, the people of the southern kingdom would be in dread of what God has proclaimed would happen to them as it had already happened to their northern kinsmen. God will, because of the sin of the people, leave them without mature leadership and chaos would result. With only children and the young left to lead them, they would be at the mercy of their enemies who will have no mercy and only design to completely remove them from the earth.

3:5 The people will be oppressed,
   everyone by another,
   and everyone by his neighbor.
The young will behave proudly against the old,
   and the base against the honorable.

The chaotic nature of society ruled by capricious children, 3: 4, is described by Isaiah. The people left alive in Jerusalem and Judah will be oppressed by each other, within their homes and by their neighbors. The young will oppress the elderly and those who are the “inferior” of society will oppress those who are considered “honorable”. When God is rejected as the rightful ruler of His people, sinful, unholy and unrighteous people, like those described in Isaiah 1:4-8, will dominate society and as will be the situation in Jerusalem and Judah, no one will assume responsible leadership as verses 6 and 7 affirm.

3:6-7 A person will even grab hold of his brother
   in his father's house, saying,
   "You have clothing,
   come you be our ruler,
   and let this ruin be under your rule."
7 In that day he will cry out,
   "I cannot cure this;
   for there is neither bread or clothing in my house,
you must not make me ruler of the people.

The complete destruction of Jerusalem and Judah is seen in the deplorable situation of the home life of those living during these terrifying times. Without food for sustenance and clothing for covering the body, the people will cry out in desperation, “I cannot cure this” as they seek someone who at least has clothes to assume leadership of the people. David L. Cooper, comments:

At the time here foreseen, we are told that one man will take another of his father's house and insist that he assume the leadership and bear the responsibility for the wreck and ruin that is certain to come upon the nation. This prediction shows that the situation in Israel in the time of the Tribulation will become desperate--without any hope of recovery. Hence there will be those in the ranks who will push others forward and make them assume the leadership in order that the impending ruin may come under their management. (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-October 1943).
Introduction: 3:8-15

The prophet states the reason for this terrifying judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah. They have fallen. This indictment on His people by the Lord extends to all of the people and specifically to the elders and princes of the land who the Lord says have devoured the vineyard, plundered the poor, crushed His people and have grinded the face of the poor. The people and their leaders have nothing with which to respond to God. Their time is up. Judgment awaits them, and it is a bitter future that they will have to endure. The prophet declares that Jerusalem and Judah have fallen because of they have rebelled against the LORD, vs. 8. They flaunt and display their sin before God like Sodom bringing disaster upon themselves, vs. 9. The righteous will be rewarded but the wicked will face disaster, vss. 10-11. The people of God will be oppressed by their leaders who will bring confusion and mislead them, vs. 12. The LORD will rise to bring judgment on the people and upon their leaders who have ruined the land and have plundered the poor among them, vss. 13-15.

3:8 For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen; because their words and their deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious watchfulness.

In 3:8, Isaiah explains the root of the reason judgment will fall upon His people, “Because their words and their deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious watchfulness.” In the DASV in 3:8, “watchfulness” is the translation of the Hebrew word ayin, which is translated most often in the Old Testament including by Isaiah, as “eyes.” However, the DASV translation of “defying his glorious watchfulness” is a suitable rendering. The KJV has, “to provoke the eyes of his glory.” The ESV has: “defying his glorious presence.” These translations help to capture the shocking wickedness of God’s people, who although they were aware of God’s presence, chose to mock and scorn their Creator and as Isaiah 3:9 reveals, they unashamedly performed their evilness in rebellious defiance before His glorious eyes (His presence).

3:9 The look on their face witnesses against them; they flaunt their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it.

Woe to their soul! They have brought disaster on themselves.

This verse is one of the most stunning indictments of sinful behavior in the Scriptures. See also Isaiah 30:11 and particularly 65:5 for other statements of the complete rejection of God by His covenant people including their abhorrent blasphemy against the LORD. The Jewish people will be boldly and defiantly practicing their evil behavior during the days of tribulation when God is judging them and others on the earth, for continuing to rebel against Him. Isaiah 3:8-9 reveals that sinful humanity is solely responsible for the consequences of their sin that they arrogantly and with hubris debauchery openly flaunt it in the face of their Creator. The NIV for Isaiah 3:9, states this indictment with arresting clarity, “The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.”

Modern society has so fallen into the depths of depravity that they openly display their lascivious and abominable lifestyles in parades in the cities of the world with many elected officials giving their support by participating in and some even leading the parade. God will not leave this situation unopposed. He will judge those nations that promote and participate in this evil behavior for those who so “parade their sin” and show
openly that they have defied God’s commands and have rebelled against His glorious presence. For comment on the word “woe” see notes on Isaiah 3:11.

3:10 Tell the righteous, that it will go well with them, for they will eat the fruit of their labors.

The words of Isaiah 3:10-11 are similar to the wisdom literature in Scripture which describe “well” for the righteous and “woe” to the wicked. Those who are righteous will reap the benefits of their obedience, their love and their commitment to God. The ultimate benefit will be their living forever in the presence of God’s glorious presence. Many righteous followers of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will not see the “fruit of their actions,” compare Galatians 6:7-8, during their sojourn upon the earth. But for now, in the oppressive atmosphere of this sin-exalting and God-rejecting world, many Christians are persecuted, and many are executed because of their faithful allegiance and obedience to their Lord. The days described in Revelation chapters 6-19 are fast approaching.

3:11 Woe to the wicked! Disaster! For exactly what their hands have done will be done back to them.

Isaiah declares a prophetic “woe” on the wicked. The word “woe” occurs 22 times in Isaiah (DASV). The most remembered is likely Isaiah’s exclamation of “woe” when He saw the Lord, lofty and exalted in the Temple, Isaiah 6:5. Woe is the Hebrew word owy, which is also declared upon the wicked in 3:9 above. It has the meaning of a cry of lamentation, or a lament of impending judgment. In English, it can be understood as a lament of certain grief. It was a word frequently used by Jesus Christ in judgment upon those, often the religious leaders of Israel, who failed to fulfill their obligations to the people of Israel. The wicked, Isaiah states in 3:11 will receive what they deserve. The words “wicked” and “wickedness” occur 13 times in Isaiah. These occurrences translate the Hebrew word rasha, which has the meaning of being guilty and deserving of punishment. The famous phrase stated by Isaiah, “There is no peace for the wicked” occurs in Isaiah 48:22 and 57:21, and this phrase completes important divisions within Isaiah chapters 40 to 66.

The word “Disaster!” in 3:11 is a translation of the Hebrew word ra, which has the meaning of bad or evil. This word stands alone in 3:11 and some modern versions have added words to explain its meaning. The DASV simply translates ra as “Disaster!” which conveys the thought that the wicked will reap to themselves what they have sown as the rest of the verse explains.

3:12 As for my people, children oppress them, women rule over them.

O my people, those leading you mislead you, and confuse the direction of your paths.

Isaiah 3:12 is an emphatic précis of 3:4-7. It is evident that the period of time that Isaiah is prophesying about cannot be the during the days of Isaiah, for they had a king and leaders that rule over them. The time Isaiah is indicating is in the far future as the context of the greater passage reveals. The people will be oppressed by children. Male leadership will vanish, and women will lead those who are left in the land during the rule of Antichrist in the terrifying days of the tribulation. The result of this oppression and of those who will lead them astray is that the people will be confused in seeking a direction. The KJV is very pointed in its statement of judgment on these people: “they which lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of thy
paths.” Isaiah 28:14-15 is another stinging indictment on these people whose leaders lead them to destruction.

Isaiah 3:13-15 comprises a small section declaring that the Lord will rise up to judge His people for their selfish actions. Thomas Constable comments:

“Yahweh is the ultimate Judge of His people, and He would contend with His human representatives who used their positions to fatten themselves rather than feeding their people (cf. Zech. 11:1-17). Their possessions witnessed to their stealing from their neighbors. The vineyard is a common figure for Israel (cf. 5:1, 7; Ps. 80:8-18; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:6-8; Hos. 10:1). The people belonged to the Lord, not these abusing leaders who crushed them and ground them down to get out of them as much as they could for themselves (cf. Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:20-21).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 29).

3:13 The LORD rises to make the accusation; he stands to judge the peoples.

The righteous LORD will not allow sinful and rebellious actions to continue without consequence. God will rise up to contend or to make an accusation against His people. “Accusation” in the DASV is the Hebrew word riyb, which has the meaning of an indictment or plea in a legal setting such as a court. The Lord will therefore “stand to judge” His people. He alone will act as the One bringing the charge, as prosecutor, as judge and as One delivering punishment. Not only will God act as the sole judge of His people during the days of tribulation but also in the Millennial kingdom as Isaiah will state later, Isaiah 11:3-4; 16:5; 33:22 and 51:5.

3:14 The LORD comes to pronounce judgment on the elders and on the princes of his people.

"It is you who have ruined the vineyard;
the plunder stolen from the poor is in your houses.

God brings His judgment on the leaders (elders and princes) of the people who have neglected their duty of faithfulness and oversight of the people and have acted corruptly and selfishly. These leaders have “devoured” the vineyard which is a word depicted by Isaiah to represent the people. The picture of the vineyard is a common theme throughout Isaiah. It is first introduced in 1:8, “The daughter of Zion is left like a hut in a vineyard” and it next mentioned in 3:14. The prophet’s main description of the vineyard is as a parable in 5:1-7 and also in 5:10. Other references are 16:10; 27:2; 36:17; 37:30 and 65:21. An expanded description on the meaning of the vineyard is provided in the notes on chapter 5:1-7. These leaders have also added to the misery of the poor by plundering the weak and helpless and accumulating the confiscated goods within their own houses.

3:15 Why do you crush my people, and grind the faces of the poor?"
says the sovereign LORD of hosts.

The Lord directs His wrath on the leaders of His people for their evil mistreatment of the people. Victor Buksbazen comments:

““The prophet speaking for the Lord, seems to be almost livid with outrage and indignation. He cries: “Mahlahem?” – “By what right? “What do you mean that you crush my people and grind the faces of the poor?"
Here we have a very striking metaphor, tellingly employed by the prophet. Just as the stones of a mill crush grain and then grind it fine flour, later to be baked and eaten as bread, so the leadership of Jerusalem and Judah crush and grind the faces of the people in order to devour them completely.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 122).

Introduction 3:16-4:1

The Lord, through the prophet, denounces the pride and self-exaltation of the women of Zion whom the prophet states as the “daughters of Zion,” vs. 16. The coming judgment on the Jewish nation will result in their shameful defilement with plucked out scalps, they will smell like putrefaction and will wear sackcloth instead of fine cloths, vss. 17-24. A further shame for the women will be that the coming battle against the nation’s enemies will result in a lack of marriageable men, as the men of the nation will be killed during the days of tribulation. Like the leaders, elders and princes of the land, the women also will face the consequences of their sinful pride and evil actions, 3:25-4:1. Isaiah 4:2 has the definitive phrase “in that day” that begins the messianic kingdom passage of chapter 4:2-6. Thus, the entire section Isaiah 2:5 to 4:1 refers to the judgment of the Jewish peoples, and the inhabitants of the earth, during the horrifying days of the tribulation.

3:16 The LORD says, The daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and seductive eyes, walking with dainty little steps as they go, and jingling with their feet.

The prophet continues to announce the judgment of God on His people with a message directed to the proud and prosperous women who are called the ‘daughters of Zion.’ All females in Jerusalem would be represented by this title which occurs in the DASV in Isaiah 3:16-17, and 4:4. The words “daughter of Zion” (singular) occur in 10:32; 16:1; 37:22; 52:2 and 62:11. The phrase “daughter of my people” occurs in 22:5 and “daughter of Jerusalem” occurs in 37:22. Other references to the daughters (of God’s covenant people) occur in 43:6, 49:22; 56:5 and 60:4. The phrase “daughters of Zion” occurs in Song of Solomon 3:11 and a similar title, “daughters of Judah” occurs in Psalm 97:8. The declaration of judgment in 3:16 to 4:1 is likely upon the women who were married to husbands belonging to the king’s court and other rich members of society. The reign of Uzziah was very prosperous and the king had cities built and a large army well equipped for battle, 2 Chronicles 26:1-15. The main indictment against these prosperous women, during Isaiah’s day and as also will be in the last days, is that in their vanity and pride, they flaunted their wealth with their haughty walk with their heads held high and their noses in the air. They also had seductive (flirtatious) eyes, and walked with mincing (small and quick) steps and had bangles or tinkling ornaments around their ankles that would announce their coming, so everyone could observe them.

3:17 Therefore the Lord will strike with scabs the top of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will make them bald.

As a result of this vain display, the Lord will take direct judgmental action against them by inflicting their heads with ugly scabs and a loss of hair on their foreheads which would render them ugly and repulsive to look upon.

3:18-23 In that day the Lord will take away their beautiful anklets, the headbands, and the crescent necklaces,
the earrings, bracelets, and veils,
the headdresses, the ankle bracelets, the sashes,
the perfume boxes, and amulets,
the rings and nose rings,
the party dresses, robes, shawls and purses,
the hand mirrors, fine linen garments,
the turbans and shawls.

Isaiah states the time frame, “in that day” in 3:18 which connects this judgment on the women with the preceding larger passage beginning in 2:5 and continuing to 4:1 with reminders of the time in which these judgments will occur. The words “that day,” also occur in 2:11, 12, 17, 20; and 3:7. Following the time of judgment in the day the Lord has appointed, will also be a period of blessing indicated by the phrase “in the latter days” 2:2-4. The coming period of judgment on the proud women of Jerusalem (Zion) will be during the tribulation period. The Lord, according to 3:18-23, will remove the vain display of wealth from the women which includes a long list of jewelry and other items they have worn to flaunt their wealthy status.

3:24 Instead of sweet perfumes there will be a rotten stench;
and instead of a sash, a rope;
instead of a beautiful hairdo, baldness;
instead of a rich robe, sackcloth;
a slave branding instead of beauty.

The Lord next describes with what He will replace the items of luxury. Sweet perfume will be replaced with putrefaction (a melting stinking rottenness). Belts (sash) will be replaced by rough ropes. A “beautiful hairdo” will be replaced with baldness that have the hairs plucked out. Sackcloth, a rough and scratchy ugly garment of disgrace, will be worn instead of fine cloths. The armies of Antichrist will brand the women causing great pain and they will bear an ugly mark removing any previous beauty they had.

3:25 Your men will fall by the sword,
and your warriors in the war.

The women will be humiliated in this way, 3:24, because there will be no men left to protect them and preserve their vain lifestyle. The mighty men and warriors will be put to death in a future time of warfare which is described in the notes for Isaiah 3:1.

3:26 Her gates will lament and mourn;
deserted she will sit on the ground.

Because of the destruction caused by the forces of Antichrist during the Tribulation period, the gates of Zion now referred to as belonging to the women who are left, and within these gates, these women will lament and mourn the devastation that they will face. Dejected, disgraced, defiled and disfigured, the women will sit on the ground within the lonely and desolate gates, mourning this tragedy that has come upon them.

4:1 Seven women will take hold of one man in that day, saying, "We will eat our own food, and wear our own clothes, just let us be called by your name; take away our shame."
With the great men and warriors defeated and dead, these women who have been marked by the judgment of God, will seek to obtain some semblance of self-worth by clinging on to any willing man who will marry them. Even if it means that a man will have at least seven wives, these women will use their own resources instead of relying on the provisions of the man. They will do this so that the “reproach” of being left unmarried and alone will be removed.

Teaching Outline of Isaiah Chapter 2:5 to 4:1
2:5-11  Removal of Foreign Influences
2:12-22  Removal of Useless Idols
3:1-7  Removal of Evil Leaders
3:8-15  Removal of the Place of Zion’s Men
3:16-4:1  Removal of the Pride of Zion’s Daughters

4. The Branch and the Messianic Covering: 4:2-6

Introduction to Isaiah 4:2-6
This is one of the most beautiful promises of the coming kingdom of the Lord contained in all of Scripture. It is an addition to the glories of the Messianic kingdom the prophet declares for example, in 2:1-4 and 28:5-8, 15-17, 65:18 and in other passages in Isaiah. In this section 4:2-6, the reader of Isaiah is introduced to the “branch of the LORD” and will discover that this metaphor refers to a Person who will come in the future to restore the relationship between God and His chosen nation Israel. Yet there is much more that the “Branch” will do among the people and within the land of Israel and in particular, what the Branch will accomplish on Mount Zion.

This section begins with the words, “in that day”. The student must consider what day is Isaiah writing about. References in Isaiah (DASV) to this day, the far future day of the Lord, is recorded in the previous verse, 4:1) and also in 2:11, 17, 20; 3:7,18; 10:20; 11:10, 11; 12:1, 4; 17:4, 7, 9; 19:16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24; 24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1, 2, 12, 13; 28:5; 29:18; and 30:23. It refers to a time when the Lord will bring righteous and holy justice and also great blessings to the people of Israel. In the broader context of the opening chapters of Isaiah it includes the description of chapter 2:2, “in the latter days.” Therefore, “in that day” refers to the time when the Lord will finally deal with the sins of the people of Israel and when He will set up His throne to rule from Mount Zion. It is also called the “day of the Lord,” in Isaiah in 2:12; 13:6, and 9. Other O.T. references to the phrase “day of the Lord” include, Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 2:11, 2:31, 3:14; Amos 5:18, 5:20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7, 1:14; and Malachi 4:5. N.T. references include, Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; and 2 Peter 3:10.

It also is referred to many times as simply “that day”. The meaning of these shorter phrases must be understood in the context of the passage as is obvious, for example, Zechariah chapter 14 in which Zechariah is describing the terrifying beginnings and glorious results of this future day of the Lord. However, not every passage containing these shorter phrases is a direct reference to the future day of the Lord.

4:2 In that day the branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and beauty of the survivors of Israel.

Isaiah 4:2 provides the context of what will happen in this future “day.” Isaiah begins with a designation, “the Branch (capitalized in some versions) of the LORD.” It is critical to the understanding of these events to determine from Scripture exactly who is the “Branch of the Lord”
In Isaiah 11:1-2, the branch is referred to as a person whom the Spirit of the LORD will rest, “The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him.” The prophet Jeremiah declares that this person will be righteous, and will reign as a King; and will act with wisdom, justice and righteousness. His name will be called, “The LORD is our righteousness:”

5"The days are coming," says the LORD,
that I will raise up for David a righteous Branch,
and he will reign as king
and will act with wisdom,
justice and righteousness in the land.

6 In his days Judah will be saved,
and Israel will dwell in safety;
and this is his name by which he will be called:
'The LORD is our righteousness.'"
(Jeremiah 23: 5-6)

Jeremiah provides more information about this Branch, as recorded in Jeremiah 33:14-16:

14 “Look, the days are coming,” says the LORD,
that I will perform the good promise that I have spoken
concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

15 In those days, and at that time,
I will cause a righteous Branch to sprout up for David;
he will execute justice and righteousness in the land.

16 In those days Judah will be saved,
and Jerusalem will dwell in safety.

She will be called by this name:
'the LORD our righteousness.'”

The prophet Zechariah in 3:8, stated, “Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you; for they are a portend of things to come for I am going to introduce my servant, the Branch.” As a result of the introduction of the Branch, in Zechariah 3:9, the Lord declared, “I will remove the iniquity of this land in one day.” Zechariah also stated in 6:12-13, “This is what the LORD of hosts says, Look, here is the man whose name is the Branch. He will branch out of his place and will build the temple of the LORD.

13 Yes, he will be the one to build the temple of the LORD, and he will bear the honor, and will sit on his throne and rule. There will be a priest with him on his throne and there will be perfect harmony between the two of them.”

From the above Scriptural references, it is abundantly clear that the “Branch” of Isaiah 4:2 refers to a man and that this man will come in the future to reign as king and He will execute justice and righteousness in the land (of Israel) and on the earth and in His days, Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. He will also build a new temple in which He will reign as King and serve as Priest. There should be no doubt that this person is the future Messiah who will come as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as is recorded in Revelation 19:16. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The ancient Chaldee paraphrase of Isaiah 4:2 translates “the Branch of Jehovah” as the “Messiah of Jehovah.”
(Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 126.)
The word “Branch” in Isaiah 4:2, in the Hebrew is semah, which literally means branch or sprout. King David, hundreds of years prior to Isaiah’s day, during what is recorded as his last words, in 2 Samuel 23:5 stated, “Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all thing and secure. For this is all my salvation and my desire; Will He not make it increase?” (NKJV). In the context of the everlasting covenant that God made with David, the word “desire,” the last word of 2 Samuel 23:5, can also be translated as “grow” which literally means to spring forth or bring it to fruition. It is likely this is a prophetic reference to the role of the Messiah as the Branch who will sprout or spring forth to bring to fruition God’s plans for a future kingdom, in which the Messiah will rule from Jerusalem sitting on the throne of David. The “everlasting covenant” that David mentioned in 2 Samuel 23:5, refers to an earlier promise God gave David, as recorded in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, “When your days are completed and you sleep with your fathers, I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” Also, 2 Samuel 7:16 states, “Your house and your kingdom will be made secure forever before me. Your throne will be established forever.”

Another prior reference to the coming of the Branch is found in Psalm 132:17, “There (Zion as stated in Psalm 132:13), I will make the horn of David sprout; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.” The horn of David, a reference to God’s Anointed, will “sprout”. The word “sprout” is in the Hebrew, related to the word Branch in Isaiah 4:2 and has the meaning that God’s Anointed, the Messiah, will bring fruition to God’s plan for the future glory of Zion which is the context of the entire Psalm. Some may be tempted to accuse premillenialists of finding references to the Messiah behind every tree in the Old Testament Scriptures. To that the answer must be no, but certainly the Messiah is found behind every branch!

In that day the branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious: (Isaiah 4:2)
Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:15 describe the feet of those who bring good news as beautiful. The most beautiful feet of all who bring good news, are those of the Messiah who not only brought good news but was the cause and reason for the good news. He Himself is the person of good news and is beautiful in all His attributes, works and in His divine being. Isaiah describes the beauty and glory of the Lord in 28:5, “In that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of his people” (ESV). See notes on Isaiah 28:5 of this study. Other references to the beauty and loveliness of God’s land and name include, Psalm 27:4, 96:6, 135:3; Isaiah 33:17 and in Daniel 8:9, 11:16, 11:41, and 11:45. Selected references to the glorious nature of the Lord, His throne and name include, 1 Chronicles 29:13; Nehemiah 9:5; Psalm 72:19, 87:3, 145:5; Isaiah 3:8; 11:10, 63:14; Matthew 19:28, 25:31 and James 2:1. A study of the glory of the person, name and possessions of the Lord would be a wonderful undertaking for the student of God’s Word and this study of Isaiah is just too brief to give it the full value it deserves. Victor Buksbazen comments on verse 2:

“Islah’s redemption will come through “the branch of the LORD,” in Hebrew “Tsemah Jehovah,” or sometimes “Tsemah David.” “Tsemah” means growth or vegetation in general, or a sprout, a plant, a branch. When used in conjunction with Jehovah or David, it has a Messianic connotation, and refers to the Messianic King who is a branch of the stem of Jesse (11:1).”

(Note: following this, Dr. Buksbazen quotes Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12 and Isaiah 11:1)

Dr. Buksbazen continues: “All “the Branch” prophecies have a strong Messianic content. “The Branch” is a rod of the stem of Jesse, that is a descendant of King David (Isa. 4:2, 11:1). His mission is to save Judah. This divinely appointed king-Messiah is referred to by Jeremiah as “the Branch of righteousness.” He is endowed with divinity, so that the prophet call Him “Jehovah Tsidkenu” – The LORD our Righteousness (Jer.23:5-6).

Zechariah calls Him “my servant the Branch” (Zech. 3:8) or the man whose name is “the Branch.”
Although there were a number of good kings in Israel since the days of Isaiah (Hezekiah, Josiah, Zedekiah) none of them came near the fulfillment of the prophetic vision of the Messianic King. It is therefore understandable that the earliest Jewish commentators always interpreted the term “Branch” as a reference to the Messiah. In fact one of the many rabbinic names for the Messiah is “Tsemah” – “branch.” The Hebrew prayer book is replete with references to the Messiah who is called “Tsemah David” – the Branch of David.

The ancient Chaldee paraphrase of Isaiah 4:2 translated “the Branch of Jehovah” as Meshicha d’Jah – the Messiah of Jehovah. “In that day,” that is, when this prophecy shall be fulfilled, then shall “the Branch of Jehovah” (that is the Messiah) be beautiful and glorious in the eyes of redeemed Israel. “And the fruit of the land their pride and glory.” Here is an allusion to the dual nature of the Messiah: As “the Branch of the LORD,” He is of divine origin, as the “fruit of the land; He is also human. “Inscribed for life,” the Targum paraphrases as those who are written for “eternal life” (See also Ex. 32:32; Dan. 12:1; Rev. 13:8).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 126-127).

Isaiah 4:2 concludes with the description: and the fruit of the land will be the pride and beauty of the survivors of Israel. Regarding the phrase “fruit of the land”, David Cooper comments:

“Isaiah’s prediction (of the Branch) is a Hebrew parallelism. A recognition of this fact gives us the proper clue to the correct interpretation. The phrase, the Branch of the Lord, therefore, refers to the divine nature of this coming ruler, whereas the parallel expression fruit of the land calls attention to His human nature. The prediction, therefore, foretells the time when the remnant of Israel which survives the purging judgments given in chapter two shall unanimously and enthusiastically accept its divine-human Ruler, Messiah.” (David L. Cooper, Messianic Series: Messiah: His Nature and Person, Page 216).

Isaiah’s statement of “the pride and beauty (adornment, honor, excellence) of the survivors of Israel” would have been a stinging indictment against the people of Israel. Isaiah has just reminded these people that the Lord will remove their self-adorned “beauty” and their pride of place for their mighty ones will fall in battle and the women in Zion’s gates, will lament and mourn as they sit on the ground, deserted. Isaiah 3:24-26. Isaiah tells these prideful and self-exalting people that the Messiah, the Branch of the Lord will be coming “in that day” and He will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. This is a stark reminder to all who hear this message that the followers of the Messiah will exalt Him alone. Those who repent and follow the Lord will not be in the spotlight. They will not be the ones receiving accolades of glory nor will they be exalted on pedestals of importance. It will simply not be about them. It will be all about the exaltation, praise and worship of the Lord! Thomas Constable comments:

“In a general sense "The Branch of the Lord" refers to Israel, but this is also a messianic title here as elsewhere (cf. 11:1; 53:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). It was regarded as a messianic reference here as early as the Targums, the Aramaic interpretive translation of the Old Testament that dates after the Babylonian exile or possible during it.” 70. [Note 70: See Joyce G. Baldwin, “Semah as a Technical Term in the Prophets,” Vetus Testamentum 14 (1964): 93-97]. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 31-32).

It is evident that God is preparing his people in the future for a dual blessing. First, the people and land will be transformed by the future actions of the anointed Servant of God who will gloriously restore and fit Zion for His role as the messianic ruler on the earth. Second, this ruler will have both a divine and human nature which points prophetically to the good news of the healing of salvation and justification that Isaiah will discuss later in his book in Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Following the phrase “fruit of the land,” Isaiah adds “will be the pride and beauty of the survivors of Israel”. The presence of the person and the accomplishments of the Messiah during the messianic kingdom will be a source of pride for the remnant of Israel who have survived the horrors of the great tribulation and have
returned to Zion to live in peace. They shall be in the very center of the place of worship of the Lord on the earth.

Their beauty, (adornment, honor, excellence), will be their attachment to the Lord of Glory who reigns in splendor and wonder. It will be the same for these believing and born-again survivors in the far future as it is now for those who are believers and followers of Jesus Christ, as the Apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “But we all, with unveiled faces reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which comes from the Lord, who is Spirit.” Paul continues this thought in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For it is God who said, "Let there be light shining out of darkness," who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

4:3 Anyone who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who is recorded as among those living in Jerusalem.

Those in Zion and Jerusalem who enter into the messianic kingdom will be called holy. For the chosen people, this is a realization of God’s statement recorded in Exodus 19:6, “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Leviticus 11:44 states, “For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy because I am holy.” The Apostle Peter referenced these verses in his first Letter, in 1 Peter 1:16 (Lev. 11:44) and 1 Peter 2:9 (Ex. 19:6). Those who are called holy in the messianic kingdom will not need, as required in Exodus and Leviticus, to keep the Mosaic law with perfect obedience, but will be called holy because they will be believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and will bear the Lord’s imputed righteousness upon them, and will be living together with Him.

The phrase: “everyone who is recorded as among those living in Jerusalem” must refer to the book of life that is mentioned several times in Scripture. Moses, when contenting with God over the sins of the people of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai, spoke of the book God had written. God responded by saying, "Whoever has sinned against me, that person alone will I blot out of my book.” Exod. 32:32-33. This may be a reference to an actual book or a metaphor for God who keeps an accurate account of all deeds performed by all people on the earth. The fact that God’s book is mentioned throughout the Bible from Exodus to Revelation is not to be taken lightly and if the Bible is understood in its plain sense, then it is not unreasonable to understand that God indeed has “books” which are spiritual records that He alone keeps.

Ultimately, those who will appear before the great white throne for judgment will be judged from the things which were written in the books, “according to their deeds,” Rev. 20:12. One of the books mentioned in Revelation chapter 20 is the “book of life.” This is likely the same book as Isaiah mentions as “recorded for life” in Isaiah 4:3. References to the “book of life” in Scripture include, Psalm 69:28; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 20:15 and the “Lamb’s book of life” Revelation 21:27. Other likely references to the same book are, Psalm 56:8, 139:16; Daniel 7:10, 12:1 and Malachi 3:16.

4:4 Then the Lord will wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and will purge the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of fire.

The prophet in Isaiah 4:4 states the time when the survivors of Israel will be called holy. It will be following the washing away by the Lord of the filth of the daughters of Zion and after Jerusalem has been purged of its bloodshed by “the spirit of judgment and the spirit of fire.” This undoubtedly refers to “the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he will be saved out of it,” Jeremiah 30:7. This time is called the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:21 and Revelation 7:14. Isaiah is announcing a prophecy regarding the period of time just prior to the
commencement of the messianic kingdom which will be a time of judgment on the wicked of the world and a
time of trial for Israel. During this time, God will remove the wicked from the earth and prepare the survivors
or remnant of the people of Israel for service during the coming millennial kingdom. The events of the
tribulation period will be governed and ordered by God who is sovereign over His world. The Old Testament
prophets, as they were given inspiration to write from God, spoke about this time. The New Testament
writers, also inspired from God, provided further information and it is in the last book of the Bible, the
Revelation of Jesus Christ, that the most details regarding these days are provided. However, all of God’s
Word must be studied to fully understand the events and outcomes of this period of time. A highly-
recommended resource for a study of this period of time is, The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the
Sequence of Prophetic Events. Author: Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Publisher: Ariel Ministries, 2004.

Burl Haynie comments on the three-fold purpose of the Tribulation:

“Multitudes of the earth's inhabitants will be touched and influenced by the judgments of the Tribulation to seek
the Lord. This is shown in Isaiah 26:9 "With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within
me will I seek thee earnestly: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn
righteousness." Isaiah 26:9 teaches that God's judgments poured out upon the world will cause the inhabitants of
the earth to learn righteousness. This is the first purpose of the Tribulation.

Although a great host will turn to God during the Tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble, some will have hearts so
callused by sin that the terrible judgments of that day will only harden them more. Instead of repenting of their sin,
they will grow increasingly wicked. They will hate God, curse Him, and openly defy Him.

These wicked ones will come up under a certain wicked and godless leader, during the Tribulation. He will claim
to be God and will demand that all the peoples of the world worship him. The Bible calls this wicked one
antichrist.

God will destroy all the wicked ones of the world and will rid the world of wickedness during the seven years of
the Time of Jacob's Trouble. This is the second purpose of the Tribulation.

God has yet another purpose in pouring out upon the world one judgment after another during the Time of Jacob's
Trouble. A messenger from heaven informed Daniel that the tribulation judgments will continue till they break the
power (will) of the holy people. The messenger said, "and when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the
power [will] of the holy people, all these things [tribulation judgments] shall be finished" (Daniel 12:7). This is the
third purpose of the Tribulation.”

(Excerpts from: Chapter 3: The Three-Fold Purpose of the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, in the online publication:
Time of Jacob’s Trouble Approaching: Israel – God’s Timemiece, author, Burl Haynie, Biblical Research Studies
Group, (http://www.biblicalresearch.info/index.html at time of publication of this study of Isaiah).

4:5-6 The LORD will create over the entirety of Mount Zion, and over her sites of assembly, a cloud
and smoke by day, and a glowing flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy.6 There
will be a shelter for shade in the day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and
rain.

Following the terrible days of the tribulation period the Lord will create over the whole area of Mount Zion.
The NKJV translates these verses as:
“Then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion and above her assemblies, a cloud of smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.” (Isaiah 4:5-6, KJV).

This prophecy of the millennial kingdom, is reminiscent of the Shekinah glory which is promised to fill the house (temple of God), which will exist during the messianic kingdom as stated in Ezekiel 43:2-5. It is also reminiscent of the protection God gave to the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings after God rescued them from their captivity in Egypt. It seems that the Messiah, during the duration of the messianic kingdom, will constantly remind His people about His miraculous actions in the past which were designed by Him to evoke praise and worship to the glory of His great name.

The words “dwelling place” (NKJV), Isaiah 4:5, is the Hebrew word makown, which has the meaning of “an established place.” It is first mentioned in the Scriptures in the Song of Moses, Exodus 15:17, “You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established.” (NKJV). (bold added). This prophecy by Moses is a majestic description of the promised kingdom of the Messiah in which the dwelling place of God’s own creation will be a sanctuary among His people. This “sanctuary” will be the tabernacle of God, Isaiah 4:6, in which He will dwell with His people. The word “tabernacle” (NKJV), is the Hebrew word sukka and is the word for the feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23: 33-43 which will be celebrated during the millennial reign of the Messiah as described in Zechariah 14:16-19. The re-establishment of the tabernacle (or temple) during the messianic kingdom is prophesied in Amos 9:11, “On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old.” (NKJV). The portrayal of God dwelling with the saints forever is recorded in Revelation 21:3, “Then I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look, the dwelling place of God is among humankind. He will live with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them.” The words “dwelling place” in Revelation 21:3 is the Greek word skene, which is often translated in the New Testament as “tabernacle.”

For the people who heard Isaiah proclaim this message, it would be news of hope that would be dependent upon their repentance from their pride and self-exaltation. If they repented and chose their true pride and adornment in their Messiah (the Branch of the Lord), rather than exalt themselves in their self-pride and useless trinkets of adornment, they would look forward in joyous anticipation to the coming day when their Lord would rule among them on Mount Zion. Gary V. Smith comments on verses 5-6:

“After Zion is purified, God will create something new in Zion. The use of “create” (bārā’) suggests that this activity is parallel to Isaiah’s later elaborations on God’s special act of re-creating the new heaven and the new earth (65:17; 66:22) at some point in the eschatological era. One of the primary new factors in that kingdom will be the glorious presence of God himself. The cloud by day and the fire by night symbolize his presence in Zion. Isaiah draws these images from the Exodus tradition, where God’s presence was known through the cloud and fire that led the Israelites out of Egypt and eventually dwelt in the tabernacle and temple (Exod 13:21–22; 14:19, 24; 40:34; Deut 1:33; 31:15; 1 Kgs 8:10–11). The divine presence demonstrates God’s acceptance and nearness to his holy people. The surprising difference is that God’s presence will not be limited to a temple building; it will be like a canopy over the whole of Zion (cf. 60:1–2; 62:2; Ezek 39:25–29), because all of Zion and its people will be holy. The canopy (4:5 sukkâ) is sometimes associated with weddings in Hebrew culture (Ps 19:6; Joel 2:16), but its function here seems to point to the divine protection of all the holy people in Zion. God’s glory is imaginatively pictured as a shelter or refuge from the harshness of the weather. These symbols represent any danger that might threaten the people of God. God is there to care for and to protect his people.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, pages 158-159).
Teaching Outline: Isaiah 4:2-6

4:2  The Beautiful and Glorious Person who will rule the Kingdom
4:3  The Holy Survivors of the People who will enter the Kingdom
4:4  The Sins of the Kingdom’s People Purged
4:5-6 The Security of the Kingdom’s Palace Provided

5. The Parable of the Vineyard: 5:1-7

Although being in the form of a song, 5:1, which is also a parable or teaching story, it is a portrait of God’s care and protection for His chosen people. God laments that His care for His people did not result in their fruitfulness that He expected. The people did not respond with joy, holiness, justice and righteousness. They instead rebelled against God and continually committed acts of bloodshed and unrighteousness. As told in this parable about a vineyard, God expected a yield of good grapes but received only worthless grapes. The result of Israel’s failure to yield “good grapes” would be the removal of God’s care and protection for them resulting in their land being trampled and consumed by their enemies. In and of itself, the parable offers no hope of redemption to Israel but only judgment. Such hope will only come in later proclamations by the prophet.

Isaiah in these verses, declares a song sung by God about His beloved, for whom He carefully cultivated a vineyard, building a tower in its midst, and a winepress, expecting the vineyard to produce (good) grapes but it only produced sour grapes, vss. 1-2. God asks what more could be done for His vineyard that He had already done, and yet it produced only sour grapes, vss. 3-4. Because of its failure to produce good grapes, God describes His judgment upon it and its destruction and reveals that His vineyard is the house of Israel and the people of Judah, of whom God expected justice and righteousness, but received only oppression and cries for help, vss. 5-7.

Of this section, Thomas Constable writes:

“This is the third and last of Isaiah’s introductory oracles. The first one (ch.1) introduced the book as a whole by presenting major themes with which the prophet proceeded to deal in chapters 2-66. The second, chiastic one (chs.2-4), presented the tension between what God intended Israel to be, and what she had become. This third prophetic sermon (ch.5) was a clever presentation of the present condition of Israel in Isaiah’s day and its consequences. It starts out deceptively as a casual song, transforms into a courtroom drama, and ends with pure condemnation. Isaiah lured his listeners into hearing him with a sweet song and then proceeded to burn them with fiery preaching.”

The Song of the vineyard 5:1-7

Isaiah, like a folk singer, sang a parable about a vineyard that compared Israel to a vineyard that Yahweh had planted and from which He legitimately expected to receive fruit. One cannot help but wonder if this passage lay behind Jesus’ teaching on the vine and the branches in John 15:1-6. The prophet's original audience did not realize what this song was about at first. It started out sounding like a happy wedding song, but it turned out to be a funeral dirge announcing Israel's death. This chiastic "song" is only the first part of Isaiah's unified message in this chapter. His song flowed into a sermon. This is the first of several songs in Isaiah (cf. chs. 12, 35; 54:1-10; et al.).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 34).

5:1 Let me sing for my beloved
a song about his vineyard.
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
The prophet begins his “song” by declaring that it is about his “beloved” or well-beloved without revealing who this one is. The revelation of who this one is comes at the end of the song or parable as recorded in 5:7. The revelation of the owner of the vineyard is a dramatic literary and theatrical devise designed to have the greatest impact on those who first heard this song or on those who first read it. The use of a vineyard as a metaphor would have been commonly understood in the agriculturally dependent economy of ancient Judah. Noah was the first recorded person to plant a vineyard, Genesis 9:20. Moses often made mention of a vineyard and used the vineyard as a symbol of judgment on the people of Israel if they were disobedient to God, Deuteronomy 28:30 and 39. Moses declares the severe consequences of their disobedience in Deuteronomy 28:45-46, “Then all these curses will come on, pursue and overtake you, till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he has given you. These curses will be a sign and a wonder against you and your descendants forever.”

Isaiah mentions the vineyard as a very important sign of God’s judgment or blessing of His people in 1:8; 3:14; 5:1-7; 5:10; 16:10; 27:2; 36:17; 37:30 and 65:21. In 27:2 Isaiah again mentions singing about a vineyard in another metaphor about God’s care and blessings of His people in the portrayal of His people as His vineyard, Isaiah 27:2-6. In the parable recorded in Isaiah chapter 27, God’s people, “in that day” (27:2), will take root, blossom, sprout and fill the whole world with fruit, 27:6.

Other prophets also use the vineyard in terms of judgment or blessing, Jeremiah 12:10; 31:5; 32:15; 35:7; 9; 39:10; Ezekiel 19:10; 28:26; Hosea 2:15; Amos 4:9; 5:11, 17; 9:14; Micah 1:6 and Zephaniah 1:13. Solomon used the vineyard as a metaphor to represent his love as recorded in Song of Solomon, 1:6, 14; 2:15; 7:12 and 8:11-12. Solomon also mentions a vineyard in Ecclesiastes 2:4 and in Proverbs 24:30 as does Lemuel in Proverbs 31:16. The psalmist mentions the planting of a vineyard with results similar to Isaiah 5:1-7 as recorded in Psalm 80:8-13 and a blessing in Psalm 107:37. Jesus recognized the importance of the vineyard in the lives of the people of Israel and may have had Isaiah’s song in mind when he spoke the parable of the owner (God) of the vineyard and his son (Jesus Christ) as recorded in Matthew 21:33-46. See also Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19.

Isaiah, further in 5:1, stated the soil conditions or context of the planting of the vineyard by his “beloved.” The NKJV has “Well-beloved” in Isaiah 5:1. The vineyard was located on a fertile hill. As an obvious song-parable about how the Lord prepared for the development of His chosen people to produce fruit for Him, Isaiah leaves no doubt as to the care God took in this development. As 5:77 will reveal, the people had no one to blame but themselves for their unproductiveness in fulfilling God’s intended plans for them.

5:2 He cultivated it, cleared out its stones,
and planted it with the choicest vine.
He built a tower in the midst of it,
and also hewed out a winepress in it.
He expected that it would produce grapes,
but it yielded only sour grapes.

In 5:2, Isaiah continues the song-parable about the vineyard of his “beloved” by declaring the great care this one took in digging the soil for preparation of planting; by removing the stones from the ground; by planting the choicest or best of vines; by building a tower (for protection from animal and human enemies) in the midst of the vineyard; and by hewing (cutting) out a vine vat (wine press) in expectation that the vineyard would produce good grapes. Isaiah then reveals the tragic result that instead of good grapes it only produced worthless ones. The Hebrew word for “sour” is beushim which literally means “stinking.” God would be offended by the stench of these stinking grapes.
Although this is a song-parable it does raise an interesting issue of tension between God’s omniscience (all knowing) and His consequent actions of performing a work even if He knew beforehand how this work will turn out. It is similar to God’s work in creating the world. He knew beforehand how His creation would be defiled by the sin of man although He pronounced the results of His creative activity as being “very good,” Genesis 1:31. Throughout the Scriptures this tension exists between God’s sovereign work, His elective decrees, His purposes in predestination and choosing those who will have an everlasting relationship with Him in heaven and between humans who bear the responsibility for their own actions and choices, even their choice to honor God. The Apostle Paul declares that humans are “without excuse,” Romans 1:20-21, for even though they knew Him, they refused to honor Him. For an extended discussion on the issue of the sovereignty of God versus the responsibility of man, consult the theology texts mentioned in the resources for this study.

The tension in Isaiah’s song-parable is that, students of the Scriptures understand that God knew just how the Jewish people would respond to all His work in preparing them for His service to produce “fruit” described as justice and righteousness in 5:7 for Him. God also knew that His people would fail in their responsibilities to Him. Yet God with His prior-knowledge began and completed His work and preparation of His chosen people. One response to this tension is that, in a future day, God’s work and preparation will yield the results He intended as Isaiah 27:2-6 demonstrates. For Isaiah’s day, the results of God’s work and preparation had not yet yielded the results He desired. One of the major themes of Isaiah is that God has been and continues to cultivate and prepare a remnant of the people who will respond to Him in faith and obedience. The sad reality of humanity is that, so many of God’s created beings will not respond to Him in trust for their eternal salvation but will suffer the consequences of their own evil choices and actions. Yet we must rejoice in that there will be uncounted numbers of human beings who will choose God in faith and will enjoy His presence forever. God makes specific and detailed knowledge about Him evident to everyone, Romans 1:19-20, so they can choose to have faith in Him and honor Him as God. However, a vast number of humans who have this specific and detailed knowledge about God, will choose to not honor Him or have faith in Him.

5:3 Now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

God calls upon His people living in Jerusalem and Judah to be a judge (to discern) the truth between Himself and His vineyard. Students of Scripture will notice that the speaker in 5:3 is no longer Isaiah but the Lord. The Lord continues the narrative of the parable in order to explain its intended meaning and to guide His people into comprehending their responsibility for their own failure to produce the fruit of justice and righteousness. For a discussion of the likely time frame when Isaiah delivered this song-parable to the people of Judah and Jerusalem refer to, Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, volume 1, pages 159-164.

5:4 What more could I have done to my vineyard than I have not already done for it? When I expected that it would produce grapes, why did it yield only sour grapes?

God next requests that His people answer His question about His work and preparation in preparing His vineyard for its expected harvest of good grapes. God asks: What more could He have done? It is a rhetorical question for the obvious answer is that God not have done any more to His vineyard nor could He have cared for it any better than He has already done. Up to this point those hearing this song-parable for the first time would have been wondering why a vineyard so carefully prepared would have failed to produce good grapes
and only produced stinking grapes. Refer to notes on 5:22. What was the reason? Perhaps the prophet will reveal it to them. In the meantime, God declares in 5:5-6, what He will do because of the failure of His vineyard to produce good grapes. The prophet Nathan delivered a story-message to king David, 2 Samuel 12:1-15, following the tragic results of David’s sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, resulting in the death of Uriah. The story-message from Nathan prompted a judgmental response from David without David realizing that the story in the message was really about himself. Isaiah presents a similar song-parable for the people of Judah who to this point do not yet realize the message of the story of the vineyard is really about their relationship with God.

5:5 Now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard:
   I will take away its hedge,
       and it will be eaten up;
   I will break down its wall,
       and it will be trampled down.

God startles His audience with His decision of what He will do with His vineyard. It must be remembered that this “vineyard” and everything in creation belongs to God. The created order is for God to do whatever He deems or desires to with it, for it and to it. It is created for Him. God’s sovereignty, regarding His people Israel, is expressed powerfully in Romans chapters 9-11. In summing up the great theological teachings about God’s sole right and choice to do and accomplish only what He desires in Romans chapters 9-11, the Apostle Paul declares in one of the most glorious doxologies in Scripture, Romans 11:33-36,

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
   How unsearchable are his judgments,
       and how unfathomable are his ways!
34 For who has known the mind of the Lord?
   Or who has been his counselor?
35 Or who has first given to God,
   so that he is obligated to repay him?
36 For from him, and through him, and to him, are all things.
   To him be the glory forever. Amen.

God does not ask permission from anyone regarding His vineyard. He simply declares, which is His sovereign right, what He will do with this mass of worthless stinking grapes. First, He states He will remove its hedge with the result that it will be consumed. The Hebrew word for “eaten” (consumed) is baar, which has the primary meaning of burning, kindling and to completely sweep away. The judgment of God on His people which is likened to a tongue of fire consuming stubble is mentioned in Isaiah 5:24.

Second, God declares in His judgment on His vineyard that He will break down the protective wall He had built around it, likely from the stones and rocks He had removed from the ground. The result of this action is that the entire vineyard will be open and vulnerable, and God declares that it will be trampled. The meaning here is that God will remove His protection from His chosen people and their nation so that they will be left to be over-run and destroyed by a foreign nation, as the prophet declared will happen to them in judgment as recorded in Isaiah 5:26-30. God will use a “distant nation” to be His instrument to bring this judgment upon His people. See notes on Isaiah 5:26 for an expanded discussion on God’s methods and the instruments He uses to accomplish His actions of judgment.
5:6 I will make it a wasteland; it will not be pruned or hoed; instead, briers and thorns will come up.
I will also command the clouds that they not shower any rain on it.

In His third statement of judgment on His vineyard, God states that He will lay it waste. It is God’s prerogative to make the work of His hands a wasteland. The Hebrew word for “wasteland” (waste) is bathah meaning an end or destruction. God has previously warned that He would lay waste the land of His chosen people if they forsook His covenant and served other gods, Deuteronomy 29:22-29. See also Leviticus 26:14-33. Isaiah also mentions this land will be laid waste in 5:17; and the earth will be made waste, 24:1, 3; and 42:15. However in a future time God will restore the waste places, 49:19; 51:3 and 52:9.

Fourth, God will no longer cultivate the land and remove its weeds (pruned and hoed). As a result, briers and thorns will arise. The metaphor of comparing the judgment of God to briers is a common literary device of Isaiah. See 7:23-24; 9:18; and 10:17. Briers are mentioned in the sense of blessing in 27:4 and 32:13 (thistles). Fifth, God will withhold the rain, so the vineyard will receive no water and therefore it will dry up. God had previously warned His people not to turn away and serve other gods for if they did, “Then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will not produce its fruit; and you will quickly perish from the good land that the LORD is giving you,” Deuteronomy 11:17. See also 1 Kings 8:35-36; 1 Kings chapter 17; 2 Chronicles 6:26-27; 7:13-14; Jeremiah 3:3; 14:4; Ezekiel 22:24; Amos 4:7; Zechariah 14:17-18; and James 5:17-18.

5:7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah is his cherished plant.

He expected justice, but got only oppression; hoped for righteousness, but heard only cries for help.

At the end of the song-parable, Isaiah reveals that the vineyard is a metaphor for God’s chosen people, the house of Israel and the people of Judah. They were intended to be His delightful plant, but the song-parable reveals that they instead turned out to be stinking and worthless. Students of the Scriptures should note the impact of Isaiah’s choice of words being two pairs of alliterations. In the English NASB version, the last half of 5:7 states, “Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold a cry of distress.” The first pair of this alliteration is, justice versus bloodshed. In the Hebrew, justice is mishpath and bloodshed is mispach (mishpath – mispach). The second pair of this alliteration is, righteousness versus a cry of distress. In the Hebrew, righteousness is tsedakah and cry of distress is tseakah (tsedakah – tseakah). When these words are spoken in Hebrew, the powerful effect of their obvious alliteration becomes evident to those hearing the message.

Teaching Outline: Isaiah 5:1-7
5:1-2 The Rationale of God’s Care and Protection
5:3-4 The Results of God’s Care and Protection
5:5-6 The Removal of God’s Care and Protection
5:7 The Repudiation of God’s Care and Protection

Following the parable of the vineyard, Isaiah continues his scathing message, that due to their horrific sins, their remains no hope of safety or longevity in the land for the Jewish people. The section 5:8-30 is a pronouncement of several woes that are coming. Woe is pronounced upon the rich who accumulate buildings and land to the detriment of the poor. These buildings (homes), will be uninhabited and the lands will not produce sustainable yields, vss. 8-10. Woe is pronounced upon drunkards and party goers who have no respect for the deeds of the LORD. They will face exile and death, but the LORD will be exalted by justice as He demonstrates His holiness by righteousness. Also, animals will graze among the ruins of the land, vss. 11-17. Woe is pronounced on those who are quick to sin and have no patience for the LORD, vss. 18-19. Woe is also pronounced on those who call evil good and turn light into darkness, vs. 20; and those who are wise in their own eyes, vs. 21; and those who are captivated by strong drinks, vs. 21; and who accept bribes to acquit the guilty and deny justice to the innocent, vs. 23. God declares His judgment upon all of His people who practice wickedness and therefore, God will recruit a foreign nation to come and destroy them, vss. 24-30. The theme of this section is the obvious contrast between the demise of the sinful people and the exaltation of their holy God. A suggested outline of this section, provided below, highlights God’s solemn statement of woes and the resulting judgments. A parallel to this section in Isaiah is declared by the prophet Hosea who spoke about the plight of the Jewish nation as recorded in Hosea 8:7:

For they sow the wind,  
and they will reap the whirlwind.  
The stalks do not have heads of grain;  
it will not yield meal;  
even if it did yield grain,  
foreigners would swallow it up.

There is much literary evidence to connect 5:1-7 with 5:8-30. Isaiah uses similar themes and repeats several verbal roots. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, page 170. Isaiah, in 5:8-30, reveals why God is justified in condemning the Jewish people for their failure to produce the fruit God expected. Isaiah states six woes are laments for specific sins that have been continually committed. A most egregious set of sins is stated in 5:18-19. The people are so tied to iniquity and falsehood that they sin as if they are dragging their evil ways with them with strong cords like cart ropes. If this is not wicked enough, they taunt God to show them the judgment Isaiah has been speaking about. They are saying, they will believe it only when they see it. The apostle Paul aptly summaries their attitude, “Be not deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever a person sows, that will he also reap,” Galatians 6:7. The warnings of Scripture do not stand alone. As in Hosea 8:7 and Galatians 6:7 so in Isaiah chapter 5, the harvest of sowing evil is to reap ruin and destruction.

A suggested outline for Isaiah 5:8-30:

5:8-12: Woes: (1) material self-indulgence: 5:8-10; (2) drunken self-indulgence: 5:11-12.
5:13-15 Judgment announced
5:16-17 The Lord exalted in judgment / The land exploited in judgment
5:18-23 Woes: (3) mocking God: 5:18-19; (4) calling evil good: 5:20; (5) declaring themselves wise: 5:21 and (6) corrupt drunkards: 5:22-23
5:24-30 Judgment announced
5:8 Woe to those who accumulate house after house,  
that acquire field after field  
until there is no room left,  
until you are left to dwell alone in the midst of the land!

The first lament of woe, Isaiah 5:8-10, regards the sin of the self-indulgent rich who buy up houses and land for their own selfish desires and thus leave no land for the poor to use. God had decreed that the land belonged solely to Him and it was not to be sold permanently. Also, God had set rules for poor relatives (kinsmen) who, because of poverty, had sold their land and their nearest kinsman was required to buy the land back for this poorer relative. There were also rules regarding the sale of a residence within a walled city and those in villages without walls. Houses in villages had redemption rights and were required to revert to the original owner in jubilee years. Levites enjoyed a permanent right of redemption for their houses, but the land used for pastures were not to be sold, for God gave it to them as their permanent possession. See Leviticus 25:23-34 for these redemption laws. Laws of inheritance are declared in Numbers 27:1-11. An example of coveting land and its consequences is recorded in 1 Kings chapter 21, regarding evil king Ahab coveting the land belonging to his neighbor Naboth. The prophet Micah, as recorded in Micah 2:2, declared an oracle of woe on those who covet and seize fields and houses. See the greater context in Micah 2:1-11. The prophet Amos also declared God’s judgment on similar circumstances in Amos 2:6-8.

5:9-10 In my ears the LORD of hosts said,  
"Of a truth many houses will be desolate,  
even large and beautiful mansions  
will be left without inhabitant."  
10 For ten acres of vineyard will produce only six gallons of wine,  
and six bushels of seed will produce less than a bushel of grain.

God spoke directly to Isaiah, “in my ears,” regarding the judgment on the rich who had acquired houses and land in violation of His laws. First, their houses will be left desolate and without occupants. Second, their land would not yield its expected harvest. God said ten acres of vineyard would only yield six gallons (a bath) of wine and six bushels (a homer) of seed would only produce about half a bushel (an ephah) of grain. Not only would the houses of the rich be empty, but their lands would produce an empty harvest. This judgment coincides with the song-parable of the vineyard, 5:1-7 and Isaiah in these later verses of chapter 5, is giving the details of why God’s vineyard did not produce its expected good fruit but only rotten stinking and worthless fruit.

5:11-12 Woe to those who rise up early in the morning  
so that they may pursue strong drink;  
who stay up late into the night,  
until they are inflamed with wine!  
12 Their parties have the harp and lute,  
the tambourine, flute, and wine.  
They have no respect for the deeds of the LORD,  
or consider the work of his hands.

The second lament of woe, 5:11-12 is against those who are self-indulgent by continually becoming so inflamed with alcohol that they rose early to pursue strong drink and stay up late in the evening to consume wine. They also held lavish banquets including many musical instruments and wine, but they did not
remember and honor God’s many deeds (accomplishments) or consider the works of God hands on their behalf. They had forgotten one of the most solemn confessions of faith, the Shema, recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. They also had forgotten that Deuteronomy chapter 6 contains this awful reminder in vs. 15, “For the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God and the anger of the LORD your God may be sparked against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.”

5:13-17 Therefore my people will go into exile
for lack of knowledge;
their nobles will lack food,
and their crowds parched with thirst.

14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its throat
and opened its mouth without limit.
Their famous ones and their multitude,
with their boisterous revelers will descend into it.

15 Each person will be on their face,
each one brought down,
and the haughty eyes humbled.

16 But the LORD of hosts will be exalted by justice,
and God the Holy One will demonstrate his holiness
by righteousness.

17 Then will the lambs feed as in their own pasture,
and the fatlings graze among the ruins.

Because of these sins, Isaiah 5:8-12, God announces a particularly stinging and horrendous set of punishments in 5:13-17. First, the people will go into exile meaning banishment from the land. This is a direct prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, in which the city will lie in ruins, 5:17, and the inhabitants will be taken as captives and exiles to Babylon. If this message was delivered by Isaiah in 740 B.C., it stands as a most significant prophecy, for it was fulfilled in 586 B.C. An earlier deportation of Jews from Judah to Babylon occurred in 605 and 597 B.C. but the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the removal of most of its inhabitants occurred in 586 B.C. Daniel and his three friends, were among the prominent young men who were taken captive to Babylon in 605 B.C. The prophet Ezekiel was also one of the prominent young men to be taken into exile in 597 B.C.

Earlier than these most significant dates for the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of her citizens was the events of the Syro-Ephramite war, 734-732 B.C. King Ahaz of Judah had refused to join king Rezin of Damascus and king Pekah of Israel in a proposed three-nation alliance to repel the advancing Assyrian threat against their nations. Following the refusal of Ahaz to join forces with Damascus (Syria) and Israel (Ephraim), these kings led their armies to invade Judah and as recorded in 2 Chronicles 28:5-15, this invasion resulted in the deaths of 120,000 soldiers of Judah. Also, 200,000 women and children were taken captive into Samaria. Later they were returned to Judah through the intervention of the prophet Obed. One of the goals of the Syro-Ephramite alliance was to remove king Ahaz and replace him with a king of their choice, Isaiah 7:1-6, thus threatening to end the lineage of Davidic kings upon the throne of Judah. 2 Chronicles 28:5 also reveals God’s judgment on king Ahaz, “Therefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Aram, and they defeated him, and carried away captive many of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with heavy casualties.”
One outcome of this devastating war was the fear of evil king Ahaz of the complete destruction of the land of Judah and the City of Jerusalem. The evilness of Ahaz is described in 2 Chronicles 28:1-4. Instead of turning to God for aid against the Syro-Ephramite alliance, king Ahaz requested help from Assyria, 2 Chronicles 28:16-21. This rebellion against God, by seeking help from a pagan nation, resulted in further disaster for King Ahaz and Judah. See also 2 Kings 16: 1-20 for additional details of the evil life of King Ahaz and its consequences.

Another earlier event was the conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) by Assyria and the removal of its people into exile into lands controlled by Assyria in 722-721 B.C. The Biblical account of this conquest and exile is stated in 2 Kings 17:1-18. King Hoshea of Israel had rebelled against the king of Assyria, Shalmaneser, by seeking aid from Egypt and by refusing to pay tribute to the Assyrian king. King Shalmaneser, as a result of Hoshea’s actions, brought his armies to besiege the northern kingdom of Israel and after a three-year period of assault, the armies of Assyria completely conquered Israel and took captive its people and transported them to various parts of the Assyrian empire. As with the assault by Syria and Ephraim and later Assyria on Judah, God was the divine mover of the events that led to the complete destruction of Israel, 2 Kings 17:18. Refer to 2 Kings 17:19-41 regarding the events that followed the destruction of the nation of Israel.

The people of Judah were not ignorant of these events. They brought great fear and dread to them. But they were not moved by these events to repent of their evilness and rebellion against God. They constantly mocked God by worshipping idols and seeking the help of pagan nations instead of humbly repenting of their sinfulness and seeking God for protection. Finally, God was to do something that the people of Judah would not believe. God was to use Babylon as His agent to demolish Jerusalem and its temple and to take its people into exile, as Isaiah 5:13 predicts.

As stated in Isaiah 5:13-17, the second set of punishments recorded by Isaiah in 5:8-30 is that they will suffer from famine and thirst which was punishment for their abuse of the land. Third, many, including the famous ones and those who are boisterous revelers will descend to Sheol, which may be a double reference to the grave and to hell. This is permanent banishment from the earth as punishment for their rebellion against God. Fourth, the common, the important and the proud will all suffer the same fate of being humbled and abased as punishment for exalting themselves before God. Fifth, the land will be used for food only by grazing animals as punishment for their selfish acquisition of land and properties. The vulnerable and defenseless lambs will graze in these pastures that the rich had so coveted for their own use. The NKJV adds in vs. 17, that strangers will eat in the waste places (literally “the fat”) of the land. Therefore, the rich would not eat of the harvest of the land they had cultivated.

The central and most critical message in this section is the contrast between 5:15 and 16. The people, because of their unrelenting sinfulness, will be brought down, 5:15, but the Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment, 5:16. The ultimate result of this contrast is stated in the latter half of 5:16, “God the Holy One will demonstrate his holiness by righteousness”. The people had brought upon themselves God’s judgment because of their unrighteousness. The repeated usage of “holy” in this verse points to its double meaning. God who in Himself is holy, also shows that His righteous acts demonstrate that He is holy. He is altogether holy, and all his actions are holy.

5:18-19 Woe to those who drag iniquity with cords of falsehood, and sin along like with a cart rope.
Who say, "Make him hurry up, 
let him do his work quickly, 
so that we may see it. 
Let the plan of the Holy One of Israel happen soon, 
so that we may experience it!"

The third lament of woe resulted from two very vile actions. The first was that they had been so captivated by their self-centeredness in thinking only of themselves and choosing to forget and then reject God, which is described by the prophet, as they “drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood.” “Falsehood” is the Hebrew word shav, which has the meaning of emptiness, vanity and deceitfulness. The picture the prophet reveals here is that the people of Judah and Jerusalem have so immersed themselves with their deceitful and worthless vanity that they are bound to their sin with strong cords just as with the same type of cords with which they use for their animals to pull their carts. God has given them up to be bound by their own cords of sin.

The second sinful action recorded in Isaiah 5:18-19 is far worse. The people had removed any influence of God on their lives and solely relied on their own corrupt immoral consciousness. They had no concept of holiness which God had demanded, “be holy because I am holy.” Leviticus 11:44. They mockingly demanded of Isaiah that God quickly show His works to them, so they could “see it” or discern it. They would not believe in God and His works (His plans and purposes) on behalf of His people, unless they could see it with their own eyes and then decide if they, would even then, believe in God.

5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, 
and good evil; 
who turn darkness to light, 
and light to darkness; 
who swap bitter for sweet, 
and sweet for bitter!

The forth lament of woe was very contemptuous in the eyes of God. Those in Israel who called evil good and called good evil were a preview of the evilness of the Pharisees who blasphemed the Holy Spirit as recorded in Matthew 12:22-37. The Pharisees declared that the works of Jesus were the actions of the devil (Beelzebul), the ruler of demons. Jesus declared their words to be a sin for which there is no forgiveness for they spoke against the Holy Spirit. Jesus ended His warning to these hypocritical religious leaders by stating, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned,” Matthew 12:37. These certainly would have been applicable words of warning for the people of Judah in Isaiah’s day.

5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, 
And shrewd in their own site!

The fifth lament of woe speaks against those who “are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.” They were conceited in their view of what they know but, in reality, they were fools. Proverbs 26:12 is applicable to this situation, “Do you see a person wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” The first sin of humans was due to Adam and Eve falling to the temptation to be wise and be like God knowing good and evil, Genesis 3:1-7. The words of Solomon in Proverbs contain many warnings about the folly of being wise in one’s own eyes. See Proverbs 3:7, 12:15, 26:5, 26:16 and 28:11.
5:22-23 Woe to those who are champions at drinking wine, and valiant at mixing strong drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deny the innocent justice!

The sixth and final lament of woe is about a set of sinful actions that lead to serious consequences. The first action concerns those who are “heroes in drinking wine” and valiant in “mixing strong drink”. Isaiah is not commending these people but sarcastically calling them heroes and valiant, as an obvious rebuke for their corrupted habits. The result of this corruption, is that they give a bribe to the wicked to justify their wicked actions and this set of sins led to the taking away of the “righteousness of the righteous” (KJV). The result of this set of sins is stated in Psalm 34:21, “Evil will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.” King David as recorded in Psalm 69, prayed for protection from his enemies and asked, “Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be listed with the righteous.” Psalm 69:28.

Introduction: Isaiah 5:24-30

Following the six oracles or laments of woe against his people, Isaiah begins a declaration of God’s judgment on them with the connecting word “therefore.” God’s judgment is decisive, deliberate and devastating. There will be no escape. They will be destroyed as fire destroys stubble and dry grass, vs. 24. God’s anger had burned against His people and He has struck them down with the power that makes the mountains shake, vs. 25. Finally, God will bring a great military force from a distant nation to complete their destruction, vss. 26-30. The reason for God’s judgement upon them is stated by God in vs. 24, “they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

5:24 Therefore, just as the tongue of fire devours straw, and as the dry grass shrivels in the flame, so their root will become rotten and their blossom will blow away like dust, because they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

The declaration of judgment on God’s people begins with “therefore” which includes the whole collection of evil actions in 5:8-23 that prove that the people have rebelled against God and have mocked Him and have treated righteousness with contempt leading in 5:24-30 to God’s just and holy punishment against them. The judgment mentioned in 5:24 is the first of three God has decreed. Just as God had stated earlier in the vineyard song-parable, Isaiah 5:7, that He will remove the hedge and it will be consumed (burned, kindled), so 5:24 connects His judgment with the vineyard song-parable and expands on this fiery consummation. The people will themselves be consumed in like manner as God’s hedge and become like fragile and helpless plants that will be completely destroyed.

God gives an immediate reason for this judgment. The people have “rejected the law of the LORD of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.” The word “law” in the Hebrew is torah, which refers to the entire law of God recorded in the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. Their action of also despising God’s word is a parallel evil to rejecting the law. It is highly significant that God’s titles, the LORD of hosts and the Holy One of Israel are stated in this context. It is not just the law and word of God, recorded by Moses that is being maligned. God’s people have rejected and despised the law and word of the Most High God who is almighty who leads the armies of heaven and earth. He also is the Holy God who is holy in His relationship to Israel as well as to the entirety of His creation. To shun and neglect His word and law is to reject and
despise the great Creator of the heavens and the earth. There is no One higher, or more exalted, or more mighty, or more holy than God who has chosen Israel not because they were more numerous than other peoples, but because He first loved them, and He remembers His oath (covenant) that He had sworn to their forefathers. See expanded explanation in Deuteronomy 7:6-11. God told Moses that His people would rebel against Him and turn to idols and forsake Him and break His covenant. As a result, God said His anger would be kindled against them…and they will be consumed. See greater context of this amazing revelation from God in Deuteronomy 31:14-22 and the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:1-43.

5:25 Therefore the anger of the LORD burns against his people;
he has stretched out his hand against them,
and has struck them.

The mountains tremble,
and their corpses are strewn like garbage in the streets.

After all this, his anger is not turned away,
but his hand is still stretched out.

The second of three judgments declared by God against His people is stated in 5:25. God’s burning anger against His people and He has struck them, and their corpses lie like refuge in the streets. His anger caused the very mountains to shake. Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, page 180, notes that this judgment is given in the past tense and may refer to a great earthquake that occurred in approximately 765-760 B.C. that is mentioned by the prophet Amos in his prophecy, Amos 1:1, 6:11; 8:8 and 9:1. Smith’s commentary on Amos is suggested as a recommended resource to understand the background to this event, Gary V. Smith, Amos, A Mentor Commentary, 1989; Christian Focus/Mentor Publications. The prophet, as recorded in Isaiah 5:25, concludes that God is still angry with His people and His hand of judgement is still stretched out against them. God, in His holy and just judgment, has decreed that these people will face elimination by fire and earthquake, but He is not through. God has another stunning announcement for His anger is not yet spent. God will do something these sinful and rebellious people would not expect. An overwhelming scourge (“overflowing whip” in the DASV), will come to finish His punishment upon them. Compare this with Isaiah 28:15,18.

5:26 He will send the signal to a distant nation,
and will whistle for them to come from the ends of the earth.

Look, they come with speed and swiftness.

The third of three judgments is declared by God against His people, in 5:26-30. This specific judgment was something that the people of God would not have expected. Because of God’s covenants, which he swore with their forefathers (He reminded them of this in Deuteronomy 7:6-11), and because they were God’s chosen people because of His love for them, the people of Judah and Jerusalem had the expectation that God would always protect them from being destroyed and keep their land safe from foreign invasion. God’s comment in 5:6, “I will lay it waste” (NKJV), within the context of the song-parable of the vineyard, may have caused some to ponder seriously what He meant. But now there is no wondering. God will do something that will gut their land of its resources including its people. Isaiah may have written this section of his prophecy, chapters 1-6 during the year in which king Uzziah died, c. 739 B.C. The northern kingdom of Israel had not yet been destroyed and its people had not yet been taken into captivity by the Assyrians. This would occur in 722 B.C. So, the people of Judah and Jerusalem may have had no immediate reference to just how serious God’s intentions were regarding their removal from the land.
In a later time, approximately 609 B.C., the prophet Habakkuk was lamenting to God about the violence, wickedness and iniquity of the people of Judah. The prophet cried, “How long, O LORD, must I cry, and you not listen? I cry out to you “Violence,” but you do not save,” Habakkuk 1:2. Just as in Isaiah’s time, the people had ignored God’s law and perverted justice. God responded to Habakkuk that, indeed He has heard and will do something about the situation in Judah. God stated in Habakkuk 1:5:

Look at the nations, and see.
Be absolutely amazed.
For I am doing a deed in your days
which you will not believe,
even if you were told about it.

God told Habakkuk that He was raising up the Chaldeans to destroy nations and take captives, Habakkuk 1:6-11. After this shocking revelation, Habakkuk appeals to God and states “we will not die,” 1:12 (NKJV), and reminds God that His eyes were too pure to gaze on (approve) evil;” 1:13. The Lord again responded to the prophet that the vision He gave would not delay, 2:3. Habakkuk then acknowledges the Lord’s report and that he was in fear. He replied to the Lord, “In wrath remember mercy,” 3:2. He later stated, “I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us,” (NASB) 3:16. In the end of his prophecy, Habakkuk gives a testimony of praise and rejoicing in the Lord, even though calamity will come, 3:17-19. The lament and prophecy of Habakkuk is the counterpoint to the prophecy of Isaiah recorded in Isaiah 5:26-30. God would be patient and would wait from 739 B.C. to 586 B.C., before the final destruction of the temple and Jerusalem would be completed by the Chaldeans (Babylonians) under the direction of Nebuchadnezzar. The beginning of the Babylonian siege and captivity of Judah and Jerusalem was in 605 B.C which was just four years after Habakkuk recorded his prophecy. He would have witnessed this judgment by God on his people. Isaiah would certainly have known about the overthrow of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., but he was spared the complete destruction of his own nation.

Isaiah begins this third statement of judgment by the words, 5:26, “He will send” indicating that this is an additional judgment to the two preceding ones declared in 5:24-25. The Lord makes it clear that this judgment is what He will accomplish. Two descriptive phrases are used to describe how He will call a distant nation to quickly come and destroy Judah and Jerusalem. First, God will send (lift up) a signal to a distant nation. The signal was a flag or banner used to call for the assembling of an army. Second, God will “whistle,” 5:26, for this nation to come “from the ends of the earth.” In the context of the judgment on Jerusalem, the specific nation would have been Babylon. But as God mentions “nations” (NIV & NKJV), this prophecy would also include the Assyrians who advanced against the northern nation of Israel and conquered it in 722 B.C. They later also captured most cities of Judah in 701 B.C. See Isaiah chapters 36-37. The armies of these nations are prompted into swift action by God’s whistling for them as if they had been prepared and ready for battle and were waiting for His call. These nations, although they would not understand nor acknowledge it, were being prepared for God’s purposes and plans in dealing with His wicked and rebellious people. They would have understood that they were masters of their own destiny and the expansion of territory was their sovereign right. However, they were but God’s instruments in His outworking of His dealings with His covenant people (and themselves). Secular history has recorded the movement of the people in the ancient near-east in the rise and fall of great nations. The history (His-story) of God reveals His movements behind the scenes to accomplish His purposes.

Many years later, God gave this message to the prophet Jeremiah regarding the army that would destroy Judah and Jerusalem, “Therefore, this is what the LORD of hosts says: “Because you have not listened to my words, “I will send and gather all the tribes of the north, says the LORD, led by Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all the
surrounding nations. I will utterly destroy them and make them an object of horror, a hissing ridicule, and a perpetual ruin. Moreover I will remove from them the voice of laughter and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride, the sound of the millstones and the night lights of the lamps in their homes. This whole land will become a desolate wasteland and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.” Jeremiah 25: 8-11.

5:27-28 None of them are tired or stumble; none will slumber or sleep; not a belt will be loosed, not a thong of their sandals will be broken. 28 Their arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent. Their horses’ hoofs are like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind.

The army the Lord calls will be alert and ready for battle with no encumbrances to slow it down. Its armaments will be ready for action and its equipment and conveyances will be swift for direct confrontation with its enemies. The portrayal of this foreign army was designed to instill fear into the people of Judah and Jerusalem who had become complacent with their position as the Lord’s chosen people. They had assumed no one would be able to overthrow them. But, with their unchecked moral freedom, they had flaunted their vile lifestyle before God, and He would swiftly deal with their pompous immorality. See Isaiah 3:8-9.

5:29 Their roaring is like a lion, they roar like young lions. They growl, seize their prey, and haul it off, and there is no one to rescue.

The foreign troops to be summoned by God would terrify Judah and Jerusalem just as a lioness and young lions would roar over the prey it has seized for devouring. In the distant past, a pagan seer had declared a similar statement about the people of Israel who were journeying to their promised land. Balaam was prompted by God to state, “Behold, a people rises like a lioness, and as a lion it lifts itself; It will not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain,” Numbers 23:24. In Isaiah’s day, the Lord brought a similar word not to describe His people, but to announce how His people will be devoured by an ungodly military force. David had also worried that his enemy would overpower him and prayed to God for protection lest his pursuer would, “tear my soul like a lion, dragging me away while there is none to deliver,” Psalm 7:2. David was protected by God from his enemy, but the vile people who had paraded their sin before God would not be so delivered for their God had now become their enemy.

5:30 They will roar over them in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks at the land, there is darkness and distress; even the light is darkened by clouds.
The growling noise as of lion of the army that the Lord will send to destroy Judah and Jerusalem will sound like the roaring of the sea. The noise of this oncoming army will terrorize the people before the troops arrive at the city walls to break them down and kill the people inside. This prophecy certainly pointed to Assyria’s armies which conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722-721 B.C. and most of Judah in 702-701 B.C. and pointed also to the military forces of Babylon, who first assaulted Jerusalem in 605 B.C. and then demolished the city and the temple in 586 B.C. Yet, there is also a hint of a far fulfillment of this prophecy. With the words of vs. 30: “darkness” and “distress” and “even the light is darkened by clouds” there is an ominous pointing to a distant time, during the last days, when the light of the sun will be darkened, and God’s wrath will be poured out upon the earth. Selected references only: Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:2, 2:10, 2:30-31, 3:15; Amos 5:18, 5:20; and Revelation 6:12-17. Many other portions of Scripture give details of the “day of the Lord” to which this prophecy in Isaiah 5:30 likely alludes. David L. Cooper suggests a far future time period for the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy:

“This sermon concerning the vineyard of Jehovah ends with a paragraph, verses 26-30, which foretells the final siege and distress of the Jewish people in the Tribulation. "And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss for them from the end of the earth; and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly" (vs. 26). This gathering of the nations against the Jews is a subject of constant discussion by the prophets. Isaiah represented this future judgment as being an irresistible force which none could withstand. In concluding his remarks, he declared that "they shall roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened in the clouds thereof" (vs. 30). The time here foreseen will be one of unprecedented distress and sorrow to the people of Israel.

The information contained in this prophecy is supplemented by other predictions which show us that, although Israel in and of herself cannot stand against these mighty aggressors, God will supernaturally strengthen the remnant who will retard, and to a certain extent repel, the invader until the Lord Jesus himself appears upon the scene and defeats the enemy (cf. Zech., chap. 14).” (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-November 1943).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 5:8-30
5:8-12: Woes for Sins of Self Indulgence
   5:13-15 Lord’s Righteous Judgment Declared
   5:16-17 The Lord exalted in judgment / The land exploited in judgment
5:18-23 Woes for Sins of Self Corruption
5:24-30 Lord’s Righteous Judgment Declared

B. Isaiah’s Vision of the Lord: Chapter 6

1. The Contrition of the Prophet: 6:1-7
2. The Commissioning of the Prophet: 6:8-13

Following what many see as a lengthy introduction, in chapters 1 to 5, to the entire prophecy of Isaiah, is one of the most glorious visions of God recorded in Scripture. Some may wonder why chapter 6 was not placed at the beginning of the book. Upon a careful study of chapter 6 and the chapters preceding and following it, a suggested solution as to the position of chapter 6 in the prophecy of Isaiah is suggested. As recorded in chapters 1 to 5, Isaiah is pronouncing the righteous and holy judgment of God on sinful, rebellious and unrepentant Israel. Hope lies in the distant future but only destruction and banishment will be the lot of the Jewish people for the decades ahead. As stated in chapter 6, Isaiah is commissioned to be God’s faithful spokesman to a doomed people who will not repent. Yet hope remains for the “stump” that is a holy seed which will be a tenth portion of the people who will grow in the future to an obedient and prosperous nation under God. In chapters 7 to 12, many prophecies are declared regarding a singular holy seed, One who is
called the “Branch.” This One is the ultimate hope for Israel and the world. Chapter 6 is a pivot between devastating destruction and divine deliverance. Isaiah is commissioned to declare God’s message to a deaf, blind and heartless people for whom God, in amazing grace and love, is preparing One to come who will open their ears and eyes and turn their stony hearts into fountains of obedience and worship. Victor Buksbazen makes some general observations regarding Chapter Six:

“It is generally agreed that the first chapter of Isaiah is an introduction to the whole book. Chapters 2-5 present a collection of prophetic messages covering the earliest period of Isaiah’s ministry during the reign of Uzziah and Jotham, approximately from 740-735 B.C.

During that period in spite of solemn warnings of Isaiah, and his predictions of approaching disaster, the people continued to sink deeper in their disobedience and defiance of God, with resulting moral decay. Meanwhile Israel’s enemies were forging an ever tighter noose around Israel and Judah, menacing the very existence of the two divided and feuding kingdoms. No doubt Isaiah must have been asking himself why his nation was rushing so blindly toward its own doom. The prophet found the answer to his painful query in recalling the commission which the LORD of Hosts gave to him early in his ministry.

He remembered that he was called to speak to a people who would neither hear nor heed his message. Now things were coming to pass exactly the way the Lord said they would. The political and moral situation of Israel served to confirm the prophet, that he was called to a frustrating and apparently useless ministry, described in 6:9,10. Isaiah’s call was further confirmed by later events during the disastrous reign of Ahaz. These events are reflected in the prophecies of chapters 7-12. The placing of chapter 6 in its present position, therefore, appeared to be natural and logical, serving to clarify the past as well as future events.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 136).

1: The Contrition of the Prophet: 6:1-7

The opening verse of chapter 6 provides an historical reference for Isaiah’s most remarkable meeting with the Lord. King Uzziah had a lengthy and prosperous 52-year reign in Judah and was able to achieve much for the Jewish people as recorded in 2 Chronicles chapter 26 and 2 Kings 15:1-8. However, 2 Chronicles 26:16 records that, “But when he became powerful, his heart became proud which destroyed him. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.” God immediately punished Uzziah for his sin. God struck Uzziah with leprosy from which he never recovered. He lived in a separate house and was cut off from the house of the Lord. 2 Chronicles 26:16-23. The year Uzziah died was approximately 740 B.C. There is a stunning contrast between Uzziah and Isaiah in their experiences within the temple and the altar of incense. Also, the irony of this description of “two kings”, one human and sinful, and the other divine and holy, is emphasized by the prophet so his audience will immediately understand the impact of Isaiah’s meeting with the exalted Lord of the universe. Isaiah chapter 6 opens with the historical time frame, the year king Uzziah died and the prophet’s amazing vision of the Lord, vs. 1. Angelic seraphim are next introduced in this vision including their unforgettable calling to each other which when uttered, the very door frames of the temples shook as it filled with smoke, vss. 2-4. Isaiah realized the sinfulness of himself and his people and one of the seraphim touched his mouth with a burning coal from the altar and stated that his iniquity had been taken away and his sins forgiven, vss. 5-7.

6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Isaiah does more than just provide an historical context. It brings into stark contrast the perished body of a human king in the grave and the high, exalted and eternally living King of kings. Human kings are fallible, prone to corruption, and all of them face death. They all have the same earthly destiny in that their bodies decay in a grave. Isaiah saw the Lord, the eternal King of kings who is infallible, completely holy and will
never die. The eternal One was sitting on a throne in the temple because the temple belonged to Him. The ultimate purpose of the temple was for God’s covenant people to worship Him including exalting and glorifying Him above every name or thing. The train of Lord’s robe filled the temple. There was no place for anything or anyone else that would compare or compete for pre-imminence in His temple. David L. Cooper suggests an alternative temple location other than the physical temple in Jerusalem during Isaiah’s ministry:

“What temple was this? There is a temple in heaven (Rev. 11:19). There were the Temples of Solomon, of Zerubbabel, of Herod, and there will be the Jewish temple which will stand in Jerusalem during the Tribulation, and the millennial temple which will be built by the Lord Jesus (Zech. 6:12). Of these various sanctuaries, which was the one appearing in our passage? The answer is to be found in John 12:39-41. In this passage John quoted from Isaiah, chapter 6, and declared that the prophet made these predictions because he (Isaiah) saw His glory; and he spake to Him. John therefore interpreted the vision of Isaiah, chapter 6, as one of the Lord Jesus in His glory—the millennial kingdom. This conclusion is confirmed by the clause "The whole earth is full of his glory." The earth will, for the first time, be filled with the glory of the Lord when Jesus returns and sets up His kingdom. Further confirmation of this interpretation is found in the prophet's words: "For mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts." There can therefore be no doubt regarding this prophecy's being a prediction of Christ's millennial reign." (Dr. D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-November 1943).

The Hebrew word for “Lord” in 6:1 is the Hebrew word Adonay which is always depicted in the Old Testament as a name reserved for God only. It first appears in Scripture in Genesis 15:2. God had just promised Abram, before his name was changed to Abraham, that he would receive a great reward. Abram responds, “O Sovereign LORD, what will you give me, since I am still childless?” Abram called God by the name of “Adonay Yahweh” which has the meaning of Adonay (who is Lord supreme and Lord over all the earth, the Lord of Lords) and Yahweh (a most holy name for God who is eternal and self-existent). The name Adoany occurs often in the O. T. It is used by Isaiah as a proper name for God 47 times. Selected verses where Isaiah refers to God as Adonay include, 7:14; 11:11; 25:8; 40:10; 48:16; 61:1, 11. Note: all occurrences of Adonay in the Scriptures are significant.

The throne of the Lord was “high and lifted up,” or “lofty and exalted” as in the NASB. This meant Isaiah had to look up to see the Lord who, as Isaiah was to later state, was “the high and lofty One,” Isaiah 57:15. Another significant occurrence of the meaning of lofty and exalted is in Isaiah 2:2, in which the prophet states, the mountain of the Lord will, in the last days, be “exalted” (raised) above the hills. The earthly king, Uzziah had died and his body was now buried and decomposing in the ground. The eternal King, is always living and He is exalted above all else in the universe. Even the adornments of the Lord are larger than life, for Isaiah saw that the train of His robe filled the temple. For Isaiah, the presence of the Lord in the temple was startling, of magnificent grandeur, awe inspiring and over powering. For a comparison see 1 Kings 22:19 where the prophet Micaiah spoke of seeing the Lord, “I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.” The other occasions (selected only, not an exhaustive listing), where the Scriptures record the meeting and visions of humans with God (or the Angel of God) include, Genesis 16:7-13 (Hagar); 18:1-33 (Abraham); 28:10-16 (Jacob); Exodus 24:9-11 (Elders of Israel); 33:17-23 (and many other occasions where Moses met with God), Joshua 5:13-15 (Joshua); Job 38:1-42:9 (Job and Eliphaz); Jeremiah 1:4-10 (Jeremiah); Ezekiel 1:1-2:10 (Ezekiel); Daniel 7:9-14 (Daniel); Zechariah 1:7-21 (Zechariah); Acts 9:3-7 (Paul); and Revelation 1:9-20 (John). The N.T. also records several occasions where humans met with the resurrected Christ before His return to be with the Father.

6:2 Above him stood the seraphim, each one had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.
Isaiah next saw at least two six-winged Seraphim standing above the Lord. Seraphim, is a plural form of the word “seraph” meaning “fiery ones”. There are not many instances in the Scriptures were winged beings are seen. Ezekiel saw Cherubim, Isaiah saw Seraphim and the Apostle John saw living creatures similar to those whom Ezekiel saw. These creatures appear to be either a separate created order than Angels or a different (higher?) form of Angel. Angels themselves are not described in Scripture as having wings. Although in Daniel 9:21, regarding the angel Gabriel, the KJV states: “being caused to fly swiftly” and the NIV states: “came to me in swift flight.” The NASB translates this phrase as “came to me in my extreme weariness.” Refer to Stephen R. Miller, Daniel, New American Commentary, pages 250-251, for a discussion as to why the NASB translation is preferred.

Isaiah saw that the Seraphim used two of their wings to cover their faces, two to cover their feet and used the remaining two wings for flight. It is just speculation to give definitive reasons why the Seraphim covered their eyes and feet. Perhaps they did so to show their complete humility before the exalted Lord and also to be continually worshipping the Lord.

6:3 They called out to each other,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

The prophet hears one of the Seraphim calling out to another, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” The thrice repeated attribute of God as holy is a powerful emphasis on the character of God. God in His holiness is set apart completely from the sinfulness of humanity. As the holy and eternal King of the Jewish nation, the world and the universe, God in His holiness is perfect and absolutely pure, blameless, true, and without any trace of sin or evil. The three-part announcement of God’s holiness also by six winged creatures, is recorded in Revelation 4:8. No other attribute of God is so emphasized in Scripture. Without being dogmatic or overstating the case, it may be said that if one had to describe God in one word, that word would be holy.

The other statement of the Seraphim regarding God is that “the whole earth is full of His glory.” This statement is also found in Numbers 14:21 and Psalm 72.19. The word glory, the Hebrew word kabod, has the meaning of great weight or quantity and with God it also has other possibilities of meaning. For example, one scholar states, “God’s glory refers to the outshining of His person.” Thomas L. Constable, Isaiah, page 43. It is extremely significant that the phrase does not say, the whole earth is filled with His holiness, but does say, “the whole earth is full of his glory!” God’s creation communicates His glory, Psalm 19:1-4a; and 97:6. God’s glory has been set above the heavens and the earth, Psalm 8:1; 57:5, 11; 108:5; 113:4;148:13. The glory of God and the Lamb is the praise of heaven, Revelation 4:8-11; 5:9-14; 7:11-12 and their glory will fill heaven forever, Revelation 21:23.

As the Lord Himself fills the earth just as He filled the temple, there is no place on earth where His glory is not present. God’s glorious light is victorious over darkness, John 1:5, even the darkness of our hearts as the Apostle Paul declared, “For it is God who said, "Let there be light shining out of darkness," who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” 2 Corinthians 4:6. Thus, the most intimate shining of God’s glory on the earth is within the hearts of those who have believed in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Apostle John wrote: “Isaiah said these things, because he saw his glory and spoke about him.” John 14: 41. The “Him” John is writing about is Jesus Christ.

Victor Buksbazen comments on the glory of God which fills the earth:
“The essence and supreme attribute of God according to this vision of God, is His holiness, which expresses His perfection, His purity, and His absolute “otherness” and “aboveness” over all His creation. The glory of God which fills the whole earth, or as some have translated this passage “the fullness of the earth is His glory,” is the reflection and manifestation in the universe of the holiness of God.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 139).

6:4 At the sound of their cry the door frames shook, and the temple was filled with smoke.

The words of the Seraphim were so powerful that the “foundations of the thresholds shook...and the house was filled with smoke.” (ESV). This indicates that this was not a heavenly vision and that Isaiah was in the actual temple in Jerusalem. In the vision of heaven that the apostle John saw, at the giving of the seven golden bowls of God’s wrath, representing the third series of judgments of the Tribulation period, John records that, “The temple was filled with smoke from the glory and power of God; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished,” Revelation 15:8. The filling of both the earthly and heavenly temples with smoke depict the glory and power of God. Isaiah had just heard from the Seraphim that the earth is full of God’s glory and this was visually displayed to the prophet by the filling of the temple with smoke.

Although there may be other possible sources, the smoke was likely from the altar of incense. God gave specific instructions to Moses regarding the making of fragrant incense which was only to be used for the purposes God directed, Exodus 30:34-38. Incense was used in an atonement activity by Aaron upon directions from Moses on behalf of the people of Israel. David, many years later, prayed, “Let my prayer be accepted, as incense before you, my lifted hands, as an evening sacrifice,” Psalm 141:2. Thus, the proper use of incense was counted by God as a holy activity by His people. The improper use of incense brought very prompt judgment by God, resulting in God’s wrath upon the perpetrator and for some, instant death. For example, refer to Leviticus 10:1-3 and 2 Chronicles 26:16-21. God came to abhor the burning of incense by those who trampled His courts and were very wicked in worshipping Him and as recorded in Isaiah 1:13, God declared, “Your Incense is detestable to Me.” However, in the meeting between God and Isaiah, incense was used for its rightful and holy activity of atonement. In John’s vision of heaven, the incense altar has an important role in the activities immediately following the opening of the seventh seal and just prior to the giving of the seven trumpet judgments, Revelation 8:1-6.

6:5 Then said I, "Woe is me! For I am doomed; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Isaiah, upon seeing the LORD, realized his awful sinful condition and the rebellious position of the Jewish people. Isaiah pronounced woe upon himself. He knew that no one could see the living Lord and live. See Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:20 and Judges 13:22. Yet he was not consumed. God is merciful to those who are truly repentant. Isaiah, in the very first words that he spoke about himself after seeing the LORD, were words from a contrite heart realizing his sinfulness and guilt for he said, “I am a man of unclean lips.”

He also was repentant on behalf of the nation whom he knew were also a people of unclean lips. Seeing God in His glory, has brought others to acknowledge that they were unable to stand before Him, Job 42:5-6 and Revelation 1:17. To see God in His holiness and majesty is to instantly recognize one’s own abhorrent sinfulness. Sinners have no standing place in the presence of God. Only by faith, in the Messiah, who is God’s Son, will anyone “stand” in God’s presence for they will be declared righteous because of their faith.

6:6-7 Then a seraphim flew to me, having a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar.
He touched my mouth with it, and said, 
"Look, this has touched your lips; 
your iniquity is taken away, 
and your sin forgiven."

These verses record a truly remarkable event in the life of Isaiah. One of the Seraphim flew to Isaiah with a burning coal which he had taken from the altar with tongs and touched Isaiah’s mouth with the coal and the Seraphim declared, “Look (or behold), this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin forgiven.” Recognition of one’s sins is the first step in true repentance. It is acknowledging what God already knows, that sin is present in one’s life and has not been confessed. When Isaiah confessed his sin, the Lord immediately forgave him. Thomas Constable suggests:

“Isaiah only acknowledged his hopeless condition—he did not plead with God or make vows to God—and God then went into action. Confession must precede cleansing (cf. 1 John 1:9). The altar from which the seraph took the coal was probably the brazen altar in heaven, in which case the coal itself symbolizes substitute sacrifice. Fire from the brazen altar lit the incense on the incense altar in Israel, so, whichever altar may be in view, the coal connects with sacrifice.

Ultimately, all sin is forgiven because of sacrifice. Fire ("burning coal. . . from the altar) in the Old Testament symbolizes the wrath of God (Gen. 3:24; Num. 11:1-3), the holiness of God (Exod. 3:2-6; 19:18-25), His purifying process (Num. 31:22-23; Mal. 3:2-3), and the context of the Law (Deut. 4:12, 33, 36).” [Notes: 102: Motyer, p. 78. 103: The Nelson…., p. 1122.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 44-45).

Some may want to describe this as the conversion of Isaiah. Others may see this as a re-dedication of the prophet to the ministry of the Lord. Whatever view is understood, Isaiah was now ready to receive a commission from God to serve Him in a most unpleasant and difficult task. J. Alec Motyer suggests:

“The live coal thus encapsulates the ideas of atonement, propitiation, satisfaction, forgiveness, cleansing and reconciliation, and of these spiritual realities Isaiah, the erstwhile doomed sinner, is left in no doubt when the seraph explains: ‘Behold, as soon as this touched your lips your iniquity went, and, as for your sin—paid by ransom!’” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 72).

2. The Commissioning of the Prophet: 6:8-13

This second part of Isaiah 6 deals with the commission God gave Isaiah upon Isaiah’s willingness and request to be used by God. God gave His commission only after Isaiah asked to be sent by God. Some see a three-point teaching within chapter 6 using the KJV as a reference. In 6:5, Isaiah states Woe (is me for I am ruined). In 6:7 the Seraphim states, Lo (behold) and in 6:8 God asks, who will go (for us). Preachers often have used this three-point message of “Woe, Lo and Go” to explain the need for Christians to confess their sins, trust God for the forgiveness of their sins and then be obedient to go and serve God wherever he will send them. In this passage, Isaiah 6:8-13 the prophet records that He heard the actual voice of the LORD asking who would go for Us and whom will I send, to which Isaiah, in one of the most famous phrases of all the Scriptures, replies in vs. 8, “Here am I! Send Me” (NKJV). The LORD gives Isaiah his commission to go to “this people,” God’s covenant people, and tell them that they are to continue in their current sinful condition so that they will not hear, understand and repent, vss. 9-10. Isaiah asks how long his commission was to last, and the LORD replies until the land has become absolutely devastated and uninhabited, vss. 11-12. However, the LORD offers some hope that a tenth part of the people will remain and even if these are destroyed, there will be holy seed who will survive, vs. 13.
Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,
"Whom will I send,
and who will go for us?"
I replied, "I am here. Send me."

Isaiah hears a request for service from the triune God: “who will go for us?” and Isaiah responds to the request by stating one of the most beloved pleas to God in all of Scripture: “Here am I! Send me.” (NKJV). Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord: “Whom will I send, and who will go for us?” This is a very significant combination of the oneness of the Lord explained in a plural sense. See also: Genesis 1:26 (at creation), and 11:7 (scattering of peoples at Babel). The New Testament is very clear on the plurality of the Godhead ascribing works of God to the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit: to the Father, Matthew 3:17; to the Son, John 1:1; and to the Spirit, Acts 28:25-27. For a full treatment of the plurality of the Godhead, see David L. Cooper, Messianic Series: Chapter 2: The Plurality of the Divine Personalities, of Volume 1: The God of Israel, Biblical Research Society, 1945.

Only after Isaiah has recognized and was contrite about his sinfulness and then after he had received atonement for his sin, was he ready to meet and receive a commission from God. This is where the stunning contrast between Isaiah and Uzziah is most evident. Uzziah went into the temple without permission full of pride, hubris and self-importance. Isaiah entered the temple rightfully, (some claim he may have been a priest), with a humble spirit. Uzziah committed an act of sinful rebellion against the Lord’s stated commands regarding the incense altar. Isaiah stood obedient confessing his and the sins of the people of Judah before the Lord.

Uzziah received immediate condemnation from the priests and immediate punishment from the Lord. Isaiah received forgiveness for his sins, represented by having his lips touched by a burning coal from the altar of incense, and a commission from the Lord. Uzziah entered the temple full of pride and self-exaltation and left the temple humbled, punished and banned from being with his people. Isaiah entered the temple humbled and contrite and met the true exalted King and was forgiven, cleansed and commissioned to go among his people with the message of the Lord.

Immediately following Isaiah’s response to God’s call by exclaiming, “Here am I, Send Me,” God gave him a very difficult commission as recorded in 6:9-13. It was a commission to proclaim (tell) the Lord’s message to a people who would be hard of hearing to the point of being deaf, with poor eyesight to the point of being blind and with selfish hearts to the point of being hardened and insensitive. Within the commission was the message of condemnation that God was giving to the Jewish people. The proclamation that Isaiah was to give would be the source of the people’s hardness of hearing, seeing and understanding. God was giving the people over to their sins. See also Ezekiel’s experience as recorded in Ezekiel chapters 2 and 3. The Apostle
Paul explains this method of God regarding the people in Paul’s day as recorded in Romans 1:18-32. God in both instances was giving them over to their sinful rebellion and allowing sin to have its destructive and deadly consequences. God also hardened Pharaoh’s heart as recorded in Exodus 9:12.


“The five references to Isaiah 6:9-10 concern national Israel’s unbelief in Jesus the Messiah and a rejection of the kingdom of God. Even though some Israelites believed in Jesus and thus comprised the remnant of Israel (see Rom. 11:1-6), the lack of corporate belief by Israel brings a stinging rebuke in which both Jesus and Paul draw upon the words of Isaiah 6:9-10 for their current Jewish audiences. This situation will be reversed one day when national Israel believes in Jesus as Messiah as passages like Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 11:26 indicate.” (Michael J. Vlach, “The Significance of the Five Quotations of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the New Testament,” http://mikevlach.blogspot.ca/2017/07/the-significance-of-five-quotations-of.html. Accessed March 6, 2018.)

6:11-12 Then I asked, "Lord, how long?" He answered, "Until cities are destroyed without inhabitant, and houses uninhabited, and the land become absolutely devastated, and the LORD has sent everyone far away, and the midst of the land is abandoned.

Isaiah, as recorded in 6:11, asked how long? How long was he to keep proclaiming judgment on the people of Judah and Jerusalem? The Lord’s response, 6:11-12, was chilling. Isaiah was to keep proclaiming the word of the Lord until no one was left in the land and until the land itself was abandoned (utterly desolate). There would be no escaping the judgement of God for the people of Judah. Their rebelliousness and blatant defiance of God and His word had reached a point where God, in His righteous indignation could not allow it to continue without a just punishment. Isaiah was to keep these stunning words in mind for the remainder of his prophetic ministry. Any hope for the immediate fulfillment of God’s covenantal promises would not come upon these people. Isaiah was to minister to a doomed people who would face the full wrath of God.

David L. Cooper adds:

“To the Lord the prophet responded: "Lord, how long?" Isaiah understood that his ministry, as far as good results were concerned, would not be a great success. He therefore asked how long he would have to continue such seemingly profitless labors. To this query the Lord responded: "Until cities be wasted without inhabitant, and houses without man, and the land become utterly waste, and Jehovah have removed men far away, and the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land." It is usually supposed that the prophet began his ministry in the middle of the eighth century B.C., according to the common chronology. This reduction of the country to a condition of desolation occurred about the close of the century. Thus there was something like half a century during which God declared the prophet was to engage in his unappreciated ministry. The true servant of God is to deliver the message in firmness and love--without compromise--regardless of visible outward results.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – November 1943).
6:13 Even if a tenth remains in it,
it will be destroyed again.
Just like a terebinth and an oak whose stump remains
when they are cut down;
so the holy seed will be its stump.

Yet there was hope. God states “Yet there will be a tenth portion in it.” (NASB). This tenth portion, likely a tenth of the people who will survive, will undergo trouble. They will be “like a terebinth and an oak whose stump remains when they are cut down; so the holy seed will be its stump.” The reference to the “holy seed” has both a national (ethnic) and singular fulfillment. The national fulfillment is seen in several passages of Scripture. These verses speak of the remnant God has chosen from the Jewish people, both from Judah and Israel. Selected references to the remnant of God: 1 Kings 19:18 (the first statement in Scripture to a remnant the Lord has kept for Himself); Isaiah 11:11-16 (a remnant to be saved); Isaiah 41:8-16 (Israel called God’s chosen servant whom He has not rejected); Isaiah 43:1-13 (God’s promise of redemption to His people); Isaiah 45:25 (all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory in the Lord), Isaiah 53:10-11 (the many to be justified); Isaiah 59:15-21 (God’s salvation and covenant with the redeemed); Isaiah 65:8-10 (God’s chosen ones to inherit the land); Isaiah 65:23 (he offspring will not labor in vain or bear children for calamity), and Isaiah 66:22 (eternal endurance of the offspring and name of the sons of Israel). Many other references in Isaiah to the remnant will be discussed in later sections of this study. A reference to the remnant in the New Testament is found in Romans 11:5.

The singular fulfillment to the “holy seed” is the coming and ministry of the Messiah, whom Isaiah called the “Branch”, “Prince of Peace”, “Servant” and other names describing the person and role of the Messiah. The book of Isaiah has several passages which prophesy of this One to come, both in His first advent and the events of His second advent including the Messianic Kingdom. The John MacArthur NASB (Updated) Study Bible provides a comprehensive listing of references in the book of Isaiah regarding the Messiah's first advent (page 946) and events leading to and during the Messianic Kingdom (page 1032). Victor Buksbazen again comments:

“Verse 13 is characteristic of the whole message of Isaiah. In spite of all his predictions of gloom and disaster, there is a bright glimmer of hope for Israel’s future, the rainbow of promise, after the violent storm of destruction has passed.

For a while the message of gloom continues without relief: Even if a tenth of the people should survive and come back from exile, that small survivorship will again be consumed, just as when the terebinth and the oak in the fall shed their leaves and are burned. Yet all is not lost, the stump of the tree remains and shall live again. One day it will cover itself with leaves as with a new glory. Verse 13 is difficult to translate because the Hebrew words tend themselves to differing interpretations. The word “leaves” is not expressly in our Hebrew text, but seems to be implied. Others translate “like the terebinth and the oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled.” (R.S.V.). However the basic thought remains the same. The Hebrew word “matseveth” can be translated either as “a stump” or “substance.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 142-143).
6:8-13 The Commissioning of the Prophet
   6:8 The Request of the King and Response of the Prophet
   6:9-10 The Response of those who Refuse the Message
   6:11-12 The Removal of those who Refuse the Message
   6:13 The Remnant to be Restored
C. The Prophecies of Immanuel: Chapters 7-12

1. The Threat to the Nation: 7:1-9
2. The Sign of Immanuel: 7:10-16
3. The Plunder of the Nation: 7:17-25
4. The fall of the Nations Enemies: 8:1-8
5. The future of the Nation’s Remnant: 8:9-22
6. The Promise of the Kingly Child: 9:1-7
7. The Anger of the Lord: 9:8-10:4
8. Assyria: God’s Choice for Punishing the Nation: 10:5-19
10. The Kingdom of the Righteous Branch: 11:1-10
11. The Victory of the Remnant: 11:11-16
12. The Praise of the Remnant: Chapter 12

Following the commissioning of the prophet by the Lord, the section 7:1 to 12:6 presents further revelation regarding the “holy seed” (singular). Details are given regarding His birth, His titles, His redemption of the remnant, His personal attributes, and His kingdom. The Lord will not relent in pouring out His righteous judgment on His rebellious and sinful people. Yet He also, in the midst of wrath, gives mercy and the hope of future redemption through a Messianic figure whom various titles are given: Immanuel, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace and to whom descriptive words are ascribed: “shoot from the stem of Jesse”, “root of Jesse” and “a branch”.

The great question of this section and arguably to the entire prophecy of Isaiah is: Who do you trust, God or yourself? The early chapters of Isaiah provide ample proof of the folly and deadly consequences of the Jewish people’s self-trust, self-indulgence and the selfish worship of idols. In response God sends a prophet to proclaim the Lord’s message of judgment and mercy. God also is patient and specifically offers the King of Judah, an opportunity to trust Him during a time of warfare and invasion by Aram and Israel. To whom will the King of Judah look to for help and protection? Will the King look to an evil and regionally powerful nation or to the Eternal, Holy and all-powerful God? The response is predictable, and the results are catastrophic.

Historical Background

The historical background to Isaiah chapters 7-12 is recorded in 2 Kings 16: 1-20 and 2 Chronicles 27:9 - 28:27. King Ahaz of Judah, grandson of King Uzziah, was just twenty years of age when he became King of Judah. His reign lasted about 21 years (including co-reigning with his father Jotham) and was one of evilness and rebellion against the Lord. Ahaz was so vile that he made molten images for the Baals, he burned incense in the valley of Ben-hinnom and sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills and under every green tree.

His most rebellious act against God he committed was in burning his own sons in fire according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had driven out before the sons of Israel. (2 Chronicles 28:1-4).
Because of the sins of Ahaz, the Lord brought swift judgment against the nation of Judah. 120,000 people of Judah were slain in one day by the armies of king Pekah of Israel. The armies of the northern kingdom of Israel under command of king Pekah also carried off 200,000 captives from Judah and brought them to Samaria. However, these captives whom the northern kingdom wished to enslave, were very quickly escorted back to Jericho in Judah because of the intervention of the Lord through His prophet Obed. (2 Chronicles 28: 5-15).

Following a further invasion by the Edomites and the Philistines who also took captives from Judah, King Ahaz sought help from the king of Assyria. Ahaz offered to pay tribute to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria in payment for seeking Assyria’s aid to fight against Judah’s enemies. This act of rebellion by Ahaz resulted in further affliction against Judah due to Assyria’s abuse of this small nation. In spite of all the disaster facing Judah by its enemies, king Ahaz became more rebellious and unfaithful to the Lord by offering sacrifices and burning incense to pagan gods and using temple implements, devoted to the worship of the Lord, to make altars for worshipping these pagan gods. There is no record that Ahaz ever repented of his sins against God. See also, 2 Chronicles 28: 16-27. For further historical details regarding the reign of Ahaz, see article on “Ahaz” by R. D. Culver, in the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1975, Vol. 1.

It is also important to the understanding of chapters 7-12 to know the historical timeline of the events Isaiah describes from the viewpoint of his location in Jerusalem. Much was happening in the Fertile Crescent area of the Ancient Near East region. The smaller nations were in turmoil and fear, as both Egypt and Assyria were asserting their imperialistic plans for expanding their empires. A smaller nation, Babylon was just emerging which was to have an over-powering presence several years in the future from the days of Isaiah. The duration of the reigns of the kings of the various nations and some of the most important historical dates and events for the Book of Isaiah are indicated in the following list:

Note: all dates are approximate only.

Approximate time of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry: 740 – 681 B.C.

Kings of Judah and Israel:
Death of King Uzziah, king of Judah: 740 B.C.
Rule of Jotham, king of Judah: 750 -731 B.C. Jotham co-ruled with Uzziah from 750 – 739 B.C.
Rule of Ahaz, king of Judah: 735-715 B.C. Ahaz co-ruled with Jotham from 735-731 B.C.
Rule of Pekah, king of Israel: 752-732 B.C.
Rule of Hoshea, king of Israel: 732-722 B.C.
Rule of Hezekiah, king of Judah: 729-686 B.C. Hezekiah co-ruled with Ahaz from 729-715 B.C.
Rule of Manasseh: king of Judah: 695-642 B.C. Manasseh co-ruled with Hezekiah from 695-686 B.C.

The Assyrian kings:
Rule of Tiglath-Pileser III king of Assyria (also known as “Pul”): 745-727 B.C.
Rule of Shalmaneser V king of Assyria: 726-722 B.C.
Rule of Sargon II king of Assyria: 721-705 B.C.
Rule of Sennacherib, king of Assyria: 705 – 681 B.C.

The Babylonian kings:
Rule of Merodach-Baladan king of City of Babylon: 721-703 B.C.
Babylon under Assyrian control: 701-626 B.C.
Rule of Nabopolasar, king of renewed Babylon 626-605 B.C.
Rule of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon: 605 – 562 B.C.
Major Events:
Isaiah’s vision of the Lord in the temple: 740 B.C.
Isaiah’s meeting with king Ahaz: 735 B.C.
Invasion of Judah by Aram and Israel: 734-732 B.C.
Assyria conquered Damascus: 732 B.C.
First invasion of Israel by Assyria: 732 B.C.
Destruction of Israel by Assyria: 722-21 B.C.
Complete obliteration of Israel’s people (Isaiah 7:9): 669 B.C.
Sickness and healing of Hezekiah: 703-702 B.C.
Hezekiah receives ambassadors from Babylon: 703-702 B.C.
Conquest of Judah by Assyria: 701 B.C.
Threatened siege of Jerusalem by Assyria and destruction of the Assyrian army: 701 B.C.
Prophesied destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon:
First conquest and exile of Daniel and his friends to Babylon: 605 B.C.
Second conquest and exile of 10,000 captives including Ezekiel to Babylon: 597 B.C.
Third conquest and complete destruction of the city, the temple and the walls: 586 B.C.

1. The Threat to the Nation: 7:1-9

Before the events described in 2 Chronicles chapter 28, Isaiah records some background details about the plans to invade Judah by Aram and Israel. The armies of the Arameans had advanced against Judah and were camped just north of Judah in Israel (Ephraim). It was just prior to the invasion of Judah by Aram and Israel that Isaiah was instructed by the Lord to take his son Shear-jashub (“a remnant will return’) and meet king Ahaz and bring the king a message from the Lord. The message was for Ahaz to be calm and have no fear and not to be fainthearted because of the impending invasion by the kings of Aram and Israel. These two kings planned to invade Judah, breach its walls (likely the walls of Jerusalem) and set up a puppet king who would be in their service. The Lord stated regarding the plans of the kings of Aram and Israel, “It will not stand and it will not happen.” Isaiah 7:7. The Lord also gave words to Isaiah of a stunning prophecy, “Within sixty-five years, Ephraim will be shattered in pieces, so that it will not be a people”. Isaiah 7:8. The Lord through the prophet then stated: “if you will not faithfully stand firm, then you will not stand at all”. Isaiah 7:9.

The words of the Lord to remain calm and be without fear in the midst of impending doom were hard for Ahaz to bear as the armies of his enemies whom he could see appeared more menacing than the armies of the Lord whom he could not see. Ahaz, if he considered the records in Scripture of the kings of Judah and Israel, would have remembered the story of Elisha’s servant, who was in a similar situation, when an army from Aram had encircled the city. The servant was in distress and said to Elisha, “Oh no, my master! What can we do now?” Elisha replied, “Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them.” Elisha prayed that his servant’s eyes would be opened, and God responded by allowing the servant to see that “the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” 2 Kings 6:11-17. The remarkable issue in Isaiah 7 is that God was willing to provide help, not to an obedient and believing prophet, but to a faithless, evil and rebellious king who never ceased to perform abominable acts in the very face of God.

It is also remarkable that Isaiah was told by the Lord to take his son, Shear-jashub with him when he went to meet with king Ahaz. In the midst of impending doom, Isaiah was to bring with him a living message of hope. Isaiah’s son, Shear-jashub whose name means “a remnant will return”, was a sign to Ahaz that God would bring a future restoration to the nation. Isaiah recognized that he and his sons were “signs and harbingers in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion”. Isaiah 8:18. It is very unlikely that Ahaz took any notice, yet God gave him hope both in the prophet’s message and in the presence of
Isaiah’s son. It could be concluded that due to the grace given to him, Ahaz was without excuse before the Lord.

As recorded by Isaiah in Isaiah 7:1-9, an unsuccessful attack against Jerusalem was made by Aram and Israel in the days of Ahaz, king of Judah, vs. 1. The king of Judah also heard that Syria had allied itself with Israel (described as Ephraim), causing the king and his people great fear, vs. 2. The LORD requested that Isaiah, accompanied by his young son, meet king Ahaz in a specific place, “at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the road to the Laundry Washing Field,” vs. 3. The LORD’s message to king Ahaz through Isaiah was not to fear about the kings who had planned to overthrow Judah and replace king Ahaz with a king of their choice, vss. 4-6. The LORD stated that the plans of these oppressing kings would not stand and within sixty-five years, Ephraim (Israel) would be so shattered in pieces that it would no longer be a people and commanded king Ahaz to stand firm in faith, vss. 7-9.

7:1 In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to attack Jerusalem, but could not prevail against it.

Isaiah 7:1 contains much historical information that is an important background to the message that the prophet delivered to king Ahaz. Ahaz had an impressive family lineage. His grandfather Uzziah and father Jotham were God-followers and the land and its people prospered under their leadership. Ahaz’s son, Hezekiah was also sought the Lord and the Lord brought deliverance to the city of Jerusalem in response to the prayers of Hezekiah. But Ahaz would have nothing to do with following or worshiping the Holy One of Israel. During the first year of Ahaz’s reign (735 B.C.), Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah, king of Israel incited war against Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles 28:5-15 describes this war. See also, brief details regarding it above. The nation of Judah and its cities were devastated by this war, yet the capital city of Jerusalem was not conquered. 2 Chronicles 28:5 and 2 Kings 15:37 state that it was God who delivered Ahaz into the hands of the king or Aram and king of Israel due to the sins Ahaz had committed. See also to 2 Kings 16:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 28:1-4. 2 Kings 16:1-20 provides a brief account of the life and times of King Ahaz.

7:2 It was reported to the house of David, "Syria has allied itself with Ephraim." His heart and the heart of his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest tremble in the wind.

News of the coalition between Aram and Israel had brought terror into the hearts of the king Ahaz and his people in Jerusalem. Due to the evilness of Ahaz, the Lord had brought an end to the influence and strength of the nation of Judah. Its sphere of influence and control was diminishing, and its armies were no longer blessed by the Lord. They were in great fear of the nations around them. They knew they were vulnerable to being conquered and Ahaz had two options for help. He could seek the assistance of men, in this case the powerful king of Assyria or seek the divine aid of the true King of the Jewish people who Isaiah had seen in the temple, the high and exalted Lord. The following verses sadly reveal to whom the heart of king Ahaz would trust.

The mention in Isaiah 7: 2 of the “house of David” is due to the threat of the removal of the (dynasty) the line of David. God moves to assure the current member of this line, Ahaz that the threat will not result in the total collapse of the house of David, for God will keep His covenant with David. Refer to notes on 7:3). Isaiah will also refer to the “house of David” in 7:13 in the same context of preserving the lineage.
7:3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub [a remnant will return], at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the road to the Laundry Washing Field.

At this precise time, when Ahaz was in despair for his life and for the lives of the people of Jerusalem, God sent Isaiah to meet the king. God told the prophet to bring along with him his young son, Shear-jashub. God never does things haphazardly or on a whim. The presence of Isaiah’s son was intended to bring Ahaz a crucial message from God. The meaning of the name Shear-jashub was “a remnant will return”. The presence of Isaiah’s son and the meaning of his name, Shear-jashub, was a three-fold object lesson to king Ahaz. First, God was not sugar-coating the realities of the sins of Ahaz. For the king of Judah must bear the responsibility for the ravages of war upon his nation and the great number of his people who had been and who were going to be killed. God was judging Ahaz and the message "a remnant shall return" was a stunning prophecy that exile for his people was decreed by God. The land was to be conquered and most of its people were to be killed or taken into captivity. Ahaz would live to witness this happen to the northern kingdom of Israel within a few-years. Yet this message of judgment was for him and for his nation of Judah. Second, God was sending a message of hope to the king who was born into the royal line of David. It was to David that God had made covenant promises that David’s house (lineage) and kingdom would endure before the Lord forever. For further Scriptural background, see 2 Samuel 7:8-17 and 1 Chronicles 17:7-14. Refer also to the Master’s Seminary Journal, (MSJ) Volume 10, Number 2, Fall, 1999, devoted to the Biblical Covenants. This edition of the MSJ provides an excellent study of the promises of God through His covenant with the people of Israel. Ahaz was confronted with a reminder of God’s covenant promise in the person of a small boy. Another young son would soon be announced to him that would change history forever. Third, the presence of Shear-jashub would also have significance in understanding “the boy” in 7:16.

The location of the meeting place between Isaiah and Ahaz was also not inconsequential. Ahaz had likely gone out to inspect the water supply that led into the city. David L. Cooper explains:

“Thereupon the Lord sent Isaiah, together with his little son Shear-jashub, to Ahaz who was inspecting the water system of Jerusalem in preparation for the threatened siege. Isaiah met him at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, which was in the highway of the fuller's field. In other words, he was in the Kidron Valley (east of Mount Moriah, the Temple area) near Gihon. This was the only running water around Jerusalem.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-December 1943).

This location was also to play an important part in later years when the Assyrian spokesman, Rabshakeh, stood on this spot, Isaiah 36:2, to taunt King Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, and the people of Jerusalem with threats of destruction if Jerusalem did not surrender to the king of Assyria and his army. Rabshakeh challenged Hezekiah’s trust in God; a challenge he and the Assyrian army would soon discover, when king Hezekiah and his people did just that, was to bring doom to the Assyrians.

7:4 Tell him, 'Be careful, be quiet, and don't be afraid. Do not be timid, because of these two stubs of smoldering sticks, because of the fierce anger of Rezin, Aram, and the son of Remaliah.

God’s message to Ahaz through the prophet was reassuring to someone who placed their faith and trust in God. Ahaz was not that someone! The first part of Isaiah’s message was for Ahaz to not fear and be quiet within himself so as not to panic because of the actions of the kings of Syria and Israel. Isaiah was putting into practice the commission God had given him, Isaiah 6:8-13, to proclaim the word of the Lord to a people who would be insensitive to the message. Isaiah’s commission was primarily one of announcing judgment to those who were rebellious to God. Isaiah’s words to Ahaz would result in sealing the fate of the Judean king for although He had an opportunity to respond positively to God, his refusal, Isaiah 7:12, brought judgment
upon him. He could blame no one except himself for the great calamity to come upon the people of Judah during his lifetime and upon Jerusalem many years later.

In God’s opinion, the threat of the two kings, Rezin and Pekah (son of Remaliah) were but the stub ends of a smoldering (dying) piece of wood in a fire pit. They were not to be feared nor should Ahaz worry himself about them. God’s call for the king to adopt a calm attitude about the threat of siege for God was in control and as Ahaz was about to hear, God would soon remove forever any more threats from these two kings.

7:5-6 Aram, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have planned evil against you, saying,
6 “Let us go up against Judah, terrorize it, and rip it apart and divide it up for ourselves. Let us set up a king, the son of Tabeel, over it.”

Isaiah, as recorded in 7:5-6, explains why Ahaz was in dread over the threats of Rezin, the king of Aram and Pekah, the king of Israel. These two kings had plotted together to breach the walls of Jerusalem and set up a puppet king, one who is called the son of Tabeel, who would join them in their resistance to the imperialistic designs of the king of Assyria. This was no idle threat. As the historical background, stated above, revealed, these two kings had the means and the motivation to destroy Jerusalem as they had earlier devastated Judah. Not only did Ahaz remain full of fear but he had likely already considered, but had not yet taken any action, to seek the aid of Assyria against these two menacing kings.

7:7-9 This is what the sovereign LORD says:
8 "It will not stand,
  and it will not happen,
  for the head of Aram is Damascus,
  and the head of Damascus is Rezin.
  Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered in pieces,
  so that it will not be a people.
9 The head of Ephraim is Samaria,
  and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.
  If you will not faithfully stand firm,
  then you will not stand at all."

Isaiah emphatically declares the intention of God in 7:7, “It will not stand, and it will not happen.” God was demonstrating that He was the One in sovereign control of world affairs and Ahaz was not to worry about other kings who had but limited power and resources in comparison to almighty God. But God had used these two nations as His agent of judgment upon the evil acts of King Ahaz. See 2 Kings 16:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 28:1-4. The judgment of God upon King Ahaz was most severe as the account in 2 Chronicles 28:5-15 demonstrates.

The Lord, through the prophet, next reveals some startling news for Ahaz to consider. God reminds Ahaz that these two kings, Rezin and Pekah are just minor players in the greater scheme of things but the stunning announcement is that the northern kingdom, Israel, in 7:8, called Ephraim, will not even exist as a people in 65 years. “Ephraim will be shattered in pieces, so that it will not be a people,” Isaiah 7:8. Why would God allow the complete destruction of Israel? As recorded in Isaiah 9:8 to 10:4, the prophet proclaims God’s judgment on the northern kingdom. Also, almost the entire prophecy of Hosea is about God’s judgment on Israel. In 13:15-16, Hosea declares Israel’s (Samaria) final demise for, “Samaria will bear her guilt, for she rebelled against her God,” Hosea 13:16.
However, even in the midst of calamity and destruction, God offers hope as Hosea reveals in chapter 14 of his prophecy and the prophet’s final recorded words, Hosea 14:9, have an application for all peoples for all time:

Who is wise, that he may understand these things?
Prudent, that he may know them?
For the ways of the LORD are right,
and the just will walk in them,
but rebels will stumble in them.

Isaiah completes this first part of his discussion with Ahaz with the warning: “If you will not faithfully stand firm, then you will not stand at all,” Isaiah 7:9. Ahaz was issued an ultimatum by God to trust solely in Him in faith. To put his trust in anyone or anything else would prove disastrous for him and his people. Isaiah had earlier warned the people of Judah, including the king’s house, that destruction would come upon them because they had “despised the word of the Holy One of Israel,” Isaiah 5:24. In chapter 8, Isaiah would again warn them of their impending doom, 8:6-8. Later, another warning would be given as recorded in 30:12-17. Ahaz certainly heard the warning from Isaiah but with dull ears. He listened but did not perceive nor acknowledge the gravity of these words.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 7:1-9
7:1-2 The Problem Described
7:3 The Prophet Dispatched
7:4-9 The Prophecy Delivered

2. The Sign of Immanuel: 7:10-16

These verses contain some of the most controversial issues of interpretation in all of Scripture. The crux of the issue is the understanding of the sign and the word virgin in Isaiah 7:14 and whether two sons are indicated in 7:14-16. Discussions involving these issues will be given within the notes on these verses. The lead up to and reason for the declaration by Isaiah that the Lord will give the house of David a sign is explained in the notes for 7:10-13. This section, Isaiah 7:10-17 and specifically 7:14 are of critical importance to the doctrine of Christology and specifically to the biblical support of the virgin birth of the Messiah. A careful study of these verses must be undertaken by the student of Scripture in order to understand God’s intended purpose of His revelation of the announcement of the virgin who would bear a son. More information about this “Son” is recorded by Isaiah in the chapters immediately following, specifically in Isaiah 8:8; 9:1-7; and 11:1-10. Isaiah will record much more information about this Son as his prophecy unfolds. The apex of this revelation is stated by Isaiah in 52:13-53:12 and 63:1-6 but it does not diminish in any way the importance of the other prophecies regarding the Messiah interspaced throughout the book of Isaiah.

7:10-11 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying,
11 "Request a sign from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depths of Sheol, or in the height of heaven."

“Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz.” Isaiah 7:10. The Lord would have certainly spoke to Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah. It is not recorded if this was immediately following Isaiah’s warning as recorded in Isaiah 7:9, but it is likely, as no other meeting between Isaiah, accompanied with his son and king Ahaz is stated in
the Scriptures. The first part of God’s message though the prophet is directed to Ahaz, “Request a sign form the LORD your God; ask it either in the depths of Sheol or in the heights of heaven,” Isaiah 7:11. There are important issues to be discussed in this request. First, the Lord had just revealed to Ahaz that the two kings he had feared would not conquer Jerusalem and the dynasty of the line of David would be preserved. Also, God had given him the most stunning news that the northern kingdom of Israel would cease to be a people in 65 years. Prior to these announcements, God had told Ahaz to be calm, and have no fear nor be fainthearted because of the threat posed by the kings of Aram and Israel. Second, as the current representative of the house of David and the living recipient of the covenant God gave to David, 2 Samuel 7:8-17 and 1 Chronicles 17:7-14, Ahaz needed to have faith in His God and trust Him for keeping His covenant promises. Third, although Ahaz was an evil king who did not seek God, he was being offered something far beyond what he deserved. His evil activities were well documented, for example as recorded in 2 Kings 16:2-4. Nonetheless, up to this point, God was willing to extend a sign to Ahaz which would demonstrate God’s faithful commitment to His covenant. Fourth, by requesting a sign from God at God’s request, Ahaz did not need to exercise extraordinary faith, because the fulfillment of such a sign, by God’s sole act, would be proof of God’s intention and faithfulness to His word. No unusual act or work was required by Ahaz. Fifth, God’s offer of a sign was not a suggested minor change to the immediate situation or a small miracle. God opened the possibilities to have Ahaz ask for a sign that could have possibly been the greatest of all miraculous acts God had undertaken short of creation itself. It could possibly have been more spectacular than the parting of the Red Sea or any other miraculous things God had done up to this point in history. The vault of God’s divine acts was open to Ahaz to consider.

7:12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask. I will not test the LORD."

The response of Ahaz to the request by God of a sign was short and momentous in its tragic significance. Ahaz responded, “I will not ask, I will not test the LORD.” His response was not only hypocritically pious but full of hubris as Ahaz displayed his great contempt for and open rebellion of God. It was unlikely that Ahaz had a pure mind or heart when he responded to the command of God. Deuteronomy 6:16 states, “Do not put the LORD your God to the test.” Ahaz had shown no previous concern for any command of God. Also, his sinful and repulsive actions were an indication of the evil intentions of his heart. This was not a mere response to a whim to ask the Lord for a sign. The One asking was God Himself. It was a direct request with the demand of a response. By his seeming pious attitude, Ahaz was in fact throwing his sinfulness into the face of God and demonstrating, as Isaiah had earlier recorded in Isaiah 3:9, his blatant wickedness and rebellion against God. He was therefore bringing judgment upon himself and his nation.

Ahaz had placed himself and the royal line of David in grave danger. God’s patience with Ahaz’s wickedness and rebellion had finally come to its full conclusion. The Scriptures state that the Lord is slow to anger. Yet when His anger is aroused, no one, not even the king of Judah can stand before God. The prophet Nahum stated as recorded in Nahum 1:3: “The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.” Isaiah would later state as recorded in 51:17:

Wake up, wake up, stand up, O Jerusalem,
you who drunk at the hand of the LORD
the cup of his wrath;
you have drunk dry the bowl that causes staggering.

Ahaz had taken the cup of the Lord’s anger and completed drank it. There would be no further offer from God for the king to consider. God would act alone.
7:13 Then Isaiah said, "Listen now, O house of David. Is it too small a thing for you try the patience of humans, that you want to try the patience of my God too?"

Isaiah responded to the hypocritical and self-pious response of Ahaz. At least two very significant issues are addressed by Isaiah. First, he responds by addressing the “house of David.” It is no longer a direct response to Ahaz as a representative of the line of David. Isaiah addresses the entire covenational dynastic lineage of David with whom God has made a covenant described as the Davidic Covenant. See for example 2 Samuel 7:12-16. Ahaz, has been judged and found guilty of rejecting God’s offer of defense on behalf of Judah and Jerusalem. Ahaz effectively had been cast aside for consideration as a representative of the Davidic dynasty and Isaiah rhetorically addresses the entire lineage of David. Second, Isaiah had previously, 7:11, referenced God to Ahaz as “the LORD your God”; now Isaiah states that the Lord is “my God”. This change in reference is not coincidental. It is a deliberate statement of Isaiah’s faithfulness to God and Ahaz’s disobedience and unfaithfulness to God. (Bold intentional). Thomas Constable comments:

“Isaiah saw right through the king's hypocrisy. He warned him by addressing him as the representative of the house of David. The plural "you" indicates that Isaiah was addressing all the members of the house of David and perhaps the whole nation (cf. v. 9). Yahweh had made covenant promises that David's dynasty would continue forever (2 Sam. 7:16; 1 Kings 8:25). Ahaz should not have feared being replaced by a puppet king (v. 6). Ahaz had said he would not test God (v. 12), but by refusing to ask for a sign, that is precisely what he was doing—testing God's patience with him. He was also testing the patience of the godly in Israel who were looking to their king to trust God.

The prophet had called Yahweh "Ahaz's God" (v. 11), but now that the king had rebelled against Him, Isaiah referred to the Lord as "my (Isaiah's) God." This change was ominous, suggesting that God would abandon the king. If Ahaz's decision resulted in God withdrawing support from the Davidic kings, the prophecy of Immanuel may imply that God would raise up His own King from David's house who would be faithful to Him. This could explain why God gave such a major messianic prediction at this time.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 52).

7:14-16: Introduction

Isaiah 7:14-16 is absolutely vital to a proper understanding of the great sign God gave to the “house of David” which was a prophetic announcement of the virgin birth of a Son, Jesus Christ 730 years in the future. The fulfillment of this sign would have world changing significance and would be of critical importance to God in keeping His covenantal promises with David. Also, within these verses, God gave a promise of immediate historical importance to the people of Judah which was to be through the illustration of Isaiah’s son. Isaiah 7:14-15 address the future great sign of the divine Son, Immanuel. Isaiah 7:16 addresses the current political crisis with reference to a son standing literally at the feet of king Ahaz.

There has been a great deal of debate and controversy regarding the correct interpretation of these verses. Even among conservative, evangelical and pre-millennial scholars, a friendly debate ensues to this day regarding the meaning of the sign and how should this sign address both the far distant application as recorded by Matthew in his gospel, (Matthew 1:22-23) and how it addresses the immediate crisis faced by the people of Judah. (Bold intentional). At least four major “interpretations” have been suggested:

First interpretation: The sign of Immanuel was for the day of Ahaz and addressed the immediate historical crisis only without a certain meaning for a future application in the New Testament.

Second interpretation: The sign of Immanuel was intended for the day of Ahaz but was applied by Matthew to refer to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.
Third interpretation: The sign of Immanuel is a double reference referring both to the immediate context in the days of Ahaz and also to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

Fourth interpretation: The sign of Immanuel itself, verses 14-15, was for the future and was literally fulfilled by the birth of Jesus Christ from a virgin named Mary. Vs. 16 referred to Isaiah’s son and was an object lesson for the people of Judah regarding the crisis they were facing.

The following brief critiques of these three interpretations are not intended to fully engage scholarly debate or provide technical and language-based reasons for any stated conclusions. References to scholarly publications regarding this issue will be provided to give Bible students helpful resources in order to delve deeper into this most critical passage of God’s word.

Regarding the first interpretation: Proponents of this suggested “solution” usually do not interpret the Hebrew word almah as “virgin”, (as stated in most English versions), as being an unmarried woman who has had no sexual relations with a man. These proponents suggest “almah” means a young woman. Thus, Isaiah, according to this understanding of “virgin,” is simply referring to a son, soon to be born to a young woman, who will be given the name of Immanuel. The identification of the son’s father is further suggested as Isaiah, Ahaz or some other person with connections to the unfolding drama faced by Judah. The three major problems with this interpretation is that (1) as will be indicated below, “almah” indeed does mean “virgin” in the sense that it refers to a woman of marriageable age who will have a son although she has had no sexual relations with a man. (2) This interpretation robs any sense of the meaning of a “sign” by God. Ahaz could have simply shrugged his shoulders and said, “so what,” young women are having sons born to them every day. (3) As well, this interpretation makes Matthew’s reference to Isaiah’s prophecy in 7:14 of no importance as it robs the Old Testament of having specific Messianic content regarding this “sign.” It also removes from Scripture, the vital importance of the virgin birth of Christ and brings into question the deity of Christ.

Regarding the second interpretation: Proponents of this suggested “solution” suggest that Matthew drew his story of the virgin birth of Christ from an Old Testament story that had no direct prophetic relevance. Matthew simply “applied” the Isaiah 7:14-16 as an illustration to accent his record of the birth of Christ. This so called “solution” is similar to the first proposed solution and the objections to the first proposed solution apply to this second proposal. The most important objection to this second interpretation that it makes Isaiah’s prophetic message to Ahaz, without a purpose or a solution and denies that the Old Testament has a specific messianic content regarding the “sign.” Also, by applying an Old Testament story to an event current in Matthew’s day, it gives affirmation to those who seek to allegorize the content of the Old Testament to fit any desired interpretation they intend to apply to a New Testament text.

Regarding the third interpretation: Proponents of this suggested “solution” hold that the sign of Immanuel has a double reference both to the immediate historical context of the crisis facing Judah and to the future reference to the virgin birth of Christ as Matthew records the quotation from Isaiah 7:14. Two major problems (among others) are evident regarding this viewpoint. (1) There is no evidence that a virgin during the days of Isaiah and Ahaz gave birth supernaturally to a son which would literally fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy. Some may point to Isaiah 8:8 and 10 as evidence that a son named Immanuel had been born but a close study of these verses reveals they refer to a far future day when indeed the land of Judah will be rightly called Immanuel’s land. (2) There is also no internal direct warrant for imposing a law of “double reference” on certain prophecies of Scripture. Many conservative, godly and highly regarded scholars have held to this view and it is not the intention of this study to cast aside or deride their opinion. It is with respect of their great contribution to the understanding of Scripture that this study suggests another possibility for understanding the sign of Immanuel.
Regarding the fourth interpretation: There appears that there are not many proponents of this suggested solution. Michael Rydelnik is one such scholar who holds this view and he suggests that Wm. Kelly and H. Bultema also proposed this solution. See Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* Note: pages 159-160. Gary V. Smith also hints at this solution, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, pages 214-216. Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, pages 146-163 devotes a chapter to explaining why the Hebrew language of Isaiah 7:14-16 strongly supports the literal future prophecy of a virgin who will give birth to a son in vss. 14 and 15 and the literal reference in vs. 16 to Isaiah’s son, Shear-jashub, as an object lesson pointing to the soon demise of the two kings who were threatening Judah and Jerusalem. For additional study refer to W. Kelly, *An Exposition of the Book of Isaiah*, London: Paternaster, 1987; and H. Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. D. Bultema, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1981. The following notes on Isaiah 7:14-16, expands upon the reason for supporting this fourth interpretation.

7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, a virgin will conceive, and give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel [God with us].

Isaiah directly speaks to the “house of David” (see above notes on 7:13) and announces that the LORD Himself will give “you” a sign. The word “you” in the Hebrew is plural and refers to the house of David, Isaiah 7:13. This sign was offered to the entire “house of David” since the offer of a sign was rejected by the current representative of this “house” who has brought God’s judgment upon himself (king Ahaz) for his unbelief and evil rebellion against God. The sign was of the greatest importance to the house of David. The prophet declared, “Look (Behold), a virgin will conceive, and give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel [God with us].” Several points of discussion will be provided to help in the understanding of this sign.

The DASV, among many other English versions, translates the Hebrew word “almah” as virgin. Whenever the word “almah” appears in the Hebrew, it always refers to a virgin. In the New Testament, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7:14 and uses the Greek word “parthenos” which also clearly means virgin., Matthew 1:23. The reason this word has received so much critical attention is that liberal and Jewish scholars do not want to admit the obvious, which is Isaiah was given a true prophetic word from God approximately 730 years before the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is for theological reasons and not exegetical reasons that many do not translate the Hebrew word “almah” as virgin. For example, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translates “almah” as young woman, in Isaiah 7:14 which causes confusion because the RSV translates “parthenos” as virgin in Matthew 1:23. For an excellent treatment of this issue, please refer to Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, pages 149-153 and Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, pages 151-155. In another publication, Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer comment on translation issues:

“The virgin of 7:14 would be with child. However, the Hebrew is even more emphatic, using the feminine singular adjective harah (‘pregnant’). This should more accurately be translated “the virgin is pregnant” or “the pregnant virgin.” Were it not for the context calling for a miraculous sign, such a translation would seem impossible. However, the prophet, by a vision, saw a specific pregnant virgin before him who would be the sign of hope for the house of David. Indeed, this would meet the miraculous requirement of being deep as Sheol or high as heaven (v. 11).” (Michael Rydelnik, James Spencer, *Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary*, page 1021).

God provided a sign for the Jewish people and for all humanity that would ultimately deal with their wickedness. God demanded a righteous and just punishment for humanity’s sinful condition. The punishment was that any sin committed by anyone without atonement resulted in death. Since God could not find anyone worthy to bear the death penalty for all humanity due to their sinfulness, He alone gave the remedy. The first
action of this remedy was to give the world a sign which was unheard of or unimaginable to humanity’s finite and fallible intelligence. The sign was that a virgin would be with child and bear a son, and she (the virgin) will call His name Immanuel, Isaiah 7:14. See David L. Cooper, for a discussion on the significance of this “sign”, Messianic Series Volume 2: Messiah: His Nature and Person, Biblical Research Society, 1933, pages 143-146.

The importance of this sign cannot be understated. The rebellious Ahaz certainly could not provide this protection or salvation. No one at any time in history, past, present or future could be the means of salvation from the penalty and punishment for the sins of the entire world – except for One Person. The nation of Judah was in danger of being destroyed and the line of David was in danger of being obliterated. Who could save them? It certainly would not be the king of Assyria who would later inflict the nation of Judah with hardship and the nation of Israel with complete destruction. It also would not be any other nation or powerful earthly king. God alone could save them.

Isaiah chapter 59 is a commentary on the failure of humanity to provide salvation for their wickedness. Isaiah 59:11 states, “we look for justice, but there is none, for salvation, but it is far from us.” A few verses later, 59:15b-16, Isaiah recorded:

“

The LORD saw it, and the fact that there was no justice displeased him.

He saw that there was no vindicator; and was amazed that there was no one to intervene.

Therefore his own arm brought salvation to him; his righteousness supported him.

In a truly wonderful passage regarding the second advent of the Messiah, Isaiah 63:1-6, Isaiah prophecies of the Messiah’s provision of salvation. In verses 4-5 of Isaiah 63 the prophet states:

For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redeemed has come.

I looked, but there was no one to help; I was shocked that there was no one to lend support.

Therefore my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath sustained me.

The name of the son to be born of the virgin was to be Immanuel. The name is a blessed hope not only for the nation of Judah but to the entire world. The name means “God is with us”. It is God who is with us who will make right that which is evil and wrong, who will heal the nations, who will be a comfort to all who are suffering, who will by His own arm bring eternal salvation to all those who will trust in the Son who was born of the virgin. Although this is far from an original thought, it is among the great truths of Scripture that God alone provides hope, present salvation and eternal joy in heaven with Him. He does this through three easy to remember themes: God is with us: Immanuel, Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23; God is for us, Romans 8:31; and God is in us, Colossians 1:27.

Victor Buksbazen provides an excellent discussion on the meaning of Immanuel:

“It was one of the central doctrines of the Hebrew Scriptures that God was present with His people, watching over their destiny. He was with the patriarchs (Gen. 26:3; 28:15; 39:2,3). He was with Moses (Ex. 3:12) and with His people as a national entity (Ex. 3:16; 33:15-17).
The Tabernacle in the wilderness (and later the Temple in Jerusalem) was a material and physical symbol that God was amidst His people. This Presence was visible to the children of Israel in the cloud which filled the Tabernacle by day, and the pillar of fire which rested over it by night, or went before them as they journeyed in the wilderness (Ex. 40:38).

The very word for “tabernacle” in Hebrew Mishkan is derived from the root shachan – to dwell, to rest, to abide, the same root from which the word “Shechinah” is derived.

Isaiah was now prophesying that the birth of that wonder child, whom the virgin will call “Immanuel”, “God-Is-with-Us,” shall be a visible manifestation in flesh and blood, that God is truly among His people, in a manner more real and more intimate even than the Tabernacle or the Temple.

The apostle John understood this when he wrote:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth. John 1:14.

It was this certainty of the Presence of God among His people which allowed Isaiah to defy all the hostile forces of the nations assembled against Israel. Take counsel together and it shall come to naught, speak the Word and it shall not stand, for “God is with us” [Immanuel] (Isa. 8:10).

The prophet’s faith in the coming of the Messiah was the very foundation of his confidence in Israel’s future triumph and redemption.

What kind of redeemer did Isaiah think that Immanuel would be? Isaiah gives an answer to this in chapters 9:6-7 and 11:1-10 where he describes Immanuel’s glorious reign. The three prophecies, Isaiah 7:14; 9:6,7; and 11:1-10 are closely related and should be studied together. The name Immanuel, just at the four names in Isaiah 9:6, was not meant as a proper name, but rather as a description of the person and character of the Messiah.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 153-154).

7:15 He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

Continuing with the far future significance of the sign of Immanuel, Isaiah predicts that the Son to be born will live his early years: “at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good,” eating curds and honey. Curds (butter) and honey can refer to desolate times when the ground is only suitable for the grazing of animals who produce the less than desirable cheese curds and wild flowers flourish, instead of food crops, resulting in the abundance of bees who produce honey. Such was the situation at the time of Christ’s birth. The nation of Israel was in subjection to Rome, politically and militarily but the desolation of the land can be traced back to the days of Ahaz who was responsible for the destruction of the land by foreign nations as God’s judgment on the land was widespread and lasted for many centuries. Michael Rydelnik explains:

“The point then of the description of the coming virgin-born, Davidic king eating butter and honey is to accentuate that he would be born during a time of political oppression. In other words, the prophecy of Messiah concludes with a hint that He will be born and grow up (“Learn[ing] to reject what is bad and choose what is good”) at a time when Judah is oppressed by a foreign power”. (Michael Rydelnik, The Messianic Hope, page 156).

7:16 For before the child knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.
It is unlikely that Ahaz cared for or even gave much thought to the sign from God that Isaiah proclaimed to him. He did not want to acknowledge the hope of God through faith in God. Yet if he listened to the prophet, he would have reason to trust God. In 7:6, Isaiah refers to the boy, Shear-jashub his son, who is standing next to him, which explains why God directed Isaiah to bring his son with him to meet with King Ahaz. Isaiah had just proclaimed an amazing message of a future hope to the entire world in 7:13-15. He now announces a message of an immediate hope to the nation of Judah, recorded in 7:16. The two kings, Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel, whom Ahaz had feared (you dread) will have met their deaths (will be forsaken).

Isaiah had told Ahaz earlier, 7:4-7, that the king had nothing to fear from these two kings. Isaiah uses similar words in 7:16, “to refuse the evil and choose the good,” regarding his son. The prophet had to describe the divine Son, Immanuel, in order to provide a separation between the divine Son who was to be born of a virgin, and Isaiah’s own son, Shear-jasub.

In 7:16, Isaiah uses his own son (the child) as an object lesson to describe that, in a short period of time, both of these kings whom Ahaz dreaded would be dead and the threat to Judah from them would be removed. As noted above, Michael Rydelnik provides an excellent discussion on the Hebrew text to support the difference in meaning between Isaiah 7:13-15 and 7:16. Michael Rydelnik again explains:

“While many have considered v. 16 to be a continuation of the prophecy in 7:13-15, the grammar of the passage suggests otherwise. The opening phrase in Hebrew can reflect an adverative nuance, allowing for a disjunction between the child described in 7:13-15 and the one described in verse 16. There is a different child in view in this verse.” (Michael Rydelnik, The Messianic Hope, page 157).

One of the issues to be considered, is the audience to whom the prophet is addressing his message in Isaiah 7:16. Michael Rydelnik offers this viewpoint:

“To whom does Isaiah make this prediction? What is not evident in the English text is plain in the Hebrew. The prophet returned to using the second-person singular pronoun in 7:16 (“the land of the two kings you [sg.] dread”). In 7:10-11 he used the singular to address King Ahaz. Then, when addressing the house of David with the prophecy of Messiah, he shifted to the plural. But in 7:16, he addressed King Ahaz, using the singular pronoun once again and giving him a near prophecy: before Shear-Jashub would be able to discern good from evil, the northern confederacy attacking Judah would fail. Within two years, Tiglath-Pileser defeated both Israel and Syria, just as the prophet had predicted.” (Michael Rydelnik, The Messianic Hope, page 158).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 7:10-16

7:10-12    The Scorn of the Sinful: Ahaz
7:13-15    The Sign of the Savior: Immanuel
7:16       The Son of the Seer: Shear-jasub

3. The Plunder of the Nation: 7:17-25

The coming days for Judah and Israel (Ephraim) were to be terrifying due to the continual sinfulness of the Jewish people. There are four “in that day” judgments: 7:18, 20, 21 and 23. These days were to be judgments, in the form of the coming of the Assyria, from the Lord as they had never seen “since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah”. God was to whistle for “the fly” from Egypt and “the bee” from Assyria to descend upon the land and on all the watering places. God would use the King of Assyria to symbolically shave the head, the hair of the legs and the beard of the Jewish men bringing disgrace upon them as the outward symbols of their manhood would be removed. Also, the overwhelming armies of the Assyrians would leave very little cattle or sheep which would mean the people would only have curds to eat and some
honey. God would still provide food for His people among the devastation to come. The vineyards and cultivated lands would be trampled by the invading armies leaving only briars and thorns and a place where only sheep and cattle could wander.

As declared by Isaiah in 7:17-25, the prophet reveals that the LORD will bring judgment upon Judah in the person of the king of Assyria, who represents the Assyrian army, vs. 17. The LORD will call the Egyptians and the Assyrians to bring His judgment upon Judah, vss. 18-20. Only milk producing curds and honey from bees will be left for the people of Judah to eat, vss. 21-22. The agriculture produce of the land will be destroyed leaving only briars and thorns, suitable only for cattle to graze and sheep to trample, vss. 23-25.

7:17 The LORD will bring on you, your people, and your father's house days that have never been since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah -- the king of Assyria.

Many scholars place Isaiah 7:17 in the previous section. However, upon a close inspection of the context it seems best to start the new section with vs. 17 as it is an introduction to the new section which is about the judgment of God on king Ahaz, his nation and upon the house of David. Isaiah reveals that God was to bring judgment on Ahaz, his people and importantly on his “father’s house,” the house of David. The reason for God’s punishment was due to Ahaz’s sinful rebellion against God and his evil acts, 2 Kings 16:1-4, 2 Chronicles 28:1-4, 16-27; and for his refusal to trust in God by calling upon the king of Assyria for assistance against his enemies. Ahaz’s enemies were, Aram and Israel, 2 Kings 16:7-9; and the Edomites and the Philistines, 2 Chronicles 28: 16-18.

The entire line of David would now suffer a great calamity. This judgment of God would be so severe that it is described as days: “that have never been since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.” This refers first to the prophecy of Ahijah to Jeroboam, 1 Kings 11:29-39, which gives God’s reasons for splitting the kingdom but preserving the tribe of Judah and the City of Jerusalem. Second it refers to the time when this rendering of the kingdom actually happened, 1 Kings 12:12-20. The reason God gives for the sundering of the kingdom into two, 1 Kings 11:33, was similar to the actions and disbelief of king Ahaz during the days of his reign in Judah. The entire house of David would in the future suffer a separation which seemed on the surface to put an end to the covenant God made with David. Jeremiah prophesized that Coniah (Jeconiah) would not have any man of his descendants who would sit on the throne of David or who would rule again in Judah, Jeremiah 22:28-30. The cities of Judah would also be made a desolation without inhabitant, Jeremiah 34:21-22. However, as Isaiah proclaimed in 7:14, God would fulfill His covenant promises with a Son who would be born and be called Immanuel. Isaiah would later describe this Son with four, two-fold titles describing Him as God. Isaiah would also declare that this Son would have a kingdom that would never end, Isaiah 9:6-7. See also Jeremiah 33:14-26. The New Testament reveals that this Son would be from the line of David, as recorded in Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-31.

The last phrase of Isaiah 7:17 is “the king of Assyria.” Here the prophet finally reveals, as he received the prophecy from the Lord, that the punishment God has meted out to the people of Judah and its leadership, due to the sinful actions of Ahaz, would be the coming of the armies of Assyria, under rule of its king. Isaiah 7:18-25 contain four oracles of judgment stating just what the Assyrians, and also the Egyptians, would do to the people and land of Judah. The beginning of Isaiah 7:17 states that it was the LORD who was bringing this calamity to Judah. The Lord would use foreign pagan nations to accomplish His acts of judgment. As a result of this judgment, Judah would be disgraced as a people and their land would be in ruin.
In that day, the LORD will whistle for the flies from the remotest part of the rivers of Egypt and for the bees from the land of Assyria.

They will come, and will settle in the ravines between cliffs and in the crevices of the rocks, and on all thorn bushes and at all the watering holes.

The first of the four “in that day” oracles in this section, 7:17-25, are declared by Isaiah in verses 18-19. The context of the words “in that day” is easily understood as a reference to an invasion that would soon come upon Judah. It is not a latter day or end times prophecy. Assyria would first conquer the northern kingdom of Israel and takes its people into exile. See notes on verses 7:8-9 above. In the days of Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, Assyria would come upon Judah and capture all its territory except for the city of Jerusalem. See Isaiah chapters 36-37.

The LORD will: “whistle for the flies” (from Egypt) “and for the bees” (from Assyria). Some scholars see an historical significance in these two insects. Thomas Constable comments:

“Yahweh would summon the armies of Assyria and Egypt to do His bidding as one whistles (or hisses) at insects (cf. 5:26). The ancients could evidently control flies and bees by hissing at them. Egypt was a land filled with flies, and the ancients spoke of Assyria as a country of beekeeping. Enemy soldiers would swarm everywhere in Judah (cf. Judg. 6:1-6).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 55).

The calling of the armies of Egypt and Assyria would result in a massing of troops that will overwhelm the nation of Judah. The armies would “settle in the ravines between cliffs and in the crevices of the rocks, and on all thorn bushes and at all the watering holes,” 7:19. In other words, they would be literally everywhere and no place in the land would be free from their presence. There would be no place for the people of Judah to take refuge. See also Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, page 217, for comments on Isaiah 7:18-19 including the invasion of Judah by Egypt.

In that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired from beyond the Euphrates River-- with the king of Assyria--the head and leg hair; along with the beard too.

The second “in that day” oracle declared by Isaiah regards the actions of the king of Assyria representing his army who will shave off the hair of the Judean men from their head and legs and remove their beard. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The Assyrian razor from beyond the Euphrates whom Ahaz had foolishly hired, will shave Judah from top to toe, including the beard. To an Israelite the beard was the emblem of his manly dignity. Isaiah predicted that the land would be shaven clean of man and of all his treasured possessions, and that the unfortunate survivors would undergo the most cruel treatment and indignities. This was exactly what happened later under Sennacherib who in 701 B.C. invaded Judah, destroyed 46 cities and led 200,000 people of Judah into captivity.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 155-156).

In that day, a man will keep alive a young cow and a couple goats.

From the abundance of milk they will produce he will eat curds; for everyone left in the land will eat curds and honey.

In the third “in that day” oracle, Isaiah states that the livestock will be so few that a man (head of the family) will only be able to keep alive “a heifer and a pair of sheep.” With all other sources of food (animals and crops) destroyed because of the Assyrian invasion, only milk will be in enough abundance for the people to survive on curds which is the poorest of milk products. There will also be honey available due to the
proliferation of wild flowers where edible crops used to grow. See Isaiah 7:23-25. The descriptive phrase “curds and honey” is also used by Isaiah in 7:15 to describe the poor agricultural conditions of the land of Judah during the time of the birth of Christ when Judah was under the control of the Romans.

7:23-25 In that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines worth a thousand shekels, it will be overgrown with briers and thorns.
24 With bow and arrows one will hunt there, because all the land will be full of briers and thorns.
25 All the hills that used to be dug with a hoe, you will not go there for fear of briers and thorns. It will be a place for cattle to graze and for sheep to trample.

The fourth “in that day” oracle describes the results of the Assyrian invasion. See also Isaiah 8:6-8. The land will be so destroyed that the people of Judah will have to depend for food on animals they will hunt with bows and arrows in lands full of briars and thorns. The crops from the fields will no longer produce any edible yield and the value of their agricultural lands will now be virtually useless. The reason for these four-fold “in that day” oracles is due to the unfaithfulness of Ahaz and his rebellious heart that was opposed to God. Ahaz was so vile that he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him when the armies of Aram and Israel had conquered most of the land of Judah. Ahaz reasoned that because of the success of the gods of the kings of Aram, he would sacrifice to them with the thought that they would help him. Instead of any help from a pagan worthless idol, Ahaz brought ruin and destruction to himself and to his people. A further reason for the demise of Ahaz and his people was that instead of having faith in God for the protection of his people, he sought and purchased dearly for the aid of the king of Assyria. See 2 Chronicles 28:22-33 and wider context of all of chapter 28. See also 2 Kings 16:7-18.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 7:17-25
The four “in that day” Oracles of Judgment:
7:17-19: The Settling of foreign armies
7:20: The Shaving of the pride of Judah
7:21-22: The Shortage of livestock
7:23-25: The Scourge of Food Crops

Chapter 8 Introduction

Chapter 8 continues the dialogue Isaiah began in chapter 7 regarding the incidents during the days of the invasion of Judah by Aram (Syria) and Ephraim (Israel). Some scholars refer to this conflict as the Syro-Ephraimitic War. Details of this invasion are recorded in 2 Kings 16:5-6 and 2 Chronicles 28:5-15. As recorded in chapter 7, Isaiah, accompanied with his young son Shear-jashub, met with king Ahaz and gave the king a hopeful message from God that the two kings Ahaz feared, Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel would not succeed in their planned siege of Jerusalem. Following Ahaz’s rejection of God’s message and His offer of a sign to authenticate His message, Isaiah declared that God Himself would give a sign which was the sign of Immanuel, the future virgin birth of the Messiah, Matthew 1:18-25. Following the repulsion of God’s offer by the king of Judah, Isaiah began a series of prophetic judgment declarations on king Ahaz, his people and upon the house of David, the kingly line of David.

In Chapter 8, Isaiah is directed by God to make a sign with the name on it of Maher-shalal-hash-baz and have two well-known individuals witness the writing of the name on the sign. Shortly, after this, about a year, Isaiah’s wife gave birth to a son to whom Isaiah called the same name as written on the sign. Isaiah would later declare in 8:18, that he and his children “are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion.” (NKJV). In this chapter, Isaiah also declares more prophecy about the demise
of both Damascus (Aram) and Samaria (Israel) and the fate of Judah at the hands of the king of Assyria. However, all is not lost and along with judgment, Isaiah announces mercy in that God will be with both the houses of Israel, the southern and northern kingdoms. Isaiah was instructed to not fear what the people of Judah fear, the king of Assyria, for Isaiah was only to fear (reverence) the LORD of hosts. Chapters 8-39 of Isaiah primarily deal with the threat of the Assyrian advance on Judah and the threat to Jerusalem. Near the end of chapter 8, Isaiah declares a message of despair on those who do not consult God, “should not a people consult with their God?” 8:19. The fate of these people is that they will be driven into darkness. Thus chapter 8 ends in darkness but the great hope of chapter 9 is that “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.” Isaiah 9:2.

4. The fall of the Nation’s Enemies: 8:1-8

David L. Cooper gives a brief overview of verses 1-8:

“In the section chapters 8:1-10:4 occurs another oracle which was spoken at some later time. As to what length of time there was between them no one can say. In chapter 8:1-4 is a prediction of the birth of Isaiah's second son, who is called Maher-shalal-hash- paz. Some have thought that Isaiah's second son was the one whose birth was foretold in verses 15 and 16 of the preceding chapter. This interpretation may be correct, but one cannot be dogmatic.

The next portion of this prophecy consists of verses 5-8. Again the prophet spoke of the Jews' being dissatisfied with their own condition and casting about, thinking that they could better their situation and improve conditions by winning the favor of Assyria. He therefore spoke of the Assyrian invasion, which came to pass under the rulership of Sennacherib. He compared the oncoming hosts to the flood waters of the river Euphrates and declared that they would overflow Immanuel's land. The Assyrian records show that the hosts of that empire actually swept over the entire country, leaving it desolate.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-December 1943).

8:1-2 Then the LORD said to me, "Take a large tablet, and inscribe on it with an ordinary stylus: Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz [quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil].
2 I will have it verified by faithful witnesses, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeherechiah."

The chapter opens with a message to Isaiah from God to take a large tablet. The Hebrew word gillayon is translated “tablet” in 8:1 and “hand mirrors” in 3:23. It has the meaning of a shiny flat surface that can be easily seen. Isaiah was instructed to write a name on this tablet, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which in the Hebrew is “Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil”. The meaning of this name was that it spoke of the advance of the Assyrian army who in just a short time would gather, on behalf of the king of Assyria, the spoils of victory from Damascus (Aram) and Samaria (Israel) as the LORD in Isaiah 8:4 declares.

The tablet written in ordinary letters for all to see, was a sign for the people of Judah. God saw to it that two witnesses would testify that this name was written on the large tablet by His prophet Isaiah. The two witnesses were called “faithful” however it was not necessarily because they were faithful to God or trusted in Him. They were likely called “faithful” because they would testify to Judah the truth that Isaiah had written the name on the tablet at a specified time which was before the Assyrian invasion upon Aram and Israel and upon the land of Judah. These two witnesses were Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeherechiah. Uriah is known to students of Scripture as the priest who followed the wicked orders of Ahaz, 2 Kings 16:10-13. Zechariah may have been the one described in 2 Kings 18:2 as the father of Ahaz’s mother Abi. Thus, these two witnesses, although faithful to testify that Isaiah wrote the name on the sign at a specific date, were not likely friendly to Isaiah who spoke against the wickedness of King Ahaz.
8:3-4 So I had relations with the prophetess, and she conceived, and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz."

4 For before the child knows to cry, 'My father,' and, 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria."

After these things and not necessarily as a direct consequence, as the word “so” in Isaiah 8:3 seems to indicate, Isaiah had relations with the prophetess (his wife) and as a result she conceived and gave birth to a son. The words “had relations with” should be understood as a descriptive term for sexual relations between a man and woman, in this case the wife of Isaiah. The word “prophetess” may simply be a reference to the wife of Isaiah and may not indicate that she also was a prophet as there are no Scriptural records that she was a prophet of God. The wife of Isaiah gave birth to a son and Isaiah followed the LORD’s instruction and named this boy the same name that was written in plain language on the sign: “Maher-shalal-hash-baz.”

God explained that the meaning of the boy’s name was a sign for Judah. God revealed that before Maher-shalal-hash-baz knew how to cry out for his mother or father, the problem Judah faced with the threat from Aram and Israel would be removed, as explained by the words, “the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria,” Isaiah 8:4. This word from God was fulfilled in approximately two years, 732 B.C., by which time, both of the kings threatening Judah would be removed from power and their lands would be overrun by the Assyrian armies and would become vassal states under control of the king of Assyria. For the fate of king Pekah of Israel refer to 2 Kings 15:27-31. For the fate of king Rezin of Aram refer to 2 Kings 16:9. See also the introductory notes on Isaiah 7 for a timeframe for the complete destruction of Samaria, the northern kingdom of Israel.

8:5-6 Then the LORD spoke to me again, saying,

6 "Because this people has refused the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, and rejoices over what will happen to Rezin and Remaliah’s son,

As recorded in Isaiah 8:5-6, the Lord explains to the prophet why this judgment was brought upon the northern kingdom of Israel. The core reason is recorded in 8:6: “Because this people has refused the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over what will happen to Rezin and Remaliah’s son.” The reference to the gently flowing stream of Shiloah, which brought water into the City of Jerusalem to the pool of Siloam from the exterior Gihon Spring, is very poetic and poignant and refers to God, who extended an offer of safety to king Ahaz. The words, “rejoices over what will happen to Rezin and Remaliah’s son” is a reference to the trust that king Ahaz of Judah had placed in the king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser. 2 Kings 16:7-9. This Assyrian king sent his army to conquer the Rezin’s nation, Aram and also conquered the nation of Israel led by the son of Remaliah, who was Pekah. Instead of accepting the offer of safety from the Lord of the Universe, Ahaz turned to the king of Assyria, who was a temporary and treacherous ruler, who would only be on the regional stage for a short time. Ahaz rejoiced in a brief raging torrent instead of an eternal and gentle “stream”. The result of rejecting God’s offer is always disastrous as Ahaz should have known from the past history of his fore-fathers. Ahaz and his people who were blinded by sin had now to face the wrath of God.

8:7 therefore the Lord will bring up against them

the strong floodwaters of the Euphrates River,

the king of Assyria and all his glory.

It will overflow all its channels,

and overrun all its banks.
As a result of the rejection of God by Ahaz, God was to bring on Judah the destruction of the king of Assyria described as “the strong floodwaters of the Euphrates River.” The Lord further described this king with the addition of “and all his glory” referring to the temporal earthly might of Assyria which at that time had no equal among the nations within the “fertile crescent” area of the Middle East. The metaphor of the waters of the Euphrates River also included the description that the river waters would flood and therefore fill all the surrounding land. For Aram and Israel, the metaphor of the flooding waters was meant to indicate that these nations would be totally over-run and conquered by Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria.

8:8 It will sweep on into Judah,
flooding and pouring through.
It will reach even to the neck,
and the stretching out of its wings
filling the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

These flood waters, representing the invasion by Assyria would also flow southward into Judah passing through this nation and rise even to the neck of the Judean people. This surely is a prophecy that the Assyrians would, at a later time, invade Judah but not completely conquer it. They would threaten to destroy Jerusalem but would be prevented from doing so by God. See Isaiah chapters 36-37 for a fulfillment of this prophecy. Isaiah in 8:8 changes the metaphor for the Assyrian advance to that of a bird spreading its wings to cover the entire land which Isaiah adds is the land of Immanuel. This was a strong statement of the faith Isaiah had in God for the prophet recognized that the land did not ultimately belong to the people of Judah but to the God of the people whom the prophet called Immanuel.

The Lord states that among the judgment He has called, He will still be with them, depicted by the reference to Immanuel which has the meaning of God with us. He has not forsaken them. He is inflicting them with holy justice, yet they will have enough sustenance to survive, Isaiah 7:22. The Lord also reminds His people that the land they live upon belongs to the Lord. It is Immanuel’s land. It is still Immanuel’s land. It has not ceased to be and as long as the earth remains, it will always be His land. Any current conflict in Israel needs to be understood in light of these truths. God stands with and among His people and His people need to be constantly reminded that the land is His land. See notes on Isaiah 7:14 for discussion on “Immanuel.”

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 8:1-8
8:1-4 The Prophet’s Son and the Pursuer’s Spoil
8:5-8 The Lord’s Lament and the Lord’s Land

5. The future of the Nation’s Remnant: 8:9-22

In these verses, Isaiah declares the message of the Lord for the nations, the prophet and his family and the people of Judah. In vss. 9-10, the Lord warns any nation that would seek to by plan or action to destroy His people that they themselves would be shattered (stated in vs. 9 three times for emphasis). In vss. 11-22, the Lord speaks to Isaiah about: walking with God rather than in the way of the people of Judah and judgement upon those who fail to walk with Him. This section has four main parts. First, in vss. 12-17, the prophet speaks of trusting in the LORD only and fearing Him. Second, in vs. 18 Isaiah declares to the people of Israel, that Isaiah and his children are signs and wonders from the Lord. Third, in vss. 19-20, God’s people are to look to the Word of God rather than consulting mediums and spiritists. Fourth, Isaiah issues a message of judgment on God’s people who fail to trust Him, vss. 21-22.
8:9-10 Be broken, O nations,  
and be shattered in pieces.  
Listen all you distant countries.  
Gear up for battle,  
but you will be shattered;  
gear up for battle,  
but you will be shattered.

10 Devise a plan,  
but it will achieve nothing.  
Issue orders,  
but they will never happen,  
for God is with us."

Isaiah, in these verses, declares a message to the nations of the earth regarding their plans concerning the people of God. For dramatic emphasis, Isaiah states three times in 8:9 that those nations will be “shattered,” which is the Hebrew word, chathath, which has the meaning to be dismayed. This word is also translated in Isaiah 9:4 as “broken;” in 20:5 as “dismayed;” in 30:31 as “terrified;” in 31:4 as “frightened;” in 31:9 as “panic;” in 37:27 as “dismayed;” in 51:6 as “never end; and in 51:7 as “fear.” It they “devise a plan,” it will “achieve nothing,” 8:10. “Achieve nothing” is a translation of the Hebrew word parar which has the meaning of breaking, frustrated or annulled. If these nations issue “orders” dabar in the Hebrew, which has the meaning of giving a word or a speech, these orders will never happen. The reason Isaiah can state this with complete confidence is that “God is with us” (Immanuel). See also Isaiah 8:8 and 7:14. Not only is the land of Judah and the land of Israel Immanuel’s land and belongs to the Messiah, so also is Immanuel with God’s people. Any suggested, proposed or planned attack on the land and the people of God will be under the direct superintendence of God. He has decreed that any such plan or proposal will achieve nothing. It also will “never happen, for God is with us” 8:10.

This warning to the nations must be seen within the greater plan of God for His people. Isaiah has just prophesized that Assyria would be used of God to overflow Immanuel’s land like the Euphrates river when it floods its banks, 8:5-8. Also, in 7:17-25, the prophet had declared that the Lord will call (whistle) for the armies (flies and bees) of both Egypt and Assyria to assault Judah as an act of God’s judgment because of the sinfulness of God’s people. Only as directed by God and under His sovereign control will any planned attack on God’s covenant people succeed because it is God’s judgment upon His people. Any planned attack against God’s people that does not have His sanction will fail. See for example, Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. God faithfully keeps His covenants with His people and His land. As Scripture indicates, the permanent fulfillment of God’s covenants will need to wait until the days of the end when the Messiah will rule on the earth from Mount Zion. Prior to the establishment of Messiah’s earthly reign and kingdom, however, there have been numerous times recorded in the past (from Isaiah’s time) and predicted for future days when this fulfillment is postponed or delayed due to the sinfulness and rebelliousness of the people of God. See Amos chapter 9 for God’s clear intentions for His people.

8:11-12 For the LORD told me this with a strong hand, and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying,  
12 "Do not make allegation of a conspiracy;  
concerning everything this people calls a conspiracy,  
do not be afraid of what they fear,  
or be in dread of it."
The Lord spoke to Isaiah “with a strong hand”, signifying the importance of the message that Isaiah was given to address the people of Judah. The Lord’s first statement to Isaiah was for the prophet not to walk in the way they have walked. This is a parallel message given to the psalmist as recorded in Psalm 1:1-3. The righteous are those who delight in God’s law and meditate day and night upon it. The prophet, as recorded in Isaiah, 8:12 was to avoid the gossip of those who talk about (allegation) a conspiracy, neither was he to be afraid or in dread of that which caused the people of Judah to fear. The people feared and dreaded the combined armies of Aram and Israel even though Isaiah had relayed God’s message to them, through king Ahaz, to be calm and have no fear and to be quiet (in heart) because of the intentions of the kings of Aram and Israel, Isaiah 7:4.

8:13 The LORD of hosts is the one you must recognize as holy,
and let him be your fear,
and let him be your dread.

Isaiah next declares a message from God that is full of wonderful theology and Biblical truth. It is a three-part message: The first part is that God’s people are to regard as holy, the LORD of hosts, the great Lord of armies who is the supreme commander and sovereign over all the hosts (armies) of heaven and earth. Isaiah had heard the call of the Seraphim in the temple declaring the three-fold attribute of “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts.” See notes on Isaiah 6:3. The people of God should have been acutely aware of the command of God in the Torah as stated in Leviticus 11:44, “For I am the LORD your God, consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.” Also, the words written by the Apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 1:15-16 refer to Isaiah 8:13.

The second part of this critical message from God in 8:13 is about God “let him be your fear”. Fear in this verse is the Hebrew word morah, which has the meaning of respect and reverence as well as the common meaning of being afraid. The necessity of a reverent fear of God is one of the most emphatic themes of Scripture as Proverbs 1:7 so perfectly illustrates, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge”.

The third part of this message from God in vs. 13 is also about God “let him be your dread.” Dread is the Hebrew word arats and has the meaning of to cause to tremble. Although some may want to equate fear and dread as synonymous terms, they are separated in this study to emphasize a seldom stated and perhaps unpopular characteristic of those who would live a godly life. To tremble during times of worship of and meditation upon God is to acknowledge the profound truth that God alone rules the universe and there is no one else to whom anyone can rely upon and invest their trust. To dread God is to visibly demonstrate His affect upon the believer. It is different than fear, which in the context of the Scriptures, is often an inward calmness of absolute trust in Him. Dread gives the connotation of trembling with sweat that breaks out when one comes face to face with the truth of whom God is and what that really means to the believer’s daily life. Dread visibly moves the believer to holiness. Dread also moves believers to be intensely aware of any sinful act which separates them from a right relationship with God and spurs the believer to repent with the result of restoring this relationship. Believers move to repentance, but God restores the relationship. Being in dread of the Lord can also be the safest place for the believer, who knows that any other place is unsafe and undesirable. (Bolding in above paragraphs is intentional).

8:14-15 He will be a sanctuary;
a rock one trips over
and a stone of stumbling
for both the houses of Israel.
He will be a trap
Many will stumble over them.  
They will fall and be broken,  
snared and taken captive."

Although some may want to interpret these verses as a prophecy of the Babylonian captivity, the message of Isaiah 8:14-15 had an immediate application and a future prophetic fulfillment in the Messiah. To those who heard Isaiah’s declaration, it would be a warning to either trust in God for safety as a sanctuary or to trust in their evil king causing them to stumble and be snared and caught by their enemies. In the future, other servants of God would apply this message to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Refer to Matthew 21:44, Luke 2:34, Romans 9:32-33 and 1 Peter 2:8. To those who trust in the Messiah, the stone of stumbling would be their cornerstone, Psalm 118:22, but to those who reject Him, this stone will cause them to fall and be broken. See notes on Isaiah 28:16.

8:16-17 Bind up the testimony,  
seal the teaching among my disciples.  
I will wait expectantly for the LORD,  
who hides his face from the house of Jacob,  
but I will put my hope in him.

Isaiah next turns to his disciples, and perhaps also to the faithful remnant of God, who are those who remain true to the Lord. Isaiah and declares to them, that they are to “bind up the testimony” and “seal the teaching” which likely refers to the necessity to committing themselves to the law of God and to the words that God has given to the prophet. This is the only reference in Isaiah where the prophet refers to his disciples. Isaiah repeats this call in 8:20 to: “consult the law and the testimony!” Even though, God presently “hides his face from the house of Jacob,” 8:17; Isaiah will look eagerly for Him as should all of Isaiah’s disciples and those who are the faithful remnant of the LORD. It is possible that Isaiah addresses his disciples because the court of the king and the people of Judah had rejected his message, exactly as God had previously revealed would be the response from the people. See Isaiah 6:9-13.

The disciples of Isaiah and the remnant who are faithful to God would be the “tenth” portion and the “holy seed” that God had stated in Isaiah 6:13. Even so today, Christians are to eagerly look to the return of the Lord, Romans 8:23, 8:25, Philippians 3:20, and Hebrews 9:28. The phrase “I will wait expectantly for the LORD,” Isaiah 8:17, has a messianic application. In the New Testament, it is interpreted as “I will put my trust in Him” as recorded in Hebrews 2:13 which cites this verse. The sense is similar. To expectantly wait for Him is by implication to put one’s trust in Him. In the context of Hebrews chapter 2, it is Christ who has put His trust in the Father.

8:18 Look, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and harbingers in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

As Isaiah waited expectantly for the Lord, Who, had hid His face from the house of Jacob, the people were not without a sign from God. Isaiah understood his relationship to the people when the Lord was silent. Isaiah reveals in 8:18, that he and his children were to be seen as “signs and wonders in Israel, from the LORD of hosts.” (NKJV). The very presence of Isaiah, as the one proclaiming God’s word, was a sign. Isaiah’s name means “Salvation is of the Lord”. When they spoke about Isaiah, the people in Judah acknowledged this truth from God. Isaiah was a walking testimony of the saving grace of God to the Jewish people. Isaiah’s first son was Shear-jashub, which means, “a remnant will return”. This name was also a
constant reminder to the people that the Lord, not only will save them, but will preserve to Himself a remnant from among the people who will have a future in the land. The meaning of the name of Isaiah’s first son was a message that was frequently repeated throughout Isaiah’s long career as a prophet. The name of Isaiah’s second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz means, “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil” or “swift to the booty-speedy to the prey.” This sign was first applied to the immediate situation that the king and people of Judah found themselves as recorded in Isaiah 8, with the coming of the armies of Assyria to conquer Aram (Syria) and Israel (Samaria). As time progressed, this second son’s name would act as a reminder that the Lord keeps His promises and a warning, that if the Jewish people continued to rebel against God, this message would apply to them.

The words “Look, I and the children whom the LORD has given me” was used by the author of Hebrews as recorded in Hebrews 2:13, to indicate that to those who have put their trust in Him, Christ is not ashamed to call them brethren. The words “children” and “brethren”, in the context of Hebrews Chapter 2, should be understood as those who trust in Christ. It is not the only passage where believers in Christ are referred to as children. For example, Isaiah states this in chapter 53:10, “He will see His offspring.”

8:19-22 When they say to you, "Consult with mediums and spiritists, who chirp and mutter,"
should not a people consult with their God? Should they really ask the dead on behalf of the living?
20 Rather consult the law and the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, surely there is no dawn for them.
21 They will wander through the land distressed and hungry. When they get hungry, they will be enraged, and curse their king and their God, as they turn their faces upward.
22 They will look to the earth, and see only distress and darkness, gloom and anguish; they will be driven away into the darkness.

Isaiah next turns his attention to those who are not the offspring of the Messiah by trusting in Him but are those who rejected Him, and instead of seeking the Lord, consulted mediums and spiritists. Isaiah asks these iniquitous inquirers, “should not a people consult with their God? Should they really ask the dead on behalf of the living?” Isaiah 8:19. Consulting mediums was condemned by God. See Leviticus 19:26 and Deuteronomy 18:9-14. King Saul was an example of those who went against God’s command when he consulted a medium (witch) at Endor. See 1 Samuel chapter 28. It is not surprising that the people Isaiah spoke about who did consult mediums and spiritists would have no dawn, 8:20, and would “see only distress and darkness, gloom and anguish,” 8:22. They would, due to the hardships placed upon them, “be enraged and curse their king and their God as they turn their faces upward,” 8:21. The passage of time will not change the sinfulness of people and their rebellious acts towards God. During the Great Tribulation, the people who will have the mark of the beast upon them will curse God and blaspheme his name when they face the wrath of God which will be represented by the seven bowl judgments as recorded in Revelation chapter 16.

Isaiah chapter 8 ends with a message of despair, “they will be driven away into the darkness.” Isaiah had earlier warned king Ahaz, “if you will not faithfully stand firm, then you will not stand at all,” 7:9. It was a message that the king blatantly ignored, and his and Judah’s future destiny was firmly set in destruction because of Ahaz’s failure to trust God. As recorded in Isaiah 8:22, the prophet reminds the people of Judah that their destiny will be the same as their king because they also have refused to consult God and trust in Him for their salvation. If the message of Isaiah had ended in this place, we would have to despair with these ancient participants in the great covenants of God. But all is not lost to darkness. The very next verse, Isaiah 9:1 begins with “But there will be no gloom to her who was in anguish.” Also, the great news of 9:2 blazes into the darkness and beams hope, “The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light.” A few verses
later, Isaiah reveals the astounding messages that this great light will be seen in the person of a child. These messages begin with, “for unto us a child is born, unto us a son given,” Isaiah 9:6. This blazing light that defeats the darkness, is revealed in chapter 9 of Isaiah, as the promised Messiah, with titles given to Him that are only applicable to God. This child is the virgin born Son, Isaiah 7:14, and later will be revealed by Isaiah as the great suffering Servant of the Lord upon whom “the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all,” Isaiah 53:6.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 8:9-22
8:9-10  God’s Safety for His People: Immanuel
8:11-15 God’s Sanctuary for His People: Instruction
8:16-22 God’s Sign for His People: Isaiah (and his sons)

6. The Promise of the Kingly Child: 9:1-7

This short passage of just seven verses, Isaiah 9:1-7 is enormous in scope to the significance of Biblical prophecy and specifically to Messianic studies. It would be difficult to find so much information about the coming Messiah in any other Scriptural passage of the same length. Portions of these verses are sung as high praise to God the Father and to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ each Christmas season. Of all the titles ascribed to Christ in Scripture, the names in Isaiah 9:6 are perhaps the most memorized and cited by Christians throughout the world. But there is much more to this small passage than these four titles. Nearly all the verbs in this section, except for vs. 7, are written in the past tense to indicate Isaiah’s confidence that the predictive words given to him from God are considered as events that already have taken place. It is critical to understand that the names given to this child, this Son given to us, are not for “signs” as were the names of Isaiah and his children. This Son to come is not a sign of a future hope for He Himself is the future hope, the Messiah, not only for Judah and Israel but for all the nations of the earth.

With the prophecy of the coming of this Son, see also 7:14; 8:8,10, Isaiah completes the narrative of using sons, including two of his own, to illustrate significant truths for his people. Isaiah’s first son, Shear-jashub meaning “a remnant shall return” was a constant reminder that God, although exacting judgment on the rebellious people of Judah and Israel, promised that all would not be lost, and a faithful remnant would return to the glorious land in the future. Isaiah’s second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz meaning “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil” was a sign of a specific historical event, in which the Assyrian armies would quickly gather up the spoils of victory over Aram (Syria) and Israel. Isaiah’s name has the meaning of “the Lord is salvation” and his name was a constant reminder to his people all through his ministry that, even though judgment would fall on Israel and Judah, the people must look to the Lord for their salvation, for there is no hope in any other God, person or nation. The names of the greater Son, first called Immanuel in 7:14 meaning “God with us” are given in this section, Isaiah 9:1-7, to declare a most amazing message to the people of Judah and Israel. This message is that God is sending His very own unique Son to finally bring peace to His people and to establish a kingdom which will be ruled by this Son and will last forever. The people of God must, as must all peoples, trust in God for their future salvation and glorious eternal existence when this greater Son will forever be Immanuel.

The prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-7 begins with a most amazing prophecy about Zebulun and Naphtali, which in times past had been treated with contempt, but in the future to Isaiah’s day, during the Messiah’s first advent, would be made glorious, vs. 1. Those who once walked in darkness and have lived in the land of the shadow of death have seen a great light, vs. 2. The nation has been multiplied by you (the Messiah), who have increased their joy, vs. 3. The nation’s oppression has been broken by you (the Messiah), and the oppressor’s have been defeated, vss. 4-5. A child, a Son has been born to the nation (us), who will have the government upon His shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of
Peace, vs. 6. There will be no end to the increase and peace of His government and He will rule over His kingdom upon the Davidic throne. He will establish this kingdom with justice and righteousness forever for the zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish (all) this, vs. 7

9:1-2 But there will be no gloom to her who was in anguish. In the former times he treated the land of Zebulun and Naphtali with contempt, but in the latter time he will make glorious Galilee of the nations, from the way of the sea to the region beyond the Jordan.

2 The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
on them the light has shined.

In the Hebrew text, verse 1 of chapter 9 in the English versions, is placed as vs. 23 of chapter 8. Thus, this verse serves as a bridge between the despair due to the judgment upon the people in the latter verses of chapter 8 and the great promise to the people of the coming Prince of Peace. The NSAB translates the first clause of this verse as: “But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish”. Isaiah speaks about earlier times when the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, areas to the north of Galilee, were treated by God with contempt. As these times are not specifically mentioned, and in the context of the preceding chapters in the prophecy of Isaiah, these times may be a reference to the areas in northern Israel (Ephraim) conquered by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III. In contrast to these devastating earlier times, God in later times, “will make glorious Galilee of the nations, from the way of the sea, to the region beyond the Jordan.” Isaiah 9:1.

This verse, Isaiah 9:1 implies a question: what is going to happen in later times within the area known as Galilee of the Gentiles? An historical response to this question is recorded in Matthew chapter 4:12-17. Matthew states that, when Christ had heard that John (the Baptist) was taken into custody, He left Nazareth and withdrew into Galilee, settling in Capernaum, which is by the sea (of Galilee), in the region of Zebulun and Napthali and Matthew adds that this fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2. When Jesus was in this northern area of Galilee He from that time, “began to preach, and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" Matthew 4:17. It was the presence of Christ and His teaching in this northern area of Galilee that was the great light that would shine upon them. This often neglected, and Gentile influenced area of Israel would be blessed with the Messiah and His message. In application, it could be suggested that the entire nation would be blessed by the presence of the Lord, Jesus Christ, for the message that the Lord preached during Matthews’s time was that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, implying that the kingdom was at hand due to the presence of the King of the kingdom. However, the kingdom was not yet a present reality and was later postponed due to the rejection by the Jews of Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

9:3 You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased their joy;
they joy before you like the joy during harvest,
like warriors rejoice when they split up the spoil.

In Isaiah 9:3, the prophet records another great blessing upon the nation, but it is for another time. The result of having the Messianic light shine upon them was one of great blessing to the people who would, in the far future, be living in Israel during the time of the Messianic kingdom. This event can fit no other period. They do not refer to Isaiah’s time, nor do they adequately apply to the first century. But they must refer to a later time when the nation shall be multiplied, and the people’s gladness will be increased for the people will be joyful in the presence of the Messiah. The work of God in multiplying the nation naturally implies the expansion of the borders of the land and an increase in population. The expansion of the land during the Messianic kingdom is described in detail in Ezekiel chapter 47. The increase or multiplication in population

9:4-5 For the yoke of their oppression,
   and the bar on their shoulder,
   the rod of their oppressor,
   you have broken as in the day of Midian's defeat.
5 For every boot of the marching warriors,
   and every garment drenched in blood,
   will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

These two verses affirm the likelihood that these blessings could only refer to a time when the Messiah would be among them ruling over His kingdom. The people would finally be at peace with their enemies and battle clothing would only be used as fuel for the fire. Isaiah predicts that the people of God will break or remove the yoke, staff and burden from those who oppress them. This could have an application (but not prophetically fulfilled) to Assyria and in the eighth century B.C. and to Babylon in the seventh century B.C. Many Biblical scholars suggest that within Isaiah 1-39, Assyria is referenced as the dominant aggressor to the Jewish people and in a few chapters within Isaiah 40-66, Babylon assumes this role. The good news for God’s people is that, eventually, in a far future time, they will be victorious over all nations who oppose them and seek their destruction. They will be reminded of the victory God brought them over the armies of Midian under the leadership of Gideon as recorded in Judges Chapter 7. Refer also to Isaiah’s further discussion on the removal of the burden placed upon them by their enemies, for example, see 10:24-27; and 14:24-27. Chapters 13-23 of Isaiah deal mostly with God’s judgment on the nations which have oppressed Judah and Israel, but they also include judgment on Israel.

9:6-7 For unto us a child is born,
   unto us a son is given,
   and the government will be upon his shoulders:
   and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
   Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of his government
   and of peace there will be no end.
He will rule on the throne of David,
   and over his kingdom,
   to establish it,
   and to uphold it with justice
   and with righteousness from this time forth forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.
The prophet gives details about the Messiah who will be present during this blessed future time, and He will be the cause of the peace of the land. Isaiah, in 9:6, stated this reason: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” Certainly, this must in the context of the preceding chapters, refer to the son who was to be born of a virgin and who would be called Immanuel, Isaiah 7:14. Also Isaiah would have known the prophetic words of Psalm 2:6-7 regarding the Son who was to be installed on Mount Zion as a King. Isaiah would have pondered the meaning of the words God had given him to proclaim as recorded in Isaiah chapter 9, and he may have wondered about their fulfillment. We have the advantage of the completed Scriptures to inform us of the full impact of these prophetic words. See Matthew 13:17; Luke 10:24 and Acts 3:17-26.

Another detail given in Isaiah 9:6 regarding this Son is that, “the government will rest on His shoulders”. This certainly amplifies Psalm 2:6-9 and looks forward to Zechariah 14:9; Matthew 2:6; Revelation 1:5, 2:26-27, 12:5, 19:15-16 and 20:4. There is no doubt that one of the highest offices of the King to come, the Messiah, is that of a Ruler. This Ruler will first come as a Son and will later reign over the nations. All peoples will acknowledge His rule and not only obey Him as Ruler but worship Him as the King of King and Lord of Lords. For this title, see Revelation 19:16.

The Ruler, the child to come as a Son, will have four two-fold names or titles ascribed to Him. These two-fold names/titles are not an exhaustive description, but it is specifically given to emphasize His eternal, exalted, holy, majestic and royal person. The first two-fold name is “Wonderful Counselor,” Pele Yoetz in the Hebrew, is literally, “wonder of a counselor” See Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 62. He is to be a counselor both in the sense of the instruction He is to give and the life He is to live. His word and His sacrificial life would give irrefutable counsel regarding salvation for mankind. Luke states as recorded in Acts 4:12, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among humans, by which we must be saved.” (bold intentional). Victor Buksbazen instructs that:

“Pele Yoetz – Wonderful Counsellor – Actually the word “pele” is not an adjective but a noun, literally translated this means Wonder Counsellor. This word first occurs in connection with the appearance of the Angel of the God to Manoah, the father of Samson:

And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD What is your name? And the angel of the LORD said to him: Why do you ask my name seeing that it is secret [Peti]…
And Monoah said to his wife, we will surely die because we saw God (Jud. 13:17-18, 22).
For their fathers he did wonders [pele] in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan (Psa. 78:12, also Psa. 88:12.

The word “pele” therefore indicates a wonder, a mysterious act of God, beyond human grasp. Pele wonderful or mysterious is an attribute of God, like holiness. Pele Yotz therefore means a wonderful counselor and partakes of the very nature of God.

Elsewhere Isaiah wrote:
This also cometh from the LORD of hosts who is wonderful in counsel and great in deliverance (Isa. 28:29)” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 164).

The second two-fold name is “Mighty God,” El Gibbor in the Hebrew. In Isaiah 10:21, the prophet records that “A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.” Since this title would naturally refer to the “Lord, the Holy One of Israel” in the preceding verse, it is an extremely important reference in Isaiah 9:6, that the Son to be born would also be called “Mighty God”. Thus, the Son to be born would be God. No other person or spiritual being in all of Scripture was given this name. In the New Testament, passages such as John 1:1-14 and Hebrews 1:1-3 give further revelation that this Son to be born would be more than just a human son, He was also God in the flesh. Victor Buksbazen again instructs:
Elsewhere Isaiah calls God El Gibbor (10:21): “A remnant shall return, a remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God [El Gibbor].”

Jeremiah refers to God: “The God who is great and mighty [Ha-El Ha-gibbor] his name is the LORD of hosts” (Jer. 32:18).

Here the Messiah is called the mighty God, the same name as God, thus clearly bearing witness to the divinity of the Messiah. Some translate El Gibbor, God-like hero, but in view of Isaiah 10:21 this is not satisfactory.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 165).

The third two-fold name is “Eternal Father,” Abhi ad in the Hebrew. This is a title combining two concepts which could be stated as “my father is eternal” or “father of eternity” See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah 1-39, NAC, page 241. There are only a few references in the Old Testament to God as Father, Deuteronomy 32:6, Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4, 19; and Malachi 2:10. There are many other Scriptural references where the Jewish people are called God’s sons. This two-fold name is another clear statement that this Son to come is declared to be God. In the New Testament, as recorded in John 10:30, Jesus stated, “I and the Father are one”. The Jews immediately understood that Jesus was claiming to be God because they picked up stones to stone Him. Jesus asked them, “I have showed you many good works from the Father; for which of those works are you stoning me?” John 10:32. The Jews answered, “We are not stoning you for a good work, but for blasphemy; because you who are just a man, claim to be God.” As the Davidic King, the Messiah is the father of His people, and will eternally act as a kind and gentle father.

The second aspect of this title is “eternal.” This is a clear statement of the eternality of the Son. He always existed and there never was any time when the Son did not exist for He is God who lives forever. The tri-unity of God is also clearly stated in this phrase. The Son is God as the Father is God and the Holy Spirit is God. As God, the Son will rule over his kingdom forever. In the next verse, Isaiah 9:7, Isaiah records that the son would sit on the throne of David, forever. The prophetic reference in 2 Samuel 7:16 to the eternal duration of David’s throne points forward to the birth of this Son and to His place on the throne of David as stated in Luke 1:32-33, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Victor Buksbazen comments on this name:

“Abhi-ad – The Everlasting Father
Literally the father of eternity. In Isaiah 63:16b the prophet approaches God in these words: “Thou O Lord art our father, our redeemer, from everlasting is thy name.” Here the father aspect is relation to His people is emphasized. He acts in relation to His people with paternal compassion. “Like a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” (Psa. 103:13).

We are reminded of the words of Matthew 9:36 concerning Jesus: “But when He saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them…” Some commentators who sought to diminish the implication of divinity in this name of Messiah, translated Abhi-ad – the father of booty or spoil, which neither grammatically nor contextually is admissible. The name means that the Messiah is eternal and paternal in relation to His people.” (Victory Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 165).

The fourth two-fold name is “Prince of Peace,” which is Sar Shalom in the Hebrew. In the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, the prophet expands upon the reign of this Prince, whom Isaiah refers to as a shoot and a branch that will spring from the stem of Jesse. The reign of peace is described and the reason for this peace is given in Isaiah 11:9, “For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” Not only will the earth be at peace during the reign of its divine Prince, but God and man will be reconciled and be at peace forever through this Prince’s reconciliation work on the cross. Colossians 1:19-20 states, “For the
Father was pleased that all his fullness should dwell in him; and through him to reconcile to himself all things, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

See also Romans 5:10, and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. Again, Victor Buksbazen instructs:

“Sar Shalom – The Prince of Peace

On another occasion Isaiah prophesied that the Messianic kingdom will be a kingdom of universal peace and harmony. Now the prophet presents the Messiah as the Prince of Peace, the King of the Messianic Kingdom. The Messiah is the King of Peace. The Hebrew word shalom has a much wider meaning than our term “peace.” Shalom is not merely absence of war and strife but prosperity, well-being, harmony within and without, peace in one’s heart and peace with God, it is the perfect state of man.

Taken together the four names of the coming Messiah are an extension of the name Immanuel. They are not names in the modern sense, but rather attributes of the one to whom they are given.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 165).

Isaiah, as recorded in 9:7 gives more detail about the eternal kingdom of the Son. First, the increase of His government and peace will never end, indicating that it will be limitless. This comment should be seen as referring to the eternal kingdom and not just to the millennial kingdom of Christ. Second, the Son will reign on the throne of David over His kingdom for a limitless period of time. This is a very important statement of Scripture verifying the prophecy of 2 Samuel 7:12-17, Psalm 89:4, and all of Psalm 89 in context, and in the future at the birth of Christ, Luke 1:32-33. Third, the kingdom of the Son will be established and upheld with justice and righteousness forever. The Holy King will reign over a Holy kingdom. Fourth, these promises will be fulfilled because they will be accomplished by the zeal of the LORD of hosts. There need not be any doubt as to their fulfillment, for the LORD Himself has a great burning desire (zeal) to ensure that they will be put into place just as Isaiah has prophesized. As a concluding note, it is important to understand that the above details regarding the kingdom of the Son will begin with His millennial kingdom on earth and proceed without end into the eternal state. Regarding the rule of the Messiah, David L. Cooper comments:

“THE destruction of all Israel's foes and the introduction of this new era of righteousness will be the result of the birth of Immanuel, because the prophet exclaimed: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (vs. 6). This child is none other than that of the virgin concerning whom we studied in Isaiah 7:14.

This one is born unto the Jewish people--He sustains a relationship to the nation such as no other has ever done. Jesus came in fulfillment, as we have seen, of Isaiah 7:14, but He was not recognized by the nation as the God-man of whom this verse speaks. When, however, Israel as a nation accepts Him and pleads for Him to return--as the Scriptures have foretold that she will do--He will return and will be recognized by not only Israel, but the entire world as this Wonderful One, this Counsellor, this Mighty God, this Everlasting Father, this Prince of Peace!

When Israel receives her long-rejected Messiah and He returns, He will establish His rule and authority over His Chosen People. The Jews will then, as we learn from other passages, go forth into all the world, proclaiming the one everlasting gospel to the nations that survive the Tribulation, and convert them to Christ. As each nation receives the light and accepts Christ, it will apply to be incorporated into Messiah's kingdom. This turning to Christ by the nations of the world will continue until all will be brought under His benign and righteous reign. This growth and development of His kingdom is foretold in the following words: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7).” (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-December 1943).
Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer add:

“The child will fulfill the promise of the Davidic covenant (cf. 2 Sm 7:12-16), and establish the messianic kingdom through justice and righteousness. This kingdom will not be the outworking of a king with human wisdom and power. The child will rule with the wisdom, power, and peace of God. The final statement in v. 7 notes that the Lord will accomplish all that has been described. Isaiah again underscores that trust in the Lord is the key to receiving the promised blessing.” (Michael Rydelnik, James Spencer, Isaiah in the Moody Bible Commentary, page 1025).


Teaching Outline for Isaiah 9:1-7
9:1 Place and Proclamation of the Promised King
9:2-5 Prosperity and Peace of the Promised Kingdom
9:6 Preeminence and Power of the Promised King
9:7 Perpetuity and Piety of the Promised Kingdom

7. The Anger of the Lord: 9:8–10:4

Following the glorious announcement of the birth and everlasting rule of the promised Son, Isaiah turns his attention to the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim). The last section of Isaiah chapter 9 and first four verses of chapter 10 are a burning indictment against the arrogance, pride, false teaching, godlessness, evilness, foolishness, and wickedness of the people of the northern kingdom. As stunning as is the list of the sins of the people, so is the list of the punishments by the Lord. This section is distinctively marked by the phrase: “Even after all this, His anger is not turned away but his hand is still stretched out still.” This phrase is stated in 9:12, 17, 21 and 10:4. See also Isaiah 5:25. This phrase marks the divisions of this declarative statement of the anger of God upon His disobedient and rebellious people. An outline of this section resulting from these divisions is suggested:

9:8-12: The Proud Confronted
9:13-17: The Populace Cleaved
9:18-21: The People Consumed
10:1-4: The Prosecutors Condemned

9:8-12: The Proud Confronted

In the section Isaiah 9:8-12, the prophet declares that the word of the Lord is against the northern kingdom of Israel which is described as Ephraim and Samaria who are proud and arrogant, vss. 8-9. They boastfully claim they alone (without the Lord) can rebuild their cities and forests following their destruction, vs. 10. Therefore, the LORD has brought enemies against them which will further destroy Israel, vss. 11-12.

9:8 The Lord sent a word against Jacob, and it has fallen on Israel.

Isaiah begins this section with a declaration that Lord is delivering a message (of judgment) against Jacob which is for or will fall upon Israel. Isaiah often described the people of God as “Jacob” meaning the entire twelve tribes of Israel named after the sons of Jacob. In the context of this section Isaiah states that the
message of judgment will fall upon the northern kingdom, Israel containing ten of the twelve tribes of Jacob. It is unlikely that Isaiah travelled to Israel to deliver this message during a time of warfare. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, page 243. The message was about Israel but spoken to Judah to confront the southern kingdom with their need to consider their failure to seek God and take action by repenting and turning to God. Isaiah was not the only eight century B.C. prophet to declare a message of judgment upon Israel. Hosea, who may have been a native of Israel, primarily had his prophetic ministry to that nation although his message was also for Judah. The prophet Amos, although from Tekoa in Judah, ministered mostly to Israel, Amos 7:15. Micah had his prophetic ministry mostly among the people of Judah although some of his messages were for Israel, Micah 1:5-7. Jonah, another eighth century prophet, may have had an unrecorded prophetic ministry to Israel. He was sent by God to bring a message of judgment (unless repentance came) to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Thomas Constable comments:

“The prophet announced that God had pronounced a message (Heb. dabar, word) of judgment against the Northern Kingdom. It had all the force of Yahweh’s sovereign power behind it, but it would come subject to Ephraim continuing on the course it presently pursued. Prophetic announcements of judgment usually allowed for the possibility of repentance. If the people under God’s promised judgment repented, the judgment would not fall (cf. Jer. 18:7-10; Jon. 3:4-10).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 65).

9:9-10 All the people will know it,
Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria,
who in pride and in arrogance of heart, say,
10 "The bricks have fallen,
but we will rebuild with carefully crafted stone;
the sycamores are cut down,
but we will replace them with cedars."

The message of judgment Isaiah brought from God was not hidden or obscure. All of the people of Israel, signified by the words Ephraim, one of the largest tribes (7:2, 17) and Samaria, the capital city of Israel, knew or were to know the content of the judgment declaration of God. The first indictment of God against the northern kingdom in this specific message is that even though the people of Israel knew the message of God, they responded to it with pride and arrogance in their heart. They like king Ahaz of Judah, refused to humble themselves before God and repent of their stubborn willfulness. They would not acknowledge nor trust in God for protection nor worship Him as their sovereign Ruler and Holy God.

The people of Israel mocked God in their arrogance, by stating that they will just rebuild with smooth stones because the bricks have been knocked down and will replant with cedars because the sycamores have been cut down. This is more than just stating that they will rebuild in times of calamity. It is a statement that no matter what God can throw at them, they will simply just work around it and get things back to normal. This response may have referred to the first assault on their land by the Assyrians (733-732 B.C.), in which many of their cities were destroyed. But as the later verses declare there will be no more normal in their land.

Students of the Bible must be discerning about the proper interpretation and application of this verse. In its historical and grammatical context, this verse is only stating the response of the sinful and hard-hearted people of the northern nation of Israel to the attack of a foreign nation on their land and their failure to seek God in repentance and trust. Those who would lift the words of 9:10 from the book of Isaiah and apply it to any far future event are miss-applying the words of Scripture.
Therefore the LORD has raised their adversaries against them, 
And has stirred up his enemies,
Aram on the east, 
and the Philistines on the west; 
they will gobble up Israel with an open mouth. 
Even after all this, his anger is not turned away, 
but his hand is stretched out still.

The Lord will raise up adversaries against them consisting of the Arameans from the northeast and the Philistines from the southwest. These local enemies however are just irritants in contrast to Assyria who will come against them to totally destroy them, Isaiah10:1-11. The NKJV in 9:11 has “the adversaries of Rezin” thus it is not Rezin and his army that is indicated but the foes of Rezin who are the Assyrians. The main point of these verses is that Israel is not to think they have been attacked just by the imperialistic designs of these nations, but these nations have been stirred into action by God who is sending them on His behalf to punish the nation for their repetitive and unrelenting sins against Him. Isaiah 9:12 ends with the refrain, “Even after all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is still stretched out.” This is the same phrase Isaiah has employed before in 5:25 and again in chapter 9 in verses 17 and 21 and chapter 10 vs. 4. Gary V. Smith comments:

“This oracle ends with a refrain that characterizes this whole unit. The refrain has three parts: (a) even though God has already brought all these judgments to pass; (b) his anger has not stopped; and (c) his sovereign hand is still outstretched and ready to punish more. Although it would have been wise to turn to God as soon as the first punishment came (Exod 7–11; Amos 4:6–11), the people did not repent. Consequently God will continue to exert more and more pressure to convince his people in Israel to turn to him, rather than to rely on themselves. The continued work of God’s wrath parallels Amos’s repeated reminder to the Israelites that because of three sins and even four, God will not turn back his wrath against any sinful nation (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13). Either punishment for sin must be exacted before God’s wrath is satisfied and removed (Deut 13:17; Josh 7:26) or else one must seek to atone for these sins (Exod 32:12, 20, 31–32; Lev 4–5). The image of the “outstretched hand” (yādō nᵉṯ ʿyā) of God is a symbol of power ready to act, either for good, as in the exodus (Exod 15:12; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19), or for punishment of sin (Jer 21:5; Ezek 6:14; Zeph 2:13). God’s outstretched hand demonstrates his power to carry out his plans for all the nations of the earth (Isa 14:26–27). In this case God’s outstretched hand still has plans to enact more punishment against Israel.” (Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, pages 246-247).

The Lord sent judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel because they continually refused to acknowledge Him. They also failed to repent of their wickedness and seek Him in trust and faith. The people did not discern that the invasion of their land was punishment sent from God. God sent this judgment so that they could turn back to Him. This verse is a dramatic insight into the thoughts and intents of God. He brings a rod of correction, which damages and is destructive, in order that the ones being disciplined will repent of their evilness and return in faith to Him. Refer also to Psalm 119:75 Proverbs 3:11-12; Jeremiah 5:3, Hosea 7:7-10, Amos 4:1-11 and Hebrews 12:5-6 for similar insights from God as to the reason why He inflicts those who are called His people with such corrective discipline.
9:14 Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel
head and tail,
palm branch and reed in just one day.

Because of Samaria’s refusal to repent and return to God. He will, in a single day, cut off the “head” which represents the elders and dignitaries, and God will also, in the same day, cut off the “tail” which represents the false prophets, Isaiah 9:15. The “palm branch and reed” are most likely descriptive terms for the same two groups. That day was soon forthcoming for Israel, in about 10 years, in 722 B.C. when the Assyrian armies swept in like a flood and captured the people of Israel and took most of them away as captives. The northern kingdom came to an end. See a similar expression using head/tail and palm branch/bulrush in Isaiah 19:5 in the context of the Lord’s judgment on Egypt.

9:15-16 The elder and the dignitaries, are the head;
the prophets who teach lies, are the tail.
16 For those who lead this people have led them astray;
those who are led by them are destroyed.

The meaning of the words “head and tail” from Isaiah 9:14 are explained. The head were the elders and dignitaries, representing the religious and government heads of Israel who, as false guides were causing the people to be led astray. The tail represents the false prophets who spread lies among the people. The people therefore were confused for they were not taught to trust in the Lord but to put their confidence and trust in evil kings and the leaders of the kingdom. Isaiah had previously mentioned this issue in 3:12 and would address it again in 28:7 and 32:5-7. See also Jeremiah 23:13-21; 32; 50:6; Hosea 4:12; Amos 2:4; and Micah 3:1-12. In the New Testament, similar warnings are found in 2 Peter 2:1-22 and Revelation 2:20-23.

9:17 Therefore the Lord is not pleased with their young men,
nor will he have compassion on their orphans and widows;
for everyone is godless and an evildoer,
and every mouth speaks folly.
Even after all this, his anger is not turned away,
but his hand is stretched out still.

The whole nation of Israel had become godless and everyone from the highest in society to the lowest in rank were evil continually, provoking the Lord to remove His pleasure from even the orphans and widows who were counted among the evildoers. The Lord as recorded in Scripture, took special care of orphans and widows. Isaiah, for example had already mentioned this need in 1:17, 23 and would again in 10:2. It is first mentioned in Exodus 22:22 and often in Deuteronomy, see chapters 10, 14, 16, 24, 26 and 27. Jeremiah spoke of it in 7:6; 22:3 and 49:11. See also Hosea 14:3; Zechariah 7:10 and Malachi 3:5. A well-known admonition of the Lord is stated in James 1:27, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” However, in this rare occurrence, Isaiah 9:17, the Lord will not defend them because they also have become evil and godless. Isaiah in 9:17, repeats the phrase stated in 9:12, “Even after all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” It is repeated again in 9:21 and also in 10:4. For an enhanced comment on this repetitive phrase see notes on 9:12 above. The word “godless” in 9:17 is translated “hypocrite” in the KJV. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The word “hypocrite” (honef) primarily means “a flatterer.” The false prophet and lying teacher always flatters his audiences, telling them the things they like to hear, that they are not as sinful as the true prophets of
God would have them believe, and that their grim predictions will not come to pass. By flattering their people they mislead them. Note 5: In referring to some of the Pharisees as, “hypocrites,” Christ had this passage of Isaiah as a precedent. In the 4th century B.C., Socrates and Plato, called the sophist, who were manipulators of ideas and words in order to mislead people, kolax – flatterers. Dante places “flatterers and hypocrites” in “nether hell.” Dante, *Inferno*, Canto XVIII.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, Page 169 for comment and page 179 for note).

9:18-21: The People Consumed

In this short section, Isaiah describes the wickedness of people and the judgment of the LORD in similar terms. The people’s wickedness “burns like fire” and devours the land, vs. 18. The wrath of the LORD also causes the land and its people, to be “burnt up,” vs. 19. The people devour each other, and in their evilness, fight against Judah, vss. 20-21.

9:18 *For wickedness burns like fire;*  
*it devours the briers and thorns;*  
*it also burns the thickets of the forest,*  
*so that they go up in smoke.*

The wickedness of the people of Israel burns as quickly and intensely as a fire would consume briars, thorns and thickets of the forest with smoke rising upward in a column as a sign of the fire. Evil consumes a people and spreads as fiercely as a raging fire devouring all in its path. This nation of wicked people, 9:17 will become the source of their own desolation as they all become engulfed as a fire that would ravage them. They will reap what they have sown.

9:19 *Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts the land is burnt up*  
*and the people are like the fuel for the fire;*  
*no one spares even his brother.*

A second fire is consuming the nation. This fire is the “wrath” or fierce anger, or fury of the Lord who in fiery judgment upon them, burns up their land and it is the people who are the fuel for the fire. The anger of the Lord is often depicted in Scripture as a consuming fire. Isaiah mentions the fire of the anger of the Lord in 5:25; 13:9; 24:6; 30:27; and 33:10-14. See also Lamentations 2:3; Ezekiel 20:47; Nahum 1:6; Zephaniah 2:2; 3:8; and Malachi 4:1. In the New Testament see John 15:6 and Hebrews 12:29. The last phrase of 9:19 states: “no one spares even his brother.” This is explained in 9:20-21 and provides justification for the Lord’s fury which devours the people like fire.

9:20-21 *They devoured on the right, but were still hungry;*  
*he ate on the left, but they were not be satisfied.*  
*They will all eat the flesh of their own children.*  

21 *Manasseh devours Ephraim,*  
*and Ephraim, Manasseh;*  
*both will fight against Judah.*  
*Even after all this, his anger is not turned away,*  
*but his hand is stretched out still.*

The depraved peoples of Israel snatched and devoured whatever they could grab from both the right and the left, and yet they were never satisfied. These greedy, ungrateful, and self-absorbed people were always
discontent with everything around them. The phrase, “They will all eat the flesh of their own children,” is translated in the NKJV as “Every man shall eat of the flesh of his own arm” and points to 9:21 where it is described that inter-tribal warfare has been an ongoing plague upon Israel for many years. They have been devouring or killing their own brothers as if they were eating the flesh of their own arms or children. Two of the larger tribes of the northern kingdom, Ephraim and Manasseh had been involved in civil war as they had been in the past, as recorded in Judges 12: 1-6. These two tribes were descendants from the sons of Joseph and thus were part of the same family roots as was Judah whom they also attacked in the current war, which many scholars describe as the Syro-Ephraimite war. See 2 Kings 16:5 and 2 Chronicles 28:5-15.

10:1-4: The Prosecutors Condemned

The larger section of this series of messages covers Isaiah 9:8–10:4 and comprises of four parts or stanzas each with the same refrain. See notes on Isaiah 9:12 above. The first three stanzas, 9:8-12; 9:13-17 and 9:18-21 are judgments against the northern kingdom of Israel but Isaiah addresses these messages to his own nation of Judah. Isaiah was describing the sinful condition of the people of Israel and the judgment from God that would come upon these northern kinsmen. Isaiah’s audience would certainly have listened with interest and they would have derived some pleasure in learning about the judgment that is to come upon the people of Israel because of Israel’s vicious attack upon the land of Judah. Now in this last stanza, Isaiah suddenly turns his attention to the people of Judah and declares an oracle of woe upon them, attempting to persuade them that the same judgment from God that is decreed upon Israel because of the wickedness of that nation will be coming upon Judah. The people of Judah needed to repent and turn to God, yet they still refused to listen to Him. See Isaiah 6:9-12.

In this short section Isaiah describes an oracle of woe upon those who make unjust decrees and write oppressive laws and who turn the needy away from justice and rob the poor of their rights and make prey of widows and orphans, vss. 1-2. The prophet asks to whom will these evil doers turn in the day of their punishment and where will they leave their wealth, vs. 3. They will fall among the prisoners and the slain but even after all this, the Lord’s anger is not turned away, and He still stretches out His hand, vs. 4.

10:1-2 Woe to those who make unjust decrees, and to the writers who write oppressive laws; 2 to turn aside the needy from justice, and to rob the poor of my people of their rights, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the orphans their prey!

In Isaiah 10:1, an oracle of woe is declared. Although Isaiah does not state that this woe is directed to his own country there are a few indications that the last stanza of the four-fold message of judgment is for Judah. The “woe” is against those who are in places of political and judicial authority in Judah. They are corrupt and wicked for they enact laws that have an evil intent. The judges of the land declare judgments that are “unjust.” These unjust judgments (decrees) protect the criminals and further punish the victims, who are in need of an honest judgment. The people of Judah are stripped of their “rights,” 10:2, and in contrast to the plight of orphans and widows in Israel, Isaiah 9:17, those in Judah are under God’s care and He speaks out against their unjust treatment. The widows and orphans are plundered and what resources they have, however limited, are taken as spoil by the wickedness of those responsible for the care and protection of the nation. Geoffrey W. Grogan, Isaiah, page 78, notes that this section is similar to the judgment declarations of the prophet Amos. See Amos 2:6-7; 5:11-12; and 8:4-6.
10:3-4 What will you do in the day of punishment, when devastation comes from far away? 
   To whom will you flee for help? 
   Where will you leave your wealth? 
4 Nothing is left but to huddle down with the prisoners, or fall among the slain. 
   Even after all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

The prophet asks these leaders of Judah, as recorded in Isaiah 10:3, what would they do in their day of punishment and to whom will they flee for help and where would they leave their wealth? The answer Isaiah gives in 10:4 is a just response from God, stating that they will have no help from the Assyrians who will kill them and all who are not slain will be taken into captivity. Also, God Himself will not help them. Their plight is hopeless. It appears from Isaiah’s declaration that, even though God has offered an object lesson in the plight of the people of Israel, the people of Judah will not repent and trust in God. Isaiah does not wait for their answer but drives to his conclusion that these leaders of Judah will receive God’s just and righteous punishment for their wickedness. Just as God will cause the destruction of Israel, He will also be the source of Judah’s ruin. See extended notes on 9:12 above regarding the last phrase of 10:4, “Even after all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.”

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 9:8-10:4
9:8-12 God’s Indictment against Flippant Temerity
9:12 Refrain
9:13-17 God’s Indictment against False Teaching
9:17 Refrain
9:18-21 God’s Indictment against Family Treachery
9:21 Refrain
10:1-4 God’s Indictment against Fraudulent Tyrants
10:4 Refrain

Refrain: “In spite of this, His anger does not turn away and His hand is still stretched out.”

8. Assyria: God’s Choice for Punishing the Nation: 10:5-19

Assyria was chosen by God to be the rod of His anger against the people of Judah whom the Lord describes as a “godless nation.” They have become the people of His wrath. God was sending the Assyrians to seize plunder and spoil from His people. However, a woe is pronounced on the Assyrians and their king because they were not content to be God’s instrument of judgment. They failed to acknowledge God as the One whom had sent them and had their own evil plans to destroy and remove nations for their own imperialistic designs. By assigning to themselves wisdom and understanding and refusing to give God His proper honor, the Assyrians would themselves be subject to the judgment of God. There doom is declared, and it will be certain.

In this section, Isaiah 10:5-19, the prophet declares an oracle of woe against Assyria, who is God’s instrument of judgment upon a “godless nation,” who are the people of His wrath. The Assyrians were to take the spoil and seize the plunder as a reward for their assault upon Judah, vss.5-6. Yet they intended far more than just punishing Judah. They planned to destroy and cut off the nations and to boast of their
conquest of kings and worse, they planned to destroy Jerusalem in the same manner in which they had destroyed Samaria, vss. 7-11. The Lord, when Judah has been punished, will punish Assyria for their arrogance and boasting that their victories over the nations of Israel and Judah were due to their own strength and they were like instruments or tools boasting over the One who wields the tools, vss. 12-15. Therefore, the sovereign LORD will bring a disease, emaciation, upon Assyria’s warriors and Assyria’s glory will be incinerated and He will burn them in a single day, so there will be few survivors, vss. 16-19.

10:5 Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger, the club in their hands is my rage!

The second “woe” oracle of chapter 10 is directed to Assyria whom God calls” “the rod of My anger, the club in their hands is my rage!” The prophet Isaiah has used the portrait of the rod and the bar (staff) as instruments of warfare in 9:4 and would again in 10:24. This is in stark contrast to King David’s portrayal of the rod and staff of the Lord as a source of comfort as written in Psalm 23:4. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, page 256 for an extended discussion on the Scriptural use of God’s rod and staff. God describes His emotions against His people as that of anger and rage (indignation). The Hebrew word for “anger” is ‘aph and usually has the meaning of nose or nostrils indicating the face. In this context, in the DASV, it is interpreted as anger having the meaning that God has turned his face against His people in His just and righteous wrath against them. The Hebrew word for “rage” (or indignation) is za’am which has the meaning of such fury that one literally froths or foams at the mouth. The combination of these two words, anger and rage, therefore gives a vivid picture of just how full of fury God was with the wickedness of His people. God’s fury was so intense that His face demonstrated outwardly what He was feeling inside. This of course is an anthropological description as God is a Spirit and does not have a “face” but God often expresses Himself in these ‘human like” terms to express His emotions.

10:6 I am sending him against a godless nation, and against the people of my wrath. I will give him an order, to take the spoil, to seize the plunder, and to stomp them down like the mud in the streets.

Assyria was God’s rod and club (staff) and as implements of His judgment, Assyria was sent against a godless nation, Judah who were and the people of His wrath. The word “wrath” is the Hebrew ‘ebrah which occurs 34 times in the Old Testament often with the meaning of wrath, anger, rage or fury. God often expresses His wrath against His enemies including His own covenant people when they have relentlessly rebelled against Him by wicked behavior which often included worshipping idols and practicing pagan religious ceremonies that God abhorred. The Hebrew word ‘ebrah occurs in Isaiah, translated in the DASV as “wrath” in 9:19; 10:6; 13:9,13; 14:6 and as “insolence” in 16:6. Assyria, as stated in Isaiah 10:6, was sent by God to “take the spoil” and “to seize the plunder.” This specific commissioning of Assyria by God was demonstrated by the meaning of Isaiah’s second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz as a sign against Judah. See notes on Isaiah 8:1-4. Isaiah 10:5-34 is a declaration of God’s intention to (1) punish Judah for that nation’s refusal to trust Him and for calling upon Assyria for help and (2) to reserve to Himself a faithful remnant is graphically displayed by the names of Isaiah’s two sons: Maher-shalal-hash-baz (quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil), Isaiah 8:2; and Shear-jashub (a remnant shall return), Isaiah 7:3, 10:21.
This section, Isaiah 10:5-34, also describes God’s righteous judgment against Assyria whom He used to punish His people. But the Assyrians went too far in their assigned role, 10:7-11, and were arrogant and boastful failing to acknowledge God as the sovereign Lord over His creation and all of the nations of the earth. The last phrase of 10:6 is descriptive of God’s intended judgment on Judah. God had commissioned Assyria to trample down the people of Judah like mud in the streets. They were to be trod upon so heavily that they would be completely humbled and have no option but to look up to God in repentance. Isaiah’s declaration of woe on Judah, 10:1-4, is also a descriptive portrait of this humbling of God’s people due to their inciting of God to wrath. See also Isaiah 3:8-9, 30:11 and 65:5 as examples of the way God’s covenant people had so blatantly displayed their sinfulness in the very face of God.

10:7 Yet this is not what he intends, nor is this what his heart is planning; it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off many nations.

Assyria, however, rather than humbling God’s people as God intended, set out to completely destroy Judah and other nations for its own imperialistic purposes. The nations of earth seldom have acknowledged God’s directive purposes for them. They exist to fulfill God’s plans and purposes, yet they act as though God has no control or affect upon them. Assyria was one of the ancient world’s most brutal and cruel aggressors. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Of all the nations which inhabited ancient Mesopotamia, the Assyrians were the most warlike and ruthless. They lived for war and gloried in their military exploits and cruelty. They developed a highly advanced war machine and used naked terror as a means of conquest and as a method of holding their defeated enemies in abject fear and submission.

They Assyrians were apparently among the first in history to apply psychological warfare. Approaching the walls of a city which they were about to attack, they would address the defenders in their native tongue, demanding their surrender. Just such an incident is vividly described in Isaiah 36:4-21. If the defenders refused to surrender, the Assyrians would then lay siege to the city and attack the walls with battering rams, or dig tunnels underneath or kindle huge fires under the city gates and walls until they collapsed. After the capture of the city, the Assyrian king would sit upon his throne at the gate of the city, surrounded by his resplendent court.

The conquered population was marched before him, headed by their king or ruler. Most of the captives, young and old, would then be killed, or burned alive as a sacrifice to the national god of Assyria, Assur. Sometimes the captives would be flayed alive, or blinded, or would have their heads impaled on sharp stakes, sometimes with hooks in their noses. The city itself would be plundered and its accumulated wealth carried away into Assyria.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 171-172).

10:8-9 For he boasts, "Are not my princes all kings?"
9 Is not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?

Assyria, as recorded in Isaiah 10:8, is described as “he” which reveals that the words spoken are from Tiglath-Pileser III who was the king of Assyria at the time of Isaiah’s declaration of this woe oracle. The word “he” also applies to other Assyrian kings, following Tiglath-Pileser III, up to the time of the disastrous (for Assyria) siege upon Jerusalem in 701 B.C. See also the proud and arrogant boasting of king Sennacherib as
recorded in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37. The boastful words of the Assyrian king is that his princes (commanders in the NIV) are as powerful as kings of smaller nations the Assyrians had conquered. The king’s boast also lists six cities Assyria had already captured or planned in the future to capture. (1) Calno (Calneh) was located in the plains of Shinar (Genesis 10:10) although by its association to Carchemish in Isaiah 10:9, it may have been located more to the north. See also Ezekiel 27:23 and Amos 6:2. (2) Carchemish (modern city of Jerablus) was located in northern Aram (Syria) and was captured by the Assyrian king Sargon II in 717 B.C. It was subsequently conquered by Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt in 609 B.C. and by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 605 B.C. in a famous battle, Jeremiah 46:2. (3) Hamath was a city of ancient Syria located along the Orontes River 125 miles north of Damascus. It was first captured by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III, but completely destroyed by Sargon II in 720 B.C. After the conquest of Samaria in 721 B.C., the Assyrians transported people from other parts of their empire, including Hamath and re-settled them in Samaria, 2 Kings 17:24, and Isaiah 11:11. Arpad was located in northern Syria, near to the city of Hamath. (4) Arpad was conquered first by Tiglath-Pileser III in 740 B.C. and in 720 B.C. by Sargon II. See references to this city as a proverb for a conquered city in 2 Kings 18:34; 19:13; Isaiah 36:19 and 37:13. (5) Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel and is often referred to as representing the entire kingdom of Israel. Much of the history of the failure and downfall of Samaria is recorded in 2 Kings. Following a siege of three years by the Assyrians under two kings, the city was finally conquered by king Sargon II in 721 B.C. (6) Damascus, capital of Syria, has a long history, both in Biblical and modern times. In the context of the boast by the king(s) of Assyria, the city was captured by Tiglath-Pileser III in 733 B.C. See 2 Kings 16:7-9. For a detailed historical description of the conquest of cities mentioned in Isaiah 10:9, refer to The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1975, General Editor, Merrill C. Tenney.

10:10-11 As my hand has reached the kingdoms of the idols, whose images excel those of Jerusalem and of Samaria,
11 shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols, exactly as I have done to Samaria and her idols?

The boast of the king(s) of Assyria continues in Isaiah 10:10-11 to include kingdoms (including city-states) which the king(s) claimed had greater idols than either Jerusalem or Samaria. The king(s) claim that they will do to (Jerusalem and her idols just as they had done to Samaria and her idols. It is obvious from this boast that: (1) Jerusalem was not yet under siege by the Assyrians and therefore the timeframe for Isaiah’s message was prior to 701 B.C. and more likely just after 721 B.C. The Assyrian invasion of Samaria was certainly a most immediate event. (2) It is also obvious that the Assyrians either did not know about or recognize the God of the people of Israel who was sovereign over His created world and was the One who called Assyria to trample the people of Samaria, 10:6 because of the wickedness and unrepentant hearts of the people of the nation of Israel. The Assyrians were but instruments in God’s hands, 10:5-6; 15 and who were now to learn of God’s judgment upon them, 10:12 and following verses. There was truth however to the claims of the king(s) of Assyria that both Jerusalem and Samaria were cities where idols were worshiped. The Assyrians assumed wrongly that these idols alone were the only God that the Israelites had to contend with. The Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, the Holy One of Israel and the light of Israel would soon rise to make His name known to the nations whom He described as less than nothing and meaningless before Him, Isaiah 40:17.

10:12 When the Lord has finished his whole work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will say,

"I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the haughty look of his eyes."
The Lord next describes His planned judgment on the king of Assyria. In the context of Isaiah 10:12-19 and 22b-34, God is describing His judgment upon the Assyrian king Sennacherib who approached Jerusalem to lay siege to it. The Assyrian army was prevented from its planned siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Instead of Jerusalem being destroyed, it was the army of Assyria that was annihilated, and later king Sennacherib was assassinated, Isaiah 37:36-38. Before God would deal with Assyria, He would first complete all His work He had planned, up to that time, for Mount Zion and Jerusalem. Isaiah later addressed this work in 28:21, The Lord will be stirred up to: “perform his deed, his extraordinary deed, and bring to pass his work, His unusual work.” This deed (task or work) was such that God was stirred up to work against His own people by bringing devastating judgment upon them. Instead of working for them, God was working against them. Instead of working to bring safety and comfort to His people, He was working to bring them death and exile. When this work was decreed upon His people, God would also turn do “work” against the “fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the haughty look of his eyes.” The “fruit” of the king of Assyria was that he was destroying instead of punishing God’s people and ascribing this destruction to his own abilities and pompously praising himself for these deeds.

10:13-14 For he says, “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I have understanding. I have removed the boundaries of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures, and like a powerful conqueror I have brought down those who sat on thrones. My hand has found the riches of the peoples like a bird’s nest; like one gathers eggs that are abandoned, I have gathered all the earth. There was not one that flapped a wing, or that opened its mouth, or chirped.”

The Prophet lists the proud and arrogant words of the Assyrian king which is a reminder of King Nebuchadnezzar’s similar words of hubris, as recorded in Daniel 4:28-30. The Assyrian king ascribes to himself strength, wisdom, understanding, and most deserving of God’s judgment, he called himself “a powerful conqueror,” Isaiah 10:13 (NIV: like a mighty one). This self-ascribed exaltation would be similar to stating that he was like a god. There is only One mighty God as Isaiah would soon state in 10:21. This mighty God would bring His just and righteous judgment upon the proud human head of the self-exalted king of Assyria.

The king of Assyria boasted of his accomplishments as conquering nations and removing their borders, plundering the nations his armies had conquered, and destroying the peoples. The king’s arrogant boast reaches the pompous height of hyperbole declaring in 10:14 that he had “gathered all the earth” and no one resisted. The king used the metaphor of gathering eggs from an abandoned nest without any resistance from the birds of the nest. For another passage about boasting by a king of Assyria see Isaiah chapter 36. This proud self-exalting declaration by the king of Assyria demanded an answer and God was quick to respond as recorded in Isaiah 10:15-19.
10:15 Does the axe boast against the one who wields it?
 Does the saw extol itself over the one who saws with it?
 As if a rod should wave the one who lifts it up,
or as if a staff should lift up the one not made of wood.

God commences His response to the insolence of the king of Assyria by rhetorically asking, are the tools of men, (the axe, the saw, the rod and the staff), to exalt themselves over those who wield them? God was stating that He was the One who used Assyria and its might just like a craftsman would wield an instrument to accomplish his purposes. The tools being used have nothing to say or boast about as if they were mightier than their employer. In Isaiah 10:5, God calls Assyria, “the rod of my anger and the club in their hands is My rage!” In 10:6 God states that He sent it, Assyria as the rod and club (staff), against a godless nation, Judah. See also Isaiah 10:24 where God applies this analogy:

O my people who live in Zion,
do not be afraid of the Assyrian,
though he strikes you with the rod,
and lifts up his club against you,
just as Egypt did.

There is much to think about in these verses in Isaiah chapter 10. God is the sovereign One who claims to use a cruel pagan aggressive nation as an axe, saw, club, rod and staff as His instruments of punishment against His own people. God initiates the action and applies judgment. Yet, God righteously and with true justice condemns the “instruments” used (the Assyrians) due to their wicked intention to completely destroy instead of punishing God’s people. The people being targeted, Judah and Israel, although they deserve to be judged and punished by a holy God are told in 10:24, not to fear the fierce Assyrian who strikes them, for God has told them, it is really He who is striking them. There is in Scripture a tension between God’s sovereign acts and the responsibility of humans, whom God has created, to be responsible for their acts. Humans, individually and nationally cannot claim that because God did this or that, it therefore absolves them of any blame or of any responsibility for what has happened to them. God knows the heart of everyone who has ever lived or will ever live, and His just appraisal of all humans is that none are righteous, none who seek God, none who have done good as recorded in Psalm 14:1-3 and 53:1-3. The Apostle Paul cites these Scriptures and under the inspiration of God states in Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.”

The great issue here is that God alone created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. All that exists and everything in creation, belongs to God. He has the sole right to do with His creation as He deems desirable. Those who are created have no rights, no voice, no power, no standing or no ability to demand of God anything, including an explanation of why God created the universe and why He acts in any capacity. Further, God has declared that no one has any righteous standing before Him for everyone has sinned and has fallen short of His glory. Yet and solely on the basis of God’s most boundless grace, He has provided a way for humans to come into a “right” relationship with Him. Humans did nothing to deserve this grace or indeed can do nothing to benefit from it. It is God’s sole work or act to provide this grace which Paul explained in his letters and Jesus described in the four Gospel accounts. The only thing humans can do is respond to the offer of grace by faith. Isaiah also describes the act of God in providing this grace in 1:18 and 52:13-53:12. Therefore, God has, in His holiness righteousness and justice, brought His judgment upon both His people (Judah and Israel) and upon the instrument of His fury, the nation of Assyria. However, even in the midst of God’s wrath, He remembers mercy, Habakkuk 3:2, and in Isaiah 19:23-25, it is recorded that God indeed will bestow mercy on Assyria, Egypt and His people. See also Isaiah 30:18.
Therefore the sovereign LORD of hosts will send among his burly warriors emaciation; his glory will be incinerated like the burning of fire.

The light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame. It will burn and devour in just one day his thorns and his briers.

He will consume the grandeur of his forest, and his fruitful field, both body and soul. It will be like when a sick person wastes away.

There will be so few surviving trees in his forest, that even a child could write them down.

Isaiah declares in 10:16-19 what God will do to the Assyrians: first, a wasting disease (emaciation) will be sent among the stout Assyrian warriors; second, God Himself will kindle a fire and He, Israel’s Holy One will be a flame to burn and devour the Assyrians, called thorns and briers, in a single day; and third, the glory of the Assyrians described as the grandeur of his forest and his fruitful field, both body and soul, will be consumed like someone who is sick wastes away. The fulfillment of this prophecy of destruction against Assyria came in three historical events. The first was the defeat of the Assyrians by Babylon in 609 B.C.; the second was the capture of the Assyrian capital Nineveh in 612 B.C by the Babylonians; and the third was the final defeat of the Assyrians by the Babylonians in the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. Prior to these events, an earlier Assyrian army was destroyed by God in 701 B.C. See Isaiah 37:36.

God uses the metaphor in 10:17 of Himself as “the light of Israel” who will become a fire and his Holy One will become a flame. The picture here is of God holding a torch that provides both light and fire. The torch provides light to guide His people in the darkness, but it also is a fire that burns and consumes. The first picture of God as light to Israel is seen in Exodus 14:20 when a cloud separated the camps of Egypt and Israel just prior to God opening a walkway in the Red Sea for His people to cross to the other side and escape from the pursuing Egyptians. During the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel, God appeared to them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night as a light, Exodus 13:21-22, 40:38; Numbers 14:14 and Nehemiah 9:12, 19. Second, God is described as a light, providing salvation, Psalm 27:1. He Himself is described as light, 1 John 1:5. God shines His light into our hearts to reveal the glory of Jesus Christ, 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. God’s Son, Jesus Christ is the light that shines in the darkness for all to see, John 1:4-5 and Christ is the light of the world, John 8:12 and 12:46. God is also a fire that consumes, Isaiah 33:14 and Hebrews 12:29. The Servant of the Lord has the ministry of being a light to the nations, Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. See also Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47 and 26:23 which ascribe this ministry of light to the nations to Jesus Christ.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 10:5-19
10:5-14 The Evil Design of the Assyrians
10:16-19 The Eventual Destruction of the Assyrians


As recorded in Isaiah 10:20-34, the prophet declares a prophecy of hope for those who will escape the scourge of the Assyrians and he also states a further word on the certain destruction of the Assyrians. The hope is found in the concept of a remnant of the Jewish people that will truly rely on the Lord instead of
relying on a pagan foreign nation. This message by the prophet however is a double-edged sword. On one side, the hope is given that those who will follow the Lord will survive. On the other side, the majority of the people who will not trust completely in the Lord, will not survive. The Lord will execute His judgment both upon pagan Assyria and apostate Israel. Only those faithful to God will escape His judgment.

In this section, Isaiah 10:20-34, the LORD declares that the remnant of Israel, and those who survive from the house of Jacob, those faithful to God, will rely only on the LORD, vs. 20. This remnant will return to the “mighty God” and by implication to the land following God’s decreed righteous destruction that is to come upon them, vss. 21-23. Those living in Zion are encouraged by the LORD to not be afraid of the Assyrians although they would strike God’s people, just as Egypt had, vs. 24. God’s fury will be directed to the destruction of the Assyrians and the burden of the Assyrian threat against Jerusalem will be lifted from God’s people, vss. 25-27. Although the Assyrians will advance through Judah, they will not be successful against Jerusalem for the LORD will cut them down like one who cuts down a tall tree from Lebanon, vss. 28-34.

10:20-23 In that day the remnant of Israel, and those who survive from the house of Jacob, will no longer depend on the one who struck them, but they will rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

21 A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the mighty God.

22 For though your people, Israel, be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return; a destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.

23 For the sovereign LORD of hosts will execute complete destruction, in the midst of the whole land.

Isaiah identifies the hope of a surviving number of people with the word “remnant.” This hope has been previously declared in Isaiah chapter 4 and in 8:9-15. The hope of the survival of a remnant was first recorded in Scripture in Genesis 45:7 where Joseph in responding to his brother’s grief for previously selling him into slavery, declared: “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.” In 2 Kings 19:30-31, which is a parallel passage to the events recorded in Isaiah 37, Isaiah states, “Then the surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward, and produce fruit upward. A remnant will go out of Jerusalem, and from Mount Zion survivors will escape. The zeal of the LORD will do this.” God was often angry with His chosen people for their rebellious acts against Him and often threatened to destroy them. Yet his anger would not abide forever, and He later gave a promise of hope and forgiveness. In Micah 7:18, the prophet states:

Who is a God like you, that pardons iniquity, and passes over the transgression of the remnant of his possession?

He does not remain angry forever, because he delights in loyal love.
Isaiah discusses the hope of the remnant again in 11:11, 11:16, 28:5, 37:4, 37:31, 37:32 and 46:3. Other references to the hope of the remnant in the Old Testament are found in Jeremiah 23:3, 31:7, 42:2 and 50:20; Ezekiel 6:8; Amos 5:15; Micah 2:12, 4:7, 5:7, 5:8 and 7:18; Zephaniah 2:7, 2:9 and 3:12-13; Haggai 1:12, 1:14 and 2:2; Zechariah 8:6, 8:11, 8:12 and 9:7. In the New Testament the hope of the remnant is found in Romans 9:27 and 11:5. The Lord is still preserving a remnant to Himself to this very day who “will rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel,” Isaiah 10:20. The Lord is still the Holy One of Israel and Israel will survive so that the Lord can fulfill all of His promises to His chosen people. For a more detailed study on the remnant of Israel, see Ariel Messianic Bible Study MBS191, The Remnant of Israel: Past, Present and Future, Ariel Ministries.

As recorded in Isaiah 10:20, the prophet begins the message of hope with the words, “In that day.” In the immediate context, the phrase “in that day” must certainly refer to those who will escape the destroying armies of the Assyrians. Yet, in many Scriptural passages, this phrase also has a future reference to the “day of the Lord” where God will establish a kingdom of peace on the earth ruled by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Messianic hope to all who trust in Him. See discussion on this day in the notes on Isaiah chapters 2 and 4. David L. Cooper suggests:

“IN VERSES 20-30 we have a prediction that there will also be a remnant a of Israel which will escape the judgment of that time--the great Tribulation as we learn from parallel passages--and which will return to God. At that time this faithful remnant will no longer lean upon any human government or group of nations for protection as Israel has done in the past. This remnant will see the mistake which their ancestors have made through the centuries and will return "unto the mighty God." Who is this Mighty God? The answer is found in a verse which we considered in our study last month, Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

The remnant of Israel will be taught the facts concerning this child born unto the Jewish nation who is none other than "the Wonderful One, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." This passage, studied in the light of related ones, is a messianic prediction which foretells the coming of the second person of the Holy Trinity to earth and His being born in the form of the Christ-child. When the time arrives here foretold by the prophet in chapter 10, Israel--the generation living at that time--will be convinced of the truthfulness of the message and will accept Him as Redeemer and Messiah. The prophet looks into the future and sees the great increase of the Jewish people as at the present time. Hence he declares that, though the people of Israel shall be as the sands of the sea, only a remnant will return, the reason being that there is a destruction decreed upon even the Chosen People of God--a destruction which will overflow with righteousness. From the last paragraph of Zechariah, chapter 13, we learn that there will be two-thirds of the nation of Israel which will succumb to the mighty strokes of God's judgment during this Tribulation. Only a third of the nation therefore will survive. These will return to this Mighty God. The Lord has decreed a full end to be made concerning the present order of affairs. He is going to make a clean sweep of the present situation. In righteousness will He perform all His acts.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-December 1943).

This remnant of Jacob will return to the “mighty God,” Isaiah 10:21. In one sense this referred to the repentance of the few in Judah, who during Isaiah’s time, fully trusted in God and had faith in Him. In another sense it is a definite prophecy of those in the future who will trust in their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ who is called “Mighty God” in Isaiah’s earlier prophetic declaration, in chapter 9:6. One scholar suggests that, the central meaning of Isaiah 10:20-21 is that the remnant refers to a relatively small number of the people of Israel, who in a spiritual sense, will return to God who is their Messiah, for the term for mighty God, “El Gibbor” applies to both God, the Holy One of Israel and the Messiah:
“20-22: In this section the remnant of Israel or Jacob occupies the center. The term “shear” – a remnant, is used four times, either in combination with Israel (v. 20), or in combination with Jacob (v. 21), and once “pleitah beth yaakob” – “the survivors of the house of Jacob,” with emphasis on the physical aspect of survival.

However, the center of this passage is the spiritual remnant, which will no more rely for help of the very enemies who sought to destroy them, that is on Assyria and Egypt, but will return to El Gibbor, the Mighty God. Twice Isaiah uses the term “Shear-Yashub,” A-Remnant-Shall-Return, the very name of his first-born son, while El Gibbor – Mighty God, is the very name by which the Messiah was called in chapter 9:6.

The parallel to El Gibbor – Mighty God, is Kadosh Israel – “the Holy One of Israel” (v. 20), which is an implied identification of the Messiah with God, since both God and the Messiah are referred to as El Gibbor, and Kadosh Israel. No all of Israel shall return to God, but only a remnant within Israel.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 176-177).

Thomas Constable understands that the remnant mentioned in Isaiah 10:20-21 has a future reference:

“10:20 In some future day, the remnant (cf. 6:13; 7:3) who escaped annihilation by the Assyrians would no longer trust in man for deliverance, as Ahaz and Judah did before the Assyrian takeover. They would learn this most important lesson and truly trust in Yahweh, the holy one of Israel. Thus Israel would be the really wise and strong nation, not Assyria (cf. v. 13). Israel, as well as Assyria (v. 19), would have a remnant left over after the Lord's destruction of both nations.

10:21 A remnant would return (Shearjashub, 7:3) to the genuinely mighty God. It would be a remnant of the whole house of Jacob, from all the Israelites. The reference to the mighty God (cf. 9:5), along with the sincere change of attitude in Israel—one that has not yet taken place—points to a time of fulfillment in the eschatological future. "That day" (v. 20), as elsewhere, is a millennial reference here.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 70).

The prophet continues his discussion on the remnant in 10:22 by reminding the people of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:17, “I will surely bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will possess the gate of their enemies.” Yet this promise of great numbers of people is not a guarantee that all of them would be spiritually saved, as Isaiah in 10:22 reminds them, “only a remnant of them will return.” The Apostle Paul also made reference to Isaiah 10:22 in his Epistle to the Romans, “Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel, if the number of the children of Israel are as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved.” Romans 9:27

In the second half of 10:22 and in 10:23, Isaiah reminds the Jewish people of the other blade of the double edge sword of the promise of the remnant, “A destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the sovereign LORD of hosts will execute complete destruction in the midst of the whole land.” Yet a remnant of the people will survive who will trust in the Lord, however the greater number will not survive because they turned away from the Lord to put their ill-fated trust in Assyria.

10:24-27 Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD of hosts says, "O my people who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrian, though he strikes you with the rod, and lifts up his club against you, just as Egypt did.
For in a few moments my fury will be over,  
then my anger will be directed to their destruction.

The LORD of hosts will beat them with a whip,  
just like he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb.  
He will lift his rod over the sea,  
just as he did in Egypt.

In that day his burden will be removed from off your shoulder,  
and his yoke from off your neck,  
and the yoke will be broken because you will be so brawny.

The prophet exhorts the Jewish people who trust in God, to not fear the Assyrian threat for God will turn His indignation away from His people and He will spend His anger on the destruction of the Assyrians. In 10:26, God reminds them of His previous actions when He, “struck Midian at the rock of Oreb,” Judges 7:24-25, and of His destruction of the Egyptian armies in the midst of the Red Sea and the salvation of the fleeing Israelites, Exodus chapter 14. In Isaiah 10:27, God promises to remove the burden from their shoulders and to remove the yoke from their neck and to break the yoke of the Assyrian threat, because of Assyrian’s prosperity or fatness. The DASV “because you will be so brawny” seems to miss the point as does the NKJV “because of the anointing oil”. The reference to the fatness of the Assyrians most likely refers to the fact that they have become wealthy from the tribute exacted from the people of Judah for “promising” to protect them from Aram and Ephraim, the northern country of Israel. The Assyrian promise was broken, and the people of Judah would receive no help from Assyria. Indeed, they would receive only destruction. The “fat” Assyrians who were rich from the tribute of the nation of Judah were soon to receive a righteous judgment from God and the destroyer who is fat, (Assyria) would soon be destroyed. For a discussion on this issue, refer to Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, pages 264-265.

He has come to Aiath;  
he has passed through Migron;  
at Michmash he stores his baggage.

They are gone over the pass;  
they have taken up their lodging at Geba;  
Ramah trembles;  
Gibeah of Saul has fled.

Shriek, O daughter of Gallim!  
Listen, O Laishah!  
O poor Anathoth!

Madmenah flees;  
the inhabitants of Gebim run for cover.

This very day he will halt at Nob;  
he shakes his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion,  
the hill of Jerusalem.

Look, the sovereign LORD of hosts,  
will lop off the boughs with an awful crash.  
The tallest trees will be cut down,  
and the lofty brought low.

He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an iron axe,  
and Lebanon in its majesty will fall.
Isaiah declares a message detailing the destruction of the “fat” Assyrians. In 10:28-32 the cities, destined for destruction by the Assyrians, are stated geographically as starting in the north and continuing southward to Hob, which is in close proximity to Jerusalem. Yet, the Assyrians will get no closer to Jerusalem for God will cut them down like trees and thickets of the forest “with an iron axe,” 10:33. The reference to Lebanon in 10:34 is a reference to the utter devastation of the Assyrians. They will be cut down just like the Lebanon forests. See also Ezekiel 31:1-14 and specifically Ezekiel 31:3. David L. Cooper, states that these verses have a past historical and a future reference:

“The prophet, in verses 28–32, described in a most graphic manner the approach of the Assyrian to Jerusalem. Like an on rushing flood he comes within sight of the city and hurls defiance at her. He can go only so far and no farther. The Lord sets the limit beyond which he cannot pass, just as He does with reference to the mighty, roaring billows: "though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it" (Jer. 5:22). The Lord knows how to deliver His people out of every danger. When the Assyrian thus came against Jerusalem to subdue it, he was hindered by the power of God. The topmost boughs of his forest were lopped off, the high of stature were hewn down, and the mighty thicket of his forest was laid low. This prediction was fulfilled as we see in Isaiah, chapter 37, and parallel passages.

The world ruler in the end-time will bring his armies against Jerusalem to battle. He will be unable to conquer the city completely, for at a critical moment the Lord Jehovah will descend from heaven and His feet will stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives. He will stop the battle and inaugurate the period of peace. These future events will be the complete fulfillment of this prediction.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-December 1943).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 10: 20-34
10:20-27 The Remnant Restored
10:28-34 The Destroyer Destroyed

10. The Kingdom of the Righteous Branch: 11:1-10

Chapter 11 of Isaiah is a high peak of enlightenment for those studying the Scriptural evidence for the rule of the Messiah in the coming Messianic kingdom. The chapter reveals a great deal about the ruler Himself and His righteous reign. It gives hope for the nations who will benefit from living in a golden age where God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ will be visibly present to preside in righteous judgment and gracious governance over them. The kingdom will be one characterized by unparalleled peace where the animals will live in peace with one another and with humans who will not harm them, nor will they harm even a small child. It will be the restoration of the earth as God first intended when He placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It will also be a time when God’s numerous promises of restoration and peace to His chosen people will be fulfilled. Revelation chapter 20 provides the duration of this peaceful kingdom, which will be 1,000 years. Other passages of Scripture including Isaiah chapter 11, gives details about this kingdom. The first five verses of Isaiah 11 discuss the Ruler of the Kingdom and verses six to ten discuss the Kingdom of the Ruler. The remaining verses of Isaiah 11 discuss the remnant peoples who will live in the future restored kingdom.

The Ruler of the Kingdom: 11:1-5

Isaiah, in 11:1-5 describes the ruler of the messianic kingdom who will come from the line or “stump” of Jesse, King David’s father. From this stump a “branch” will bear fruit, vs. 1. Upon this “branch,” who is described as ‘him,” the Spirit of the LORD will rest and impart wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the LORD, vs. 2. This “branch” will delight in the fear of the LORD and will not
judge others based only upon the sight of his eyes or the hearing of his ears, vs. 3. He will judge the poor with righteousness and decide for the oppressed with equity. He will, at a later time, strike the earth in judgement and bring death to the wicked, vs. 4. His belt will be called righteousness and faithfulness, vs. 5.

**11:1 There will grow up a shoot out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit.**

This chapter begins with “then” in the NASB. It is a reminder that Lord will cut down the Assyrians who are described as tall trees like the forests of Lebanon. Following this descriptive picture of the felling of the proud Assyrians, the Lord announces that a humble shoot will spring from a stem or a stump of a tree. The shoot from Jesse is a person who is from the line of Jesse, the father of David. This person is described as a “branch” which will bear fruit from the roots of the tree of Jesse. Isaiah 11:10 provides additional details about the root of Jesse (the line of David), who is the “branch.”

The “shoot”, which is the lineage stemming from Jesse, was a slender and vulnerable offshoot from the stump or stem which has fallen due to sinful condition of the line of Jesse. Successive kings from this lineage had rejected the Lord’s direction and they had sought refuge in vain idols and in the disastrous pursuit of seeking aid from powerful but evil kings of pagan nations. Even though the lineage appeared on the verge of drying up, a branch was to come which would bear fruit. This branch was first introduced by Isaiah in the second verse of the fourth chapter. Refer also to the study notes on Isaiah 4:2. Additional details about this branch are given in Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12. The branch, in light of the Scriptural evidence, could only refer to the coming Messiah, who will bear fruit by giving His life as a ransom, Matthew 20:28, and guarantee salvation by rising from the dead. This “shoot” of Jesse would also bear fruit by rescuing a remnant of His people, restoring them to their land, and ruling them in person from Mount Zion during the time of the future Messianic kingdom.

The Apostle Matthew, speaking about the Messiah, Jesus Christ, quoted from Isaiah 11:1 in Matthew 2:23, “He went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.” It may be that Matthew was referencing the word “shoot,” which is hoter in the Hebrew, and has the meaning of being insignificant. The town of Nazareth was a small and lesser known town in the northern area of Galilee. Residents of Nazareth were despised by the residents of the other towns of Galilee as Galilee itself were despised by those from the southern area of Judea. Nathanael, who came from Cana of Galilee, John 21:2, when he heard that Jesus had come from Nazareth, spoke these famous words, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? John 1:46.

**11:2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.**

The prophet in Isaiah 11:2 provides some descriptive detail of the person who is the branch. In this verse, Isaiah introduces the Holy Spirit. Isaiah speaks of the Holy Spirit more than any other writer in the Old Testament. References to the Holy Spirit in Isaiah’s prophecy following this verse, occur in, 30:1, 32:15, 34:16, 40:13, 42:1, 44:3, 48:16, 59:21, 61:1, 63:10-11 and 63:14. Isaiah 11:2 begins with the statement: “The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him.” The “him” is a person who is described as a “branch” in the preceding verse. The following verses in Isaiah chapter 11 provide sufficient detail about Him for the student of Scripture to discern the identification of this person. He will have the Holy Spirit rest on Him. In Matthew 3:13-17, the Apostle describes the baptism of Jesus Christ. Matthew records in verses 16-17, “After Jesus
was baptized, when he came up out of the water, suddenly, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him. A voice from of heaven, said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The very next verse in the Matthew’s gospel, Matthew 4:1 begins: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.” It was the Holy Spirit who Isaiah prophesized about Who would rest on Christ the Messiah, who is the branch. When the Spirit “rested” on Him, the Spirit would endow the Messiah’s human nature with spiritual “fruit” or characteristics which are described in the remainder of Isaiah 11:2.

The branch (His human nature) would be endowed with the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Much could be written about the character qualities of each word and a Biblical word study on each word would be a beneficial undertaking. A few brief comments regarding these character qualities are given in this study to provide a basic understanding of them. These character qualities were those chosen by God for the earthly ministry of the “branch,” who is the Messiah. They were endowed on Him to enable His specific ministry which the Father gave Him. This is not an exhaustive listing as Jesus Christ certainly had many other divine characteristics while He faithfully completed His ministry on the earth. The prophecy of the endowment of the character qualities by the Spirit on the “branch” enabled the Messiah, as fully human (He was also fully God), to carry out His assigned ministry. A short comment by Victor Buksbazen is worthy of our attention:

“The new Twig would be the Messianic king upon whom the spirit of the LORD would rest. This spirit of the LORD would manifest itself in a sixfold way, forming together as it were a seven branched candlestick. Each of the branches is inter-related with and indivisible from the central stem, which is the Spirit of the Lord.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 181).

The first character quality 11:2, imparted by the Spirit to the Messiah (the branch) is “wisdom” which is the Hebrew word hokmah, which has the meaning of skill or ability. Hokmah comes from the root work hakam which means to be wise. In the Old Testament wisdom was imparted on conferred upon certain individuals to accomplish specific tasks such as the building of the tabernacle or temple. See Exodus 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; 36:1-2; 1 Kings 7:14; and 1 Chronicles 28:20-21. King Solomon was imparted with wisdom from God, 1 Kings 4:29; 5:12; and 2 Chronicles 9:23. Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom after Moses had laid his hands upon Joshua, Deuteronomy 34:9. Wisdom comes from the LORD, Proverbs 2:6; Daniel 1:14 and 2:23 and it begins from having a fear of the LORD, Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; and 15:33. In the New Testament, Jesus is described as a child, becoming strong in spirit and being filled with wisdom, Luke 2:40 and 52. Stephen who was appointed as one of the first servants of the young Church was described as being full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith, Acts 6:3-6.

Wisdom is a characteristic of God that was evidenced in the creation of the earth, Proverbs 3:19. Wisdom is personified as a person, “her” in Proverbs chapter 8 who was active in creation and was established from everlasting, Proverbs 8:23. The works of wisdom are again depicted as a person in Proverbs 9:1-6. These personified depictions describe the multi-varied aspects of God’s wisdom, for only true wisdom comes from God, James 3:13-18. The NKJV describes the wisdom of God as, “the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy,” James 3:17. This is the Spirit of wisdom that was imparted to the Messiah at His first advent and it is with this wisdom that He will reign on the earth when He comes at His second advent to establish the messianic kingdom.

The second character quality, Isaiah 11:2, imparted by the Spirit to the Messiah (the branch) is “understanding.” Many understand that wisdom and understanding are interchangeable synonyms. However, it is best to describe them as different characteristics that are related. It could be said that wisdom is the righteous and godly application of understanding. It is one thing to possess understanding but understanding
in itself has no value unless it is applied. The imparting of understanding by the Spirit upon the Messiah competes the relationship, in that the Messiah will be endowed with proper and divine understanding of all things and will apply this understanding with righteous and godly wisdom. Isaiah 11:3 describes this application in a negative sense but the reader/hearer of Isaiah comprehends that the Messiah will only judge and make decisions based upon His understanding applied by His godly and righteous wisdom.

The word “understanding” in Isaiah 11:2 is the Hebrew word “binah,” which stems from the root word “bin,” which has the meaning to discern and perceive. A closely related Hebrew word is “tebunah,” which has the meaning of skill, reasoning and understanding. The psalmist as recorded in Psalm 147:5, stated, “Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; his understanding (tebunah) is limitless.” As it was with wisdom, it was also with understanding (tebunah) that the LORD created the heavens and the earth, Proverbs 3:19. See also Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15. God also endued others with understanding, Exodus 31:3; 35:31; 36:1-2; 1 Kings 7:14; 2 Chronicles 2:12-13; and Daniel 1:17. To those who are believers in Christ, He has given them understanding so that they may know Him, 1 John 5:20. The Spirit imparted understanding to the Messiah, not only to make righteous and godly decisions, Isaiah 11:4, but also to rule with righteousness and peace, Isaiah 9:7 and 32:1.

The third character quality, Isaiah 11:2, imparted by the Spirit to the Messiah (the branch) is “counsel.” This is depicted in one of the Messiah’s great two-fold titles in Isaiah 9:6, “Wonderful Counselor.” This is also seen in Isaiah 28:29, “This also comes from the LORD of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom.” The word “counsel” in Isaiah 11:2 is the Hebrew word esah, which has the meaning of to advise, to plan, to purpose as well as to counsel. It is a related word to ya’as, which has a similar meaning to that of esah. God’s counsel (esah) is translated often as His plans and purposes. See Job 12:13; Proverbs 8:14; Isaiah 19:17; 46:10; Jeremiah 49:20; 50:45 and Micah 4:12. God does not need nor receive any counsel from any other, Isaiah 40:13. See also Romans 11:34. God as counsellor (ya’as), who plans and purposes in accordance with His own divine will, is declared in Isaiah 14:24, 19:12 and 23:8-9. In the New Testament, one of the great theological themes of the Bible is revealed in Ephesians 1:7-12: “In him we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, that he lavished on us along with all wisdom and prudence. He did this when he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of the time, to unite all things in Christ, everything in heaven and on earth. In him also we obtained an inheritance, being chosen beforehand according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. To the end that we who had before hoped in Christ, should live for the praise of his glory.” (bold intentional). The Spirit imparted “counsel” to the Messiah so that God’s purposes and plans would be perfectly carried out. The advice and counsel that the Messiah declares works in perfect unity with the plans of God so that God’s immeasurable and splendorous glory will be declared and displayed.

The fourth character quality, Isaiah 11:2, imparted by the Spirit to the Messiah (the branch) is “might.” The Messiah will demonstrate this might and strength, at His second coming to earth, when He will defeat His enemies, Psalm 2:9; Isaiah 11:4; 30:30; 63:1-6 and Revelation 19:11-21 and when He will rule the earth with a mighty rod (scepter), Psalm 110:2; Revelation 12:5; and 19:15. The word “might” is geburah in the Hebrew which is translated as strength, power and acts. God’s might is declared in the Old Testament in His redemptive and powerful acts. See Deuteronomy 3:24, 1 Chronicles 29:11; Job 12:13; Psalm 20:6; 21:13; 65:6; 66:7; 89:13; 106:2, 8; 145:4, 11, 12; 150:2; and Jeremiah 10:6. Strength is coupled with wisdom in Proverbs 8:14. In the New Testament, Mary called God the Mighty One in Luke 1:49, who has done mighty deeds, Luke 1:51. Paul declares in Ephesians 1:19, that believers may know, “what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe. This working of his tremendous strength.” Later in this same letter Paul exhorts believers to “be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty strength,” Ephesians 6:10. The
The apostle Peter encourages believers to “humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time,” 1 Peter 5:6. The Spirit imparted might to the Messiah so that He could fulfill the plans God had for Him, including enduring the suffering and offering Himself as an atoning sacrifice during His first advent and then to defeat His enemies, establish His kingdom and rule the earth at His second advent.

The fifth character quality, Isaiah 11:2, imparted by the Spirit to the Messiah (the branch) is “knowledge.” The word knowledge is the Hebrew word da’at which is related to the word yada, to know. These words have the general meaning of understanding, discernment and wisdom. Certain individuals in the Old Testament were endued with knowledge from God, Exodus 31:3; 35:31 and 1 Kings 7:14. Knowledge is related to the fear of the LORD, Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 which may be the reason the next character quality imparted by the Spirit to the Messiah in Isaiah 11:2 is the fear of the LORD. It is the LORD who gives wisdom, knowledge and understanding, Proverbs 2:6. God created the heavens and the earth by His wisdom, understanding and knowledge, Proverbs 3:19-20. Wisdom itself is related to knowledge, Proverbs 8:9. Knowledge belongs to God who knows everything about His creation and humans, Job 10:7; Psalm 94:11; 139:1-6; Isaiah 48:4 and God does not need to be taught knowledge from anyone, Isaiah 40:14. The apostle Paul, in his magnificent doxology which concluded the theological part of his letter to the Romans proclaimed, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how unfathomable are his ways!” Romans 11:33. In another letter Paul, proclaimed, “it is God who said, "Let there be light shining out of darkness," who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6. The Spirit imparted knowledge to the Messiah so that He would not only know the thoughts and intents of everyone’s heart, Matthew 9:4; 12:25; Luke 11:17; and John 2:24-25; but so He would also justify many by bearing their iniquities, Isaiah 53:11.

The sixth character quality, Isaiah 11:2, imparted by the Spirit to the Messiah (the branch) is “the fear of the LORD.” Isaiah 11:3 continues with, “His delight will be in the fear of the LORD.” Not only will the Messiah be imbued with the fear of the LORD, but He will find delight in doing so. The result of delighting in the fear of the LORD is that the Messiah will perfectly obey His Father in everything and thus bring glory to Him. This obedience to the Father is dramatically portrayed in John 12:27-28, “Now is my soul troubled. What should I say? Father, save me from this hour. But this is the very reason I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name. Then a voice out of heaven said, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The obedience of the Messiah, because of His righteous reverence (fear) of the Father, brings glory to the name of the Father. The “fear of the LORD” is described in Deuteronomy 10:12-13, “Now, then, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and soul, 13 to keep the command of the LORD, and his statutes, that I am commanding you this day for your good?” It is also described in Psalm 19:9, “The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.” As noted above, the fear of the LORD it is the beginning of wisdom, Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10. The Scriptures contain many other instructions and exhortations regarding the fear of the LORD, see for example, Deuteronomy 31:12; Joshua 4:24; 1 Chronicles 16:25; 2 Chronicles 19:7; 26:5; Job 28:28 Psalm 22:23; 33:18; 40:3; 128:1; Proverbs 2:5; 10:27; 14:27; 15:16: 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; Isaiah 33:6; Acts 9:31; and 2 Corinthians 5:11. The Spirit imparted the Messiah with the fear of the LORD so that He could not only delight in this fear (by delighting in the Father), but also so He would perfectly obey His Father to ensure the Father’s plans and purposes would succeed and thus bring glory to the Father. (bold intentional).

11:3-4 His delight will be in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears.
But he will judge the poor with righteousness, 
and decide for the oppressed of the earth with equity.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; 
with the breath of his lips, he will kill the wicked.

The prophet continues his description of the character qualities of the “branch”. The One to come will delight in the fear of the Lord. This delight will be a characteristic of this One who is intimately acquainted with God His Father and He will show His “fear” in obeying His Father. The “fear” is a profound reverence perhaps so deep that no one else who has ever lived could possibly comprehend. It is a reverence that stems from eternity and is far beyond the experience of a created being. Isaiah 11:3-4 continues with what may be an outcome of the future Messiah’s delight in the fear of the Lord, for He will judge and make decisions not with what His eyes see, or His ears hear, but He will judge with righteousness. These words may be misunderstood. It is not that there will be anything wrong with the Messiah’s hearing or eyesight. He will simply not just react when reports come to Him regarding some issue needing His judgment. Nor will He make a hasty decision based upon what He sees immediately in front of Him for even visual events can be orchestrated by others to convey a meaning that hides the truth. The Messiah will be completely righteous and just in all of His decisions for He knows intimately the thoughts and intents of the hearts of all people and therefore He will make fair decisions regarding the afflicted of the earth.

Isaiah 11:3-4 gives the clear understanding, as well as the rest of the chapter, that these actions of the Messiah happen during the return of the Lord to the earth as a Warrior King and during the millennial kingdom that He will establish. The latter half of the 11:4 is very conclusive on the time frame of the actions of the Messiah. The prophecy that “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth” and with “the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked”, can only have proper understanding if applied to the time of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Revelation 19:15 makes this certain: “Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it he might strike the nations. He will rule them with a rod of iron.” When He returns to the earth, the Messiah will not take much time to subdue His enemies, for He will slay the wicked with the breath of His Lips. Isaiah 11:4. As the Messianic King over the kingdom He will establish, He will rule over the earth with a rod of iron. Psalm 2 is a prophecy of this time when the Messiah will be installed as a King upon Zion, God’s holy mountain, to rule the nations which are His inheritance from His Father.

11:5 Righteousness will be the belt around his hips, 
and faithfulness the belt around his waist.

Isaiah gives further details about the character qualities of the Messiah as ruler over His kingdom. The Messiah will wear righteousness and faithfulness like a belt. These characteristics are definitely a portrayal of One who is Divine as Isaiah earlier recorded, “But the LORD of hosts will be exalted by justice, and God Holy One will demonstrate his holiness by righteousness.” Isaiah 5:16. See also Isaiah 65:16. King David extols these same virtues of God in Psalm 40:10. Another writer of the Psalms does so again in Psalm 119:75, as does another prophet, see Zechariah 8:8.

David L. Cooper comments on verses 3-5:

“The Block of scripture consisting of Isaiah 11:3-5 foretells Christ's judgment of the living nations when He returns to earth. This scene is set forth graphically in Matthew 25:31-46. When these two passages are studied carefully and compared, it will be seen that they are not speaking of a general judgment as we frequently hear mentioned. On the contrary these passages speak of the judgment of the living nations--those
persons who survive the Tribulation and who are upon the earth when the Lord returns. In neither passage is there anything said about a resurrection, nor is there anything suggested concerning the necessity for the new birth. The basis of that judgment is the attitude and conduct of these toward our Lord’s brethren according to the flesh—the Jews. He will separate these people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Some will be put on the right hand and others upon the left. Those upon the right hand will be placed there because of their kindly feeling toward Christ as manifested in their attitude and actions toward the least of His brethren during the time of their national sorrow and distress. From Psalm 24 we see that these people will receive a blessing from the Lord, even righteousness from the God of Jacob. They will be clothed in the righteousness of Christ when they see the facts regarding Him and receive Him. They will accept Him with their whole hearts at that time and thus be clothed with His righteousness. On the other hand, those placed upon the left side will be consigned to everlasting punishment because of their hatred toward our Lord, which feeling manifests itself in their refusal to be kind and gentle to His brethren, the Jews, during their national crisis throughout the Tribulation.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-December 1943).

The Kingdom of the Ruler: 11:6-10

Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer comment on Isaiah 11:6-10:

“The descriptions of the kingdom found in vv. 6-9 paint an idyllic picture of the King’s reign. These descriptions speak to the uniqueness of this King’s reign and the restorative regime that He will bring with Him. The King’s capacity to bring forth peace moves beyond the kings of the past. Isaiah is not simply looking forward to the installation of the next Davidic monarch but to the installation of the Davidic monarch, the supreme Son of David, who will live in full obedience to God and rule with God’s wisdom, strength, and justice (v. 5). Not only will the root of Jesse bring the peace and harmony described in 10:6-9, but His reign will also initiate God’s gathering of the remnant from the four corners of the earth (v. 11). This new King’s wise rule will attract even the nations and serve as a banner around which the nations will rally to hear His counsel (v. 10).” (Michael Rydelnik, James Spencer, Isaiah in the Moody Bible Commentary, page 1027).

The messianic kingdom be a unique place, unlike any except Adam and Eve would have experienced. It is a restored Eden where the animals will be at peace with one another and with humans. Infant children will be safe from any harm from the beasts of the earth and even a small child will lead these domesticated animals. It is also a place where the entire earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, “as the waters cover the sea,” 11:9. At no other time since the placement of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, will the earth witness such peacefulness and unhindered knowledge of the Lord. No one will need to search for the source of true knowledge, for the earth’s residents will know where to find it. As earlier recorded by Isaiah in 2:3:

Many peoples will come and say,
"Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us of his ways,  
and we will walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion the law will go forth,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The prophet Jeremiah also spoke of this time, Jeremiah 31:33-34

"But this is the covenant  
that I will make with the house of Israel  
after those days,” says the LORD.  
"I will put my law within them;  
I will write it in their hearts.
I will be their God, 
and they will be my people.

Each person will no longer have to teach his neighbor, 
or each one his brother, saying, 
'Know the LORD.'

For they will all know me, 
from the least to the greatest of them," says the LORD.
"For I will forgive their iniquity, 
and remember their sin no more."

11:6-9 The wolf will dwell with the lamb, 
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; 
the calf, the young lion, and the fattened cow 
will lie down together; 
and a little child will lead them.

7 The cow and the bear will graze together; 
their young ones will lie down together; 
the lion will eat straw like an ox.

8 The nursing child will play near the hole of the asp, 
and the weaned child will put his hand into the viper's hole.

9 They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; 
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD 
as the waters cover the sea.

These verses describe the peace and security of Messiah’s future kingdom. To accentuate the extent of the pervading peace, Isaiah in 11:6-7 described this time as one in which the animals will be in perfect harmony with each other and with humans. Carnivorous animals will no longer hunt and kill other animals for food. Lions will eat straw and likely other grains. Wolves will co-exist in peace with lambs which were once a preferred food source. Other fierce predators such as the leopard and the lion, representatives of the magnificent large animals, will live peacefully along-side of other animals who were once their prey. Domestic animals such as cows will graze with wild animals such as the bear and even their young will share the same pasture lying down together. Isaiah 11:8-9 portray the human-animal relationship which has been restored to a pre-curse existence. Isaiah describes a remarkable scene in which a very young child, one who is nursing, is playing beside the hole of a cobra and a weaned child would be able to put his hand on (or in) a viper’s den without fear of any harm.

The expression of the extent of this peaceful co-existence in Isaiah 11:9, “in all My holy mountain” may lead some to believe that it will only be upon Mount Zion where such peaceful co-existence occurs. However, this is not the case. For example, see J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 105. Other portions of Scripture provide similar details regarding this time when David’s throne is re-established and David’s greater Son, the Messiah will rule His Kingdom with righteousness and judgment and all who live upon the earth, including the animals will be free from the harm and destruction of the curse of God upon the earth. Refer also to Ezekiel 34:23-31; Hosea 2:18-23; and Romans 8:19-23.

11:10 In that day the root of Jesse will be raised for a sign of the peoples; 
the nations will seek guidance from him; 
his resting place will be glorious.
Isaiah 11:10 concludes this short vignette of the messianic kingdom. The words, “in that day” in this verse is a plain reference to a future time for in no other time or place has the Lord stood on the earth as a signal (or a banner) for the nations to come to worship Him as ruler of a restored kingdom. Also, in no other time or place on the earth has the Lord’s “resting place” (place of residence) has yet been described as glorious. It will only happen when He returns to establish His kingdom after all nations of the earth have been subdued and will acknowledge Him as the rightful King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Thomas Constable comments on vs. 10:

"In that day" points to the time when Messiah would rule (vv. 1-9). Then the Gentile nations would seek out the king who would represent His people, the Jews. The signal or standard in view seems to refer to a rallying point. The fulfillment could not be the return from Babylonian exile as the fulfillment, and the rallying of all sorts of people around Christ—as preached in the church age—does not fit the picture either.

Many liberal interpreters prefer the first explanation, and amillennialists 176 prefer the second. It must refer to a future worldwide turning to Messiah in which the Jews will be prominent (cf. Rom. 11). No resting place of Messiah was especially glorious during His first advent, but when He returns, Jerusalem will become "a glory" because He will rule there.

The title "root of Jesse" presents the Messiah as the source of the Davidic line (cf. Gen. 3:15; 17:6), not just the product of that line (v. 1). It also suggests His humble origin, as opposed to being described as coming from a King’s line.” [Note 176: E.g., Young, 1:396]. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 74).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 11:1-10
11:1-5 The Ruler of the Kingdom
11:6-10 The Kingdom of the Ruler

11. The Victory of the Remnant: 11:11-16

The section, Isaiah 11:11-16 shifts its focus to the remnant who will be gathered by the Lord from the ends of the earth to come and live with Him in his glorious kingdom. The themes of peace and prosperity are again prominent in this prophecy which again begins with “on that day” which in the context of the entire chapter, must refer to a time which has not yet come but is promised for those who remain faithful to the Lord. Thus, all of chapter 11 of Isaiah is a prophecy of the coming Messianic kingdom and there is no place for attempts to allegorize it to describe it as anything other than its plain meaning. In this section, 11:11-16, Isaiah declares that the Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who remain in the earth, vs. 11. He will set up a signal for the nations and He will assemble His remnant people, called the outcasts of Israel from every part of the earth, vs. 12. There will be harmony and peace between Judah and Ephraim (Israel), vs. 13. The returning remnant will take plunder from nations, both in the east and west and the nations will obey them, vs. 14. The Nile and Euphrates rivers will be easily forded by the returning remnant and a highway for them will be created, so they can easily travel to Jerusalem, vs. 16.

11:11 In that day the Lord will set his hand again the second time
to recover the remnant of his people that remains,
from Assyria and from Egypt,
from Pathros and from Cush,
from Elam, and from Shinar,
from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.
The prophet as recorded in Isaiah 11:11 provides details of the nations from where the Lord will recover the faithful remnant of His people and a setting the gathering of His people to Jerusalem. As noted above the words, “in that day” in the context of this chapter plainly refers to a time in the future that has not yet come. It belongs to a wider understanding of the “day of the Lord,” previously discussed in these study notes. It will occur in connection with the future messianic kingdom and from the details of the verses to follow, it must refer to the time when the kingdom will be in the beginning of its foundation. The Lord will recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people who will remain. It is the mention of the “second time” that has generated much discussion among scholars who have published works on Isaiah. It is best to understand that this reference is to a time in the future as the prior phrase, “on that day” indicates. The first restoration of the Jewish people occurred following the Babylonian captivity which was still future for the time of the prophet Isaiah. The locations, stated in the latter half of Isaiah 11:11, from where the remnant, were to be recovered, this second time, do not fit any other historical event since the days of the return of the Jews to Judah. Also, the re-uniting of Ephraim (Israel) and Judah has not yet occurred. The Jewish nation under the Roman oversight did not have harmony between these two peoples as the Jews of the southern nation of Judah were antagonistic at best with the blended peoples of Samaria. Also, the locations from where the remnant would originate according to 11:11 included “the islands of the sea” which would indicate locations from a much wider geographical area than the countries surrounding the nation of Israel. Thus, with all these details provided by Isaiah, it is evident that this restoration is yet to come and will originate from nations from afar, from which the “people who remain” will migrate to Israel. The reference to the “of his people that remains” is also set in a future context, just prior to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. These are the faithful Jewish remnant who have survived the terrors of the Great Tribulation. A specific reference to Ezekiel chapter 37 is suggested also to be read as background to Isaiah 11:11.

11:12 Then he will set up a signal flag for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

The prophet as recorded in Isaiah 11:12 refers again to the Messiah who will be a “signal flag,” or a banner for those who are to be assembled from the banished and dispersed peoples of Israel (Ephraim) and Judah, from the “four corners of the earth”. From this description, it is very plain that this restoration of the remnant 11:11, will be world-wide in its scope and certainly has not yet occurred. Also, all tribes of Israel will be involved in this assembling of the dispersed and outcasts of His people. A confirmation of this is in Revelation 7:4-5 where it is revealed that 144,000 people, who will be selected for a special sealing, will be taken from every tribe of Israel.

11:13 The jealousy of Ephraim will depart; those hostile to Judah will be cut off. Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not be hostile to Ephraim.

Isaiah 11:13 gives additional details about the peace of the newly formed kingdom. The Jewish people for the first time in their history will be at peace with each other. Compare this with Isaiah 9:21. In the Messianic kingdom, there will be no divisive religious factions between the Jews and no political enmity between those whom the Messiah chooses to assist Him in ruling His kingdom, and those who have been chosen to perform other tasks. There will only be One Ruler. All the Jewish people who remain and have survived the period...
just prior to the foundation of the kingdom will be at peace with this Ruler and with each other. See also Jeremiah 3:18; Ezekiel 37:15-28; and Hosea 1:11.

**11:14** They will swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines on the west; together they will plunder the people of the east. They will put forth their hand on Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will obey them.

The events recorded in Isaiah 11:14, must certainly occur before the regathered tribes of Israel set up their habitation in the messianic kingdom. These events may occur during their journey to the kingdom from the nations of the earth. Isaiah describes how the Jewish people will have the funds to begin a new life in this kingdom and have the prosperity to change the bleak and desolate landscape into a garden of green where vegetable and animal life can flourish abundantly. Israel’s long-time enemies will be subdued, and their plunder will be the basis for Israel’s new wealth. Those they have plundered will also be in subjection to them and will serve them. Their previous enemies will also willingly give of their wealth to the returning remnant of Israel as these nations will then have witnessed the horrors of the Tribulation and will themselves be waiting in expectation for the blessings of the kingdom that will be ruled in peace by the triumphant Messiah. See Isaiah 60:5, 11; and 61:6.

**11:15-16** The LORD will divide the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with his scorching wind he will wave his hand over the Euphrates River.

He will split it up into seven streams, and enable people to cross over in sandals.

There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that remain from Assyria, like there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.

The prophet describes what the Lord will do with the geographical features of the surrounding countries so that the Jewish remnant can walk unencumbered from these nations to the Israel. The statement of a “highway” for the remnant to use to travel to Israel is a common subject of Isaiah’s prophecy. See also Isaiah: 35:8-10, 43:19-21, 49:10-13, 57:14, and 62:10-12.

Thomas Constable comments on these final verses of chapter 11:

“God will defeat Israel's ancient enemies, Egypt and Babylonia. His judgments on them will involve the drying up of major barriers: the Red Sea and the Euphrates River (cf. Exod. 14:21; Rev. 16:12). This judgment will allow the Jews to return to the Promised Land, unhindered, from those parts of the world. They will be able to leave the territory of Assyria, where God had said He would send them captive, as easily as their forefathers left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea in the Exodus. Dividing the Euphrates into seven seasonal streams (Heb. nahal) may connote a perfect and complete taming, or even re-creation, by God.

Thus, this section of the book, dealing with the hope of God's deliverance (10:5—11:16), culminates in the reign of Messiah on the earth. Israel will re-gather in the Promised Land—from all over the world—trusting in God. The Gentiles, too, will acknowledge His sovereignty, which both they and His own people have forever resisted.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 74-75).
Chapter 12 is the culmination of the events recorded in Chapter 7 of Isaiah. The people of Judah faced an invasion from the kingdoms of Aram and Israel. The Lord gave Isaiah a message of safety and protection to king Ahaz if Ahaz and the people would simply trust in the Lord. But this message was rejected, and Ahaz wickedly rejected the Lord’s offer and sought military assistance from the evil nation Assyria against the two nations threatening Judah. Later, after invading both Aram and Israel, the Assyrian king turned against Judah and sought to destroy Jerusalem just as the Assyrian army had destroyed many Judean towns and cities. But the Lord would not let this happen and Isaiah recorded the complete destruction of the army of Assyria, Isaiah 37:36. Chapter 12 of Isaiah is a prophecy of the thanksgiving and praise that the remnant of the future will give to the Lord for His promised rescue of them and the Lord’s restoration of the promised land. In this section, Isaiah 12:16, the prophet declares, as in the words of a song, that the people will give the LORD thanks for although He was one angry with them, He now comforts them, vs. 1. They will also proclaim that God is their salvation and they will trust in Him and not be afraid, vs. 2. They will joyfully proclaim that they will “draw water from the wells of salvation, vs. 3. They will, in that day, call upon the name of the LORD and declare His deeds and proclaim that His name is exalted among the peoples (nations of the world), vs. 4. They will sing to the LORD because of His wonderful deeds and proclaim it to the world, vs. 5. They will shout and cheer for they will know the greatness of Holy One of Israel who is among them, vs. 6. Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah chapter 12:

“When the Lord delivered Israel from their bondage in Egypt, Moses and the children of Israel intoned a triumphant song of praise extolling the mighty deeds of God (Ex. 15:2-18).

Now that the Lord is about to deliver His people for a second time the prophet puts in the mouth of redeemed Israel a new song, similar in character to the former song, which they sang after they left Egypt.

The new hymn of Israel is divided into two strophes (not into two separate hymns as some maintain). The first verse 1-3, is a psalm of praise, extolling God’s compassion, expressing a renewed confidence in the Lord, as the fountain of their salvation.

The second strophe, (v. 4-6) exhorts God’s people to declare among the nations His great salvation and the presence in their midst of the Holy One of Israel. The whole hymn is saturated with an exuberant and joyful missionary spirit.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 186).

12:1 In that day you will say, 
"I will give thanks to you, O LORD; 
for though you were angry with me, 
but now your anger is turned away and you comfort me.

The chapter which is likely the song of Isaiah, begins in 12:1 with “In that day you will say”. As with many passages in this section, chapters 7 to 12, the context of “that day” is a reference to the Messianic kingdom to come. In that day, the remnant who have been called from the “four corners of the earth”, Isaiah 11:12, will give thanks to God for comforting them. God had been angry with the people of Judah, but His anger had
been “turned away.” See also Isaiah 10:24-25 and 60:10. The anger (also fury, wrath and indignation) of God is one of the great yet terrifying themes of Isaiah’s prophecy. Selected verses in Isaiah describing the anger of the Lord include, 5:25; 9:9, 12, 17, 21; 10:4-6, 25; 12:1; 13: 5, 9, 13; 14:6; 26:20; 30:27, 30; 34:2; 42:25; 48:9; 51:17, 20, 22; 54:8; 59:18; 60:10; 63:3, 5, 6; and 66:15.

After His anger had been turned away or spent, God was now a source of comfort to His people. See Isaiah 40:1-2 for another declaration of the comfort of God. Refer, for example to these selected verses in Isaiah, 49:13; 51:3, 12, 19; 52:9; 57:18; 61:2; and 66:13. Isaiah 12:1 projects forward to the second great division of the book of Isaiah, chapters 40-66, which can be characterized as the section of comfort. The first great division of Isaiah’s book, chapters 1-39 can be understood as the section of judgment.

12:2 God is my salvation;
I will trust and not be afraid;
for the LORD, yes the LORD,
is my strength and song;
he has become my salvation.

The prophet records that God is being praised for He is the people’s salvation, strength and song and the people say, they will trust in God and will not be afraid (of any circumstance or situation). Again, a comment from Victor Buksbazen is appropriate:

“Having experienced salvation Israel shall be filled with a new confidence and a new song. The word salvation, “Yeshua”, occurs three times in verses 2 and 3, and is the central theme of this passage. Here “salvation” implies not mere release from physical bondage, but a renewal of the spirit, resulting from Messiah’s reign and a true knowledge of God.

It is no sheer accident that the Messiah of the New Testament is called “Yeshua” – (anglicized “Jesus”), which in the Hebrew means salvation, or the Lord’s salvation: “…thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” (Mt. 1:21b).

Apparently Jesus Himself was fully aware of the significance of His name, when He declared in the home of Zaccheus: “This day is salvation come to this house….For the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Lk. 19:9, 10) Thus salvation, according to Isaiah, is inextricably inherent in the very name and mission of the Messiah.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 187).

There are three main parts to Isaiah 12:2:

(1) **God is my salvation** (repeated at end of verse: *he has become my salvation*).

Salvation could be understood to be the “message” of the entire prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah’s name has the meaning of “the Lord is salvation”. The prophet summarizes chapters 1-12 in this verse with the exclamation that “God is my salvation”. Salvation is such an important and critical theme to the message of Isaiah, that every mention of this word and its word group in Isaiah is worthy of a careful study by the student of Scripture. Some of the verses listed below speak of salvation from harm and from enemies and some definitely speak of eternal salvation. For example, Isaiah states in 45:17:

*But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or humiliated.*
The student of Scripture must examine each occurrence of the salvation word group in its context to determine the intent of God’s message regarding salvation. Refer to the notes in this study of Isaiah on the verses listed below for a brief description of the context and meaning of the salvation word group.

The major verses where Isaiah employs the word salvation are, 12:2 (twice), 12:3; 17:10; 25:9; 33:2, 6; 45:8, 17; 46:13; 49:6, 8; 51:5; 6, 8; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:16, 17; 60:18; 61:10; 62:1, 11; and 63:5. Major occurrences of the word “save” in Isaiah are, 25:9; 30:15; 33:22; 35:4; 37:35; 38:20; 43:12; 45:17, 22; 49:25; 59:1; 63:1 and 9. A precious part of the salvation word group is Savior which refers to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (in the N.T.). All occurrences of the word Savior in Isaiah are, 19:20; 43:3,11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16 and 63:8. A more extensive discussion will be provided in the notes for the verses which include the word “Savior”.

A closely related word to salvation is “redeemed” (and redeemer). Refer to the notes on the verses where the redeemed word group is recorded for a brief discussion on its importance to the overall message of salvation in Isaiah. Major occurrences of the word “redeemed” in Isaiah are, 1:27; 29:22; 35:9; 43:1; 44:22, 23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3,9; 62:12; and 63:9. Most occurrences of the word “redeemed” are also a translation of the Hebrew word, ga’al, except for Isaiah 1:27 and 29:22 which are a translation of the Hebrew word padah, which often occurs in the O. T. as a synonym for ga al. The occurrences of the word “redeemer” are worthy of a very detailed study. All occurrences of the word “redeemer” in Isaiah are, 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5; 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. As with the word “Savior” an extensive discussion will be provided for these verses in the notes for this study. Special attention in this study will be given to the meaning of “redeemer” which in Isaiah, all occurrences of this word are translated from the Hebrew word, ga’al, which implies that the Lord is Israel’s “kinsmen redeemer” See notes on the verses for “redeemer” for this discussion.

Isaiah has already described a portrait of salvation in chapter 1: 18 in terms of having one’s sins become white like snow or wool. He also had the personal experience of having his iniquity taken away and having God’s forgiveness for his sins in 6:4-7. He will later in 53:6 describe a Servant whom “the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all.” Also, in 53:11, this Servant will “justify many as he will bear their sins.” Some scholars tend to point to Isaiah’s understanding of God’s salvation in 12:2 as saving from something that would destroy them rather than salvation based upon faith that leads to an eternal destination. For example, refer to a discussion on this point from Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol.1, pages 282-283 and Geoffrey W. Grogan, Isaiah, page 93. However, Isaiah’s understanding of God’s salvation seems to point to both a saving from external dangers and to an eternal salvation as Isaiah 45:17 clearly states. How otherwise could the Apostle Paul declare to Timothy that “from early childhood have known the Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15. King David had an understanding of this salvation as being eternal as the last words of Psalm 23 testify. Also, the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 clearly describes the faith of the Old Testament saints who looked forward to an eternal destination with God even though they did not arrive at this destination while they lived on the earth.

(2) I will trust and not be afraid.
Isaiah adds to his deep understanding that God is his salvation with the practical declaration of how he should respond to this great truth (salvation). Because Isaiah knew assuredly beyond any doubt or confusion that God is his salvation, the prophet can positively and confidently avow that he will trust God (for everything) and he will not be afraid (of anything). The word “trust” is the Hebrew word batach, which has the meaning of “taking refuge in” and “being confident and sure,” and to be “reliant upon”. The word batach is translated as “trust” in 12:2; 26:3, 4; 30:12, 15; 31:1; 36:7, 9, 15; 37:10; 42:17; 50:10; and 59:4. It is translated as “confidence: in 32:17 and 36:4. Batach is translated as “trusting” in 36:5, and 6; and is translated as “trusted” in 47:10. It is also translated as “complacent” in 32:9, 10 and 11.
(3) **the LORD is my strength and song.**

Isaiah can have confidence in God and have no fear of anything or anyone “for” or because the LORD GOD is his strength and song. See J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, pages 108-109. The acknowledgement that God is “strength” to the believer is a common theme in Scripture. Isaiah for example makes frequent reference to God being his strength, (selected verses only), 28:6; 30:15; 33:2 (strong arm); 35:3 (strengthen); 40:29, 31: 41:1, 10 (strengthen); 45:24; 49:5; and 58:11 (strong). A close parallel to 12:2 is the words of Moses in his song to God following the miraculous escape from the pursuing Egyptians through the Red Sea, Exodus 15:2:

*The LORD is my strength and song,*

*and he has become my salvation.*

*This One is my God, and I will praise him;*

*my father's God, and I will exalt him.*

This is a common praise in many of the Psalms. Psalms 37:39; 46:1, and 118:14 are but a few excellent examples. Other prophets also delighted in the strength of the Lord. See Jeremiah 16:19 and Habakkuk 3:19. In the New Testament, the authors often praised God for providing strength. Examples include Paul in Ephesians 3:16; 6:10; Philippians 4:13; and Colossians 1:11; the writer of Hebrews, 12:12 and Peter in 1 Peter 4:11 and 5:10.

Isaiah also stated that God is his “song.” When a believer meditates on his creator as the Lord of the heavens and the earth, this meditation often results in praising God in song. Isaiah does more than offer praises to God in song. Isaiah proclaims that God Himself is his song. Isaiah here is expressing the greatest joy possible in declaring this truth. See also Psalm 40:3; 118:14 and Colossians 3:16.

**12:3 Joyfully you will draw water**

*from the wells of salvation.*

The prophet records, the words of the people who are rejoicing over the Lord who will “joyously... draw water from the wells of salvation.” These words may have been in the mind of Jesus as being prophetic for his message to the Samaritan women, whom came to a well to draw water as recorded in the fourth chapter of the gospel of John. Also, these words from Isaiah 12:3, may be prophetic for the message of Jesus proclaimed during the feast of Tabernacles (Booths) as recorded in John 7:37-39. See also Psalm 116:13. As this praise to the Lord in the context of Isaiah 12:3 is for a future kingdom, it nonetheless is a recurring theme of the Lord in being the One who provides salvation, like freely flowing waters to the thirsty.

**12:4 In that day you will say,**

"Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; declare his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.

Isaiah 12:4-6 form the second stanza of Isaiah’s song to the Lord. See above notes on this two-stanza (strophe) song in the introduction to chapter 12. In this second stanza (strophe) Isaiah prophesizes that the redeemed remnant will give thanks to God for His excellent deeds and make His name known among the nations. In 12:4, the prophet records a call for the rescued and restored remnant, “in that day” to give thanks to the Lord and call on His name and to make known the deeds of the Lord among the peoples. These are all the peoples of the newly established messianic kingdom. The message of the Lord’s wondrous deeds and of
His exalted name and of His Holy presence in Zion is to be made known to all who will be alive at this time. It is a message that the people will both seek, Isaiah 2:3 and know, Isaiah 11:9; Jeremiah 31:33-34.

12:5 Sing to the LORD, for he has done wonderful things; let this be known in all the earth.

Isaiah emphasizes that because the Lord has accomplished “wonderful” things, the people in the millennial kingdom of the Messiah are to praise Him in song. The word “wonderful” is ge’uwth in the Hebrew. This word is translated as “glorious” in the NIV and “gloriously” in the ESV. Isaiah recorded ge’uwth five times. In the DASV it is translated as “wonderful” in 12:5. It is translated as “go up” in 9:18; as “majesty” in 26:10; as “glorious” in 28:1; and as “proud” in 28:3. It also occurs three times in the psalms. In Psalm 17:10 it is translated as “arrogantly,” in Psalm 89:9 as “swelling;” and in Psalm 93:1 as “majesty.”

One of the most beautiful and majestic aspects of the eschatological messianic kingdom is that the wonderful (excellent and glorious) things that the Lord has accomplished will be known throughout the earth. Isaiah in this song, 12:1-6, echoes many of the same praises to God as does the psalmist in Psalm 98. This Psalm is also a song about the majesty of the Lord which will be displayed in His millennial kingdom. See also Isaiah 24:14-16a; 42:10-12; and 44:23.

12:6 Shout out and cheer, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah ends this very brief song of praise with a call for people who will live in Zion during the messianic kingdom to loudly exclaim a joyous shout for the great One in their midst who is proclaimed by Isaiah as “the Holy One of Israel.” This title of the Lord is one of the most common names that Isaiah gives to the Lord as it describes His intrinsic characteristic, “holiness”. This title occurs 25 times in Isaiah, twice in Jeremiah, three times in the Psalms and once in 2 Kings. For an extended discussion on this exalted title of the Lord, “the Holy one of Israel,” see notes on Isaiah 1:4.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 12:1-6
12:1-3 The Salvation of the Lord Praised
12:4-6 The Name of the Lord Proclaimed
The Nations Judged: Chapters 13-23

2. Judgment against Assyria: 14:24-27
5. Judgment against Damascus and Ephraim: 17:1-14
8. Egypt, Assyria and Israel to Worship the Lord: 19:16-25
9. No escape for Egypt and Ethiopia: 20:1-6
10. Prophecy of Babylon’s Fall: 21:1-10
15. Prophecy of David’s Key and the Peg: 22:20-25
16. Prophecy of Tyre’s Fall: 23:1-18

Isaiah 13:1 to 23:18 is the first major part of the greater section chapters 13 to 35 which Thomas Constable has entitled “God’s Sovereignty Over the Nations”. Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 76. Within chapters 13:1 to 23:18 are ten passages beginning with the words “the oracle” or “this oracle”. The Hebrew word for oracle is massa which has the meaning of a message that is a weight or a burden to be proclaimed. It is a message from the Lord containing His judgment or will upon its recipients. The ten occurrences of “oracle” in this section are, 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1 and 23:1. Each of these oracle references begin a separate message or burden from God proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah to a specific nation or people. As these proclamations announce destruction to the nations, they also contain promises of hope for the Jewish people. Comments on these promises of hope will be stated as they occur within this section. Similar oracles are recorded in Jeremiah chapters 46 to 51; Ezekiel chapters 25 to 32 and Amos chapters 1 to 2. For other oracle messages see Nahum 1:1; Zechariah 9:1; 12:1; and Malachi 1:1.

Another significant part of these chapters is the repetitive declarations, “the day of the Lord” and “in that day”. These are announcements of God’s judgment on specific nations resulting in their doom and destruction. Each of these specifically named nations would receive their own “day of the Lord” judgment. Some of these “day of the Lord” prophecies of doom have a near future historical fulfillment while others have an end times, or latter-day emphasis in which the entire world will be judged and have its punishment declared. Each “day of the Lord” passage will be studied in its context to determine its time of fulfillment. The day of the Lord declarations in this section are stated in, 13:6, 9, 13; 19:16, 18, 19, 21; 22:5, 12, and 25.

The reasons for God’s declaration of judgment on these nations can basically be stated as first, their evil and cruel treatment of the Jewish people; second, their pride and arrogance in placing their trust in their own power rather than in the Lord; and third, their worship of idols. These chapters stand as an indictment on any nation that would seek to destroy the Jewish people for their own evil reasons and for any nation that rejects the “Holy One of Israel” as being the only true God. Even though nations such as, Assyria and Babylon, were used by God to bring judgment on the Israel and Judah, they did not escape God’s judgment on themselves for the reasons stated above. Included in these oracles to the nations in chapters 13-23 are indictments against Israel (Ephraim), 17:3-14 and Jerusalem (Valley of Vision) 22:1-25.
David L. Cooper provides this introduction to this section of Isaiah:

“Isaiah, like the other prophets, looking beyond the borders of Israel, was given a vision of the future that awaited surrounding nations. He looked as far east as Babylon and foretold its complete destruction in “the day of Jehovah,” which is the Tribulation. In chapters 13 and 14 is a marvelous prediction of the final overthrow of this ancient enemy of God in the plains of Shinar. These two chapters should be studied, especially in connection with Jeremiah 50 and 51 and Revelation 18, all of which refer to the literal Babylon of the Tribulation. Babylon was never overthrown as was foretold by Isaiah and Jeremiah. Since those predictions have never been fulfilled, we may be certain that the Lord will make good His threat and will accomplish His purposes as set forth in these oracles. In chapters 15 and 16 an oracle relating to Moab, one of the enemies of Israel, is found. Chapter 17 contains a marvelous prediction concerning Damascus, and in 18 appears an oracle against Ethiopia. (This chapter has been misunderstood as referring to the United States, but, when the facts are examined, no evidence is found for such an identification.) In chapter 19 is an oracle concerning Egypt which has been fulfilled, up to vs. 15 at least; but the message concerning the altar to Jehovah and the pillar mentioned in vs. 19 has never been fulfilled. (This verse has been interpreted as referring to the pyramid. Such a position is untenable because the pyramid was hoary with age in Isaiah’s day, whereas the altar and the pillar were future from his point of view. It is, therefore, erroneous to interpret this prophecy as referring to the great pyramid. In chapter 20 appears an oracle concerning Egypt and Ethiopia. Several short oracles are found in chapter 21. Another one relating to Jerusalem especially appears in chapter 22, whereas the next one, in chapter 23, relates to Tyre, which was at that time the mart of the world.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah: Introduction, Biblical Research Studies Group, undated).

See also Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1 pages 286-295; J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, pages 110-112 and Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 76-79 for an extensive introduction on this section of judgment oracles (or burdens) on the nations and how they relate to the overall message of Isaiah. Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 77, presents a chart adapted from J. Alec Motyer which diagrams the structure of the greater section of chapters 13-27.


At the time of Isaiah’s pronouncement of judgment against Babylon, it had not yet risen to its full power and prominence and had not yet invaded Judah. This invasion would occur about a century later and thus these words of Isaiah are a remarkable statement of God’s omniscience. Isaiah most certainly would have known about the city of Babylon on the Euphrates River and its rebellious movements against the power and geographical dominance of the Assyrian empire. Isaiah, by his own understanding, however may not have predicted that Babylon would eventually overtake the mighty realm of Assyria. As with the prophecies Isaiah was given regarding the Messiah, these judgments on a nation that had not yet risen to dominant power. They can only be attributable to an all-knowing God with whom the world must acknowledge and worship. Another very significant truth to remember when studying these passages, is that it was, and it remains the divine prerogative of God to raise up or to bring down nations and leaders for His own purposes to accomplish His will on earth. No nations, nor peoples nor individuals, stand on their own strength and ability. They exist solely for God’s greater glory and to fulfill His plans for His creation. God is completely and victoriously sovereign over the works of His hands.

The most important lesson coming from Isaiah’s prophecy regarding Babylon is that Judah and specifically its king, Hezekiah, must not turn away from God while in dread of the assault by Assyria on their nation. They must not look to rebellious Babylon for their safety as is implied by the reception that king Hezekiah gave to the visitors (ambassadors) from Babylon as recorded in Isaiah chapter 39. Trusting in Babylon will lead to the exile of the people of Judah including some of the Hezekiah’s direct descendants to Babylon and the looting of all the treasures of the king’s house by the Babylonians, Isaiah 39:5-7. The Lord gave Isaiah
the oracle of the judgment on Babylon prior to the events described in Isaiah 39 as a warning not to invite the aid of the Babylonians in Judah’s helpless plight before the seemingly unstoppable advance of the Assyrians. In Isaiah’s account, Hezekiah turned to the Lord in faith and prayer, Isaiah 37:1-4. Hezekiah, who at times exhibited selfish motives later in his life, was one of the few kings of Judah who devoted himself to the Lord. The Scriptures point to him as one who: “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his forefather had done,” 2 Chronicles 29:2. Refer to 2 Chronicles 29-32 and 2 Kings 18-29 for a short history of the life of Hezekiah. Isaiah chapters 36-39 add to the Biblical biography of this renowned king.

David L. Cooper provides this assessment of chapters 13-14:

“WHEN we investigate Isaiah, chapters 13 and 14, we see that the prophet was speaking of "the day of Jehovah" which is the Tribulation--the last week of Daniel's prophecy, chapter 9--a period of seven years during which God will be pouring out His wrath upon the world because of its sin. That Isaiah was speaking of the Tribulation in these chapters is evident when we note in 13:10 that there will be great signs and wonders in the heavenly bodies and terrific judgments upon the earth. When this time arrives, God will purge the world of all wickedness and there will be very few men left. When we study this prophecy in the light of others, we see that this is what God does during the Tribulation. Moreover, additional proof that Isaiah saw the destruction of Babylon in the Tribulation is evident from the predictions that, at the time foreseen in the prophecy, Israel will be delivered once and for all (Isa. 14:1,2).

From the unanimous testimony of the prophets we know that Israel will never be delivered until the end of the Tribulation. From the facts just stated we conclude that Isaiah was speaking of the overthrow of Babylon in the end-time.

THIS passage assumes, therefore, that Babylon will be standing at the end of this age. From history we know that it was still standing in the first century, even though its glory had long since passed and it had sunk almost into oblivion as far as being a great metropolitan center was concerned. It seems quite possible that Peter was in Babylon when he wrote his first epistle (I Pet. 5:13). Just when it actually ceased as a city, history does not inform us. The modern town of Hillah is located on one corner of the site upon which Babylon formerly stood. Since Babylon is to be destroyed in the end-time and since it is not in existence at the present, it must arise from the dust of the past and assume the importance that is set forth in these predictions. When one carefully investigates Jeremiah, chapters 50 and 51, one will see that the destruction foretold there was never accomplished. Its overthrow, according to the prophet, was to be very sudden. Israel at the time is to be delivered and to enter into an everlasting covenant with God. She has never thus entered into such a covenant. From these and many other predictions of the prophets we know that this prophecy has never been fulfilled, but it awaits the future for its realization. From this fact also we know that Babylon must arise out of its grave of the past and become a dominant factor in the world at the end of this age.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-February 1944).

For the student attempting to understand the tension between what is a near-prophecy, and a far-prophecy of Babylon, it must be kept in mind that Old Testament prophets often presented their prophet's content through the lens of a telescope rather than through the lens of an eye-glass. Within these prophetic messages of Babylon, Isaiah depicted judgment that would come at the hands of the Medes, Isaiah 13:17, and also judgment that would be for a far future eschatological day as is evident from Isaiah 13:1-16. It is critical for the student to examine the context of each verse before determining which time frame is intended. As was seen in the “virgin birth” passage of Isaiah 7:13-16, there are verses that apply to the present political situation and others that apply to the future. It is the same with the prophetic judgment passages on Babylon. To simply lump the entire judgment as pertaining to the conquest of Babylon by the Medes, as many scholars do, is not being consistent with a literal interpretation of the text. In doing so, these scholars must, for example, either allegorize Isaiah 13:1-16 or assume these verses are merely hyperbole which leads to the conclusion that God is exaggerating thus, not being honest with His people. If God exaggerates with these
verses, then what other passages does He do the same and what passages can be trusted as being exactly what God intends to say?

Thomas Constable introduces the first oracle against Babylon:

“The reader would expect that Isaiah would inveigh against Assyria, since it was the most threatening enemy in his day, and since he referred to it many times in earlier chapters. However, he did not mention Assyria in this section but Babylon, an empire that came into its own about a century after Isaiah's time. Babylon was a symbol of self-exalting pride, and its glory, dating back to the tower of Babel (cf. 13:5, 10-11). Thus what he said about Babylon was applicable to Assyria and other similar self-exalting powers in the eastern part of Israel's world.

Similarly, what marked the Medes (13:17-18) was their fierce destruction of their enemies, which was already in view but would become more obvious in the years that followed. When the prophet lived and wrote, Babylon was a real entity within Assyria, but Isaiah used it to represent all the nations in that area that shared its traits (cf. Gen. 9:20-25; Rev. 17—18). Behind Assyria Isaiah saw the spirit of Babel, which he condemned here. Yet this is also a prophecy against real Babylon. "Babylon" is the Greek name for "Babel." (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 78).

The Final Destruction of Babylon: 13:1-16

In the section, Isaiah 13:1-16, the prophet again states that he is the son of Amoz and that he is declaring an oracle regarding Babylon, that he had seen, vs. 1. The LORD is preparing His special forces, His warriors to execute His anger. They are likened to troops from a far country to destroy the whole land in “the day of the LORD.” The LORD’s destruction will come upon those who will wail and be terrified and agony will seize hold of them, vss. 2-8. This “day of the LORD” will come with fierce anger. The land will be made desolate and sinners will be destroyed. On this day, the stars will fail to give light, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shine. The LORD will punish the world and the wicked because of their evil and iniquity. Humanity will be destroyed and only a few will survive because of the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of His fierce anger, vss. 9-13. Awful destruction will come upon humanity including women and children, vss. 14-16.

13:1 The oracle about Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.

Isaiah begins this major section of his prophecy with the word “oracle” which has the meaning of “burden” or a “message.” Isaiah also begins this section with a third introduction (see also Isaiah 1:1 and 2:1) of himself as “Isaiah, the son of Amoz.” This must certainly mark this section as an intended separate part of the writing of Isaiah which addresses material different from that of the previous twelve chapters.

Isaiah 13:1 contains the first reference in Isaiah to Babylon and it occurs a total of 13 times within the prophecy of Isaiah: 13:1; 13:19; 14:4; 14:22; 21:9: 39:1; 39:3; 39:6; 39:7; 43:14; 47:1; 48:14; and 48:20. Babylon (“Babel” in Greek), is a very prominent name within Scripture. Babylon as a city was founded by Nimrod who was a “mighty one on the earth” (Genesis 10:8-10). It was at Babylon on the plain of Shinar, that the peoples of the earth were influenced to build a city and a tower to reach into heaven and to make a name for themselves. Genesis 11:1-9. The inference was that the peoples were dominated by pride to defy God and seek to raise themselves above His dominance over them. The intent of mankind to rebel against God is an old story, as old as Adam and Eve. People possessed by willful pride seek to throw off God’s rule as they design to rule over their own lives. The created ones seek to overthrow their Creator. The result, then as now, is always disastrous for them. From the very beginning Babylon was doomed for destruction. In the Genesis account, God confused the language of the people, and as a result, the people were dispersed over
the face of the earth. In the last days, described in Isaiah 13:6 and 9, as “the day of the LORD,” God will finally crush the influence of Babylon and its fall will be complete and utterly without hope of resurrection. See also, Revelation chapters 17 and 18.

13:2 Set up a signal flag on the bare mountain top.
   Shout out to them,
   wave your hand
   for them to enter into the gates of the nobles.

God calls for a “signal flag,” which could be a standard or a banner, to be raised high so that the warriors God has chosen will rally to it. This may be the intent of the words, “enter into the gates of the nobles” or this phrase may be a reference to Babylon, since Isaiah mentions in 13:1, that his oracle concerns Babylon that many Bible Scholars understand as the future Babylon in the times of the end, as the text of Isaiah 13:1-16 seem to imply. However, there is also a closer historical fulfillment to the judgment upon Babylon at the hands of the Medes, as is evident from Isaiah 13:17-22. This earlier fulfillment of the judgment upon Babylon may be understood as the first of two distinct phases of God’s wrath upon this nation.

The call for a standard to be lifted up, 13:2, also occurs, for various reasons in Isaiah 5:26; 11:12; 18:3; 49:22 and 62:10. See also Psalm 74:4. The prophet Jeremiah in his prophecy 50:1-3 declares a similar message to that of Isaiah in 13:2. In the section 13:1-16, Isaiah concerns himself with the time of the end and specifically the days of the great tribulation when Babylon will be completely overthrown, never to rise again. The description of the Lord’s fury and burning anger in this section makes the end-times interpretation the only logical choice, for it fits no other historical period. As stated above, Isaiah directs his prophecy to the near future application or first phase of Babylon’s judgment in Isaiah 13:17-22, where it is revealed that God will stir up the Medes against them.

13:3 I have commanded my special forces;
   I have called my warriors to execute my anger,
   those who rejoice in my victorious exaltation.

The warriors in the conquering army will be called God’s “special forces” (consecrated ones) who “rejoice in my victorious exaltation.” They will be inducted into His service to carry out His will to destroy the future nation of Babylon during the tribulation period. It is solely God’s prerogative to call on any of His created beings to enact His sovereign will in judgment and punishment on any other(s) of His created beings. It is also God’s inalienable right to call those He has called His consecrated ones, mighty warriors and proudly exulting ones. It may be that the heavenly host itself may be called upon. The prophet Elisha and his servant were witnesses of such an event as described in 2 Kings 6:15-17. See also Zechariah 1:7-11. The purpose of God calling His warriors is to “execute” or carry out, His “anger,” which is also called His wrath, in 13:9.

God’s anger, previously directed to His people, is now turned against those nations who will destroy Judah. See Isaiah 10:24-27 and Joel 3:1-2. It may be popular for those who write devotional books about God to emphasize only His love and care for the people of the world. However, to ignore His emotions of anger and wrath against all forms of wickedness and ungodliness depicts an unbalanced picture of the earth’s mighty Sovereign Lord. In many passages of Isaiah, the prophet does not hold back his portrayal of God as One who decisively deals with sinfulness in displays of His righteous anger. Isaiah’s great name for God is “the Holy One of Israel” who desires all nations to worship Him in holiness and righteousness.
13:4-5 The tumult resounds on the mountains, like that of a great many people! There is an uproar among the kingdoms, like nations assembling together! The LORD of hosts is mustering the troops for the battle. They come from a far country, as far as the distant horizons. It is the LORD and the weapons of his anger, to destroy the whole land.

The prophet depicts this God-called army as causing such a noisy tumult on the mountains that it sounds as if kingdoms and nations are being mustered for war. God is calling these nations and kingdoms to be gathered or assembled together. This may be a reference to the great battle or campaign of Armageddon of which God will gather the armies of the world’s nations for the purposes of facing the destruction of the Lord, Isaiah 13:6. Other Scriptures depicting the gathering of the nations for a battle include Psalm 2:1-6; Ezekiel chapters 38-39; Joel 3:9-17; and Revelation 16:12-16. The destruction of Babylon within the greater “day of the Lord” is prophesized in Jeremiah chapters 50 and 51 and Revelation chapter 18. For an extensive discussion on the campaign of Armageddon and its climax, the return of the Messiah, see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, The Footsteps of the Messiah, Chapter 14, pages 309-357.

Introduction to Isaiah 13:6-13:

In Isaiah 13:6-16, the prophet extends the coming destruction of Babylon to the time of the “day of the Lord.” In 13:6, this coming day of the LORD is “near”, yet in the context of these verses it is evident that this is an end times event as 13:11-12 make abundantly clear. The claim that the day of the Lord will be near for Babylon can be understood in many ways but three are suggested as most probable. First, for the city of Babylon when it was at its zenith of power and influence, it was also at its apex of pride and arrogance and this is when it was captured by the Medes in 539 B.C. under its famous leader Cyrus but the city itself was not destroyed. The city had earlier been destroyed by the Assyrians in 689 B.C. but was later rebuilt. So, the “near” day of the Lord’s prophecy, could have been partially fulfilled by the armies of the Medes and the Assyrians, but most likely by the Medes as is stated in 13:17. Second, the reference to “near” in 13:6 is a time-constant warning similar to the warning in the New Testament that the events accompanying the return of Jesus Christ is “near” as stated in Revelation 1:3. God’s retributive judgment should always be understood as near for any nation who chooses to rebel against Him and reject His rule over them.

Third, as the complete destruction of Babylon did not occur under the Medes but is promised for a far future time in Revelation chapters 17 and 18, the prophecies regarding the destruction of Babylon in chapter 13 of Isaiah can be understood as a time-compressed event with two terminus points. It began with the overthrow of the city by the Medes and it will be fully complete just prior to the return of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. With all three of these suggested fulfillments being understood as being complementary to each other, Isaiah 13:1-6 can be seen as describing the complete destruction of Babylon and Isaiah 13:17-22 can be seen as describing the beginnings of this destruction.

Isaiah 13:6-13 is a prediction of the judgment of God on the entire world that will take place in the future time of the Tribulation described in Revelation chapters 6 to 19. God states, as recorded in these verses, that this time of destruction will be upon all the earth. The removal of the light from the stars, the sun and the moon, 13:10, are Scriptural signs that these terrifying days will have arrived. Scriptures such as Isaiah 24:23, Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:10; Joel 2:30-31; Amos 8:9; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25 and
Revelation 6:12-14 all attest that these signs in the heavens will be God’s unmistakable declaration to the world that its destruction has come.

**13:6 Wail for the day of the LORD is near.**  
It will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Isaiah calls this coming destruction “the day of the LORD.” For a detailed discussion on the “day of the Lord” see the notes in this study on Isaiah 2:11-12 and 4:2-6. Isaiah describes the day of the Lord as destruction from the “Almighty”. The Biblical use of the name Almighty, (Shaddai: almighty and El Shaddai: God Almighty), suggests that this name for God depicts His sovereign rule, power and might in ruling His creation with all authority. It also depicts God as bringing destruction on nations and individuals as punishment for their sin. Joel 1:15 for example, contains similar words of God’s coming destruction: “Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near; It will come as destruction from the Almighty.” Revelation 16:14 and 19:15 are other examples.

The importance of the name “Almighty” in Isaiah 13:6 is that the destruction decreed by God on the earth is certain and unchangeable and it will be a time of terrifying dread as the following verses attest. God makes this decree based upon the integrity and glory of His Name. He can make this decree on no other name as no other name, in heaven above or on earth below, has the absolute authority to bring to pass what is spoken beforehand by God. Isaiah employs a word play in the final phrase of 13:6, “destruction from the Almighty”. It has the meaning of “the destroyer destroys.” For an extended discussion of the “day of the LORD” see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come; A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, Zondervan, 1958, Chapter XV, pages 229-232. Also, Victor Buksbazen explains:

“The day of the LORD is described as “a devastation from the Almighty,” a typical Isaianic alliteration, k’shed mi-Shaddai – a destruction from Shaddai (v. 6). In the face of God’s wrath, men are helpless, their hands tremble, their hearts palpitate. They are in pain like a woman in labor, they pale, or alternately are flushed (v. 7, 8).

The LORD’S day is a cruel visitation. It is “dies irae et calamitatis,” a day of wrath and calamity. The Lord will devastate the earth and destroy its sinners (v. 9).” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 193).

**13:7-8 Therefore all hands will hang limp,**  
and every human heart will melt.  
They will be terrified.  
Pangs and agony will seize hold of them;  
they will be in pain like a woman in labor.  
They will look aghast at each other;  
their faces will be aflame.

Because of the destruction and devastation God will unleash during the coming “day of the LORD”, mankind will be unable to bear it. People of the earth will be terrified resulting in limp hands and melting hearts. They will be in great anguish and pain such as a woman in labor. That day will be so horrifying that people will look at each other in utter astonishment with faces aflame for they will not have witnessed anything like it nor will they be prepared for it. Even though the prophets, the apostles and the Son of God have told them, as written in the Scriptures, about this day to come, the people of earth will be woefully ignorant of its coming and will be totally unprepared to deal with it. Isaiah will further describe these days in chapters 24-27.
**13:9** The day of the LORD comes, 
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger;  
to make the land desolate,  
and to destroy its sinners out of it.

This “day of the LORD” is explained as being first, “cruel, with wrath and fierce anger.” It cannot be stressed enough that the Lord is preparing a time when His fury, wrath and burning anger will be fully displayed to all peoples on the earth. Isaiah does not “sugar coat” the judgment of God on all who continue in wickedness and rebellion against Him. See notes on Isaiah 9:19; 10:5 and 12:1 for a discussion on the anger of the Lord. This anger is vividly described by Isaiah in 30:27:

*Look, the name of the LORD comes from far away,*  
burning with his anger,  
and in thick rising smoke.  
*His lips are full of fury,*  
and his tongue is like a consuming fire.*

Isaiah further explains second, that the “day of the LORD” is a time for the Lord to make the land (earth) a desolation. The Lord intends to violently shake the earth, Job 38:13; Psalm 82:5; Isaiah 13:13; 24:18-23; Jeremiah 50:46; Ezekiel 38:20; Haggai 2:6, 21; Hebrews 12:26; and Revelation 6:12-17. God will also cause the earth to be burnt up during the “day of the Lord,” 2 Peter 3:10. See also Revelation 21:1. Finally, third, the Lord intends to remove sinners from the earth. See Revelation chapter 20. Babylon in the end times will fall and will not rise again, and the wickedness of the earth, caused by the corruption of Babylon, will be judged. See Revelation chapters 17 and 18. The Lord will finally remove sinners from the earth and then begin His eternal reign upon a new earth and within a new heaven. See Isaiah 65:17; 66:22 and Revelation 21:1-8.

**13:10** For the stars of heaven and their constellations  
will not give their light.  
*The sun will be darkened as it rises,*  
and the moon will not shine.

A significant cosmic sign will be made in the heavens as a declaration to the events of the “day of the LORD.” The LORD is making a bold statement about the timing of the “day of the LORD.” It will be accompanied by dramatic events in the heavens. No other time in all the earth has yet witnessed this “signature of the Lord” on His day. This sign in the celestial sphere accompanying the greater day of the Lord (the tribulation and Christ’s second coming) is declared in several Scripture passages, Isaiah 24:23; 34:4; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:14-15; Amos 8:9; Zechariah 14:6-7; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; Acts 2:20; Revelation 6:12-14; and 8:12.

**13:11** I will punish the world for its evil,  
and the wicked for their iniquity.  
*I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease,*  
*and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless.*

One of the most ominous reasons for the “day of the Lord” 13:9, and it accompanying cosmic sign is the Lord’s intent to bring punishment upon the wicked and evil doers of the world. The arrogance of the proud and the haughtiness of the ruthless will be decisively dealt with by the Lord. The standard by which the Lord
judges the ungodliness of the world’s inhabitants is His own holiness, Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; and 1 Peter 1:15-16. The face of God is against those who do evil, Psalm 34:15-16, and 1 Peter 3:12. The Hebrew word for “ruthless” is *ariyts*, which has the meaning of tyrannical, powerful and oppressor. This verse stands as a witness against all who are consumed by pride and arrogance and against those who abuse God through their position of power by their ruthlessness and oppressiveness. A day is coming when the Lord will finally deal with all the sinfulness of mankind. None will escape including those who arrogantly think they have power and can stand against God. God’s response to these proud rebellious rulers is recorded in Psalm 2.

**13:12** I will make human beings more rare than fine gold, 
people than the gold of Ophir.

The result of the judgment upon the wickedness of the world’s peoples is stunningly declared by Isaiah. God will render mankind as scarce as pure gold and specifically as scarce as the gold from Ophir. Some scholars are uncertain as to the exact location of ancient Ophir. Victor Buksbazen suggests that it was located in southern Arabia, Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 193. Ophir and its gold, most often in reference to king Solomon, is also mentioned in 1 Kings 9:28; 10:11; 22:48; 1 Chronicles 29:4; 2 Chronicles 8:18; 9:10; Job 22:24; 28:16 and Psalm 45:9.

**13:13** Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, 
and the earth will be shaken out of its place, 
at the wrath of the LORD of hosts, 
and in the day of his fierce anger.

The day of the Lord will witness the judgment of God with the trembling of the heavens and the shaking of the earth “out of its place.” Just how God will accomplish this without the complete destruction of the earth is not stated but God can certainly shake up His created order at any time He so desires with the result He alone has planned. During the latter part of the Tribulation, in a judgment described as the pouring out of the seventh bowl, and which specifically mentions Babylon, God will cause a great earthquake to cause such devastation that islands and mountains will be removed, Revelation 16:17-21.

Haggai 2:6-7 is another commentary on this time and its conclusion, “For this is what the LORD of hosts says. Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and all nations will come with their treasures. I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts.” At the conclusion of God’s judgment on the earth, during the period of Tribulation, God will cause the wealth of the nations to be brought to the capital of the Messianic kingdom and it will also be a time of peace for this coming kingdom as Haggai chapter 2:8-9 reveals.

Again, as recorded in 13:9, Isaiah reveals that this day will witness the outcome of God’s wrath and fierce anger. If the wicked of the world have any doubts as to what the “day of the Lord” will reveal, let them be forewarned. It is not a day they will welcome. It will be a day of terror and retribution for them. God is giving the wicked advance notice, so they will have no excuse it they enter this “day” unprepared. The only way to be prepared for the coming “day of the Lord” is to be counted among the righteous. This inclusion amongst the righteous can only come as a result of those who repent of their sins, Matthew 3:2, and call upon the Lord for salvation, John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. See also (selected passages only): Isaiah 1:27; 30:15; Ezekiel 14:6; 18:30-32; Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:4, 15; 6:12; Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 11:18; 17:30; and 2 Peter 3:9. The sad result however is that even in the midst of the tribulation, during the day of the Lord, the wicked of the world will not repent. See Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9 and 11.
13:14-16 Like a startled gazelle,
   and like sheep with no one to gather them,
they will return each one to their own people,
   and will flee to their own land.

15 Everyone who is caught will be thrust through;
everyone who is captured will fall by the sword.

16 Their infants also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes;
their houses will be plundered,
   and their wives raped.

The first phrase of Isaiah 13:14 is perhaps better translated in the NIV as, “Like a hunted gazelle, like a sheep without a shepherd.” The word “gather,” stated in the DASV, is the Hebrew word qabats, and has the meaning of collecting, gathering and assembling,” and in the context of Isaiah 13:14, it is appropriate to render the translation as “a shepherd,” thus making the phrase to state, “with no one to shepherd them.” See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, page 302. In the writings of Isaiah, qabats is translated as “gather,” “gathers,” or “gathered” (or similar), in 11:12; 13:14; 34:15, 16; 40:11; 43:5, 9; 45:20. It is translated as “come together” in 49:18; 54:7, and as “regather” in 56:8; 60:4, 7; 62:9; and 66:18. Its usage is a major theme in Isaiah. It is depicted as God gathering His people from the nations of the world and bringing them to Zion, when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, establishes His kingdom, following His return, and after rescuing His people and setting up a just and peaceful reign.

The intent of Isaiah 13:14 is that, during the destruction that God will bring on the earth in the end-times “day of the Lord,” people will scatter and flee like hunted animals with no one to guide or gather (shepherd) them. Those who have been displaced from their homelands will seek desperately to return to their own kindred. In 13:15, the prophet declares that any who are found (fleeing from God’s wrath), will not reach safety for they will be killed and in 13:16, Isaiah even more graphically describes the plight of children and wives who will find no protection in their homes. See also 13:18. This time of judgment will even come upon Jerusalem as stated in Zechariah 14:3. The Scriptures do not sugar coat the horrors of the judgment of God upon the wicked people of the earth. Thomas Constable comments:

“The reason for this wrathful judgment is the evil of wicked people, especially their pride and haughtiness (v. 11). Rather than human pride resulting in increasing good conditions for ever-expanding numbers of people, it will result in the cutting back of the human population (v. 12; cf. Rev. 6:8; 9:15). The heavens and the earth would shake at the fury of Yahweh of armies when His anger would burn against the wicked (v. 13; cf. 24:18; Joel 2:10; 3:16; Hag. 2:6-7, 21-22; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18). People will scatter like frightened gazelles and sheep in that day as they seek security (cf. Rev. 6:15-17). God's warriors will slay all the wicked that they can find. Children will be unmercifully slaughtered in the sight of their parents. Houses will be looted and women raped. (vv. 14-16).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 80).

The First Destruction of Babylon: 13: 17-22

As recorded in Isaiah 13:17-22, it will be the Medes who will be called upon by God to begin the first phase of the destruction of Babylon. The Medes were not influenced or tempted by monetary gain to retreat from their appointed task of conquering Babylon. They were incited to capture Babylon for imperialistic reasons and to remove Babylon as a world power. The Lord used the Medes and the Persians to accomplish His judgment against the Babylonians for they never ceased to worship idols, and they had rejected God who had called them into His service for their appointed task of bringing judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. But the Babylonians, like the Assyrians before them, abused their commission from God and sought to destroy and
cut off the people of Judah and Jerusalem rather than just punish them as God had intended. In this section, Isaiah 13:17-22, the prophet declares God’s words that He will stir up the Medes against them (Babylon), for the Medes were not interested by silver or gold, vs. 17. The cruel Medes will not spare the young men, women or their children, vs. 18. The demise of Babylon will be like Sodom and Gomorrah whom God destroyed, for it will not be inhabited by humans from generation to generation, only wild animals will roam in its ruins, vss. 19-22.

13:17 *Look, I will stir up the Medes against them,*
*who do not care about silver*
*and have no pleasure in gold.*

Isaiah reveals that it will be the Medes who God will stir up to bring destruction upon Babylon. Assyria was God’s chosen nation for punishment against Israel and Judah, Isaiah 10:5. Babylon was the nation God elected to punish Judah, Jeremiah 25:1-11 and Habakkuk 1:1-17. Isaiah now declares that Babylon itself will be destroyed by another of His chosen nations, the Medes. There has been much debate on the understanding of the historical destruction of Babylon as a city and as a nation. The city of Babylon was first “destroyed” by the Assyrian army under king Sennacherib in 689 B.C. but it soon was rebuilt. The first phase of the complete end to the dominance of Babylon in the ancient world came in 539 B.C., when the armies of the Medes and Persian, under king Cyrus defeated Babylon. Daniel 5:30-31 states: “*That same night Belshazzar, the Chaldean King, was assassinated. Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old.*” It is not exactly clear as to the role that Darius performed in the capture of Babylon. Some believe him to be the successor of Cyrus. For excellent discussions on “Darius” refer to Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994; and John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, Moody Press, 1971.

The second phase of Babylon’s demise came in 518 B.C. when Babylon was destroyed by the armies led by Darius Hystaspes and then later by the armies led by Xeres. Babylon has a history of survival and was a small outpost during the days of the first century. Some understand Peter’s reference to Babylon as recorded in 1 Peter 5:13 as a literal place while others understand it as coded reference for the church in Rome in the later first century. The ruins of Babylon lay undisturbed for centuries until “discovered” in 1899. For an expanded history of Babylon see Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel’s History*, Zondervan, Revised Edition, 1986, chapters 14 and 15. Isaiah 13:17 also states that the Medes: “*do not care about silver and have no pleasure in gold.*” Isaiah was given a prophetic look into the motives of the Medes who captured Babylon not for loot or treasure but because of their imperialistic motives to replace Babylon as the major world power.

13:18 *Their bows will cut the young men to pieces;*
*they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb;*
*their eyes will not spare even the children.*

The opening phrase of Isaiah 13:18: “*their bows will cut the young men to pieces*” could also be translated as the bows of the young men will be dashed to pieces. The second part of 13:18, which describes the ferocity of the Medes in not having compassion on the most vulnerable of the Babylonians, is similar to the times of the last days when future Babylon will be forever destroyed and all of the wicked will be brutally murdered. See also, Isaiah 13:16. Some understand that the prophecy in 13:18 was completely fulfilled in the conquest of Babylon by king Cyrus in 539 B.C. but this does not fit the historical accounts of this incident as very few lives were actually lost.
Thomas Constable comments:

“Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Babylon suffered defeat in 689 B.C. when Assyria (including the Medes), under Sennacherib, devastated it (cf. 23:13), but the city was rebuilt. Many interpreters believe that the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. to Cyrus fulfilled this prophecy, but Cyrus left the city intact. Others believe the destruction—that Darius Hystaspes began in 518 B.C., and that Xerxes later completed—was the fulfillment. Some scholars believe that what Isaiah predicted here never took place literally, at least completely, so the fulfillment lies in the future.

Many conservatives argue for a near and a far fulfillment. I think the destruction in 689 B.C. that resulted in Babylon’s temporary desolation fulfilled this prophecy (cf. v. 22b), and I believe there will also be an eschatological judgment of Babylon (Rev. 17—18), though not necessarily one that requires the rebuilding of the city. Destruction terminology, such as appears in this passage, is common in the annals of ancient Near Eastern nations. It speaks generally and hyperbolically of devastating defeat and destruction, but it did not always involve exact or detailed fulfillment.”

Note 191: E.g., Archer, p.621; the NET Bible note on 13:22.

13:19 Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor of the Chaldeans’ pride, will be like when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

Isaiah records God’s view of the fall of Babylon. The once proud and beautiful city described as “the glory of kingdoms, the splendor of the Chaldean’s pride,” will be completely destroyed and its fate will be like that of ancient Sodom and Gomorrah. For Isaiah to mention Babylon’s fate as compared to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, reveals the intense hatred of God upon the sinfulness and wickedness of the Babylonians. They refused to acknowledge the Holy One of Israel as the Creator and only true God, even though king Nebuchadnezzar was brought to recognize God’s greatness and sovereignty after seven years of wandering like a beast of the field, Daniel 4:28-35. However, there is no record of king Nebuchadnezzar truly repenting and serving God only. The worship of idols and false gods by the Babylonians continued right up until their capture by the Medes. Even Cyrus who was chosen to be God’s instrument in the eventual release of the Israelite captives, Isaiah 44:28 -45:4, did not know, acknowledge nor worship God. This is further evidence that God will use any person or nation, regardless of their devotion to Him to accomplish His purposes and establish His will upon His creation.

13:20-22 It will never be inhabited, from generation to generation. Not even the bedouins will pitch their tent there; nor will shepherds make their flocks to lie down there.

21 But wild beasts of the desert will lie down there, and their houses will be the haunts of howling creatures. Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will frolic there.
Wolves will cry in their former fortresses,  
and jackals in the luxurious palaces.  
Its time is near,  
and its days will not be prolonged.

The city will “never be inhabited from generation to generation.” Long before the birth of Christ, the site of ancient Babylon was a great mound in the midst of a desert. Earlier, the armies of Alexander had begun to excavate the mound in an attempt by the Greeks to establish the site as an eastern capital, but Alexander died suddenly, and the excavation work was halted. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“This is the heart of the prophecy concerning the ultimate fate of Babylon, which was so remarkably fulfilled. Beautiful Babylon, the pride and glory of the Chaldees will become like Sodom and Gomorrah, never to be inhabited again, not even by the wandering Arab, but shall become the eerie haunt of all kinds of spooky desert beasts. Just as Isaiah predicted, Babylon became a heap of ruins and was never inhabited again. The ruins of ancient Babylon were excavated in the 19th century in the neighborhood of the city of Mosul, in modern Iraq.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 194).

Isaiah states that the site of Babylon will be a place for habitation only by desert creatures such as the owls, goats, hyenas and jackals. The Hebrew words for the creatures stated in 13:21 are very obscure and difficult to translate. For example, the NKJV and NASB translation of ya’anah in 13:21 is “ostriches.” See also Isaiah 34:13; 43:20. The KJV has “doeleful creatures,” and the NIV has “jackals,” J. Alec Motyer comments, Isaiah, page 116, that “Desert creatures should probably be “desert wraiths” and wild goats, goat-demons (Lv.17:7). In Revelation 18:2, the Apostle John proclaims, “Fallen, fallen in Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.” As it was foretold for the first destruction of Babylon, so it will be for its final destiny. God has and will again make Babylon unfit for human habitation.

Introduction to Isaiah 14:1-23:

The beginning two verses of chapter 14 set the context for this section. Although many may understand them as referring to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity the words of Isaiah in these verses do not fit the historical record of this return. Isaiah describes a far future time when the people of Israel will “take captive those who were their captors and they will rule over their oppressors,” vs. 2. This best fits the days following the second coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, when He will defeat the enemies of His people Israel and lead them to Zion to live in peace. Also, the taunt against the king of Babylon verses 4-23, is set within this end-times period as described in vs. 3. The taunt against the king of Babylon therefore is directed against the Antichrist who will rule the world system called Babylon during the great Tribulation period. Alternately, some Biblical scholars attest that there will be a literal city or nation of Babylon which will have a dominant and world-wide sphere of influence over the political, religious, cultural and economic realms during the days of the tribulation.

14:1-2 But the LORD will have compassion on Jacob,  
and will again choose Israel,  
and set them in their own land.  
The foreigners will join with them,  
and they will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.
The nations will take them,  
and bring them to their place;  
the house of Israel will possess them  
for servants and for handmaids  
in the land of the LORD.  
They will take captive those who were their captors,  
and they will rule over their oppressors.

Isaiah 14:1-2 should have been a source of great comfort for the people of Israel in Isaiah’s day and should remain so for our day. The prophet declares that the LORD will not forsake His people but have compassion upon them. They will settle (have peaceful rest) in their own land free of oppression and fear of their enemies. As stated above this event has not yet occurred. They will take their captors captive and will rule over their oppressors, not as cruel masters, but as co-worshippers of the Messiah.

14:3 On the day the LORD will give relief from your sorrow,  
and from your trouble,  
and from the hard labor you were forced to serve,

Isaiah 14: 3 is the key to the understanding of the timing of the “taunt” against the king of Babylon. The prophetic words of 14:4-23 regard events that will occur on the day, which could be a shortened reference to the “day of the Lord.” These events will occur when the LORD will give His people “rest” from their pain, turmoil, harsh service due to their enslavement. God’s covenant people will be scattered among the nations and will again in the end-times live under the dominance of a cruel master which the Book of Revelation calls Babylon. Isaiah 14:3 therefore links the eschatological timeframe of 14:1-2 with 14:4-23 and places these events at the time when Israel will be rescued by the returning Messiah and brought to Mount Zion, where they will live in peace and rest. When they are safely settled in their promised land, they will speak out against the Antichrist who will be the king or ruler of the world political and economic system which will be called Babylon, or as some believe, upon the literal city and nation of Babylon of the last days.

14:4-23 The Taunt Against the King of Babylon

Those who interpret Isaiah chapter 14:1-23 as a contemporary event during Isaiah’s day or referring to the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon speculate on the identity of this Babylonian king. Some suggests it was Sennacherib who was king of Assyria and Babylon because Babylon during his day was a vassal of Assyria. Others point to Merodach-baladan as the king being referenced by Isaiah. Other kings of Assyria also were known as kings of Babylon, such as Tiglath-Pileser and Sargon II. Others suggest that the king of Babylon was not any particular historical figure, but one who is representative of all the wickedness, arrogance and cruelty of the Babylonian empire. Also, there is also a popular viewpoint that at least some of the content of these verses are attributed to Satan as the diabolical motivator of any wicked king of Babylon.

As mentioned in the notes of 14:3 above, the time frame for this taunt best fits the context of chapter 14, is the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ who will defeat the final “king” of Babylon, the Antichrist and it is the Messiah who will cause the remnant of His people to settle peacefully and safely in His land, which Isaiah had earlier called Immanuel’s land, 8:8. This movement of the remnant to this land of peace and safety is described in Isaiah chapter 35 and also often in chapters 40-66. In the section, Isaiah 14:4-23, the prophet declares that “you,” referring to those of Jacob and Israel, vs. 1, should take up a taunt against the king of Babylon, saying, “How the oppressor has ended! How his fury has ceased! vs. 4. The LORD has broken the scepter of rulers and stuck down people in His wrath, those who have ruled the nations with unrestrained
aggression, vs. 6. The earth, including the cedars of Lebanon, rejoices because “you” (the king of Babylon), have been laid low, vss. 7-8. Sheol is excited to meet “you,” and the dead spirits of previous kings of the world’s nations will exclaim that “you” have become as weak as they are, vss. 9-10. “Your” pomp is brought down to Sheol and “you” have maggots and worms as a bed, vs. 11. “You,” who were called a “shining star” and “son of the morning,” and “you” who laid the nations low, have been cut down to the ground, vs. 12. “You” had said in your heart that I will ascend into heaven and raise my throne above the stars of God, and that I will make myself like the Most High. “You” will be brought down to Sheol and those who will see you in the pit, will ponder over “you” and say, “is this the one who made the earth to tremble, and shook kingdoms, and made the earth like a desert and overthrew its cities and would not release his prisoners, vss. 13-17. All the kings of the nations have their own tomb, but “you” have no sepulcher and have been trampled underfoot, like a corpse, because “you” have destroyed your land and killed your people and “you” a descendant of evildoers will never be mentioned again, vss. 18-20. “Your” children will be slaughtered for they must never rise up and possess the earth. The LORD will rise up against them and cut off the memory of Babylon and its survivors and it will be destroyed, vss. 21-23. Note: the “you” in the above verses refer to the king of Babylon, who many understand to be a reference to the Antichrist in the days of the tribulation. For example, one such scholar who understands that the “king of Babylon” in this section refers to the Antichrist is Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum who explains:

“The one who has claimed to be god, the one who has been able to perform all kinds of miracles, signs and wonders, the one who exercised all the authority of Satan as he ruled the world, will be quickly dispensed with by the Word of the Lord Jesus. For the second time, the Antichrist will die. The arrival of the soul of the Antichrist into Hell is described in Isaiah 14:3-11.

At the time of the redemption of Israel, the Jews whom the king of Babylon sought to destroy will taunt him with a new parable (vv.3-4) commemorating the greater strength of the power of God (v. 5). The Antichrist ruled the nations of the world (v. 6), but then the whole world will rejoice his demise (vv.7-8). As the spirit of the Antichrist enters into the gates of Hell, the previous great ones of the earth already there will suddenly rise up off their thrones (v. 9) in utter shock that he, too, has entered the abode of Hell (v. 10). Yet it will be so, and all the pomp of his worldwide reign will suffer the demise of Hell (v. 11).

Having described the spirit of the Antichrist in Hell, Isaiah later describes the fate of his dead body on earth in 14:16-21. Many will be able to view the body of the Antichrist and will stare in utter disbelief that he died so suddenly and easily, considering he had shaken the kingdoms of the world and the earth trembled in his presence (vv. 16-17). While lesser kings are buried in pompous sepulchers (v. 18), not so the Antichrist, whose body will be trampled by the fleeting feet of his own armies (v. 19). In fact, his body will never be buried at all (v. 20)….. His entire family will be destroyed so that they can not try to follow in their father’s footsteps and attempt to rule the world (v. 21).” (Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, The Footsteps of the Messiah, pages 352-353).

14:4 you should take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, 'How the oppressor has ended! How his fury has ceased!'

The word “taunt” is the Hebrew word mashal which has the meaning of “parable” or “proverb”. It is a discourse directed against the “king of Babylon” who is not specifically identified in the text of Isaiah chapter 14. Because of the context of the previous three verses, these notes will indicate that this taunt will take place in the far future during the day when Israel’s Messiah will return to defeat the Antichrist, whom many understand will be the final king of Babylon. After defeating the Antichrist, the Messiah will establish the Messianic kingdom. Isaiah 14:4b records the beginning words of this taunt. The people of God, whom the
Messiah has returned to rescue, will remark that finally their cruel oppressor has ended (has been put to death) and they will also say that his fury has ceased.

14:5-6 The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,  
the scepter of the rulers,  
that struck down the peoples in wrath  
with relentless blows,  
that ruled the nations in anger,  
with unrestrained aggression.

The people who will be with their Messiah at the beginning of the millennial kingdom will rejoice because the LORD has removed the wicked power of the Antichrist and has destroyed the symbol of his rule represented by the breaking of his staff and scepter. The staff and scepter in 14:5 represents the awful tyranny of Antichrist in his unrelenting assault and persecution upon the nations of the world during the future Tribulation period. See Revelation 13:1-10 for a description of the wicked power of the Antichrist. In Revelation 13:5 it is revealed that the duration of the brutality will last for forty-two months. This intense time of world-wide destruction and persecution is also known as the Great Tribulation which begins after Antichrist breaks his seven-year covenant or agreement with Israel at the end of the first three and half years or the middle of the “seven” (some English versions have “week”), as prophesized by Daniel: “Then he will make a firm covenant with many for one week. In the midst of the week, he will cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes devastation, until the decreed end will be poured out on the one making the devastation.” (Daniel 9:27 DASV).

As Daniel makes clear, there is a complete destruction (to come upon Antichrist) that is decreed (from the Lord), which will come at the end of forty-two months of unrelenting destruction and death caused by Antichrist. See also Daniel chapter 7 for a description of these future days involving the Antichrist and the return of the Messiah, the “Son of Man.” At the end of this intense time of persecution and wicked slaughter, Daniel records in 7:21-22: “While I was watching, this horn made war with the holy ones and prevailed against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was rendered for the holy ones of the Most High. Then the time came for the holy ones to gain possession of the kingdom.” When the saints take (gain) possession of the kingdom, following the Great Tribulation, and the victory of the Messiah over the Antichrist, they will proclaim the words Isaiah has recorded in 14:4-21.

14:7-8 The whole earth is at rest and quiet;  
they break forth into singing.  
8The cypress trees rejoice over you,  
the cedars of Lebanon, saying,  
“Since you were laid low,  
no woodcutter comes up against us.”

When the Antichrist is put to death by the returning Messiah the earth will enjoy rest and quiet and will rejoice with shouts of joy. Even the cypress trees and the cedars of Lebanon will celebrate because they will no longer have to endure the cutting down of the trees of the forest by the forces of the Antichrist.

14:9-11 Sheol from beneath is excited to meet you at your coming;  
it rouses the spirits of the dead to greet you,  
all the leaders of the earth.
It raises up from their thrones
all the kings of the nations.

10 They all will respond and say,
"You too have become weak as we are!
You have become like us!"

11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol,
so also the sound of your harps,
the maggots spread like a bed under you,
and worms cover you.

The taunt against Antichrist (the king of Babylon) in Isaiah 14:9-11 addresses the reception that the human soul of Antichrist will receive when he (the soul) descends into Sheol. Sheol is a place where the souls of the dead wait for resurrection. It is also translated as the “grave”, “hell” and “the pit.” Several Old Testament passages refer to this place: Numbers 16:30; Job 10:21-22; 26:5-6; 14:21; Psalm 6:5; 88:10-12; 94:17; 115:17; 139:8; 143:3; Proverbs 15:11; 27:20; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; and Isaiah 38:10. For an extended article on Sheol, refer to “The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible”, 1975. Vol. 5, page 395.

The Scriptures are clear that humans do not simply cease to exist upon death. Humans possess a soul, Matthew 22:37, and this soul will not die with the body but will exist forever with attributes of existence and knowledge. The final destination of the soul is established while humans live upon the earth as a composite creation of body and soul. It is only during this living stage where humans can decide to either reject or accept the gospel and either believe in or reject Christ, thus determining themselves upon the destination of their eternal souls. Many will reject the message of the gospel and live in perpetual torment while others will accept the gospel by faith in Christ and will live forever in heaven with their Lord. Many believe that, both in OT times and NT times, the souls of those who believe in faith, the good news of God’s provision for them, thus becoming justified (declared righteous), will immediately, upon death, go to be with the Lord and not languish in what the O.T. calls Sheol. A proof of this understanding is found in the account of the mount of transfiguration where Moses, who died and Elijah, who went directly to heaven, both as living souls met with the transfigured Christ. See Matthew 17:1-8. If this understanding is correct, then the souls described as in Sheol when the soul of the Antichrist descends into it, are souls of those who did not believe or have faith in God. If they had believed, their faith in God would have been “reckoned” (put to their account) to them as righteousness, Galatians 3:6-9. See also Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:16-17 and 5:1.

The un-regenerated souls of the kings of the earth who await the final resurrection at the Great White Throne judgment, Revelation 20:11-15, will be aroused when the soul of Antichrist descends into Sheol (hell). These souls, especially those who had been kings and leaders of the nations, will rise up and meet the solitary soul of the earth’s most brutal tyrant. They will be amazed that this one has become as weak, without any power or influence, just as they are. They will comment on the fact that the pomp and music of the musical instruments that once accompanied the Antichrist upon earth has been exchanged for the dismal situation and location of Sheol where “maggots are spread out as your bed beneath you and worms are your covering,” Isaiah 14:11. Not only is the decay of the body in the grave demeaning to these souls, but also the realization that their existence is one of misery and dismay. There is no escape or return to their previous earthly existence.

14:12-14 How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star,
son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
13 You said in your heart,  
"I will ascend into heaven;  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God.  
I will sit on the mount of the assembly,  
on the distant slopes of Mount Zaphon.  
14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High."

As recorded in Isaiah 14:12, the prophet speaks of someone who “has fallen from heaven” and is called, “shining star, son of the morning.” In Luke 10:18, Jesus may have used this prophecy by Isaiah to refer to the fall of Satan, “He said to them, I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven.” The King James Version translates this verse, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations.” It is only a conjecture or speculation to make this verse refer absolutely to Satan. The word Lucifer in the KJV is the Hebrew word helel, meaning “shining one” or “day star.” The DASV translates this word as “shining star.” Because of the KJV translation of helel as Lucifer, many Biblical scholars of past generations, stated that Isaiah 14:12-14 referred directly to Satan.

Another popular viewpoint is that Isaiah was using “Canaanite mythology” as the background to his picture of the pride of the king of Babylon. Many critical O.T. scholars claim that the writers of the Old Testament often used contemporary pagan beliefs and social, religious and legal practices as background texts for their writings. However, this claim does not have to mean that the OT Scriptures originate from pagan sources. God is the author of Scripture and if God allowed the human writers of the O.T. to reference contemporary practices and texts, it was done entirely under the superintendence of His divine care and protection of His Word. One should be very careful in discerning as to what is the proper hermeneutical approach to interpreting Scripture before coming to any conclusion that the human authors of the Scriptures were influenced by pagan beliefs and practices or endorsed them.

Those who suggest that 14:12-14 may likely refer to Satan directly, may conclude that the words of 14:13-14 refer to the person mentioned in 14:12 as these words seem to fit the sin of conceit or pride for which Satan was condemned, 1 Timothy 3:6. There are five occurrences of “I will” in Isaiah 14:13-14: (1) I will ascend to heaven; (2) I will raise my throne above the stars of God; (3) I will sit on the mount of assembly; (4) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; and (5) I will make myself like the Most High. The similarities with the evil intentions of Satan as stated throughout Scripture seem to contradict claims by some scholars that these five occurrences of “I will” could only apply to a king or to all the kings of Babylon. A similar statement of pride attributed to an earthly king is described in Ezekiel chapter 28. Contained in Ezekiel chapter 28 are words of pride and arrogance, 28:11-19, that many scholars apply to Satan. However, in the wider context of Isaiah chapters 13 and 14, this taunt or parable seems to best fit the man of sin whom Satan will empower during the tribulation to come. It is within the period of tribulation to come that Babylon will finally and completely fall.

In dramatic contrast and irony to the hubris statements to be made by the future Antichrist as recorded in Isaiah 14:13-14, the next section in this chapter,14:15-21, reveal the actual destination of the soul of this satanically empowered individual. Instead of ascending above the clouds, this soul will descend down into Sheol. Instead of any attempt to make himself like the Most High, this soul will be powerless and unable to make any impact upon or have any influence in the earth or in the heavens. Instead of boastful statements of pride once made by this once ruthless ruler, this soul will hear the taunts of the dead who will deride him because of his great fall into disgrace without pomp of burial or descendants to follow him.
14:15 Yet you will be brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit.

The word “Yet” begins this next section of the taunt against Antichrist. It is a fitting and jarring reminder of the divine One who actually rules history, even history yet to be experienced. Isaiah reveals the words of God in judgment against this future tyrant. As stated above, the retributive judgment of God is in startling contrast to what this tyrant thought would be his destiny. The impact of the fall of Antichrist into Sheol is expressed in the word “thrust.” The Hebrew word yarad means to be “brought down” as translated in the DASV. Antichrist will be without any power to prevent his descent into the dismal place of the dead. Isaiah accentuates the deepness of this descent by adding, “to the depths of the pit.”

14:16-19 Those who see you will gape at you;
they will ponder over you, saying,
"Is this the one who made the earth tremble,
and shook kingdoms,
who made the world like a desert,
and overthrew its cities,
who would not release his prisoners to go home?"

All the kings of the nations,
all of them rest in glory,
each one in his own tomb.

But you are thrown out of your own sepulcher
like a deplorable branch,
clothed with the slain who were thrust through with the sword,
who go down to the stones of the pit;
like a corpse trampled underfoot.

The words of the prophet recorded in Isaiah 14:16-19 emphatically restate the taunt of the “dead” kings, 14:9-11 who are roused up to meet the soul of Antichrist when he descends into Sheol. The sarcastic taunt of souls of the “dead” kings are a stinging indictment upon this future brutal dictator and murderer of his own people. In 14:16-17, the “dead” kings ask: “Is this the one who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who would not release his prisoners to go home?” In this descriptive taunt, these “dead” kings emphasize the horror of the brief days of the future time of Antichrist. It is little wonder that God will shorten the duration of these days for if not, no life would have been saved. “For in those days there will be tribulation, like there has never been before from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, or ever will be. Except the Lord had shortened those days, no one would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom he chose, he will shorten those days. Mark 13:19-20.

In Isaiah 14:18-19, the prophet reveals that the human remains of the future Antichrist will not be honored by a burial place or tomb. Without a tomb or place of remembrance, the body of Antichrist will be like a trampled corpse. The body of Antichrist will be thrown unceremoniously into a pit, 14:19 and lie among the stones at the very bottom of this dark and dismal hole. Some biblical scholars understand that Ezekiel 39:1-16 also describes the death and burial of Antichrist.
14:20-21 You will not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land, you have killed your people. The descendants of evildoers will never be mentioned again.

21 Get ready to slaughter his children for the sins of their fathers. They must never rise up, and possess the earth, and fill the face of the world with cities.

A final judgment upon Antichrist is stated in 14:20-21. Because of the murderous actions of this cruel tyrant who ruined his own country and had slain his own people, his descendants will be eliminated. His sons will also face death and the line of Antichrist will forever be extinct so that his sons will not be able to rise up and possess the earth nor fill the face of the earth with cities. The intent of the Lord will be to remove from the earth any living memory of this despotic world ruler, who even though his days of terror are to be short, they were foretold as the cruelest and most catastrophic days the earth will ever have to endure.

14:22-23 "I will rise up against them," says the LORD of hosts, "and cut off the memory of Babylon and its survivors, its offspring and posterity," says the LORD.

23 "I will turn it into a possession of owls, and pools of marshy water; I will sweep it with the broom of destruction," declares the LORD of hosts.

The words of God, as recorded by Isaiah are now directed in judgment against future Babylon. The presence and influence of Babylon on the earth is to be completely and finally removed. All of Babylon: “its survivors, its offspring and posterity,” 14:22 will be eliminated. The geographical location of Babylon, 14:23 will no longer be a place for human habitation for the Lord concludes: “I will sweep it with the broom of destruction.” The Apostle John further details this destruction of Babylon as recorded in Revelation chapters 17:1-19:2.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 13:1-14:23
13:1-5 The Lord’s chosen Destiny for Babylon
13:6-16 The Lord’s chosen Day for Babylon
13:17-22 The Lord’s chosen Destroyers of Babylon
14:1-3 The Lord’s chosen Deliverance of Jacob
14:4-23 The Lord’s chosen Devastation of Babylon

2. Judgment against Assyria: 14:24-27

The previous declaration of judgment on Babylon was for a nation just emerging on the world’s stage who as yet had not risen to its terrifying dominance of its local neighbors and of the nations in the wider area of the ancient near east. In 14:24-27, Isaiah announces the judgment of God on a nation posing an immediate threat to Judah and to its neighbors. In this section, God makes a significant declaration regarding His sovereign intention. The declaration is so determinative that God uses language similar to that of His covenants in which the thing promised will for certain happen just as God said it will happen. As declared by Isaiah in this
section, the LORD of hosts has sworn that what He has planned will happen, vs. 24. God will destroy the Assyrians in His land and the yoke of the Assyrians will be removed from the shoulders of His people, vs. 25. It is a plan devised against all the nations of the earth for the LORD has planned it and who can annul it or turn back His outstretched hand? vss. 26-27.

**14:24** *The LORD of hosts has sworn,*

"Surely, just as I have intended, so it will be; just as I have planned, it will happen."

Using covenant-like language, “*the LORD of hosts has sworn.*” God makes His intention plain to all who will hear or read the declaration of judgment on Assyria. It is not often that God elevates His promises to that of an oath and when He does, it almost always refers to the covenants He has made with His chosen people. These covenants are confirmed with an oath. References to the covenant oaths include: Genesis 26:3, Genesis 50:24, Deuteronomy 9:5, 1 Chronicles 16:15-16, Psalm 105:8-11, Jeremiah 11:5, Acts 2:30 and Hebrews 6:13-17. If the premise that God uses an oath to confirm His covenants is valid, then in Isaiah 14:28, the usage of “sworn” may be said to represent His covenant keeping promise to His chosen people. In this instance, God is protecting His people, His Land, and His choice of the Davidic throne upon which His Son will one day rule the earth from Mount Zion.

**14:25** *I will break the Assyrian in my land,*

*and on my mountains trample him under foot.*

*Then his yoke will be removed from off my people,*

*and his burden pulled off their shoulders.*

God declares that Assyria will be the nation that will be broken in His land and will be trampled on God’s mountains. The yoke imposed by Assyria upon His people, who live in the land and on the mountains of God, will be removed from their shoulders. In very certain and clear language, God declares that the land and mountains of Judah and by implication all of Israel, are God’s land and God’s mountains. Students of Scripture would be wise to remember the implications of the covenants of God regarding His land. God intends to keep His promises. He will accomplish exactly what He has set out to do. These promises are not hyperbole and high-sounding exclamations to make God appear to be in control of the world He has created. God is sovereign and is absolutely in control of the earth and the universe!

**14:26** *This is the plan devised against the whole earth;*

*this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.*

God extends his declaration to include the whole earth. God’s hand is stretched out against all nations. His plans and purposes for His chosen people and the land He has promised them will not be frustrated nor thwarted by any actions of any nation on the earth, past, present or future. In a later passage in Isaiah, God states the status of all nations before Him as described in 40:15-17:

15 *Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket,*

*and are regarded like dust on the scales;*

*he picks up the islands like fine dust.*

16 *Lebanon is not enough to burn for sacrificial fire,*

*nor are its animals sufficient for a burnt offering.*

17 *All the nations are as nothing before him;*

*they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.*
14:27 *For the LORD of hosts has planned, who can annul it? His hand is stretched out, who can turn it back?*

As recorded in Isaiah 14:27, the prophet reinforces the intentions and plans that God has for His land and His people. Isaiah would later bring emphasis to these comments in 40:23 by stating that it is God who: “reduces rulers to nothing, and makes the judges of the earth worthless.” The Apostle Paul expressed a similar declaration of God’s power, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31. The answer to God’s questions in Isaiah 14:27 and to Paul’s question in Romans 8:31 is a resounding “no one can stand against God.” The hostile plans of the nations bring God to laughter, Psalm 2:4. With all the Scriptural evidence for God’s absolute control of the world and its nations so plainly stated, students of the Scriptures should have the utmost confidence that God will do exactly as He has planned, and those who oppose God should shudder in terror at what will happen to them if they continue in their unbelief and rebellion against Him.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 14:24-27
14:24 The Certainty of God’s Plan
14:25 The Contents of God’s Plan
14:26 The Comprehensiveness of God’s Plan
14:27 The Confidence of God’s Plan


In the passage, Isaiah 14:28-32, the prophet states that an oracle was given to him (from God), in the year that kind Ahaz died, vs. 28. The oracle concerned the Philistines and commanded them not to rejoice because the rod that struck them, (Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III) was broken (died) because the next king of Assyria, (likely Sargon II) would inflict them more severely, like a poisonous viper. The fruit of this poisonous viper would likely be Sargon II’s son, Sargon III, who is described as being like a fiery serpent, vs. 29. The Philistines may assume they are now safe, but they will face famine and the remnant of their race will not survive, vs. 30. The cities and gates of the Philistines are to wail because their destruction comes from (a nation), from the north, vs. 31. If an answer could be given to the messengers of the advancing Assyrians (the northern nation), it is that God will only protect His oppressed people who will find refuge in Zion, (and not the Philistines), vs. 32.

14:28 *In the year that King Ahaz died this oracle was given.*

Isaiah provides a time frame for the issuance of the judgment against Philistia. Isaiah stated that it was “in the year king Ahaz died.” Historically this would have been c.715 BC. Isaiah begins this separate judgment regarding Philistia with the introduction that it is an oracle, which is the Hebrew word *massa,* meaning burden or message from God. Isaiah often began his judgment messages with the title of “oracle.” See Isaiah 13:1, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 19:1, 21:1, 21:11, 21:13, 22:1, 23:1 and 30:6. The introduction of prophetic messages with the title of “oracle” is first introduced in Scripture in relation to the evil intentions of Balaam, the son of Beor, against the people of Israel as recorded several times in Numbers chapter 24. Although Jeremiah uses this title, it is always in reference to God’s derisive indictment against His rebellious people who look to oracles for their evil intentions. See Jeremiah 23:33, 23:34, 23:36, 23:38, 50:36 and Lamentations 2:14. Other miscellaneous usages of oracle are found in 2 Kings 9:25, 2 Chronicles 24:27, Proverbs 30:1 and Proverbs 31:1.
14:29 Do not rejoice, all you Philistines,  
because the rod that struck you is broken;  
for out of that serpent’s root will come a more poisonous viper,  
and his fruit will be a fiery serpent.

As recorded in 14:29, Isaiah cautions the people of Philistia not to rejoice because of the rod that had struck them was now broken. Even though this oracle of judgment was dated by Isaiah as the year King Ahaz died, it is most unlikely that Ahaz was the person identified as the “rod” that struck Philistia. King Ahaz never led an attack on Philistia, instead it was the Philistines who invaded Judah, 2 Chronicles 28:18. It is most probable that the “rod” and the “serpent” which struck Philistia was the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III who had earlier invaded Philistia. The viper or venomous serpent who is described as the serpent’s root is most likely king Sargon II and his “fruit” (son) described as a flying serpent was king Sargon III. These kings were very aggressive in their dominance of the nations of the ancient near east. For an extended discussion, refer to Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, pages 324-325. John Oswalt also provides some additional historical background to this prophecy of Isaiah, See John Oswalt, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, pages 331-332

14:30-32 The firstborn of the poor will graze in pasture,  
and the needy will lie down in safety.  
But I will kill your root with famine,  
it will slay even your remnant which survived.

31 Wail, O gate!  
Cry, O city!  
You are melted away, O Philistia, all of you;  
for out of the north comes smoke,  
and there is not a single straggler in its ranks.

32 What will one answer the messengers of this nation?  
"The LORD has founded Zion,  
and in her the oppressed of his people will find refuge."

Even though some people of Philistia would have felt secure and safe enough that even the most helpless would be without fear at the news of the broken rod, God promises, Isaiah 14:30, that the root of the Philistines would be destroyed by famine. As the people of Philistia watched the smoke from the destruction of many cities in Judah just to the north, they would wail and become demoralized (melt away) by the terror of the approaching Assyrian armies, 14:31. Isaiah asks a rhetorical question in 14:32, How will someone answer the messengers who had sought an alliance with Judah against Assyria, while watching the destruction of the cities in Judah? Isaiah, in the latter half of 14:32, reminds the people of Philistia that it was the Lord who had founded Zion and those of His people who are afflicted will seek refuge in Zion. God will protect His beloved city which He has founded, and His people will find refuge in His city. A soon to be realized prophetic fulfillment of this statement is recorded later in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37 when the Assyrian armies who were threatening Jerusalem with destruction were themselves destroyed by the angel of the Lord. See Isaiah 37:36.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 14:28-32
14:29 No comfort for Philistia
14:30 No security for Philistia
14:31 No future for Philistia
14:32 No alliance for Philistia

Moab was a small nation located between the Arnon and Zered rivers on the east side of the Dead sea. The first mention of Moab in the Scriptures is found in Genesis 19:30-38. Following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his daughters fled to the mountains of Zoar, and stayed for a while in a cave. The daughters, convinced they and their father were alone in the world, contrived together to get Lot drunk with wine and then to have incestuous relations with him to produce offspring to preserve their family lineage. The child born to the firstborn daughter was a son whom was named Moab who became the father of the Moabites.

The Moabites and Israelites had a very contentious history, some of which is recorded in Numbers, chapters 22 to 25. One of the greatest sins committed by the Israelites during this time is recorded in Numbers 25:1-5. The men of Israel had sexual relations with the women of Moab and sacrificed to the pagan gods of Moab. This evil action was attributed to the counsel of Balaam, Numbers 31:16, who had earlier been used of God to bring blessings upon Israel instead of a curse as requested by Balak, king of the Moabites, Numbers 22 to 24. Other significant incidents of warfare between Israel and Moab are recorded in Judges chapter 3; 2 Samuel chapter 8; 2 Kings chapter 3 and 2 Chronicles chapter 20. Major prophecies against Moab other than in Isaiah chapters 15 and 16 are recorded in Jeremiah chapter 48; Ezekiel chapter 25; Amos 2:1-2 and Zephaniah 2:8-9.

The major complaint of the Lord against Moab was that even though the peoples of Moab and Israel were related through Lot, the Moabites became arrogant and taunted and reviled Israel, Zephaniah 2:8-9, and because they scorned Israel during its days of failure and said the “house of Judah was like all the nations” thus claiming the Israelites were not led by God. Ezekiel 25:8-11. However, the Lord is gracious and forgiving to the people of Moab and as stated in Jeremiah 48:47, God will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days. This is likely a reference to the days of the future Messianic Kingdom.

In this passage, Isaiah 15:1-9, the prophet declares an oracle about Moab. He states that in a single night the cities Ar and Kir of Moab are devastated and destroyed, vs. 1. The people of Dibon grieve in the temple in the high places and Moab also wails over the cities of Nebo and Medeba, vs. 2. Everyone wears sackcloth and are falling down as they are weeping, vs. 3. Other cities also cry out, including Heshbon, Elealeh and Jahaz as do the warriors of Moab, vs. 4. Isaiah states God’s intense feelings for the people of Moab, (the cousins of the Israelites), for His heart cries out to them. The nobles of Moab flee to far-away places and raise up a cry of destruction, vs. 5. Water and greenery are laid waste, and as the people flee, they bring with them any abundance they have saved up, vss. 6-7. The cry of the people of Moab echo throughout their land and the LORD promises to destroy, (a lion will attack) those who escape their land, vss. 8-9.

15:1 An oracle about Moab.
In a single night Ar of Moab is devastated and destroyed;
in a single night Kir of Moab is devastated and destroyed.

Isaiah, in 15:1, records an “oracle,” the Hebrew word massa, meaning a burden or message from God concerning Moab. Occurrences of “oracle” within Isaiah chapters 13-23 occur in 13:1, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 19:1, 21:1, 21:11, 21:13, 22:1 and 23:1. The lengthy section 15:1 -16:14 contains the burden. See introduction to this section directly above. Isaiah begins his oracle with a statement of the swiftness of the judgment on two of the cities of Moab, Ar and Kir for they will be devastated and ruined “in a night”. “Ruined” is the Hebrew word damah, meaning “silenced” which signifies the total destruction that will happen to these cities of Moab.
The timing of this destruction will be in three years according to Isaiah’s statement in 16:14. Ar was located on Moab’s border with Ammon near the Armon River. It is also mentioned in Numbers 21:15, 28 and in Deuteronomy 2:9, 18, 29. Kir may be a shortened form of Kir-Hareseth which was located in the central section of Moab. Isaiah mentions Kir-Hareseth in 16:7, 11. See also 2 Kings 3:25. The shortened form of Kir occurs in Isaiah 15:1 and 22:6. See also 2 Kings 16:9; Amos 1:5 and 9:7.

15:2-4 Dibon goes up to the temple, to the high places to grieve. Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba; all their heads are shaved, every beard is cut off.

3 In their streets they wear sackcloth; on their housetops and in town squares, every one wails falling down with weeping.

4 Heshbon and Elealeh cry out, their voice is heard even to Jahaz. Therefore the armed warriors of Moab cry aloud; their souls tremble.

Dibon once belonged to Gad but was captured by Moab. Jeremiah also brings a message of judgment against Moab, recorded in Jeremiah chapter 48 and mentions Dibon in 48:18 and 22. The reason they are grieving and wailing in their temple, bayit in the Hebrew, is because of the failure of their god Chemosh to save them from the sudden catastrophe that has come upon them and their land. The people have clothed themselves with sackcloth and have shaved their heads and cut off their beards in their grief. This removing of their hair was a sign of great humiliation and mourning. See also Isaiah 22:12; Ezekiel 7:18; Amos 8:10 and Micah 1:16. Their warriors also cry aloud because of the destruction of their land. Nebo, Medeba, Heshbon, Elealah and Jahaz, like Dibon were cities in Moab where complete destruction has been decreed as judgment from the Lord. Jeremiah declares that: “Then Moab will be ashamed of their god Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence.” Jeremiah 48:13. It is not started which country or army was responsible for the defeat of Moab. The Assyrians may have been the invaders for they certainly were the most powerful nation who were seeking physical and political control of the eastern Mediterranean countries during the time of the prophetic ministry of Isaiah.

15:5-9 My heart cries out for Moab; her nobles flee to Zoar, even to Eglath-shelishiyah. They weep as they go up the Ascent of Luhith; in the way of Horonaim they raise a cry of destruction.

6 For the waters of Nimrim are gone; the grass is withered, the new shoots fail, there is nothing green.

7 Therefore the abundance they have acquired, and that which they have saved up, they will carry away over the Wadi of the Willows. The cry echoes around the territory of Moab; their wailing reaches to Eglaim, their wailing reaches to Beer Elim.
For the waters of Dimon are full of blood;
yet I will bring even more on Dimon,
a lion will attack those of Moab who escape,
even the remnant, those left in the land.

Isaiah expresses God’s heart-felt grief over the coming destruction of Moab. He also expresses God’s deep feelings for Moab, as stated in Isaiah 16:9 and 11. Isaiah records that the LORD is very concerned for the plight of the Moabites who are fleeing from desolate conditions as stated in 15:6. The Moabites are suffering greatly, and the prophet records God’s genuine anguish for those who are the cousins of the Israelites. Isaiah also speaks for God, who, even when expressing deep feeling for the Moabites, cannot let their sin go unpunished. In 15:9 Isaiah records God’s words, stating “yet I will bring even more on Dimon a lion will attack those of Moab who escape.” The motif of a lion portrays a destroying army which has been sent by God to bring terrifying judgment on those who have sinned against Him. See also Isaiah 5:29; Jeremiah 50:17; Ezekiel 22:25 and Joel 1:16. It is this horrific future that the Moabites will face, even if their destruction was due to their own sins and evil actions. Isaiah, in the midst of prophesying doom, records God’s deeply held feelings and emotions for those who will face His judgment. Although, some may understand that it is Isaiah, and not God, who is expressing these deep feelings of grief and sadness for the cousins of Israel. However, many understand that Isaiah is expressing God’s feelings for these people, as Thomas Constable explains,

“The Lord also expressed His grief over Moab's coming judgment through the prophet (cf. 21:3-4; 22:4; Jer. 9:1). Isaiah took up God's words in his own mouth and represented God's thoughts and words by using the first person singular (cf. 16:9).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 88).

See also, Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 203-204 for an extended discussion on Moab and specifically the so-called “Stone of Mesha” which gives some historical background to the relationship between Israel and Moab.

Isaiah chapter 16: Introduction

In chapter 16 of his prophecy against Moab, Isaiah gives further details of one of the responses of the Moabites to their impending destruction. Since the Moabites were closely related to the Israelites they were aware of the sacrificial system God had decreed the Israelites use for dealing with sin. In a dynamic contrast, which certainly is more than just coincidence, Isaiah mentions a lion in chapter 15:9 and then in the very next verse, chapter 16:1, the prophet mentions a lamb. Although the context of these passage deals with God’s judgment on a pagan nation, the mention of a lion as a conquering symbol, immediately followed by the mention of a lamb as a salvation symbol is a juxtaposition of terms, without overstating the case, that points to the person and work of the coming Messiah. The connection between the lion and the lamb in this passage points to the incredible richness of Scripture. This may seem to be reading too much into the words of Scripture, but it is certainly interesting that the lion and lamb motif is mentioned in the same context of Isaiah 16:5, which is a very clear reference to the future reign of the Messiah.

Also, in this chapter the prophet Isaiah, records the words of God for the Moabites who gives them words of comfort in the face of their peril. Isaiah also records God’s words to the Israelites, exhorting them to provide protection for the fleeing peoples as they seek shelter from the advancing enemy. The direction of their flight seems to be southward as the invaders are coming from the north. It is possible that the invaders were the Assyrians and the time frame is not known exactly but could fit the Assyrian southern advance in the years of 715-713 B.C. or during the destruction caused by the Assyrian armies under King Sennacherib in 701 B.C.
As stated in Isaiah 16:1-14, the prophet declares that (tribute) lambs are to be brought by the Moabites through the desert to the mount Zion, vs. 1. The Moabites have been removed from the land like birds that have been pushed from their nest, vs. 2. The people of Israel are to provide shelter for the fleeing Moabites, vss. 3-4. A throne will be established, and One will sit upon it, seeking justice and executing righteousness in the tent of David, vs. 5. Because of their pride, the Moabites will wail for each other and because their land has been devastated, vss. 6-8. The prophet records that God weeps for the people of Moab, and His heart groans for them. The Moabites have no joy in their harvest nor in their worship, vss. 9-12. The LORD has declared that, in three years, the glory of Moab will be despised. Only a few survivors will be left, vss. 13-14.

16:1: Send lambs for the ruler of the land from Selah, through the desert to the mount of the daughter of Zion.

The words in the NASB, “Send the tribute lamb,” Isaiah 16:1, may be understood as a gift from the king of Moab to the king of Judah requesting the aid of the Israelites to provide shelter for the peoples of Moab. It was the practice of an earlier king of Moab, Meshna, who was a sheep breeder, to send payment (tribute) to the king of Israel in the amount of 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. This practice continued until the death of Ahab in 853 B.C. Meshna rebelled against Israel and refused to pay the tribute. This incident and the resulting war between Moab and the Israel-Judean alliance is recorded in 2 Kings chapter 3. The tribute lamb was sent to “the ruler of the land” to the “mount of the daughter of Zion” which is a reference to the king in Judah who reigns from Mount Zion. It is interesting that the peoples of Judah and Moab are both called daughters in the first and second verses of this chapter.

16:2-5 Like birds hovering around, after being pushed from the nest, so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon.

3 "Give counsel, make a decision; make your shade like night at noon; hide the outcasts;
   do not betray the fugitive.

4 Let the fugitives of Moab settle with you; be a hiding place for them from the destroyer.”

For the oppressor has ended, destruction has ceased, those trampling others have vanished from the land.

5 The throne will be established by loyal love; he will sit on it in truth in the tent of David, judging, seeking justice, and quick to execute righteousness.

The Moabites had fled south, like frightened birds, to the “fords of the Arnon” and also to Sela, which is present day Petra in Jordan, which is further south. From Sela the Moabites sent a plea of desperately needed help. They would be at the fords of the Arnon awaiting a response from Judah. In 16:3-5 Isaiah either records the words of the Moabites or makes an impassioned plea on their behalf to the king and people of Judah to “hide the outcasts” and “do not betray the fugitive” and also to “let the fugitives of Moab settle with you” and “be a hiding place for them from the destroyer.”
In Isaiah 16:4 the words of the prophet take the reader to a time in the future when the “destroyer”, and the “oppressor” who are the armies invading Moab, have “vanished from the land.” The word “destroyer” is the Hebrew word sadad which has the meaning of powerful, ravage, spoil and devastate. It is usually translated as destroyed or destroyer in Isaiah: 15:1; 16:4; 21:2; 23:1, 14; and 33:1. “Oppressor” is the Hebrew word muwts which occurs only in 16:4, and has the meaning of threshed. It is translated as “extortioner” in the KJV with the margin note of “wringer”. The action of the destroyer “trampling” is the Hebrew word ramas and also occurs in Isaiah in 1:12; 26:6; 28:3; 41:25 and 63:3.

This may be a prophetic reference to the complete destruction of the Assyrian army during the reign of Hezekiah, Isaiah chapters 36-37. It could also be a far future reference to the period just prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom when the returning Messiah will conquer all who oppose the remnant of chosen people. This far future reference is possible due to the prophetic words of 16:5, in which a clear statement of the ruler of the millennial kingdom is made within the context of the plea from Moab and Isaiah for help for the oppressed Moabites.

In Isaiah 16:5 a clear messianic prophetic message is stated, “The throne will be established by loyal love; he will sit on it in truth in the tent of David.” The NKJV translates this verse as, “In mercy the throne will be established; And One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David.” The ESV translates 16:5 as: “then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness.” This one who will sit on the throne, “judging, seeking justice and quick to execute righteousness,” DASV, can only rightly refer to the Messiah who will sit on David’s throne during the future millennial kingdom. To ascribe these words to any Judean king, present or in the times leading up to the Babylonian conquest of Judah, would do injustice to the words of Scripture regarding the promised faithful judge, the Messiah, who will reign on David’s throne on Mount Zion in righteousness. Refer to: 2 Samuel 7:8-17, Psalm 89:1-37, Psalm 132:11, Isaiah 2:1-4, Isaiah 9:7, Luke 1:32.

Victor Buksbazen comments:

“It is significant that the Moabites use terms which strongly reflect the Messianic expectations, nurtured by the faithful remnant in Israel and by Isaiah himself, centering around the Messianic king, who will sit upon the throne of David and execute justice and righteousness.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 206).

David L. Cooper adds:

“THE vision of the Moabites appealing to the Davidic house at Jerusalem for assistance in a crisis was suggestive to the prophet of the time in the future when the nations of earth will make their appeal to the Messiah in Mount Zion for His blessing and protection. Thus in verse 5 of chapter 16, Isaiah foretold the reign of King Messiah: "And a throne shall be established in lovingkindness; and one shall sit thereon in truth, in the tent of David, judging, and seeking-justice, and swift to do righteousness.” As we have already seen in our study of chapter 9, King Messiah will return to this earth and establish His reign in Judah when the people of Israel confess their national sin of rejecting Him. He will then mount the throne of David and re-establish it. This, of course, will be the beginning of the millennial reign of our Lord. Converted Israel at that time will go into all the world and proclaim the truth to every mortal who survives the Tribulation and who enters the millennial kingdom. These nations will accept the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation. Then each converted nation will apply to King Messiah to be annexed or united to the kingdom of Israel as is suggested in these most striking words: “Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this” ( Isa. 9:7). (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-March 1944).
We have heard about the pride of Moab, how proud; his arrogance, pride, and insolence; his boasts are bogus.

Therefore let Moab wail for Moab, everyone of them will wail. Absolutely devastated, mourn for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth.

For the fields of Heshbon waste away, even the vines of Sibmah. The lords of the nations have broken off its choice branches, which reached even to Jazer, which spread into the wilderness. Its shoots were spread abroad, they crossed over the sea.

Therefore I will weep with those weeping from Jazer for the vine of Sibmah. I will water you with my tears, O Heshbon and Elealeh; for on your summer fruits and on your harvest the shouts of joy have ceased.

Gladness and joy are removed from the fruitful field; there is no more singing in the vineyards, or shouts of joy. No treader treads out wine in the presses; I have put an end to those shouts.

Therefore my heart groans like a harp for Moab, and my inner being for Kir Hareseth.

When Moab presents himself for worship, when he wearies himself on the high place, and comes to his sanctuary to pray, it will not be effective.

As recorded in Isaiah 16:6-12, the prophet makes a declaration of a previous judgment of God on Moab, according to the summary stated in 16:13, “This is the word that the LORD spoke about Moab in the past.” In these verses, God shows deep compassion for the people of Moab. Just as the Moabites will “wail” 16:7, so God Himself will weep bitterly and drench the Moabites with His tears, 16:9, and His heart “intones like harp for Moab,”16:11. One of the reasons the Moabites will wail is for the destruction of their crops and particularly for the “raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth, 16:7. These cakes were also a favorite delicacy of the Israelites: 2 Samuel 6:19, Song of Solomon 2:5 and Hosea 3:1. The Moabites suffered the loss of their vineyards as the nations who suppressed them trampled down their choice clusters, Isaiah 16:8 -10.

Even the destruction of their fruitful fields did not cause the Moabites to seek the one true God. They instead went to their “high place” and their “sanctuary” to pray, 16:12. Their prayers to their pagan god Chemosh would be useless. The history of the Moabites and their devotion to Chemosh is recorded in Numbers 21:29; Judges 11:24; 1 Kings 11:7, 33; 2 Kings 23:13; Jeremiah 48:7, 13 and 46. Jeremiah chapter 48 gives the
final outcome of this history, 48:13 “Then Moab will be ashamed of their god Chemosh” and 48:46 “The people of Chemosh have perished”. Yet God is not finished with the Moabites and will have mercy on them in the future. Following the judgment stated for Moab in Jeremiah 48:46, God graciously extends compassion and in 48:47 states: “Yet I will bring back the exiles of Moab in the latter days,” says the LORD.”

16:13-14 This is the word that the LORD spoke about Moab in the past.  
14 But now the LORD has spoken, saying, "Within three years, as the years of a hired worker, the glory of Moab will be despised, with his entire population; and the survivors will be few and insignificant."

These summary verses state more details as to the timing of this despising of the glory of Moab and the reduction of the people of Moab to be a very small and the survivors (remnant), will be few and insignificant. This timing is stated as “within three years as the years of a hired worker.” Isaiah 16:14. Thomas Constable comments:

“Isaiah concluded this oracle by announcing Moab's imminent ruin (cf.15:1). The preceding verses describe an earlier revelation that the prophet received, but now he learned that Moab's invasion would be within three years. A hired man would count down the three years day by day, and the Judeans would do the same as they anticipated the degrading of Moab's glory and population. Only a remnant would survive.

The fulfillment came when Assyria invaded Moab sometime between 715 and 713 B.C. or, perhaps, when Sennacherib destroyed it in 701 B.C.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 89).

Therefore, it is likely Isaiah wrote this prophecy of the destruction and degrading of Moab either between the years 718-716 B.C. or in 704 B.C. which gives three years in advance for each of these possible time frames.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 15:1 – 16:14
(1) The Emotional Issue  
The Wailing of Moab for its destruction 15:1-15, 16:7  
The Weeping of the Lord for the Moabites 16:9 and 11  
(2) The Central Issue  
The false worship of the Moabites 6:12  
The true worship of the Israelites 16:5

5. Judgment against Damascus and Ephraim: 17:1-14

The judgment of God on the nations including Israel continues in Isaiah chapter 17 with an “oracle” concerning Damascus in vss. 1-3. Vss. 4-11 concern God’s judgment on “Jacob,” (Israel) and vss. 12-14 are about God’s rebuke of the nations. As noted previously the word “oracle” is a translation of the Hebrew word massa meaning oracle or burden. The use by Isaiah of the word “oracle” helps to form an internal outline of this large section of his prophecy, chapters 13-23 which can be entitled, “The Nations Judged”. In these chapters, Isaiah begins a new section regarding the judgment of God on these nations in Isaiah 13:1, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 19:1, 21:1, 21:11, 21:13, 22:1 and 23:1.

Chapter 17:1-3 of Isaiah contains the message of God’s judgment on the cities of Aram (Syria): Damascus and Aroer. The spiritual background of God’s judgment on Damascus and Israel may be, among other things, the actions of King Ahaz recorded in Isaiah 7 and 8 and in 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28. Ahaz, who was one of the wickedest of the Judean kings, made sacrifices to the gods of Damascus and arranged for an altar to be made in the temple in Jerusalem patterned after the pagan altar in Damascus. God is not
mocked and the evil of pagan worship no matter where it is located will eventually have its due reward, the wrath of God.

The text of Isaiah does not indicate when this oracle of judgment was delivered by Isaiah, but it certainly would have been before the destruction of Damascus in 732 B.C. and of Samaria “the fortified city,” 17:3 in 722 B.C. by the armies of Assyria. The political reason for the fall of the cities of Aram and Ephraim was the rebellion of Syria (Aram) against Assyria and the attempt by the Syrian king Rezin to have Israel and Judah join in a coalition to fight the dominance of Assyria. Refer to Isaiah chapters 7 and 8; 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28.

17:1-3 An oracle about Damascus.
"Look, Damascus will cease to be a city,
it will be a heap of ruins.

2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken;
they will be places for flocks to lie down,
and no one will make them afraid.

3 The fortified town of Ephraim will disappear,
along with the kingdom of Damascus.
The remnant of Syria:
they will end up like the glory of the children of Israel,"
says the LORD of hosts.

The prophet’s oracle (burden, message) concerns the coming demise of Damascus, 17:1, Aroer, 17:2, and the cities of Ephraim which is the northern kingdom of Israel, 17:3. Regarding Damascus, Isaiah states that it will “cease to be a city, it will be a heap of ruins.” The cities of Damascus and Aroer or Aram fell to the Assyrians under king Tiglath-Pileser III in 732 B.C. Ephraim (Israel) was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and most of its citizens were deported and dispersed among the nations under the dominion of Assyria.

The latter part of 17:3: “They will end up like the glory of the children of Israel” refers to the cities and territory mentioned in 17:1-3. Isaiah 17:4 states that: “in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low.” The two statements are most likely related thus indicating that both Aram and Israel will face a future of misfortune, yet they will have a remnant. Their glory will fade, but will not entirely be extinguished.

17:4-6 "In that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low,
and the fatness of his flesh will become thin.

5 It will be as when harvesters gather the standing grain,
and his arm reaps the ears of grain;
like one gleaning ears of grain in the valley of Rephaim.

6 Yet there will be some leftover gleanings in it,
like when an olive tree is harvested by beating,
two or three olives remain in the top branches,
four or five in the most fruitful branches,"
says the LORD, the God of Israel.
Isaiah predicted that “in that day” there will be a remnant of people left for both nations following the Assyrian assault, but the numbers of people and their plight will be meager. The reference to “in that day” in 17: 4 refers to the overthrow of both Syria and Israel by the Assyrians and also predicts a future eschatological day. See notes on 17:7-11. The reference to the glory of Jacob, 17: 4 is to the northern kingdom of Israel containing ten tribes, who along with the two tribes in the southern kingdom of Judah, were the descendants of Jacob. Following the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., the northern kingdom no longer held a position of power as a sovereign state. This part of the “promised land” existed as Samaria in the days of Jesus under Roman control and its inhabitants were often despised by the people of Judah for being polluted with the taint of interbreeding with Gentiles. The Assyrians took most of the population into exile and re-populated Israel with non-Jewish peoples who later married those of pure Jewish descent in Samaria and thus produced descendants who were racially impure according to their cousins to the south. See John 4:9. This is also the background implication for the parable of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37 and Christ’s healing of ten lepers, Luke 17:11-19.

Isaiah’s comments in 17:4-6 regarding the thinness or leanness of the flesh, could refer to scrawny flocks that are unfit for profitable slaughter, and the almost complete striping of the harvest, leaving very little for the gleaning. See Leviticus 19:9-10. This leanness describes just how far was the glory of Israel to fade. It was to diminish into almost complete obscurity. Yet, there remains something for the remnant to gather, the remnant who will return of Israel and of the house of Jacob, Isaiah 10:21.

17:7-11 In that day a person will look to their Maker, and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel.
8 They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither will they look to what their fingers have made, the Asherah poles or incense altars.

9 In that day their refuge cities will be like the forsaken forests of the Amorites, which were abandoned because of the children of Israel. There will be desolation.
10 For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not been mindful of the Rock, your refuge.
So you plant beautiful plants, and plant special foreign vines.
11 In the day you plant it, you fence it in, and in the morning you cause your seed to germinate; but the harvest vanishes in the day of disease and incurable pain.

Isaiah next turns his attention to a far future time. The words “in that day,” 17:7, 9 and 11 and the context of 17:12-14 can be understood as the days of the Great Tribulation. David L. Cooper, quoting from the KJV, explains:

“In Isaiah 17:7,8, however, it is quite evident that the prophet lifted up his eyes from beholding the devastation wrought by Tiglath-pileser III and beheld the end of the age, foretelling the destruction that would come at that future time. This position becomes evident when we note the following language: "In that day shall men look
unto their Maker, and their eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. And they shall not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither shall they have respect to that which their fingers have made, either the Asherim, or the sun-images. In that day shall their strong cities be as the forsaken places in the wood and on the mountain top, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel; and it shall be a desolation" (Isa. 17:7-9). In verse 7 is a universal prediction that all men will, at the time foreseen, look unto their Maker and their eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. Then they will no longer look to their altars, the work of their hands, nor to anything which they have devised in the form of worship. We know positively that they did not do anything like this at the time of the immediate fulfillment of verses 1-6 of this prophecy. On the contrary, we understand that at the conclusion of the Tribulation men will look to God and He will spare them. Thus, between verses 6 and 7 of our prophecy, we have the long lapse of time intervening between the days of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria and the days of the Tribulation which are yet future.

But why will there be such universal wreckage at this future time—especially in Israel? The answer to this question is found in verses 10 and 11: "For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength; therefore thou plantest pleasant plants, and settest it with strange slips. In the day of thy planting thou hedgest it in, and in the morning thou makest thy seed to blossom; but the harvest fleeth away in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow." (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-March 1944).

As recorded in Isaiah 17:7-11, the prophet declares the words of God who describes the mindset of those who remain after the horrors of the Tribulation This weak remnant will look to their Maker the Holy one of Israel, 17:7. They will distain their previous pagan objects of worship 17:8, as these objects failed to protect them from their enemies. The main reason why their strong cities are forsaken, and their land is desolate, 17:9 is because they have forgotten the God of their salvation and the rock of their refuge, 17:10 which certainly is directed solely to the people of Israel. The words of 17:11 reinforce the demise of their agricultural resources as previously stated in 17:5-6, which result from the people’s rejection of worshiping the God of Israel and replacing this true worship with worshiping worthless idols that their hands had made.

17:12-14 Woe, the uproar of many peoples, that roar like the roaring of the sea, and the roar of nations, like the roar of the crashing of mighty waves!

13 Though the nations roar like the roar of many waters, he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm.

14 In the evening, look, terror! Before the morning, they are gone.
This is the plight of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who loot us.

As recorded in 17:12-14, Isaiah declares a prophecy against the nations God has chosen to deliver judgment on the peoples of the northern kingdom of Israel and because of the inclusion of the word “us” in 17:14 also includes the peoples of the southern kingdom of Judah. Thus, Isaiah is delivering a message of rebuke and certain judgment on Assyria in the near future and Babylon in a more distant time and to Babylon in the eschatological days of the Tribulation. Even though, both of these powerful nations were used by God to bring about discipline and judgment on His chosen people, these nations would not escape judgment themselves due to their treachery, pagan worship and failure to acknowledge the one true God of not only
Israel, but of all the peoples of the earth. The prophecy of the sudden and overnight removal of the oppressive army who “plunder us” and “loot us,” 17:14, was to be first fulfilled during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah. The Assyrian warriors, who were at the very doorstep of Jerusalem, and were on the verge of destroying the city, were themselves destroyed in a single night. See Isaiah 37:36-37. There was also to be another fulfillment in the destruction of Babylon by the Medes and Persians and still to be a far future fulfillment of the destruction of Babylon at the end of the Tribulation Period. See Revelation chapters 17-18.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 17:1-14
The Revelation of Judgment: (The places involved) 17:1-3
The Result of Judgment: (The plight involved) 17:4-9, 11
The Reason for Judgment: (The purpose involved) 17: 10
The Recompense of Judgment: (The punishment involved) 17:12-14


This short chapter in Isaiah does not begin with an “oracle” yet it has an extremely important message as it ties together events during Isaiah’s time with the far future when the nations who were historically enemies of Israel and Judah would one day be worshipping the Lord together with the Jewish remnant as people of the Lord. Chapter 19 continues this theme with the nations of Egypt and Assyria. Chapter 18 concerns a near and far prophecy of the ancient nation of Cush. The historical background for chapter 18 is still within the context of the greater threat of Assyria which threatened the nations around Judah and Israel with destruction during the ministry career of Isaiah. Egypt was weakened with internal strife between its upper and lower Nile regions. The nation of Cush was understood to be located south of Egypt in the area of modern Ethiopia, and perhaps extending to Sudan. Victor Buksbazen provides a historical background:

“Around the year 720 B.C., Ethiopia, taking advantage of the internal problems of Egypt, conquered that land and became master of the Nile Valley for the next sixty years. Shabaka, the Ethiopian ruler of Egypt (circa 716-701 B.C.), expecting an Assyrian invasion of the Nile Valley, sent ambassadors to the various provinces of Egypt and to neighboring kingdoms, seeking to enlist their support against Assyria in the event of war.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 211-212).

As recorded in Isaiah 18:1-7, the prophet proclaims a “woe” to the land of buzzing wings which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia (Cush), vs. 1. This land sends ambassadors, called swift messengers, in papyrus vessels on the waters to a nation of tall and smooth people who are strong and conquering and whose land is divided by rivers, vs. 2. The LORD declares to the inhabitants of the world, listen when a signal flag is lifted upon the mountains and when a trumpet is blown, vs. 3. For the LORD waits from His dwelling place, and before the harvest is over, He will devastate the harvest and leave the cuttings for birds and animals to consume, vss. 4-6. Those who are tall and smooth who are from a nation which is strong and conquering and who’s land is divided by rivers will bring present to the LORD of hosts upon Mount Zion, vs. 7.

18:1 Woe to the land of buzzing wings
   beyond the rivers of Ethiopia;

As stated in Isaiah 18:1, the prophet brings a message of woe or judgment against Cush, described as the “land of buzzing wings” which may be a reference to the deadly tsetse fly which plagued this area or to swift sailing ships that plied the inland rivers. The land is described in as being “beyond the rivers of Ethiopia” (Cush), which would be an indication of the Nubian-Cush sphere of influence extending both north and south of its borders. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 18:1-3:
The land that lies beyond the rivers of Cush was Cush (Nubia), notable for its ships, whose sails looked like the whirring wings of insects over water from a distance. Another view of the whirling wings is that they represent swarming hordes of people, including soldiers.224 Cush was at the end of the earth in Isaiah's day and therefore symbolized the ends of the earth; it was a great distance from Judah. Some scholars believe Cush lay within what is now Ethiopia, but others think Cush included modern southern Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, and northern Ethiopia. 225 Envoys from Cush may have traveled to Moab, Philistia, and Judah seeking an alliance against Assyria. 226

Isaiah called on these messengers from Ethiopia to go to a nation tall and smooth (shaven). This was a common description of the Nubians (or Cushites). They were to go to a people feared far and wide, perhaps the Egyptians or the Assyrians. They were to go to a powerful and oppressive nation whose land was divided by rivers, again perhaps the Egyptians, the Assyrians, or even the Medes. Taken together these descriptions represent all great, aggressive nations.

All the recipients of this message, the "inhabitants of the world and dwellers on earth" (v. 3), were to hear that a sovereign (the Lord) would issue a call to battle. No one could miss that call when it came.” [Note 224: Young, 1:474 75; Note 225: See J. Daniel Hayes, “The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible,” Bibliotheca Sacra 153:612 (October-December 1996): 396-409; Note 226: Oswalt, p. 360]. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 91).

18:2 that sends ambassadors by the sea,
   even in papyrus vessels on the waters.
   Go, you swift messengers,
   to a nation tall and smooth,
   to a people feared far and wide,
   a nation strong and conquering,
   whose land is divided by rivers.

Isaiah states, this land (the rulers of the land) send envoys by the sea. The sea is most likely a reference to the waters of the Nile which flowed north towards its very wide delta area. These envoys travelled swiftly in “papyrus vessels” to seek aid from the provinces of Egypt and likely to the nations of Judah and Israel although the text does not state this possibility. It may be inferred that Judah and Israel have this connection, for the last verse of chapter 18 mentions the future connection between the southern nations and Mount Zion. The message of the prophet in 18:2 is to these envoys and they are instructed to go “to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared far and wide,” a powerful and oppressive nation whose land the rivers divide. This nation could be the tall and smooth skinned Nubians or to the peoples who resided in the northern sections of Egypt. J. Alec Motyer suggests another possibility:

“2. Envoys go out. Tall and smooth is usually interpreted as referring to Ethiopians, a proverbially tall people in the ancient world. But √māšāq, ‘to draw out, prolong’, is never found meaning ‘tall’. ‘Drawn out’ could mean ‘long-standing’ (Jer. 31:3), i.e. having a long record in history, and therefore well-established. Smooth (mōrāt) means polished, as of a sword sharpened and gleaming, ready for action (Ezek. 21:9); maybe, therefore, ‘in battle trim’, well-armed. This understanding makes the people in question exactly the sort to seek out for an alliance.” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 135).

The exact destination of these envoys is not as important as the message God has for them which the prophet declares in 18:3 and following. However, for an extended discussion on the identification of this land and the ambassadors, see Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, pages 348-351.
18:3 All you inhabitants of the world, 
and you dwellers on the earth,
when a signal flag is lifted on the mountains, look; 
when the trumpet is blown, listen.

The prophet’s message, recorded in Isaiah 18:3, now extends to “All you inhabitants of the world”. Isaiah is not just pointing to a local event of one nation seeking aid from another but is introducing a message from God to the world at large. The import of this message is for the peoples of the world to pay attention. God is at work and significant signs and events are to take place in which the peoples will both see and hear. A signal flag (banner or marker), will be raised on the mountains indicating more than just one banner or marker will be raised. Also, a trumpet will be blown that the peoples of the world will hear. This certainly is a reference to an event to occur in the far future. Isaiah gives more details of this event in the following verses.

18:4 For this is what the LORD said to me, 
"I will quietly watch from my dwelling place, 
like heat shimmers in sunshine, 
like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."

Isaiah introduces these next events with the words, “For this is what the LORD, said to me.” It must have been highly significant in the eyes of the prophet to emphasize the authority of the LORD in the declaration of this message. Connecting the message of 18:3-7, this authoritative declaration is of paramount importance. God is speaking! The peoples of the world are to pay attention to what God will be doing and where the message is leading. God, as stated in 18:4, is allowing the world’s inhabitants the privilege of being ushered into His chambers where they are witnesses to His pronouncement of judgment on the nations of the world. Not all is lost however for following these days of judgment, there will be peoples who will bring gifts to the Lord as their act of worship to the Messianic ruler of His earthly kingdom as 18:7 reveals.

18:5-6 For before the harvest, 
when the blossom is over, 
and the flower becomes a ripening grape, 
he will prune off the shoots with pruning shears, 
and cut off and remove the spreading branches.
6 They will be left together for the mountain vultures, 
and for the beasts of the earth; 
the birds of prey will spend summer feeding on them, 
and all the beasts of the earth will spend winter eating them.

The judgment of God, declared in Isaiah 18:5-6, involves the destruction of the agricultural resources of these people who are likely the Assyrians who brought complete destruction and exile upon the northern kingdom of Israel and the same to all but the city of Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah. The Lord would not allow the Assyrian’s sinful self-determination, pride and their failure to acknowledge His plans and purposes to go unpunished. For God to announce the destruction of this nation’s (Assyria) harvest meant complete devastation and famine which would force the peoples of the nation to abandon their homeland in search of food. The political and social structure of the nation would collapse.
18:7 In that time a present will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, to people feared far and wide, a nation strong and conquering, whose land is divided by rivers. to the place of the name of LORD of hosts, to Mount Zion.

God, through the prophet, declares that in the time of the Messiah’s kingdom, “in that time” the people who were tall and smooth, Isaiah 18:2, and were once were feared far and wide and were a strong nation of war and lived in a land divided by rivers (the Ethiopians and perhaps also referring to the Assyrians) will bring a gift of homage to the Lord of Hosts, to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts, Mount Zion.

The introductory words of 18:7, “In that time”, must therefore refer to a time in the far future when the Lord of Hosts will be in residence on Mount Zion. This prophecy will be for a time when all the people of the world would witness when the Lord establishes His kingdom on the earth and will rule in righteousness and holiness from David’s throne on Mount Zion. For a discussion regarding this glorious time, see Geoffrey W. Grogan, Isaiah, page 123.

As recorded in Isaiah 19:23-25, the prophet makes an astonishing revelation that other nations will also worship the Lord, together with the people of Israel, God’s inheritance. The message in Isaiah’s day for the people of Judah was certainly that they were not to put their hope and trust in the temporary might of the surrounding nations to save them from the Assyrian armies. The Lord of hosts will save them, and they must put their faith, hope and trust solely in Him. This message is the same today for all who read the words of the prophet Isaiah. The Lord calls upon all peoples of the earth to pay attention to His word and obey it!

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 18:1-7
The Revelation of Judgment: (Woe declared) 18:1-3
The Realization of Judgment: (Wreckage described) 18:4-6
The Result of Judgment: (Worship delivered) 18:7


In chapter 19, Isaiah proclaims an oracle or burden of judgment against Egypt which in the first section, 19:1-15, is similar to declarations of judgment against other nations but in the second section, 19:16 -25, is one of the most profound prophetic statements of God’s world-wide intent for all nations in the future when the Messiah returns to rule over His kingdom. The background of Isaiah chapter 19 is the conflict within Egypt which has led to internal strife and to a weak and divided leadership. During the years 720 to 721 B.C., Egypt was attacked by the Assyrians and the Ethiopians. The Ethiopian king, Shabaka, became the eventual ruler of Egypt. The reference to Egypt being delivered into the hands of a cruel master and mighty king,

Isaiah 19:4 could refer to king Shabaka from Ethiopia or perhaps to king Sargon of Assyria. The Assyrians defeated the Egyptians in war, but it was king Shabaka of Ethiopia who actually ruled the Egyptians with cruelty and brutality.

As recorded in Isaiah chapter 19, the prophet declares an oracle about Egypt, stating that the LORD swiftly comes to Egypt and the Egyptian idols tremble at His presence and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them, vs. 1. The LORD will stir up the Egyptians, so they will fight against each other. The spirit of the
Egyptians will be demoralized, and their plans will be ineffective. They seek guidance from idols, spirits of the dead, mediums and sorcerers, vs. 2-3. The LORD will hand the Egyptians over to a cruel master and a fierce king who will rule over them, vs. 5. The waters from the sea, the Nile river and the streams will be dry, and the rivers will also become foul. The reeds and rushes will wither away. Egypt’s fishermen will lament and mourn. The weavers and all who work for wages will be grieved, vs. 6-10. Egypt’s princes and counselors have become foolish and stupid and lead Egypt astray. None of the wise of Egypt can make known what the LORD has planned for them, for the LORD has poured upon Egypt a spirit of distortion and Egypt can do nothing about it, vs. 11-15. In that day, the Egyptians will tremble and fear for the LORD is against them, vs. 16. In that day five cities of Egypt will swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts, and an altar to the LORD will exist in the midst of the land of Egypt and a pillar dedicated to the LORD will exist at its border. These will be a sign and witness to the LORD within Egypt. When the Egyptians cry out to the LORD because of oppressors, He will send them a savior and defender who will deliver them, vs. 18-20. In that day, the LORD will reveal Himself to the Egyptians who will know Him and worship Him with sacrifices and offerings, and will make and keep a vow to the LORD, vs. 21. The LORD will strike the Egyptians and then heal them, and they will return to the LORD, vs. 22. In that day, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria and these nations will worship (the LORD), together, vs. 23. In that day, Israel will be a third member with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing in the earth, vs. 24. The LORD has blessed them, saying, blessed be Egypt, my people, Assyria, the work of My hands, and Israel, my inheritance, vs. 25.

19:1 An oracle about Egypt.

Look, the LORD rides on a swift cloud
and comes to Egypt.

The idols of Egypt tremble at his presence;
the hearts of Egyptians melt within them.

As recorded in Isaiah 19:1, the prophet proclaims an “oracle,” a message of judgment, on Egypt in the form of a picture of God riding on a swift cloud to come to Egypt. See also Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalm 18:10, 68:33 and 104:3-4. It is not that God needs to ride on the clouds to get from place to place but Isaiah is describing the rapid advance of God to bring His judgment to this evil nation. God is a sovereign King over the His created world. This will not be the first lesson the Lord would teach the nation of Egypt. The days of God’s dealing with a stubborn Pharaoh and his people, Exodus chapters 6-14, was a reminder to all peoples of the foolishness of trusting in idols and false gods. Sadly, Egypt would need to have a repeat lesson. However, the lesson for the people of Isaiah’s day was more than learning of the judgment of God upon Egypt. The people of God were only to trust in the true God who had a covenant relationship with them and not to trust in any nation for help in times of crisis or at any other time.

19:2-4 "I will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians;
each one will fight against his brother,
each person against his neighbor,
city against city,
and kingdom against kingdom.

The spirit of Egypt will be demoralized within them;
I will make their plans ineffective.
They will seek guidance from idols,
and from spirits of the dead,
along with mediums and sorcerers.
I will hand the Egyptians over to the hand of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them,"
says the sovereign LORD of hosts.

As recorded in Isaiah 19:2-4, the prophet declares that it is God who is behind the civil strife which will soon come upon the Egyptians. God will incite the Egyptians to fight against each other including city against city and kingdom against kingdom. The strategy of the Egyptians to resist God’s plans for this nation will be defeated by God. The word “plans,” 19:3 is the Hebrew etsah meaning strategy, purposes, counsel or advice. The Egyptians will consult their idols and spirits, but they will be of no help. God will also bring a cruel master and a mighty king to rule over them, 19:4. Many suggestions have been made as to the identity of this “fierce king.” These suggestions include the Assyrian kings Sargon II, Sennacherib or Esarhaddon or the Ethiopian king Shabaka. Since this fierce king or his country was not mentioned it is best to let Isaiah’s prophecy stand as a warning to Egypt that they will face God’s judgment upon them in the person of His choosing. This was God’s judgment on Egypt which as a nation had continually refused to acknowledge Him as the one true God and Creator and Lord of the Earth. Even the past history lesson of the plagues many years before was not heeded by these heathen people who lived in close proximity to a land whose legitimate ruler was God.

19:5-10 The waters from the sea will be dried up, and the Nile river will be waterless and dry.
6 The rivers will become foul; the streams of Egypt will be depleted and dried up; the reeds and rushes will wither away.
7 The bulrushes by the Nile, by the mouth of the Nile, and all the sown fields by the Nile, will wither, be blown away and gone.
8 The fishermen will lament, all those who cast hooks into the Nile will mourn, and those who spread nets on the waters will waste away.
9 Those who work in combed flax will despair and those who weave white cloth will grow pale.
10 The weavers will be crushed; all those who work for wages will be grieved.

As recorded in Isaiah in 19:5-10, the prophet describes the physical outcome of God’s judgment. The Nile river, described in vs. 5 as “the waters from the sea” will dry up along with all other rivers, canals and streams. Those who earn their living by the sea including farmers who need irrigation for their crops, fishermen who will have no catch and those who make linen from combed flax and the weavers of fine linen, these will have no livelihood. The leaders of Egypt to the hired laborers will be “crushed” and “grieved in soul”. Although some may interpret these verses as an allegory referring to the collapse of the economic, social and government structure of Egypt, there is no reason to change from a literal historical-grammatical interpretation which is used throughout this messianic study of Isaiah. David L. Cooper makes this comment on these verses in defense of a literal historical-grammatical interpretation:
"An examination of Isaiah 19:5-10 discloses the fact that in addition to the civil war which would wreck the country, there would also be the drying up of the Nile River which would prove to be a national calamity. The Nile ceased to flow several centuries before the days of Joseph. Then in his time there was a famine in the land for seven years, caused by the drying up of the Nile. Isaiah, in this special paragraph which we are studying, likewise foretold the ceasing of the yearly inundation of Egypt by the Nile. As a result the fisheries would be stopped, the manufacture of linen cloth for the priests and for the wrapping of mummies, and the manufacture of cotton for the great masses of Egypt would cease. General distress would be the result. All industry alike would cease. The waters would no longer be in the canals, the fields would be reduced to dust, and the topsoil would be blown off by the wind. The country from end to end would be one great desolation and waste." (D.L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly-April 1944).

If no history of the Nile since Isaiah’s day exists for such a drying up of its waters, then this must be a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. This is in concert with Isaiah 19:16-25 which describe events during the coming day of the Lord. The reference to the river drying up, see also Isaiah 44:27 and 50:2, is consistent to another future day prophecy recorded in Isaiah 11:15:

*The LORD will divide the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with his scorching wind he will wave his hand over the Euphrates River. He will split it up into seven streams, and enable people to cross over in sandals.*

19:11-13 The princes of Zoan are absolutely foolish; the Pharaoh's wise counselors give stupid advice. How do you dare say to Pharaoh, "I am a sage, a student of the ancient kings?"

12 Where now are your wise men? Let them tell you now and make known what the LORD of hosts has planned concerning Egypt.

13 The officials of Zoan have become fools, the officials of Memphis are deceived; they have caused Egypt to go astray, those who were the cornerstones of her tribes.

The prophet turns his attention to those who bring advice to Pharaoh and to his court. The wisdom of these advisors will be seen as stupidity for they could not have foreseen the actions of God against their nation. The drying up of the Nile, 19:5 would be a devastating blow to the Egyptians who worshipped the river as a god. “Zoan” 19:11, also known as Tanis, was a major city in the Nile delta area of northern Egypt. “Memphis” 19:13, also known as Noph was also a major city and was once the capital of northern Egypt.

In Isaiah 19:13, the word “deceived” is the Hebrew *nasha*. It occurs first in Scripture in Genesis 3:13 where Eve responded to God about her disobedience by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Other notable occurrences of *nasha* are found in Jeremiah 4:10; 29:8; 37:9; 49:16; Obadiah 1:3 and 7. Also in Isaiah 19:13, the word “cornerstones” (cornerstone) is the Hebrew word *pinnah*. It has a significant meaning in the Scriptures. The word “cornerstone” (stone) refers to the Messiah in Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14-15; 28:16 and Zechariah 10:4. In the New Testament, this prophecy
of the Messiah is stated in Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Romans 9:33; Ephesians 2:20; and 1 Peter 2:6-8.

19:14 The LORD has poured a spirit of distortion into her; they have caused Egypt to go astray in everything she does, like a drunkard staggering around in his own vomit.

Isaiah sums up the actions of the foolish advisors and wise men, “they have caused Egypt to go astray in everything she does.” The nation has been judged by God who has mixed or poured within her a spirit of distortion. “Distortion” is the Hebrew word ivin and has the meaning of perversity and warping. In the Old Testament, it only occurs in this verse. Because of repeated sins and rebellion against God, the Lord had given the so-called wise-men of Egypt over to the consequences of their actions. Like the famous Pharaoh of the time of the exodus, they had hardened their own hearts, and did not acknowledge the wisdom of God nor seek Him, who is the only One who could save them from the consequences of their sins. Therefore, God poured upon them the perversity of their evilness and let their sins lead them to its ultimate end, death.

19:15 Egypt can do nothing about it, head or tail, palm branch or reed.

Isaiah declares the physical condition of the people of Egypt, “Egypt can do nothing about it.” The leaders, wise men, and all peoples of Egypt have been completely demoralized, defeated and distraught. This was the condition of the Egyptians when king Shabaka from Ethiopia overcame the nation with his forces and ruled them for several years. It was not that Shabaka was insightful and powerful enough by his own wisdom and power to walk into Egypt and conquer it, but it was God who delivered the Egyptians into the hand of this cruel master. See also Isaiah 19:4. God is the One who rules the earth with His power, purposes and plans. God raises up rulers and deposes them to accomplish His will on the earth, Daniel 2:21. The words “head or tail, palm branch or reed” were also used by Isaiah to describe the judgment upon Israel for its refusal to seek the Lord, Isaiah 9:13-16. The elders, dignitaries and prophets of Israel were leading the people of God astray just as the wise-men of Egypt, through their foolish (stupid) advice, were leading Pharaoh and the people of Egypt astray.

A brief summary of Isaiah 19:1-15: The rulers of the earth are reduced to nothing and will last but a moment in time. See also Isaiah 40:23-24. Proud and powerful nations and leaders need to heed the word of God. They have their position only because it is a part of God’s will for His earth and suits His plans and purposes to accomplish what He wishes. Any nation or ruler should humbly submit in worship and adoration to God for the place and position He has established them in order to carry out His will for all peoples on the earth.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 19:1-15
The demoralization of Egypt’s people: 19:1-4
The destruction of Egypt’s prosperity: 19:5-10
The deflation of Egypt’s princes: 19:11-15

8. Egypt, Assyria and Israel to Worship the Lord: 19:16-25

The latter section of chapter 19 of Isaiah is punctuated with six “in that day” prophecies: 19:16, 18, 19, 21, 23 and 24. These prophecies move the narrative from the time of Isaiah to the time when the Lord will send a Savior and Champion to deliver Egypt from their oppressors. Then, in that day, Egypt, Assyria and Israel will
together worship the Lord. Victor Buksbazen comments on the wider passage of Isaiah chapters 18-20 which reveals God’s plans for these nations:

“Chapters 18-20 form a remarkable prophecy which deals with the destiny of Ethiopia, Egypt, Assyria and Judah. Here Isaiah reaches the pinnacle of prophetic universalism, unsurpassed anywhere else in the Old Testament.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 211.)

19:16-17 In that day the Egyptians will be like fearful women; they will tremble and fear because the LORD of hosts waves his fist; he shakes it against them.

17 The land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt; everyone who hears mention of it will be terrified, because of what the counsel of the LORD of hosts advises against it.

Isaiah states that “in that day” the Egyptians will tremble and fear because of what the Lord will bring to them, due to the action of the Lord who “waves his fist” and “shakes it against them.” The Lord made a similar statement, as recorded in Zechariah 2:8-12, which in many ways is a parallel passage to these verses in Isaiah. “For this is what the LORD of hosts says: "After his glory sent me against the nations that plundered you--for the one who touches you, touches the apple of his eye. 9 For, look, I will shake my fist against them, and they will be plundered by their own slaves. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me. 10 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for look, I will come and I will live in your midst,” says the LORD. 11 "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and will be my people, and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. 12 The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.”

Even tiny Judah, according to 19:17, (in that day implied), will be a terror to the Egyptians due to God’s purpose against Egypt. Since 1948, Egypt has fought four wars with Israel and has lost each one. It is not difficult to see how Egypt, in the days leading up to the Messianic kingdom, will be in dread of the small nation of Israel due to the works of God on behalf of Israel.

19:18 In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan, and swear allegiance to LORD of hosts. One will be called the City of Sun.

Isaiah speaks of a number of cities in Egypt which, “in that day” will speak the language of Canaan or Israel which will be the Hebrew language. These cities will also be loyal to the Lord of hosts and swear allegiance to Him. One of the five cities will be called the “City of Sun” which can be understood as the “City of Destruction” which could be a reference to the Egyptian City of On and known as Heliopolis (Greek). The city of On was known for its worship of the Sun as a god. In the Millennial kingdom, this city will worship the Lord of hosts as God.

19:19 In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar dedicated to the LORD at its border.

Not only will there be cities in Egypt that speak Hebrew and are loyal to God, but an altar to the Lord will be erected in the midst (perhaps middle) of Egypt. Also, a pillar will be raised to the Lord in Egypt near its border. In ages past, Abraham built an altar to God as an indication of his commitment to God. Genesis 12:8 and Jacob erected a pillar to express his allegiance to God because of the Lord’s covenant which He had made with Abraham and later with Isaac and then with Jacob. Genesis 28:22. One of the important aspects of Jacob’s erection of the pillar was that he named the place where the pillar stood Bethel, which means the “house of God”. In 19:20 the purpose of the altar and pillar are stated as, “a sign and a witness to the LORD
of hosts in the land of Egypt”. Within Egypt, in the Millennial kingdom, the altar and a pillar in Egypt will represent the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham and also signify that the house of God will be recognized in that former pagan nation. A further reason for the erecting of the altar and pillar is that they will be a witness of the response of God who, will send them a “Savior and a Champion” in response to their crying out to God because of those (nations) who will oppress them. It is not known which nations will oppress the Egyptians in the days prior to the coming of the Lord to set up His kingdom. When Christ, the Savior and Champion, returns to deliver Israel from their enemies, He will also deliver Egypt from their enemies.

19:20 It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt. They will cry out to the LORD because of oppressors, and he will send them a savior and a defender who will deliver them.

The prophet in 19:20 records a reminder to Egypt of the mercies of God. When the people of Israel cried out to God when they were slaves in Egypt, God sent a champion to deliver them and set them free. When Egypt will also face oppression and circumstances from which they cannot escape, they also will cry out to God who will save them from their enemies. The pillar which will be erected at the border of Egypt which will be dedicated to the Lord will act as both a sign and a witness to the people of Egypt that they can “look” to the Lord to be their savior who will defend them against and deliver them from their oppressors.

19:21 The LORD will reveal himself to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day. They will worship with sacrifices and offerings, and will make a vow to the LORD and keep it.

“It is quite likely that Jews will yet colonize in Egypt and will set up some kind of special worship similar to that of the temple service in Jerusalem and there attempt to worship God. Moreover they will probably erect an obelisk or an altar similar to the one which was made by the two and a half tribes of Israel at the time of their settlement in Canaan (see John 22:10-12).

These Jews who will yet settle in Egypt will have a certain amount of influence on the Egyptians in pointing them to the worship of the true God. This seems to be intimated in 19:21,22.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1944).

19:22 The LORD will strike Egypt, striking and then healing them. They will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their prayers and heal them.

The prophet adds more detail of the workings of the Lord. For some reason, which is not stated in Isaiah chapter 19, the Lord will strike Egypt and then heal the people so that the Egyptians will “return to the Lord”. When the Egyptians return to the Lord, God will respond to them and will heal them. This striking of Egypt could refer to a further action needed to completely bring Egypt to be obedient to God as referenced in Zechariah 14: 16-19 or to another incident not mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures.
Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 19:19-22:

“Abraham built an altar to express his gratitude and commitment to the Lord (Gen. 12:8; cf. Josh. 22:34; 24:26-27), and Jacob erected a pillar when he memorialized God's covenant to him (Gen. 28:22). The Egyptians will do these things throughout their land to express those things in that day (v. 19).

Israelites during the Judges Period cried out to God because of their oppressors, and He sent them deliverers (Judg. 3:9, 15; 6:7; 10:10). Their great oppressor in the past, of course, had been Egypt herself. Similarly, when the Egyptians call out to God for help, He will send them a Savior and a Champion, Messiah (v. 20). The Lord revealed Himself to the Israelites and brought them into a saving relationship with Himself through bitter defeat in the Exodus (Exod. 7:5; 9:29; 14:4).

He will do the same to the Egyptians in that future day (v. 21; cf. Jer. 31:34; Zech. 14:16-18), and they will respond with appropriate worship. Parents sometimes strike their children to bring them into line, and God will discipline Egypt to bring her to Himself. He will hurt them, but He will hurt them to heal them, like a surgeon (v. 22). This whole section is a picture of reconciliation still future.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 94-95).

19:23-25 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. Assyrians will come to Egypt, and the Egyptians will go to Assyria. Egyptians will worship with Assyrians.

24 In that day Israel will be a third member with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth.

25 For the LORD of hosts has blessed them, saying,

"Blessed be Egypt my people,
Assyria the work of my hands,
and Israel my inheritance."

Isaiah, in 19:23-25 brings to a climax the prophecy of the events of that day. A highway will exist connecting Egypt with Assyria (and successor nations). The highway will be used for travel and communication between these nations and most importantly this highway will facilitate worship as these nations will worship God together. Once fierce and powerful enemies will now peacefully worship God as God works out His perfect plan for the nations of the earth.

Isaiah punctuates this stunning relationship with God’s viewpoint as to the relationship of these nations and Israel with Him. In 19:24, Isaiah states, “In that day Israel will be a third member with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth.” This is one fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham, stated in Genesis 12:1-3 ending with the words, “Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” This blessing includes the Israelites as well as the Gentiles.

The last sentence of this prophecy is unique in the Scriptures as it ascribes intimate affection to the Gentile nations of Egypt and to Assyria (and successor nations) that otherwise was only between God and His chosen people Israel. God calls Egypt, “my people” which was a phrase He often used for Israel, Exodus 5:1, 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; 1 Samuel 9:17; 2 Samuel 7:8; 1 Chronicles 17:9; 2 Chronicles 6:6; Psalm 81:13, Isaiah 10:24; Jeremiah 7:12, 12:4 30:3; Ezekiel 36:8; Daniel 9:20; Joel 2:27; Amos 7:15, and 9:14). However, the prophet Zechariah proclaims regarding “that day”: “Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and will be my people, and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.” Zechariah 2:11. In this last verse of Isaiah chapter 19, God calls Assyria, “the work of my hands” a phrase that also was used by God to refer to Israel, Isaiah 60:21. However, the Lord reserves solely to Israel, the term, “Israel my inheritance”. Deuteronomy 32:9 and Joel 3:2.
The lessons of Isaiah 19:16-25 are important for Israel and all who believers in Christ, the Messiah. These lessons include: **First**, God will honor and not forget His covenants with His people. **Second**, God will shape or direct the events of history to fulfill His plans and purposes for the peoples of the earth. **Third**, God will not leave helpless and provide a Savior to those who cry out to Him in true repentance. **Fourth**, God desires all peoples to come to Him in worship and He will call these people, whether Jew or Gentile, His people who are the work of His hands to bring about His perfect purposes for mankind. **Fifth**, God will cause former enemies, whom the Lord has blessed, to be the source of blessings in the midst of the earth. **Sixth**, these events will take place in “that day”, a day the Lord has established when the peoples of the earth will worship the Lord and they will know the Lord personally for He will reign among them.

**Teaching Outline for Isaiah 19:16-25**

In that day, the Egyptians will be terrified of the land of Judah: 19:16-17
In that day, five Egyptian cites will speak the language of the Hebrews: 19:18
In that day, an altar and a pillar “to the Lord” will be erected in Egypt: 19:19-20
In that day, the Egyptians will know the Lord: 19:21-22
In that day, a highway will exist between Egypt and Assyria: 19:23
In that day, Egypt, Assyria and Israel will be together as a blessing in the earth: 19:24--25

9. **No escape for Egypt and Ethiopia: 20:1-6**

The short chapter of Isaiah 20 is a summary of the lessons God wanted the Israelites to know regarding trusting other nations for safety when facing their enemies. These few verses also act as the conclusion to the prophecies regarding Egypt and Cush (Ethiopia) in the Judgment of the Nations section, chapters 13 to 23. As stated in chapter 20, Isaiah, as he had previously done in 6:1 and 7:1 of his prophecy, indicates an exact time when the Lord gave him the words regarding Egypt and Cush. This time is the year when the Assyrians captured Ashdod, vs. 1. The LORD, at that time, commanded Isaiah to walk naked and with bare feet, vs. 2. This removal of Isaiah’s apparel for a three-year period was a sign from the LORD against Egypt and Ethiopia, vs. 3. The sign meant that the Assyrians would lead away captives of Egypt and exiles of Ethiopia, in the same manner of undress of the prophet Isaiah, vs. 4. These captives will be ashamed because Ethiopia was their hope and Egypt their boast. The people of Judah will say, look what happened to our hope (Ethiopia and Egypt), how show we ever escape? vs. 6. David L. Cooper provides this summary of Isaiah chapter 20:

This oracle concerning Egypt found in chapter 19 has chapter 20 as an appendix. This is an oracle that deals with a situation which is now past. It was uttered in the year that the Tartan of the Assyrian army came to Ashdod when Sargon, king of Assyria, sent and fought against that city. In this oracle Isaiah was commanded to remove his outer garments and the sackcloth which he, like Elijah, had worn and to retain nothing but his short tunic. He was to dress thus as a captive and walk about the streets of Jerusalem at certain periods for three years. This conduct was a prophecy being enacted before the people. The significance of this action was that the Ethiopians and the Egyptians would be carried captive into the land of Assyria by the king of Assyria. Neither Sargon nor Sennacherib invaded and conquered Egypt. Esarhaddon and his son Ashurbanipal did this and fulfilled the prophecy. The peoples of the coastlands would become disappointed in that the empire upon which they had depended for deliverance was to be taken into captivity. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly, April 1944).

**20:1 In the year when Sargon the king of Assyria sent his commander-in-chief to Ashdod, he fought against Ashdod and took it.**
The year indicated in Isaiah 20:1 can be established as 711 B.C. Sargon II of Assyria sent his military commander, or Tartan which is a title for the chief of staff for the Assyrian forces, according to V. Buksabazen, *Isaiah*, page 220. Ashdod was the northernmost city of Philistia about 35 miles south west of Jerusalem. The people of Ashdod had rebelled against paying tribute to Assyria. The Assyrians in response replaced the king of Ashdod, Ahimiti, with another ruler, Yamani who would be more favorable to Assyria. However, Yamani was forced by the people of Ashdod to also withhold tribute from Assyria and it was then that King Sargon II sent his military commander to conquer Ashdod. Yamani realizing the immediate danger fled to Egypt for protection. When the Assyrians also threatened Egypt, the Egyptians handed over Yamani to the Assyrian forces. (Adapted from Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 97).

**20:2** At that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and take off the sackcloth from your waist, and remove your sandals from your feet." So he did it, walking naked and barefoot.

The identifying phrase “at that time”, would have been the time of the conquest of Ashdod by the Assyrian king Sargon II, 711 B.C. See vs. 1 above. God requested that Isaiah to do a most unusual thing. Isaiah was to remove his sackcloth, which indicated that he had been in mourning, from his waist and remove his sandals from his feet, so that he would be walking both naked and with bare feet. Isaiah obeyed this command and went “naked and barefoot”. The reference to naked is acknowledged my many commentators to be without his outer garment. He would have still worn his undergarment. To be completely naked would have been seen as a shameful way to walk about where people could see him. Thus, Isaiah was a visual portrait as an object lesson for the end of a period of mourning and the transition to a portrait of judgment as a sign to Egypt and Cush as verses 3-4 explain. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were requested by God to be visual portraits as object lessons of His judgment. See Jeremiah 13:1-11; 19:1-15; 27:1-2; 32:6-16; 43:8-13; and Ezekiel 2:8-3:3; 4:1-17; 5:1-4; 12:1-16, 17-20; 21:18-23; 37:15-23,

**20:3-4** Then the LORD said, "Just like my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a harbinger against Egypt and Ethiopia,

4 so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, both young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks bared, to the shame of Egypt.

The Lord gave the reason for this shameful appearance of Isaiah. It was to be a sign and token against Egypt and Cush. In 20:4, the Lord continues, “so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, both young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks bared to the shame of Egypt.” Isaiah’s appearance for three years was a portrait sign-act to the nations of Egypt and Cush that they would also walk in this same manner, as captives to Assyria. The historical timeframe for the fulfillment of this prophecy most likely came in 701 B.C. when the Assyrians defeated the Egyptians at Eltekeh.

Also in 20:3 the Lord addressed Isaiah as “My servant”. This is a very significant title that the Lord gave to the prophet. It signifies that the prophet was acting on the Lord’s behalf to bring a specific message to certain peoples and nations. Many individuals and the nation of Israel were called God’s servant. Abraham is the first to be called God’s servant, Genesis 26:24. Others include Moses: Numbers 12:7-8; Joshua 1:2,7; 2 Kings 21:8 and Malachi 4:4. Caleb: Numbers 14:24. David: 2 Samuel 3:18 and numerous other verses. Job: 1:8 and other verses; Eliakim: 22:20; The Son of God, Messiah as Servant of the Lord: Isaiah 42:1; 49:5-7; 52:13; 53:11; Zechariah 3:8; Matthew 12:18. The nation Israel was also called God’s servant in Isaiah 41:8-9 and numerous other verses. Nebuchadnezzar: Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6 and 43:10. Zerubbabel: Haggai 2:23. God called His faithful proclaimers, My servants the prophets:2 Kings 9:7; 17:13; Jeremiah 7:25; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezekiel 28:17 and Zechariah 1:6. In the New Testament, believers are called the servants of the
Lord. This catalog of verses contains some very prominent names including that of king David but most importantly the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, of whom Isaiah will have much more to say in the later chapters of his prophecy.

20:5-6 They will be dismayed and ashamed because Ethiopia was their hope, and Egypt their boast. In that day the inhabitants of this coastland will say, 'Look at what happened to our hope, to those we fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! How will we ever escape?'"

Isaiah describes the sign-act and its meaning to Egypt and Cush and was further intended to be a dramatic message to the people of Judah who were now “dismayed and ashamed” because they realized that the nations of Egypt and Cush, whom they were trusting in to protect them from the advance of the Assyrian armies, would be of no help. The people of Judah who looked away from the Lord to these pagan nations now were in distress and exclaimed, “How shall we ever escape?” The purpose of the proclamations of Isaiah, as recorded in this chapter and others, specifically chapters 36-37 was to answer this question. The only way of escape from the Assyrian advance to destroy Jerusalem was for Judah, from its lowest member of society to the king, to trust in the Lord. The Lord alone could be trusted. No other nation or peoples could accomplish their salvation.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 20:1-6
The Destruction of Ashdod: 20:1
The Drama-Act of the Prophet: 20:2-3
The Doom of Egypt and Cush: 20:4-5
The Despair of Judah’s Hope: 20:6

10. Prophecy of Babylon’s Fall: 21:1-10

Chapters 21 to 23 of Isaiah contain the second set of five oracles in the wider section of chapters 13 to 23. The oracles in this second set are: the Prophecy of Babylon’s Fall 21:1-10; the Judgment against Edom 21:11-12; the Judgment against Arabia 21:13-17; the Valley of Vision and Weeping over Israel including the prophecy of David’s Key and the Peg 22:1-25; and the Prophecy of Tyre’s fall 23:1-18.

An introduction to Babylon is contained in the study of the Judgment against Babylon, Isaiah 13:1 – 14:23. The second oracle against Babylon, Isaiah 21:1-10, is a prophecy most likely about the complete destruction of Babylon by the Assyrians in 689 B.C. during a time when Babylon was an ally of Judah. The destruction of Babylon described in these verses was probably not the “capturing” of the city of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 B.C., because Elam 21:2, did not exist after 646 B.C. and could not have been a party to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus. Also, Cyrus the Persian did not lead a destructive attack against Babylon but led his forces to walk into the city almost unopposed. As well, it would be unlikely that Isaiah would show so much anguish, 21:3-4 over Babylon’s fall if it was during a time when Babylon was the terrifying enemy of Judah instead of being Judah’s ally. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, page 369 for an expanded discussion.

The purpose of this prophecy, 21:1-10, in its local setting is to warn the people of Judah not to trust in Babylon as an ally against Assyria. This best fits the context of the previous chapters of Isaiah in which the prophet brought a message to Judah not to trust the nations near Judah to be of any help against the ravaging forces of Assyria. As with many passages of Isaiah, the prophecy in 21:1-10 also has a connection with the latter days, in this case during the tribulation period, in which the final destruction of Babylon is described: Revelation chapters 17 and 18. As stated in Isaiah 21:1-10, the prophet declares an oracle about the “Wilderness by the Sea, which is also described as “a terrifying land,” vs. 1. Isaiah calls the vision “harsh”
regarding one who is treacherous and a destroyer who deals treacherously and destroys. The cities of Elam and Media are to go up against this one, vs. 2. Isaiah felt in anguish about the vision he heard for it frightened him as a horror, vss. 3-4. Commanders who had been at ease are to arise and prepare for battle, vs. 5. Isaiah was to post a lookout who would report what he has seen, and the lookout was to be vigilant upon sighting advancing troops, vss. 6-7. The lookout reported that someone advancing toward him announced that Babylon had fallen and all its images of its gods had been smashed into the ground, vss. 8-9. The people of Judah were described as “threshed and beaten” because of this report of Babylon’s fall, vs. 10.

21:1 An oracle about the Wilderness by the Sea.
Like whirlwinds in the Negev sweep through,
it comes from the wilderness,
from a terrifying land.

The prophet describes an oracle or “burden” concerning the “wilderness of the sea”. In the context of verses 1-10, this oracle is against Babylon, 21:9. The identification of the “wilderness of the sea” as Babylon can be verified by a comparison with Jeremiah 51:12-13.

“Raise the flag signaling the attack of the walls of Babylon, reinforce the watchmen, post the guards, prepare the ambushes. For the LORD has planned and done what he has spoken concerning the inhabitants of Babylon. O you who dwell along many waters, abundant in treasures, your end is come, the thread of your life is cut.”

Babylon was built on the marshes and over the many streams which made up that part of the Euphrates River. When the river was in its flood mode, the walls of Babylon loomed above what could be described as a city floating on the sea. Against this “floating city” came windstorms from the Negev which was a barren and hot desert area. These hot and dry desert windstorms created a deserted and unbearable wilderness. Thus, the prophet could state at the end of 21:1, “It comes from the wilderness, from a terrifying land.” This description is an introduction to the definition of the peoples or nation which is coming against Babylon.

21:2 A harsh vision was told to me;
the treacherous man deals treacherously,
and the destroyer destroys.

Go up, O Elam;
lay siege, O Media;
all the sighing she has caused
I will bring to an end.

Isaiah describes the vision of which he has been shown to him as “harsh” for “the treacherous man deals treacherously, and the destroyer destroys.” Elam and Media are called upon to rise up against the assault of the Assyrians who were advancing upon Babylon, likely in 689 B.C. The assault by Assyria would put an end to all the “groaning” of the nations which had been caused by the brutality of the Babylonians. The words treacherous and treacherously are bagad in the Hebrew. The ESV translate these words as “The traitor betrays.” Isaiah will use bagad again in 24:16 (twice); 33:1 (twice) and 48:8. The words destroyer and destroys are sadad in the Hebrew. The NIV translates these words as: “The looter takes loot.” The NKJV translates them as: “The plunderer plunders”. Isaiah had used sadad previously in 15:1 and 16:4 and will use this word again in 23:1; 23:14 and 33:1 (twice). Isaiah 33:1 is an emphatic usage of these words by the prophet referring to Assyria:
Woe to you who destroy,  
but you have not been destroyed;  
and you traitor, but they have not betrayed you!  
When you finish destroying,  
you yourself will be destroyed.  
When you have finished betraying,  
they will betray you. (Isaiah 33:1)

21:3-4 Therefore my loins are filled with anguish;  
pangs have seized hold of me,  
like the pangs of a woman in labor.  
I am so bewildered by what I hear,  
troubled by what I see.  
My heart flutters,  
horror has frightened me;  
the twilight that I desired has brought me only trembling.

Since Babylon was an ally of Judah, Isaiah 39:1-8, the prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, whom the people of Judah were hoping would help them against Assyria, would have caused Isaiah much anguish and terror as the prophet describes in 21:3-4. The prophet felt compassionate and empathetic for his fellow Jews in Judah, who were now without any help from any nation who could stand against the fierce armies of the Assyrians. This very human response to a helpless situation demonstrates how Isaiah identifies with his people. The prophecy Isaiah has been given from God meant Judah was now defenseless and helpless and facing certain destruction.

21:5 They prepare the table,  
they lay the carpet,  
they eat, they drink.  
Get up, you commanders,  
oil the shields.

While there is no direct reference to any specific nation or situation, Isaiah seems to describe a banquet by a visiting delegation, perhaps the envoys of Babylon, who visited Judah as recorded in chapter 39:1-8. While feasting with the leaders of Judah, the visitors were plotting to overthrow this tiny country and steal its treasures. It is also possible that the words of 21:5 refer to the Babylonians who were feasting and drinking and unprepared for the coming assault upon them. The Assyrians were described as the “treacherous one” and the “destroyer” in 21:2 and 5. It is possible that the allies of Judah, the Babylonians were also seen as just as treacherous and destructive to this small nation of Judah.

21:6-7 For this is what the Lord says to me,  
"Go, post a lookout,  
let him report what he observes.  
When he sees chariots  
with pairs of horses,  
riders on donkeys,  
riders on camels,  
let him be vigilant, very vigilant."
In light of the treachery of Assyria and perhaps also of Babylon, the Lord requests the prophet to “station the lookout” and let the lookout report what he sees. The Lord in 21:7 cautions Isaiah to tell the lookout to pay close attention if he sees “chariots, with pairs of horses, riders on donkeys, riders on camels.” This was likely an indication that an invading army, the Assyrians, were on the move and the lookout was to keep watching carefully for other developments that would arise from the advance of this invading army.

21:8-9 Then he cried out,

"O Lord, I stand constantly on the watchtower in the day, and am stationed at my post every night.

Look, here comes a man on a chariot with a pair of horses."

He announces,

"Babylon is fallen, fallen; and all the carved images of her gods are smashed into the ground."

The lookout reports that he is continually watching and suddenly reports that he sees a “troop of riders, horsemen in pairs” and he hears the message, “Babylon is fallen, fallen; and all the carved images of her gods are smashed into the ground.” Thus, the prophet hears the tragic news that, Judah’s ally, who were treacherously plotting the destruction of Judah, were themselves destroyed by the overwhelming force of the Assyrian armies. Babylon would fall and yet rise again. However, the final defeat of Babylon would need to wait until the days of the great tribulation in the future and these very words, “Fallen, Babylon the great is fallen,” would once again ring out, this time by an angel from heaven. Revelation 18:1-3 (DASV): “After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was lightened by his glory. He shouted out with a mighty voice: "Fallen, Babylon the great is fallen, and is become a dwelling place for demons, and a haunt for every unclean spirit and every unclean and disgusting beast. All the nations have fallen because of the wine of the passion of her immorality. The kings of the earth have had sex with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from her extravagant luxury."

For a very extensive discussion on the fall of Babylon in the future see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, The Footsteps of the Messiah, Chapter 14, pages 309-357. John F. Walvoord comments on the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18:1-3:

“The announcement by the angel given in verses 2 and 3 declares that Babylon the great is fallen. The repetition of the verb “is fallen” found in the aorist tense, indicates a sudden event viewed as completed, though the context would indicate a future event. Seiss believes that the repetition of the phrase “is fallen” is intended to describe “two separate parts or stages to the fall, answering to the two aspects in which Babylon is contemplated, referring first to Babylon in mystery, as a system or spirit of false worship, and second to Babylon as a city, in which this system or spirit is embodied."

In chapter 18, the context seems to indicate that Babylon here is viewed in its political and economic character rather than in in its religious aspect.....It seems that chapter 17 deals with the religious aspect and chapter 18 with the political and economic aspects of Babylon.” [Note 1: Joseph A. Seiss, The Apocalypse, p. 407] (John F. Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary, Moody Press, 1966, pages 258-259).

Victor Buksbazen comments on verses 6-9 of Isaiah chapter 21:

“In contrast to the careless watchmen set by the carousing Babylonians, who failed to warn their masters, God has set His own faithful watchman, the prophet himself, to look into the approaching events with all the
keenness of his spirit and his senses. The prophet stands on watch day and night, giving faithful warning about everything that the Lord has shown him.

He sees the approaching enemy, riding on horses, camels and asses, animals, which were used not only as mounts for the cavalry, but for carrying equipment and also to cause confusion in the ranks of the enemies. The prophet-watchman sees the enemy cavalcade entering the city, then emerging with the triumphant shout: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon!” This triumphant shout was later echoed by John: “Babylon the great is fallen and is become the habitation of devils and every foul spirit” (Rev. 18:2). Already in Isaiah’s vision, Babylon is the symbol of universal tyranny and injustice, under which all the nations groan and languish.

In the book of Revelation, Babylon symbolizes the wicked world powers which openly defy God and His Anointed, and which eventually will be crushed by the Son of God.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 222-223).

21:10 O my people, threshed and beaten on my threshing floor!
I have reported to you what I have heard
from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel.

The message of the destruction of Babylon was news of devastation to the people of Judah and a cause of affliction as recorded by Isaiah who called his people “threshed” and “beaten’. Isaiah faithfully relayed the message he had from the Lord to the people of Judah. It was a message from the mighty Lord of hosts, who has an army that is invincible. It therefore is by implication, that the Lord’s people needed to stop trusting in foreign pagan nations for their salvation and put their trust and hope solely in the Lord of hosts whom alone could save them from their enemies. Isaiah made it clear who is the saving One of the people of God. Refer also to 2 Samuel 22:2-4. King David earlier had written a song which the people should have remembered as recorded in Psalm 18:1-3:

I love you, O LORD, my strength.
2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge;
my shield and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold.
3 I called on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
so I was saved from my enemies.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 21:1-10
The Assault of the Enemy: 21:1-2
The Anguish of the Prophet: 21:3-4
The Ambush of the Envoys: 21:5
The Announcement of the Lookout: 21:6-9
The Afflicted of the Lord: 21:10


21:11-12 An oracle about Dumah.
Someone calls to me from Seir,
"Watchman, what of the night?
Watchman, what of the night?"
The watchman replied,
"The morning is coming, then also the night.
If you want to ask, then ask; come back again."

Edom was a small country located to the southeast of the Dead Sea. It was named after Esau, the brother of Jacob. Esau was hated by God. See Malachi 1:3 and Romans 9:6-13. Edom was also another name for Esau, Genesis 25:30 and 36:1, 8. Esau’s home was in the land of Seir, called in Genesis 32:3 as the country of Edom and described in Genesis 36:8 as the “hill country of Seir.” The listing of the descendants of Esau, called Edom is given in Genesis chapter 36. The names Esau and Edom have the meaning of “red” because of Esau’s desire to eat the red stew that Jacob had cooked, Genesis 25:29-30.

Among other events concerning Esau and Edom, three significant ones stand out. In the first event, recorded in Genesis 25:27-34, Esau, the older brother of Jacob, was willing to sell his birthright to Jacob for a meal of red stew. God’s comment on this action is recorded in Genesis 25:34, “Thus Esau despised his birthright.” This act was no little thing in God’s eyes. The author of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament comments on this act, Hebrews 12:15-17: “Make sure no one falls short of the grace of God; so that no bitter root springs up causing trouble, and by it many become defiled. Make sure that no one becomes like Esau who was an immoral and godless person, who for just one meal sold his own birthright. For you know that later when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no opportunity to repent, even though he sought it with tears.”

The second event, recorded in Obadiah 1:1-11; Psalm 83:4-6 and 137:7, was the reaction by the Edomites to the destruction of Israel by the Babylonians. The Edomites stood back and gloated over the misfortune of their “brothers”. They also took part in the looting of the possessions of the Israelites. The third event had fore-shadowed this reaction by Edom. In Numbers chapter 20 and referenced in Judges 11:17, the Edomites did not allow the Israelites, led by their leader Moses, to pass through their land during the time of the wanderings of the Israelites between the time they left Egypt and when they finally entered into Canaan. God’s reaction in judgment because of the actions of the people of Edom is recorded several times in the Old Testament, Isaiah 11:14, 34:5-6, 63:1; Jeremiah 9:26, 27:3, 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14, 32:29, 36:5; Amos 1:11, and Malachi 1:1-5 in addition to the passages in Obadiah and the Psalms mentioned above. Ultimately God brings judgment on Edom because of their refusal to repent of their actions against Israel and most importantly for their refusal to acknowledge and worship God as the Sovereign Lord, the God of Judah and the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

In the passage recorded in Isaiah 21:11-12, the prophet describes a night scene in which someone from Seir, representing Edom calls out to Isaiah who is portrayed as a watchman, and asks, “Watchman, how far gone is the night?” The word Edom in 21:11 is Dumah in the Hebrew which has a meaning of “silence” or “place of silence”. Dumah was also one of the sons of Ishmael, Genesis 25:13-14. The significance of the name Dumah could be twofold, first, it could refer to the judgment of God on Edom rendering Edom to silence and second, it was where news could be gleaned about the coming of the Assyrian and later the Babylonian armies in their fury and destructive conquest.

The question in 21:11, “Watchman, what of the night?” may have the meaning of: “how long until the morning of rescue from our oppressors appears” In 21:12, Isaiah first responds, “The Morning is coming, then also the night.” This is likely to have the meaning that the assault from the Assyrians will soon be eliminated, Isaiah 37:36-37 which represents the morning. However, another conquering army, the Babylonians, is coming in the future which represents the night. The second response by Isaiah in 21:22 is best understood from the meaning of the words, “come back again”. These words, according to Victor...
Buksbazen, are stated not in the Hebrew, but in the Aramaic: “atha” - come - (as in Maran-atha – Lord come) and “Thibayun,” – “inquire.” It is related to the Hebrew “shuv”- to return. (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 223-223).

The message of these two verses, Isaiah 21:11-12, therefore is that the Assyrians will not destroy the Edomites but later the Babylonians will conquer them with brutal force. The Edomites must therefore come to the Lord and repent of their sins. It is also a somber message to the Israelites and is given in the wider context of Judah looking to its neighbors for assistance against the onslaught of the advancing Assyrian armies. Just as Babylon will not be of help to Judah, neither should Judah look to its relations who live in Edom. They will be soon left helpless and must come to the Lord in repentance as must the people of Judah. Isaiah’s most significant audience who need to heed the message of this short oracle is his own people in Judah, even though it is written as a prophetic picture of what will soon be facing the people of Edom.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 21:11-12
The People’s Request: (A Call for Reprieve): 21:11
The Prophet’s Response: (A Call for Repentance) 21:12


David L. Cooper provides an introduction to this section:

“In Isaiah 21:13-17 we have the third symbolic vision. This is addressed to Arabia. The word in the original which is here rendered "Arabia" also may be interpreted differently and mean "evening." Some of the very best commentators are of the opinion that this rendering is possible, believing that the prophet in his mystical manner thought of Arabia as being in the evening or twilight of its historical past.

An examination of the complete thought of this short prophecy shows that a war was foretold which would sweep through the country and devastate its villages and cities. Because of the ravages of war the regular caravans that traversed the desert, taking the wares of the east doubtless to Tyre, which was on the Syrian coast and which was at that time the mart of the world, are seen going farther north in order to escape the ravages of war. We see the fugitives from the war-stricken areas fleeing and being entertained with the bare necessities of life—water and bread—as they escape for their lives. According to verse 16 the prophet declared that the war which he foretold would come within one year. Kedar, one of the principal cities, would be reduced to insignificance. He guaranteed that the prophecy would be fulfilled for, "Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath spoken it." (David L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-May 1944).

The location of this oracle or burden is the lands of the Arabians which is a vast desert area to the east and southeast of Judah. Dedan, where the caravans originate, was located about 290 miles southeast of Duma in the northwestern part of the Arabian desert and Tema was located about 200 miles southeast of Duma, also in the northwestern part of the Arabian Desert. Kedar covers the area in the northwestern part of the Arabian desert. (See notes from MacArthur Study Bible, Updated NASB, page 966). Other Old Testament references: Dedan, Tema, and Arabia are mentioned, regarding God’s judgment in Jeremiah 25:23-24 and Dedan, Arabia and Kedar are mentioned as the trading partners of Judah in Ezekiel 27:20-21.

In this section, Isaiah 21:13-17, the prophet declares an oracle regarding Arabia, stating that the caravans of the Dedanites will lodge in the thickets of Arabia, vs. 13. The people of Tema are too bring water and bread to the caravans of the Dedanites who have fled from the battle against them, vss. 14-15. Isaiah declares God’s words, stating that within one year, the glory of Kedar will come to and end and their survivors will be few, vss. 16-17.
   In the thickets in Arabia you will lodge,
   O caravans of Dedanites.

14 Bring water for the thirsty;
   O inhabitants of the land of Tema
   meet the fugitives with bread.

15 For they have fled from the swords,
   from the drawn sword,
   from the bent bow,
   and from the pressure of the battle.

Isaiah records that the caravans from Dedan must spend the night in the “thickets” of Arabia. The Arabian desert does not have forests as some versions state. The caravans need to seek shelter from an unidentified enemy pursuing them in during an assault in a battle. The members of the caravans are suffering from hunger and thirst and the inhabitants of the land of Tema are called by the prophet to bring them water and bread. The most likely identification of the enemy is the Assyrians who were destroying the neighboring countries to Judah and many of the cities of Judah during the days when Isaiah wrote this oracle.

21:16-17 For this is what the Lord said to me, "Within a year, according to the years counted by a hired hand, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end.
17 The surviving archers, and warriors of Kedar, will be few," for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.

Isaiah declares a very specific prophecy which he has received from the Lord. In a year’s time, “counted by a hired man”, the splendor of Kedar will come to end and the men of Kedar, who were their “mighty men”, their warriors would be few. The statement “as a hired man would count it” has the same meaning as in Isaiah 16:14. This is a definite time period decreed by the Lord with no less time and no more time allotted. The judgment and its timing are assured, “for the Lord God of Israel has spoken,” Isaiah 21:17.

This oracle concerning Arabia, Isaiah 21:13-17, and those that have just preceded it: Babylon, Isaiah 21:1-10, and Edom, Isaiah 21:11-12, are not just three random declarations of judgment from God on nations surrounding Judah. They have a common meaning: First, God is bringing a fierce and pagan nation, Assyria, upon them in an act of punishment for their ungodliness and rebellion against Him, and for their failure to acknowledge and worship Him. Second, Isaiah, in delivering these burdens of judgment, is also bringing a message to Judah. It is useless for Judah to seek help from her close neighbors against the oncoming Assyrian armies. These neighbors, themselves cannot provide any assistance for they will be destroyed by the Assyrian advance. Judah’s only defense is in total reliance on the Lord God of Israel who has just spoken to the prophet Isaiah. Judah needs to heed the voice of the Lord!

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 21:13-17
The Prediction of the Demise of Kedar: 21:16-17


There is not a consensus among Biblical scholars regarding the exact circumstances that the prophet is “burdened” about as recorded in Isaiah 22:1-14. Some understand it to be regarding the attack on Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Others cite the possibility of the Assyrian
southern campaign in 711 B.C. under Sargon, while some date it in 701 B.C., during the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem under Sennacherib. After considering the evidence that these verses themselves declare and considering the greater context of the preceding chapters, it seems that place of priority should be given to the 701 B.C. event. Gary V. Smith provides a very persuasive argument for this date in his commentary: *Isaiah, Volume 1*, Vol. 1, pages 379-381.

The oracle concerning the Valley of Vision, Isaiah 22:1-14 is a fourth declaration of judgment by God in this second set of five oracles beginning with chapter 21:1. The first three oracles, chapter 21, dealt with Babylon, Edom and Arabia. As recorded in Isaiah chapter 22, the prophet turns his attention to Jerusalem and specifically to its people and its servants. Just as the neighboring countries to Judah would not escape God’s judgment, the capital of Judah must also reap what it has sown and face the consequences of its self-trust and its failure to completely trust in God for protection from the enemy surrounding Jerusalem.

The wider portrait the prophet describes in these verses, 1-14, is that the people of Jerusalem have done everything in their own strength to prepare the city for the defense of the city from the siege against it by the armies of Assyria that have surrounded the city. The historical details of this event are described in greater detail in 2 Chronicles chapter 32 and in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37. Jerusalem’s proud and partying people were praising themselves for their preparation against the Assyrians. They had forgotten their Sovereign Protector whom the prophet Isaiah had so faithfully declared unto them on many occasions. Due to the iniquity of their self-exaltation, God refused to forgive them. The city walls and structures were saved but the people within them were condemned to face eternity separated from God.

In this section, Isaiah 22:1-14, the prophet declares an oracle regarding the “Valley of Vision” asking what is their problem that has cause the inhabitants to go up to their rooftops for the city is full of pandemonium and revelry. Those who have been slain were not killed by sword nor did they die in battle, vss. 1-2. Their rulers have been captured, even though they fled far away, without being shot at, vs. 3. Isaiah expresses deep grief over this prophecy about his people, for it is a prophecy of destruction for Jerusalem, vss. 4-5. The enemies of the people of God came against Jerusalem and the city’s inhabitants attempted to fortify the city, vss. 6-11a. But, the people of God did not look to Him nor respect Him and in that day, God called for weeping and mourning, vss. 11b-12. But instead of remorse for their sins, God’s people celebrated, and said, “let’s eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” vs. 13. The LORD told Isaiah that the iniquity of the people would not be forgiven them. vs. 14.

**22:1-2 An oracle about the Valley of Vision.**

*What is the problem now,*

*causing all of you to go up to the rooftops?*

*The city is full of pandemonium,*

*the town full of revelry.*

*Your slain are not killed by the sword,*

*nor do they die in battle.*

The oracle (or burden) of Isaiah concerns the “valley of vision.” Most conservative scholars understand this as a reference to Jerusalem. See, for example, Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, page 40 for a discussion on the Valley of Vision. Isaiah seems distressed with his own people by exclaiming: “What is the problem now, causing all of you to go up to the rooftops?” The NKJV English translation of “what ails you know,” and the DASV translation of “What is the problem now,”, is literally, “what’s with you?” The people have taken to their rooftops and as 22:2 indicates, and they were boisterous and full of noise and exaltation as if in celebration. This is in contrast to the people of Moab who went up to the high places to weep, Isaiah 15:2.
The reason for the jubilation of the people of Jerusalem may have been that so far, they in the city have been spared conquest and death that had come to many cities and towns in Judah by the invading armies of Assyria, Isaiah 36:1. There is no historical verification of this claim by the Assyrians who also conveniently omitted to admit the defeat of the Assyrian forces as recorded in Isaiah 37:36. Isaiah, as recorded in verses 1-2 therefore was challenging the morality of the people of Judah for loudly celebrating their freedom from capture while seemingly failing to lament the deaths and deportation of so many people of their own country.

The reference in 22:2 to “your slain” being those who were not slain by the sword or died in battle may be understood as those who have died because of starvation from famine caused by the destruction of the crops in the fields outside of the city of Jerusalem. Even though the people within the walls of Jerusalem had not faced death by the swords of the Assyrians, many of them had died by the direct cause of the destruction of the agricultural resources the city depended upon for their food. Isaiah is distraught that the people could ascend to their rooftops to loudly rejoice that they had escaped death while so many people within Jerusalem had died along with thousands more that had died or were taken captive in the cities and towns of the small nation of Judah.

22:3-4 All your rulers together have fled;
    they were captured without even a bow shot.
   All who were found were captured together,
   even though they fled far away.
4 Therefore I said, "Don't look at me,
   while I weep bitterly;
   don't try to comfort me
   concerning the destruction of the daughter of my people."

Isaiah also berates his own people because they were exultant about the city’s escape from capture while their leaders were captured while they were fleeing the onslaught of the Assyrian advance even if these leaders had fled a long distance. The prophet is in deep distress over the death and deportation of so many of his people. He seeks to weep bitterly and does not desire the people of Jerusalem to look upon him or try to comfort him. Isaiah in 22:4 laments the destruction of the “daughter of my people.” This phrase of endearment to his people only occurs in 22:4 in the prophecy of Isaiah. See Jeremiah 8:19 for a similar expression.

22:5 For it is a day of panic, defeat, and confusion,
   from the Lord, the LORD of hosts,
   in the Valley of Vision.
   It is a day of battering down of the walls,
   and cries for help to the mountains.

As the people of Jerusalem were engaging in ungodly rejoicing Isaiah brought a prophecy from the Lord of the coming doom of the City of Jerusalem. It is the Lord God of hosts who has (or is preparing) a day of panic, subjugation and confusion for His people. The day of panic will occur in Jerusalem (the valley of vision) where there will be a breaking down of walls and a crying to (or against) the mountains. This prophecy of Isaiah is likely referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon (586 B.C.) with assistance from its ally, Elam which is mentioned in 22:6.
Elam picked up the quiver, coming with chariots and horsemen; Kir uncovered its shield.

Your key valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen took up fixed positions at the city gate.

Isaiah further describes this coming day of destruction for Jerusalem as involving Elam and Kir along with the unmentioned army of Babylon. The valleys surrounding Jerusalem and the area up to the very gate of the city will be filled with the chariots and horsemen of the enemy. The enemy would lay siege to the gate of the city of Jerusalem. Thomas Constable comments:

“The enemy would be Elam, an ally of Babylon's to her east, and Kir, whose exact location is unknown but was the destination of some Israelites taken into Assyrian captivity (cf. 2 Kings 16:9; Amos 1:5; 9:7). It was also the place (city or land) from which the Arameans originated (cf. Amos 9:7). Isaiah did not identify the main enemy, Babylon herself, but only two of her allies here, perhaps to emphasize the size (by merism) and or distance of the foe.

This enemy would conquer the countryside around Jerusalem and then set up a siege of the city outside her walls at her very gates.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 102).

He stripped back the defenses of Judah.

In that day you looked for the weapons in the House of the Forest armory.

You saw the many breaches in the walls of the city of David.

You collected water in the lower pool.

You numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and tore down houses in order to fortify the wall.

You also made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool.

But you did not look to him who had done this, or respect him who planned it long ago.

Isaiah declares that it is not just Babylon and its allies who will be fighting against the people of Jerusalem, but it is God Himself, “He” in 22:8, who will be the main mover in this judgment upon the city. God will remove the defense of Judah and allow the destruction of Jerusalem because they would rely not upon God but upon their own resources and preparation of their defense against their enemies. The people of Judah had first depended on the weapons of the house of the forest armory. This armory, also called “the house of the forest of Lebanon”, was constructed from cedar wood during Solomon’s reign and was used for the storage of weapons and valuable items. Refer to 1 Kings 7:1-5; 10:17, 21; 2 Chronicles 9:20 and Isaiah 39:2.

Hezekiah when confronted by the impending siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib of Assyria, first, had weapons and shields made in “great number,” 2 Chronicles 32:5. Second, they saw that the breaches of the wall of the City of David were many and they used the materials from selected houses within Jerusalem to repair (fortify) these breaches, Isaiah 22:9-10. Refer also to 2 Chronicles 32:5. Third, they collected the waters of the lower pool and made a reservoir between the two walls for the waters of the old pool, 22:9 and 11. See also 2 Chronicles 32:1-5. The great indictment against the people for these seemingly worthwhile and prudent defensive actions was they did not depend upon Him who made the old pool or planned it long
ago, 22:11. It was God who gave the water pool for the needs of the people of Jerusalem. For an extended discussion, see J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, pages 155-156.

22:12-14 In that day the Lord, the LORD of hosts called
for weeping and mourning,
for heads to be shaved,
and for sackcloth to be put on.

13 But instead there was joy and gladness,
celebratory slaying of oxen and slaughtering of sheep,
eating meat and drinking wine.
"Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," you exclaim.

14 The LORD of hosts revealed himself in my ears,
"Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven until you die,"
says the Lord, the LORD of hosts.

Because of the self-sufficient attitude of the people of Jerusalem and their failure to consider or rely on God, and due to their ungodly rejoicing over their own safety despite the great loss of life of those around them, God was preparing a day, when they would be called by Him to wail and weep and to shave their heads and to wear sackcloth because of the coming days of destruction of their city, 22:5-8. Instead of days of seeking God and mourning for their great loss, the people were expressing “gaiety and gladness” and killing cattle, slaughtering sheep for banquets of meat and wine. Their attitude was so aptly described by Isaiah as “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” 22:13. This is one of the most well-known statements in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul references Isaiah 22:13 in his first letter to the church at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 15:32. The people were demonstrating their complete lack of trust and faith in their God with whom they had received so many blessings and were the recipients and benefactors of the great covenants God had made with His chosen people.

The words of God, in response to the wickedness of these, people are chilling: “Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven until you die, says the Lord, the LORD of hosts.” 22:14. God’s spirit will not always strive with mankind because they are but flesh, Genesis 6:3. There has and will come again, times when the actions of humans including God’s chosen people will lead many to their earthly demise and others to their eternal destruction. See also Numbers 14:20-24; Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:14-15.


Isaiah 22:15-19 form a sub-section to 22:15-25 and also to the Valley of Vision oracle which comprises all of chapter 22. As stated in 22:15-19, Isaiah declares that God told him to go to the palace manager, Shebna and ask him, what right does he have by making a tomb for himself in this high place? vss. 15-16. The Lord will remove him from his position and he will die, for he is a disgrace to his master’s house, vss. 17-19.

22:15-16 This is what the Lord says, the LORD of hosts,
"Go to Shebna, the palace manager, and say,

16 What are you doing here?
What relatives of yours are buried here?
Why have you hewed out a sepulcher here for yourself?
He cut out a sepulcher on this high place,
craving a tomb for himself in the rock.
Isaiah is told to go to the steward Shebna who is in charge of the royal household. Shebna is an Aramaic name and it is likely that he was a foreigner who did not have a family burial plot nor a family tradition within Jerusalem. The Scriptures do not reveal how this person came to have such a high position within the courts of the king. Isaiah is told to confront Shebna and ask, (NASB): “What right do you have here, and whom do you have here, that you have hewn a tomb for yourself here, you who hew a tomb on the height, you who carve a resting place for yourself in the rock?” Isaiah 22:16. Shebna was not part of the royal family nor of the aristocracy of Judah. He had no lineage rights to make a tomb for himself, which would enshrine his memory among the tombs of kings of Judah and their families. What he could not do in life, which was to become a member of the royal line, Shebna schemed to accomplish in his burial plot.

22:17-19 Look, the LORD, will hurl you away violently; O warrior.
   Yes, he will seize hold of you firmly.
18 He will roll you up tightly like a ball
   tossing you into a large country.
   There you will die,
   and there your marvelous chariots will lie.
   You are a disgrace to your master's house.
19 I will drive you out of your office;
and you will be pulled down from your exalted position.

The message given to Isaiah for Shebna is described in 22:17-19. Instead of having a lofty and exalted memorial tomb, he was to be cast down into a large country, likely the wilderness, where he would die alongside of his "marvelous chariots," which were his prized possessions. He would die an infamous death as a shame to his master’s house. Isaiah, with great boldness confronted Shebna with these words from the Lord, “I will drive you out of your office; and you will be pulled down from your exalted position.” 22:19. It is not stated how Shebna was removed from being the Steward to the king of Judah’s court (household). It may have been a wasting disease that drove him from royal society or some other action that caused him to be removed from office. However, it occurred, one thing was certain, when the LORD of hosts, 22:15, makes a decree, it will happen just as God says it will happen. Prior to his final demise, Shebna was demoted to the lesser office of scribe under the superintendence of Eliakim, Isaiah 36:3 and 37:2.

There are a couple of lessons that one should take from this short portion of this prophecy. First, God is not mocked: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” Galatians 6:7. Shebna contrived to elevate himself to a position he did not have by the right of birth. Second, God appoints officials as well as rulers and kings. No one who holds a high position must think they hold this position due to their own strength, wisdom or ability. The only right response to having any high position is to humbly praise God for His divine working within the situation and yourself. This was one lesson king Nebuchadnezzar was to learn personally as he was driven from power immediately after claiming that the nation, Babylon and the royal residence were built by himself. Daniel 4:30 states regarding Nebuchadnezzar: “The king said, “Is not this the great Babylon that I have built for the royal residence, by the strength of my power and for my glorious majesty?” The voice from heaven, Nebuchadnezzar heard, stated his punishment would be certain. While the words were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is proclaimed: The kingdom is removed from you.32 You will be driven from human community and you will live with the animals of the field. You will be fed grass like oxen and seven times will pass over you until you realize that the Most High rules over the kingdom of human beings, and gives it to whomever he pleases.” Daniel 4:31-32.
15. Prophecy of the David’s Key and the Peg: 22:20-25

Isaiah states a follow up prophecy as recorded in 22:20-25. In these verses, the prophet declares that God will call as His servant, Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah and will clothe him with the robes and sash that Shebna had worn and Shebna’s authority would be transferred to Eliakim who will be as a father to the people of Jerusalem and to the house (court) of the king, vss. 20-21. God will give to Eliakim, the key to the house of David and whatever he opens no one will shut and what he shuts no one will open, vs. 22. Eliakim will be securely fastened like a peg in a secure place and he will become like a glorious throne to the king’s house, vs. 23. All the glory of this house will be upon Eliakim, but in a day to come, the glory upon him and upon the king’s house will be cut down and fall, vss. 24-25.

22:20-25 In that day, I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah.
21 I will cloth him with your robe, and lash your sash on him. I will transfer your authority into his hand. He will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.
22 The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder. What he opens, no one will be able to shut; what he shuts, and no one will be able to open.
23 I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place; he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.
24 They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the descendants and offspring, every small vessel, from the cups to all the jugs.
25 In that day," says the LORD of hosts, "the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way. It will be cut down and fall. The load that was hanging on it will fall down," for the LORD has spoken.

The story of the disgrace of Shebna is immediately followed up with the announcement of the Shebna’s replacement in the office of Steward over the house of Judah. Eliakim, son of Hilkiah was appointed to this office when Shebna was removed from this office. The words “in that day” Isaiah 22:20 may refer to the days of King Hezekiah from the siege of Jerusalem to the death of the king. Eliakim was to wear Shebna’s tunic and his sash. God entrusted him with Shebna’s authority and declared that Eliakim was to become “a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.” 22: 20-21. Perhaps the most significant title given to Eliakim by God is that of “my servant,” 22:20. God does not bestow the office of “servant” to just anyone. It is a position of great responsibility to be called the servant of the great King of creation. Refer to the notes on Isaiah 20:3 where another who was called the servant of God was the great prophet Isaiah.

The prophet Isaiah records nine significant things about God’s appointment of Eliakim as Steward over the house of Judah in 22:20-25. First, Eliakim was called “My servant”. Second, Eliakim was to wear the official clothing of the office of Steward. Similar to Elijah’s mantle (cloak) being worn by his successor, Elisha, 1 Kings 19:19. Third, Eliakim was to be entrusted with the authority of the office of Steward. Fourth, He was to become a “father” to all who lived in Jerusalem including the royal house of Judah: the king and his family. Fifth, God would set the “key of the house of David” on Eliakim’s shoulder. When Eliakim used this key to open (a door) no one will close it and when he uses this key to shut (a door) no one will open it. Sixth, God would “fasten him like a peg in a secure place”. Seventh, God stated Eliakim would “become a throne of glory to his father’s house.” Eighth, Upon Eliakim, (the peg) would be hung “all the glory of his father’s house, the descendants and the offspring.” (posterity), and including small things like the cups and jugs (the royal household’s furnishings and implements). Ninth, Sadly, even Eliakim’s Stewardship would not last
long, for “in that day” (the days of the rule of king Hezekiah), “the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way. It will be cut down and fall. The load that was hanging on it will down.” Isaiah 22:25.

Some points to consider regarding these nine declarations of the Lord regarding Eliakim:

First, to whom the Lord call as His servant, great authority and responsibility is bestowed and great results are expected. The Lord, as recorded in the Scriptures, called the following persons His servant: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Caleb, David, Isaiah, Eliakim, Israel, Messiah: the Servant and the Branch, Nebuchadnezzar, Zerubbabel, also: “my servants the prophets” and the followers of Christ, John 12:26. This is an impressive list. That Eliakim was included among them is to be seen as an indication of God’s plan for him to fulfill God’s purposes. It is not that any pride of place or position should be considered or even imagined by a servant of God, however it is a glorious privilege to be humbly received that God would trust His plans to one He has chosen as a servant.

Second, the wearing of the official clothing, robe and sash of the office of Steward over the house of the line of David is a symbolic portrait of the high position this servant has in the purposes of God and responsibility to carry out these purposes.

Third, everyone seeing the Steward would recognize his lofty and trusted position and would acknowledge the authority of the Steward to perform kingdom duties and speak for the king.

Fourth, Eliakim was to fulfill a role of fatherhood to everyone in the kingdom, including the king. This would include the role of mentor, elder, comforter, leader and many other superior roles. It was similar to the role that Daniel had as one of just three commissioners to king Darius the Mede (Daniel chapter 6).

Fifth, the key of the house of David may have been an actual key that was used to open and close doors to official kingdom rooms, storehouses, the treasury and perhaps the armory, stated as the “House of the Forest armory” in Isaiah 22:8. The reference to “the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.” in Revelation 3:7 is very dramatic and forceful as the reference in Revelation is a quote from this key that Eliakim carried on his shoulder. Thus, the key represents the authority of the one carrying it in the greater house of David. Eliakim therefore can be seen as a type of Christ in that he, as God’s servant, is entrusted with the literal keys of the kingdom of which in the greater house of David, the Lord’s kingdom, only the greater servant, the Messiah, will be given to use. The Messiah therefore can be seen as not only the greater King, Prophet, Priest, Ruler and Servant but also as the greater Steward of His own house.

Sixth, the peg was a prominent fixture in ancient houses and tents, for upon it, household goods, clothing and valuable items where hung. The peg had to be solid and sturdy enough to carry the most treasured things of the household and be firmly positioned into a wall or the main pole of the tent. Eliakim was depicted as representing this peg. He was one who was trustworthy enough to carry precious possessions of the kingdom and be firmly established to ensure these possessions would not be lost or “fall off the peg”. The peg also represents the role of the Messiah: “From him will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler.” Zechariah 10:4. This is another majestic reference to Eliakim being a type of Christ representing another significant role that the Messiah will have in His future kingdom.

Seventh, is the reference to Eliakim becoming “a throne of glory to his father’s house.” Within his family Eliakim, by being trusted to carry out the duties of the Steward of the kingdom, would bring glory to his father Hilkiah. However, this is not the most important meaning of this metaphor. The reference to Eliakim’s father’s house surely represents the house of the lineage of David and the throne of glory is that belonging to
the greater Servant and Steward of this house, the Messiah. Thus again, Eliakim is a type of Christ representing the glorious throne of the great kingdom to come. This is the throne of David upon which the Messiah will sit, Isaiah 9:7:

*Of the increase of his government  
and of peace there will be no end.  
He will rule on the throne of David,  
and over his kingdom,  
to establish it,  
and to uphold it with justice  
and with righteousness from this time forth forever.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*

Also, the gospel of Luke States: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.”

_Eighth_, are the things hung on the peg. As mentioned in the _sixth_ point, the peg was the object in the household trusted to carry the precious things of the house. Included with the household objects, such as, the vessels and bowls that the peg carried, are: “descendants and offspring.” These are a reference to the family lineage and the generations to follow. Also, as with the comment in the _seventh_ point, regarding Eliakim’s father and family, the immediate family of Eliakim is a possible meaning to the “descendants and offspring.” However, it also has a more significant and royal meaning. The peg has a future reference to the Messiah during the Millennial reign. The Messiah, as the peg, will carry or bear the offspring and descendants of the elect people, the remnant of Israel, who will enter into the Millennial kingdom with their Messiah.

_Ninth_, some scholars understand that the words of Isaiah 22:25 are an indictment against Eliakim who will not continue as the faithful Steward due to his moral failure or the ungodly acts of his children for the reason the peg representing Eliakim’s responsibilities will be cut off and not continue. The context of this prophecy seems to indicate otherwise. The words beginning 22:25, “In that day” as mentioned above most likely refer to the days of the Hezekiah from the time of the siege against Jerusalem by the Assyrians to the death of Hezekiah and its aftermath. The words of Isaiah 39:5-8 bring light on this day: “Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: 6 'Look, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and everything that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left,' says the LORD. 7 Some of your sons that will be born to you, will be taken away and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." 8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my days."

In light of the importance of the nine things the Lord has ascribed to Eliakim and their future prophetical meaning it seems unlikely that Eliakim was to be removed from the scene due to his own or his immediate children’s iniquities. Why would God depose one evil Steward of the royal house of David just to appoint another one who will also cause his own demise and not last long to fulfill the things God had appointed him to do. It seems better to understand “in that day” of Isaiah 22:20 to refer to the actions of King Hezekiah and their aftermath as predicted by Isaiah in chapter 39:5-8. When the days of Hezekiah were finished, he and his royal court and those with him would be removed. It seems best to understand Isaiah 22:25 as a reference to the actions of king Hezekiah as the reason why the “peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way. It will be cut down and fall. The load that was hanging on it will fall down.”
16. Prophecy of Tyre’s Fall: 23:1-18

The last oracle or burden of this great section of the prophecy of Isaiah, chapters 13-23, is about the judgment of God on the Phoenician mercantile city of Tyre. In this chapter, the prophet declares an oracle about or against Tyre for this city is to be destroyed which news will be reported as far away as Cyprus, vs. 1. God commands the inhabitants, merchants and messengers of Sidon to be still (silent). The merchants of Sidon (Tyre), had traded with many nations and they are to be ashamed because Tyre has been destroyed, vss. 2-4. The people of Egypt will be sorely pained about the destruction of Tyre as would those of Tyre who had travelled to Tarshish, vss. 5-6. The once glorious city of Tyre, of ancient origin (has been destroyed), vs. 7. The LORD of hosts has planned the downfall of Tyre to defile its pride and to bring to shame all the honored of the earth, vss. 8-9. The “daughter of Tarshish’ are to bemoan the destruction of any harbor (in the great sea) for purposes of trading, vs. 10. God also will destroy the fortresses of Canaan, vs. 11. There will be no celebration in Sidon nor rest in Cyprus, vs. 12. The people of Tyre are to look to land of the Chaldeans which is also in ruins. The ships of Tarshish are to wail for their fortress is destroyed, vs. 13. In the day of their destruction, Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years and ten it will be re-established, and it will once again “prostitute” itself with all the kingdoms of the earth, vss. 14-17. Yet in a time to come, the wealth of Tyre will be consecrated to the LORD and used for those who live in His presence, vs. 18.

Thomas Constable comments on this Chapter:

“The first cycle of oracles closed by revealing that Egypt, the political oppressor of the Israelis, would come into equal status with Israel in the future (19:25). The second cycle similarly closes by disclosing that Tyre, the materialistic corrupter of God's people in the past, would come into a relationship of holiness (v. 18). Thus the climax of both revelations of judgment was the divine blessing of the Gentiles.

There are also parallels between Babylon, the first oracle in the first series, and Tyre, the last oracle in the second series. Babylon was the great land power of the ancient world, and Tyre was the great sea power. Babylon gained her power through warfare, whereas Tyre gained hers through peaceful trading. The descriptions of both cities meld into the view of future Babylon presented in Revelation 17—18. There the religious and commercial aspects of future Babylon are strongly reminiscent of Tyre. Note also the reference to a prostitute in both passages.

This oracle consists of two parts: a poem describing Tyre's fall (vv. 1-14) and a prediction of Tyre's ultimate commitment to the Lord and His people. Tyre was the major city of Phoenicia at this time, and undoubtedly represents the other towns allied with it in the region, in some of the references in this chapter. 263. Similarly, Jerusalem represented all of Judah when used in a collective sense.” [Note 263: John D. Watts, Isaiah 1-33, WBC, page 305]. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 106).

23:1 An oracle about Tyre.

Wail, you ships of Tarshish.

Tyre is destroyed without house and harbor;
from the land of Cyprus it is reported to them.
The prophet calls the ships of Tarshish to wail for “Tyre is destroyed without house and harbor.” The location of Tarshish is a much debated by scholars of the history of the ancient near east. Tarshish may have been located in Spain. If so, this location would have made the Mediterranean Sea a Phoenician waterway with boats plying its waves over its full length. Tarshish seems to have been a major trading port with Tyre. Goods from the far west, as the residents of Phoenicia would have understood it, and grain from the Nile delta, Isaiah 23:3, would be brought into the port of Tyre which had a close proximity to Judah. The ancient Phoenicians were able seafarers and controlled much of the trade on the Mediterranean Sea. One of their colonies, Cyprus is also mentioned later in this prophecy, 23:12.

The reason that the ships of Tarshish are to wail, is that the center of commerce for the entire eastern region of the Mediterranean Sea was destroyed without house or harbor. The sailors and merchants who relied on Tyre for the buying and selling of goods would have lost their major trading port with all the profits that they could have gained. Within the context of the preceding chapters of Isaiah, the great enemy of Tyre who destroyed it would have been the Assyrians under Sennacherib. The Assyrians defeated Babylon in 703 B.C, 23:13 and thus it is most likely to understand the historical setting of this prophecy was the conquest of the Assyrians of the entire eastern part of the Mediterranean coast in 702-701 B.C. Only Jerusalem was spared the destruction brought by the armies of Assyria. The message of the destruction of Tyre was brought first to the east bound ships from Tarshish who had anchored in Cyprus.

23:2-3 Be still, you inhabitants of the coast,
you merchants of Sidon,
your messengers sail through the sea.
Over the great waters they come with grain of the Shihor,
the harvest of the Nile was her revenue.
She was the market of the nations.

Isaiah commands that the merchants of Phoenicia including the other major trading port of Sidon were to “be silent” or to mourn for the loss of the revenue they once enjoyed including revenue from transporting grain from Egypt (the harvest of the river Nile). Isaiah 23:3 closes with the statement that she (Tyre) was the “market of the nations”.

23:4-7 Be ashamed, O Sidon;
for the sea has spoken,
the stronghold of the sea, saying,
"I have not been in labor,
or given birth,
I have not reared young men,
or brought up daughters."

5 When the news gets to Egypt,
they will be sorely pained at the report about Tyre.
6 Travel to Tarshish;
wail, you inhabitants of the coast.
7 Is this your joyous city,
whose origin is from ancient days,
whose feet have carried her to settle far away?
Isaiah calls for the Phoenicians (O Sidon) to be ashamed for the “sea has spoken the stronghold of the sea” (Tyre) which now has no children to bring up because, it is implied that the men of Phoenicia have been killed or taken captive by the Assyrian armies. Even Egypt will be “in anguish” upon hearing of the demise of Tyre. The ships of Tarshish are to turn around and return to their home port without selling their goods. The inhabitants of the coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea are also to wail due to the loss of this profitable trading center. Even the ability of Tyre to colonize the coastlands has been removed. The reference in 23:4 to the “stronghold of the sea” is most likely a metaphor for the island fortress of Tyre which had a proud and defiant history resisting all who came against it. Even though the Assyrians defeated this “stronghold” and later the Babylonians would bring it under their control, Tyre would in the future return to its former glory as the great merchant city of the ancient near east.

23:8-9 Who has planned this against Tyre,
the bestower of crowns,
whose merchants are princes,
whose traders are honored around the world?

9 The LORD of hosts has planned it,
to defile the pride of all glory,
to bring to shame all the honored of the earth.

Isaiah reveals that the Lord of hosts has planned the destruction of Tyre, who was once the “bestower of crowns” and whose “merchants were princes” and whose “traders are honored around the world,” The NKJV translates this better as: “Whose traders are the honorable of the earth.” The great pride of Tyre and the Phoenicians was now defiled of all their beauty as was the earth itself for God planned to defile “the pride of all glory, to bring to shame all the honored of the earth.” This message, 23:8-9, was most likely for the people of Judah so they would understand that even great nations and peoples can be brought to destruction by God who controls the world. As in the previous oracles by Isaiah, the prophet is declaring to the people of Judah not to seek assistance from the Phoenicians against the advancing Assyrians armies. No former great nation, Egypt, Ethiopia or Phoenicia, nor fledgling nation, Babylon, nor their immediate neighbors, Syria (Damascus) nor Moab, Edom or Arabia or any other nation can be of any assistance against Assyria. God has decreed that Assyria is his agent of destruction in his judgment against the nations. As Isaiah, will later reveal, in chapters 36-37, even this agent of God, will itself suffer complete defeat from God Himself without any aid from any nation.

23:10-12 Cross through your land like the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish;
there is no harbor any more.

11 He has stretched out his hand over the sea;
he has shaken the kingdoms.
The LORD has given commands concerning Canaan
to destroy its fortresses.

12 He said, "You will not celebrate any more,
O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon.
Arise, pass over to Cyprus;
even there you will have no rest."

The prophet reveals the continuing work of God in making the nations tremble and the sea to be His means of destruction. Canaan will also have its strongholds demolished. The Phoenicians are called upon to leave their land and travel over the sea to its colony Cyprus but even in this small island nation, the Phoenicians
will find no rest. In these days, 702-701 B.C., God is using the Assyrians to bring about his punishment for the sins of the countries of the ancient near east. No nation can resist or defeat the Assyrians as God’s agent of judgment.

23:13-14 Look at the land of the Chaldeans;
    this is a people who were not;
    the Assyrians established it as a place for desert animals;
    they set up their siege towers;
    they stripped bare its palaces;
    they reduced it to a ruin.
14 Wail, you ships of Tarshish;
    your fortress is destroyed.

Isaiah explains that the Assyrians would defeat Babylon (land of the Chaldeans) and cause the Babylonians to be a people “which was not”. Babylon was reduced to a ruin and therefore could not be of any assistance to Judah in its defense against the invasion of the Assyrians. The defeat of Babylon by Assyria was in 702 B.C. The Assyrian armies would be entirely destroyed by God in 701 B.C. However, Babylon would once again rise to become the most dominant nation in the ancient near east and God would use this pagan nation to bring about the destruction of Judah and His beloved city Jerusalem as future events unfold. In 23:14, Isaiah repeats his command to the ships of Tarshish to wail for their fortress (Tyre) is destroyed. Isaiah 23:14 concludes this part of Isaiah’s oracle against the Phoenicians.

23:15 In that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, for the days of a single king. Then at the end of seventy years, Tyre will come back as in the song about the prostitute.

A major change in Isaiah’s message is presented in 23:15-18. As recorded in Isaiah 23:15, the prophet states that Tyre was to be forgotten for a period of seventy years, “the days of a single king” or the period of time of a king’s lifespan. It is not stated when this period of seventy years will begin or end. One scholar suggests that if the seventy years began in 702 B.C. and ended in approximately 630 B.C. it would coincide with the complete collapse of the Assyrian empire following the death of its last king, Ashurbanipal. See, Gary V. Smith, Isaiah 1-39, page 403.

23:16 “Take a harp, go about the city,
     O forgotten whore;
     make sweet melody,
     sing many songs,
     so that you may be remembered.”

At the end of this seventy-year period, Tyre will be like a forgotten harlot who walks about the city with a harp and singing many songs with the implication that with its enemy now gone, it can once again play the harlot with its trading partners and entice them to do business as before.

23:17 After the seventy years, the LORD will restore Tyre, and she will return to her hire, and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.
There is a significant change to this prophecy introduced in 23:17. It is the Lord who will visit Tyre and bring about the resurgence of Tyre, but she will “prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.” After a period of seventy years of judgment, Tyre will once again regain her position as a major trading center. But the city will not have learned from this period of judgment to trust in Him and acknowledge Him. It seems that a shift has occurred in the prophecy from the times of the prophet Isaiah to that of the end times. This is a feature of prophetic Scriptures that God gives a message to “his servants the prophets” that at first speaks to the immediate historical events happening during the lives of the prophets and then moves without break or introduction to the end times.

23:18 Her merchandise and her wages will be consecrated to the LORD. It will not be stored up or hoarded; her merchandise will be for them who live in the LORD's presence, supplying plenty of food and beautiful clothes.

Isaiah 23:18 is most assuredly is an end-times prophecy. God will use the profits of sinful nations who have stored up or hoarded the profits (wages) from their trading of merchandise which will be “consecrated to the LORD”. These “wages” or profits will become a supply of plentiful food and beautiful clothes for the faithful remnant, the ones who live in the presence of the Lord. See Isaiah 18:7, 60:10-18 and 61:6. If we remember that God is in absolute control of the world and is sovereign in all of the dealings of the world, it should not surprise us that He will use the monies of the world to ensure His people are looked after.

Isaiah 23:17-18, conclude and summarize the entire section of chapters 13-23 which are the judgment of God on the world’s nations and specifically those who have a relationship or border the ancient small nation of Judah. The primary message of these chapters is that Judah must not seek aid from any other nation or peoples in their defense against the advancing Assyrian armies. God is using Assyria as His agent of judgment and retribution against these nations. Judah must trust in God alone for salvation and security. The secondary message of these chapters is that God controls every aspect of all nations including their leadership and their financial resources. He will use the leaders of these nations and the wealth of these nations to accomplish His plans and to bring about His decreed will for the peoples of the earth. Even previous enemies of the nation of Judah will one day become like family and they will worship God together in His glorious kingdom to come upon the earth.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah chapter 23

1 A loss from the Sea
   The Wailing of the Ships of Tarshish: 24:1,14
   The Wasting of the Strength of Tyre: 24:2-7

2 A Lesson from the Sovereign
   The Divine Power of God’s Administration: 24:8-12
   The Destructive Power of God’s Agent: 24:13

3 A Levy from the Sea
   The Wages of the Harlot Set Adrift: 24:15
   The Wages of the Harlot Set Apart: 24:16-18
E. Worldwide Judgment and Protection for Israel: Chapters 24-27
2. Praise for Israel’s Salvation: 25:1 – 26:21

Thomas Constable provides an extended introduction to Isaiah chapters 24-27:

“This section of the text has similarities to the preceding oracles against the nations (chs.13-23), but it is also different in certain respects. It is a third cycle, but not a cycle of oracles. The content integrates with the oracles, but chapters 24—27 are one continuous whole. It is similar to the finale of a great piece of music; it is climactic but can be appreciated by itself (cf. Zech. 9—14).

Chapters 24—27 also parallel chapters 1—4 in that both sections contain messages of sin, judgment, and restoration “in that day.” Likewise, 27:2-6 is another song about a vineyard (cf. 5:1-7). Chapters 28—33 contain six woes, like 5:8-30. Chapter 34 assures divine judgment on Gentile oppressors (cf. ch.10), and chapter 35 promises kingdom blessings for Israel (cf. chs.11—12). 271

The theme of this section is the triumph of God over His enemies for His people. Isaiah developed this theme by picturing the destruction of one "city" ("the city of chaos" [v. 10], which is the city "of man," i.e., "of the whole world"), and the establishment of another city (Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the city of God). These two "cities" are the focal points of the judgment and restoration that Isaiah alluded to in the preceding oracles. As the city of man falls under divine judgment, the songs of God-neglecting people disappear; and as the city of God appears, the songs of the redeemed swell.

Temporally, the first five oracles (chs.13—20) had strong connections to Isaiah's own times, and the second five (chs. 21—23) reached further into the future. This is not saying, however, that the first oracles were entirely restricted to Isaiah's time and the second were completely futuristic. The comparison is only general, not absolute, as exposition of the oracles has shown. This section (chs.24—27) stretches even further into the future and is mainly eschatological.

Many commentators refer to this section as "Isaiah's Apocalypse," because it reveals the culmination of history, though strictly speaking the language used is not apocalyptic but eschatological.275 These are prophecies regarding the eschatological day of the Lord. Later scriptural revelation enables us to locate these judgments more specifically in the Tribulation, at the return of Christ, in the Millennium, and at the very end of human history on this earth.

The original settings of the prophecies that make up this section are even more difficult to nail down than those in the foregoing oracles. Chapters 24—27 develop the calls expressed in 2:2-4 and 5: calls to the nations and to God's people to come to Jerusalem, the magnet of the earth in the future. The structure of the passage is chiastic, also centering on Mount Zion (25:6-12).

Chapters 24-27 contain prophetic declarations of world destruction and songs of praise to God in a manner that is very similar to the prophecy of the Book of Revelation from chapters 6-20. Since the Scripture have One divine author who moved the human scribes to write as He directed, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21, it should not surprise students of the Scriptures to see the consistency of the message of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. Many commentators of Scripture fall into the habit of stating that a particular human author of a Bible book borrowed or took his message from a stated source either within or without of the pages of the Bible. This is a dangerous viewpoint and may lead to the conclusion that the divine author, the Holy Spirit, was not actively involved in the writing of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit moved the human writers to inscribe exactly as He planned so no human writer needed to borrow, repeat or take from any source any reference that was not the full intention of the Holy Spirit. These four chapters of Isaiah are placed exactly where the Holy Spirit intended them to be and are placed in this specific part of the prophecy God gave Isaiah for God’s divine purposes.

Up to this point in the prophecy of the Book of Isaiah, the prophet has described in startling detail the plan of God in His dealings of judgment upon the nation of Judah, its immediate neighbors and the most powerful nations in the ancient near east during the days of Isaiah. All who oppose God or refuse to acknowledge Him and worship Him as the One glorious creator of the heavens and the earth will face His divine wrath. Chapters 24-27 are a dramatic climax to all 23 preceding chapters. The main message of these four chapters is: God demands unfettered trust and faith in Him and any peoples including His chosen race who do not trust Him whole-heartedly will face His judgment and destruction. A secondary message is also evident: Even amid the wrath of God, He will show mercy, Habakkuk 3:2, and has decreed that a remnant of His chosen race and Gentiles from the nations of the earth will survive to enjoy His glorious kingdom, which has as its center-piece Mount Zion and has as its personal Ruler, the Messiah.

Gary V. Smith provides a very useful analysis of how chapters 24-27 are thematically related to chapters 13-23:

“Chapters 24–27 are thematically connected to the messages against the foreign nations in chaps. 13–23 (especially 13:1–16), to the eschatological ideas in 2:1–5, and to the praise of God in 12:1–6. Specific theological ideas are recalled from earlier texts: (a) The positive “song of the vineyard” in 27:2–6 reverses the negative vineyard song in 5:1–7. (b) The establishment of God’s kingdom in 2:6–21 will involve the humbling of the proud (cf. 25:11–12; 26:5) and the Lord reigning in Zion (cf. 24:23b). (c) The imagery of destruction in chaps. 24–27 is closely connected to images of God’s judgment of the individual nations in chaps. 13–23, and particularly some of the phrases in the eschatological introduction in 13:1–16. (d) Both 13:1–16 and 24:1–23 describe the destruction and desolation of the earth (13:5, 9 and 24:1, 3). (e) People will be in pain like a woman in labor (13:8 and 26:17–18). (f) God will come to the earth in power (13:9 and 24:23). (g) The sun and moon will be darkened (13:10 and 24:23) and the earth will shake (13:13 and 24:18–20). (h) The proud will be humbled (13:11 and 25:11–12; 26:5). And (i) few people will be left on earth (13:12 and 24:6) because the people are sinful (13:11 and 24:5–6). Chapters 24–27 are not so much a summary but the grand finale for 13–23. This repetition of ideas unfolds a high level of theological continuity with Isaiah’s earlier prophecies, but the meanings of these phrases in 24–27 are not limited to their meaning in earlier paragraphs. Though earlier reference may provide a background from which to draw meaning, the interpreter needs to evaluate carefully the new contexts in chaps. 24–27 to find out if new meanings have developed to clarify God’s eschatological work.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, pages 406-407).

David L. Cooper provides this brief introduction to Isaiah Chapters 24-27:

“In chapters 24:1-27:13 we have what is known as "The Little Apocalypse" of Isaiah. This section is a fitting sequel to the burdens concerning the nations. As the name implies, the contents of this portion of the book pertains to the great Tribulation and the judgments which will fall upon the earth at that time and the
introduction of the great millennial kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly - June 1944.)


If we understand that Holy Spirit intended these four chapters to naturally follow the preceding chapters on the judgment of the nations and prior to the destruction of the Assyrian armies by the angel of the Lord, then it is possible to determine the time when these prophecies were declared. It is likely that they were proclaimed by Isaiah just prior to the final siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 701 B.C. They are then closely linked to chapter 22:1-14 and stand as a vivid picture of God’s intentions, not only for the nation of Assyria in the near future but for all the nations of the world in a far future day.

Throughout chapter 24, Isaiah is declaring the destruction to come on the entire earth. But when is this destruction to come? We know from history that this world-wide destruction did not happen during the days of Isaiah nor any day since the times in which Isaiah lived. We also know from Scripture that the type of destruction described by the prophet will happen in the future as stated by the Apostle John in Revelation chapters 6 to 20. It cannot refer to the opening verses of Genesis for at that time no peoples yet lived on the earth. There were no inhabitants during the first day of creation to be scattered.

As recorded in Isaiah chapter 24, the prophet proclaims that his audience is to Look (or Behold), for The LORD makes the earth desolate, and twists its surface and scatters its inhabitants, vs. 1. This will affect all of the earth’s people, regardless of rank or wealth for the earth is to be absolutely devastated and completely plundered, vss. 2-3. The earth is devastated, and few people remain, because its inhabitants have transgressed laws and violated statutes and have broken the everlasting covenant, vss. 4-6. Grape vines dry up and celebration ceases. Cities are ruined throughout the earth, vss. 7-13. However, in a far future day, the inhabitants of the earth will glorify the LORD, vss. 14-16a. The prophet laments the judgments to come upon the earth and the wickedness of its people, vss. 16b-20. In the day of the LORD, He will punish the kings of the earth and He will reign in Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, vss. 21-23.

Gleason L. Archer, Jr. comments on verses 1-13:

“The judgment that has been particularized in chapters 13-23 for each of the nations involved with Palestine now is represented as about to be poured out upon the earth as a whole. Verse 4 makes it certain that earth here must mean “the whole inhabited world” and not simply the land (of Palestine), as eres (v. 3) might otherwise be construed. There are just two classes of mankind in view here: the wicked and corrupt society of this world; and the faithful people of God. Without distinction as to class or condition, the wrath of the Almighty is to be poured out upon all the people of the world; and all the delights of sinful pleasure will be snatched away from them. Only the smallest remnant of them (vv. 6, 13) will survive the general destruction.” (Gleason L. Archer, Jr. *Isaiah*, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, page 626, Moody Press, 1962).

24:1 Look, the LORD lays waste to the earth,
makes it desolate,
twists its surface,
and scatters its inhabitants.

There should be no doubt that the opening verse of chapter 24 clearly states that the cataclysmic days of the end of the Tribulation period, prior to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom are prophesized by Isaiah. This opening verse is a fit declaratory introduction for chapters 24-27 of Isaiah’s prophecy. Some call these chapters the little apocalypse of Isaiah for they describe events that are revealed in greater detail in the Book
of Revelation which is also known as the Apocalypse. This title for the Book of Revelation comes from the word “revelation” which is the Greek word Apokalypsis, meaning revealing, unveiling or unfolding, which is the very first word of John’s Revelation of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 24:1 not only is a capstone statement for all of chapters 24-27 but is also the beginning statement of these four chapters which brings to dramatic conclusion the judgment on the nations recorded in chapters 13 to 23 of Isaiah’s prophecy. Therefore, chapters 24-27 were not arbitrarily inserted into the book of Isaiah at this point but were carefully written by the prophet to bring his words of judgment on the nations to a stunning conclusion. These words should provoke all who read them to consider their relationship with the Lord who holds their future in His hands. If any who read or hear the words of chapters 24-27, choose not to come to the Lord in faith and trust in Him for salvation, then they will suffer the consequences that these chapters so terrifyingly reveal.

The very first word that Isaiah states in 24:1 is “Look” or better translated as “Behold.” Isaiah begins this declaratory exclamation with a notice that the LORD has something dramatic to reveal and all who hear or read the prophet’s words should sit up and take notice. This is not just the passing on of words received from the Lord. Isaiah intends that his audience pay serious attention to the message he will next reveal.

The message concerns the earth. The word for “earth” is the Hebrew word eres which in the context of this passage, as Gleason Archer Jr. has stated above, is best translated as “earth” and not simply land which some may misunderstand as referring only to the land of Judah. The entire world is being addressed and God’s judgment is to come upon it as the last book in the Bible so vividly declares.

The word “desolate” is also translated as ‘devastates” and is the Hebrew word balaq and has the meaning of “to annihilate” or “lay waste” which is repetitive of the prior phrase: “lays waste to the earth.” The word “twists” often translated as “distorts” is the Hebrew word avah which has the meaning of perversion, to do iniquity, and bending or twisting. The sense of the Hebrew is that all of the earth will be twisted out of recognition or distorted due to the activity of iniquity by its inhabitants. The Lord is therefore distorting the entire surface of the earth as a judgment upon the earth’s inhabitants for their unending wickedness. See also verses 5-6.

24:2 It will hit the priest just like the people,
the master just like the servant,
the mistress just like the maid,
the seller just like the buyer,
the borrower just like the lender,
the debtor just like the creditor.

The comparative words of who will be like each other: people-priest, servant-master, maid-mistress, buyer-seller, lender-borrower, and creditor-debtor are indicative that in the last days when God will lay waste the earth, everyone will equally face God’s wrath. There will be no exclusions. This prophecy is again seen in Revelation 6:15-17:

“15 Then the kings of the earth, important people, commanders, the rich and powerful, and every slave and free person, hid themselves in the caves and rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of the one sitting on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath is come, and who is able to survive it?"
The earth will be absolutely devastated, and completely plundered; the LORD has spoken this word.

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the people of prominence of the earth languish.

The destruction of the earth in these verses is described by many words which are very descriptive of the kind of devastation that will come upon the world at the end of the Tribulation period when God completes that part of His judgment just prior to the second advent of the Messiah who will rescue the faithful remnant of His people Israel and then establish His earthly kingdom that will endure for a thousand years.

The types of destruction mentioned describe a climatic time when God will deal with mankind for their abominations and evil actions. John the Apostle states, “We thank you, O Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. 18 The nations raged, and your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged has arrived, as well as the time to reward your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name, both the small and the great and to destroy those who destroy the earth.” Revelation 11:17-18.

Those who were responsible for destroying the earth would themselves be destroyed as Isaiah so clearly proclaims in 24:5-6. The final destruction of the earth will come about at the time of the great white throne judgment, Revelation 20:11 and just following the pronouncement of the judgment of the second death, the lake of fire as described in Revelation 20:14 – 21:1. Some students of Scripture see this destruction as not involving the complete destruction of the earth but more of a renovation where the earth is being prepared for the final eternal state. This view seems unlikely as the Apostle Peter states as recorded in 2 Peter 3:10, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” (NKJV)

At the time of the great white throne judgment, the Apostle John describes the demise of the earth and heaven as recorded in Revelation 20:11, “Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat on it, from whose presence the earth and heaven fled away and there was no place found for them.” The Apostle Matthew records the words of Jesus regarding these climatic days in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Isaiah also adds more comment in 24:18-20. See the notes below for these verses.

During the days of the Tribulation as recorded in the book of Revelation, the Lord will bring disaster upon the earth and its inhabitants. The Apostle John states various stages of destruction in Revelation 6:12-16, 8:7-12, 11:19, 16:1-21 which were all a prelude to the final removal of the earth and heaven as recorded in Revelation 20:11. The reference to the heaven in Revelation 20:11 must be the atmospheric and cosmic heaven, including the sun and the moon and all stars and galaxies. The new heaven and new earth, Revelation 21:1, will have no need for these celestial objects as stated in Revelation 21:23, “The city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminates it and the Lamb is its lamp.”

During the period of the Tribulation, the earth will be subject to great turmoil, yet the entire earth will not be destroyed. Jeremiah 4:27-31 is a similar passage regarding the days of the Tribulation. Jeremiah 4:27 states, “For this is what the LORD says, the whole land will be desolate, yet I will not totally destroy it.” The complete destruction of the earth will happen at the time of the great white throne judgment.
It is not just the earth and the cosmos that are under the judgment of God. Isaiah 24:1 as seen above includes the scattering of the inhabitants of the earth. Isaiah 24:2 describes these people as including all peoples from every walk of life. Isaiah 24:4 states that, “the people of prominence of the earth languish.” The Hebrew word for languish is *amal* which has the meaning of languish, fades and withers. Isaiah uses this word in 16:8, waste away; 19:8, waste away; 24:7, languishes; and 33:9, withers. See also Jeremiah 14:2; Hosea 4:3; Joel 1:10 and Nahum 1:4. Israel will not escape these days of judgment and devastation. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum suggests that there are several day of the Lord (Jehovah) passages that refer to the punishment of Israel: Ezekiel 13:1-7; Zechariah 13:2-6; Joel 2:1-11; Joel 3:14-17; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:7-13; and Zechariah 13:8-9. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, pages 281-285.

**24:5-6** The earth is defiled by its inhabitants; because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants are found guilty. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few people are left.

As stated in Isaiah 24:5-6, the prophet expounds on the reasons for the demise of the people of the earth. The peoples of the earth, since the creation of the first man and woman, have never stopped violating God’s commands and rebelling against Him. God’s first catastrophic judgment on the peoples of the earth for their continual evilness was the great flood recorded in Genesis chapters 6-9. God stated that He would not destroy every living thing – while the earth remains.

Moses, as recorded in Genesis 8:20-22 stated, “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took some of all the clean beasts and clean birds, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And the LORD smelled the sweet aroma. And the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of human beings, for the imagination of the human heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again destroy every living thing as I have done. 22 As long as the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night will not cease.”

The people of the earth have defiled the earth by transgressing “the laws.” The word “laws” is the Hebrew word *torot*. It may not be a reference to the Mosaic law. It can be understood as general laws of truth that God has made evident to all human beings. The Apostle Paul stated in Romans 1:18-20, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness, 19 because what can be known about God is clear to them; for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes are clearly seen, even his everlasting power and divinity, being seen through the things that are made. So they are without excuse.” However, as “laws”, Hebrew word *torot* is combined with “statutes”, the Hebrew word *choq*, it would also apply to the people of God who will face the terrible days of the Tribulation as Jeremiah 30:4-7 reveals.

Also, God stated, as recorded in Genesis 9:11, “I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; and never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” It is important to remember God made this promise to keep the seasons and the cycle of day and night, “as long as the earth remains”. In Isaiah chapter 24 and Revelation chapter 20, God promises to completely destroy the earth. The earth will not remain and therefore God can keep His covenant with Noah and also punish the
inhabitants of the earth for their continuing to transgress His laws and to violate His statutes and to break the everlasting covenant, Isaiah 24:5.

The reference to breaking the “everlasting covenant” Isaiah 24: 5, may lead to speculation by students of the Scriptures as to the identification of this covenant. There are several covenants that God has made with mankind and His covenant people that are stated in the Scriptures as “everlasting”: (1) Covenant with Noah: Genesis 9:16 and the greater context: Genesis chapters 8 and 9; (2) Covenant with Abraham: Genesis 17:7 and the greater context: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-21; 26:2-5 and 28:10-17; (3) Covenant with the Priesthood: Numbers 25:10-13; (4) Covenant with David: 2 Samuel 23:5 and the greater context: 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalms 89; 110 and 132; and (5) the New Covenant: Jeremiah 32:40 and the greater context: Jeremiah chapters 31-33; and Ezekiel 36:22-37. As Isaiah does not identify any specific “everlasting covenant” it is perhaps best to let this statement stand on its own. For an excellent resource on the Biblical Covenants see The Masters Seminary Journal TMSJ 10/2 (Fall 1999). Dr. Paul Martin Henebury has also published valuable content about the Biblical covenants on the website, Dr. Reluctant, https://drreluctant.wordpress.com.

It is a worthwhile and important study for students of the Bible to understand the covenants God has made with mankind. It is one of the great core issues of the Scriptures as the covenants give detail as to God’s purposes and plans for the world and the peoples He has created. To understand the Bible correctly is to understand the meaning and intent of these covenants. It is to be lamented that many Bible believing saints do not know nor understand, even in a cursory way, the content and meaning of these covenants.

As recorded in Isaiah 24:6, the prophet records the results of those who have not kept the laws and statutes of God and have broken the everlasting covenant God had made with them. There are two calamities to come upon the earth. The first calamity is, “a curse devours the earth,” and the second is, “the inhabitants of the earth are burned and few people are left.” The reference to the curse that devours the earth is as old as the Garden of Eden. God cursed the ground because of the sin of Adam, Genesis 3:17. Later when Noah was born, Lamech, his father called his name Noah, and he said, “He will bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, because of the ground that the LORD has cursed.” Genesis 5:29.

God has promised a curse on those who have been disobedient to his commandments and a blessing to those who have been obedient to them. Near the end of Moses’ life, this great leader spoke to the Israelites and urged them to be obedient to the Lord and follow all his commandments. Deuteronomy chapters 28 to 30 contain promises of both blessings and curses for the people of God depending upon their obedience or disobedience to the words of God. Other passages of Scripture contain similar invocations: Joshua 8:34, 2 Chronicles 34:24, Proverbs 3:3, Isaiah 65:5, Jeremiah 11:1-5, 17:5, and Daniel 9:11 in the Old Testament. It is not until the last chapter of the Bible that we read of the eternal state where, “There will no longer be any curse.” Revelation 22:3. Jeremiah reminded the Israelites of the consequences of not heeding the words of God’s covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 3 Tell them, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'Cursed is the person who does not obey the words of this covenant, 4 which I commanded your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace,' saying, 'Obey my voice, and do everything that I command you then you will be my people, and I will be your God, 5 so that I may keep the promise that I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey,'" the very land you have this day.'" Then I answered, and said, "Amen, may it be so, LORD.” Jeremiah 11:1-5.
The words of Isaiah in 24:6, “its inhabitants are found guilty,” have a significant meaning. “Found guilty” in the DASV is translated “desolate” in the KJV. The Hebrew word is haru which means to be burned or charred. See Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 237, and Edward E. Hindson, Isaiah in the King James Bible Commentary, page 798. Thus, when this idea is repeated in 24:6, “Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned”, it delivers a powerful message to all who read Isaiah’s prophecy. God’s final solution to the unrepentant sin of mankind is destruction by fire. First the burning of Hell awaits those who go there and then Hell itself is cast into the eternal lake of fire. Revelation 20:14. This is not a popular message, and many try to dispel this horrible outcome by advocating the annihilation of man’s souls upon death, but this is not what the Bible teaches. The message of both Isaiah 24 and Revelation 20 needs to be heeded by all of the world’s inhabitants. No one who continues to sin is exempt. No one can escape the horrific consequences of God’s final solution for sin unless they repent of their sins and trust in the Messiah of Isaiah who is the Savior of mankind. Isaiah had earlier commented on this time in 13:11-13.

24:7-9 The new wine dries up,  
the vine languishes,  
all the merry-hearted groan.  
8 The celebration with tambourines ceases,  
the revelry of those who rejoice stops,  
the joy of the harp halts.  
9 No longer will they drink wine with a song;  
strong drink will be bitter to those who drink it.

Isaiah 24:7-9 is a sub-section within the greater section of 24:7-12 which continue the description of the woes of the people who are living during the time of the Tribulation. Those who would drink wine for celebrating have no cause for merriment as the vine will decay. Isaiah in 24:7, describes the new wine as languishing (mourning) as if the wine itself is aware of the calamity of the judgment of God upon the people. In 24:8, Isaiah stated that musical instruments, tambourines and harps will no longer be used by revelers, those who are joyous, exultant or by the jubilant. There will be no cause for joyous occasions. If and when singing takes place, wine is not consumed, 24:9, and even strong drink offers no pleasure for it will be bitter to those who drink it.

24:10 The wasted city is broken down;  
every house is locked down  
so that no one can enter.

The identification of the “wasted city” or city of chaos, Isaiah 24:10 and desolate city, in 24:12, may cause some to speculate as to its specific identity. However, as the city is not identified, it seems best to let this prophecy of the “city” in the future to be a representation of all the cities and their inhabitants that will suffer unimaginable misery and ruin during the Tribulation period to come. The city where the wicked inhabitants have rebelled against God is “broken down.” The meaning here is that the city has been laid waste and is now of no worth. There is no house open where people can enter or live. This is a prophecy of the final days of the Tribulation period during which the announcement of the fall of Babylon is described. See Revelation chapters 17-18.

24:11 There is crying in the streets for wine;  
all joy has turned to gloom,  
the gladness of the land is banished.
Isaiah in 24:11, repeats the emphasis of 24:7-9 as the vine has decayed and there is no wine to drink and there is no joyous occasion where wine would be consumed. There is no joy whatsoever in “the earth” as only gloom remains for any gaiety has been banished. The wicked inhabitants have no place to turn and face utter despair and the horror of the judgment of God upon them.

24:12 **The city is left desolate,**

*and the gate is beaten into pieces.*

As a fitting description of the worthlessness of the city, Isaiah states that the very gate of the “city” is “left desolate” or “battered into ruins” (ESV). The city gate represents its defense in the keeping out of enemies and protecting the people within the walls. There is now no defense and the enemy the people face is God Almighty who will enact complete destruction on both the city and its inhabitants. There will be no escape from the judgment of God as only desolation remains in the city.

24:13 **This is how it will be throughout the earth**

*among the nations,*

*like when an olive tree is beaten in harvest,*

*like the gleanings left when the grape harvest is over.*

Although contained within the message of destruction, Isaiah’s prophecy does offer a glimmer of hope for those who will endure the days of Tribulation. The residue from the shaking of an olive tree and the gleanings when the grape harvest is over, seems to indicate that there will be a few people who can harvest the meager fruit that is left. These people may be understood to be the “remnant” of the elect people of God which are ethnic Jews who have come to a belief of their Messiah for salvation. They will have called on Him to come and save them from their enemies who have surrounded them and threaten to completely destroy them. Zechariah 9:11-17, 12:1-14:7. In that day they will, “look on me, the one whom they have pierced. They will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and will grieve bitterly for him, as one bitterly grieving over a firstborn child.” Zechariah 12:10. The ones who glean the meager leftovers from the harvest would also include surviving Gentiles who have come to trust in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, for salvation.

24:14-16a **They will lift up their voices,**

*they will shout for joy;*

*the majesty of the LORD*

*they will proclaim from the west.*

15 **Therefore glorify the LORD in the east,**

*even the name of the LORD,*

*in the islands of the sea,*

*the God of Israel.*

16 **From the ends of the earth we hear songs:**

"Glory to the Righteous One."

The remnant, both Jews and Gentiles who have trusted in their Messiah for salvation and are alive when the Messiah returns to end the period of Tribulation will sing praises of glory to the name of the Lord. They will sing His praises from the east and from the west, from the coastlands of the sea and from the ends of the earth. The peoples from every place on the earth will glorify God and sing “Glory to the Righteous One.” vs. 16a. The reason for this rejoicing is that they will have seen the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who has
saved them from the calamity of destruction. This inclusion of songs of praises amid prophecies of destruction is similar to the pattern of the Book of Revelation. Chapters 24-27 of Isaiah remind the reader of Scripture of Revelation chapters 6-19 where the prophecies of world doom, introduced by Isaiah, are further explained. For a discussion on the inclusion of the Gentiles in this world-wide chorus of praise, see Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, page 421.

The DASV, in Isaiah 24:16 states “Glory to the Righteous One.” The KJV states “glory to the righteous.” One scholar posits an alternate meaning to the words, “the Righteous One.”

“Some understand “the righteous” as referring to God Himself. However since God is nowhere else called “Tsadik” – “the righteous one,” it therefore means “the righteous people of God,” or His faithful remnant. (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 237-238).

24:16b-20 But I said, "I am wasting away, I am wasting away, woe is me! For the deceivers have acted deceitfully; the deceivers have acted very deceitfully."

17 Terror, the pit, and the snare, are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth.
18 Whoever flees from the sound of terror will fall into the pit; whoever comes up out of the midst of the pit will be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble.
19 The earth is totally broken up, the earth is ripped apart, the earth is violently shaken.
20 The earth will stagger like a drunkard, it will sway like a hut in a storm; its transgression will be heavy on it, it will fall and not get up again.

As the Prophet Isaiah contemplates the vision of the doom of the world given to him by God, he realizes the hopeless condition of all mankind including the nation of Judah. Not only is the situation of the world hopeless it is further terrorized by the treacherous actions of the world’s inhabitants. Instead of seeking God in repentance when faced with worldwide calamity, the peoples of the world resort to treachery. The prophet cries out, “woe is me” similar to an earlier time when he saw the Lord, Isaiah 6:5, and he acknowledged that he lived among a people of unclean lips. David L. Cooper comments on these words:

“In verse 16b the prophet sighs and expresses a woe because "the treacherous have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous have dealt very treacherously." When one recognizes that Isaiah, chapter 24, is the abridged form of Revelation 6:1-20:10, and when one compares this brief outline with the full details as given in the Book of Revelation, one comes to the conclusion that this "treacherous one," or ones of whom the prophet here speaks, can be none other than the Antichrist and his lieutenants who, in the middle of the Tribulation ban all religion and demand that everyone worship him.” (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-June 1944).
Isaiah does not seem to be responding in woe to the current crisis facing Jerusalem by the armies from Assyria amid the cavalier attitude of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Isaiah 22:1-14. The prophet states in Isaiah 24:17-20, that it is the entire earth and all of its inhabitants that are facing destruction. From the perspective of Isaiah, who is declaring this prophecy, the timing of the calamity of the complete destruction of the earth would not be known. He would not have known how far it will be in the future that the earth “will fall, and not get up again,” 24:20. Thus, Isaiah sees that due to the treachery of the world’s inhabitants, he also is among the doomed and he cannot, at this time, sing the songs of praise, 24:14-16a, that those in the future will sing who will have escaped the doom to come.

The tone of Isaiah 24:16b to 20 is one of complete dismay and helplessness for the inhabitants of the earth. Those who are victimized by the treacherous dealings by the wicked of the earth will not escape terror if they run away for the pit and the snare will entrap them, 24:16b-18a. If this is not enough to endure, the prophet reveals that the windows above will be opened, 24:18b, which is likely a reference to the judgment God will send from the heavens upon the peoples of the earth as described in Revelation 6:12-17; 8:3-13 and 16:1-21. If the judgments of God sent from the heavens are endured, then worse is to follow.

The words in Isaiah 24:17-18, “the pit and the snare,” are descriptive terms that predict that humans will be caught in traps just like those set for wild animals. Jeremiah uses these words when describing God’s judgment on Moab, “Terror, the pit, and the snare, is your destiny, O inhabitant of Moab,” says the LORD. 44 “The one who flees from fear will fall into the pit; the one who climbs out of the pit will be taken by the snare.” Jeremiah 48: 43-44. The Prophet Amos describes these days in a well-known passage, “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light. 19 It will be as if a man fled from a lion, only to meet a bear; then escaping into a house, rests his hand on the wall, only to be bitten by a snake.” Amos 5:18-19.

The words in Isaiah 24:18, “For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble,” are descriptive of the destruction to come during the days of the Tribulation. The phrase “the windows of heaven are opened” is a reference to the destructive judgments God will cause to come from heaven as John describes in Revelation 6:12-17; 8:5-12 and 16:1-21. The phrase “the foundations of the earth tremble” is also a reference to these same horrifying days of judgment as John describes in Revelation as earthquakes, 6:12; 8:5; 11:19; and 16:17-19.

Isaiah 24:19-20 reveals that the earth itself will be “broken up.” It will be “ripped apart” and will be “violently shaken” and the earth will “stagger like a drunkard”. It will “sway like a hut in a storm,” and finally, due to the transgressions of its inhabitants, “it will fall, and not get up again.” This descriptive terminology of the last days is not confined to this specific prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah mentioned a very similar judgment on the earth as stated in 13:13-16. Those who understand this prophecy to be a literal description of the last days will acknowledge that no matter how bad this period of calamity appears to be during the great Tribulation period, God is still in control and will not allow the earth to be finally destroyed until after the days of the millennial kingdom are over and the world’s inhabitants come face to face with God at the great white throne judgment. Revelation 20:11.

24:21 In that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven in heaven, and the kings of the earth on the earth.

The final three verses of Isaiah chapter 24 are an amazing prediction of the final days of the earth, immediately following the great Tribulation period. These three verses are directly connected with the previous verses of chapter 24 with the opening words of 24:21, “In that day.” What day is meant by the
prophet? “In that day,” must refer in context to the period of the great Tribulation and the days following when God will have His final solution for the sinful inhabitants of both the “host of heaven on high and the kings of the earth on the earth,” 24:21. The verses that precede these final three verses of chapter 24 deal with the destruction of the earth and punishment of its inhabitants that can only be understood as the days during the great tribulation. No other period in the history of the earth can rightly fit the days described in Revelation chapters 6-19. Isaiah 24:21-23, completes the prophecy with a description of the rule by the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem on Mount Zion.

The prophet records in 24:21 that, in that day, “the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven and the kings of the earth on the earth.” The close connection of the words “hosts” and “kings” reveal the prophet’s intention. For just as God is the Lord of hosts, 24:23, who is the sovereign of all the armies (angelic ones) of heaven, the word “host” in 24:21 should be rightly understood as those angelic beings who inhabit the heavenly places. These “hosts” should not be interpreted as stars and other celestial bodies for what purpose are they being punished? What have they done to deserve God’s judgment? The prophet Daniel was given a vision of the activities of these angelic hosts as recorded in Daniel 10:13. Other Scriptural references to their activity and their judgment are recorded in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 2:15, 1 Peter 3:22, and Revelation 12:7-9. Refer also to Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7 for insights into Satan’s activities in the heavenly realm.

It is sometimes a puzzle to students of Scripture why God, in His design and plan for His creation, allowed for those angelic hosts to remain for so long in a state of rebellion before He finally brings His judgment upon them. The student must remember that God’s ways are higher than our ways and His wisdom far surpasses that of any human being, no matter how intelligent or knowledgeable. God ultimately has a purpose for these angelic beings and when this purpose is fulfilled to God’s glory, He will bring on them the punishment He alone has decreed. Not all angelic hosts will be so judged. Revelation 12:7-9 seems to indicate that up to one third of these angelic hosts will come under the judgment of God for their rebellious allegiance with Satan.

Not only will the angelic hosts who have rebelled be judged by God in the last days, but the kings of the earth will also come under divine retribution for their sins. It is significant that in Isaiah 24:21, the prophet repeats the phrase “on the earth”. This emphasizes the distinction between the heavenly realm and the earthly realm and makes it clear that God’s judgment upon all beings is being described. While Isaiah limits this punishment on earth to the kings as a counter point to those who are in the heavens on high, other Scriptures certainly indicate that all the inhabitants of the earth will face God’s punishment in that day. Refer to Zephaniah 1:2-3, Matthew 13:41-42, and Revelation 20:12. The earth’s rulers will certainly be at the forefront of the ones receiving their due reward for their sinfulness and rebellion against God. Revelation 6:15.

24:22 They will be gathered together, as prisoners gathered in a pit.

They will be locked up in the prison; after many days they will be punished.

Isaiah records that “they”, likely both the angelic hosts and the wicked kings of the earth, will be gathered together and confined in prison and “after many days they will be punished”. A description of the fate of the angels and ungodly humans that have sinned is recorded in 2 Peter 2:4-5, “For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but threw them down to hell, and held them in pits of darkness to be there until the judgment; and if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with
seven others, when he brought a flood upon the ungodly world.” and 2 Peter 2:9-10: “then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and reserve the unrighteous for punishment unto the day of judgment, especially those who indulge their flesh with defiling lust, and despise authority. Brash and arrogant, they do not fear slandering heavenly beings.” Jude records in his letter, verse 6, “And angels that kept not their proper positions, but left their appropriate dwelling place, he has kept in everlasting chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day.” It is likely that the place where angelic hosts who have sinned are being kept for their final judgment is the pit or abyss. Revelation 20:3. The ungodly people of the earth who have died will be kept in Hades (Hell) until the day of the great white throne judgment. Matthew 23:33, James 3:6, and Revelation 20:14.

The next statement as recorded in Isaiah 24:22 “after many days they will be punished,” if taken in context with the first part of this verse, describes a period of time that best fits the time that follows the millennial rule of Christ. See Revelation 20:1-6. This is a natural understanding of this verse. Revelatory prophecy in Scripture is progressive from Genesis to Revelation with later prophetic truth often filling in details that was not declared in an earlier passage. This is seen most readily in comparing prophetic and fulfillment passages such as Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 1:26-38.

24:23 Then the moon will blush,
and the sun will be ashamed;
for the LORD of hosts will reign in Mount Zion,
in Jerusalem and before his elders with glory.

The prophet reveals the crowning and glorious truth of the apex of “in that day” of Isaiah 24:21. In that day, “the moon will blush and the sun will be ashamed.” The Hebrew words Isaiah used was literally the white and the hot referring to the white reflection of the moon and the hot blazing sun. The reason they would be abased and ashamed is their brightness and glory cannot measure up to the glory of the LORD of hosts who “will reign in Mount Zion” The Lord will reign in Jerusalem “before his elders with glory.” It is possible that the words of the prophecy in this verse are condensed as early prophetic messages often are in Scripture. Prophets of the Old Testament were often given prophetic truths from God that “telescoped” or condensed the complete message. Later passages in Scripture expanded the message to provide full details as to the Lord’s purposes and plans for His people and for the times of the end. Isaiah 24:23 appears to be one of these condensed prophecies. The abasing of the sun and moon seems to fit with the eternal state according to Revelation 22:5, “There will be no more night. They will not need any light from a lamp, nor light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. They will reign forever and ever.”

However, the words in Isaiah 24:23, “for the LORD of hosts will reign in Mount Zion in Jerusalem,” best fit the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. In the eternal state, there is no mention of Mount Zion and Jerusalem is there called the New Jerusalem. The following selected passages describe the rule of the Messiah from Mount Zion, Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 2:3, 4:5, and 8:18; Joel 3:16-21; Micah 4:1-13; Zechariah 8:3, and 9:9. The last phrase of Isaiah 24:23, “before his elders with glory.” can be understood as fitting either the millennial kingdom or the eternal state. The first Scriptural reference to elders beholding the glory of God is Exodus 24:9-11 and the last specific reference is John’s vision of heaven in Revelation 19:4 which comes just before the establishment of the millennial rule of Christ. David L. Cooper comments:

“At the conclusion of the Tribulation the Lord Jesus Christ will come back to this earth and will set up His kingdom. He will not return, however, until the Jews acknowledge their national sin of rejecting Him and plead with Him to return. This truth is seen in such passages as Hosea 5:15-6:3 and Matthew 23:37-39. When He reappears, He will lift the curse from the earth and restore conditions similar to those which prevailed in Eden. A hint of this is found in Isaiah 51:1-3.
In the last verse of chapter 24 the moon, it is said, will be confounded and the sun put to shame. The reason for this phenomenon is that Jehovah of hosts with His glory and majesty will eclipse the brilliancy of the heavenly bodies—even though at that time the light of the moon will be as that of the sun and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold what it is today (Isa. 30:26). For a glowing picture of the earth as it will appear during the peaceful reign of our Lord, see such passages as Isaiah 2:1-4 and 4:2-6”. (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-June 1944)

Teaching Outline of Isaiah chapter 24
The Prophecy of the Ruin (of the earth): 24:1-12
The Plight of the Remnant: 24:13
The Praise of the Remnant: 24:14-16a
The Predicament of the Reprobates: 24:16b-20
The Proclamation of the Reign (of the King): 24:21-23

2. Praise for Israel’s Salvation: 25:1 - 26:21

Chapter 25 of Isaiah continues the short apocalyptic section of chapters 24-27. Thomas Constable provides a concise commentary on this chapter:

“Isaiah next described the remnant, believers who will stream to Zion, praising God, at the beginning of Messiah's reign. Notice the many triadic formations in the structure of this chapter, creating a feeling of the completeness of joy. The prophet first pictured the pilgrims moving through a ruined world to Zion, singing of the wonder of their rescue and the Lord's power over their enemy.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 116-117.)

As stated in Isaiah chapter 25, the prophet praises and exalts God because of His wonderful accomplishments and faithfulness to His ancient plans, vs. 1. God has brought to ruin a fortress that will never be rebuilt, vs. 2. Therefore, the strong will respect God for He has been a refuge, and a stronghold for the poor and needy, and He has also been a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat, vss. 3-4. God will silence the ruthless and the foreigners, vs. 5. God will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples, in this mountain (Mount Zion) and will remove the veil and shroud that has covered all the nations and will swallow up death forever and will remove forever the disgrace of His people, vss. 6-8. In that day, it will be said, here is God and He will save us and let us be glad in His salvation, vs. 9. The hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain (Mount Zion) but the people of Moab will be trampled down, and their walled fortress will be torn down to the ground, vss. 10-12.

25:1 O LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you,
I will praise your name;
for you have done wonderful things,
plans shaped of old in absolute faithfulness.

As recorded in Isaiah 25:1-5, the prophet proclaims another song of praise to God. Interspersed among the prophecies of destruction on the earth are these praise hymns: 24:14-16a; 25:1-5; and 26:1-19 and 27:2-6. Following the immediate context of Isaiah 24:21-23, the prophet proclaims this praise song, which will be sung by the remnant of the earth as they march through a ruined city and onwards to Mount Zion to meet the Lord of hosts who will, in that far future time, be ruling the world from the city of Jerusalem. The song of praise begins in Isaiah 25:1, with exaltation and thanksgiving to the name of the Lord, for He has “done wonderful things, plans shaped of old, in absolute faithfulness.”
This wonder working God is being praised for bringing to completion His plans which He had formed in the countless ages of the past and He has brought them to fruition with a faithfulness that is perfect. The plans of God are precious promises for those who trust in Him, “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.” Psalm 33:11. “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD, “plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11. Isaiah spoke often of the plans of God, Isaiah 14: 24, 27; 22:11; 23:9; 37:26 and 46:11; as did Jeremiah 18:8; 49:20 and 50:45.

The plans of God are steadfast and certain, and in His faithfulness, He is completing in perfection all that He has planned. Moses after a lifetime of witnessing first-hand the faithfulness of God proclaimed, “He is the Rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are just. A faithful God who does nothing wrong, Just and upright is he.” Deuteronomy 32:4. Even amid the foreboding sadness of a sinful and rebellious generation, the prophet Jeremiah could proclaim, “The loyal love of the LORD never fails, because his compassions never end. They are fresh every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23. The perfect faithfulness of God is sung about most gloriously in the Psalms, Psalm 33:4; 36:5; 40:10; 89:1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33, 49; 91:4; 92:2; 96:13; 98:3; 100:5; 119:75, 90, 138; and 143:1 It is also a common praise from the prophet Isaiah. See Isaiah 11:5, 16:5, 25:1 and 38:18-19.

25:2 For you have made a city a heap,
   a fortified town a ruin,
   a fortress for strangers is no longer a city;
   it will never be rebuilt.

One of the wonders mentioned in Isaiah 25:1 is declared in 25:2. It is that a city has been made into a ruin and it is no longer a fortress or palace for strangers for it will never be rebuilt. No specific city is mentioned by Isaiah his song of praise. Babylon may have been the intended city. Jeremiah proclaimed that, “Babylon will fall for the slain of Israel who have fallen, just as the slain of all the earth have fallen because of Babylon.” Jeremiah 51:49. The great city of Babylon will certainly meet its eventual doom just before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as stated in Revelation 14:8 and 18:1-2. This city may be intended as it best fits the chronology of the last days if this praise hymn is sung by the remnant as they march through the ruined city and on to Mount Zion in Jerusalem. David L. Cooper understands the city to be a reference to Babylon. Other commentators however, are not so certain to name “the city” as Babylon and understand it to be representative of a typical city which has been judged of God and overthrown completely.

25:3 Therefore strong peoples will respect you;
   a city of ruthless nations will fear you.

The prophet records in Isaiah 25:3 that due to the destruction of “the city” as stated in 25:2, that “Therefore the strong people will glorify You; the city of the terrible nations will fear You.” (NKJV). Who are these strong people and in what context are we to understand the cities of ruthless nations who will “glorify” (revere, respect) the Lord God? As Isaiah, had previously proclaimed in 19: 23-24, two of Judah’s greatest enemies, Egypt and Assyria will one day worship the Lord. There likely could not be any stronger peoples from any more ruthless nations than these nations and in days of the end times, there may be more Gentile nations who will revere the Lord as Messiah and come to worship in when He reigns on Mount Zion in Jerusalem during the Millennial kingdom. If the city that is destroyed completely is understood as representing the ungodly cities of humanity, then the Gentile survivors of the wrath of God during the Tribulation will be the ones who will come and revere the Lord God.
25:4 For you have been a refuge for the poor, 
a stronghold to the needy in their distress, 
a shelter from the storm, 
a shade from the heat. 
For the breath of the ruthless is 
like a storm battering against the wall,

The prophet’s song of praise concentrates on the helpless and the needy in distress. The helpless and needy people described in Isaiah 25:4, are set in contrast to the strong and ruthless of 25:3. In that time, during the terrifying days of Tribulation, Revelation chapters 6-19, not everyone will be destroyed. The prophet, as recorded in Isaiah 26: 20-21 of this united prophecy, urges his people, the faithful remnant of the Jews, to hide in their rooms:

20 Go, my people, enter into your rooms. 
    Shut your doors behind you. 
    Hide yourself for a little while, 
    until his anger is passed. 
21 For look, the LORD comes out of his dwelling place 
    to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their sin. 
    The earth also will reveal the bloodshed on her, 
    and will no longer cover her slain.

The prophet is now praising God in the past tense. As recorded in 25:4, Isaiah proclaims that God has been for the poor and needy a refuge and a fortress. From the storm and the heat God has been s shelter and shade. Those who would seek their harm, the ruthless, are likened to a storm that is battering against the wall of God’s fortress. The implication is that their attack will not succeed and all inside God’s protective shelter will be safe. The praise of the prophet here is that these horrific days are now past, and God has been faithful to protect His people from the storm of destruction being brought on the whole earth. It is in keeping with the context of these verses that this protection by God refers to the safety He will give to the most helpless during the days of the great Tribulation.

25:5 like heat in a parched place. 
    You will silence the uproar of foreigners; 
    like the heat subsiding from the shade of clouds, 
    the song of the ruthless will be silenced.

Isaiah continues his praise to the Lord God who subdues or silences the uproar of the foreigners, which are the Gentiles who belong to the army of Antichrist who will seek to destroy the people of God. Not only will these ruthless invaders be silenced, but their song will be silenced “like heat in a parched place”. The poetic language of the prophet here is used to dramatize the ways God will protect the helpless and needy. The songs of praise as recorded in Isaiah 25:1-5 is leading up to an event, that the peoples who were listening to the song would not likely have imagined. The proclamation of the next section, Isaiah 25:6-12 to the prophet’s audience, must have been like listening to the “Hallelujah Chorus” for the first time for modern day audiences. No wonder Kings and rulers stand in respect when the music and words of the composer Handel are sung by a grand choir. It may have been the same for Isaiah when he proclaimed these next words. His audience would have been overwhelmed in wonder.
Isaiah’s prophecy of the end times as recited in chapters 24-27 has now arrived at the very center of the prophet’s magnificent oration. Isaiah 25: 6-12 is like a grand introduction to the entire great section of salvation and comfort that the prophet will present in chapters 40-66. It is almost as if the prophet is invoking the words of the psalmist David, “Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.” Psalm 34:8.

The center of attention is now shifted beginning in Isaiah 25:6 to what the prophet states as “in this mountain.” What mountain is this? In Isaiah 24:23 the prophet indicates that it is Mount Zion where the Lord of hosts will reign. Therefore, it is logical in context of Isaiah chapters 24-27, that the mountain mentioned in Isaiah 25: 6, 7 and 10 is also Mount Zion. There should be no doubt that this prophecy is about the day of the Lord where the returning Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ will defeat His enemies and rescue the remnant of the Jews from imminent destruction and then set up a banquet “for all peoples” on Mount Zion to celebrate His victory and the establishment of His kingdom on earth. There was no day like this on Mount Zion from Isaiah’s day to today and it will not happen until the Lord returns. The Spirit of God, who is the true author of Scripture, gave this magnificent prophetic word to Isaiah. It is one of the grandest pictures of the days of the returning Messiah that is recorded in all the Scriptures.

The history of Mount Zion is worthy of careful study by the student of the Scriptures. Abraham was told by God to take Isaac: “your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love,” to be offered as a burnt offering, in the land of Moriah, “on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” Genesis 22:1-3. This was Mount Moriah where David went to erect an altar to the Lord and purchased this site, which was called “the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite,” 2 Samuel 24:18-25. This very site was stated by God to be the place upon which Solomon built the temple of the Lord 2 Chronicles 3:1. Abraham called this site, “The Lord Will Provide” and Moses commented, “it is said even to this day, in the mount of the Lord it will be provided.” Genesis 22:14. Moses called this place the “mount of the Lord.” God, through the prophet and king David, later stated, “I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.” Psalm 2:6 (NASB). In the future from David’s time to the time of the end, the day of the Lord, Mount Zion is the focal point of God’s dealing with his chosen people. For further study, students should consider all the Scripture passages where Zion and Mount Zion are mentioned. The words “Mount Zion” occur 21 times and “Zion” 178 times in the DASV. From this study, it will be marvelous to discover just how much the Lord loves His holy mountain and the people who inhabit it.

25:6: In this mountain the LORD of hosts will
make a lavish banquet for all peoples,
a feast of well aged wines and choice meats,
of the finest wines well strained.

As will be discussed below, the occasion of this banquet will be the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Messiah will return to the earth as a victorious warrior king, Isaiah 63:1-6, and will vanquish His enemies and then lead His faithful remnant to “this mountain” which was previously Mount Moriah but is called Mount Zion, the beloved mountain of the Lord. This banquet consisting of wine and choice pieces stands in sharp contrast to the failed vineyards of Judah, Isaiah 1:7-9, 3:14, 5:1-12 and 7:23; and to the banquet the Jews themselves selfishly enjoyed. Isaiah records in 5:12, “The harps and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts; but they do not regard the work of the LORD, nor consider the operation of His hands.” (NKJV).

Just as in Isaiah’s day, there were other banquets in the past when kings were crowned as recorded in 1 Samuel 11:15; 1 Kings 1:9, 19, 25; 1 Kings 8:62-65; and these banquets were also hosted by sinful men who
could not measure in any way in holiness to the Lord of hosts. The banquet, Isaiah references in 25: 6 is to be unlike any other the world has seen before or will see, because its host is the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. The fulfillment of this predicted banquet must certainly be the marriage supper of the Lamb recorded in Revelation 19:7-9 for no other banquet event recorded in all of the Scriptures could possibly be the event predicted in Isaiah 25:6. This great banquet was alluded to by the Lord in the parable of the marriage feast in Matthew 22:1-14. The wedding clothes necessary for attending the marriage feast, Matthew 22:11-14 certainly point to the “fine linen, bright and pure” which will be worn by the saints who will be the bride of the Lamb who will attend the great marriage supper of the Lamb. Revelation 19:7-8.

25:7 He will swallow up on this mountain
the shroud that covers all peoples,
and the veil that is spread over all nations.

Isaiah 25:7 most likely refers to the final removal of the “shroud” and the “veil” that have covered all the inhabitants of the world. When people are still in their sins and unsaved, the meaning of the Scriptures and specifically the words of Moses, which is the law, appear as a veil over their hearts. Only when they turn to the Lord for salvation is this veil removed. They then will understand the word of God. Satan, the one called “the god of this world” has blinded unregenerate minds so that they cannot see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:4. Refer to the greater context in 2 Corinthians 3:12 – 2 Corinthians 4:6. In contrast to this viewpoint, many scholars understand this shroud and veil to be a reference to the action of God who will “swallow up” (remove) the curse of death that is upon all nations. However, David L. Cooper affirms the first interpretation given above:

What is meant by this covering or veil which is spread over the peoples of earth and which Jehovah will destroy in that mountain, Jerusalem? We immediately realize that the prophet was not talking about a literal covering; it therefore must be a spiritual one. What covering can this be? The answer is doubtless given in II Corinthians 4:3,4: “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them.” That portion of the veil which covers Israel is referred to in Isaiah 29:9-12. As we have already seen, the judgments of the Tribulation will bring the bulk of the people of the earth to a realization of their helpless condition. Many of them will turn to God. The wicked will be purged by those judgments from the earth. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, He will bind Satan and all of his cohorts in the pit of the abyss and will lift this veil which blinds the eyes of the people; thus, in that mountain—Jerusalem—will this great miracle be wrought. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – June 1944).

25:8 He will swallow up death forever;
and the sovereign LORD will wipe away tears
from off all faces;
the disgrace of his people,
he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken it.

Isaiah 25:8 is another dramatic statement of the many actions that will happen on Mount Zion during the great banquet to be hosted by God as the beginning of the millennial reign of His Son. First, Isaiah states that God “will swallow up death forever.” The Apostle Paul cited Isaiah 25:8, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:54, to point out the truth of the victory over death that God will provide at the resurrection of all those who believe in Christ for salvation. Isaiah in 25:8 makes an outstanding prophecy about the reality of life after death. The prophet Isaiah commented on this in chapter 26:
Your dead will live;
your dead bodies will rise.
Wake up and sing, you who dwell in the dust.
For your dew is like the morning dew,
and the earth will give birth to those who were dead.
(Isaiah 26:19)

The Old Testament does contain references to the reality of life after death. Death as an outcome of disobedience to God is first mentioned early in the Scriptures in Genesis 2:17 and Genesis 3:17-19. However, the possibility of living after death is revealed in later days. Job, who may have lived during the days of Abraham or shortly thereafter, believed in the reality of living with God following death. Job stated, “But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth in the end. 26 Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes, and not another. My heart is overwhelmed by the thought.” Job 19:25-27. Job understood that he will have a Redeemer who will save him, not from physical death but from eternal death. This passage in Job contains the first mention of the word Redeemer. Students of Scripture understand that this Redeemer is the One who was declared to be the seed of Eve who would “bruise Satan on the head” but Satan could only bruise Him on the heel. Genesis 3:15. Isaiah, in 41:14 reveals who this Redeemer is:

Do not be afraid, O Jacob, you worm.
You men of Israel,
I will help you,”
says the LORD;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 25:9 states, this One, whom the people of God have been waiting for, during the dark devastating days of the Tribulation will be revealed as the LORD for He will save them. In the context of these verses in chapter 25, there should be no doubt that Isaiah is not referring to just temporal physical salvation. Isaiah states in 54:5:

For your Maker is your husband;
the LORD of hosts is his name.
The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer.
He will be called 'the God of the entire earth.'

In Isaiah 54:5, the prophet also calls this Redeemer by other titles: “your Maker – your husband”. In the Old Testament God calls Himself the husband of Israel. In the New Testament Jesus Christ is the bridegroom of the saints –and that is also worthy of another study by the student to Scripture. Isaiah continues his description of this Redeemer as recorded in 60:16:

You will know that I, the LORD,
am your Savior, your Redeemer,
the Mighty One of Jacob.

There certainly may have been many who understood this Mighty One of Jacob, the Lord of hosts, to be their savior or redeemer in the sense of saving them from physical harm from their enemies. However, it is readily evident that by comparing Job’s comment about eternal salvation wrought by the Redeemer with the description by Isaiah of the One who is the Redeemer, that Isaiah must have had understood that this
Redeemer and Savior provides eternal rather than temporary physical salvation to those who trust in Him. The prophet Daniel clearly understood the reality of everlasting life. Daniel 12:2.

The second great action in Isaiah 25:8 regards the events of the end time banquet hosted by the Lord of hosts. It is stated as “the sovereign Lord will wipe away tears from all faces.” In this comment, Isaiah again brings an early prophetic word about the wondrous works of God in the future. In Revelation 7:17, the Apostle John states, “For the Lamb who is in the middle of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” John repeats this comforting word in Revelation 21:4, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, nor will there be any more mourning, crying, or pain. The former things have passed away.”

It is evident from the references in Revelation that the eternal state is in view rather than the millennial reign of Christ. Thus, we see again the telescoping of prophecy by the Old Testament prophets who were not given all the details about the end times and how God would bring in two sequential reigns, the one being temporal, for one thousand years on the existing earth and the other being eternal on a new earth. It is significant that the Revelation 21:4 passage and the Isaiah 25:8 passage both mention the removal of death and the wiping of tears away from the eyes of the saints.

Isaiah continues with a third great action of the marvelous works of God as recorded in 25:8, “the disgrace of his people, he will take away from all the earth.” At the time of the beginning of the millennial reign of the Messiah, Jesus Christ upon Mount Zion, the remnant of the Jewish people, “his people” which is ammi in the Hebrew, will finally have the stigma removed from them of being God’s outcasts and His scattered ones. God will bring His people back to the land which He has promised them. This process has already started and will increase dramatically when Christ returns. Then His people will have a new status and standing in the world. Long ago, Moses stated the words of God as recorded in Deuteronomy 28:13, “The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you will always be on top and never on the bottom, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, that I am giving you today, to observe and to do them.”

The words of Moses again speak to this situation in the longer passage, Deuteronomy 30:1-10 which promises that the Jews would return to God and be restored from captivity and would be gathered “again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.” Deuteronomy 30:3. This second re-gathering of the Lord’s people is also mentioned by Isaiah in chapter 11:11-12:6. Refer to the notes on that section of this study. Other passages of Isaiah declaring this great re-gathering include, Isaiah 27:12-13 and 43:5-7. The major and minor prophets also made mention of this truth, Jeremiah 16:14-15, 23:3-4, 23:7-8 and 31:7-10; Ezekiel 11:14-18, 36:24 and all of Ezekiel chapter 37; Amos 9:14-15; Zephaniah 3:18-20; and Zechariah 10:8-12.

It should be remembered that the basis of this re-gathering of God’s chosen and elect people to a place of preeminence in the land God gave His people, was the covenant that God cut with Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:12-21; 26:2-5 and 28:13-15. Other references in the Old Testament include, Leviticus 26:40-45; Deuteronomy 30:1-14; Isaiah 27:12; 30:23-26; 35:1-10; 65:21-24; Jeremiah 31:1-14; Ezekiel 20:42-44; 28:25-26; 34:25-31; 36:8-15; 28:38; Joel 2:18-27; 3:18; and Amos 9:13. These Scriptures have to do specifically with the land promise God made to His people. For a further treatment of the final restoration of Israel and many other subjects dealing with the Messianic Kingdom, see The Footprints of the Messiah, Revised Edition 2004, published by Ariel Ministries, by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum.

The prophet concludes this magnificent prophecy, recorded in Isaiah 25:8, with the authoritative “for the LORD has spoken it.” This is a sure word of prophecy which has the stamp of the Lord’s sovereign declaration. It will happen exactly as the Lord said it will. There should be no doubt as to the messianic
fulfillment of not only Isaiah 25:8, but of all the prophetic words that Isaiah has delivered. The words, “the LORD has spoken” is a common phrase used by Isaiah to affirm the authority of God’s message. See also Isaiah 1:20; 21:17; 22:25; 24:3; 37:22; 40:5; 46:11; 48:15; and 58:14.

25:9 It will be said in that day,
"Look, here is our God;
we have waited for him,
and he will save us.
This is the LORD;
we have waited for him,
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

As mentioned above in the notes for Isaiah 25:8, the prophet would certainly have known that the great Redeemer would bring everlasting salvation to the people of God. The occasion of the Lord’s banquet, Isaiah 25:6-12, would be a celebration of this eternal life that the Holy One of Israel has given to His people. It is certainly not a coincidence, that the very words of Isaiah 25:9, “let us be gland and rejoice in his salvation” are part of the praise of the saints at the great banquet, the marriage supper of the Lamb as recorded in Revelation 19:7. These words also are part of the great praise of Psalm 118:24, “This is the day that the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” Other Scriptural references which use similar words of praise for the days when the Messiah will reign include, 1 Chronicles 16:31; Psalm 21:1; 31:7; 32:11; 40:16; 70:4; 96:11 and 97:1, 8; Isaiah 35:1; 65:18-19 and 66:10; Joel 2:21, 23; and Zechariah 10:7.

Isaiah expectantly waits for the salvation of the Lord and in his prophecy as recorded in 25:9, the prophet states that, at this great banquet, the peoples will see the Lord for whom they have waited. Others have expressed this sentiment, “But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.” Micah 7:7 See also Genesis 49:8; Psalm 25:5; 62:1 and 119:81 and Lamentations 3:26. The prophet further records his desire to wait for the salvation of the Lord as recorded in Isaiah33:2 and 51:5. See also Romans 11:25-26. An interesting and unique commentary on Micah about the long wait of Israel is entitled Micah and the long, sad days before Israel’s latter days by Bernard E. Northrup. This short commentary of Micah was available online at the time of the publishing of this study of Isaiah.

25:10-12 For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain;
Moab will be trampled down in his place,
just like straw is trampled down in the water of a manure pit.

11 Moab will spread out its hands in the midst of it,
like one who swims spreads out his hands to swim;
but the LORD will lay low their pride together
with the spreading out of their hands.

12 Your impregnable walled fortress he will bring down,
laid low, torn down to the dusty ground.

These verses contain comments about the people of Moab who live in close proximity to Mount Zion, “on this mountain” Isaiah 25:10. The mountains of Moab can be seen from various parts of Jerusalem including Mount Zion. The Lord includes, in His message to Isaiah regarding the last days, a lament about the people of Moab who will not be a part of the glorious times mentioned in the first 9 verses of chapter 25. The legacy of the Moabites was one of ill dealings with their close cousins the Israelites. Isaiah had earlier delivered a
message about the demise of this nation in chapters 15 and 16 of Isaiah’s prophecy. The last mention of Moab in the Scriptures, Zephaniah 2:8-9, gives the reason for their demise:

8 I have heard the taunts of Moab,
and the ridicule of the Ammonites, by which they have mocked my people
and arrogantly threatened their border.
9 Therefore as surely as I live,
says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,
Moab will become like Sodom,
and the Ammonites like Gomorrah.
They will be overrun by nettles,
and become salt pits and a permanent wasteland.
The remnant of my people will plunder them,
and the remnant of my nation will occupy their inheritance.

Isaiah states the Lord’s complete and utter distain for the people of Moab. In Isaiah 25:10-12, the prophet states that the Moabites will be trodden down like straw in a manure pile and when they try to get out of the pile, they will be prevented from escaping and their final plight will be to be ground to dust. It is of interest to students of the Scriptures, that God adds the lament about Moab in the context of the great words of praise for the works He will perform on Mount Zion. There seems to be an intentional contrast between the Mountain of the Lord where blessings will be given to the faithful remnant and the mountains of Moab where there will be judgment and absolute destruction. The prophet’s intent in these verses is to remind all who will listen of the drastic consequences of their sinful actions contrasted with the delightful blessings of their faithful actions.

Even among those who despise the God of Israel and His people, God can still work to fulfill His sovereign plans and purposes. Could any good thing come out of Moab? God answers this question with the story of Ruth. This is a story about a widowed Moabite widow named Ruth who, although in deep poverty, became the wife of a wealthy landowner in Bethlehem named Boaz who happened to be a kinsman of Ruth’s late husband’s father. Boaz and Ruth became the parents of a son named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse and Jesse had a son named David. The great story of Ruth from Moab is about her kinsmen redeemer, Boaz who is a portrait of the greater kinsman redeemer, the Messiah.

Teaching Outline of Isaiah Chapter 25
The Rejoicing of the Remnant: 25:1-5
The Reward of the Repentant: 25:6-9
The Ruin of the Rebellious: 25:10-12

Isaiah Chapter 26

Isaiah 26:1-19 contains a song of praise and a prayer of patience. This song and prayer will be proclaimed by those who have been kept safe during the days of tribulation, Isaiah 26:20-21. These are the words of the faithful remnant in the land of Judah who rejoice over their LORD who has brought them salvation, removed their enemies and has enlarged the borders of their promised land. “In that day,” the future day of the LORD, these words will be proclaimed regarding what God has accomplished, giving them a strong city into which a nation, the remnant, the faithful and righteous people may enter, vss. 1-2. God will keep His faithful people who trust in Him, in perfect peace, vs. 3. His people are to trust in Him forever for He as an everlasting rock has defeated His enemies who once lived on high but now have been trampled down to the dust of the ground, vss. 4-6.
The LORD makes the way of the righteous straight and level. God’s people wait for Him in the path of His judgments and the desire of their souls is for His name and His memory. God’s people desire Him. When God’s judgments are seen on the earth, the inhabitants learn righteousness, but when favor is shown to the wicked, the world will not learn righteousness, but will act unjustly and will not see the majesty of the LORD, vss. 7-10. The prophet asks that the wicked will see the LORD’s zeal for His people, so they can be put to shame, and the LORD’s fire will consume His enemies, vs. 11. But the LORD will establish peace for His people and His name was kept in remembrance by them, vss. 12-13. Those the LORD destroys will not arise and all memory of them will be erased, vs. 14. But the LORD has increased the nation and enlarged its borders and His name is glorified, vs. 15. The people had searched for the LORD when they were in trouble and did not accomplish any deliverance in themselves, vss. 16-18. Yet the LORD will cause the righteous to live and they will arise and sing to Him, vs. 19. The people of the LORD are to hide themselves for a little while until the LORD completes His punishment upon the wicked of the earth, vss. 20-21.

26:1-2 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
   We have a strong city;
   God has set up salvation like walls and ramparts.
2 Open the gates,
   so that the righteous nation
   that keeps faith may enter.

Some may view the words of the prophet, “in that day,” Isaiah 26:1, as a return to the days just prior to the culmination of the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem. Others may understand it to be a continuation of the prophecy of the greater day of the Lord and in particular the beginning of the millennial kingdom. The song of the strong city, Isaiah 26:1-6 is contrasted with the song of the ruined city, 25:1-5. There seems to be no valid reason to understand the words, “in that day” Isaiah 26:1 to be anything other than a continuation of the prophecy of the greater day of the Lord, which Isaiah began as recorded in 24:1 and continues until the end of chapter 27. The words “in that day” are repeated often in chapter 27 to confirm the continuation of the prophetic message of Isaiah in chapters 24-27 regarding the days of Tribulation and entrance into the millennial kingdom of the Messiah.

As recorded in Isaiah 26:1, the prophet recites the beginning of a song that the remnant will sing as they march into Jerusalem, which will be the regal residence of the Messiah during the millennial kingdom. In the context of this song, the people are singing about a strong city within the land of Judah. The word Judah, Yehuda in the Hebrew, means praise, and is a fitting statement for the song of praise that the remnant will sing. This city is undoubtedly Jerusalem and one who sets up walls and ramparts is the Lord of the city, the Messiah who will reign the earth from this “strong city”. Those who sing are calling for the gates of the city to be opened, Isaiah 26:2, so that the faithful righteous nation may enter. The faithful nation is the remnant of the Jewish people who have just been rescued from their enemies by their Messiah. The prophet calls for the gates of the city to be opened. The city had just recently been overrun by the armies of the nations who were bent on destroying the Jews. Zechariah 14:1-3. Now it stands ready for re-occupancy by a faithful and righteous nation. Psalms 15, 24 and 118 describe this event. Psalm 118:19-20 is another description of this day:

“Open the gates of righteousness for me;
I will enter through them,
and I will give thanks to the LORD.
20 This is the gate of the LORD,
the righteous will enter in through it.”
Following the victory of the Lord over His enemies and His divine protection of the righteous remnant of His chosen people, those who belong to this faithful righteous nation, will march from their secure place, in Bozrah, where they have been in hiding during the most terrifying days of the Great Tribulation. The Lord will have just rescued them from the armies of the world who had surrounded them. In their most desperate moments they had called on the Lord in repentance and in humble recognition of their prior rejection of Him as their Messiah, they ask Him for protection. The Messiah responds to their plea and returns to the earth to destroy these enemies, Isaiah 63:1-6 and then to lead His faithful remnant to the strong city and to Mount Zion where a great banquet has been prepared, Isaiah 25:6.

The above narrative is a very concise prophetic description of the last days of the Great Tribulation and the beginning days of the millennial kingdom. There is no single Scriptural passage that records the complete depiction of this narrative. Students of Scripture must be diligent in their study to piece the story together from a number of Old and New Testament passages. One student who has done this piecing-together is Arnold Fruchtenbaum who has put this narrative together in precise order. Fruchtenbaum’s book, The Footsteps of the Messiah, presents the plight of the Jewish people from the days of their scattering and sojourning in the nations of the world until their re-gathering and settlement in their promised land during the days of the millennial kingdom and then into the everlasting days of the eternal state.

26:3-4 You will keep in perfect peace,  
those whose minds are steadfast,  
because they trust in you.  

4 Trust in the LORD forever;  
for in the LORD, yes the LORD,  
you have an everlasting rock.

Isaiah continues the song of the faithful remnant. The emphasis of these two verses is on trusting in God the Lord who is an everlasting Rock. Because of this trust, those who are steadfast of mind will be kept in perfect peace by the Lord. The words “perfect peace” are in the Hebrew, shalom shalom or “peace peace”. The repetition of the word peace signifies the completeness and perfection of this peace which the Lord alone gives to those whose “minds are steadfast” which has as its meaning, that these people have a mind-set of completely leaning on and depending on the Lord. Thomas Constable comments on verse 4:

“Isaiah urged everyone to trust in the Lord as a way of life, not just in a saving act of faith, because Yahweh, even Yahweh, is the very essence of what an everlasting rock should be (cf. 17:10; 30:29; 44:8; Exod. 33:21; Deut. 32:4; 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 22:2, 32; Ps. 18:2; 19:14; 61:2; 1 Cor. 10:4). His presence is an unmoving place of refuge and protection from the elements and from all enemies. Augustus M. Toplady drew the inspiration for his hymn Rock of Ages from this verse.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 120).

26:5-6 For he has brought down those who dwell on high,  
the lofty city;  
he lays it low,  
he lays it low even to the ground;  
he throws it down into the dust.  

6 Feet will trample it down;  
even the feet of the poor,  
the steps of the needy.
Isaiah completes the first segment of the song of praise by the faithful remnant as they enter the City of Jerusalem to commence the millennial kingdom and to worship their retuning Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Messiah who is the subject of these verses. It is He who is praised for bringing low “those who dwell on high, the lofty city.” This is a reference to Isaiah 25:2 and 12, where the cities of the world including those of Moab have been made into a ruin. It is the faithful remnant who, in Isaiah 26:6, are described as having, “the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy.” It is they who are singing these praises to the Lord. It is they who will trample the remains of these cities into dust; when they walk victoriously from their hiding place up to Mount Zion. The prophet, in Isaiah 51:11 records their journey as does Isaiah 35:10 which states,

Those ransomed by the LORD will return,  
and come with singing to Zion;  
everlasting joy will crown their heads.  
They will find joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

26:7 The way of the righteous is straight,  
you level the path of the righteous.

The prophet changes the tone of the prophecy from a song of praise to a supplication of patience. The prayer beginning in 26:7, reminds the reader of the Psalmists plea as recorded in Psalm 1:1,

Blessed is the one who  
does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
or stand in the way with sinners,  
or sit in the seat of mockers.

It also is similar to many of the instructions of Solomon as recorded in the book of Proverbs. The word “straight” is meshar in the Hebrew and has the meaning of evenness, uprightness and equity. It also occurs in Isaiah 33:15, “speaks straight” and 45:19, “speak righteousness.” In the context of this passage this word could also be translated as “even” or “smooth” as the walkways and paths in Judah were upon rocky hillsides which made progress slow and often dangerous. Yet during the walk of the faithful remnant up to Zion to worship the Messiah, their paths would be made level and even. The word “way” is the Hebrew word orach. Among the major prophets, Isaiah alone uses this word. It is translated in Isaiah as “path” or “paths” in 2:3; 3:12; 26:8; 30:11; 40:14; and 41:3. In 33:8 it is translated as “highways.” It also occurs in as path in Joel 2:7 and as paths in Micah 4:2. The word “path” in Isaiah 26:7 is the Hebrew: magal, which is also translated as “paths” in Isaiah 59:8. It is interesting that in many of these verses, the English version contains both the words way and path, such as Isaiah 2:3 and Micah 4:2. In Isaiah 2:3 it is translated as “He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in his paths,” and in Micah 4:2 it is translated as “He shall teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths” (NKJV). Isaiah 26:7 states, “The way of the righteous is straight, you level the path of the righteous.” In Isaiah 30:11 the people of Judah rebelliously state, “Get out of the way, turn aside from the path.” Isaiah in 40:14, speaking of God, states “Who taught him the path of justice?.... or showed him the way of understanding?” These references are all for the DASV except for the NKJV as shown.

In the NKJV, the name of the Lord, “O Most Upright” is inserted between lines one and two of Isaiah 26:7. The DASV and the ESV have only the word “you” as a reference to God. The NIV and NASB have “O Upright One”; and the KJV has “Thou most upright.” This title for God, in these English versions, other than the DASV and the ESV, is unique in the Old Testament, occurring only in this verse.
26:8 Yes, in the path of your judgments, O LORD, we wait for you; the desire of our soul is for your name for your memory.

Isaiah reminds the Lord that the people of God have waited eagerly for Him and have been following the way, or path, of His judgments. They declare that the desire of their inner-being or souls is for the name of the Lord and for His memory. That this is a prayer of the faithful remnant and not of the people of Judah during Isaiah’s day, is obviously evident. Isaiah had previously delivered a message of condemnation to the people of Jerusalem and reminded them that their iniquity would not be forgiven, Isaiah 22:14. The Jewish people of Isaiah’s day were desirous of anything or anyone else other than the Lord. It is only after the chaotic days of the Great Tribulation that the Jewish people will finally cast off all other desires and love the Lord with all their hearts, souls, might (mind). Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Matthew 22:37.

The reverence and glory of the name of the Lord is a great theme of Scripture. For example, in Psalm 102:21 the psalmist writes, “So that the name of the LORD may be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem.” Ezekiel writes in 39:25 that the Lord is jealous of His name, “Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says: ‘Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel. I will be jealous for my holy name.”

Giving praise to the name of the Lord is also one of the majestic themes of the book of Isaiah. See 12:4; 24:15; 25:1; 26:8; 13; 47:4; 50:10; 56:6, 19; 60:9; 73:14, and 16. The Psalms, however, are the Scripture’s grand storehouse of the glories of the name of the Lord with over fifty verses declaring praise to the name of the Lord. Psalm 106:47, for example, is an example of a song the faithful remnant will sing, “Save us, O LORD our God, and regather us from among the nations, to give thanks to your holy name, and to glory in your praise.” Also, similar to Isaiah’s prayer in 26:8, is Psalm 119:55, “I have remembered your name in the night, O LORD, and keep your law.”

26:9 My soul longs for you in the night; yes, my spirit within me desires you. For when your judgments are seen in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

As recorded in Isaiah 26:9, the prophet continues the prayer of the faithful remnant proclaiming that their soul and spirit longs for and desires the Lord in the night. The longing of the Lord during the night watches, (see also Psalm 63:6), compliments the injunction of Psalm 1:2 which states that the righteous meditates on God’s law, day and night. After the calamity of the Great Tribulation, all the faithful remnant will have left to them is their memory of and longing for their Messiah. They will seek Him with diligence and they will find him after He re-gathers them from among all the nations where they have been scattered. See also, Ezekiel 34:11-31.

In the second half of 26:9, Isaiah reveals how God deals with the ungodly by stating, “For when your judgments are seen in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.” The prophet Jeremiah, in 36:3 comments, “It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster I plan on doing to them and turn everyone from their evil way so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.” The Apostle John expressed a similar but negative comment on this truth in Revelation 9:20, “The rest of humankind, who were not killed with these plagues, refused to repent of the works of their hands.” God brings judgment upon the earth as a punishment for the sins of its inhabitants but also as an opportunity for the world’s peoples to repent of these
sins and turn to Him in trust and worship. Refer also to 1 Kings 8:47; 2 Chronicles 6:37; Jeremiah 26:3; 2 Peter 3:9; Rev. 2:21, and 16:9.

26:10 When favor is shown to the wicked, 
they will not learn righteousness;  
in the land of uprightness they will act unjustly, 
and will not see the majesty of the LORD.

As recorded in Isaiah 26:10, the other side of the issue is declared. Even though the wicked are shown favor, with the meaning that they witness the word and works of God, they will not repent and “learn righteousness.” The ungodly continue to “act unjustly” even in the midst of righteousness “and will not see the majesty of the LORD.” The Lord, just prior to His crucifixion, recorded over Jerusalem, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kills the prophets, and stone the ones who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not! 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I say to you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” The Apostle Paul stated, in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

26:11 O LORD, your hand is lifted up, 
yet they do not see it. 
Let them see your zeal for your people, 
and be put to shame; 
yes, fire will consume your adversaries.

In Isaiah 26:11-19, the prophet prays for the future resurrection of God’s people, and also that they would be careful to praise God. In 26:11, Isaiah asks God to allow His people to see His uplifted hand and see His zeal that they may be “put to shame,” for God’s enemies will be consumed by fire. The prophet warns the wicked of their final destiny because they fail to see the hand of the Lord raised and ready to bring judgment upon them. Even though the wicked witness the zeal of the Lord for His people, they still remain unrepentant and their shameful acts will lead them to be consumed by fire. Isaiah had previously warned his audience about the destruction of the earth to come including the burning of the inhabitants of the earth, 24:1-6. The prophet is casting his gaze far into the future where God will enact His ultimate solution for the unrepentant actions of the earth’s inhabitants. The author of Hebrews reminds everyone of Him whom all will have to face, “for our God is a consuming fire,” Hebrews 12:29.

26:12 O LORD, you will establish peace for us; 
for all our works you have actually done for us.

The prophet’s tone changes to that of praise for the Lord who will establish peace (shalom) for His people. This action of the Lord to establish ultimate peace best fits the period of the millennial kingdom when the Prince of Peace will rule the world in peace and righteousness. Isaiah’s choice of words, “for all our works you have actually done for us” is a remarkable statement that would be at home in Paul’s epistle to the Philippians, “for it is God who works in you both to desire and to work, for the sake of his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13. It is statements like this in 26:12 that so endears the prophecy of Isaiah to the believer in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. For example, chapters in Isaiah such as 49, 52, 53 and 60-66 are filled with exhortations and promises that drive the believer to worship the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Messiah for whom the earth desires.
26:13 O LORD our God,
other lords besides you have ruled over us,
but your name alone we will keep in remembrance.

As recorded in Isaiah 26:13, the prophet speaks for the faithful remnant, those who will enter into the newly established millennial kingdom. Although the chosen people of God have lived under the rule of many foreign kings and masters, it is God alone whose name they have confessed. This statement certainly best fits the context of the millennial kingdom since no other time in history, since the days of Isaiah, could this statement be true.

26:14 The dead do not come back to life;
the spirits of the dead do not rise;
because you have punished and destroyed them,
and erased all memory of them.

Isaiah, in 26:14, describes the wicked who have been punished and have been destroyed. There is no hope for them. Their departed spirits will not rise to enjoy the messianic blessings of the millennial kingdom. This understanding of the non-resurrection of the wicked at the beginning of the millennial kingdom is the only one that is in harmony with the unfolding of God’s word about the latter days as revealed in Scripture, specifically Revelation 20:5, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.” Attempts to generalize Isaiah’s words to claim that he was speaking figuratively or allegorically about death has no validity. In chapters 24-27, Isaiah is declaring truth about the last days and these words about the non-resurrection of the wicked (during the millennial kingdom), must be taken in this context.

26:15 You have increased the nation, O LORD;
you have increased the nation.
You are glorified;
you have enlarged all the borders of the land.

The prophet adds additional details about the millennial kingdom. The repeated declaration that God has increased the nation can be understood as an increase in the number of people in the land and an increase in the land area of the nation. This will happen in the kingdom ruled by the Messiah when he sets up His earthly reign. Isaiah, in 49:19-20 and 54:1-3, describes this future time when the Lord will fulfill His promise to expand the nation of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel in 47:13-23 provides a very detailed description of the land of Israel with its widened borders. The nation of Israel currently does not have the land area described by Ezekiel. For Israel to enjoy the increase in her population and land area, she much first, experience the trauma of the Tribulation, and then be liberated by her Lord from the horrifying threat of annihilation by the forces of Antichrist. After these dramatic events, Israel will joyfully witness the expansion of her land area and the increase of her people.

God will preserve His faithful remnant who will return to the land. Isaiah declares the protection of the Lord for these faithful ones. See, for example, Isaiah 10:20-23; 41:8-20; 65:8-16; and Micah 2:1-2. When the Lord gains victory over His enemies, Isaiah 63:1-6, He will lead those He has rescued, in glorious praise to Mount Zion, Isaiah 35:10; 55:11 and establish His kingdom which He will rule in peace and prosperity. Prior to the official start of this kingdom, the Lord will deal with certain items that need to be performed. This period is defined in Daniel 12:11-12 as following the second half of the Tribulation which will last for three and one-half years or 1,260 days. There is first an additional 30 days mentioned that will total 1,290 days since the start of the second half of the Tribulation and then an additional 45 days bringing the total to 1,335 days.
These additional 75 days (30 plus 45) mentioned in Daniel 12:11-12 allude to the necessity of cleansing of the temple from the desecration of it by the Antichrist. Also, the Lord will finally deal with the beast (the Antichrist) and the false prophet who will be cast alive in the lake of fire, Revelation 19:20. Satan will then be cast into the abyss to be bound for a thousand years, Revelation 20:1-3. The Lord will also deal with the Gentiles who have fought against He and His people, Joel 3:1-8; Matthew 25:1-46. The resurrection of the Old Testament saints will also occur during these days, Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2. Also, the resurrection of the saints who were martyred during the Tribulation will occur during these days, Revelation 20:4-6. Finally, the Lord will host the marriage feast of the Lamb just prior to establishing His rule, Isaiah 25:6-8 and Revelation 19:9.

There would be many who would not agree with the events that will occur during these “extra days” mentioned in Daniel 12:11-12. The above paragraph was adapted from Chapter 15, pages 361-372 of the book, The Footsteps of the Messiah by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. This adaptation may not do proper justice to Dr. Fruchtenbaum’s full description of these days. Students are encouraged to carefully study this period and evaluate all passages of Scripture mentioned in the chapter of the book authored by Dr. Fruchtenbaum. Following the events just described above which will occur during the interval of 75 days mentioned in Daniel 12:11-12, the Lord will establish His messianic kingdom. As Isaiah states in 26:15, one of the glorious acts of the Lord will be to expand the population and the area size of the land of Israel. Thomas Constable explains:

“Rather than Israel dying out as a nation, the Lord had increased her, as He promised Abraham (Gen. 15:5). This was not Israel's doing; the Lord had increased her borders and so gained great glory for Himself. During the reigns of David and Solomon the Israelites experienced numerical growth and geographical expansion. God would do the same for them in the future.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 122).

26:16 O LORD, in trouble they have searched for you; they poured out a prayer when your discipline was on them.

Isaiah continues to unfold the details of the plight of the faithful remnant. It was in a time of trouble that they, the faithful remnant, searched for Him, and prayed diligently and fervently when God’s discipline was upon them. This is among the most remarkable prophecies regarding the predicament that the remnant will find themselves in, immediately prior to the return of the Lord to redeem His people. Here Isaiah speaks for this remnant as a prophetic description of what will have happened to them, in the far future day. The prophet Hosea in 5:15 – 16:3 also prophesied of these days:

“5:15 I will return to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt, and seek my face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek me 6:1 Come, and let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, but he will heal us, he has injured us, but he will bandage us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, and we will live before him. 3 Let us acknowledge him; let us pursue knowing the LORD; he will come forth as sure as the morning dawns; he will come to us as sure as the rain, as the latter rain that waters the earth.”

This passage in Hosea which is one of the most important prophetic messages of the Old Testament regarding the events immediately preceding the return of the Lord to rescue His beleaguered people. When read in the context of the other prophetic Scriptures regarding the days just prior to the return of the Messiah to rescue His people, it is evident that it must refer to the repentance of the people of Israel who find themselves in an impossible place where their enemies have surrounded them, and they face annihilation. They will then, acknowledge their national sin of rejecting the Messiah at his first appearance when He lived among them in the days when Rome ruled them. Their acknowledgment of their guilt and their whole-hearted
seeking of Him will result in His return to rescue them. Refer also to Zechariah 12:10-13:1 and Matthew 23:39.

26:17-18 Like a woman with child,  
who nears the time of her delivery,  
with writhing and cries in her labor pains,  
so we have been before you, O LORD.  
18 We were pregnant,  
we were in pain,  
but we gave birth only to the wind.  
We have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth;  
nor have the inhabitants of the world been born.

Isaiah foretells of the futility of the remnant, during the days just before the Lord redeemed them, who were striving in their own strength to bring about their own rescue from their enemies. The history of the Jews from Isaiah’s days to the end times would certainly fit the context here as it was and is a history of rebellion and denial of the provision of the Lord in preserving them. The imagery of these verses is a woman in labor who is unable to give birth. Thus, the people of God, in their own strength could not bring salvation to the earth nor could they bring forth children. The lament here is a parallel to the prophecy of judgment delivered by Isaiah as recorded in 13:6-8, in a clear “day of the Lord” context. But events will soon change for the faithful remnant who will be confessing their sins to the Lord as recorded in Isaiah 66:7-9:

7 Before her labor pains began,  
she gave birth;  
before her pain came,  
she delivered a boy.  
8 Who has heard of such a thing?  
Who has seen such things?  
Can a country be born in a single day?  
Will a nation be born in a second?  
Yet as soon as Zion went into labor,  
she gave birth to her children.  
9 Would I ever bring a baby to the point of birth  
and not deliver it?” says the LORD.  
Would I who deliver  
ever force the womb shut?” says your God.

The Lord will bring about a great transformation to His land and His people. He will allow the wombs of the wives of the remnant to be fruitful and quickly His millennial kingdom will flourish with people.

26:19 Your dead will live;  
your dead bodies will rise.  
Wake up and sing, you who dwell in the dust.  
For your dew is like the morning dew,  
and the earth will give birth to those who were dead.

David L. Cooper provides a proper context for Isaiah 26:19:

“Following the statement in verse 19 is the prophet's address to the righteous dead: "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth the dead." From the context we are certain that this prophecy refers to the righteous in Israel who are dead.

Let us recognize the fact that there two resurrections--one which precedes the Millennial Age and one which follows it. The righteous are raised before the thousand years' reign of our Lord; but the unrighteous never come to life until after the thousand years are finished. Some have thought, however, that the passage in John 5:28,29 proves a general resurrection. The words cited as evidence are these: "For the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, 29 and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment." There is no contradiction between our Lord's language in this passage and that of John in Revelation, chapter 20. John says that one thousand years intervene between the resurrection of the just and that of the unjust. The word "hour" which Jesus used, though it may refer to a period of sixty minutes, has various connotations. For example, in John 4:23, our Lord said: "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth." Certainly "hour" in this passage does not mean sixty minutes, but connotes the entire Christian Dispensation. Since our Lord used the term with this meaning and since there is no contradiction between His statement and that of the Apostle John, we are to understand that the word "hour" in John 5:28,29 is a long period of time and that His teaching agrees with that of John. So there are two resurrections: one of the righteous before the thousand years of our Lord's literal reign and one of the unrighteous after the thousand years.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – July 1944).

26:20-21 Go, my people, enter into your rooms.
Shut your doors behind you.
Hide yourself for a little while,
until his anger is passed.

21 For look, the LORD comes out of his dwelling place
to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their sin.
The earth also will reveal the bloodshed on her,
and will no longer cover her slain.

Isaiah, in 26:20-21, records a message from the Lord about the latter days that have an impact on both the people of God and the ungodly of the earth. God urges His people to hide in their rooms for a little while. See Hebrews 10:37 for a New Testament application of Isaiah 26:20. The Lord will be coming “out of his dwelling place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their sin.” In the context of chapters 24-27 and specifically when references in Isaiah 26:20-21, to the earth are compared, it seems most likely that the Lord is referring to the times of the day of the Lord and not to the days of the Prophet Isaiah. If this is a reasonable understanding of 26:20-21, then the Lord’s message is about the days of the Great Tribulation when He will punish the wicked inhabitants of the earth and yet provide protection for the faithful remnant who will survive these days. Revelation 12:1-6 is a New Testament confirmation of these verses. Students of Scripture
should note that there is a great deal of debate regarding these verses and many scholars interpret the message of the Lord differently than the one given immediately above.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 26
The Praise of the Remnant: 26:1-6
The Prayer of the Remnant: 26:7-19
The Protection of the Remnant: 26:20-21


In chapter 27, Isaiah brings to a conclusion his short prophecy on the Day of the Lord. To emphasize the end times meaning of his message, Isaiah begins each section in this chapter with the words, “In that day”: vs. 1, 2, 12 and 13. Also in vs. 6 the prophet states regarding this time, “In the days to come.” In the context of this chapter and specifically the concluding verse, the “day” that is emphasized is the time of the millennial reign of Christ the Messiah who will be worshiped in the holy mountain at Jerusalem. No other time before or after the days of Isaiah fit these words of prophecy. Those who do not believe in a literal millennial kingdom ruled by the Messiah are left with interpreting this chapter and the preceding three chapters either by figure or by allegory. A plain literal sense of these chapters leads the student to an understanding that God is preparing a time in the future where the Messiah will reign on the earth from Mount Zion. This Messiah will fulfill all the promises contained in these four chapters and in all other passages of Scripture to His chosen people during His messianic reign.

As declared by Isaiah in chapter 27, the prophet states that “in that day” the LORD will punish and slay leviathan the swift serpent also described as the sea monster, vs. 1. Also “in that day,” the people of God are to sing about the LORD’s delightful vineyard which is likened to Jacob and Israel who will “bud and bloom and fill the entire world with fruit,” vss. 2-6. Although the LORD had struck His people and expelled them from the land, He will forgive them and cause their land to be cleansed from idols and from those who worship false gods, vss. 7-11. Also, “in that day,” the LORD will gather the Israelites from the nations to worship Him in “the holy mountain at Jerusalem,” vss. 12-13.

27:1 In that day the LORD with his terrible, great and strong sword
will punish leviathan the swift serpent,
leviathan the twisting serpent;
he will slay the sea monster.

The prophet gives a message about the destruction by the Lord of a beast called “leviathan the swift serpent, leviathan the twisting serpent.” The NKJV translates this verse as, “In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea.” The KJV translates the last phrase as, “And he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.”

Scholars and students of the Scriptures, have posited many and fanciful interpretations of the identification of this beast. Yet those who understand that this prophecy regards the days of Messiah’s return and rule on the earth, the descriptive words can readily be seen as referring to Satan as the Apostle John records in Revelation 12:9, “So the great dragon was thrown down, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the one deceiving the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth and his angels were thrown down with him.” The final destruction of this beast, who is Satan is recorded later in Revelation 20:10, “The devil, who had deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet
were too. *They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.* Not only does God have a final solution for those who rebel against Him, He also has a final solution for the great deceiver of mankind.

David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 27: 2-6:

“In Isaiah 27:2-6 appears the "song of the vineyard." This song is related to Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-15; and Matthew 21:33-46. In each of these passages God compares Israel to a vineyard which He has planted and which He owns. All these references, except our present passage, deal with Israel as God's vineyard which has borne the wild bitter grapes of injustice and unrighteousness. But in the verses which we are to consider, Israel is represented as a vineyard which God, the true husbandman and owner, will tend, protect, and keep, and which will eventually yield a harvest, filling "the face of the world with fruit." The prophet urged his hearers to sing concerning this vineyard. The theme is indeed a worthy one. Israel is the nation of destiny. God will yet use her in the future as He has never done in the past.” (D.L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly-July 1944).

27:2-3 In that day sing about the delightful vineyard.
3 I, the LORD, am its keeper;
   I will water it all the time.
   I will guard it day and night
   so that no one can harm it.

The Lord proclaims through the prophet of a vineyard, “*in that day*” which must refer to the day when the Lord will punish Satan when Christ returns. It is a day when Christ will set up His messianic kingdom which is described as a “vineyard” in which the LORD Himself is the keeper. Those who inhabit this future vineyard will be “Jacob and Israel,” 27:6, who will prosper greatly. See notes on Isaiah 27:6 below. The description and outcome of this future vineyard is portrayed in sharp contrast to the days of Isaiah which are also described as a vineyard as recorded in Isaiah 5:1-7. Isaiah emphasizes the protective care of the Lord, who is the keeper of His future vineyard. The Lord will water the vineyard, “*all the time*” and guard it “*day and night*”.

27:4-5 I am not angry;
   if it gives me briers and thorns
      I will wage war on them!
      I would burn them up.
5 Let them take hold of my protection,
   that they may make peace with me;
   yes, let them make peace with me.

The Lord’s message, “*I am not angry*” (I have no wrath), Isaiah 27:4, is significant because in the context of the day of the Lord, His wrath has been released during the terrible days of the Great Tribulation. The Lord now lovingly tends to His beloved vineyard and will not let anyone try to destroy it. In 27:5, the Lord entreats all those who would be against His vineyard to make peace with Him. This call of the Lord for those alive “*in that day*” is for them to “*make peace with me*” is so emphatic that it is repeated. He will rule the world as the Master of His kingdom and no one will be able to overthrow His government or His rule. Many will try, specifically towards the end of this future period of one thousand years. But there will be no doubt as to the outcome of their feeble attempts, Psalm 2:1-12 and Rev. 20:1-10. One of the great titles of the Son who is to come, who is the keeper of the vineyard, is described in Isaiah 9 as “*Prince of Peace*” (9:6). Also, Isaiah prophesied that: “*Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end.*” Isaiah 9:7.
The Lord will reach out to the residents of the earth in this future day, to those who seek His protection and who desire to make peace with Him. To not do so will be futility and folly with fatal consequences for no one will be able to stand against Him, Revelation 6:16-17.

27:6 In days to come Jacob will take root;  
Israel will bud and blossom,  
and fill the entire world with fruit.

The Lord, as recorded in Isaiah 27:6, gives the meaning of this short parable. It is Jacob and Israel, His covenant people who are His vineyard. They will take root, blossom, sprout and “fill the entire world with fruit.” These days can only be during the millennial kingdom of the Messiah who will rule the earth with peace. During these days, the chosen people of God, the Jews described as Jacob and Israel, will multiply and fill the earth and the earth will be blessed by their presence. Refer also to Isaiah 35:1-10; Isaiah chapters 60-66; Amos 9:11-15; and Zechariah 14:8-11.

27:7 Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them?  
Or have they been killed as those who killed them were killed?

As recorded in 27:7-11, Isaiah declares a prophecy about the purpose of the Lord in dealing with His people during the days of the Tribulation. The Lord asks His people in 27:7 a rhetorical question, has God struck His people Israel as He has punished the enemies of the people of Israel? Also, have His people Israel been killed as God has killed those who have assaulted and killed His people? The Lord did not deal with His people in the same way as He has done with the enemies of Israel and Judah. The evil nations have been destroyed and their peoples slaughtered yet God has had compassion on His people.

27:8-9 You contend with them by expulsion and exile;  
he has blown them away with his fierce wind  
as in the day of the east wind.  
9 Therefore by this Jacob’s iniquity will be forgiven,  
and this will be the full fruit of taking away his sin:  
When he makes all the stones of the altar like crushed limestone,  
with no Asherah poles and incense altars left standing.

Isaiah declares the way God deals with his rebellious chosen people by sending them into exile and removing them from their land and the benefits of their temple worship instead of destroying them. Also, God does something amazing which is unlike anything the people of the earth could comprehend. Instead of punishing them with death as they deserve for their continual sinfulness, as graphically described in many passages of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord will forgive His people and the proof of this forgiveness will be when their idols and incestuous practices will be forever removed.

God hates idols and idol worship and the long sad story of Israel and Judah had been one of rebelling against God and turning to idols for worship and to other nations for safety and protection. When God forgave them through the discipline of banishment and expulsion, they did not return to their previous acts of rebellion by idol worship. In the more intermediate future from Isaiah’s day, God banished His people to exile in Babylon and when they returned to the land, idol worship was a forgotten sin. In the far future, during the Great Tribulation, however, God will once again discipline His people for idol worship and the result will be permanent peace between God and His people.
27:10-11 For the fortified city is solitary,
a habitat deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness.
There the calf feeds,
and there it will lie down,
and consume its branches.

11 When its branches are withered,
they are broken off;
women come and make a fire with them.
For it is a people with no understanding,
therefore he who made them will not have compassion on them,
and he who formed them will show them no mercy.

The prophet describes the sad conditions of those who live in the “fortified city”. This city is not identified, and it seems best to understand it as representing the cities of the world during the period of the Great Tribulation. Some, however, may want to identify this city as the restored Babylon. This “city” will be left desolate and forlorn, for it is a home to a people who do not have discernment. The Lord will not be gracious to them nor will He have compassion on them, as He will have on His chosen people. To His chosen people, the Lord gives grace and forgiveness of their sins. To the ungodly peoples of the world who will not repent, the Lord gives judgment and punishment for their sins. In 27:7-11, Isaiah gives a concise statement of the purposes of the Lord for bringing the days of the Tribulation to the earth.

27:12-13 In that day, the LORD will thresh grain, from the Euphrates River to the Brook of Egypt; you will be gathered one by one, O Israelites.
13 In that day, a great trumpet will be blown; those lost in the land of Assyria will come, along with those who were refugees in the land of Egypt; they will worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

The message of the prophecy changes from judgment to redemption. God will “in that day” gather His people, one by one, the from the nations where they have been perishing and scattered and He will bring them to Zion, His holy mountain at Jerusalem. The purpose of this gathering of His people is for them to worship Him as their Messiah who has returned to redeem His people. The message of the Lord’s gathering of His people is one that is repeated often in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament prophets. It remains a hope and a reality for the Jewish people today for this gathering is beginning, even though many are in disbelief. But in a future day, it will be a gathering of the faithful remnant who have repented of their sin of rejecting their Messiah and have asked Him to return and rescue them. See Hosea 5:15-6:3; Zechariah 10:8-12 and 12:10-14; and Matthew 23:38-39.

Teaching Outline of Isaiah Chapter 27
The Predetermination of the Lord: (Final Destination of Satan) 27:1
The People of the Lord: (His Vineyard) 27:2-6
The Purposes of the Lord (Forgive His People) 27:7-9
The Punishment of the Lord (On His Enemies) 27:10-11
The Pleasure of the Lord (Re-gather his Faithful Remnant) 27:12-13
Outline of Isaiah Chapters 28:1 – 35:10

F: Warnings, Woes and Wrath: Chapters 28-33
1. Woe to Wicked Leaders: 28:1-29
2. Warnings and Woes to Jerusalem: 29:1-16
3. Rejoicing and Blessings to Jacob: 29: 17-24
4. Warnings to Judah: No safety in Egypt: 30:1-17
5. God’s Graciousness to Jerusalem: 30:18-33
6. The Sons of Israel Need to Return to the Lord: 31:1-9
7. Future Blessings on the Nation: 32:1-20
8. Prayer for Zion to take Refuge in the Lord: 33:1-24

G: The Wrath and Blessings of God: Chapters 34-35
1. The Wrath of God on the Nations: 34:1-17
2. The Blessing of the Future Kingdom: 35:1-10

Introduction to Isaiah Chapters 28-33

Thomas Constable comments on Chapters 28-33:

“Chapters 28—35 are somewhat similar to chapters 13—27 in content and form. The same general pattern of argument unfolds, but the historical context is somewhat later. The historical context of chapters 13—27 was mainly Ahaz's reign, in which Judah faced temptation to trust in Assyria for her safety rather than in the Lord. As mentioned above, however, these chapters evidently contain a mosaic of prophecies that Isaiah delivered at various times during his ministry and then arranged in their canonical order for literary purposes. This theological arrangement of material marks the whole Book of Isaiah. Yet a general advance chronologically is also observable.

The historical context of chapters 28—35 was mainly Hezekiah's reign, in which Judah faced the temptation to trust in Egypt. The Judeans began looking more to Egypt for help while Assyria declined as a hope for Judah's salvation—as Ahaz had considered her— and instead became an increasing threat to the Southern Kingdom's security. Interest in alliance with Egypt was especially strong between the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. and Sennacherib's unsuccessful attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Also different is the emphasis in chapters 13—27 on Yahweh's sovereignty over the nations compared with the emphasis in chapters 28—35 on Judah's choice to trust Him or not. This is a matter of emphasis, however, since both sections deal with both issues.

The first part of the present section, chapters 28—33, serves the same general function as chapters 13—23: they focus on the particular situation in Isaiah's day to warn Judah against trusting neighbour nations. The second part, chapters 34—35, like chapters 24—27, again project further into the future and deal more with Israel's eschatological hope.

The presence of six "woes" also marks off chapters 28—33 as a distinct unit of Isaiah's prophecy (28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; cf. 5:8-10, 18-23; Matt. 23:13-39; Rev. 8:13; 9:12; 11:14; 12:12). Delitzsch referred to this section (chs. 28—33) as "the book of woes."318. It is quite similar to the Book of Micah. Like chapters 13—27, his section is also divisible into three parts.
Chapters 28—29 paint the picture of Judah's foolish leaders concluding that something must be done at once, other than trusting God, to save the people from their enemy. Here the principles involved in Judah's situation emerge clearly. Chapters 30—31 focus on the proposed solution, trust in Egypt, and the folly of that option.

Chapters 32—33 stress the proper solution, namely: acknowledgment of Israel's true King and trust in Him. In these last four chapters, the application of the principles in history and in the eschaton receive more attention.” [Note: 318: Delitzsch, 2:2.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 127).

David L. Cooper also comments:

“IN OUR EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH we have now come to a new section, chapters 28-35. The oracles contained in this portion of the book were spoken during the reign of King Hezekiah of Jerusalem and reflect the conditions of the first part of his reign--before the fall of Samaria. Chapters 36-39 came out of the events of the fatal fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign and faithfully reflect the conditions of the kingdom from that time to the close. Thus chapters 28-39 echo the situation in Israel during the reign of Hezekiah, as chapters 7-12 (the Book of Immanuel) do in regard to the times of Ahaz, when those early oracles were spoken.

Isaiah, chapters 28-35, has been properly called the "Book of Woes," because each of the oracles, with the exception of chapters 34 and 35, begin with this ominous word. Chapters 28-33 consist of separate oracles directed at Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom, and Nineveh, the royal city of the great Assyrian empire, which was in Isaiah's time threatening the security of Israel. Chapter 34, as we shall learn, deals with the world situation in the end-time and singles out Edom, an inveterate enemy of Israel, as a typical nation upon whom God's judgments will fall. In contrast with these world judgments is the prediction of chapter 35 which deals with the great Kingdom Age when the curse will be lifted and the glory of God will encircle the globe.

In each of these oracles the prophet dealt with the situation which was confronting him and the nation at that time and then blended these predictions with prophecies regarding the world-wide situation of Israel during the final Tribulation from which she will eventually be delivered. We have in these chapters, as we find throughout the prophetic word, applications of the "law of double reference," which enabled the prophet to blend predictions and descriptions of both the immediate and remote situations. A failure to recognize this law of the prophetic word throws the pictures of the prophets out of focus, but a proper understanding and a recognition of this law instantly bring their predictions into sharp focus. Micah, as all Bible students know, was a contemporary of Isaiah's, for his ministry fell in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. A close examination of the Book of Micah reveals the fact that there is reflected in it the same situation which we see in Isaiah, chapters 28-35. One who is eager to get a clear understanding of the situation of these chapters would do well in studying the Book of Micah in connection with our study of this portion of Isaiah.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1944).

The structure of these six “woe” sections is highlighted by Isaiah’s declaration of woe followed by a message of hope, preservation and salvation. (1) 28:1-4 and 28:5-6; (2) 29:1-4 and 29:5-8; (3) 29:15-16 and 29:17-24; (4) 30:1-17 and 30:18-26; (5) 31:1-5 and 31:6-9; (6) 33:1-4 and 33:5-24.

F: Warnings, Woes and Wrath: Chapters 28-33

1. Woe to Wicked Leaders: 28:1-29

Isaiah’s overall emphasis, as recorded in chapter 28, is the pronouncement of woe on the evil leaders of Israel and Judah who have become drunk while boasting in their own designs and actions to save themselves from impending doom. Judah is specifically warned of God’s judgment for their covenant with Egypt whom they think will be a strong ally to prevent the Assyrian armies from destroying their small country. It is likely that
these messages of woe and wrath were declared by Isaiah just prior to the invasion of Israel by Assyria in 722 B.C. Both Israel and Judah refused to repent and seek God’s forgiveness for their rejection of His divine leadership. Failure to trust in God completely for their protection led to their downfall. The leaders of Judah were just as impertinent to God as were their northern neighbors.

This is a suggested outline of chapter 28 of Isaiah:
A The moral failure of Israel’s Political Leaders: 28:1-13
B The moral failure of Judah’s Religious Leaders: 28:14-29
   B 1: The Offer of God’s Foundation Stone: 28:14-22

A The moral failure of Israel’s Political Leaders: 28:1-13

As stated in Isaiah 28:1-13, the prophet declares a woe on the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim who are overcome with wine, vs. 1. The Lord has directed one who is mighty and strong to trample the crown of Ephraim underfoot and bring it to destruction, vs. 2-4. The LORD, “in that day,” will become a crown of glory to the remnant of His people, a spirit of justice to the one who sits in judgment, and strength to those who repel the attack upon them, vs. 5-6. The people (of Ephraim) stagger from strong drink, they teeter from seeing visions, and stumble when offering judgments, vs. 7-8. The people of Ephraim complain against and mock the prophet’s message from the LORD to them, vs. 9-10. Therefore, the LORD will bring judgment upon them, vs. 12-13.

28:1 Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,
   and to the fading flower of its glorious beauty,
   located at the head of the fertile valley
   of those overcome with wine!

Isaiah often used the word “woe” as an introductory term for a message of warning and judgment. For other declarations of “woe” see Isaiah 3:9,11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 6:5; 10:1, 5; 24:16 (2x); 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; 45:9, 10. The prophet’s woe in 28:1 is directed at the pride of the people of Ephraim (Israel) described as drunkards wearing a wreath or a crown which represents the fading and diminishing glory of its capital city Samaria. See also Hosea 7:5 and Amos 4.1 and 6.6. This city sat on a hill and overlooked a fertile valley. Many scholars suggest that Isaiah had made this prophecy prior to 722 B.C. when the Assyrians had captured Israel and had taken many of its citizens captive. Isaiah may have inserted this prophetic message here as a warning to his intended audience, Judah to whom he would soon direct his attention in 28:14 and following. See also previous “woe” judgments on Israel: Isaiah 5:8-30.

28:2 Look, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong;
   like a hail storm or a destroying windstorm,
   like a torrential rainstorm flooding,
   he will throw their crown down to the earth with his hand.

Isaiah declares that the Lord has one who is strong and mighty and is also described as a destructive storm coming down to earth from the hands of the Lord. It is evident from the fulfillment of this prophecy in 722-721 B.C. that it is the Assyrians who are God’s agent of destruction. The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be thrown down to the ground when the strong and mighty Assyrian army invades the northern kingdom of Israel. The people of Israel should not be surprised that the Lord is bringing judgment upon them. Isaiah, Hosea and Amos had declared prophetic messages warning of God’s coming judgment upon
them. For example, Amos spoke about the Israelites who: “lay down beside every altar upon clothes acquired from debt collateral, and drink wine in the house of their God funded by unjust fines.” Amos 2:8. In 2:11-12, Amos declared the indictment of God on Israel: “I raised up some of your sons to be prophets, and some of your young men to be Nazirites. Isn’t this true, O people of Israel?” says the LORD. 12 But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy.’” Hosea in 4:10-11, spoke against the sins of the northern kingdom including their harlotry and drinking: “They will eat, and not have enough; they will play the harlot, and will not increase; because they have forsaken the LORD 11 to devote themselves to prostitution with old wine and new that enslave the heart.”

28:3-4 The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim

will be trampled underfoot.

4 The fading flower of its glorious beauty,

which is at the head of the fertile valley,

will be like the first-ripe fig before the harvest;

whoever spots it,

gobbles it up soon as he can get his hand on it.

Isaiah, after declaring the one (the Assyrians) who will bring God’s judgment to Israel, 28:2, next reveals the awful results of this action. The once proud crown of the leaders of Ephraim (Israel) is now trodden under foot and what has been left of its agricultural bounty would soon be devoured by this agent of God (the armies of Assyria). Isaiah uses a portrait of the ruin of Israel’s agricultural resources as a description of the downfall of the people of the northern kingdom. The phrase “fertile valley” in 28:4 is literally “valley of fatness.”

28:5-6 In that day the LORD of hosts will become a crown of glory,

and a beautiful diadem to the remnant of his people;

6 a spirit of justice to the one who sits in judgment,

and strength to those who repel the attack at the gate.

Isaiah introduces a message of salvation in contrast to the oracle of woe declared in the first four verses of chapter 28. The LORD of hosts, which can be understood as the Lord of armies, “in that day”, will become a “a crown of glory, and a beautiful diadem to the remnant of his people,” 28:5. Isaiah has been given a superlative prophecy about the latter days, “in that day”, in which the Lord will reign gloriously on another hill, Zion in contrast to the hill of Samaria. Instead of drunken and depraved human leaders, the Lord Himself will be to His faithful remnant, a crown of glory and beautiful diadem. The Lord will also describe this faithful remnant with similar words as recorded in Isaiah 62:3: “You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.” The reference to diadems points to the returning Messiah who will come as a warrior King to rescue His people who have repented on their sin of rejecting Him during His first advent and have called upon Him to return. See Hosea 5:15-6:3. When the Messiah returns to the earth, He will be wearing many diadems on His head, Revelation 19:12, signifying, not only that He is the LORD of Lords and KING of Kings, but also, He is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of 28:5. He will when He returns to rescue His people, in that day, be “a crown of glory and a beautiful diadem to the remnant of his people.” Isaiah also in 28:5, returns to one of his favorite themes, the salvation of the faithful remnant of the Lord. Isaiah had earlier mentioned this remnant in 1:9, 10:20-22 and 11:11, 16 and will mention them again in 37:31-32 and 46:3.

As recorded in 28:6, Isaiah states two characteristics of the One who will reign as a beautiful crown and glorious diadem to the remnant of His people. First, the one who will sit in judgment will have a “spirit of
justice” (or judgment) upon him. Isaiah’s earlier prophecy, chapter 11:1-5, about the Spirit of the Lord resting on King Messiah is in view here and specifically 11:4:

But he will judge the poor with righteousness,
and decide for the oppressed of the earth with equity.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips, he will kill the wicked.

The Lord as judge is a very common theme of Scripture and this role will be one in which the Messiah will continue when He returns and when He reigns in the millennial kingdom. Refer to Isaiah 2:4; 11:3-4; 16:5; Joel 3:12; Micah 4:3; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Revelation 11:18; 19:11, and 20:12-13. The second characteristic stated in Isaiah 28:6, of the One who will reign, is that He will be a: “strength to those who repel the attack at the gate.” This is a reference to the time of the return of the Messiah when He will empower the faithful remnant to defeat their enemies. Isaiah explained this statement in more detail in chapter 41:8-16 and specifically 48:15-16:

15 Look, I will make you to be a new sharp threshing instrument
having many teeth.
You will thresh the mountains,
crush them and make the hills like chaff.
16 You will winnow them and the wind will carry them away,
and the whirlwind will scatter them.
Then you will rejoice in the LORD;
you will glory in the Holy One of Israel.

It is critical to understand that Isaiah, as recorded in chapter 28:5-6, has been given a wonderful prophetic message about the ministry of the Lord when He returns to redeem His people who are called here, the “remnant of His people.” An important aspect of this prophecy is that Isaiah 28:5 starts with the words, “in that day,” which certainly must be understood as an end-times prophecy especially when coupled with the works, “the remnant of His people.” Some scholars try to force these words to be a message about the impending assault by the armies of Assyria because the overall message of chapters 28 to 33 is about this time period. However, interspersed in the dialogue Isaiah is having with the people of Israel and Judah, are specific prophetic messages of the salvation of the Lord and His dealings with the faithful remnant who will endure the days of the end-times tribulation and then enter victoriously into His millennial kingdom.

28:7-8 Even these reel from wine,
and stagger from strong drink;
the priest and the prophet reel from strong drink,
they are swallowed up because of wine,
they stagger with strong drink;
they teeter when seeing visions,
they stumble when offering judgments.
8 For all tables are full of filthy vomit,
there is nowhere that is clean.

In 28:7-13, Isaiah concentrates his warning of woe on the priests and prophets of Israel. Some scholars suggest that Isaiah, beginning in 28:7 is describing events in the southern kingdom of Judah. However, as there is no direct indication in the text of such a change of location, it seems best to consider that Isaiah, as
recorded in these verses, is completing his judgment declaration on the nation of Israel. The notes by John MacArthur, in the *NASB Study Bible*, state that Isaiah 28:7-13 refers to the nation of Israel.

These religious leaders, as recorded in Isaiah 28:7-8, are so besotted with wine and strong drink they have consumed, that they stagger and reel, and have no clean place to eat because of their vomit on the tables. In this confused and depraved condition, these religious leaders of Israel refuse to hear the warnings of Isaiah and scoff at his message. The Lord’s words to Aaron, Leviticus 10:8-10, were very clear that priests were not to drink wine or strong drink while entering and prior to coming into the “tent of meeting.” This was to be a perpetual statute throughout all of Aaron’s generations meaning all priests in Aaron’s lineage. See also Hosea 4 and 5 for further pronouncements of judgment against Israel. Victor Buksbazen comments on verses 7-8:

“There are few passages in the prophetic writings which express o vehemently Isaiah’s profound disgust with the nations depraved priests and prophets. Instead of being mediators between the people and their God, instead of teaching them the Word of their God, they are so degraded by their filthy orgies, and so overcome by alcohol that they reel, stagger and mumble, even while performing their prophetic and priestly functions.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 249).

28: 9-10 They complain,

"Who does he think he is trying to teach knowledge?  
Who will he make to explain the message?  
Those who are weaned from the milk,  
those just taken from their mother’s breasts?
10 For he repeats the same precept on precept,  
precept on precept again and again;  
line on line, line on line;  
here a little, there a little."

In Isaiah 28:9-10, the prophet records the response of the priests and the prophets. They sarcastically respond to Isaiah by ridiculing his words as being those of an infant with babbling speech. Thomas Constable comments on these people:

“They accused Isaiah of proclaiming elementary teaching and of speaking to them like small children (cf. 6:9-10). What Isaiah advocated was trust in the Lord rather than reliance on foreign alliances for national security. Isaiah built his hearers’ knowledge bit by bit, adding a little here and a little there. This is, of course, the best method of teaching, but it has never appealed to proud intellectuals who consider themselves beyond the simplicity of God’s truth. Similarly, today, many modern university professors of religion ridicule those who believe we should take the Bible at face value.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 130-131).

28:11-13 So with stammering lips and with foreign tongues  
he will speak to this people;  
12 to whom he said,  
"This is the rest, give rest to the one who is weary;”  
and "This is a place of refreshment."  
Yet they would not listen.  
13 Therefore the word of the LORD will be to them  
precept repeated upon precept, precept upon precept;  
line upon line, line upon line;  
here a little, there a little;
so that they may go and fall over backward,  
and be broken, snared, and taken captive.

God responds to these drunken leaders in Isaiah 28:11-13. The prophet declares that God will speak to them through “stammering lips and with foreign tongues” 28:11, which is the language of the Assyrians whom they cannot understand. The Apostle Paul used this verse in his first letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 14:20-21, as a reference to emphasize that maturity is needed in the exercise of the gift of tongues. Isaiah would later refer to the speech of people of a stammering tongue which no one understands in a prophecy about the latter days during the millennial reign. In Isaiah 33:19 the prophet states:

You will not see these fierce people,  
a people whose obscure language you cannot comprehend,  
whose stammering tongue you cannot understand.

In Isaiah 28:12-13, the prophet’s words of mercy and rest for the weary for these religious leaders are spurned and these leaders would not listen to Isaiah. Therefore, as stated in Isaiah 28:13 God responds to them that their instruction would be as though they were infants with teaching meted out in small measure, “here a little, there a little.” The result of their rejection of God’s warning is judgment as recorded at the end of 28:13, they would: “go and fall over backward, and be broken, snared and taken captive.” The words of Isaiah would soon become reality for the people of Israel. The Assyrians who were the strong and mighty agent of God for this purpose, assaulted the nation and took away captive all of its leaders and many of its inhabitants. Only defeat, demise and destruction remained. Those who scoff at God and His message will be severely judged. The Apostle Paul, as recorded in Galatians 6:7 would many centuries later write in his letter to the church in Galatia, “Be not deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever a person sows, that will he also reap.”

B The moral failure of Judah’s Religious Leaders: 28:14-29

In the passage, Isaiah 28:14-29, the prophet turns his attention to the rulers of Judah in Jerusalem. They also scoffed at the message of God, 28:22. They refused to trust in God for protection and made a covenant with Egypt for protection against the invasion of the Assyrians. God, in response, would do a strange and unusual work. He will turn against His chosen nation and bring upon them the destruction that He had promised to the enemies of His people. Yet He still offers hope in His wonderful counsel and wisdom if they would but listen to Him. Isaiah 28:14-29 can be further sub-divided into two parts: (1) The Offer of God’s Foundation Stone: 28:14-22 and (2): The Wisdom of God’s Counsel: 28:23-29.

B1: The Offer of God’s Foundation Stone: 28:14-22

28:14 Therefore hear the word of the LORD  
you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem:

The prophet calls the rulers of Judah in Jerusalem “scoffers”. This is a very harsh term for those who sin against God. God’s judgment against scoffers is most severe as the words of 2 Chronicles 36:15-17 testify: “The LORD, the God of their forefathers, sent warnings to them by his messengers repeatedly, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, to the point that there was no remedy. 17 Therefore he brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary. He did not spare a young man or virgin, old
man or the infirm; he gave them all into his hand.” For a selected study on this word in the Scriptures, refer to: 2 Chronicles 36:15-17; Psalm 1:1, Proverbs 1:22, 9:12, 13:1, 14:6, 15:12, 19:29, 21:24, 22:10 and 24:9; Isaiah 28:14, 22 and Acts 13:41. God, in His righteous divine temper, scoffs at the wicked of the earth who mock Him. See Psalm 2:4, 59:8 and Proverbs 3:34.

28:15 because you have said,
“We have made a covenant with death,
and we have an agreement with Sheol;
when the overflowing whip passes through,
it will not come to us;
for we have made lies our refuge,
and hid ourselves under deception.”

Isaiah reveals the extent of the scoffing the rulers of Judah had committed. As recorded in Isaiah 28:15, they bragged that they had made a legal agreement or covenant with the nether-world Sheol, and this covenant would protect them from the attack of the Assyrians described as an overwhelming whip or scourge. Isaiah 28:15 does not state with whom these evil rulers made this covenant. However, in Isaiah 30:1-5, the prophet states that the rulers of Judah, described as “rebellious children,” had made an agreement with Egypt. These rulers would include king Hezekiah, who up to this point in time, was not listening to the warnings of Isaiah. Judah looked to Egypt for protection against the invading armies of Assyria. This would have been a foolish action as Isaiah has already warned of the folly of looking to Egypt as recorded in chapter 19 of his prophecy. Also, the covenant people of God, had an everlasting covenant with their Creator promising among other things, blessings on their land. See Genesis 12:1-3, 15:18-21, 17:1-21, 26:2-5 and 28:10-17. It was an extremely vile sin for the rulers of Judah to seek assistance from a disgraced and pagan nation (Egypt) when the God of the Universe had already cut a covenant with them to bless them and keep them in their land. These rulers even mocked God by stating that they would be protected against the overwhelming scourge for they had “made lies our refuge and hid ourselves under deception,” Isaiah 28:15. God’s sure and swift punishment would come to them, but not in a way they would have expected. God, who is rich in mercy, responds, in 28:16-17 to their wickedness with a stone!

Some scholars and students of the Scriptures may be tempted to interpret Isaiah 28:15 as a latter-day prophecy regarding Israel’s trouble just prior to the period of tribulation. A covenant is mentioned in the context of this period in Daniel 9:27 when, one who is to come, will make a covenant and then break it by setting up an abomination. Jesus states, that this statement by Daniel the prophet, refers to this “abomination of desolation” who will stand in the holy place at a time in the future. Matthew 24:15. The Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 and the Apostle John in Revelation 13:14-15 wrote that this event would be for a time in the future.

So where does this leave the student of the Scriptures in determining the intent of Isaiah 28:15? Is it (1) a prophecy only about the latter days, or is it (2) a poetic description of an agreement of protection the leaders of Judah have made with Egypt, or is it (3) a combination of the two where both interpretations are possible? In defense of the first option, F. C. Jennings states:

“The prophecy therefore must find its definite fulfilment in the future, when there shall again be a Jewish State so organized that it can make an alliance, or covenant; and whilst such a condition may be seen as approaching, it certainly has not yet fully developed.” (F. C. Jennings, Studies in Isaiah: Notes on chapter 28, vs. 15).
Many scholars defend the second option including the ones often referenced in this Messianic Study of Isaiah. Thomas Constable is one who confirms this option:

“The rulers had made a covenant with some nation (probably Egypt) that involved deception and falsehood (probably against Assyria). Israel had already made a covenant with Yahweh that guaranteed her security (Exod. 19—Num. 10). Why did she need to make another? The rulers thought that as a result of their covenant, the scourge of their dreaded enemy (Assyria) would not touch them. But Isaiah sarcastically told them that their covenant was really with Death and Sheol; death would be the outcome of their pact. They were the naive ones, not he (cf. vv. 9-10).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 131-132).

Regarding the third option, some evangelical and conservative scholars, understand that there is a law of "double reference" in the Scriptures and some passages have a dual fulfillment. For purposes of this study, it seems best to understand that Isaiah is first, discussing the current threat against Judah and the wicked actions of the leaders of Judah which will result in God’s judgment against them. The reference by Isaiah to a “coveneant of death” in the context of chapters 28-33 is a depiction of their confidence in Egypt to protect them. However, second, this historical event in Isaiah’s day can be used as an application of the actions of the sinful people of God when future events are studied. In the case of the events leading up to the future tribulation period where a similar covenant with death will be made, the student can refer to Isaiah 28:15 as an example of how the Jewish people still have not learned to completely trust in God for protection. Refer also to Daniel 9: 24-27; Matthew 24:15-28; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 and Revelation 13:11-18.

28:16 Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says, "Look, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation. One who believes will not panic.

There is a definite change to the prophetic message in Isaiah 28:16, wherein the first word, “therefore” relates to the context of the preceding verses and also anticipates the response of God to those who have spurned His covenant and scoffed at His word. The response of God to these wicked people is both one of hope and judgment through a “tested stone.” David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 28:16 and following verses:

“An examination of this prophecy shows that it related to the first coming of our Lord. It was impossible for those mockers who were ruling Jerusalem in Isaiah's day to recognize the Messiah, had He come in their day. Moreover, it was impossible for those of the same character of the first century to recognize the Messiah when He actually did make His appearance. But the one who believed God and who was following the light which he had would not be in haste but would trust the Messiah for his salvation and protection.

However in vs. 17, the prophet went forward in his vision and described the second coming of our Lord in the following words: "And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place.”

In order for one to see the real significance of this verse, he should read II Kings 21:1-15, especially verse 13. In the language of this historical account and this prophecy we see that the line of justice and the plummet of righteousness and their being used refer to God's destructive judgments which He will bring upon the nation in purging all the wicked from Israel. Since verse 16 refers to the events of the first coming of Messiah and verse 17 to those of His return, we know that the entire Christian Dispensation intervenes between the events of verses 16 and 17. The prophet very frequently blended descriptions of the two comings of our Lord into a single picture as he has done here.
The leaders of Israel in the end-time will enter a covenant with death and with Sheol will they be in agreement when they make the covenant with the Antichrist, to which fact the Prophet Daniel referred in Daniel 9:27. But that covenant will not protect the people of Israel of the future. It will be the occasion, on the other hand, of special judgments coming upon those who thus enter such an agreement with this future world dictator.

As often therefore as the scourge will pass through the land of Israel, it will bring desolation to the country. Israel's plight at that time will be indeed pitiable. Her situation is represented by a man who is endeavoring to rest on a bed that is too short and under cover that is too narrow. Thus the bed and the covering of the agreement with the Antichrist will be insufficient for the protection of those relying thereupon.

According to verse 21 God will bring a signal victory for the faithful remnant of Israel as He did in the past, when He intervened in her behalf (see II Sam. 5:17-21; Joshua 10:10-14). When Israel looks to the Messiah and pleads for Him to return, having confessed her national sin, He will come and bring this marvelous deliverance.

That the prophet is looking forward to the time of the Tribulation and God's universal judgments upon the earth is evident from verse 22, in which the prophet declared, "For a decree of destruction have I heard from the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, upon the whole earth." (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly- August 1944).

Isaiah 28:16, is clearly a prophecy about the first coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. God decrees that He is laying for a foundation that is firmly placed: “a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone a sure foundation.” These three mentions of this stone are an emphatic declaration of the certainty of God’s decree prefaced with the beautiful Look, or “Behold, I am.” That this is a definite messianic prophecy is without doubt as later portions of Scripture testify including an earlier prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 8:14-15 and Psalm 118:22-23. Later references in the Old Testament include Zechariah 3:9 and10:4. In the New Testament this reference to the Messiah as the cornerstone is recorded in: Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17-18; Acts 4:11-12; Romans 9:30-33, 10:11(quoting Isaiah 28:16), Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-8. The great truth of this prophecy of the Messiah as the cornerstone is explained in Acts 4:11-12:

Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, he has become the chief cornerstone. 12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among humans, by which we must be saved.

The costly cornerstone is a direct and emphatically clear reference to God’s Son who, at the expense of His own life died for the sins of the world so that whoever believes in Him by faith will not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16. The historian Luke, in Acts 4:12, links the importance of believing in the Jesus Christ by stating that: “There is salvation in no one else.” The prophecy of God as a stone came early in the Scriptures. In Genesis 49:24, the patriarch Jacob stated: “But his bow remained firm, and his arms were strengthened by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.” The word Rock can also be translated as “Stone.” Moses in his final song of praise, as recorded in Deuteronomy 32:4 stated:

“He is the Rock, his work is perfect;
   all his ways are just.
A faithful God who does nothing wrong,
   Just and upright is he.”
The importance of this Rock is mentioned several times in this song of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 32. The songbook of the ancient Israelites, the Psalms, mention this Rock so many times that it is a compelling argument for understanding the Psalms as a book of prophecy of the coming Messianic king. For an expanded explanation of the importance of this “stone” refer to Geoffrey W. Grogan, Isaiah in the Expositors Bible Commentary, 1986, pages 180-182.

Isaiah 28:16 continues the decree by God: (the) one who believes will not panic.” The word “panic” is literally to hasten, which has the meaning of patiently waiting on God. This sense of the meaning is expressed in Isaiah 25:9:

*It will be said in that day,*

"Look, here is our God;
we have waited for him,
and he will save us.
This is the LORD;
we have waited for him,
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

The Apostle Paul cited Isaiah 28:16 in Romans 10:11 in the context of one of the most important Biblical discussions on salvation. Paul had earlier quoted from Isaiah 28:16 as stated in Romans 9:33. The Apostle Peter also quoted from Isaiah 28:16 as recorded in 1 Peter 2:6. The student of Scripture has every right to understand the words of Isaiah 28:16 as a salvation message. This precious (costly) and tested stone that God has established, is a metaphor for the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who trust in Him for salvation will not be disappointed but receive eternal life. Those who refuse to trust in Him will be disappointed and forever doomed to an eternity of torment without the comforting presence of God and His Son.

**28:17 I will make justice the measuring line,**

and righteousness the plum line.

*Hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,*

and the waters will overflow the hiding place.

Isaiah provides further details about the just and righteous reign of the Messiah who is described in 28:16 as the tested and precious “cornerstone” Who, Himself, will be the sure foundation for His reign which will be centered on Mount Zion. Continuing with the metaphor of construction, Isaiah describes this future reign as having justice as its measuring line and righteousness as its level. Changing metaphors in the second half of 28:17, Isaiah describes the storm of hail and overflowing waters which will sweep away lies from their secret place of refuge. No place, no matter how secret or remote, will be allowed to harbor lies or sinfulness. The justice and righteousness of the Messiah’s reign will clean away all corruption. As David L. Cooper mentions above, Isaiah 28:17 is a reference to the second coming of the Messiah, thus the entire church age is contained within the scope of 28:16-17.

**28:18-19 Your covenant with death will be annulled,**

and your agreement with Sheol will not last;
when the overflowing whip passes through,
you will be beaten down by it.
As often as it passes through, it will take you;
  for morning by morning it will pass through,
  by day and by night;
when the message is understood,
  it will cause sheer terror.

Isaiah, as recorded in 28:18 and following, returns to the immediate matter of the covenant that the rulers of Jerusalem have made with Egypt, 28:15 for protection against the Assyrian armies. See notes above on Isaiah 28:15 and also 30:1-5. The prophet, in 28:18 records God’s decision that the legal agreement or covenant they had made with Egypt will be cancelled (annulled) and their agreement with Sheol will also be terminated. Trusting in an agreement with Egypt, called a covenant with death and a pact with Sheol, will come to nothing. The nation of Judah, except for Jerusalem, would be trampled by the Assyrians in the near future.

The Assyrians will continually and repeatedly destroy the people of Judah in repeated waves of assault. The Assyrian armies will invade Judah in waves of destruction “morning after morning” and at any-time during the day or evening. The prophet adds in Isaiah 28:19 that for those who understand what will happen to them, the conquest by Assyria will be “sheer terror.” Victor Buksbazen comments on these verses:

“Using the very terms previously used by the scoffers of Jerusalem, the prophet predicts that they will become the victims of death and Sheol and of the sweeping scourge (epidemic diseases), the companions of devastating war and will know the misery of exile. It shall be sheer terror to understand the meaning of the message, (in Hebrew “shemua,” hearing or report, the same term which Isaiah used in 53:1).

The very report of the disaster with strike terror into the hearts of the believers.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 251).

28:20 For the bed is too short for one to stretch out on;
  the blanket too narrow for one to wrap around oneself.

In 28:20, Isaiah records that no place will be safe, nor will there be any hiding place including one’s bed which will not provide sufficient cover. This statement should be understood as being similar to a proverb and can be applied to any situation where the plight of people is hopeless, and they are left without remedy.

28: 21-22 For the LORD will rise up as he did on Mount Perazim,
  he will stir himself up as he did in the valley of Gibeon;
  so that he may perform his deed,
  his extraordinary deed,
  and bring to pass his work,
  his unusual work.
22 Now therefore do not mock,
  lest your bonds be made stronger;
  for I have heard from the sovereign LORD of hosts
  a decree of destruction against the whole earth.

The mention in Isaiah 28:21 of Mount Perazim and the valley of Gibeon are references of past victories by the Lord over the Philistines at Mount Perazim. See 2 Samuel 5:17-21. 2 Samuel 5:20 states: “Then David came to Baal-perazim, and defeated them there. He said, "The LORD has burst out on my enemies before
me, like the burst of a flood before me." Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim [the Lord burst out].’” The name given to Mount Perazim has the meaning of God being the “master of breakthrough” and the picture of this action is of waters breaking through a dam overwhelming everything in its destructive path. Isaiah also stated in 28:21, that God will “stir himself up as he did in the valley of Gibeon.” This is a reference to the defeat of the Canaanites by the actions of God as recorded in Joshua 10:6-11. Joshua 10:11 ends by stating: “There were more who died from the hailstones than were killed by the Israelites’ swords.” The hailstones were sent from God. Just as God had done a strange work on behalf of Israel to defeat Israel’s enemies, Isaiah declared that God will take action. He will stir Himself up to do his unusual (strange) work and cause the defeat of His own chosen people who have scoffed at His word and turned away from His protection, Isaiah 28:22.

Along with the declaration of coming judgment, Isaiah offered a hope of reprieve to the people of Judah Isaiah 28:22, by requesting that they should not continue their sinful actions of scoffing at God. If they do continue, God will make their situation even worse: “lest your bonds be made stronger.” Isaiah also explained that these “bonds” (chains or shackles) would be a means of judgment on the entire earth. Not only would the nation of Judah face destruction but God, in the future, will bring a similar destruction on all the earth’s peoples who will scoff at His word and rebel against Him. This added prophetic word by Isaiah is a reminder of God’s present (during Isaiah’s day) and future plan for the wicked of the earth.


As recorded in the passage Isaiah 28:23-29, the prophet begins by declaring a call from God to the rulers of Judah to listen to the wisdom of His counsel, vs 23. God describes His words of wisdom in an agricultural setting. In the days of Isaiah almost all of the inhabitants of Judah were engaged in the raising of crops for their sustenance. The Lord reminds these leaders of the work of the farmer who performs the work of harrowing the ground, planting seed and harvesting the crop in methodical ways to produce the best results. The farmer does not perform one task all the time but varies the work as necessary so that the harvest is gained with the results that food is produced, vss. 24-25. The prophet states that it is God who instructs and teaches the farmer how to properly perform these functions, vss. 26-28. Isaiah completes this portrait of the works of the farmer who is guided by the great wisdom and wonderful counsel of God, vs. 29.

Thomas Constable comments on the implied meaning of these verses:

“An implication of these two parables (vv. 24-25 and 27-28), not stated, is that God might deal differently with the Southern Kingdom than He dealt with the Northern Kingdom. The Jerusalemites should not conclude that because God would allow the Assyrians to defeat the Ephraimites, the same fate would necessarily befall them. A change of attitude could mitigate their judgment. So this whole “woe” ends with an implied offer of grace.

As things worked out, of course, God did allow an invading army to take the Judahites into captivity, after a different invading army had first taken the Israelites captive. But that did not happen at the same time. Sennacherib destroyed Samaria but not Jerusalem. God postponed Judah’s judgment because He found a measure of repentance there.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 134).

28:23-29 Listen, and hear my voice. 
Pay attention and hear what I am saying.
24 Does one plowing in order to plant plow continually?
Does one continually cultivate and break up his ground?
When he has leveled its surface,
does he not spread the seed of caraway,
and scatter the cumin,
putting the wheat in rows,
and the barley in its designated place,
and the spelt along its border?

For his God correctly instructs him,
and teaches him how.

For caraway is not threshed with a sledge,
nor is a cart wheel rolled over the cumin;
caraway is beaten out with a stick,
and the cumin with a rod.

Grain for bread must be ground;
one will not keep threshing it forever;
the wheel of one's cart rolls over it,
but one does not use horses to crush it.

This also comes from the LORD of hosts,
who is wonderful in counsel,
and excellent in wisdom.

The prophet as recorded in 28:23-25 asks a series of rhetorical questions that can be likened to a parable regarding the method used by a farmer to cultivate the soil and plant different types of seeds that will yield their intended crop. In 28:26-29 Isaiah reveals that it is God who correctly instructs the farmer how to cultivate the land and plant his crop. A number of examples are used to illustrate this instruction including caraway, cumin, wheat, barley and spelt. The implication of this parable is that, as a farmer would not cultivate and plow the ground continuously, nor would a farmer use improper methods and instruments for planting and threshing, God know how to properly tend and care for His chosen people whom the prophet has described as God’s vineyard. In contrast to the ruinous results of the vineyard of God, Isaiah 5:1-7, the planting and tending by God to the crop of His people, will result in a fruitful harvest.

As recorded in Isaiah 28:29, the prophet declares a statement about the greatness of God: “This also comes from the LORD of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.” The student of Scripture will immediately think of the descriptive words earlier declared by Isaiah regarding the name of the Messiah as “Wonderful Counselor” recorded in Isaiah 9:6. The Lord is reminding the people of Judah to consider Him, who is wonderful in counsel and great in wisdom. The people of Judah were asked to repent of their rebellious actions and consult Him alone for protection. To do otherwise would be foolish and would result in their destruction. In Isaiah’s day, the Lord spared the city of Jerusalem when He answered the prayer of Hezekiah, Isaiah 37:14-38. Much later however, the people of Jerusalem including their kings had rebelled against and had defied and scorned the Lord to an extent that God’s patience had finally run its course and God brought the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the army of Babylon under the leadership of king Nebuchadnezzar. See 2 Kings chapters 24-25; Jeremiah chapters 39 and 52. In the future, the prediction by Isaiah of the complete destruction of the earth, Isaiah 28:22, will be realized during the days of the Tribulation. Refer to Revelation chapters 6-19. But, even in the future days as in the present day, God’s offer of salvation is open to all who would repent of their sins and by faith believe in His Son and in His sacrificial death and resurrection for atonement of their sins. God will declare righteous all who by faith believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Refer to Genesis 15:6, Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 3:21-26; 4:3-8.
Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 28
A The moral failure of Israel’s Political Leaders: 28:1-13
B The moral failure of Judah’s Religious Leaders: 28:14-29
   B 1: The Offer of God’s Foundation Stone: 28:14-22

2. Warnings and Woes to Jerusalem: 29:1-16
   Declaration of Woe: 29:1-4
   Message of Salvation: 29:5-8
   God’s Explanation of Judgment: 29:9-14
   Declaration of Woe: 29:15-16

In chapter 29, Isaiah declares a prophetic message from God that best fits the time at the end of the Tribulation period when Jerusalem will be besieged and destroyed by the armies of the world during the battle of Armageddon and then into the millennial kingdom when the Messiah will reign from Mount Zion. Within the context of these verses, it is evident that Isaiah is not discussing the immediate threat to the city from the Assyrians. The Assyrians did not conquer the city or raze the city to the ground. The complete destruction of Jerusalem in which the city is brought to the ground and when the people of the city will speak as they lay prostrate in the dust will certainly be the days the prophet Zechariah prophesized about in chapters 12 to 14 of his prophecy. Other Scriptures that point to this latter-day destruction include Ezekiel chapter 38; Daniel 11:40-44; Revelation 9:13-21, 14:20 and 16:12-16.

As recorded by Isaiah in 29:1-16, the prophet declares an oracle of woe upon “Ariel,” (Jerusalem), the city where David laid siege. Isaiah reminds his audience that year after year they celebrate the annual cycle of feasts, vs. 1. God will bring distress on Ariel and in this city, there will be mourning and lamenting for it is Ariel, God’s altar hearth, vs. 2. Just as David laid siege to the city, vs. 1, God will lay siege to it, with towers and will raise siege works against it, with the result that the city will fall, and its people will lie in the dust, vss. 3-4. The city’s enemies, including many tyrants, will be as plentiful as the dust and will be blown away instantly, like chaff, vs. 5. The city’s enemies will be punished by the LORD of hosts with thunder, earthquake, great noise, with whirlwind, storm and by the flame of a devouring fire, vs. 6. It will all be like a vanishing dream or a night vision to the hordes of all the nations who fight against Mount Zion and its stronghold, vs. 7. To these nations who assault Ariel, it will also be like a hungry or thirsty person who dreams of eating and drinking but awakens still hungry and thirsty, vs. 8. Those who hear the LORD’s message are to be shocked and awed, for the LORD has poured on them a spirit of deep sleep. The eyes of the prophet have been closed, and the seers have had their heads covered by the LORD, vs. 9. The entire vision is like the words on a scroll, given to one who can read but cannot be read because the scroll is sealed. Also, one who cannot read is given the scroll but cannot read it, vss. 11-12. The LORD declares that these people honor Him with words from their lips, but their heart is far from Him. Their fear of Him is just from the teachings of humans, therefore, the LORD will do an astonishing and amazing work among His people. Their wisdom of their wise will perish and the understanding of their prudent will disappear, vss. 13-14. A further woe is pronounced by the prophet on those who attempt to hide their plans from the LORD and upon those whose deeds are done in the dark, and boast, who can see them or knows what they are up to, vs. 15. These people turn things upside down as if the clay was stating that it was not made by the potter and claiming that the potter has no understanding, vs. 16.

Declaration of Woe: Isaiah 29:1-4

In four short verses, 29:1-4, Isaiah delivers a prophecy about the complete destruction of Jerusalem by enemies that God Himself will raise up. David L. Cooper comments on the beginning of chapter 29:
“Chapter 29 constitutes the second woe. In our translation, however, appears the word "Ho" in the text but "woe" in the footnote. The same word in the original occurs here as appears in the other verses where it is translated "woe." It should be thus rendered here also. Although chapter 29 constitutes this second woe, the same word appears in verse 15 of the chapter, but it is simply a reiteration of the thought and does not start another oracle of judgment.

The Prophet Isaiah declared, "Woe to Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped!" What is the significance of "Ariel?" According to its derivation it means either the hearth of God or the lion of God. It is not likely that it means the lion of God here because city is feminine in the original and according to usage, had Isaiah this idea in mind, he would have said the "lioness" of God--which thing he did not do. It is therefore not likely that he had that comparison in mind.

Since this same word occurs in Ezekiel 43:15 and refers to the top of the great altar in the Millennial Age and since in Isaiah 31:9 Jerusalem is represented as a furnace where the fires of God's wrath will burn, it is most likely that our prophet here thought of Jerusalem as the hearth of God. When the Jew thought of Jerusalem, he thought of the Temple first and of the great altar on which the sacrifices were offered to make atonement for them. Thus in the minds of the Hebrews the fire consuming their offerings stood out in bold relief. The transition from this idea to that of comparing the city to a furnace where the fire burns intensely was very easy. In fact, it is simply a play upon words. The fire upon the altar consumed the offerings, especially the whole burnt offerings. These were authorized by the Lord. With this thought as a background, the prophet's mind easily conceived of Jerusalem as a great altar upon which God would burn and consume the dross of the nation--the wicked--and would refine His people and bring them forth as pure gold. Malachi expressed this thought in 3:1-6.

This hearth of God is the city where David camped and where the feasts of Jehovah were observed. Shiloh was the place where the worship of God was conducted after Israel left the plains of Jericho. Finally in the days of David God selected Jerusalem out of all other places for placing His name there.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1944).

29:1 Woe to Ariel, Ariel, the city where David laid siege!

Year after year you celebrate the annual cycle of feasts.

The prophet gives the city the name of Ariel which in the context of this passage has the meaning of “altar hearth” as expressed in Leviticus 6:9 and Ezekiel 43:15-16. See notes on Isaiah 33:14. Another meaning of this word is “lion of God” as first mentioned in Genesis 49:9 but refers to the Messiah and not to the city of Jerusalem. Ariel or Jerusalem is: “the city where David once laid siege!” “Lay siege” is a translation of the Hebrew word chanah and can also be translated as “campaed.” Isaiah called Jerusalem the ‘city of David” in 22:9. The story of the capture of Jerusalem by David and his men is recorded in 2 Samuel 5: 5-9. Upon siegeing Jerusalem, David lived or camped in it and called Jerusalem the “city of David.” See also 2 Samuel 6:10, 12, 16 and many others where Jerusalem is referred to as the ‘city of David.” It is this city of David where the Messiah to come would minister and from where, in this same city, the returning Messiah will reign over the entire earth from Mount Zion.

The prophet also declared, in Isaiah 29:1, that the people of God would be continuing in their ritualistic practices of the annual cycle of feasts and other religious observances. They would be continuing these annual observances in form only as Isaiah notes in 29:13. These people draw near with their words and honor God with their lips but not their hearts, for the fear or reverence of God consists only of human commands which they have learned by rote. Because of their heartless worship of Him, God describes their judgment in 29:2-4.
29:2 I will bring distress on Ariel,  
there will be mourning and lamenting;  
she will be to me like Ariel [an altar hearth].

God declares through Isaiah, that the city will be a place of lamenting and mourning and will be “like an Ariel” to Him, for it will be a place of death just as the altar hearth is a place of death for animals sacrificed to the Lord. Lamenting and mourning are closely related in terms of meaning. The Hebrew word for mourning is aniyyah and the Hebrew word for lamenting is taaniyyah. They both stem from the root word anah meaning “to mourn.” A biblical commentary on Isaiah 29:1-4 occurs in Lamentations 2:5:

The Lord has become like an enemy,  
he has swallowed up Israel.  
He has swallowed up all her palaces;  
he has destroyed her strongholds.  
He has multiplied mourning and lamentation  
in the daughter of Judah.

The people of Ariel will be mourning and lamenting because of the disaster that will come upon them during the days of the Tribulation. In Isaiah 29:1-4 the Lord declares that it is He who bring this disaster upon them and they will be ones sacrificed on the “Ariel,” the Lord’s altar hearth. The security the Israelites may feel in the future because they are living in Zion, the city of David will not last because they have made a covenant with death and Sheol, and they arrogantly declare that the “overwhelming scourge” will not affect them. See Isaiah 28:15. There dependency on a pagan dictator, the Antichrist of the Tribulation, to help them and their heartless worship of God will bring on them the wrath and judgment of God. Living in “Ariel” will not protect them from the God of “Ariel.”

29.3-4 I will lay siege against you all around.  
I will besiege you with towers,  
and I will raise siege works against you.  

You will be brought down,  
you will speak from the ground;  
your speech will come from the dust where you lie.  
Your voice will be like one who has a familiar spirit,  
coming out of the ground,  
and your speech will whisper out of the dust.

In Isaiah 29:3, the prophet records God’s declaration that even though armies will be encamped about the city and encircling it and will be laying siege-works and raising battle towers against it, it is really God who is their enemy and foreign armies are His agents doing His work of judgment. The result of the judgment of God, 29:4 will be total destruction, and the city will be ground to dust. From the dust, the people as they lay prostrate, would speak to Him. Hosea 5:15-6:3; Zechariah 12:10-14 and Matthew 23:37-39 describe this day when they will speak to the Lord. Leviticus 26:40-42; Isaiah 53:1-9 and Jeremiah 3:11-18 describe the words they will speak as a confession of their national sin for the rejection of the Messiah when He first came to be among them. Arnold Fruchtenbaum describes these days in much greater detail in Footsteps of the Messiah, pages 331-339.

It should be noted that many very capable Biblical scholars understand Isaiah 29:1-4 as a reference to the siege of Jerusalem by the army of Assyria. Some add that it could also refer to the conquest of Jerusalem by
Babylon and later Rome. But, as noted to the introduction to chapter 29, the Assyrians did not conquer Jerusalem or raze it to the ground. Also, the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem, as recorded in Isaiah 29:5-8, does not fit either the Babylonian or Roman empires. Babylon and Rome continued for many centuries following their conquest of Jerusalem and neither of them were ‘blown away” in an instant as 29:5 states. The context of Isaiah 29:1-8 best fit the days of the Tribulation and the return of the Messiah who will defeat His and Israel’s enemies in a sudden tumultuous victory.

Message of Salvation: 29:5-8

Isaiah often follows a message of judgment with words of comfort and salvation. In Isaiah 29:5-8, the prophet brings a message of what the Lord will do to the enemies of Jerusalem, which is also called Ariel and Mount Zion, describing the intensity of the destruction of these enemy nations. Even though the Lord admits that He is the cause or the motivator for Jerusalem’s enemies to attack the city, He will not hold these ruthless Gentile nations harmless. In other passages Isaiah delivers God’s response to those nations who assault His beloved city Jerusalem. This is a message from the Lord in the immediate context of this chapter in verses 7 and 8. It is also a major theme of the book of Isaiah: 2:12-16; 10:24-28; 14:2; 19:2, 12,17; 26:11; 34:1-2; 37:21-38; 42:13; 48:14; 54:17; 59:18; 66:6 and 14.

29:5 But your foes will be as plentiful as dust,
and your many tyrants will be blown away like chaff;
it will happen suddenly, in an instant.

As described in Isaiah 29:5, the destruction of the Lord upon the “plentiful” enemies, of Jerusalem will be instant and sudden. This description of the destruction of the Lord’s enemies (tyrants) will be during the last days of the Tribulation when the Lord will come to rescue the remnant of His people who have found themselves surrounded by the armies of the Gentile nations and who have pleaded for their Messiah to return. The Lord will come and suddenly and instantly destroy these armies and liberate the faithful remnant. Their pleading is stated in Psalm 79:1-13; 80:1-19; and Isaiah 64:1-12. This is not an exhaustive listing of all passages relating to the pleading of the remnant for their Messiah to rescue them. Their rescue by the Messiah is stated in the following passages. The location of the rescue is first, at Bozrah and continuing to the Valley of Jehoshaphat and then to Jerusalem: First at Bozrah: Isaiah 34:1-7; 63:1-6; Habakkuk 3:3 and Micah 2:12-13. The second location is at the Valley of Jehoshaphat: Joel 3:12-17 and the third location is at the city of Jerusalem: Zechariah 14:1-15 and Revelation 14:19-20. The description of the Messiah’s rescue is stated in many passages: Psalm 18:8-16; Ezekiel 39:21-29; Habakkuk 3:1-19 and Revelation 19:11-21. For a full treatment of the Scripture passages relating to the return of the Messiah to rescue the remnant, refer to the publication by Arnold Fruchtenbaum, mentioned above.

29:6-8 She will be punished by the LORD of hosts with thunder,
with earthquake and great noise,
with whirlwind and storm,
and the flame of a devouring fire.

7 It will be like a vanishing dream,
or a vision in the night;
the horde of all the nations will fight against Ariel,
all those who fight against her and her stronghold,
and those who distress her.
8 It will be like when a hungry person dreams,
    and he eats,
    but then he wakes up with an empty stomach.
Or like when a thirsty person dreams,
    and he drinks;
    but then he wakes up he is still faint from thirst.
So it will be with the horde of all the nations,
    that fight against Mount Zion.

The Lord will punish these nations with disasters of earthquakes, whirlwinds, storms, and fire accompanied by thunder, Isaiah 29:6. The attackers will all vanish as if it all were a bad dream in the night for the inhabitants of the city, 29:7. Ariel’s enemies will have nothing to show for their destructive intentions. It will be as they dreamed of food and water but awoke still hungry and thirsty, 29:8. The intent of Isaiah’s warning to these enemy nations is that their plans and actions to destroy Jerusalem will result in their own destruction. Some understand Isaiah 29:6 as referring to God appearing in the midst of thunder, earthquake, whirlwind, storm and fire. See Psalm 83:13-18 for a close parallel to God’s appearance to save His people and destroy His enemies.

The Reason for and the Declaration of the Judgment of God: 29:9-16

After describing the judgment of God, in the latter days, to come upon Jerusalem, described as Ariel in Isaiah 29:1-4 and then the judgment upon those nations who have waged war against Jerusalem and Mount Zion, as recorded in 29:5-8, the prophet next declares God explanations, in 29:9-16 of the reasons for His need to bring judgment. This section includes two parts: (1) The Explanation of Judgment, 29:9-14, and (2) The Declaration of Woe, 29:15-16.

The Explanation of Judgment: 29:9-14

29:9-10 Be shocked and awed.
    Blind yourself and be blind.
    They are drunk,
        but not from wine;
    they stagger,
        but not from strong drink.
10 For the LORD has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep,
    and has closed your eyes, O prophets,
    and covered your heads, O seers.

God first describes the condition of the people of Jerusalem who have been the target of His judgment. They have become blind and drunk, not with wine or strong drink but with their own rebellion against God and therefore God has poured over them a spirit of deep sleep and has covered the eyes and the heads of the prophets and seers. Isaiah has heard this before. When he was commissioned by the Lord to prophesy to these people, the Lord told him, as recorded in Isaiah 6:9-10, to go and tell this people: "Go, and tell this people:

    Keep on listening, but do not understand;
    keep on looking, but do not perceive.
10 Make the heart of this people insensitive,
   and make their ears deaf,
   and shut their eyes;
   so that they may not see with their eyes,
   and hear with their ears,
   and understand with their heart,
   and repent and be healed."

Isaiah asked at the time of his commissioning, how long? (How long would he need to keep telling this message to a people who will not listen, hear or understand?). The Lord told him until no one is left in the land to hear the message. Yet the Lord gave Isaiah hope in that even among all these who will not respond, there will be a tenth, a remnant who will remain faithful as a holy seed. Isaiah 6:11-13. The Apostle Paul, in his great defense of God’s care and ultimate preservation of the people of Israel (Romans chapters 9-11), quotes from Isaiah 29:10 in Romans 11:8.

29:11-12 To you this entire vision is like the words of a sealed scroll, which is given to one who can read, saying, "Read this," but he replies, "I cannot, because it is sealed."
12 Then the scroll is given to one who cannot read, saying, "Read this," but he replies, "I can't read."

The prophet declares that his message described as the entire vision, would be to these people, like someone who can read but refuses and to others they would be illiterate and cannot read the vision. It is possible that Isaiah’s reference to a sealed scroll (book) in 29:11-12 is the extant Scriptures to Isaiah’s day including the law or simply a reference to the words that Isaiah himself had written in a scroll. The point of 29:11-12 appears to be that those who are not faithful to God cannot discern the words of God for God has blinded them to His truth and given them over to the results of their sinful rebellion against God. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul describes this same idea as God’s wrath against all ungodliness in Romans 1:18-32. Paul also speaks against “a natural man” who cannot understand things of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. See also Romans 11:8 where Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:10

29:13-14 The Lord says,
   These people draw near to me with their mouth
   and with their lips they honor me,
   but their heart is removed far from me,
   and their fear of me is merely human commands
   which they have been taught.
14 Therefore I will again do an astonishing work among this people,
   a truly amazing work;
   the wisdom of their wise will perish,
   and the understanding of their prudent will disappear.

These people, the Lord declares come to worship Him by meaningless words and action which are merely human commands likely taught to them by the priests. They are not whole heartedly devoted to Him and are simply going through the motions of religious activities without being engaged in truly worshiping the Lord. The Lord responds, 29:14, to this heartless worship of Him in a way that would make others marvel. Those who were considered wise and discerning in Jerusalem will see their wisdom perish and their discernment concealed as to no effect. God will put an end to the entire works of those considered wise and those considered seers who have turned their hearts from God. The Apostle Paul describes a similar situation in 1
The Declaration of Woe: 29:15-16

29:15-16 Woe to those who attempt to hide their plans from the L ORD,
and whose deeds are done in the dark,
and who boast,
"Who can see us?"
and "Who knows what we're up to?"

16 You turn things upside down!
Should the potter be thought of as no better than the clay.
Should the thing made say to him who made it,
"He didn't make me."
Should the thing formed say of him who formed it,
"He has no understanding"?

The prophet declares a separate message of woe on the people of his beloved city Jerusalem whom have made secret plans in darkness as to keep their plans hidden from the Lord. God describes them as having turned things around, Isaiah 29:16. They are described as being like clay pottery, “that which is made” which speaks to the potter, as if the things formed are equal with the one who shapes them. The “clay” speaks evil words saying, “He did not make me,” and “He has no understanding.” Isaiah would again mention this relationship between the potter and the clay in 45:9-10 of his prophecy. The prophet Jeremiah in chapter 18 of his prophecy and the Apostle Paul in Romans 9:21 also refer to this relationship of the potter and the clay where the thing created mocks and scoffs against the one who created it. The point of all of these Scriptural references is that God is telling all who have been created by Him to worship, fear and reverence Him but if they rebel against Him they will face His fearful and deadly wrath. Their destruction is described by Isaiah just a few verses later in 29:20.

3. Rejoicing and Blessings to Jacob: 29:17-24

Following the warnings of the Lord in the preceding verses, Isaiah now turns his attention to the future blessings of the Messiah during the days of the millennial kingdom. The pattern of judgment followed by blessing continues in the last half of chapter 29 of Isaiah. The Lord often blends mercy with wrath as He stands faithful to His covenant promises with His chosen people. David L. Cooper comments on these verses:

“IN (vss. 17-21) the prophet looked through the centuries beyond the time of crisis of the Tribulation, through which Israel must pass, and he saw the dawn of the perfect day, the great Millennial Age. In comparison with eternity the time intervening between the prophet's day and that of the great Millennial Age is very short. Hence he asked: "Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?" During the present distresses time drags upon the souls of men. But in comparison with all eternity our little disappointment and sorrows fade into insignificance and time seems to be but a tiny speck of eternity.

When that era comes, the curse will be lifted and men's bodies will be perfect. "And in that day shall the deaf hear ... the eyes of the blind shall see ... the meek also shall increase their joy in Jehovah, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (29:18,19). At that time all oppression will cease. The "terrible ones" will have been rooted out of the earth and men of little minds and sinister motives will no longer exist.
IN THE final paragraph of our chapter (vss. 22-24) the prophet looked forward to the great Millennial Age and he saw Jacob in the kingdom of God. Surrounding him will be his children, the redeemed Israelites--those who have been saved through the centuries and those who will be living during the Millennial Age--who will be, according to promise, like the stars of heaven for multitude. This passage therefore presupposes the resurrection of the righteous and the increase of the nation according to promise.

Thus Israel in association with the patriarch of old, from whom the race sprang, will be "the work of my [Jehovah's] hands." God is overruling in the lives of all men. We are indeed the clay whereas He is the Divine Potter. If men will yield their hearts and lives to Him, He will make them into vessels of honor fit for the Master's use; if they do not yield completely, He will then make a less honorable vessel out of them; but, if they will not yield to Him at all and accept the salvation which He offers freely through the Lord Jesus Christ, then of course they will be banished from His presence and from the glory of His might forever.

When she is thus saved, according to verses 23 and 24, she -- all the saved of Israel -- "shall sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall stand in awe of the God of Israel." In that time they will never err in spirit nor misunderstand any situation. Great will be those days.

According to the signs of the times this present age is drawing rapidly to a close. The storm clouds of the Tribulation Period already are beginning to settle down upon the world. The "day of the Lord" will continue for seven years but will be followed by the marvelous Kingdom Age when the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly- August, 1944).

29:17 In just a little while will Lebanon not be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be thought of as a forest?

The promise that the forests of Lebanon will be in a short time (little while) turned in a fruitful filed that will be considered as a forest is certainly a reference to the days of the coming messianic kingdom as best fits the remaining verses of chapter 29. In God’s economy of time, a little while could be any period of years from just a few to a thousand or more. Lebanon, in the pages of Scripture is often described as a place in which towering cedars and cypress trees grow. These trees are Lebanon’s glory, Psalm 72:16; 104:6, Isaiah 2:3; 35:2; 60:13 and Hosea 14:5-6. But, Lebanon also was to have its time of destruction when its glory would be removed, Isaiah 10:34; 33:9; 37:24; Jeremiah 22:6, 23; Nahum 1:4 and Zechariah 11:1. In Isaiah 29:17, the prophet predicts a time when Lebanon will be a fertile field that will be considered a forest. Its glory will be restored. The time of this restoration is described in 29:18 as “on that day” which is assuredly a reference to the great day of the Lord to come. For a discussion of the Scriptural passages regarding “in this day,” or “on that day,” refer to the notes in this study on Isaiah chapter 2.

29:18-19 In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and the eyes of the blind will see out of their gloom and darkness.

The oppressed also will again rejoice in the LORD, and the poorest people will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah continues the blessings of the messianic kingdom beginning with the key words, “in that day,” 29:18. Refer to notes on 29:17 above and to the notes on Isaiah chapter 2. In the glorious days of this kingdom, the deaf will hear, the blind will see, the afflicted will be glad “and the poorest people (the most-needy of mankind) will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” Some may understand that the fulfillment of Isaiah 29:18-19 is during the days when Jesus walked the soil of Israel but there is a more world-wide meaning to these words. The phrase in 29:19, “the poorest people” must mean a future time not yet realized. This future time stated in 29:18 as “in that day,” would indicate a fulfillment during the time when there will be someone on
the earth capable of bringing world-wide healing and help to the poorest and most-needy of all mankind. That someone will be the Messiah who is described in Isaiah 29:19 as “the Holy One of Israel.”

This name for God, the Holy One of Israel, is a beloved description that Isaiah often uses in his prophecy, 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9 and 14. It is such a beloved and descriptive name Isaiah uses in so many chapters, that it helps to confirm the fact that Isaiah wrote the entire prophecy as recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

29:20-21 For the tyrant will vanish,
   and the scoffer will be gone,
   and all those who are keen on doing wrong will be cut off,
   those who convict a person based on a false testimony,
   and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,
   and denies justice to the innocent.

Isaiah, in 29:20-21, describes more about the days of the messianic kingdom. There will not be any ruthless ones nor scorners in this kingdom who will oppress or defraud those who are innocent with meaningless arguments. The “tyrant” is most likely a reference to the Antichrist who be banished to the eternal lake of fire. This kingdom will be blessed with those who have righteous intentions. The New Testament gives evidence of the righteousness of the kingdom of God, Romans 14:17; and that the wicked and ungodly will not be present in it, 1 Corinthians 6:9.

29:22-24 Therefore this is what the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, says about the house of Jacob:
   Jacob will no longer be ashamed,
   nor will his face grow pale.
   But when he sees his children,
   the work of my hands among them,
   they will sanctify my name;
   yes, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob,
   and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.
   They also whose spirit goes astray will come to understanding,
   and those who grumble will receive instruction.

Isaiah turns his attention to the ethnic Jewish nation, the house of Jacob. Isaiah begins this discussion with the declaration that it was the Lord “who redeemed Abraham”. For an expanded discussion on the justification of Abraham based upon his faith, see Romans 4:1-22. Some may understand the redemption of Abraham as the work of God in calling Abraham from the pagan culture of the Chaldeans, Genesis 12:1-5, but it is perhaps best to understand this redemption as justification (reckoned or counted as righteousness), Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:3, 9, 22; Galatians 3:26 and James 2:23.

According to Isaiah 29:22-24, in the messianic kingdom to come, the house of Jacob, the ethnic believing remnant of the Jewish race, will have no cause for shame for they will be called the work of God’s hands and they will sanctify God’s name, which is described as the “Holy one of Jacob.” Isaiah blends the names of Israel and Jacob in his description of the beloved name of the Lord as the Holy One. Compare 29:19 with 29:23. The shame of Jacob’s family will finally be removed, and the faithful remnant of Jacob will, “on that day,” 29:18, sanctify and stand in awe of the God of Israel. Isaiah is acknowledging the blessedness of
God’s name and His special family relationship with His chosen people. To the redeemed family of Jacob, the Lord is the God of Israel, 29:23; the Holy One of Israel, 29:19; and the Holy One of Jacob, 29:23. In Romans chapters 9-11, the Apostle Paul describes this special relationship between God and the believing remnant of the Jews. In Romans 11:2, Paul states, that: “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.” (NKJV) There yet remains a remnant of His people as Paul describes them, “at this present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.” Romans 11:5. In the future millennial kingdom, this remnant will finally without shame from past failures and sins, freely worship and adore the God of Israel.

In Isaiah 29:24, the prophet concludes the magnificent prophecy of chapter 29 by declaring that the errant in spirit (mind) will know God’s truth and those who grumble or criticize will receive or accept instruction. The faithful remnant of Jacob “in that day,” 29:18, will be transformed by having their minds renewed and will be able to discern spiritual matters and accept instruction from the Lord. They will finally reach the day where the injunction against them as God told Isaiah, 6:8-13, will be removed. In that day, they will have eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart of understanding.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 29
The Concern of the Lord: (warnings and woes) 29:1-16
The Comfort of the Lord: (restoration and redemption) 29:17-24

Chapter 30 Introduction

The statement of “woe” that begins chapter 30 links it to the next two chapters, 31 and 32 which together with chapter 30 comprise three messages or oracles of warning by the Lord. Although many outlines and section divisions are possible for chapter 30, this study will present two main sections for chapter 30: first, verses 1-17: Warnings to Judah: No Safety in Egypt; second, verses 18-33: God’s Graciousness to Jerusalem. Each of these main sections contain sub-sections.

30:1-17: Warnings to Judah: No Safety in Egypt
1-7: The Rebellious who seek help from Egypt
   The Sinful Plan: 30:1-2
   The Shameful People: 30:3-5
   The Sitting Protector: 30:6-7
8-17: The Rebellious who do not seek help from the Lord
   The People Refuse God’s Wisdom: 30:8-11
   The People Reject God’s Word: 30:12-14
   The People Reject God’s Will: 30:15-17

30:18-33 God’s Graciousness to Jerusalem
18-26: God’s Future Blessings
27-33: God’s Present Blessing

4. Warnings to Judah: No safety in Egypt: 30:1-17

30:1-7: The Rebellious who seek help from Egypt

Isaiah, in chapter 30 of his prophecy, is dealing with those who have made an alliance with Egypt seeking safety and protection from the Egyptians, whom the Lord states, cannot help them or profit them. Verses 1-7 of this chapter are an oracle of woe on the folly of this alliance which is described in vs. 1 as compounding or
adding sin to sin for they have not sought to align themselves with the Lord to seek His guidance and protection from the assault of the Assyrians.

30: 1 "Woe to the rebellious children,"
   declares the LORD,
   "who execute plans that are not mine,
   and who make alliances but not by my Spirit,
   so compounding sin on sin;

Isaiah declares an oracle of woe on “the rebellious children,” which in the context of the preceding chapters, must refer to the leaders of Judah who have made an alliance with Egypt, 29:2, which is called in Isaiah 28:18, a “covenant with death.” This reference to the “covenant with death” directly applies to the historical days of Isaiah and his country, Judah. See notes on Isaiah 28:18. In Exodus 13:17 and Deuteronomy 17:16, God warned His people not to return to Egypt. Earlier in his prophecy, in chapter 19, Isaiah had declared an oracle of warning against Egypt as a deterrent for Judah to seek any help from the Egyptians. Isaiah again warns Judah of the folly of trusting in Egypt for protection in chapter 30 and 31 and uses the message of the Assyrian spokesman, Rabshakeh in chapter 37 verses 4-10 to once again remind the leaders of Judah of the futility of seeking aid from Egypt.

These leaders had executed a plan with the leadership of Egypt without seeking direction from God’s Spirit. This is one of many verses in the prophecy of Isaiah where God’s Spirit is mentioned. See also Isaiah 11:2; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:21; 61:1 and 63:14. Isaiah mentions the Holy Spirit in 63:10 and 63:11. This mention of God’s Spirit in 30:1 is not by itself a proof of the Trinitarian doctrine of the Godhead. However, the accumulation of references to God’s Spirit in Isaiah and in Ezekiel form a developmental foundation for this doctrine as it is further unfolded in the Scriptures. It would not be out of place to say that the disciples of Jesus and others around Him during His first advent, would have had a basic understanding of the plurality of the Godhead from their study of the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 1:20, points to creation itself as being enough evidence for knowledge about God. Paul also stated in Romans 1:19, that God has revealed sufficient knowledge about Himself to every human. When Paul combines the work of God in revealing Himself to mankind, His creation revealing details about His divine nature, and the testimony of God’s Word about the plurality of the Godhead, it is little wonder that Paul can claim that mankind is without excuse for suppressing the truth about what they already know about God. Thus, those who were students of the Scriptures, written before the first advent of Jesus Christ would certainly have had a good understanding of the plurality of the Godhead.

God, as recorded in Isaiah 30:1, declares through the prophet that those who have made this alliance and executed their plan without consulting Him have compounded or added sin to sin. It is an act of rebellion to seek an alliance with a nation that God had previously denounced for their idolatry. But it is adding sin to sin for making this evil alliance, by turning from seeking God, and not wanting to even hear from God as Isaiah, in 30:11 of this chapter makes plain.

30:2-3 who set out to go down to Egypt,
   and have not asked for my guidance;
   to find refuge under Pharaoh's protection,
   and seek safety under Egypt's shade!
3 Therefore Pharaoh's protection will bring you shame,
   and the safety of Egypt's shade will be your disgrace.
God emphatically declares His indictment against the sin of the leaders of Judah who were seeking shelter in the shadow of Egypt without consulting Him for His guidance. God avows that this evil act of seeking the protection of a pagan ruler will only bring shame and disgrace to the people of Judah. The Lord, through the Psalmist as recorded in Psalm 91:1-2 states:

\[
\text{He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High} \\
\text{will abide under the shadow of the Almighty.} \\
2 \text{ I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,} \\
\text{my God, in whom I trust."}
\]

All of Psalm 91 stands in stark contrast to the actions of the leaders of Jerusalem, who if they had sung this Psalm in the temple, would have, with the testimony of their lips, understood the need to seek the LORD’s counsel. They did, however, prove by their rebellious acts that mere words of understanding were far from their hearts. It is only in Psalm 91:1 and Isaiah 30:2-3, that the words shelter and shadow are found together. In the Psalms, the godly person trusts in the Lord for shelter and shadow. As described in Isaiah 30:2-3, the ungodly leaders of Judah trust in their deadly covenant with Egypt to seek a false sense of shelter and shadow for they have become their shame and humiliation.

**30:4-5 For their officials are at Zoan, and their envoys have come to Hanes.**

5 They will all be ashamed 

because of a people who cannot benefit them, 

who cannot give them help or profit, 

but only shame and disgrace."

The prophet states in Isaiah 30:4, that the Judean princes and ambassadors had arrived at the Egyptian cities of Zoan and Hanes. This action points conclusively to the role of king Hezekiah in the evil plot to ignore God and seek aid from Egypt. In Isaiah 30:5, the prophet states that everyone and by implication, also the king of Judah, will be ashamed for seeking help from a people who will only bring them shame and reproach. It was only God’s gracious mercy and love for His people and His faithfulness in keeping His covenant that He heard the words of king Hezekiah when the king requested prayer from God’s servant Isaiah in the face of the assault by the armies of Assyria, Isaiah 37:1-4. Hezekiah’s alliance with Egypt was a complete failure. It was only when Hezekiah was faced with certain death, did he deem it necessary to seek help from the Lord. God is a merciful Sovereign, who in spite of the sins of His people, will keep His promises to preserve to Himself a faithful remnant and even in the events recorded in Isaiah chapters 36-37, keep His promises to preserve a sinful and rebellious city safe from destruction.

**30:6-7 An oracle about the animals of the Negev.**

Through the land of trouble and anguish, 

of the lioness and roaring lion, 

of the viper and fiery darting serpent, 

they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys, 

and their treasures upon the humps of camels, 

to a people who cannot help. 

7 For Egypt’s help is worthless and futile. 

Therefore have I called her "Rahab-who-just-sits-there."
Isaiah declares an oracle on the “beasts of the Negev.” This is a description of the route the princes and ambassadors from Judah had taken when they travelled from Jerusalem to Egypt. It was a dangerous journey, carrying rich treasure for the leaders of Egypt on the backs of donkeys and camels. They travelled “through a land of trouble and anguish” where they faced wild animals including lions and vipers and darting snakes and many other dangers which put their beasts of burden at risk. There is a two-fold irony in this story. First, these ambassadors and princes had taken a similar route, in the opposite direction, from the promised-land to Egypt, as their ancestors had taken many centuries earlier when escaping from Egypt. This return to Egypt was against the word of the Lord, Exodus 13:17 and Deuteronomy 17:16. Second, the risks of travel and the costs of the gifts to Egypt were not worth the effort as the gifts were given to a people who could not help or profit them.

Isaiah as recorded in 30:7 emphasizes the futility of taking this journey and the making of an agreement with Egypt whom the profit calls “Rahab.” Other references in the Scriptures to Egypt be named Rahab are found in Psalm 87:4, 89:10 and Isaiah 51:9. Rahab has the meaning of arrogant-turbulence. Many Biblical scholars understand this word as referring to a sea monster as this is clearly the description in Isaiah 51:9. Isaiah as stated in the NKJV calls Egypt, “Rahab-Hem-Shebeth” which has the meaning of “Rahab who sits idle.” The NIV renders this phrase as “Rahab the Do-Nothing,” and the KJV has “Their strength is to sit still.” The point Isaiah makes about Egypt is a stinging rebuke to king Hezekiah and those he sent to Egypt. Their time, money, dangerous journey and agreement were not only worthless but the whole exercise was also an exercise in rebellion against God as the following verses make plain. Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 30:6-7:

“The prophet visualizes the caravan of the Judean ambassadors passing through the wild and eerie land of the Negev, inhabited by lions and all kinds of snakes. The fauna of the Negev, since the time of Isaiah, has changed considerably, but snakes still infest some parts of it. The caravan of camels and asses is loaded down with rich presents for the rulers of Egypt. However, all this will be of no avail since Egypt will not help Judah. Isaiah calls Egypt “The Reclining Sea-Monster” (Rahab-hem-shabeth), literally “the sitting Rahab.” Rahab (Sea-Monster) is the name applied to Egypt elsewhere (Isa. 51:0, Psa. 87:4, 89:10, etc.).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 258).

30:8-17: The Rebellious who do not seek help from the Lord
The People Refuse God’s Wisdom: 30:8-11

As stated in Isaiah 30:8-11, the prophet records the command of the LORD to write a message on a tablet and inscribe it on a scroll as a perpetual witness, vs. 8. The reason for this perpetual witness is that God’s people are rebellious and deceptive children who will not obey the law of the LORD, vs. 9. They tell the seers to refrain from seeing visions and tell the prophets to stop prophesying to them what is right, and they only want to hear illusions and pleasantries, vs. 10. With what is one of the evillest blasphemies recorded in the writings of Isaiah, the people say, “let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel,” vs. 11.

30:8 Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it on a scroll, that it may be preserved as a witness for the future forever.

The Lord requested that Isaiah write a message of warning against the people of Judah on both a tablet, for public viewing as the words “before them” indicate and on a scroll, likely for private viewing and also as a permanent record which would have formed this part of the book of Isaiah. The words on the tablet would have been more concise than those written on a scroll, yet both of these writings were for an eternal witness of God’s warning. The words that God wanted recorded may be the very words of Isaiah stated in 30:8-17.
Isaiah does not disclose the exact words he wrote on the tablet and the scroll, but he gives the reason for these inscriptions in the verses 30:8.

30:9 For they are a rebellious people,
deceptive children,
children that will not obey the law of the LORD.

God, as Isaiah stated in 30:9 and following, gives His reason for requesting a permanent record of warning and judgment against His people. God’s people are rebellious and deceptive children who will not obey His law. This has been an all too familiar lament from the Lord about His chosen people. The word “law” in this verse is literally torah meaning the law of the Lord. The prophet Jeremiah often lamented on the refusal of God’s people to listen or obey the words of the Lord: Jeremiah 6:19; 9:13; 13:10; 26:4; 43:23 and 44:23. Daniel also prayed for forgiveness for his people who had transgressed the law of God and did not obey His voice. See Daniel 9:11.

30:10-11 They tell the seers, "Stop seeing visions,"
and to the prophets, "Stop prophesying to us about what is right,
tell us pleasanties, prophesy illusions.

Get out of the way,
turn aside from the path,
let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel."

Isaiah continues the declaration of Lord’s rebuke of His people who have refused to listen to the seers and prophets, including Isaiah, who speak the words of the Lord. The people refused to listen to what the Lord wanted them to do and instead demand these prophets speak only pleasant words and words of illusion. The people further push away the prophets and demand to hear no more about the Holy One of Israel. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, told Amos, "O seer, go, flee to the land of Judah. Earn your bread and prophesy there. Do not prophesy any more at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house." Amos 7:12-13. In many passages of Scripture, the sad testimony of God’s people is recorded that they refused to listen to the prophets whom God had sent to them. See 2 Chronicles 24:19; Jeremiah 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; Ezekiel 2:5; Daniel 9:6; Zechariah 1:4 and Luke 16:31. The blasphemous words of the people, “let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel,” stands alongside other wicked actions of God’s covenant people as recorded in the writings of Isaiah. An example of this are the words of Isaiah 3:9, “they flaunt (parade: NIV), their sin like Sodom;” and the words of Isaiah recorded in 57:3-11 regarding the people’s practice of pagan religious rites.

The word way in 30:11 is the Hebrew word derek, which occurs often in Isaiah. Its meaning in the context of Isaiah 30:11 is a command to stand aside and not block the way (or path) the people desire to proceed. The Hebrew word derek, is also recorded in Isaiah 53:6 which is a very familiar verse in Isaiah and describes the wickedness of the heart of the people of God, “All we like sheep have gone astray; and have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him, the sin of us all.” By going in their own way, God’s covenant people and all people, have turned to a path of destruction. The word “path” in Isaiah 30:11 is the Hebrew word orah, which can be used interchangeably with derek, (way). Both Hebrew words orah and derek occur together in Isaiah 30:11 and 40:14. In the context of Isaiah 30:11, God’s people are demanding that Isaiah turn aside from the righteous “path” of declaring the words of the Holy One of Israel. Thus, the sinfulness of the people of Israel stands in profound contrast to the holiness of the Holy One of Israel. The reaction of God to the wickedness of His covenant people is recorded in Isaiah 30:12-14.
The People Reject God’s Word: 30:12-14

As recorded in Isaiah 30:12-14, the prophet declares God’s retributive reaction to the sinfulness of His covenant people, as stated in 30:1-11. Because they had despised God’s word and trusted in oppression and deception, their iniquity will be upon them and they will be shattered instantly, like a cracked and bulging wall which will fall and they will be smashed without mercy like a potter’s clay pot that has fallen to its complete destruction.

30:12-14 Therefore this is what the Holy One of Israel says, "Because you despise this word, and trust and rely on oppression and deception; therefore this iniquity will be to you like a cracked and bulging wall ready to fall, that topples suddenly, in an instant. He will smash it like a potter's clay pot, shattering it into pieces without mercy; so that not a shard of it can be found among its pieces for taking fire from the hearth, or to dipping up water out of a cistern."

God’s response to the refusal of His people to listen to Him or to His prophet and their rebellious acts of turning to a pagan nation for help instead of trusting in Him. The disaster, called by Isaiah, “this iniquity” to fall on them would be like the sudden collapse of a wall, 30:13; or the smashing of a potter’s jar in which the smashed shards of the vessel would be useless for any purpose, 30:14. The comparison of the smashing of a potter’s jar was a stinging rebuke for the attitude of these people who although they were but a vessel of clay, they considered themselves to be equal with the potter (God) and they spoke insolent words to their maker, (vs. 16). Thomas Constable comments:

“Consequently their iniquity would lead to disaster, similar to the sudden internal collapse of a high wall, and the severe external smashing of an earthenware jar. It would be complete, as when no useful pieces remain after the smashing of a pot. That judgment had not yet come was hardly grounds for concluding that it would not come (cf. Matt. 24:36-44; Mark 13:32-37; 2 Pet. 3:3-10).

When God miraculously slew Sennacherib's besieging forces around Jerusalem in 701 B.C., the Assyrians had already destroyed much of Judah.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 143)

The People Reject God’s Will: 30:15-17

In Isaiah 30:15-17, the prophet records that although the sovereign LORD has offered to deliver His people if they return to Him, rest upon Him and trust in Him, but they have rejected the offer of the LORD. Instead of trusting in the LORD, they had trusted in their swift horses that could provide them no safety from even swifter enemies who will overtake them.

30:15 For this is what the sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel says, "In returning and rest you will be delivered; quietness and trust will be your strength, but you rejected it."
God offers them salvation from their impending doom which in the context of chapters 28-33 is the invasion of Judah by the Assryrians. God asks them to simply repent. Resting quietly in the Lord and trusting in Him alone is the only way for the people of Judah to experience God’s protection from their enemies. God’s words to the people of Judah were the same as He delivered to King Ahaz a few years earlier: “Be careful, be quiet, and don’t be afraid,” Isaiah 7:4. Just prior to this offer to the people of Judah, Isaiah had recorded in chapter 28:12:

"This is the rest, give rest to the one who is weary;"
and "This is a place of refreshment."
Yet they would not listen.

God also sums up this request, in 30:15, by stating: “but you rejected it.” The people rejected God’s offer of protection and instead of coming in quiet respect to God and resting in Him, they sought refuge in fleeing on horses from the Assyrian assault. Other passages in Isaiah speak of a day when God will provide rest for His faithful remnant, 11:10; 14:3; 32:17.

30:16-17 You say, 'No, we will flee on horses;'
therefore you will flee.
and, 'We will ride on swift horses;'
therefore those who pursue you will be swift.

17 One thousand of you will flee at the threat of one of them;
at the threat of five all of you will flee,
until you are left as a lone flagpole on the top of a mountain,
and as a signal flag on a hill."

The rebellious and obstinate people of God had rejected His guidance and protection and sought protection from the advancing Assyrians in the courts of Egypt. God rebuked His people and told them this strategy of seeking aid from the Egyptians would only result in shame and disgrace. The people of Judah and by implication, the court of Judah, including its leaders and king, refused to listen to God’s rebuke and mockingly claimed that they would flee from the Assyrians on swift horses. God simply responds that this would be a useless strategy because those who flee will be pursued by even swifter enemies who will overtake them. The people of Judah would be so in fear that they would flee at the sight of five or even one of the Assyrians and all that would be left of them would be an abandoned banner or flag on a lonely hill. David L. Cooper comments:

The one who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek after Him. No one can please God without faith. The Lord delights to exercise our faith and our trust. If one trusts, he does not worry; if he worries, he does not trust. When Israel said that she would not trust God but would flee upon horses, the Lord declared that, since she had taken this attitude, they would have to flee. He assured them, however, that their pursuers and their persecutors would be swifter than they and that a great calamity would overcome them; for, "One thousand shall flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill" (vs. 17). Every sin and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward. God must deal with man according to the merits of his case.

The Lord is very much concerned about all His people. He never willingly afflicts the children of men. It grieves His heart to punish any of His children. Humanly speaking, the Lord is reluctant to punish them but endures with long-suffering until He cannot act otherwise than to bring summary judgment upon them.
He must wait very frequently in order that He might pour out the fullness of His blessings upon His people. This is true of the people of God today and is also correct with reference to Israel, for the prophet declared, "And therefore will Jehovah wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for Jehovah is a God of justice; blessed are all they that wait for him" (vs. 18). Nothing would delight the heart of God more than their letting him have full possession of their lives and working in and through them His plans and purposes in His effort to reach others. He longs to be gracious to everyone who has come to Him; but unfortunately most of His people by their lack of surrender will not allow Him to have His way in their lives. Such is the declaration found in this quotation. God has longed to be gracious to Israel, but He could not; He has wanted to have mercy upon her, but she would not allow Him to do so. These statements are in perfect accord with the declaration of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 23:37-39. In this passage He declared that He often wished to gather the Jewish people as a hen does her chickens under her wings but they would not. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – September 1944).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 30:1-17
30:1-7: The Rebellious who seek help from Egypt
   The Sinful Plan: 30:1-2
   The Shameful People: 30:3-5
   The Sitting Protector: 30:6-7

30:8-17: The Rebellious who do not seek help from the Lord
   The People Refuse God’s Wisdom: 30:8-11
   The People Reject God’s Word: 30:12-14
   The People Reject God’s Will: 30:15-17

5. God’s Graciousness to Jerusalem: 30:18-33

God’s Future Blessings: 30:18-26
The latter half of chapter 30 is a declaration by God of His gracious blessings on the people of Judah. This is the fourth of a series in chapters 28 to 33 of a message of woe. Isaiah 30:1-17 is followed by a message of salvation and blessing, 30:18-33. Isaiah 30:18-33 has two distinct parts: one in the future, where God bestows His blessings in the millennial kingdom, 30:18-26, and the second in the present with God’s promise of His immediate help to the city of Jerusalem, 30:27-33.

As recorded in Isaiah 30:18-26, the prophet states that the LORD waits patiently for His people so that He may be gracious to them. He will rise up to have mercy upon them for He is a God of justice and blessed are all those who wait for Him, vs. 18. Those who live in Zion will receive help from the LORD for He is their teacher whom they will see and receive instruction, and they will remove their carved images from their midst, vss. 19-22. In that day, their crops will flourish, their animals will have abundant food, and land will have brooks of flowing water, vss. 23-25. The light of the sun and moon will be much brighter and in that day the LORD will heal His people, vs. 26.

30:18 Therefore the LORD patiently waits, so that he may be gracious to you. Therefore he will rise up, so that he may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for him.
It is very significant that Isaiah 30: 8 contains a double “therefore” as they point to the ultimate response of God to the sinfulness and rebelliousness of Judah. God is faithful and keeps His promise to His chosen people. Therefore, in spite of their wickedness, and in spite of the fact that they have no patience to wait upon God, He will wait for them in His desire to have compassion on them. He longs to be gracious to them. He calls those who long for Him blessed, because He is a God of justice. God will not let their enemies go unpunished and He will not forget His beloved city of where His holy mountain sits.

The word “gracious” is the Hebrew word chanan which is perhaps best known in the Scriptures in the benediction or blessing of Aaron as recorded in Numbers 6:24-26:

24 "The LORD bless you and keep you;  
25 the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.  
26 The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."

Other important occurrences include Exodus 33:19 and many of the Psalms. The Prophet Amos also used this word in 5:14-15 of his prophecy, “Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have claimed. 15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish justice in the city gate. It may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.” See also: Isaiah 26:10; 27:11; 30:19 and 33:2.

The word “mercy,” which is the Hebrew word rachan, can also be translated as “compassion.” It often occurs in Isaiah translated as mercy or compassion. See Isaiah 9:17; 13:18; 14:1; 27:11; 30:18; 49:10, 13, 15; 54:8, 10; 55:7 and 60:10. The phrase “God of justice” occurs only in Isaiah 30:18 and Malachi 2:17. The word “justice,” which is the Hebrew word, mispha’t, is often translated as “judgment.” It occurs 40 times in Isaiah and is one of the major themes of the prophecy of Isaiah.

30:19 For the people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem;  
you will weep no more.  
He will surely be gracious to you  
at the sound of your cry for help;  
when he hears, he will answer you.

Isaiah states that God will answer the cry of the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem. That this response by God is in the future is evident by the content of 30:20-26. The weeping of the people of Jerusalem will be met by God’s gracious response. In the last days, when Jerusalem is surrounded by its enemies and hope seems lost, God will provide a way of escape for the faithful remnant who have cried out to Him. Zechariah 14:3-5. See above notes on Isaiah 29:5 for a brief explanation of the return of the Lord and His rescue of His people.

30:20 Though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity  
and the water of affliction,  
yet your Teacher will not be hidden anymore,  
but your eyes will see your Teacher.

Isaiah explains that the Lord had punished them by giving them the “bread of adversity and water of affliction.” The Lord’s punishment was meant to be restorative and not punitive. He longs for fellowship with His people. As their Teacher, He will, in the blessed days to come, no longer hide Himself and their eyes will behold their Teacher. This verse is the only place in the Old Testament where God is called their Teacher. It
will only be in the future when the people of Jerusalem will behold their Teacher with their eyes and worship Him as their Messiah. During His first advent, the Messiah was called a Rabbi (meaning teacher): John 1:49, 6:25; 11:8 and 20:16, but the people of Israel of that day, rejected their teacher. It will only be during the second advent of the Messiah, when the faithful remnant who have cried out to Him, will behold Him with their eyes and will worship Him as their Protector, Savior and Lord on Mount Zion. Victor Buksbazen comments on vs.20:

“In the Qumran documents (The Habakkuk Commentary), “The Teacher of Righteousness” (Moreh Tsedek), a Messianic figure, is of paramount importance and may have some connection with Isaiah 30:20 and the Hebrew text of Joel 2:23 and Hosea 10:12.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 264).

30:21-22 Your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it;"
when you turn to the right hand,
or when you turn to the left.
22 Then you will defile your silver-coated carved images,
and your gold-plated metal idols.
You will throw them away like a menstrual rag;
you will say to them, "Get out of here."

In the blessed days of the millennial kingdom, the people will respond to the lesson of the teacher, “This is the way, walk in it”, Isaiah 30:21. God’s people will also, finally, throw away their carved images and their idols, plated with silver and gold, 30:22. During the Tribulation period, idol worship will be prevalent among the ungodly and even in the midst of God’s judgment upon them, they will not repent of their sins of idolatry. Revelation 9:20. It will only be after the people of God, who will be known as the faithful remnant, have repented of their past sin of rejecting their Messiah and have turned from their worship of idols, that their Messiah will return, and they will behold Him with their eyes.

30:23-26 Then he will give the rain for your seed,
which you sow in the ground.
Food from the produce of the ground
will be rich and plenteous.
In that day your cattle will feed in large pastures.
24 The oxen and the donkeys that till the ground
will eat savory fodder
which has been winnowed with the shovel and pitchfork.
25 There on every lofty mountain,
and on every high hill,
there will be brooks of flowing water,
in the day of the great slaughter,
when the towers fall.
26 Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun,
and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter,
like the light of seven days,
in the day that the LORD binds up the injuries of his people
and heals the wound he has inflicted.
The prophet, as recorded in Isaiah 30:23-26, describes the bountiful blessings of the messianic kingdom. Some may wish to explain away these words as describing only the benefits of salvation in Christ. However, the plain reading of these words, lead to an obvious conclusion that the Lord is describing how life will be like in the future days when the returning Teacher, the Messiah will reign over His kingdom on the earth. In 30:23-24, Isaiah records the word of the Lord, stating that, “on that day” there will be abundant rain and the soil will yield a rich and plenteous harvest. The livestock will graze in wide pastures and the beasts of burden, the oxen and donkeys will eat savory (salted) fodder. These verses indicate that not only will the people of God be restored but nature itself will finally be free of its futility and corruption when the Lord returns. See also Romans 8:19-21. In 30:25, Isaiah explains that streams will run from every high hill and lofty mountain “in the day of the great slaughter when the towers fall.” This day of great slaughter is the day when the Messiah will return and defeat the enemies of His people. The words “when the towers fall,” are most likely a reference to the final fall of Babylon. Revelation 18:21-24.

“In that day,” when the Messiah will return and “binds up the injuries of his people and heals the wound he has inflicted,” Isaiah 30:26, will be days of great brilliance when the glory of the Lord will shine as if seven times brighter than the sun and will be like the light of seven days. See also Isaiah 60:19-20. The most important theological truth of 30:26 is the fact that the Lord heals the bruise He has inflicted. The Lord will establish days of Tribulation in the future. They will be established for the purposes He desires. These days are described in Jeremiah in 30:5-7:

5 For this is what the LORD says:
   "We have heard cries of terror,
      fear, and not peace.
6 Ask now, and see:
   Can a man give birth to a child?
   Why do I see every man with his hands holding his stomach,
      like a woman in labor,
      and all faces have turned pale?
7 Alas, that day is so great that there has never been one like it.
   It is the time of Jacob's trouble;
      but he will be saved out of it."

According to Revelation chapters 6-19, it is the Lord who sends the calamitous destruction on the earth during the Tribulation years. He does this so that the world will learn righteousness, to bring judgment on the wicked who will not repent and to bring His faithful remnant to repentance and safety. See notes on Isaiah 4:4 for an extended discussion. As indicated above on the notes concerning Isaiah 29:5, the Old Testament contains a great amount of detail regarding the days of the Tribulation period and the second coming of Christ. Thomas Constable comments on verses 23-26:

“30:23-24 There will be plenty of rain so the harvests will be bountiful. The agriculture of Palestine depended totally on rain.355 There will be such abundant pastureland for the cattle that they will eat the best food.

30:25-26 There will also be an abundance of water, even on the hilltops, when the Lord defeats His enemies (at Armageddon; cf. v. 19; 2:12-17; 25:1-5; Rev. 16:16; 19:17-21). Increased light and the healing of God's formerly broken and bruised people will also mark "that day" (cf. 24:23; Rom. 8:21). The point is that things will be much better then than now. It may be impossible for life as we know it to exist if there were literally seven times as much light as there is now. Yet a renovation of nature as well as humankind is in view.”
(Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 145).
God’s Present Blessings: 30:27-33

God promises to act on behalf of the doomed people of Jerusalem. The mighty God comes in burning and fierce anger, to destroy the Assyrians and to bring a final judgment on the Assyrian king. These verses are a description of God and His actions that are among the most graphic in all of Scripture. Isaiah describes God in an anthropomorphic (human like) sense ascribing to God actions from His lips, tongue, breath, voice and arm. God is a spirit and He does not have the physical characteristics of a human. However, the Scriptures often describe God with human like attributes so that the meaning of His actions can be understood. As recorded in Isaiah 30:27-33, the prophet declares that the LORD will come with burning anger and He will shake the nations and leads them to ruin, vss. 27-28. God’s people will have hearts full of gladness when they keep the holy feast, vs. 29. The LORD will demonstrate His anger and the Assyrians will be terrified for He will strike them down, vss. 30-32. The fires of Topheth have been prepared for the enemies of the LORD, vs. 33.

30:27a Look, the name of the LORD comes from far away,

In the opening words of 30:27, Isaiah declares that it is the “name” of the LORD that comes from a remote or far-away location. God’s name has a holy and revered meaning in Scripture. God is jealous of His name and responds in wrath when His name is profaned. God often acts for the sake of His name even when His people rebel against Him. The student will derive much benefit from a study of what the Scriptures teach about the name of the Lord and what God has done and will do for His name’s sake.

Students who desire to conduct a study on the name of the Lord should consider the following selected verses in the Old Testament, Exodus 3:15; 6:3; 15:3; 20:7 and 34:14; Leviticus 24:16; Deuteronomy 28:58; 2 Samuel 6:2; Psalms 8:1, 9; 29:2; 34:3; 86:9; 103:1 and 145:1, 21; Proverbs 18:10; Nehemiah 1:11; Job 1:21; Daniel 9:19; Micah 4:5; 5:4 and Zechariah 13:9 and 14:9. The importance of the name of the Lord and what He does for His own name’s sake is stated often in the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Verses to consider in Isaiah include, 12:4; 24:15; 25:1; 26:8; 42:8; 45:4; 47:4; 48:2, 9, 11; 50:10; 51:15; 54:5; 56:6; 59:19; 60:9 and 63:16.

The reference to “far away” in Isaiah 30:27 has the meaning of the heavenly realm, where God abides. It would be pure speculation to attempt to specify exactly where God has His throne. It is a place simply called from above. See Isaiah 40:22; John 3:31, 8:23 and James 1:17. When Jesus was baptized by John and when He was speaking to Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration, God the Father spoke audibly from above, from heaven, Matthew 3:16-17 and from a cloud, Luke 9:34-35. Many days after His resurrection, Christ ascended up into heaven and it was said He will return from heaven, Acts 1:9-11. Isaiah calls heaven a far-away place and it is best to understand it that way. However, God is not far from us: Acts 17:27.

30:27b-30 burning with his anger,
and in thick rising smoke.

His lips are full of fury,
and his tongue is like a consuming fire.

28 His breath is like a flooding river,
that reaches even to one's neck.

He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction.
He puts a bridle in the jaws of the peoples to lead them to ruin.
29 You will sing a song as in the night when the holy feast is kept;  
    have gladness of heart, as when one goes with a flute  
    to come to the mountain of the LORD,  
    to the Rock of Israel.
30 The LORD will cause his glorious voice to be heard,  
    and will show his arm swinging down,  
    with the fury of his anger,  
    and the flame of a consuming fire,  
    with a cloudburst, storm, and hailstones.

The latter half of Isaiah 30:27 and 30:28 and 30 are an anthropomorphic (human like) depiction of God by Isaiah. God is described as having anger that burns; lips that are filled with fury (indignation); a tongue that is like a consuming fire and His breath, 30:28 is like an overflowing river. In 30:30, Isaiah further describes God as having a glorious voice and He will cause His arm to descend to be seen in fierce anger. These depictions of God with human like characteristics are Scriptural portraits that define the attributes and actions of God in ways that humans can understand them. God is a spiritual being who possess characteristics of a person. Scripture defines God as One who exists in three persons, each having individual characteristics or attributes. For an excellent study of the plurality of the Godhead see David L. Cooper, The Plurality of the Divine Personalities, chapter 2 of The Messianic Series: Volume 1, The God of Israel. (Biblical Research Studies Group). Other anthropomorphic (human like) Selected Scriptural references include Exodus 24:9-11; Psalm 18:7-15; Ezekiel 1:26-28, Daniel 7:9-14; Nahum 1:1-8; and Habakkuk 3:3-15.

In Isaiah 30:29 the prophet describes the expected response of the people to whom God will rescue. They will be glad in their hearts and sing festival songs like those who would march in a festive parade up to the mountain of the Lord to Him who is called “the Rock of Israel”. Often in Scripture, God is defined as the Rock of His People providing refuge, safety and salvation. A few of the many references to God as rock include: Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Samuel 22:2, 3, 32 and 37; Psalm 18:2, 46; 61:2; 89:26 and 95:1; Isaiah 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; and 44:8; and Habakkuk 1:12. Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 30:29:

    “We hear an echo of pilgrims marching to the Temple to the joyful tune of flutes. The festive mood of the pilgrims seems to fit in especially with the Feast of Tabernacles.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 263).

In the latter half of 30:30, Isaiah returns to the literary device of theophany to describe God who will show Himself as a flame of a consuming fire and as a storm with a flooding rain and hailstones. The word “cloudburst” is the Hebrew word nephets, which only occurs in Isaiah 30:30. Similar words in Isaiah occur in: Isaiah 8:7, floodwaters; 17:12, mighty waves; 17:13, many waters; 28:2, flooding; and 28:17, overflow. Other descriptive words for the fury of God in the tempest are “storm” occurring also in Isaiah 4:6, storm and rain; 25:4, storm; 28:2, storm; 32:2, storm; 40:24, whirlwind; 41:16, whirlwind; and 54:11, storm. The word “hail” occurs in Isaiah 28:2, 17 and 32:19. The passage in the Old Testament with the most occurrences of hail is Exodus chapter 9 describing the plague of hail on the Egyptians.

30:31-33 The Assyrians will be terrified at the voice of the LORD;  
    when he strikes them down with his rod.  
32 Every stroke of the rod of punishment  
    which the LORD will lay on him,  
    will be to the sound of tambourines and harps;  
    in battles with the waving of his arm,
he will fight with them.

33 For Topheth has been prepared for a long time;
yes, made ready for the king;
he has made its pyre deep and wide
with firewood piled high;
the breath of the LORD,
like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it on fire.

In Isaiah 30:31-33, the target of the Lord’s fierce and burning anger is stated. The Assyrians will soon face the wrath of God as Isaiah will later describe in detail in chapters 36 and 37. When God strikes Assyria, the people of Jerusalem will rejoice with the music of tambourines and lyres. The blow of God’s rod of punishment will strike Assyria and its king will be punished in a place called “Topheth,” 30:33, which literally means “a burning place of abomination or shame.” According to 2 Kings 23:10, Topheth was a valley of the son of Hinnom. It was a place where child sacrifices, in the form of burning, to the pagan god Molech were carried out. It was a most hideous act which God condemned. See Jeremiah 7:31-32; 19:6 and 11. The reference to this burning valley in Isaiah 30:33, is most likely a metaphor for Hell. The actual place of death for Sennacherib, the king of Assyria was in the place where he worshipped his god Nisroch, Isaiah 37:38. However, death is not the end of a human’s existence. Those who have faith in the Messiah will live eternally with Him in peace. Those who rebel against God will be tormented in Hell and eventually forever in the lake of Fire, Revelation 20:14-15. The destination of this king upon his death was in Hell, which Isaiah describes as Topheth.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 30:18-33
God’s Promised Millennial Blessings: 30:18-26
God’s Present Municipal Blessings: 30:27-33

6. The Sons of Israel Need to Return to the Lord: 31: 1-9

Isaiah chapter 31 introduces the fifth woe of chapters 28-33, (1) 28:1; (2) 29:1; (3) 29:15; (4) 30:1; (5) 31:1 and (6) 33:1. The imprecation of woe on those who oppose God is a major theme of Isaiah, 3:9, 11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 10:1, 5; 15:9; six woes of chapters 28-33; 45:9, and 10. Isaiah also pronounced “woe” on himself twice when faced with overwhelming circumstances, 6:5 and 24:16. The declaration of woe was also a major theme of the prophet Jeremiah and of the message of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. The final “woes” of Scripture are recorded in the book of Revelation as a statement of God’s judgment against those who are ungodly during the days of the Tribulation. Isaiah chapter 31 is also a summary of the previous three chapters. It is a concise statement of God’s comparison of His wisdom and strength against that of the nations who are central to the unfolding drama facing Isaiah and the people of Judah. The main theme of this chapter and those preceding chapters is God’s lament over the failure of His people to trust in Him for protection and their failure to accept His offer of salvation. They would be protected and have salvation if they would just repent and return to Him.

As recorded in Isaiah 31:1-9, the prophet declares an oracle of “woe” on those who trust in the armed forces of the Egyptians for help rather than looking to or seeking the LORD, vs. 1. The LORD will rise against the house of evildoers and those who help them, for the Egyptians are merely human but LORD is spirit, and He will accomplish His judgment upon those who help and those being helped, vss. 2-3. Like a lion who is not afraid of human voices, the LORD will descend to fight on Mount Zion and will protect, deliver and protect Jerusalem, vss. 4-5. The prophet calls God’s people to return to Him, against whom they have rebelled, and
to discard their silver and gold idols, vss. 6-7. The Assyrians will be defeated by God whose “fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem,” vss. 8-9.

31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help,
and rely on horses,
and trust in their many chariots,
and in horsemen because they are strong,
buts they do not look to the Holy One of Israel,
or seek the LORD!

The woe in 31:1 is directed to the leadership of Judah who had made an agreement with Egypt, called a “covenant with death” in Isaiah 28:15, for protection against the Assyrians. The leadership of Judah had rejected the counsel of the Lord, 30:9-11. Compare these verses with Isaiah 28:29. They had put their trust in horses whom they saw as strong and chariots whom they see as many. “But they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek the LORD.” They also had ignored the warnings of the Scriptures not to seek protection in Egypt against those who would war against them or trust in horses for victory over their enemies. See Exodus 13:17; Deuteronomy 17:16; Psalm 20:7, 33:17 and Proverbs 21:31. They had long ago separated themselves from their once close relationship with the Lord. In the distant past, they consulted with God for His instructions before engaging an enemy: 1 Samuel 23:1-14 and 2 Samuel 5:17-25.

31:2 Yet he too is wise, and will bring disaster,
and will not go back on his words.
He will rise against the house of the evildoers,
and against the helpers of those who do wrong.

In biting sarcasm, the prophet, in 31:2, declares that God “also is wise”. The leaders of Judah thought themselves to be wiser than the words of counsel from the Lord that Isaiah had declared to them. Isaiah had earlier pronounced a “woe” on these people, “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,” Isaiah 5:21. The leaders of Judah should have heeded the words of Moses written in the Torah. See Deuteronomy 32:28-29. See also: Isaiah 29:14 which is quoted by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:19. The Book of Proverbs is a commentary on the need for God’s wisdom versus the folly of man’s wisdom. See specifically Proverbs 12:15 and 26:12. The Apostle Paul in Romans 1:21-22 rightly pronounced judgment on these leaders of Judah and on all who would forsake the Lord. “For even though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, or give thanks to him; but became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

Isaiah further declares in 31:2, that this wise God will bring disaster, for He will oppose those who commit evil and do the work of iniquity. Isaiah had earlier, in his introductory address to the nation, spoke about the people’s sinfulness, Isaiah 1:4:

O sinful nation,
a people loaded down with iniquity,
an offspring of evildoers,
children who act corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have despised the Holy One of Israel;
they have turned their backs on him.
The people of God ignored Isaiah’s words when He first began his prophetic ministry and they still ignored his words even when faced with impending doom from the Assyrians. Following many declarations of woe and warning, recorded in his prophetic messages, Isaiah offered the hope of salvation. In his first address, Isaiah offered hope if the people would only listen to the reasonable words of God to obey Him, Isaiah 1:18-19. As recorded in chapter 31, Isaiah again offers hope if the rulers of Judah would only return to God. 31:6-7.

31:3 Now the Egyptians are merely human, and not God; their horses only flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD will stretch out his hand, both he who helps will stumble, and he who is helped will fall. They all will perish together.

Isaiah reminds the leaders of Judah of the folly of trusting in the men and horses of Egypt. Both the Egyptians, those who are helping, and also those who are helped, the people of Judah, “will all perish together” because they are no match for the Lord who has to just stretch out His hand to bring destruction upon them. The world’s strongest armies and its technological might are useless before the strength of the Lord. He simply laughs at the hubris of mankind who rebel against Him, Psalm 2:1-4. See also: Deuteronomy 4:32-40, 7:17-19, 2 Chronicles 32:7-8; Psalm 107:40, Isaiah 40:21-26; Ezekiel 28:9. What power has flesh over the spirit of God? See Zechariah 4:6 and John 4:24. The work of the Lord, described as His outstretched arm or hand, is a very common theme in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah mentions it also in 5:25; 14:26-27; 23:11 and 45:12.

31:4-5 For this is what the LORD says to me, "When a lion or a young lion growls over its prey, if a group of shepherds is called out against him, will it not be frightened at their voice, or intimidated from their noise. So will the LORD of hosts come down to fight on Mount Zion, and on its hill. Like birds hovering overhead, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it, he will pass over and rescue it.

The prophet in 31:4a, states that the Lord’s actions is likened to a lion who growls over his prey and is not deterred by the presence or the voice of shepherds (defending the flock). The DASV has “will it not be frightened” which has the implication that the lion will be afraid of the voices and noise of the shepherds. The NKJV has “He will not be afraid of their voice,” which gives a better sense of the intention of the prophet in comparing the lion to the LORD of hosts who has no fear of His enemies.

In 31:4b, Isaiah states that “so will the LORD of hosts come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill.” In 31:5, this action of the Lord is likened to flying birds protecting (their nests). The Lord’s protection of Jerusalem is declared by Isaiah, in words which remind the prophet’s audience of the past when the Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt and rescued them from the captivity of the Egyptians: “He will protect and deliver it; He will pass over and rescue it.” The words “pass over” are both a reminder of the
rescue accomplished by the Lord of His people as recorded in Exodus chapters 12-14 and the inauguration of
the feast of Passover which forever commemorates this rescue. The people of the Lord in Isaiah’s day would
be reminded of the necessity to bring praises to the Lord when He came to rescue Jerusalem from the
Assyrian armies. See Isaiah 37:36. This rescue by the Lord also acts as a reminder of a future day when the
Lord will once again come down to wage war on Mount Zion and on its hill during the terrible time
described in Scripture as the “day of the Lord.” Refer to the many notes on the day of the Lord in earlier
installments of this study. Also, Gary V. Smith provides an expanded discussion on the portrayal of the Lord
as a lion and a bird in his Isaiah Commentary, Vol. 1, on pages 532-534.

31:6-7 Return to him from whom you have deeply rebelled,
O children of Israel.
7 For in that day each one of you will cast away your idols of silver,
and your idols of gold,
which your own hands have sinfully made for you.

The prophet declares hope for the besieged people of Jerusalem. In 31:6, Isaiah calls for repentance much
like that of later chapters. For example, refer to Isaiah 44:22 and 55:7. See also, Jeremiah 3:6-25 and Ezekiel
18:30-32. No matter how desperate the situation or how long the continuance in sin, God offers hope for His
people and for all peoples if they will but repent and turn in faith and trust to Him. In Isaiah 31:7, the prophet
turns his gaze far into the future. In one of many “in that day” prophecies contained in the book of Isaiah, the
children (sons) of Israel, as stated in 31:7, will finally cast away their idols which for them to have made is a
sin. God’s longsuffering for His people is seen in this verse. God has been patient with His people and has
repeatedly warned them about the worship of idols. From every pagan nation around them the sons of Israel
have adopted the sinful ritual of idol worship. It will continue right up to the end of the Tribulation where they
will finally abandon this rebellious practice. The Lord will only return to His people following their
recognition of their great sin of rejecting their Messiah and in contrition and repentance ask the Lord to
return to them. See Hosea 5:15-6:3 and Zechariah 12:10. See also, above notes on Isaiah 29:2, 5.

31:8-9 Assyrains will fall by the sword, but not a human one;
the sword, but not of humankind, will devour them.
They will flee from the sword,
and their young men will be forced into hard labor.
9 Their rock will pass away in terror,
and their officers will panic when they see the signal flag,”
says the LORD, whose fire is in Zion,
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

The immediate circumstances of the attempted assault by Assyria on Jerusalem, is the topic of Isaiah 31:8-9.
God will cause the defeat of the Assyrian army. It will not be the sword of a man that brings about the
Assyrian defeat. God is the mighty warrior who brings victory to His people living in Jerusalem. Isaiah
frequently declared that this great victory is the work of the Lord. See Isaiah 14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33 and
37:36. The reference to forced labor in 31:8 is most assuredly the longer-term demise of the Assyrians after
the Babylonians defeated them and took many of their young men captive. In 31:9, Isaiah describes the
failure and death of the Assyrian rock which is a description of the defeat of their stronghold or city fortress
and the terror of seeing the standard or flag of their enemy, the Babylonians, being raised in victory. Some
understand the words “their rock” as a reference to the king of Assyria as a counterpoint to the Rock of Israel
in 32:9. Isaiah ends this passage with a reminder that the Lord is jealous for His City Jerusalem and His
mountain Zion because His fire and furnace which is His great zeal for them is present there.
Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 31
The Lord’s Wisdom and Power: 31:1-3
The Lord’s Wrath and Protection: 31:4-5
The Lord’s Waiting and Patience: 31:6-7
The Lord’s Work and Passion: 31:8-9

7. Future Blessings on the Nation: 32:1-20

Chapter 32 of Isaiah does not begin with a “Woe” warning as did the previous four chapters. However, chapter 33 does begin with an oracle of “woe”. Many understand that Isaiah intended to have a distinct outline when he wrote the section we now know as chapters 28-33. Of course, when Isaiah wrote his prophecy there were no chapters and verses to separate thoughts and subject matter. If it is understood that Isaiah’s intention was to have a separate message for each section beginning with “woe”, then these chapters can be seen as having six sections, (1) 28:1-29; (2) 29:1-14; (3) 29:15-24; (4) 30:1-33; (5) 31:1-32:20 and (6) 33:1-24. Some may want to include chapters 34 and 35 in this sixth section. However, it seems best to keep these two chapters as a separate unit as will be further examined later in these notes.

Chapter 32 contains a prophecy of a righteous king. As there were no kings declared to be righteous over the nations of Judah or Israel prior to Isaiah’s day and no kings so designated following this prophet, it seems best to understand verses 1-8 and 15-20 of this chapter as relating to the millennial kingdom. This chapter has three distinct sections. Verses 1-8 contain details about this future reign. Verses 9-14 contain a current warning to the complacent women of Jerusalem and in verses 15-20, Isaiah again discusses matters of this future peaceful reign of the righteous king. It was not unusual for Isaiah to interject a message of current importance within a larger future prophetic passage.

32:1-8: The Future Reign of the Righteous King

As recorded in Isaiah 32:1-8, the prophet declares, “look” (behold), a king will reign in righteousness and princes will rule in justice for each of them will be like a shelter to the people from wind and storm and like streams in the desert and shade in a weary (parched) land, vss. 1-2. The people will both see and hear from their righteous and just leaders and the people will have discernment and clarity of speech, vss. 3-4. Righteousness will prevail against wickedness and those who are noble will stand secure in their plans, vss. 5-8.

32:1-2 Look, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice.
Each of them will be like a hiding place from the wind, and a shelter from the storm, like streams in the desert, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.

Isaiah begins this message in 32:1 with “Look” in the DASV. Other English versions translate the opening word as “behold” which is an emphatic declaration of astonishing news that will happen in the future. Isaiah often employed this declaration. See Isaiah 12:2; 13:9; 17:1; 19:1; 21:9 and 24:1. See also: 1 Samuel 12:2; 18:22; 2 Samuel 19:9; 1 Kings 1:18 and Jeremiah 23:5. The important news that Isaiah is revealing is that “a king will reign in righteousness and princes will rule in justice.” This is indeed astonishing news for a people who have had a sad history of corrupt rulers. However, this righteous king will rule a kingdom far in the future. Isaiah is describing a grand contrast between what the people of God endure at the present time with
what they will be blessed with in the future. The “king” can be no other than the promised Messianic ruler who will reign on Zion and who God describes in Psalm 2 as “My Son.” Psalm 2:6-7. Isaiah declared that this righteous king, who would be a son given to the people, would have the four two-fold names of: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace” for the “government will be upon His shoulders.” Isaiah 9:6. It could rightly be stated that one of the grand themes of the prophecy of Isaiah is the coming rule of the righteous king who is the Lord of Salvation. Isaiah has written much about the rule of this King, who is the Messiah who will rule in righteousness and peace. See Isaiah 1:26; 5:16; 9:7; 11:4-5; 16:5; 24:16; 26:2, 9-10; 32:16-18; 33:5; 45:23-25; 51:6-8;54:11-14; 58:8-12; 60:15-17; and 61:11. He will also rule with justice. See Isaiah 1:27; 5:16; 9:7; 28:6, 17; 30:18; 33:5; 51:4; and 61:8-11.

The DASV beings 32:2 with the words, “Each of them” but the NKJV has “A man” which better translates the Hebrew. Who is this man? He is the righteous King of 32:1, who will have the ministry that is described in 32:2 as: first, a refuge or hiding place from the wind; second, a shelter from the storm; third, like streams in the desert and fourth, like the shade of a great rock in a parched or weary land. The New Testament provides a few details regarding the ministry of the Messiah during His millennial reign. However, as is the case for most of the “day of the Lord” prophecies, it is the Old Testament that fills in much detail of these days to come. The Princes who will rule in justice during the millennial reign of Christ are not identified and it would not be useful to speculate as to who they may be. They will, however, be much different than the princes or leaders who have had roles of responsibility during the days of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry. The leaders of Judah in the days Isaiah’s prophetic ministry, were those who scoff at the Lord’s direction and sought alliances with pagan nations, Isaiah 28:14-15; they attempted to hide their evil schemes from God, Isaiah 29:15; and they corruptly deny justice to the innocent, Isaiah 29:21.


32:3-4 The eyes of those who see will not be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will listen.

4 The heart of the rash will be able to discern knowledge,
and the tongue of those who stutter
will be articulate and speak clearly.

The results of and comments about the ministry of the righteous King and the ruling princes are declared by Isaiah in 32:3-8. These will be days when no one will be blind or deaf. The minds of the people will be able to discern truth and the tongues of the people will be able to speak without stammering. The mention in 32:3-4, of eyes that will not be blinded and ears that will listen and minds that will discern and tongues that will not stammer are a stunning contrast to Isaiah’s earlier indictment on the leaders of Judah. See Isaiah 3:8-10; 5:20-24; 6:9-10; 28:7-13; 29:9-12 and 30:9-11. It will only be when a righteous King rules them and just princes oversee their government that their abilities to see, hear, discern and talk will be transformed to participate morally right and in a holy manner in the society of the coming kingdom.
32:5-8 The fool will no longer be called noble,
nor the rascal considered honorable.

6 For a fool speaks folly,
and his heart plots wrongdoing,
They practice ungodliness
and speak error concerning the LORD,
to leave the soul of the hungry unsatisfied,
and to deprive the thirsty of water.

7 The rascal's schemes are evil;
he devises evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies,
even when the plea of needy is right.

8 But the noble plans noble actions;
by noble actions he stands secure.

Isaiah provides editorial comment about this future kingdom. Fools will not be tolerated or called noble. Those who were rascals (rogues) will have no standing. It is only those who are noble, literally: majestic or glorious (KVJ: “liberal”), who will see their plans honored by the Messiah, and their plans will glorify Him. The Messiah will protect the needy and they will speak just or righteous words. It is possible that the intent of the latter half of 32:7 and also 32:8, is that the noble, by their righteous acts in the millennial kingdom, will stand up for the needy and meet their needs. It should also be noted that the millennial kingdom will have dishonest, scheming and foolish people living along-side those who are living righteous lives.

At the end of the millennial kingdom, we should not be surprised that there will be those who will align themselves with Satan after he is released. See Revelation 20:7-10. How could people who have lived on the earth, with full knowledge that Jesus the Messiah is ruling among them, rebel against Christ and see to overthrow Him and His rule? The answer is as old as Moses and yet older, as old as Adam. Adam and Eve knew God intimately yet rebelled against Him. The people of Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness with the presence of God before them day and night and yet rebelled against Him. Psalms 2 speaks to the rebellion which will occur in the last days when those who align themselves with Satan will seek to overthrow the Son of God in Zion. Why will God allow such rebellion even to the end of the age? The answer is that God is patient and loving and will wait even to the very end of days for those who will seek Him with their whole hearts.

32:9-14: Warning to the Complacent Women of Jerusalem

As recorded in Isaiah 32:9-14, the prophet brings a warning to the women of Jerusalem who have become complacent because of the anticipated protection of Judah by Egypt. Isaiah calls them to arise and pay attention to his message, vs. 9. Isaiah declares that in a short time, about one year, the fruit harvest including grapes will fail, vs. 10. The women are to adorn themselves in sackcloth and beat their breasts (in mourning), for their land will be overgrown with thorns and thistles. Their once joyous city will be deserted, and their fields of agriculture will be fit only as a pasture for wild donkeys and other animals, vss. 11-14.

32:9-14 Get up, you women who are at ease;
hear my voice, you complacent daughters;
give ear to my speech.

10 For in just about a year you will shudder,
you complacent ones;
for the grape harvest will fail,
the fruit harvest will not come.

11 Tremble, you women who are at ease; shudder, you complacent ones; strip down, and expose yourselves, and put sackcloth on your waists.

12 Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine.

13 For the land of my people will be overgrown with thorns and thistles; yes, over all the houses of joy in the city of carousing.

14 For the palace will be forsaken; the populous city deserted; the Ophel and the watchtower will be caves forever, the joy of wild donkeys, and a pasture for flocks;

Isaiah directed his message to the women in Judah who have been living at ease and have become complacent during times of fruitful harvests and a false hope of trusting in Egypt for their protection. Isaiah tells them, in 32:10, that these days of prosperity and safety will be coming to an end, “for in just about a year,” DASV or a better translation is: “in little more than a year,” ESV. This specific time reference most likely pinpoints when Isaiah declared the prophetic words of chapter 32. Jerusalem was attacked by the Assyrians in 701 BC. Thus, the time of Isaiah’s message to the women of Judah can be identified as 702 B.C. and not later than 703 B.C. Isaiah instructs these complacent women to dress in sackcloth which is a symbol of lament and mourning and to beat their breasts lamenting the end of their enjoyment of the fruit of the harvest described in 32:12 as the fruitful vine. Again, Isaiah returns to a favorite theme of the relationship between God and His people, both in Isaiah’s time and in the future, described as a vineyard, and wine, the fruit of the vineyard. This common theme was certainly due to the fact, that the Judeans were people of agriculture and they could easily understand why God would describe His relationship with them in this manner. References in the book of Isaiah include, 1:8; 3:14; 5:1-30; 7:23-25; 22:13; 25:6; 27:2-6; 28:1-8; 37:30-32; 55:1; 56:12; 61:5; 62:8-9; 63:1-6; 65:8-11 and 21.

As recorded in Isaiah 32:13-14, the prophet further describes the calamity that will soon come upon these women to their jubilant city and their joyful houses. Also, their palace will soon be abandoned. The hill and watch-tower will soon become caves and be suitable only for the enjoyment of donkeys and as pastures for the flocks. This further description of destruction and ruin extends the timing of God’s judgment beyond the siege in 701 B.C. of the City of Jerusalem by the Assyrians to the time of the complete devastation of the nation of Judah in 586 B.C. by a nation they have not yet seen as their oppressors, the Babylonians. Isaiah will direct his prophetic message to this menacing nation in the latter part of his writings. Isaiah had earlier pronounced God’s judgment on the people of the city of Jerusalem for their indulgences, when they should have been wearing sackcloth and lamenting over the coming assault of the Assyrians as recorded in 22:12-14:

12 In that day the Lord, the LORD of hosts called for weeping and mourning, for heads to be shaved, and for sackcloth to be put on.
13 But instead there was joy and gladness, celebratory slaying of oxen and slaughtering of sheep, eating meat and drinking wine.
"Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," you exclaim.

The LORD of hosts revealed himself in my ears,
"Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven until you die,"
says the Lord, the LORD of hosts.

32:15-20: A Time of Future Blessing

As recorded in Isaiah 32:15-20, the prophet declares that the wilderness will become a fruitful field which will be considered a forest and justice will reside in the wilderness and in the fruitful field when, in a further day, God’s Spirit will be poured on His people, vss. 15-16. The product of the righteousness from the Spirit to come will be peace, quietness and confidence forever. God’s people will live in security even in times of extreme weather, like hail that may destroy the city and the forest, vss. 17-20.

32:15-20
until the Spirit is poured on us from on high,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field considered a forest.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness; righteous will reside in the fruitful field.
The produce of righteousness will be peace; the result of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.

My people will live in peaceable dwellings, in safe homes, and in secure resting places.

Even if hail destroys the forest and the city is totally leveled;
blessed are you who plant beside every stream, who let the feet of the ox and the donkey graze freely.

After describing the destruction upon the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem in 32: 9-14, Isaiah declares a message of future messianic blessings in the last section of chapter 32. The ultimate restoration of the nation will not occur until the Lord will come and accomplish a mighty work of restoration among His people. This restoration has not yet occurred in the history of Israel and will only occur, according to 32:15, until “the Spirit is poured on us from on high.” Isaiah mentioned the Spirit of the Lord numerous times in his prophetic writings. The prophet’s audience was not ignorant of the work of the Spirit in relation to God’s creative work in the past, Genesis 1:2 and Psalm 104:30, and to His blessings for them in the future, Isaiah 11:1-10. The Spirit of God is mentioned in Isaiah 11:2; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 50:21; 61:1; 63:10 (Holy Spirit); 63:11 (Holy Spirit) and 63:14. The only other reference to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is David’s plea in Psalm 51:11. In the context of Isaiah 32:15, it is the mention of the future work of the Spirit that is being emphasized. See also Ezekiel 36:26-27; 39:29; Joel 2:28-28 and Zechariah 12:10.

The prophets of God were sent by the Spirit to declare the words and law of the Lord as Zechariah so graphically stated, “They made their hearts as hard as rock, so they would not have to obey the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.” Zechariah 7:12.
The people of Zechariah’s day refused to hear the words of the Lord just as they had done during the ministry of Isaiah. Yet, in spite of the rebellious actions and attitudes of His people, God will, because of His great love to His people and due to His faithfulness in keeping His covenant promises with them, restore them to the land with bountiful blessings in the future. These future days and blessings have not yet occurred. Yet it is these blessings that Isaiah declares to the people of God in the words recorded in Isaiah 32:15-20. But before the arrival of these days of blessings, the Lord has and will again bring judgment on His people for their refusal to listen to Him through the words of His servants the prophets and by the words, life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

When God pours out His Spirit in the future, several blessings to the people of God will be realized. Isaiah stated, in 32:15 that the Spirit would be poured out, on us, referring to those who are the covenant people of God. These blessings are stated in 32:15-20 as, (1) the wilderness will become a fruitful field; (2) the fruitful field will be considered a forest; (3) justice will dwell in the wilderness; (4) righteousness will reside in the fruitful field; (5) the work or produce of righteousness will be peace; (6) the result of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever; (7) God’s people will live in safe homes; (8) they will live in secure resting places; (9) they will live in resting places; (10) they will be blessed as they plant beside every stream; and (11) they will be blessed when they let the feet of the ox and the donkey graze freely. An examination of these Scriptures reveals that God is establishing a righteous and peaceful kingdom that will be ruled by His righteous king. See Isaiah 32:1. These prophetic words of Isaiah, chapter 32:1-8 and 15-20 are certainly one of the clearest statements in all of Scripture regarding the truth of the coming millennial kingdom which will be ruled by the Prince of Peace, the One who is the King of righteousness. Isaiah 32:19-20 is a summary of this message. In 32:19, however, Isaiah reminds his audience of the certain doom of the city which is Jerusalem which he discussed in 32:9-14. In Isaiah 32:20, the prophet again declares how blessed the people of God will be for they will live in the righteous kingdom to come which he discussed in 32:1-8 and 32:15-20. It is this repetition that emphasizes the impact of Isaiah’s message. God will bring judgment on those who refuse to repent of their sins against Him. He will also bring blessings in the future when they finally repent and seek Him to rescue them from their enemies.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 32
A Righteous Potentate: 1-8
A Rebellious People: 9-14
A Restored Place: 15-20

8. Prayer for Zion to take Refuge in the Lord: 33:1-24

Chapter 33 of Isaiah contains the sixth and last “woe” of Isaiah chapters 28-33 and it is the only one of these woe oracles that is directed against a foreign nation. All of the other woes, (1) 28:1-29; (2) 29:1-14; (3) 29:15-24; (4) 30:1-33; and (5) 31:1-32:20, are addressed to the people and leaders of Judah. Chapter 33 contains messages from Isaiah that concern the immediate threat of the Assyrian siege and words of hope and blessings for a future day when the majestic One, the Lord, will be present and the future people of God will see the King in His beauty. The chapter has several possible divisions. For purposes of this study, an outline that seems best to fit the context of chapter 33 is suggested:

The Hope of the Hopeless: 33:1-6
The Crying City and the Consuming Creator: 33:7-12
God’s Summary of His Work: 33:13-16
The Place and Prince of Peace: 33:17-24
The Hope of the Hopeless: 33:1-6

As recorded in Isaiah 33:1-6, the prophet declares an oracle of woe on those who destroy and those who betray for they will be destroyed and betrayed, vs. 1. The prophet prays for the LORD to be gracious to His covenant people and bring them salvation, vs. 2. Those who oppose God will flee when He arises against them, vss. 3-4. The LORD is exalted and will fill Zion with justice and righteousness and He will be bring stability, abundant salvation, wisdom and knowledge for the fear of the LORD produces these things, vss. 5-6.

33:1 Woe to you who destroy,
but you have not been destroyed;
and you traitor,
but they have not betrayed you!
When you finish destroying,
you yourself will be destroyed.
When you have finished betraying,
they will betray you.

The woe in Isaiah 33:1 is addressed to a destroyer who also deals treacherously (betrays). The words “you who destroy” is translated as “destroyer” in the NASB and is the Hebrew word shadad, which has the basic meaning to spoil, destroy or ruin, and occurs four times in 33:1: “destroy,” “destroyed,” “destroying” and “destroyed.” The word shadad. also occurs in Isaiah in 15:1 twice as “destroyed;” in 16:4, as “destroyer;” in 21:2 (twice) as “destroyer” and “destroys;” in 23:1 as “destroyed;” and in 23:14 as “destroyed.” The obvious intent of this fourfold use of shadad in Isaiah 33:1 is to dramatically emphasize that the destroyer (Assyria) will be destroyed by a far greater destroyer (God). The word traitor, translated as “who is treacherous” in the NASB, is the Hebrew word bagad, which has the basic meaning of “deceitful,” “traitor” and “treacherously.” As with shadad (destroy), bagad (betray) also occurs four times in Isaiah 33:1. The word bagad also occurs in Isaiah in 21:2 (twice); 24:16 (four times); and once in 48:8. The obvious intent of this fourfold use of bagad in Isaiah 33:1 is to dramatically emphasize that the betrayer (Assyria) will also be betrayed in a later time by the agent of God, Babylon.

The context of the preceding chapters and the historical account of these days recorded in 2 Kings 18:13-19:37 indicate that this treacherous, betraying destroyer is the Assyrian armies led by king Sennacherib who are about to lay siege to Jerusalem. In the passage 2 kings 18:13-17, Hezekiah had paid the king of Assyria three hundred talents (11 tons) of silver and thirty talents (1 ton) of gold for assurance that the Assyrians would not attack Jerusalem. In today’s currency this amount would be an enormous fortune. Sennacherib, however took the silver and gold and did not honor his word with king Hezekiah of Judah. The Assyrians kept to their strategy of destroying all in their path as their armies swept southward. 2 Kings 18:13 records the time and event, Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and captured them. Only Jerusalem was left unconquered and the Assyrians, the destroyers and treacherous ones, began their preparations for destroying the capital city of Judah. God’s oracle of woe on the Assyrians is blunt, “When you finish destroying, you yourself will be destroyed. When you have finished betraying, they will betray you.” In a very short time, perhaps less than 1 year, the Assyrian armies would be destroyed by an angel of God as recorded in Isaiah 37:36 and 2 Kings 19:35. The complete and final destruction of the Assyrian nation came through the assault of the Babylonians in 586 B.C.
33:2 O LORD, be gracious to us; we have waited for you.
   Be our strong arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble.

As recorded in Isaiah 33:2-6, the prophet called upon the Lord in words of supplication and praise, perhaps as the Assyrians were at the doors of the City of Jerusalem. Hezekiah had asked the prophet to pray, Isaiah 37:4. Hezekiah himself also prayed to the Lord, 2 Kings 19:15-20. Isaiah’s prayer identified himself with the people of Jerusalem, “O LORD, be gracious to us,” 33:2. Earlier, Isaiah had recorded words of repentance: 6:5; 25:9; and 26:8. The prophet Daniel in a later day included himself with his people, in a prayer of repentance to the Lord, Daniel 9:5.

Isaiah’s prayer in 33:2 not only beseeches the Lord to be gracious to he and his people, but declares that they have waited for the Lord. It is significant that these words are included. Twice in the earlier words of the prophet it is stated a waiting has or will occur. In chapter 8:17, Isaiah speaks for himself stating “I will wait expectantly for the Lord.” In chapter 25:9, Isaiah declares that in a far future day, “It will be said in that day, Look, here is our God; we have waited for him.” But nowhere in his prophecy up to this point, has Isaiah recorded that the people have waited for the Lord. They did not during the days of kings Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz nor in the early days of the reign of Hezekiah. It was only when they could see the faces of the enemy, when the Assyrian armies were at their door laying siege-works to breech the walls, and destroy the city and its inhabitants that they could now say, “we have waited for you.”

In past years, when the vineyard produced bountiful yields of grapes from which they could make wine and during prosperous times the people saw no need to wait on the Lord. The prophet told them to trust in the Lord, but they were not willing, Isaiah 30:12, 15. They did not heed the instruction of the Lord regarding seeking aid from Egypt. See Isaiah 30:1-2 and Deuteronomy 17:16. They did not want to hear any more about God, the Holy One of Israel, Isaiah 30:11. So how could Isaiah say the people of Jerusalem have waited for God? In years past their time was not measured in milliseconds, but now when the enemy is just about to break the walls down, days seemed like months, and hours like days and minutes like hours. It was during the most intense hours of fear and terror that they could truthfully say we have prayed and waited for you. It is also likely that these were the dreadful hours when most of the people in Jerusalem turned in repentance to God. There schemes and alliances with foreign pagan nations were now useless and they had no other hope except in turning to the Lord.

Isaiah in 33:2 stated that this was indeed the situation as He invoked the Lord to be the strength (strong arm) of the people of God every morning and to be their salvation in the time of distress or trouble. Every morning must have seemed like an eternity. When would God deliver them? Hezekiah, was at the very end of his dependency on diplomacy and the hope that paying ransom would bring a peaceful solution to this situation, Isaiah 37:1-4 and 2 Kings 19:1-4. In desperation, king Hezekiah turns to the Lord in prayer, 2 Kings 19:15-20 and he also seeks the prayer of Isaiah, Isaiah 37:4. Waiting for the Lord to act may seem like a frustratingly long time, but all children of God must remember that His time of action does not need to nor does not necessarily have to coincide with our sense of time. God will act when He deems best to accomplish His plans and purposes. It is interesting that God responds to Hezekiah’s prayer with these words, “Because you have prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard.” 2 Kings 19:20, NKJV.

33:3-4 At the roar of a crowd, the peoples flee; when you rise up the nations scatter.
Your spoil is gathered like the caterpillar gathers; like locusts leaping so they will leap on the loot.

Isaiah declares that it is the Lord who will cause nations to disperse and flee at the sound of tumult. When the Lord growls the armies of the nations are dissolved into disarray and terror and are scattered. King David prayed, “Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered.” Psalm 68:1. The words of Isaiah 33:3-4 are the answer to the prayer of Isaiah in 33:2. In a short time the enemy of the nation of Judah will be scattered when the Lord arises to destroy the army of Assyria and scatters its leaders. In a far future day the Lord will again “come down to wage war on Mount Zion and on its hill.” Isaiah 31:4. As recorded in Isaiah 33:4, the prophet praises the Lord’s complete victory over His enemies for the spoils of war will be gathered like the gathering of caterpillars and locusts.

33:5 The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high. He fills Zion with justice and righteousness.

As stated in Isaiah 33:5, The prophet offers praise to God for His person: “The LORD is exalted;” for His place: “He dwells on high;” and for His Purpose: “He fills Zion with justice and righteousness.” Isaiah’s praise telescopes the sense of meaning from the immediate terror of the invading Assyrians to a day far in the future when He will reign on Mount Zion with justice and righteousness. This was a similar message that Isaiah had frequently declared, 1:26-27; 2:2-5; 4:1-6; 11:1-10; 24:23; 27:12-13; 28:5-6 and 32:15-30 and would again declare in this chapter 33:20 and in later times: 34:8; 35:10; 37:32; 46:13; 51:3, 11, 16; 52:1, 7; 59:20; 60:1, 14; 61:3; 62:1, 11; and 66:8.

33:6 He will be stability in your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. The fear of the LORD produces this treasure.

The praise of Isaiah to the Lord continues in 33:6, “He will be stability in your times.” (DASV). This phrase may cause some confusion as stated in other versions. The NIV translates this phrase as, “He will be the sure foundation of your times.” The ESV has “And he will be the stability of your times.” However, the KJV put the emphasis on the people who need to trust the Lord’s wisdom and knowledge. The KJV states, “And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times and strength of salvation.” This is similar to the NKJV. The intent of this phrase in 33:6 is not to repeat the truth of Isaiah 28:16, “I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.” It is however, a statement by Isaiah that only in the Lord is faithfulness, stability and security for the time at hand when the Assyria armies are at the door of Jerusalem.

In Isaiah in 33:6, the prophet reminded the people that the Lord is “an abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge.” This was a treasure of truth for the people of Isaiah’s day to grasp and perhaps it was the best time for the prophet to tell them when the great dread of the enemy was before them. They were finally ready to hear the wonderful truths of the Lord that Isaiah had been continually declaring to them for many years. Isaiah does not hold back and gives them much to digest. Isaiah was teaching them deep theological truths about the Lord, which if they had been listening to him and studying their Scriptures, they would have already known. There is much to comment on about these wonderful truths. However, the space necessary would be beyond the scope of this study. A word study on the word salvation in the writings of Isaiah would be very profitable for it occurs 26 times. This theme will be discussed in more detail in the sections in Isaiah on the Servant of the Lord and in particular Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12, where the actual word salvation does not
occur, but the acts of the Lord in providing salvation is this section’s great topic. The word wisdom occurs 5 times in Isaiah. Also of significance is the specific reference is to the Branch (the Messiah) in Isaiah 11:2 where it is stated a spirit of wisdom will rest on Him. The word knowledge occurs 11 times in Isaiah. A specific reference is within the above-mentioned Servant of the Lord section, Isaiah 53:11, “As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see and be satisfied. By His knowledge my righteous servant, will justify many, and he will bear their sins.” There will be much to comment upon this verse and others in this great section later in this study.

Finally, Isaiah concludes v33:6 with another significant truth, “The fear of the Lord produces this treasure.” The NKJV translates this phrase as, “The fear to the Lord is His treasure.” For those who are now ready to listen to Isaiah, this last comment would be of immense value. It should have reminded the people of the great significance of their Scriptures and specifically the book of Proverbs from its first mention in the first chapter, 1:7 to its final mention in the last chapter, 31:30. It also should have brought to their minds, Isaiah’s earlier mention of this treasure to them, 8:3 and 11:2-3. Isaiah later remind them of this as recoded in 50:10 and 59:19. With this declaration of treasure of the Lord, Isaiah concludes his great theological lesson and now proceeds to discuss the devastation to the land due to the invasion of the Assyrians and the Lord’s response in verses 7-12.

**The Crying City and the Consuming Creator: 33:7-12**

The Assyrians were now at the very walls of Jerusalem and the once brave inhabitants of the city and the ambassadors of the king who had made an agreement with Sennacherib were weeping bitterly because their efforts to bring peace had failed. The neighboring lands were stripped of their crops and no trade could be conducted. It was time for the Lord to act. As recorded in Isaiah 33:7-12, the prophet declares that the heroes and ambassadors of Jerusalem weep bitterly, vs. 7. The highways are empty without travelers and their enemy has broken its treaties and respects no one, vs. 8. The land of Judah and its neighbors mourn and withers and have become like a desert, vs. 9. But the LORD declares that He will arise and will be exalted for the enemies of His people will be cut down like thorns and burned in the fire, vss. 10-12.

33:7-9 Look, their heroes cry in the streets;  
the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly.  
8 The highways are vacant,  
the travelers are gone.  
The enemy has broken its treaties,  
its witnesses are despised,  
he respects no one.  
9 The land mourns and withers;  
Lebanon withers with shame.  
The fertile plain of Sharon has become like a desert,  
and Bashan and Carmel lose their rich foliage.

Isaiah records the reaction of those who had once been brave (Hebrew erelam meaning valiant ones) and of those who were ambassadors of king Hezekiah who had made a covenant or agreement with king Sennacherib of Assyria. The city had been stripped of its silver and gold as a payment of peace to the king of Assyria. Diplomacy and costly agreements were of no avail. Victor Buksbazen comments on 33:7-9 and provides his own translation of 33:7:
“Behold the inhabitants of Ariel cry in the street, The messengers of peace weep bitterly.”

The Hebrew word “erelam” is translated in the KJV as “the valiant ones,” but it is apparently an allusion to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, which Isaiah (29:10 has previously call Ariel – “the hearth” or “the altar of God.”

It would appear from our text that after Sennacherib captured Lachish and many fortified cities in Judah – and according to Assyrian record, carried away over 200,000 prisoners – Hezekiah sent “messengers of peace” to negotiate terms. However, Sennacherib with his customary brutality insulted the ambassadors, who returned to Jerusalem humiliated and weeping (v. 7).

As a result of the Assyrian depredations, the whole land is desolate, the highways are deserted, the most fertile regions of the land (Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan, and Carmel) lie idle and untilled. (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 271).

The people of Jerusalem wept bitterly. In 33:8, Isaiah described the commercial devastation due to the advance of the Assyrians. No one could conduct any business due to the danger on the roads now that the Assyrian armies had conquered the lands surrounding Jerusalem. The words in 33:8, “The enemy has broken its treaties, its witnesses are despised, he respects no one.” is a reference to king Sennacherib with whom the ambassadors of Judah had made a covenant or agreement. The Assyrian king had demanded a staggering amount of silver and gold as a result of the plea of peace made to him by Hezekiah, 2. Kings 18:13-16. But Sennacherib had no intention of keeping this covenant with Hezekiah and all the cities of Judah except Jerusalem had been conquered by the Assyrians. As described in 33:9, Isaiah describes the destruction of the trees and foliage of the surrounding lands: Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan and Carmel. The besieged city of Jerusalem was left defenseless and the only possible help to them was from the Lord.

33:10 "Now I will rise," says the LORD,
"now I will lift up myself, now I will be exalted.

When no other means of escape from destruction was available, the Lord took action. In 33:10, the prophet records the reaction of the Holy One of Israel, “Now, I will arise, now I will lift up myself, now I will be exalted.” The repetition (three times) of “now”, Hebrew attah, is an emphatic and dynamic attestation by the Lord that, in contrast to the weak and futile efforts of the leaders of Jerusalem, He will act decisively and victoriously. These actions of the Lord are those He describes as arise, exalted and lifted up. Later Isaiah will describe the Servant of the Lord in similar words, “Look, my servant will deal wisely; he will be exalted and lifted up and will be greatly exalted.” Isaiah 52:13. In the New Testament this praise was also given to the Servant, who is the humble Son, Jesus Christ and the believers great High Priest, Philippians 2:9 and Hebrews 7:26. In the Old Testament this praise is attributed to the Lord, Exodus 15:1, 21; Numbers 24:7; Psalm 47:9 and 97:9 and Isaiah 57:15. The praise to the king in Numbers 24:7 is very important to understanding the messianic message of the Hebrews Scriptures. For a detailed explanation of the messianic importance of Numbers 24:7, see Michael Rydelnik. The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic? pages 38-39.

33:11-12 You will conceive chaff, you will give birth to stubble;
your breath is a fire that will devour you.
12 The peoples will be completely burned to lime, like thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire."
God compares the blasphemous words and self-proclaimed might of the Assyrians, 2 Kings 18:19-35 and Isaiah 36:4-20; to works which will only conceive chaff and stubble. God’s works never fail, and He will consume the Assyrians like fire from the breath (of His mouth). God describes the ultimate end of the Assyrians as peoples who “will be burned to lime, like thorns cut down that are burned in the fire,” Isaiah 33:12. This does not describe the means of their death but their ultimate destination. This was the Lord’s previously stated ultimate destination of the king of Assyria. See notes on Isaiah 30:33.

**God’s Summary of His Work: 33:13-16**

As recorded in Isaiah 33:13, the prophet declares the words of God in which he calls the distant people of the world and those in Judah itself (far away and near) as a witness to hear what He has to say about His mighty works of protection for His beloved Zion. The prophet records the words of the LORD to those who are far off and those who are near, to hear what He has accomplished, so they can acknowledge His might, vs. 13. The sinners and godless people of Zion are afraid and are trembling because their God is a consuming fire, vs. 14. However, those who act righteously, will live on high (with the Lord) with security, peace and contentment, vss. 15-16.

**33:13 Hear, you who are far off, what I have done;**  
**you who are near, acknowledge my might.**

The Lord calls those “who are far away” and those “who are near” to hear what He has done. The prophet also made reference to those who are far away to listen to Him, Isaiah 1:2; 34:1; 41:1; 43:9; 49:1; and to those who are near (in Judah), 28:23; 44:1; 46:3; 48:1; 48:12; 51:4; 51:7; 55:3. This is not an exhaustive list of all such references in Isaiah but is an indication of the Lord’s intent in calling both Judah and the Gentile nations to listen to God’s message or to acknowledge His might, for He has saved His people from the assault of the Assyrians.

**33:14 The sinners in Zion are afraid,**  
trembling has seized the godless, who say:  
"Who among us can live with the consuming fire?  
Who among us can live with everlasting burnings?"

Isaiah asks the godless and terrified sinners in Zion, “Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?” This is not a picture of the terrors of Topheth, Isaiah 30:33 or the valley of burning, 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 19:6, which in later times was a reference to a fiery hell, Matthew 5:22: 18:9 James 3:6. The word “burning” is the Hebrew word *moqed*, which has the literal meaning of “altar hearth.” This word also occurs in Psalm 102:3 translated as “hearth.” A similar use of “altar hearth,” occurs in Isaiah 29:1 referring to the City of Jerusalem as “Ariel.” See notes on Isaiah 29:1. The meaning of altar hearth originates in the law of the burnt offering as stated in Leviticus 6:9, “Command Aaron and his sons, this is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering must be left on the hearth of the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar must be kept burning.” The meaning of burning in Isaiah 33:14 is that God Himself is a consuming fire. See Hebrews 12:29. The prophet asked, who among us (the people of Judah) or any people can live with God for He is a consuming fire? The answer to this question is that only those who are righteous can live with God, 33:15-16. See also Isaiah 4:4. For a similar set of questions by God and their answers see Psalms 15 and 24.
33:15-16 *The one who walks righteously and speaks straight;* 
*who despises the profit from oppression,*
*whose hands wave away a bribe,*
*who plugs his ears from murderous plots,*
*and shuts his eyes from looking at evil.*

16 *This one will dwell on high,*
*his place of refuge will be the fortresses of rocks;*
*his food will be provided;*
*his water guaranteed.*

The question the prophet raises in Isaiah 33:14 is answered in 33:15-16. Although God is described as a burning altar hearth, He will allow those that are righteous to draw near to Him. These are people who (1) walk righteously; (2) speaks straight (with sincerity); (3) despise profit from oppression (reject unjust gain); (4) have hands that wave away or hold no bribe; (5) will not listen to plots of murder; and (6) will not look on evil. Isaiah also mentions the walk of the righteous in 32:3-8 and 58:5-12. The result of this righteous living is the reward of living in a refuge that is likened to a “fortress of rocks” or stronghold on the heights where his food source will be secure. This call to righteous living and its rewards was delivered in a very timely manner when the people of Judah were left only with the hope of God and when they would have been most likely to not only hear the message, but to obey it. See above notes on Isaiah 33:6. Isaiah 33:15-16 is a glorious climax to the message of the Lord about who may live with Him, and is also a beautiful bridge to the future during the reign of Messiah the King where there will be peace, and the righteous will live with the Prince of Peace for their eyes will see Him in His beauty.

The Place and Prince of Peace: 33:17-24

Isaiah easily transitions the Lord’s message, from the present terrifying times, verses 1-16, to those of a “far distant land” when those who live righteously will see “the king in His beauty,” verses 17-24. As mentioned above, the timing of this message was acutely critical. The people of Judah had just recently rejected the message of Isaiah and had wanted nothing to do with God, Isaiah 30:11. But, when faced with impending doom, their only hope is to trust fully in God.

Their ears and eyes may have finally opened to the truth of God that the prophet had been so faithfully declaring to them for several years. When they listen to God through the message of the prophet and they respond to His call to repent of their sins, have faith in Him and live righteously, then they will be among those who will personally live in a future place of wonderful peace and security. Verses 17-24 of Isaiah 33 are among the most poetic of all the descriptions in Scripture of the reign of the Messiah in the millennial kingdom.

In this section, Isaiah again uses the imagery of eyes, vs. 17, 19, and 20; heart, vs. 18; and a reference to ears (listening to speech) in vs. 19. The prophet often referred to the characteristics of his audience, “eyes, ears, and understanding,” from the first meeting Isaiah had with the Lord, 6:9-10 to his last message: 66:18. God often lamented that even though they had eyes, ears and a mind to understand Him, they refused to do so. The righteous, however will use all their characteristics to live a holy life free from sin, vs. 15. In the future reign of the messianic king, the eyes, ears and heart (mind) of the redeemed will see, hear and understand the glories of this wondrous kingdom.

33: 17 *Your eyes will see the king in his beauty;*
*they will survey a land that stretches far away.*
This section begins in Isaiah 33:17 with a most beloved phrase, “Your eyes will see the king in his beauty.” Who is this beautiful King? The Scriptures give the emphatic answer, He is the king of glory, Psalm 24:7-10; the Lord who is delightful, Psalm 27:4; a beautiful and glorious Branch, Isaiah 4:2; the Lord of hosts who is a beautiful crown and a glorious diadem, Isaiah 28:5; and the Lord their God is great in beauty (KJV), Zechariah 9:16-17. The first and greatest benefit stated by Isaiah of those who enter Zion in the future kingdom will be to see the King who is described as beautiful. This is the Mighty One the psalmist describes as having splendor and majesty, Psalm 45:3. Many are the glorious titles ascribed to the Lord who will reign in Zion in a future day and arguably, one of the loftiest is the word in 33:17, “beauty” (beautiful).

The DASV in 33:17, has the phrase “a land that stretches far away” for the place where the redeemed will see the king in His beauty. The most likely interpretation of this phrase is that it is “a far-stretching land.” The land of Judah was small in area when Isaiah declared these words and the Scriptures prophesy of a time when the land during the millennial kingdom will have vastly wider boundaries, Ezekiel 47:13-23.

33: 18-19 Your heart will obsess about former terrors:
"Where is the sage?
Where is the one who weighs the tribute?
Where is the one who counts the towers?"
19 You will not see these fierce people,
a people whose obscure language you cannot comprehend,
whose stammering tongue you cannot understand.

At first glance, the words of the first phrase in Isaiah 33:18 may seem difficult to understand, “Your heart will obsess about former terrors.” The word “obsess” can be translated as “meditate” or “ponder.” However, the remainder of 33:18-19 provides the solution. When the redeemed, the righteous remnant enter Immanuel’s land, they will be in wonder and rejoice that there are no fierce people present in it. There will no longer be according to 33:18, any stern and cruel overlords who crush the people in demanding military service to a tyrant (the one who counts the towers) or demanding tribute payment (the one who weighs the tributes) or using the Lord’s city as a military outpost (a further meaning of “he who counts the towers”). There will be no longer be according to 33:19, a despotic Gentile ruler or a fierce people, who will rule over them with speech, literally “a deepness of lip” that is described as a stammering tongue in Isaiah 28:11, that no one comprehends. It is these things that will be absent in the kingdom that the people will meditate upon when they enter the land. David L. Cooper comments:

“At that time the faithful remnant that survives the Tribulation and enters the great Millennial Era will muse upon the experiences of that time of trouble saying, “Where is he that counted, where is he that weighed the tribute? where is he that counted the towers? In answer to this meditation the Lord declares that they will never again see such a fierce people, cruel and ruthless.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – October 1944).

33: 20 Look on Zion, the city of our festivals;
your eyes will see Jerusalem,
a peaceful home,
a tent that will not be removed;
its stakes will never be pulled up,
neither will any of its ropes be broken.
The prophet in Isaiah 33:20, declares that those who will enter the millennial kingdom, will have their attention diverted from what is not there to what is to be seen. Isaiah emphatically calls them to “Look on Zion”. Zion is the beloved mount of the Lord. It is the place He has chosen and where He desires to stay forever. The Psalmist declared, in Psalm 132:13-14:

13 For the LORD has chosen Zion,  
   he has desired it for his home.  
14 "This is my resting place forever;  
   I will dwell here,  
   for it's what I wanted.

The Lord’s love for Zion is so great that He calls His people, the faithful remnant to desire it for He will build His future messianic kingdom around it. Zion, although a small mountain in size, is often referred to as the city of Jerusalem. It is the place where the people of God celebrated their appointed feasts. Three times each year, the males of the Jewish people were required to go to Jerusalem to take part in the feasts of Passover, Pentecost (Weeks) and Tabernacles (Booths). Deuteronomy 16:1-16. During the feast of Tabernacles, the Lord required them to make booths for their habitation during the duration of the feast, Leviticus 23:42. The latter half of Isaiah 33:20 alludes to this practice, but it will occur in the future following the devastation of the Tribulation. Jerusalem shall be “a peaceful home, a tent which will not be removed.” The tent which will not be folded is a reference to both the Feast of Tabernacles and the permanent dwelling (tabernacle, tent) of God among His people. The permanence of God’s dwelling is reinforced by the remaining words of Isaiah 33:20, “Its stakes will never be pulled up, neither will any of its ropes be broken.” The temporary and portable tabernacle of the wilderness had its stakes pulled up many times resulting in the tearing of its cords. The future “tent” in the messianic kingdom of God will be as permanent as God is, for He Himself will be the tent.

A study of the meaning of “tabernacle” in the Scriptures will yield many wonderful truths. In the Old Testament, tabernacle has the meaning of a tent of meeting, a dwelling place and the tabernacle or tent of the testimony. Its most basic meaning is that it was a place of God’s presence. During their wilderness journeys, the Israelites were instructed by the Lord to build a structure called the tabernacle, a temporary place of worship and the focal point of their community where God would live among them. See Exodus 25:8; and 1 Kings 8:27. In the New Testament, tabernacle is most often the translation of the Greek word skene and its related words such as skenoo. The New Testament describes the dwelling place of God as the tabernacle and not the temple. The believers in Christ are themselves called the temple of God, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

Tabernacle in the New Testament has a great significance. In John 1:14, the Apostle John wrote, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt (skenoo) among us.” Jesus lived with His people on the earth to accomplish His great task of redemption. God has never abandoned His people and they will live with Him forever. Revelation 21:3 contains two references to the word “tabernacle.” “Behold the tabernacle (skene) of God is among men and He will dwell (skenoo) among them.” Hebrews chapter 9 contains a significant discussion comparing the old earthly tabernacle and the “greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands” through which Christ, as the believer’s High Priest, entered.

33:21 But there the LORD will be with us in splendor.  
   It will be a place of broad rivers and streams,  
   where no galley of warships with oars may enter,  
   nor will splendid ships sail through.
Isaiah, in 33:21, introduces more splendid truths about this future kingdom. “But there the LORD will be with us in splendor.” God will no longer fight against His people. See notes on Isaiah 28:21. The LORD who is the Majestic One will be on the side of His people and will belong to them. The context of Isaiah 63:1-6 identifies the returning Lord as the person coming from Edom with garments of glowing colors (crimson) from Bozrah. The depiction in Isaiah 63:1 as the One who is wearing splendid (majestic) apparel, should leave no doubt as to His identification. This is the same One who is described as “in splendor” or better the majestic One, Isaiah 33:21, who will be among His people and will stand with them and for them forever.

The description of this future place in Isaiah 33:21 as a place of broad rivers and streams or wide canals, is a beautiful portrayal of the difference between the Zion of Isaiah’s day and the Zion of the future messianic kingdom. Judah and specifically Jerusalem was, and still remains as a place of hills and rugged terrain. It is most unlike most capital cities of the world for it is not situated on or near any water course. The closest water is the salt saturated and evaporating Dead Sea. However, in the future God will transform Zion, Isaiah 2:2, and it will have magnificent water courses upon which boats and ships will not be allowed to pass. Other cities in the ancient near east were built on rivers and canals, such as Babylon. It was a place of great beauty, yet it was due to the proximity of the river that became the means for its downfall when the Medes and Persians used its water courses to enter the city and conquer it. The future Zion will be safe from any attack.

33:22 For the LORD is our judge,
the LORD is our lawgiver,
the LORD is our king;
he will save us.

Isaiah 33:22 is a most poetic and glorious tribute to the Lord. When any significant word is stated twice in a sentence it is often for emphasis. When such a word is stated three times, those who hear the sentence or read it are called to attention! There is something extremely important being said. In Isaiah 6:3, the words: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts is a statement of this great attribute of the Lord. Isaiah had twice in the past few verses, 33:10 and 18 repeated a significant word three times, “now” in 33:10 and ‘where’ in 33:18. These were used for poetic emphasis. However, in 33:22, the repetition of “the LORD” is a major declarative statement meant to attest how the LORD leads His people in the roles of judge, lawgiver and king, in past days, in the days of Isaiah, and in the future. Isaiah 33:22 concludes with, “he will save us.” The Lord is the savior both in Isaiah’s day from the Assyrian assault and in the future day where no enemy ship can attack the stronghold of Zion. Therefore, the people of God can have absolute trust in their God.

33:23 Your rigging is loosed;
they could not secure their mast,
they could not spread the sail.
Then the prey of a great spoil will be divided;
even the lame will haul the plunder away.

The prophet, in Isaiah 33:23, may be making a reference to the Assyrians who are likened to a disabled sailing craft and is a comparing this to the future kingdom when no ship or boat will assault the people of God. The reference to the dividing of the spoil may point to the plundering of the Assyrian camp after the angel of the Lord had brought about the death of the entire Assyrian army that had surrounded Jerusalem. However, 33:23 is best understood as having a future fulfillment, (see note on vs. 24), referring to the days just prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom when Israel will plunder the spoils of the nations. See also Isaiah 60:16; Ezekiel 39:9-10; and Zephaniah 2:9.
The resident of Zion will not say, "I am sick."

The people who live there will have their sin forgiven.

In 33:24, Isaiah describes more of the benefits of the future messianic kingdom. The residents of Zion will not suffer sickness and they will have their sins forgiven. As 33:24, in most English versions, starts with the conjunction “and”, it is an indication that both 33:23 and 24 refer to the future kingdom. The days of this future kingdom will witness a time of unprecedented health for its inhabitants. See Isaiah 65:20. It will also be a kingdom which will begin with those who live righteously and have been forgiven of their sins. See also Exodus 23:25. Even the cooking pots in Jerusalem in this future kingdom will be like bowls before the altar and will be holy to the Lord. Zechariah 14:20-21. King David, as recorded in Psalm 103:2-3, declares:

2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits--
3 who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases;

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 33
The Redemption of the Lord: 33:1-6
The Response of the Lord: 33:7-12
The Refuge of the Lord: 33:13-16
The Reward of the Lord: 33:17-24

G: The Wrath and Blessings of God: Chapters 34-35
1. The Wrath of God on the Nations: 34:1-17
2. The Blessing of the Future Kingdom: 35:1-10

Isaiah chapters 34-35 are a grand conclusion to the message of the prophet in the greater section, chapters 28-35. They are a superlative contrast between the judgment of the Lord on ungodly nations, chapter 34, and the blessing of the Lord on His future messianic kingdom, chapter 35. These two chapters are clearly latter-day prophecies as their contents reveal.

1. The Wrath of God on the Nations: 34:1-17
The Lord’s Indignation: His Vengeance: 34:1-15
The Lord’s Instruction: His Validation: 34:15-16
The Lord’s Indignation: His Vengeance: 34:16-17

Within this larger section of chapter 34, four shorter parts are evident from the context of the message. After the introduction of vs. 1, the three remaining parts are introduced by the word “for” which introduce cumulative actions of God against the nations and specifically against Edom, of which Isaiah may have named as representing the evil nations of the world. As recorded in Isaiah chapter 34, the prophet declares a call for all nations and peoples to listen and hear the message of the LORD, vs. 1. The message is that the LORD is angry with all nations and their armies and He will totally destroy them with a great slaughter. Also, the host of heaven will be dissolved, and the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll and their hosts (stars, etc.), will fall, vs. 2-4. The Lord will bring His judgment upon Edom whose people are doomed to destruction, for their land will be soaked with blood, vs. 5-7. The prophet declares that the LORD has a day of vengeance upon Edom for the cause of Zion. The streams and land of Edom will become burning pitch which will not be extinguished, and its smoke will forever rise up. Only wild birds and animals will live in
the waste of Edom, vss. 8-15. The prophet calls the nations to seek out and read the scroll of the LORD that declares that the wild animals will possess the former lands of Edom forever, vss. 16-17.

Introduction: Vs. 1
Against the Nations: Verses 2-4:
Against Edom (1): Verses 5-7
Against Edom (2): Vs. 8-15

34:1 Come near, O nations, to hear; 
listen, O peoples.
Let the earth and everything in it hear, 
the world and all things that come from it.

The prophet calls upon the entire world including all nations and all peoples to hear the message of the Lord. It is similar in tone to the opening of the book of Isaiah, 1:2, where the heavens and the earth are called to listen to the indictment of the Lord against His people. In 34:1, the peoples of the world are called to listen to the indignation of the Lord against the very people whom the Lord calls to listen to Him. See also Isaiah 28:23 and 33:13 for a similar indictment.

Against the Nations: Verses 2-4

34:2 For the LORD is angry against all the nations, 
and furious against all their armies. 
He will totally destroy them, 
he has delivered them up to slaughter.

Isaiah begins this message as recorded in 34:2, with a statement of the anger or indignation of the Lord against all nations of the earth. In Isaiah 13:5 the nations themselves were the instruments of God’s indignation against Babylon. Isaiah records in chapter 13:6-16, that the Lord turns His wrath against these very nations and others in the coming “day of the Lord” for they were evil, wicked, sinful, arrogant, ruthless, and full of pride. The sobering message of Lord in Isaiah chapter 13 is that even if the Lord uses a nation as a means of judgment on another nation or upon His people, He does not hold them harmless for their own evil actions and rebellion against Him. See also Isaiah 24:1-6. The nations had been warned by the prophet about God’s impending judgment and now it is announced. The word “angry” in Isaiah 34:2 is qesep in the Hebrew, and can also be translated as “indignation” which seems to give a nuanced perspective of the feelings of God towards the unrepentant nations of the world.

The words regarding the armies of the nations, Isaiah 34:2, “He will totally destroy them, he has delivered them up to slaughter,” are an announcement of the certainty of a future action. The army of a single nation nor the amassed armies of all the nations can do nothing against the plan and will of God. His attitude towards them is described in Psalm 2:4 and in Isaiah 40:15-17. The word slaughter in 34:2 has the meaning of a brutal killing. It is also the word used in Isaiah 53:7, “He was oppressed yet when he was treated harshly he did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep before its shearers is silent.” God would not spare the armies of the world for they will be brutaly killed in the latter days. God also would not spare His Son. He was pleased to crush Him, Isaiah 53:10. See Isaiah 34:6 and 65:12 for other contexts of this most descriptive word for death. Also, the notes on chapters 52 and 53 of Isaiah will contain an expanded explanation of the brutal death of the Servant of the Lord Thomas Constable comments on 34:2:
“The first reason (cf. vv. 5, 6, 8) everyone should listen is that the Lord is very angry with the nations. He has determined to devote them to destruction, to put them under the ban (Heb. herem; cf. 11:15; Josh. 6:21; 1 Sam. 15:3).

What humankind must hear, then, is a sentence of judgment on the whole earth (cf. Ps. 2:9).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 157).

**34:3** Their slain will be cast out,
  and the stench of their corpses will stink;
  the mountains will flow with their blood.

The prophet in Isaiah 34:3 continues the description of the latter-day slaughter of the armies of the nations by God. The corpses of the slain will be thrown out and will smell (stench) “and the mountains will flow with their blood.” This is a graphic description of the brutal killing of the armies of the nations by God. The following passages refer to a latter-day destruction of the armies of the nations. See Jeremiah 25:33-34; Ezekiel 35:6; 38:22; 39:1-24; Joel 2:10; Revelation 16:16 and 19:19. The timing of God’s slaughter of the armies of the world will most likely occur during the battle of Armageddon near the end of the Tribulation. Some scholars, however, view the Ezekiel 38-39 prophecy as an attack on Israel prior to the Tribulation period. See Arnold Fruchtenbaum, The Footsteps of the Messiah, Ariel Ministries, 2004, page 121.

**34:4** All the host of heaven will be dissolved,
  and the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll;
  all their hosts will fall,
  like a withered leaf from a vine,
  or like a shriveled fig from a fig tree.

Isaiah in 34:4, expands his description of the days of God’s destruction of the armies of the nations to include the upheaval in the cosmos. The celestial objects will be dissolved, and the heavens will be closed or perhaps will vanish. Isaiah had earlier described such as day as recorded in 2:10-22 and 13:6-13. Other Scriptural references to this cataclysmic day include, Joel 2:30-31; Matthew 24:29; 2 Peter 3:10; and Revelation 6:12-14. Some may ask, should Isaiah 34:1-4 be understood as a description of a single unified event or a series of events over a period of time during the times known as the greater day of the Lord? David L. Cooper understand the events of these verses as being literal and occurring in the days of the Tribulation period. He comments on Isaiah 34:4:

“Isaiah, in verse, 4, foretold the dissolution of the heavenly bodies during this time when God punishes the nations of earth—in the Tribulation Period. He therefore declared, "And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their host shall fade away, as the leaf fadeth from off the vine, and as a fading leaf from the fig tree." This language is to be taken at its face value because there is nothing in the context to indicate a departure from the literal meaning. This theme the Apostle Peter discussed in the third chapter of II Peter. An examination of its context shows that the apostle was speaking of the events of the day of Jehovah. At that time, according to his prediction, the heavenly bodies will be dissolved and pass away with a great noise and the earth will burn with intense fire. There will be volcanic eruptions here and there on the earth. The smoldering fires that are deposited in the earth will burst forth into mighty conflagrations. Since Peter gave that description in reply to the mockers who question the second Coming of Christ, it is evident that he was talking about the Tribulation and what will occur at that time. All the facts of the context point in that direction. It is, however, unfortunate that many Bible commentators have overlooked the time element of both the Isaiah passage and the one in II Peter and have applied them to the events connected with the conclusion of the Millennium.” (D.L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-November 1944).
Against Edom (1): Verses 5-7

34:5-7 For my sword has drunk its fill in heaven; look, it will come down on Edom, and on the people doomed to destruction.

6 The sword of the LORD is filled with blood; it is covered with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams.

For the LORD has made a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

7 The wild oxen will fall with them, and young bulls with the mighty bulls; their land will be soaked with blood, and their soil made fertile with fat.

Isaiah in 34:5-7, declares God’s judgment on the nation of Edom. Was this a specific addition to the passage about the destruction of the armies of the nations to discuss the small nation Edom’s destruction or was Isaiah’s mention of Edom intended as a representative of all the ungodly nations of the world? Against the idea of Isaiah 34:5-7 being a literal reference to just Edom alone, Thomas Constable comments:

“A second reason for God's worldwide judgment is that when His sword, a symbol of His judgment (cf. Deut. 32:41-43; Josh. 5:13; Judg. 7:20), has done all it can do to the heavenly host, it will fall on the nations represented by Edom. That the literal destruction of Edom is not in view should be clear from two facts. A judgment on the heavenly hosts has not yet happened. Edom did not experience such a destruction as this passage presents during her history. Edom ceased to exist as a nation long ago, so a future destruction of Edom is not possible.

Humans must pay. Everyone belongs to God. If human beings do not submit to Him voluntarily, He will force them to do so against their wills. This will be God's judgment on the world for rebelling against Him.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 158).

Edom was a unique nation among those that were neighbors of Judah and Israel. Its people were descendants of Esau, the older brother of Jacob. Although very closely related to the Jewish people, the people of Edom would not come to the aid of the people of Israel when they sought to pass through Edom on the way to the promised land. Numbers 20:14-21. The Edomites were bitter enemies of Israel during the days of Saul. David managed to subdue them, however they rebelled against Solomon and remained hostile to Israel and Judah for centuries. They gloated over the downfall of Judah and Israel and plundered the city of Jerusalem after its destruction by the Babylonians. Psalm 137:7 and Obadiah vs. 10-14. John MacArthur, NASB, page 1330, has an extended note on the meaning that God loved Jacob; but hated Esau. (Malachi 1:2-3). See also J. Alec Moyter, *Isaiah*, pages 215-16 for a Biblical study on the animosity between Edom and the people of Israel (Jacob).

Because of this unique and bitter relationship over centuries between the people of Jacob and the people of Esau, and the amount of Biblical attention to their conflicts, and God’s continual warnings of judgment on Edom, it seems best to understand the reference to Edom in Isaiah 34 as literal Edom. However, it would not be amiss to see how the destruction allotted to Edom is as an example of how God will deal in judgment on the ungodly nations of the world prior to the days of the millennial kingdom. This is not to say that Isaiah
intended Edom to represent these nations, but all nations should learn a lesson from Edom’s judgment. Even though Edom as a nation ceased to exist about 500 B.C., the lands once occupied by Edom, now modern Jordan, will certainly face the devastation Isaiah declares in chapter 34. It is possible that for God, these lands will always have the title of Edom no matter the name that humans will allot to them.

It is quite a subjective exercise to point to any passage of Scripture and state categorically that, even though a person or nation is named, the passage should be understood as figurative and not a literal reference to that person or nation. Unless the passage itself is an obvious simile or a metaphor or another grammatical format, the student of the Scriptures should keep to a consistent standard of interpretation. Suggestions regarding the literalness or figurativeness of a Scriptural passage based upon conjecture, subjective criteria, theological leaning, etc. should be avoided even when the passage may point to a conclusion that seems on the surface to be difficult to understand if taken literally. For further reference, the following resource is recommended: Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, Published by, David C. Cook. 1991.

The judgment of God as recorded in Isaiah 34:5-7 is filled with graphic pictures of His sword filled with blood not only of the people of Edom whom God had “devoted to destruction.” ESV 34:5, but also upon the animals of the land of Edom. In 34:6, the Lord states His reason for including the slaughter of the animals, “For the LORD has made a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.”

In a later message, Isaiah would again mention Edom and Bozrah in the context of a judgment with blood, Isaiah 63:1-6. Along with the passage in Isaiah 63:1-6, Isaiah, in chapter 34, is definitely declaring a future prophecy about the return of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is remarkable how Isaiah 34:5-7 and 63:1-6 compare in its vivid portrayal of the judgment on Edom being brought about by the pouring out of blood due to the slaughter of its people. Jesus Christ, the Messiah will return as a warrior King to exact judgment on those who will desire to completely destroy the people of God. The returning King will destroy the destroyers. David L. Cooper comments:

“The sword of God especially comes to Bozrah as we see in verse 6. This was one of the leading cities of Edom. When the Lord Jesus returns in flaming fire at the conclusion of the Tribulation, He will first appear in Bozrah. Isaiah, in chapter 63, verses 1-6, gives us this information. Habakkuk likewise in the third chapter of his prophecy sees the Messiah after He has struck His terrific blow in the land of Edom. “(D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly, November 1944.).

Arnold Fruchtenbaum also links these verses with Isaiah 63:1-6. Under the title of: *The Place of the Second Coming*, Fruchtenbaum states that there are four key passages and another possible passage that pinpoint the place of the Second Coming at Bozrah: Isaiah 34:17; Isaiah 63:1-6; Habakkuk 3:3; Micah 2:12-13; and a possible reference in Judges 5:4-5. (Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, Ariel Ministries, 2004, Pages 339-342.).

Victor Buksbazen has an alternate suggestion as to the meaning of verses 5-7:

“The wrath of God is directed in particular against Edom for her relentless hatred against her brother Israel. The sword of the Lord is obviously the same “heavy, great and strong sword” previously mentioned by the prophet (27:1). It will descend in full fury upon Edom.

Some commentators have attempted to substitute for “Edom” the word “adam” (man), spelled in Hebrew with the same consonants, but with different vowel signs (Duhm, Kissane). However, the context, and the mention of Bozzrah, an Edomite City, does not favor such a reading. We find that the accepted Hebrew text is almost invariably to be preferred to dubious textual speculations and corrections.
The smaller sacrificial animals – lambs and goats, - represent the smaller nations such as Edom and Moab, while the larger beasts – oxen, bulls and bullocks – symbolize the powerful nations such as Assyria, Babylon and Egypt.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 277).

Against Edom (2): Vs. 8-15

34:8 For the LORD has a day of vengeance,
a year of pay back for the cause of Zion.

The slaughter of the people and animals of Edom is explained by the Lord in Isaiah 34:8. The Lord will take vengeance against the evil actions of Edom as a retribution for His people described as Zion. Isaiah, in his prophecy often declared a prophecy about the vengeance of the Lord. See Isaiah 35:4; 47:3; 59:17-18; 61:2 and 63:4. It is also a common theme of Scripture. See Deuteronomy 32:35, 41, 43; Psalm 58:10; 79:10 and 149:7; Jeremiah 46:10 and 50:15; Ezekiel 25:14, 17; Micah 5:15; Nahum 1:2; and Luke 21:22. The Tribulation period is the meaning of the time frame “day” and “year” in 34:8. The Lord exacts vengeance and recompense on those nations who have opposed or attacked His beloved Zion and its people. The prophet Ezekiel also records the words of the Lord regarding the vengeance to be wrought upon Edom for its actions against the house of Judah. Ezekiel 25:12-14. Because the Lord is jealous for Zion, Zechariah 1:14 and 8:2, He will act with wrath and take vengeance and recompense on His enemies. See also Genesis 12:3.

34:9 The streams of Edom will be turned into pitch,
and its dust into sulfur,
and its land will become burning pitch.

In Isaiah 34:9-15, the prophet describes the devastation of the land of Edom. The words “its” and “it” in 34:10-13 must certainly refer to the single nation Edom and not generally to many unnamed nations. The land once occupied by Edom will be a place of burning pitch and brimstone, 34:9. This is a description also of the type of judgment God had brought upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah had earlier discussed the destruction of Babylon in similar terms, Isaiah 13:19-22. Many other Scriptures refer to the fiery destruction that God brought on Sodom and Gomorrah in the past and upon the wicked nations in the future. See Genesis 19:24-28; Deuteronomy 29:23; Psalm 11:6; Jeremiah 49:18; Luke 17:29-30; Jude vs. 7, and Revelation 14:10-11.

34:10 It will not be extinguished day or night;
its smoke will go up forever;
from generation to generation it will lie waste;
no one will pass through it forever and ever.

Isaiah declares in 34:10, that the burning pitch, (see 34:9) “will not be extinguished day or night; its smoke will go up forever.” This is on the surface a difficult verse to understand literally. However, it will do an injustice to Scripture to attempt to allegorize the intent of Isaiah’s words to say it is meant only as a figurative statement meaning a long time. Also, is should not be understood as a grammatical function of hyperbole in which the writer uses inflated language to dramatically emphasize his intention. It is best to let the statement stand as it is particularly in light of other Scriptural references such as Isaiah 66:24 and Revelation 19:3.

A likely meaning of this passage is that the burning will be present all during the one thousand years of the millennial kingdom and then continue forever in the burning lake of brimstone (sulfur), Revelation 14:10-11;
19: 3, 20; 20:10, 14-15; and 21:8. When faced with this much Scriptural evidence for the eternal burning mentioned first by Isaiah in 34:10 and then in the passages listed above, the best method of interpretation is to let Scripture explain itself.

34:11-15 But the desert owl and the screech owl will possess it; 
the owl and the raven will live there. 
He will stretch over it the measuring line of chaos, 
and the plum line of emptiness.

12 Her nobles will have nothing to call a kingdom, 
all its princes will be gone.

13 Thorns will come up in its palaces, 
nettles and thistles in its fortresses. 
It will become a home of jackals, 
a haunt of owls.

14 The wild beasts of the desert will meet with the hyenas, 
and the wild goats will bleat to one another; 
yes, the night creatures will settle there, 
and find there a place of rest.

15 There the owl will make her nest, 
and lay eggs, hatch, and protect them; 
yes, there the buzzards will be gathered, 
each one with her mate.

Isaiah describes the complete ruin of the lands once occupied by the descendants of Esau. This land will only be inhabited by wild animals and will be unfit for human occupation. The Hebrew words for many of the animals listed in these verses are difficult to interpret and many suggestions are given by scholars. One of the most difficult words is translated “night creature” in vs. 14. Victor Buksbazen, suggests the following possible interpretation:

“Among the gruesome creatures dwelling in deserted Edom, Lilith the night monster, or night ghost, is mentioned. In later rabbinical literature, Lilith was considered a female demon who sought to harm children, especially newborn babies.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 278).

Thomas Constable and Herbert M. Wolf also mention this possibility. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 159. Herbert M. Wolf, Interpreting Isaiah, page 167). Gary V. Smith, however, does not see the need to understand these creatures as demonic beings. (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, page 575). Whatever was meant by Isaiah, either animal or demonic, it will be a place no human would want to live in or visit. 

Wedged between two descriptions of the creatures who will inhabit this desolate land, 34:11 and 13-15, Isaiah interjects a comment about the claim to the land by any person, especially any of noble origin. Isaiah states in 34:12 that the land will be devoid of any nobles or princes and specifically any of these who would be proclaimed king. It will be a land called “no one there.” This poetic title for this land is reminiscent of the title that Isaiah had earlier ascribed to Egypt in Isaiah 30:7, where the prophet called Egypt, “Rahab who has been exterminated.”

The Lord’s Instruction: His Validation: 34:16-17
34:16-17 Seek out and read of the scroll of the LORD:
Not one of these animals will be missing,
not one will lack a mate,
for the mouth of the LORD has commanded it,
and his Spirit has gathered them.
17 He has cast the lot for them,
and his hand has split it up to them with a measuring line.
They will possess it forever;
from generation to generation they will settle there.

Isaiah calls upon the nations in 34:16, to “Seek out and read from the scroll of the LORD.” What is the book or scroll of the Lord that Isaiah has mentioned in 34:16? Many different books are mentioned in Scripture but none of them have the words Isaiah has stated in 34: 16-17. Therefore it must be Isaiah’s own writing that he entitles, “the book of the Lord.” Isaiah records that in this book, those who read it or hear it will know that what God has stated about animals inhabiting the land of Edom will happen just as God said it would, “for the mouth of the LORD has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them” 34:16. It is recorded in Isaiah 34:17, that this book declares that God has assigned the place of the animals, “He has cast the lot for them, and His hand has split it up to them with a measuring line” just as the apportionment of the promised land was accomplished for the people of Israel. See Numbers 26:52-56; Deuteronomy 32:8 and Joshua 18:1-10. The animals shall possess this land in accordance with God’s command forever, (as long as the land shall last) from generation to generation.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah chapter 34

The Wrath of God on the nations:
The Lord’s Indignation: His Vengeance: 34:1-15
The Lord’s Instruction: His Validation: 34:15-16

2. The Blessing of the Future Kingdom: 35:1-10
The Blossoming of the Desert: 35:1-2 and 6b-7
The Healing of the Remnant: 35:3-6a
The Return of the Ransomed: 35:8-10

In vivid contrast to devastation of the land of Edom and slaughter of the armies of the nations at the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ in chapter 34, Isaiah in chapter 35 declares a glorious prophecy of the healing both of the land and the remnant people of God and the return of the remnant (the ransomed of the Lord) as they march joyfully to Zion at the beginning of the millennial kingdom. This is one of the loftiest chapters not only in Isaiah but in the Old Testament. It is a portrayal of restoration, return and rejoicing for the faithful remnant of the Lord who have endured the fiery trials of tribulation and enemy assault. The King has returned to rescue His people and lead them to glorious Zion, His holy hill. As recorded in Isaiah chapter 35, the prophet declares that the wilderness, dry land and desert will be glad and rejoice for the desert will blossom abundantly like the crocus. Rejoicing with singing will be made and the glory of Lebanon, and the splendor of Mount Carmel and the Plain of Sharon will be given to these desert places and they will also see the glory and splendor of the LORD, vss. 1-2. The weak hands and shaky knees are to be strengthened and the those who have a fearful heart are called to be strong and not afraid because the LORD is coming with avenging recompense to save the people, vss. 3-4. Then the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf will be opened and the lame will leap like the deer and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy. Also, the wilderness waters and desert streams will gush forth, vs. 5-6. The scorched land and thirsty ground will become like a pool and springs of water and the lairs of jackals will be as a marsh with grass, weeds and papyrus, vs. 7. A
highway will be there, called “The Way of Holiness,” and nothing unclean nor fools nor lion nor ravenous beast will travel on it. It will be reserved for the redeemed, those who “walk that way,” vss. 8-9. The ransomed of the LORD will return (on this highway) and will coming singing to Zion. Everlasting joy will be upon their heads, and they will find joy and gladness, vs. 10.

David L. Cooper provides an overview of chapter 35: (extensive quotation)

“VII. WORLD BLESSING-MILLENNIUM (35:1-10)

It is fitting that the Book of Woes should end with a vivid picture of the glorious millennial reign of our Lord. In 35:1,2 we have a marvelous description of the transformation which will take place in the desert. Personally I have been out on the Arabian Desert and have traveled through the desolate country in Moab and Edom. I have also passed through the desert which separates Palestine from Egypt. Likewise I have been out on the great Sahara Desert. Of course I have crossed the great western deserts in America. Whenever I see these great wastelands, as a rule I think of this marvelous prediction which is found in Isaiah 35:1,2:

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. 2 It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of Jehovah, the excellency of our God."

This passage means exactly what it says, namely, that there will be a transformation that will come upon the desert. In the prophet's speaking of this great change, he does use some figures of speech. But anyone can recognize that which is literal and that which is figurative. When due consideration is paid to the figures used and when they are properly interpreted, one sees that Edenic conditions are here promised for deserts and wastelands of this earth. The desolations that are observable upon the earth are due to the curse which fell upon the world when Adam sinned. When the Lord Jesus returns He will of course lift the curse and Edenic conditions will be restored, in fulfillment of this and many other predictions.

Isaiah urged his contemporaries to strengthen those who were weak in faith and doubting: "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." That he was not talking about infirmities of the flesh but rather that of a hesitating and doubting mind is seen from the following statement: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; he will come and save you."

Before the Old Testament saints the prophets held up constantly the glorious visible coming of Jehovah to earth, to set up His reign of righteousness. They were therefore urged to wait patiently for His appearance. King David said that he would have fainted if he had not been buoyed up by the hope of seeing Jehovah in the land of the living (Psa. 27:13,14). In Psalm 37 the writer urged his readers to wait for Jehovah's appearance.

The appearance of the Lord mentioned in Isaiah 35:4 is His second coming. The proof of this position is seen in the fact that the coming referred to is with vengeance and with the recompense of God. When the Lord came the first time, He was the very embodiment of grace, mercy, and truth. When He returns, He will come with vengeance and will reward His servants and will recompense the evildoers according to their ways. It is therefore clear that the coming to which Isaiah in our passage refers is none other than the second coming of Jesus, who will come and save the faithful remnant.

In this connection let us remember that there are passages in the Word which speak only of the first coming. The facts of each context in such cases indicate this interpretation. There are others that refer only to the second coming, such as this one. There are still other prophecies which speak of the entire redemptive career of King Messiah, consisting of the two comings and the Christian Dispensation separating those two events. (For a full discussion of this point, see my volume, The World's Greatest Library Graphically Illustrated.)
According to Isaiah 35:5,6 the infirmities which now characterize man will pass away. The "eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstop ped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." This is but another echo of the predictions which forecast the lifting of the curse and the restoration of primitive Edenic conditions to man.

In the latter part of verse 6 and in verse 7 appear references to the changes that will take place in the physical realm. In the wilderness there will burst forth refreshing waters and streams. The same thing will be true in those places that are now desert wastes. There will be no swampy, untillable land, but it will all be productive.

There will be a great highway for the redeemed to return to Zion. This is mentioned in verse 8. "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for the redeemed: the wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err therein." No ravenous beast shall be seen there. In Isaiah, chapter 19, there is likewise a prediction that there will be a great highway running from Assyria through Palestine down into Egypt in order that there may be rapid and convenient transportation between the three nations which God at that time will call His special people--Israel, Egypt, and Assyria. When the passage in 35:8 is compared with the one in Isaiah, chapter 19, it becomes apparent that probably the prophet in these two places was speaking of the same highway.

This highway has by some commentators been understood to be a prediction of the gospel and its conditions of salvation. Thus we are told that the gospel is so very plain and clear that the "wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err therein." I admit that the gospel plan of salvation is very clear and anyone, even with subnormal intelligence, can comprehend it and can accept the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy His salvation. About this proposition there can be no question. But when Isaiah 35:8 and the highway mentioned there are studied in the light of the facts of Isaiah 19 and parallel statements, one sees that Isaiah was not speaking of the gospel at all but was talking of a literal highway that will connect Assyria and Egypt in the Millennial Age. This position becomes more abundantly apparent when we recognize that in verses 5-10 of this chapter the prophet was speaking of things out beyond the second coming of our Lord. Thus one does violence to the Scriptures, when one interprets this passage as a reference to the gospel.

On this great international highway of the Millennial Age the redeemed people of Jehovah "shall return, and come with singing unto Zion," praising God; then "everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy," which will be the order of the day, "and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Great will be the blessings which await the faithful remnant of Israel--together with all the saved of this age! (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly-November 1944).

The Blossoming of the Desert: 35:1-2 and 6b-7

35:1-2 The wilderness and the dry land will be glad; the desert will rejoice, and blossom like the crocus.

2 It will blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Mount Carmel and the Sharon plain. They will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.

Isaiah in 35:1-2, proclaims a prophecy on the condition of the wilderness and the desert. The wilderness and the desert describe barren, desolate, parched and solitary places that will become devastated during the Tribulation period. The location of these places is not stated, and they may be in the general vicinity of Judah and Israel as the geographical references to Lebanon, Carmel and Sharon in 35:2 seem to indicate. Only the
lands of Edom in the local area will be exempt. See Isaiah 34:5-17. The prophet states that these once desert lands will be glad and rejoice and blossom like the crocus (rose in the KJV). A new world order will be the foundation of the millennial kingdom and not only will the people of God be transformed but also the lands of the kingdom will themselves be transformed. Isaiah’s use of anthropomorphism to describe a human reaction: gladness and rejoicing and ascribing this reaction to a desert is a poetic device that emphasizes the dramatic turn of events from the end of the Tribulation to the beginning of the peaceful days and abundance of life that will characterize the millennial kingdom. See also Psalm 89:5; 96:12; 97:1; 98:8; 148:3-4, 7; Isaiah 49:13; 52:9; 55:12; and Luke 19:40.

The prophet states in 35:1, that the desert, “will rejoice.” In 35:2 Isaiah states the desert will “rejoice with joy.” Isaiah in 35:1-2 repeats a word (word group) three times to emphasize its impact. See also Isaiah 6:3; 33:10, 18 and 22. Also in 35:2, that glory and splendor (majesty) are repeated twice. The words rejoice, splendor (majesty) and glory are used by the prophet to heighten the magnificence of the beauty of the transformed desert. The mention of Lebanon, Mount Carmel and the Sharon plain are used by Isaiah as indicators of the glory and majesty to be given to the desert is a striking counterpoint to their mention in Isaiah 33:9 where they are seen in disgrace. Once bareness disfigured the landscape now beauty and majesty will be its hallmark. The point of this beauty is to bring majesty and glory to God for it is His work and His creativity that is on display. See also Isaiah 29:17.

The Healing of the Remnant: 35:3-6a

In 35:3-6a Isaiah directs his discussion of the beginnings of the millennial kingdom to its people. The faithful remnant will have endured much suffering during the horrifying days of the Tribulation. In Isaiah’s prophecy, these future referenced days have now passed, and the people of God are still wary of what is ahead and weary from what is now behind them. Isaiah declares a message of encouragement and hope to these faithful saints.

35:3-4 Strengthen the weak hands,
and steady the shaky knees.

4 Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not be afraid.
Look, your God will come with vengeance,
and with the avenging recompense of God;
he will come and save you."

Isaiah in 35:3, calls for the exhausted and feeble to be encouraged and strengthened. In 35:4, he calls for those who are anxious to have no fear and take courage for their God will be a savior to them and will come with vengeance and recompense (on their enemies). This call by Isaiah repeats his earlier declaration as recorded in 34:8, “For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of pay back for the cause of Zion.” The words “pay back” can better be translated as “recompense.” The Lord is near unto His faithful remnant and they will no longer fear their enemies. The timing of 35:4 may be positioned in step 5 of the following sequence of events.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains the sequence of events during the time of the second coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The following briefly summarizes Fruchtenbaum’s chapter 14, in The Footsteps of the Messiah. This chapter is entitled: The Campaign of Armageddon and The Second Coming of Jesus the Messiah. In this chapter the campaign of Armageddon is described as an eight-stage event and not just one battle. The Messiah will return after the faithful remnant have repented of the national sin of the Jewish
people of rejecting Him during His first coming to earth to live among His people. As stated, the remnant will then call upon their Messiah to return and rescue them from their enemies who have surrounded them at Bozrah.

The eight stages of the campaign of Armageddon are: (1) The world’s armies are assembled at the Valley of Megiddo under the leadership of the Antichrist. (2) While the combined armies of the Antichrist are assembling in the Valley of Megiddo, the Lord sends His forces comprised of those faithful to Him to destroy Babylon, the stronghold of the Antichrist. (3) Antichrist and his combined armies fall upon Jerusalem and conquer it. (4) After conquering Jerusalem, the armies of Antichrist then proceed to Bozrah where the faithful remnant of God’s people have been sheltered. (5) It is just as the armies of Antichrist surround Bozrah, that the faithful remnant, the covenant people of God, repent of the national sin of Israel and call upon their Messiah to come back and rescue them. (6) The Messiah returns to earth with wrath and vengeance. (7) The battle of Bozrah begins and proceeds from Bozrah to the Valley of Jehoshaphat where Antichrist will be slain by the Messiah. (8) The Messiah then proceeds to Zion where He will stand upon the Mount of Olives causing it to split into two parts and provide a way for escape for those people of God still awaiting rescue. The great earthquake mentioned in Revelation 16:17-21 occurs at this time. Reference: Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Footsteps of the Messiah, Ariel Ministries, 2004, Chapter 14, pages 308 – 357.

35:5-6a: Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.
6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy;

The prophet describes a later time than recorded in Isaiah 35:4. The victory has been won by the Messiah and not only is the desert being transformed but the people of God are being healed. Isaiah states that blind eyes will see; deaf ears will hear; lame legs will leap; and mute tongues will sing for joy. This transformation of the people of God brings to an end God’s lament about His hardhearted, blind and deaf people recorded in Isaiah 6:9-10. They will finally be healed. Isaiah had asked how long until the will be healed, Isaiah 6:11. The Lord’s response, 6:11-13 is a summary of Isaiah chapters 34-35. It is the stump, the holy seed who will finally be healed during the beginning days of the millennial kingdom. See also Isaiah 29:18-19.

35:6b-7 for in the wilderness waters will gush forth, and streams in the desert.
7 The scorched land will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. In the lairs of jackals, will be a marsh with grass, reeds and papyrus.

Isaiah returns to the description of the restoration of the desert. The lands once scorched will be abundant with water. Resting places will be provided for those traveling through the desert lands and where once there was only grass, now reeds and rushes, which need a steady source of water, will be found. See also Isaiah 41:18; 43:19-20; 44:3-4; and Ezekiel 47:1-12. Victor Buksbazen comments on the first sentence of 35:7:

“The desert mirage (sharab) shall become a pool…”

The shimmering desert heat, which so often produces the illusion of abundant water, will now become a real pool of water, the deserted place a green pasture with peacefully reclining herds of domestic animals. As
always, Isaiah sees nature participating in the destiny of man, which was once cursed for his sins, but blessed again through his redemption.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 280).

The Return of the Ransomed: 35:8-10

35:8-10 A highway will be there, and it will be called "The Way of Holiness;" the unclean will not travel on it; but it will be reserved for those who walk that way; fools will never stray onto it.

9 No lion will be there, nor will any ravenous beast go up on it; they will not be found there; but the redeemed will walk there.

10 Those ransomed by the LORD will return, and come with singing to Zion; everlasting joy will crown their heads. They will find joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Isaiah, in his glorious message of restoration during the beginning of the days of the millennial kingdom, now discusses the highway in the desert. The location of the highway is the desert due to the word “there” in the first phrase of 35:8, which points back to 35:6b-7 in which Isaiah is describing the transformation of the desert. The purpose of the highway is for the faithful remnant, the ransomed of the Lord who will walk upon it as they return to Zion, the glorious capital of the millennial kingdom.

Isaiah concludes his prophecy about the transformation of the desert at the beginning of the millennial kingdom by discussing a highway. In Isaiah 35:8a, the prophet states, “A highway will be there, and it will be called the Way of Holiness.” Isaiah had earlier revealed details about this highway in 11:16 and 19:23. He would continue to reveal more about it: 40:3; 49:11; 62:10. He alludes to it in 30:21 and 51:11 (a repeat of 35:10). The name of this highway is Highway of Holiness.

In 35:8b-9a, Isaiah contrasts those who will not and those who will walk on this highway. The unclean and fools will not walk on it. The lion or any “vicious beast” will not go up on the highway. However, it will be a way for those who “walks that way,” 35:8b. Who are those who “walk that way”? Isaiah declares that those who will walk on this raised holy way will be the redeemed, 35:9. This is the first mention in the book of Isaiah of the most precious word, redeemed, which is the Hebrew word ge’ulim.

The redeemed have a Redeemer, the Hebrew word ga’al, which has the meaning of “kinsmen or family redeemer,” and is the great theme of the book of Ruth where it is mentioned five times in two verses: Ruth 4:4 (3 times) and Ruth 4:6 (2 times). Its meaning is explained in detail in Leviticus 25:23-55 and in Leviticus 27:12-33. Other Old Testament references are Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Job 19:25; Psalms 19:14; 69:18; 72:14; 74:2; 77:15; 78:35; 103:4; 106:10; 107:2; Proverbs 23:11; Lamentations 3:58; Hosea 13:14 and Micah 4:10. It is a major theme in Isaiah. Following the first mention in 35:9, it is found in 41:14; 43:1, 14; 44:6, 22, 23, 24; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 62:12; 63:4, 9; and 63:16. In Isaiah 35:9 and the references mentioned above, the redeemed are people who have by faith trusted in their Messiah who is their great kinsmen redeemer and has loosed them from their bondage to sin by paying a price. The price paid was the agony of the cross where their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ bore their sins as a guilt offering
and satisfied the great wrath of God on behalf of the people He loved. This act of redemption is wondrously explained by Isaiah in 52:13-53:12.

In the New Testament, a few Greek words are used, (1) Redemption (apolutrosis) meaning to be loose (away) from, Luke 21:28; Romans 3:24; 8:23; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:7, 14; Colossians 1:14; and Hebrews 9:12. (2) Redemption (lutrosis) meaning to be loosed from, Luke 2:38 and Hebrews 9:12. (3) Redeem (agorazo) meaning to acquire at, Revelation 5:9; and 14: 3, 4. (4) Redeem (exagorazo) meaning to acquire out of, Galatians 3:13; 4:5; Ephesians 5:16; and Colossians 4:5. (5) Redeemed (lutroo) meaning to be loosed by a price, Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18 and (lutrosin) Luke 1:68. The NT Greek words lutroo and lutrosin have the closest meaning to ga’al in the OT. A similar word in the NT is ransom, (lutron) Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45. Also (antilutron), 1Timothy 2:6.

Isaiah in 35:10 brings to a close the entire first section of his prophecy from 1:1 to 35:10. The redeemed of 35:9 are called the ransomed in 35:10. The Hebrew word is pedu’ye which has the meaning to set free or ransom. Isaiah states in 35:10, “Those ransomed by the LORD will return and come with singing to Zion; everlasting joy will crown their heads. They will find joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” This climatic verse is repeated by Isaiah in 51:11. The entire message of the prophecy of Isaiah can be seen in this one verse. The people of God in the past were laden with sin (chapters 1-6) and refused to trust and obey the Lord (chapters 7-33). They will, in the future kingdom of the Messiah, be released from the curse of the law and from the penalty of sin and walk joyfully to the capital of the Kingdom, Zion. The Lord has redeemed them and brought them great comfort and a reason to shout with joy (chapters 40-66). The reason the redeemed are returning to Zion along the Highway of Holiness is because God is bringing them to Himself. Isaiah 49:1-26 and Ezekiel 36:22-38. They had been scattered among the nations of the world and had suffered greatly due to their unbelief and rebellion against God. In the millennial kingdom, they will be free of past pain and sorrow and will walk righteously with their Messiah. Micah 2:12-13 is a wonderful picture of this walk to Zion with the Lord leading them:

12 I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob;  
I will surely gather the remnant of Israel;  
I will put them together as the sheep  
in the midst of a pasture;  
it will be noisy because there will be so many people.
13 The leader who breaks out will go up before them,  
they will break out and pass on through the gate,  
and leave.  
Their king will pass on before them,  
and the LORD will be at their head.”

Gary V. Smith comments on the last three verses of chapter 35:

“The content of 35:8–10 is unified around the repeated reference to what will be “there” (šām, used three times, drawing a contrast to the parallel in 34:15–16) and what will “not” (lō, used five times) be there. A “highway” (maslul) is a major graded road, as opposed to a small path, and usually refers to a state-constructed road that supports economic or military operations. Not every use of the highway concept in Isaiah refers to the same road or event. There is the metaphorical highway God uses to come to Jerusalem (40:1–11), which is different from the highway that the Assyrian exiles will use (11:16). The highway in 35:8 is an eschatological highway used by the people of God as they return to Zion to praise God in the distant future (cf. 62:9–12). This highway has the unique name, “Way of Holiness” (derek haqqôdeš), a title based on the fact that only holy people will walk on it. The unclean person, the fool, the lion, and the wild beast will not walk on this road, for it will be reserved for God’s redeemed people. The unclean are not allowed to enter a holy place, and the fools
cannot travel there because they walk in ways that are contrary to the will of God. Neither group is morally or ritually qualified to come before God when he comes in his glory. Those who joyfully enter Zion to fellowship and praise God are the redeemed (gĕʾûlim) and ransomed (pĕdûʾyē). The term “redeemed” is used when a person delivers a blood relative from some obligation (legal, financial, social), thus those who come to Zion are pictured as the covenant relatives that God has redeemed. “Ransom” comes from the legal practice of making a payment to deliver someone from a debt, obligation, or punishment, though the payment idea is seldom emphasized when referring to God’s theological ransoming of his people. Both terms emphasize that the people’s status as the redeemed or ransomed is based on an act of divine grace to free them from the bondage of an earlier obligation. This indebtedness is broader than the bondage to a personal sin; it includes all the effects of sin on the world. These acts of God will remove the curse on man and the world and inaugurate the holy kingdom of God. Those who “will return” (šām) to God will experience “everlasting joy,” (šām), they will be overtaken with gladness, and all sorrow will end (cf. 25:8; 65:19). Certainly, these words would have created hope in those who heard the prophet speak. They can put their trust in a God who will do these things for his people.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 1, pages 580-581).

Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer add comments on 35:5-10:

“All these changes seem to culminate in the creation of the Highway of Holiness that will lead those in need of help safely to Zion (vv. 8-10). All the Lord’s activities will result not only in the safety and prosperity of Zion, but in the establishment of a sanctuary for those the Lord has rescued, likely referring to His deliverance of the Jewish people from Bozrah (34:6). Under the reign of Messiah, the Lord will provide much for Israel, specifically, holiness (35:8), safety (v. 9), and everlasting joy (v. 10). The ransomed of the nation will be welcomed with singing and experience the ongoing joy of living in the presence of the Lord.” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, in the Moody Bible Commentary, page 1054).

Chapter 35 is a fitting ending to all preceding chapters of Isaiah as it brings those who have listened to or read the prophecies of Isaiah to a glorious roadway that leads to Mount Zion during the beginning of the Messiah’s millennial kingdom. The terrors of the Tribulation are not past and the faithful remnant of the people of God are with their Redeemer who has rescued them from the threat of annihilation by their enemies (Isaiah 63:1-6). Their Messianic Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel who is at the front of the procession as they sing joyfully and with gladness during their journey up to Mount Zion. It is there where they will enjoy the benefits of the just and peaceful reign of the Messiah and live with Him, first for a period of one thousand years, where all of the yet unfulfilled prophecies of the Scriptures will gloriously be fulfilled and then will live forever with the great triune God who will “tabernacle” with them. (Revelation 21:3).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah chapter 35
The Blossoming of the Desert: 35:1-2 and 6b-7
The Healing of the Remnant: 35:3-6a
The Return of the Ransomed: 35:8-10
Outline of Isaiah Chapters 36:1 – 39:8

II The Protection of God and the Foolishness of Hezekiah: Chapters 36-39
(An historical application of God’s promised blessings to Judah)

A: God Protects Judah from Assyria: Chapters 36-37
1. The Invasion of Judah by Assyria: 36:1-22
2. The Prophet is Summoned: 37:1-13
3. The King’s Prayer: 37:14-20
5. The Assyrian Army Destroyed: 37:36-38

B: The Illness and Healing of Hezekiah: Chapter 38

C: The Foolishness of Hezekiah: Chapter 39

Introduction to Isaiah Chapters 36-39

Chapters 36-39 of Isaiah from a bridge between chapters 1-35, containing repetitive patterns of declarative messages of judgment followed by orations of salvation and chapters 40-66, containing exhortations of comfort including a redeeming King and resplendent kingdom. The great political concern of the people of God in chapters 1-35 was the overwhelming dread of the nation of Assyria. The great political concern of the people of God in chapters 40-66 is the prophecies of the rise of Babylon. The great spiritual burden of the people of God in chapters 1-35 was the need to trust God alone for protection and safety. The great spiritual blessing of the people of God in chapters 40-66 is the promise of the coming Servant of the Lord who will be their redeemer and lead them as their Messiah in the future millennial kingdom.

Two important themes are emphasized in chapters 36-39. First, God can be completely trusted. The people of God need to have faith in Him. Second, the nations who have no faith in God and seek to destroy God’s people will themselves, be destroyed by Him. A number of minor themes will be discussed in the notes of these chapters as the narrative proceeds.

Chapters 38 and 39 of Isaiah historically come before chapters 36 and 37. The reasons for Isaiah positioning these chapters in this manner are not known but it can be suggested that the narrative culminating in the destruction of the Assyrian army is a fitting end to chapters 1-35. Also, the health issues and actions of Hezekiah resulting in the visit of the ambassadors from Babylon is a historically important introduction to chapters 40-66. The reasons for the understanding that chapters 36 and 37 actually come chronologically after chapters 38 and 39 are stated below.

1 Historical dating:

King Hezekiah co-reigned with his father Ahaz from 729-716 B.C. Hezekiah ruled as the sole monarch from 715 B.C. Isaiah 36:1 states that it was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib, king of Assyria seized all the fortified cities of Judah. The following verses record the planned assault by Assyria on Jerusalem as a continuing event. The year of the planned assault by Assyria on Jerusalem was therefore 701
B.C. Ancient records of this period also confirm this date. The events of chapters 36 and 37 happened in 701 B.C. Isaiah 39:1-2 states that Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon had heard that Hezekiah was sick and had recovered. The Babylonian prince send letters and a present to King Hezekiah and the Judean king showed the ambassadors form Babylon all the treasures of the house of Hezekiah including his treasure house, armories and all the other treasures of Hezekiah’s dominion. From historical records, it is known that Merodach-baladan ruled Babylon from 722-710 B.C. and again for a brief period in 704-703 B.C. Therefore, the events of chapters 38 and 39 of Isaiah had to have happened at least a few years prior to 701 B.C. See also Isaiah 38:6 which states that the deliverance of the city from the Assyrians by God is a future event.

2 The gold and silver of Hezekiah:

When the ambassadors from Babylon visited Hezekiah, the King showed the Babylonians all of the treasures of the kingdom including the silver and the gold. They were in place and not removed. Isaiah 39:1-2. As recorded in 2 Kings 18:14-16, Sennacherib demanded three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold from Hezekiah as a payment as Hezekiah thought would be for the Assyrians to withdraw from Jerusalem. This unbelievable amount of payment would have equal to eleven tons of silver and one ton of gold. To complete this payment verse 16 of 2 Kings 18 states that Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors and doorposts of the temple and emptied all the silver that was in the house of the Lord. In spite of this enormous payment, Sennacherib did not withdraw from his assault on Jerusalem. This happened in 701 B.C. so therefore Hezekiah showed the ambassadors from Babylon all his treasures including the silver and gold before the treachery of Sennacherib occurred and before the events recorded in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37. Gary V. Smith provides an extended discussion of the chronological dating of these chapters in his commentary, Isaiah: Vol. 1, pages 583 to 657. This discussion by Smith is very helpful to the understanding not only of the chronological issues, but also of the major political concerns and theological considerations of these four chapters.

Chapters 36 and 37 of Isaiah have much in common with Isaiah chapters 7 and 8. In both narratives: First, the people of Judah were threatened by an enemy that was on the verge of completely destroying them, but the city of Jerusalem was not conquered: 7:1-2 and 36:1-2. Second, the place of the discussion was the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller’s field: 7:3 and 36:2. Third, the king and people of Judah were deathly afraid of the threat from an invading army: 7:2 and 37:3. Fourth, the message from the prophet was the same: “do not be afraid:” 7:4 and 37:6. Fifth, the protection of God was offered to the King of Judah: 7:7-9 and 36:7; 37:21-35. Sixth, a sign was offered by God as a trust of His faithfulness to His word: 7:10-16 and 37:30-32. Seventh, the sign offered had elements of an immediate resolution and a messianic promise: 7:10-16 and 37:30-32. Eighth, God faithfully delivered Jerusalem from its enemies (8:4 and 37:36).

There are at least two issues where these narratives differ: First, in chapter 7 King Ahaz refused to consider God’s offer of a sign. In chapter 37 there is no discussion of Hezekiah refusing to consider the sign stated by God. Second, in chapter 7, there is no discussion of king Ahaz presenting a prayer to God to ask for God’s help. In chapter 36, Hezekiah goes into the temple and prays for God’s direct intervention and protection. If Ahaz had heeded the call of the prophet and trusted in the Lord, there likely would not have been a need for this second meeting at this place.

Isaiah’s account of the threatened destruction of Jerusalem and God’s supernatural intervention is complimented by the narrative recorded in 2 Kings 18:13 to 20:19 and 2 Chronicles 32:1-26. Some content is the account in 2 Kings is not recorded in Isaiah’s narrative in chapters 36 and 37: ie: Hezekiah’s payment of
silver and gold to Sennacherib. This should not be a cause to doubt the historicity of Isaiah’s narrative for Isaiah simply may have selected details of the story that were of importance to his accounting of the actions of God and of King Hezekiah. In the English versions of the gospel accounts, Mark, for example, records only two verses about the temptation of Jesus Christ while Matthew devotes eleven verses and Luke records thirteen verses to this very important incident in the life of Christ. The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke often relate the same incident in the life of Christ but provide different but collaborative details. The accounts of the narrative of God’s protection of Jerusalem, as recorded in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and in Isaiah should be understood in a similar manner.

A: God Protects Judah from Assyria: Chapters 36-37

1. The Invasion of Judah by Assyria: 36:1-22

Prior to this climactic chapter recording how God finally deals with the Assyrian threat, Isaiah had mentioned Assyria 21 times. In chapters 36 and 37 Assyria is mentioned 18 times. Isaiah only mentions Assyria once more after chapter 37 as an historical reference: Isaiah 52:4. Assyria is mentioned by Isaiah in 7:17, 18, 20; 8:4, 7; 10:5, 12, 24; 11:11, 16; 14: 25: 19:23, 24, 25: 20:1, 4, 6; 23:13; 27:13; 30:31; 31:8; 36:1, 2, 4, 8, 13, 15, 16, 18; 37:4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 18, 21, 33, 36, 37; 38:6 and 52:4. In contrast Babylon is mentioned by Isaiah nine times up to and including chapter 39 and only four times in chapters 40-66. From the evidence of occurrence of mention, it is clear that God intended to make a statement to the entire world about His direct involvement in the protection of Jerusalem from the assault of the Assyrians.

Chapter 36

Three great deliverances of the people of God are recorded in the Old Testament. The first and greatest in importance was the exodus of the Jews from Egypt culminating in the Passover and then the mosaic covenant declared at Mount Sinai. The second is the protection of Jerusalem from the Assyrians and the third is the return of the Jews to Jerusalem from Babylon. There are many others but arguably these three are the most significant because they have the most content recorded about them. God protected His people from destruction not because they had done anything to deserve His intervention, but because of the sake of His great name. As it was in the past, so it will continue in the future as Ezekiel declared, “Therefore tell the house of Israel, ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: I did not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations, wherever you went.” Ezekiel 36:22. See also Psalm 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11; Isaiah 48:9, 11; Jeremiah 14:21; Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22, 44; and Daniel 9:19. As recorded in Isaiah chapter 36, the prophet declares a historical reference for the military assault of Judah by the Assyrians under king Sennacherib, vs. 1. An account of the dialogue between the Assyrian Rabshakeh, who did most of the speaking, and the representatives of king Hezekiah is recorded in vss. 2-20. The representatives of king Hezekiah reported to him what the Assyrian commander has spoken, vss. 21-22.

36:1 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.

The armies of Sennacherib, king of Assyria seized all of the fortified cities of Judah in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s rule, 701 B.C. See above note on the chronological significance of chapters 36-39. Now a great army of Assyrians was amassing to lay siege to Jerusalem. The power and pride of the Assyrians was at its zenith during these years. Neither Egypt nor Babylon were strong enough to defend themselves against the military might of Sennacherib’s forces. What could King Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem hope to accomplish by resisting the onslaught of Assyria? Not only did the situation appear hopeless, but in human terms it actually was hopeless. However, this was not a matter for humans to decide. God had already indicated His intentions in this matter. Isaiah 14:24-25; 31:8. Thomas Constable comments on the claims of Sennacherib on the number of cities conquered in Judah:

36:2 The king of Assyria sent his chief commander from Lachish to Jerusalem to King Hezekiah with a large army. 
He stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway to the Clothes Washer's field. 

Isaiah states in 36:2, that the king of Assyria, Sennacherib sent “his chief commander” or Rabshakeh as translated in many English versions. See vs. 4. The literal meaning of Rabshakeh is “chief cup bearer” but this person likely had a more significant role as the king’s ambassador. He certainly would have been a trusted servant of Sennacherib. In 2 Kings 18:17 it is recorded that Sennacherib also sent Tartan (army commander) and Rab-saris (chief eunuch) along with Rabshakeh as the representatives of Assyria. Rabshakeh however was the chief spokesman for the Assyrians. Isaiah stated in 36:2, “He stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway to the Clothes Washer’s field.” This was the same location that Isaiah had met with Hezekiah’s father Ahaz 23 years earlier. See Isaiah 7:3. For more comparisons between this earlier meeting and the events in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37, see the above notes. It is likely that this location was chosen for its proximity to the walls of Jerusalem where both the Assyrians and the Judeans could easily talk to each other.

36:3 Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder came out to him. 

Isaiah states the names of the Judean delegation. Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe and Joah the recorder came out to meet with Rabshakeh. In the notes of Isaiah 22: 15-25, a detailed explanation is given why Shebna was stripped of his position of head of the household and why Eliakim was elevated to this prestigious position in place of Shebna. The role of head of the household (of the king) may have been that of prime minister and represented the one who would have been the most trusted of King Hezekiah’s servants.

36:4-10 Then Rabshakeh said to them, "Tell Hezekiah, This is what the great king, the king of Assyria says, 'What is the basis of your confidence? 
5 I tell you, your strategy and strength for the war are mere empty words. Now in whom are you trusting, that you have rebelled against me? 
6 Look, you are trusting in Egypt that staff is a broken reed, if someone leans on it, it will pierce his hand. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. 
7 But if you tell me, "We trust in the LORD our God." Isn't he the one, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has removed, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You must worship before this altar?' 
8 Now therefore, make a bet with my master the king of Assyria. I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able to find enough riders to put on them. 
9 How then can you repulse even one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust on Egypt for chariots and horsemen? 
10 In fact, did I come up against this land to destroy it without the LORD? The LORD told me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'"
In Isaiah 36:4-10, the prophet records the first oration of Rabshakeh to the Judean delegation. It is a speech filled with hubris boasting, misguided taunting and blasphemous lecturing. The main parts of his speech are:

(1) The king of Assyria is a great king. 36:4.

This title is an insult to King Hezekiah for nowhere in his speech or proclamation does Rabshakeh call Hezekiah a king. It also is an insult to the royal line of David and to God the true King of Israel. In the future, another king would have so much hubris to declare that he did things by the might of his power and for the glory of his majesty and was immediately humbled by God. Daniel 4:28-37.

(2) What is this confidence (their strategy and strength) you have and upon whom are you trusting? 36:5

There was no recognition by the Assyrians that Israel and Judah were led by the only true God. By its negative implication, Rabshakeh is declaring that the Judeans are fools to trust in any one including God for their salvation.

(3) It is folly to trust in Egypt for they can only hurt and not help Judah. 36:6

This statement was a stinging indictment of the foolishness of the Judeans to trust in Egypt for protection. It also confirmed the earlier declarations of Isaiah who warned the Judean leadership about their covenant with death in trusting the Egyptians. Isaiah 28:14-15.

(4) By removing the high places and altars (outside of Jerusalem) and insisting that God be worshipped only in Jerusalem, Hezekiah has undermined the people’s access to worship God and has given no reason to trust in God. 36:7.

The Assyrians evidently had some knowledge of the actions of king Hezekiah in his early days as king when he removed the high places and altars (sacred pillars). 2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 31:1. They assumed that all peoples worship idols that represented a god. They had no concept of how the Lord, the Holy One of Israel was to be worshiped and therefore they perceived that Hezekiah was destroying the Judeans access to God and insulting God in the process. Therefore, how could Hezekiah rely on this God.

(5) The Assyrians are willing to bargain with Hezekiah will provide him with two thousand horses if he could supply enough riders to sit upon them. 36:8

This was a taunt and an insult to the Judeans. The Assyrians had earlier proven they could not be relied on to bargain with Hezekiah. 2 Kings 18:14-18. It was true that Hezekiah could not supply two thousand men from his military to mount the horses, but the King knew the Assyrians were trying to intimidate him.

(6) The folly of trusting in Egypt is repeated with a stunning statement that the Lord had told Rabshakeh and by implication king Sennacherib to come up against Judah and destroy it. 36:9-10.

The blasphemous statement of the Assyrians would cut deep into the psyche of those in Jerusalem who were not trusting nor had faith in God. They would wonder if this statement were indeed true and fill them with even greater terror. However, for those who truly trusted in God within Jerusalem, it would be a sign that the
Assyrians had overplayed their hand. The majority of the Judeans may have pondered which spokesman for God was to be trusted, the Assyrian pagan or the prophet Isaiah? God would soon provide the answer!

The Interruption:

36:11-12 Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to the Assyrian commander, "Please speak, to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand it. Do not speak to us in the Judean language, in the ears of the people who are on the wall."

12 But the Assyrian commander replied, "Has my master sent me to your master, and to you, to speak these words? Has he not sent me to those on the wall, who, like you, will end up eating their own excrement and drinking their own urine?"

In Isaiah 36:11-12, the prophet records that upon hearing the oration of Rabshakeh, the Judean delegation requested that he speak in Aramaic instead of the Hebrew language for there were many inhabitants of Jerusalem listening (implying that these listeners might spread fear among the people in the city). Rabshakeh immediately reacted to this request by a taunt to all who were listening by stating in Hebrew, that all who were listening to him including the Judean delegation, would soon be forced to eat their own dung and drink their own urine. This was a threat that the food and water supplies to the city would be cut off and the inhabitants of the city would die due to starvation and thirst.

The Continuation:

36:13-20 Then the Assyrian commander stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Judean language, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria.

14 This is what the king says, 'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to rescue you.'

15 Do not let Hezekiah trick you into trusting in the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will surely rescue us. This city will not fall into the hand of the king of Assyria.'

16 Do not listen to Hezekiah. For this is what the king of Assyria says, 'Make peace with me and come out to me. Then everyone will eat from his own vine, and everyone from his own fig tree, and everyone will drink waters from his own cistern,

17 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards.

18 Do not let Hezekiah mislead you, saying, "The LORD will rescue us." Has any of the gods of the nations been able to deliver his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?

19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Did any of them deliver Samaria out of my hand?

20 Who among all the gods of these countries, were able to deliver their country out of my hand? So how can the LORD deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"

As recorded in Isaiah 36:13 to 20, Rabshakeh continued his speech after the interruption by the delegation from King Hezekiah. This speech was undoubtedly a prepared lecture designed to strike terror into the hearts of all who were listening. Rabshakeh steps up the diatribe against Hezekiah. Rabshakeh still refused to call Hezekiah a king. The main aspects of this continued lecture are:

(7) Rabshakeh called into question Hezekiah’s and the Lord’s ability to deliver the people of Jerusalem from the Assyrian assault led by king Sennacherib. 36:13-15.
The Assyrian strategy was to drive doubt into the minds of the people of Jerusalem by stating that neither their earthly king nor their eternal God could deliver them from the great king of Assyria. This speech was in direct opposition to the teaching of Isaiah who for many years had toiled among the people of the city and the court of the king proclaiming that the only true God, the Holy One of Israel was their savior.

Now the impact of Isaiah’s teaching was placed in jeopardy. To whom would the people and the king listen? To whom would they trust, the king of Assyria or the Lord of the Universe?

(8) Rabshakeh called upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem to come out of the city and be the recipients of a promised blessing of eating safely from their own vine and fig tree and drink water from their own cistern. Later they would be taken to a land (like their own land) which was a land of grain, new wine, bread and vineyards. 36:16-17.

It may have been tempting for many inside the walls of Jerusalem to heed the invitation of Rabshakeh. Times were harsh and the Assyrian advance into Judah effectively cut off access to the agricultural lands in the surrounding country side. The fact of the Assyrian strategy of displacement of captured peoples from their homeland to another land would have been common knowledge. They had done so to the peoples of Samaria about twenty-one years before. Rabshakeh tried to smooth over this reality by promising the people of Jerusalem another land which would be as rich in agriculture as their own. The heart of the matter, however is that God had promised the land of Israel to the forefathers of the Jewish people. It was Immanuel’s land, Isaiah 8:8. God would not at this time allow His great city of Jerusalem to be captured by a pagan enemy. The city would one day be given over to foreign domination, but this was not yet that day.

(9) Rabshakeh completed his harangue against Hezekiah with a taunt that the God of the Judeans could not possibly save them. Rabshakeh stated that the gods of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim and Samaria did not deliver them from the hand of the Assyrians (my hand) and why should the Lord deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians (my hand). 36:18-20.

With this last blasphemous blast, Rabshakeh concluded his oration. It was apparent that the Assyrians thought that all of the gods of the western edges of their empire were the same, powerless and impotent. They evidently did not understand that the true God, the Holy One of Israel could indeed allow his people to be taken into captivity and dispersed among pagan nations due to their gross idol worship and rebellion against Him. They likely did not have access to the writings of the prophets such as Isaiah and Hosea that explained why God would allow a foreign power to conquer the nation of Samaria. Isaiah 8:4 and Hosea 10:6. But there most glaring conceit was their assumption that the God of Hezekiah was as powerless as any idol. They would soon learn otherwise. Rabshakeh’s own conceit and pride was evident in his words “from my hand” which he repeated twice as recorded in 36:19-20.

As recorded in Isaiah 36:21-22, following the oration of Rabshakeh, the delegation from king Hezekiah, Eliakim, Sheba and Joah left the meeting with the Assyrians without any words of response as Hezekiah had ordered them and they came into the king’s presence with their clothes torn, as a symbol of mourning and distress and told the king the words of Rabshakeh. Chapter 36 of Isaiah thus, ends with a very somber and disheartening cloud hanging over the heads of all the people of the city of Jerusalem. There is no indication in chapter 36 of how king Hezekiah and his people will respond to the threat of the Assyrians or how God will respond. But, Isaiah does not leave things in doubt or distress as chapter 37 will reveal.
As recorded by Isaiah in chapter 37, the prophet describes the response of King Hezekiah to the report of the delegation that had heard the taunt of the Assyrian commander, Rabshakeh. The king tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and entered the temple, vs. 1. The King also sent Shebna and the elders, all clothed in sackcloth to Isaiah requesting the prophet pray for the remnant of God’s people, vss. 2-5. Isaiah’s responded to these servants by telling them to tell the king not to be afraid of the blasphemous words of the servants of the king of Assyria because the LORD will cause the Assyrian king to return to his own land, where he will be put to death by the sword, vss. 6-7. The Assyrian commander, following his return to his king, and witnessing the actions of the Assyrian who were then attacking Libnah and also after hearing of an impending attack upon the Assyrians by the Ethiopian king Tirhakah, sent a letter to king Hezekiah. In this letter the Assyrian commander declared that the God of Hezekiah was only deceiving the Judean king by promising to deliver them from the might of the Assyrians, who had conquered all those they had faced, vss. 8-13. King Hezekiah took the letter to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD and prayed for the protection of the LORD, vss. 14-20. The LORD responded to Hezekiah’s prayer by sending Isaiah to the king with the message that the LORD had heard the king’s prayer and would deliver His covenant people from the threat of the Assyrians, vss. 21-35. The LORD’s decisive action against the Assyrians is recorded in vs. 36 with the striking down of 185,000 Assyrians by the angel of the LORD. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria retreated to his capital city Nineveh where he was later put to death by the sword at the hands of two of his sons, vss. 37-38.

2. The Prophet is Summoned: 37:1-13

The next segment 37:1-13 of this dramatic narrative now involve the prophet Isaiah who faithfully recorded the events and orations of chapter 36 but remained behind the scenes although it is certain he would have had much to say in response to the Assyrían spokesman. In this segment, Hezekiah hears the words of the Assyrian Rabshakeh and then humbles himself by tearing his clothes and covering himself with sackcloth. He then proceeds into the temple and sends his servants to Isaiah with a message of great import. Isaiah responds to the message with words of comfort for Hezekiah and words of distress for the Assyrian king. King Sennacherib of Assyria sends a letter to Hezekiah with a final attempt at taunting the Judean king to not depend on God.

The Response of Hezekiah: 37:1-4

37:1-4 When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.
2 He sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, clothed with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz.
3 They said to him, "This is what Hezekiah says, 'This day is a day of trouble, insults, and of disgrace. It is like when children are at the point of birth, but there is no strength left to deliver them."
It may be the LORD your God will hear the words of the Assyrian commander, whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to defy the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. So lift up your prayer for the remnant that is still left here."

In 37:1-4, the response of King Hezekiah to the verbal threats of the Assyrians is recorded. His first response, 37:1, was to tear his clothes and cover himself with sackcloth as an outward demonstration of distress and mourning. He then entered the house of the Lord (the temple). Isaiah does not reveal what part of the temple was visited by Hezekiah. It is not often that the kings of Judah entered the temple. King Uzziah was likely the last king to do so and the results were disastrous as Uzziah went into the holy place to burn incense on the altar of incense. God punished Uzziah for his act of pride and disobedience by striking the king with leprosy while the kings had the incense censer in his hand. Uzziah would later die of this disease. 2 Chronicles 26:16-23. Uzziah’s son Jotham did not enter the temple. 2 Chronicles 27:2. Jotham’s grandson Hezekiah however was very much interested in the temple. In the early days of his reign he had the doors of the temple repaired and commanded the temple to be cleansed from past atrocities that had occurred there. He also reinstated the celebration of Passover including the Feast of Unleavened bread which brought great joy to the people of Jerusalem. Hezekiah also had the people remove and destroy all the pillars, Asherim, high places and altars devoted to idol worship in Judah and in the territories of Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh. Refer to 2 Chronicles 29-31 for the Biblical account of the religious reforms completed by Hezekiah.

Hezekiah’s next act, recorded in Isaiah 37:2, was to send Eliakim, Shebna and the elders of the priests to Isaiah the prophet. This was the first mention in his prophecy that Isaiah is called the prophet. Although in 8:3, he calls his wife a prophetess. Isaiah is called a prophet in 2 Kings 19:2; 20:1, 11, 14; 2 Chronicles 26:22; 32:20 and 32. In Isaiah the reference to Isaiah as the prophet occurs here in 37:2, in 38:1 and in 39:3. In the New Testament Isaiah is often referred to as the prophet, Matthew 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4; 4:17; John 1:23; 12:38; Acts 8:28, 30; and 28:25. Many other New Testament references to Isaiah just mention his name without the title of prophet.

The message from Hezekiah to Isaiah is recorded in 37:3-4. Hezekiah rightly states in 37:3 that “this is a day of trouble, insults and disgrace.” For Judah: (1) it was a day of trouble because of the threat of the Assyrians poised to conquer Jerusalem; (2) it was a day of insults (rebuke) for the failure of King Hezekiah and his court and the people of Jerusalem to listen to God’s promise that He would destroy the Assyrian threat: (Isaiah10:12-19;14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; 31:4-9); and (3) it was a day of disgrace (rejection): Hezekiah’s payment of an exorbitant amount supposedly to guarantee that Assyria would not attack Jerusalem was a sham, for Sennacherib took the money and did not offer any promise of safety for Jerusalem. See 2 Kings 18:14-17. For Assyria: (1) it was a day of trouble for their doom was earlier declared by God, Isaiah10:12-19; 14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; 31:4-9; (2) it was a day of insults (rebuke) for God would surely rebuke Sennacherib and his leaders for blasphemy, Isaiah 37:6; and (3) it was a day of disgrace (rejection) for God would reject any possible alleviation of the judgment to come on them.

It should be noted that the word translated “disgrace” in 37:3, can also be translated “rejection” It is translated as “blasphemy” in the KJV and NKJV. The word “disgrace” is the Hebrew word ne’asa can be understood as either shame (disgrace) or spurn (blasphemy). Those who interpret Hebrew into English have grammatical reasons for understanding the word within its context and one interpreter may disagree with another as to its exact English translation. For example, in the DASV in the parallel account of this plea by Hezekiah, 2 Kings 19:3 it states: “They said to him, "This is what Hezekiah says. This is a day of trouble, insults and humiliation; like when children are ready to be born, but there is no strength to bring them out.” The NKJV for 2 Kings 19:3 states: “And they said unto him, Thus says Hezekiah: This day is a day of
trouble, and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth.”

The next words of Hezekiah, 37:3, “it is like when children are at the point of birth, but there is no strength left to deliver them.” may better be applied to Jerusalem than Assyria. Hezekiah certainly had no doubt that Assyria had the strength to deliver complete destruction upon Jerusalem. It was Jerusalem who was weak and unable to defend itself from the fearsome Assyrians.

In 37:4, Hezekiah, through his delegation to Isaiah, asks the prophet to pray for the remnant of the people of God who are left and held captive in their own city. Hezekiah had prefaced this request for prayer by stating that it was likely (perhaps) that God had heard the reproachful words of Rabshakeh directed against God and that God would rebuke the Assyrians. Hezekiah describes God as “the living God.” Hezekiah certainly understood that the Holy One of Israel was a living God implying that He was the only living Divinity and the gods of the pagan nations were nothing by worthless idols. The title of God as “the living God” would be used again by Hezekiah in his prayer to God in the temple, Isaiah 37:17. It is a major theme of Scripture and one so dramatically spoken of by Peter in response to Christ’s question, "But who do you say that I am?” Matthew 16:15-16.

The Decision of the Lord: 37:5-7

37:5-7 So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

6 Then Isaiah said to them, "This is what you are to tell your master, 'This is what the LORD says, Do not be afraid of the words that you have heard, by which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.

7 Look, I will put a spirit in him, he will hear rumors, and will return to his own land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'"

In 37:5-7, Isaiah receives the delegation and responds to the plea of Hezekiah delivered by the delegation to the prophet. Isaiah states in 35:6-7 that the Lord has said that they are not to be afraid of the blasphemous words from the servants of the king of Assyria. For God will put within the Assyrian king a spirit from which he will hear rumors, and will return to Assyria where he will be put to death by the sword. When a prophet, anointed by the Lord, uses the divine authoritative “This is what the LORD says,” not only should the listeners pay immediate attention, but they should know that whatever the Lord says will happen, is an absolute certainty to happen. Isaiah uses this expression 38 times in his prophecy and three times in chapter 37.

As in earlier declarations by God, He begins his response in 37:6 by the words, do not be afraid. See Isaiah 10:24 and 35:4. Isaiah would again address the people of Judah with these comforting words from God, Isaiah 40:9; 41: 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8; 51:7; 54:4, and 14. God wants the people of Jerusalem to have no fear because of the blasphemous words from the “servants” (literally: “lads, boys or underlings”) of the king of Assyria.

The Lord declares in 37:7 that He will put a spirit in Sennacherib and the king will hear a rumor and return to his own land where he will die “by the sword”. The fulfillment of this was soon to happen as Isaiah 37:37-38 reveal. It is not stated what is meant by God putting a spirit on Sennacherib so that he heard a rumor. The rumor he heard was most likely the news of the mass death of his army, 37:36. Sennacherib, who was not with the army outside of Jerusalem, did return to Nineveh upon hearing of the destruction of his army, 37: 37, and twenty years later he was killed with a sword by two of his sons, 37:38. The timing of the death of
Sennacherib is interesting to students of Scripture. Hezekiah did not live to hear about the death of his enemy Sennacherib. It needs to be remembered that Sennacherib was really the enemy of God and He alone determined the time for Sennacherib to die. It could be that God gave Sennacherib twenty years to contemplate what really happened at Jerusalem and repent of his blasphemy against the living God. However, Sennacherib was still worshiping a false god when he was killed, and it is apparent that he did not repent.

The Letter from Sennacherib: 37:8-13

37:8-13 So the Assyrian commander returned, and found the king of Assyria attacking Libnah, for he heard that he had left Lachish.

9 He heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, "He is come out to fight against you." When he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying,

10 "This is what you will say to Hezekiah king of Judah, "Let not your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, 'Jerusalem will not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.'

11 Look, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by totally destroying them, and do you really think that you will be rescued?

12 Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my predecessors destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the children of Eden that were in Telassar?

13 Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the kings of the cities of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Iwah?"

Isaiah records in 37:8 that Rabshakeh, after receiving no response from the Judean delegation, left Jerusalem and returned to his king who was now fighting against Libnah after his likely destruction of Lachish. Sennacherib heard that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia (Cush), had led his army (from Egypt) to fight against the Assyrians, 37:9. There are some issues stated in 37:9 that need to be discussed. The term “king” as a title for Tirhakrah has been debated among scholars of Old Testament History. Tirhakrah was about twenty years of age when he led the Egyptian army against the Assyrians. He was not technically the king of Egypt but was the crown-prince and the Hebrew word for king, melek can have both meanings of king and prince. The reference to Tirhakrah as king of Ethiopia (Cush) also needs an explanation. Egypt was being ruled by an Ethiopian dynasty and Tirhakrah was the next king in line to rule Egypt. He became the sole ruler of Egypt in 690 B.C.

Why would the army of Egypt be advancing at this time to fight the Assyrians? They may have been keeping their part of an agreement they made with Hezekiah to provide protection for Jerusalem in the event of an attack by Assyria. This agreement is called a “covenant of death” in Isaiah 28:15. However, it is most likely that the Egyptians were not advancing at all and Sennacherib only heard gossip about the possibility. Egypt was no match for Assyria and there is no record of a battle between these nations in 701 B.C. Sennacherib, not wanting to begin a siege against Jerusalem at the same time as engaging an advancing army, sent a letter to Hezekiah in an attempt to hasten Hezekiah’s surrender.

Sennacherib in his letter to Hezekiah, as stated in Isaiah 37:10-13, uses similar rhetoric to that recently delivered by Rabshakeh to Hezekiah, Isaiah 36:4-20. In Sennacherib’s shorter written demand to Hezekiah, he warns Hezekiah not to depend on his God who had told Hezekiah, “Jerusalem will not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria,” 37:10. It may be that the Assyrians had heard of the proclamations of Isaiah regarding the promises of God to protect the city of Jerusalem. Sennacherib, then listed a number of nations and cities that the Assyrians had captured and asked Hezekiah of the whereabouts of the kings that ruled over these places. Sennacherib demanded to know what made Hezekiah think he would be spared from the might
of the Assyrians. The gravest comment made by Sennacherib was the insult to God, Isaiah 37:11, insinuating that just as the gods of the conquered nations were of no help so the God of Hezekiah would not protect Jerusalem. It was one thing to send a delegation to orally deliver threats to the Judean King, but now Hezekiah had a written threat from the king of Assyria. It was a letter Hezekiah could not afford to ignore.

3. The King’s Prayer: 37:14-20

37:14-20 After Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; he went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it out before the LORD.

15 Hezekiah prayed to the LORD,
16 "O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who sits enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made heaven and earth.
17 Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear! Open your eyes, O LORD, and see! Hear all the words that Sennacherib has sent to defy the living God.
18 It is true, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries and their land.
19 They have thrown their gods into the fire, for they were no gods at all but only the work of human hands, merely wood and stone. Therefore the Assyrians have destroyed them.
20 Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD."

Isaiah 37:14-20 record the prayer of Hezekiah in response to the letter he had received from king Sennacherib of Assyria. Hezekiah praises God as ruler creator of all the earth He then rehearses the urgency of the threat against Jerusalem by the Assyrians and asks God to deliver Jerusalem so that “all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD.” 37:20.

Hezekiah took the letter received from Sennacherib and went up to the house of the Lord and spread the letter out as if to imply the Lord would read it Himself, 37:14. This action by Hezekiah came after the declaration by Isaiah with the authoritative word of the Lord that Hezekiah was not to be afraid because the Lord would put events into place that would see Sennacherib return to his land where he would fall by the sword, 37:7. However, Hezekiah knowing all this, came directly to the Lord in prayer and pled for the direct intervention of God to protect the city. Hezekiah was now humbled completely. The only way out of this situation was to go to the One he should have consulted months before.

Hezekiah’s prayer, although not a model of a repentant petition as was Daniel’s prayer recorded in Daniel chapter 9, was nonetheless noteworthy for, (1) its praise to God for His position as God alone of all the kingdoms of the earth and His creative act of the maker of heaven and earth, 37:16; (2) its recognition of the blasphemy of Sennacherib and his reproach of the living God; and (3) its plea to God for deliverance so that all kingdoms of the earth may know that God alone is God. (the one true God of all the earth).


Some may have been critical of Hezekiah for his direct petition of God for protection when the King already had God’s authoritative word that He would not allow Sennacherib to approach Jerusalem but would soon sent the king of Assyria back to his own land where he would face death by the sword, 37:7. However, this was not God’s attitude.
Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'Because you have prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria,

God, as recorded in 37:21, began His response to Hezekiah’s petition by stating, “because you prayed.” God thus acknowledges the value of the King’s prayer. God often works in response to the prayers of his people. He often drives people to pray so He can respond to the praise of His great glory and act on behalf of the sake of the renown of His name.

Isaiah, as recorded in 37:22-35 declares God’s lengthy response to the prayer of Hezekiah. It should be noted that in 2 Chronicles 32:20 it is stated that “Because of this, King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz prayed and cried out to heaven.” However, in Isaiah chapter 37, it is stated that it was God’s response of Hezekiah’s prayer that is given attention. It may be that Isaiah was humble enough not to mention his own prayers of petition to God. The response of God to the prayer of Hezekiah is a master’s lesson in the methods of the Lord in dealing with those who threaten His beloved City, and His chosen people. The inclusion of a sign, 37:30-32 is an unsought blessing from God that has immediate and future kingdom consequences. God completes this response with forceful and dramatic action, 37:36-38 He accomplishes what He said He would do. The whole earth must acknowledge that He alone is God.

The Sentence of God: 37:22-29

37:22 this is the word which the LORD has spoken about him:
"The virgin daughter of Zion despises you and laughs at you.
The daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head as you flee.

God began His message which was addressed to king Sennacherib with a taunt about how the surrounded city will despise and mock the prideful Assyrian monarch. Thomas Constable comments:

“Assyria had mocked a “person” who was especially dear to the Lord, namely, His “virgin daughter,” Jerusalem (cf. 1:8; 47:1). No foreign foe had penetrated Jerusalem, Thus Assyria had incurred His anger.”
(Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 169).

37:23 Whom have you defied and insulted?
Against whom have you lifted your voice
and arrogantly lifted up your eyes?
Against the Holy One of Israel.

The Lord asks from Sennacherib, against whom had he reproached and blasphemed and against whom had he raised his eyes and haughtily (see Isaiah 10:12) lifted his voice? The answer comes immediately “Against the Holy One of Israel?” Isaiah had earlier recorded that He saw the Lord, lofty and exalted (high and lifted up in the KJV and NKJV). It was the Lord’s sole right to be praised as the high and holy One. See Motyer, Isaiah, page 228. Who did Sennacherib think he was demeaning and blaspheming by his statements that Isaiah had earlier recorded? Isaiah 36:4-20; 37:10-13.

37:24-25 By your servants have you defied the Lord, and have said,
"With my many chariots I have climbed to the mountains tops,
to the remote parts of Lebanon.
I cut down its tall cedars,
and its choice cypresses.
I have penetrated its remotest heights,  
it its thickest forests.

25 I dug and drank water,  
and with the sole of my feet  
I dried up all the rivers of Egypt.

The Lord continues His address to Sennacherib by announcing that the Lord knew everything that the Assyrian king did and said. God repeated Sennacherib’s words of boasting about conquering the heights of Lebanon, digging wells and drinking waters and most outrageously his claim that he dried up the rivers of Egypt with his feet. David L. Cooper comments:

“A Glance at verses 24 and 25 shows that the purpose of the king of Assyria when he left his native land was to invade the innermost parts of Lebanon, that is, Syria and Palestine. The Lebanon Mountains were famous for their cedar and fir trees, together with their fruitful trees. Since the same mountain range continues through both countries, they were designated as Lebanon. Moreover, according to verse 25, Sennacherib purposed to go down into Egypt and to conquer it. This is seen in the words, "I have digged and drunk water, and with the sole of my feet will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt." It was his plan, which he considered as good as accomplished, to overrun the entire country of Egypt and to destroy its military power.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly - December 1945).

37:26-29 Have you not heard how I have determined it long ago?  
I planned it from ancient times.  
Now I have brought it to pass,  
that you should crush fortified cities into piles of ruins.

27 Therefore their inhabitants were powerless,  
they were dismayed and put to shame.  
They were like the grass of the field,  
and like green plants,  
like the grass on the rooftops,  
scorched before it is grown up.

28 But I know your sitting down,  
and your going out,  
and your coming in,  
and your raging against me.

29 Because of your raging against me  
and your arrogance has reached my ears,  
therefore I will put my hook in your nose,  
and my bit in your mouth,  
and I will turn you back by the way that you came.

God reveals that even the actions of Sennacherib were planned by God Himself. The word “planned” is a potter’s verb meaning to mold or shape. See Motyer, Isaiah, page 229. God had from ancient times, prepared Sennacherib to be His instrument of divine retribution on the nations, cities, and agricultural lands that the Assyrian forces had destroyed. The places the Assyrians had so boastfully destroyed was accomplished without any acknowledgement of God’s direct participation and prior determination. In Isaiah 37:28, God revealed that He knew everything about Sennacherib even his sitting down, coming out and in and most importantly, Sennacherib’s rage against Him.
God, as recorded in Isaiah 7:29, completes his direct message to Sennacherib with a description of what He will do to the arrogant and raging king. Isaiah states that God has said that because of the raging words of Sennacherib and because his arrogance has filled God’s ears, God will put His hook into the nose of Sennacherib and His bit in the Assyrian king’s mouth and God will return this pagan king back by the way he came. God uses the language of the hunter of wild beasts who uses a cruel hook sunk into the nose to lead the captive animal at His will.

**The Sign of God: 37:30-32**

37:30-32 *This will be a sign for you, Hezekiah:

*This year you will eat whatever grows by itself,*  
*and in the second year whatever springs up from that.*

*In the third year you will sow,*  
*reap, plant vineyards,*  
*and eat its fruit.*

31 *The remnant that escaped from the house of Judah*  
*will again take root below and bear fruit above.*

32 *For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant,*  
*and out of Mount Zion a group of survivors.*

*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

God, following His message to Sennacherib, gives a proclamation of hope to king Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. God introduces a sign to authenticate His word and to show that God will accomplish what He has proclaimed to His people. The *first* great sign in the prophecy of Isaiah is the sign given to the wicked king Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah. This first great sign, Isaiah 7:10-16 had an immediate fulfillment in the protection of Jerusalem from its enemies and a future messianic fulfillment concerning the virgin birth of the Messiah. The *second* great sign, Isaiah 19:19-24, is set entirely in the far future during the coming messianic kingdom. The *third* great sign, Isaiah 20:1-6 has its setting during the days of Isaiah’s ministry and refers to the punishment of Cush and Egypt. The *fourth* great sign, Isaiah 37:30-32 has an immediate fulfillment in the return of the agricultural bounty to the people of Jerusalem and a future fulfillment in the messianic kingdom when the remnant of the Lord will rise up. The Lord will preserve those He has chosen and will not allow the lineage of David to falter. The words, ‘*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this,*’ relates this sign to the prophecy of the coming King in Isaiah 9:6-7 and to the Lord’s provision of salvation in Isaiah 59:17. See Thomas Constable, *Isaiah,* page 156.

Chronologically, the *fifth* great sign, appears before the sign of Isaiah 37:30-32. In Isaiah 38:7-8, and also in 2 Kings 20:8-11. This fifth great sign is the supernatural work of the Lord in causing the shadow of the stairway of Ahaz to go back ten steps. This sign had an immediate fulfillment to show to Hezekiah that he would be healed of his sickness. The *sixth* great sign, Isaiah 55:12-13, will have its fulfillment in the future messianic reign as will the *seventh* great sign, Isaiah 66:18-24. This short survey of the signs of God in Isaiah would not be complete without the marvelous comment from Isaiah in Isaiah 8:18, “*Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me! We are signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion.*” NKJV. God, as stated above in this survey, uses people, circumstances, future events and the movement of the sun to demonstrate His faithfulness to His word regarding His promises to His people.
The Solution of God: Isaiah 37:33-35

37:33-35 "Therefore this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria:
He will not come to this city,
or shoot an arrow here.
He will not come before it with shield,
or cast up a siege ramp against it.
34 By the same way that he came, he will leave,
and he will not come into this city,"
says the LORD.
35 "For I will defend this city to save it,
for my own sake,
and for the sake of my servant David."

As a follow-up to God’s word about the sign He will provide to fulfill the promises He has made to His people, God emphatically states His solution to the threat posed by Sennacherib and his army against the city of Jerusalem. God states concerning the king of Assyria, that he will not come to wage warfare against Jerusalem and he will leave the same way that he came. See also Isaiah 37:29. Sennacherib was not in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem, Isaiah 37:8. He would not come to the city nor take any military action against the city. The Lord then explains, 37:35, why this will happen, “For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake, and for the sake of my servant David.” The Lord had made a covenant with His people involving the everlasting endurance of David’s house (throne) and kingdom. 2 Samuel 7:8-17.

The work of God for the sake of His name is one of the most revealing aspects of God’s motivation to perform His plans and purposes for the earth and particularly for His people. God states in 37:35 that He will defend and save the city of Jerusalem for His own sake and for the sake of His servant David. A similar statement is seen in 2 Kings 19:34 and 20:6. Isaiah again records the statement of God regarding the reason for His actions in 48:11

For my own sake,
for my own sake, I will do it.
For how can I allow my name to be profaned?
My glory I will not give to another.


Thomas Constable comments on verses 33-35:

“The Lord promised Hezekiah, in closing, that Sennacherib would not even besiege Jerusalem, let alone attack it, either from close range or from farther away. He would, instead, return to his own land the same way he came. On his prism, discovered by archaeologists, Sennacherib claimed to have shut Hezekiah up like a bird in a cage, but it was really Yahweh who protected Hezekiah. 415. Yahweh would defend Jerusalem and preserve it, not so much for the sake of Hezekiah and as a reward for his faith, but for the Lord's own reputation and for

5. The Assyrian Army Destroyed: 37:36-38

37:36-38 Then the angel of LORD went out, and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. When they got up early in the morning, there were all dead bodies.

37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria left, and went and returned home, and lived in Nineveh.

38 As he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, killed him with the sword. They escaped into the land of Ararat. Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

In the short section 37:36-38, Isaiah records the destruction of the Assyrian army and the death of the king of Assyria. See also 2 Kings 19:35-37 and 2 Chronicles 32:20-21. The slaying of the Assyrian army by the angel of the Lord happened in 701 B.C. and the death of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria happened twenty years later. Isaiah had predicted the judgment of the Lord on Assyria many times as recorded in 10:12-19; 14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; and 31:4-9. The means of the death of 185,000 in the Assyrian camp came supernaturally by the angel of the Lord.


The death of king Sennacherib is described in Isaiah 37:36-37. Following the destruction of his army, the king left Judah and returned to Nineveh. Sennacherib did not bring any military action against Judah after this event. Twenty years after returning to his capital city, he was killed by two of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer. These sons put Sennacherib to death with a sword while he was worshiping his god, Nisroch. These sons escaped into the land of Ararat after killing their father. The death of the Assyrian army and of Sennacherib fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 10:12-19; 14:24-27; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; and 31:4-9.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah chapters 36-37
God Protects His City and His Name:

The People of God Threatened: 36:1-22
…….The Promise of God Revealed: 37:1-13
……….The Prayer of a Humble King: 37:14-20
……….The Promise of God Revealed: 37:21-35
The People of God Saved: 37:36-38
B: The Illness and Healing of Hezekiah: Chapter 38

Chapters 38 and 39 chronologically come before chapters 36 and 37. Refer to the notes on the introduction to chapters 36-39 for an explanation of the possible reasons why Isaiah may have put chapters 38 and 39 at the end of this great section of his prophetic writings. These two chapters close out Isaiah’s account of Hezekiah’s life and deal with two major events, (1) the illness and healing of the king, chapter 38 and (2) the foolishness of Hezekiah when entertaining the Babylonian ambassadors, chapter 39.

Chapter 38 of Isaiah should be read in conjunction with 2 Kings 20: 1-11 and 2 Chronicles 32:24-26. 2 Kings: 1-11 is a chronological record of these events and should be followed for a step by step account while the events as written by Isaiah are thematic. The account in 2 Chronicles 32:24-26 is a brief overview of these days. Some may question the accuracy of Isaiah’s version of these events in comparison to the account recorded in 2 Kings. It should be understood that these two written accounts are not contradictory but complimentary to each other. How the Isaiah account fits with that of 2 Kings will be stated in the notes for the relevant verses for Isaiah chapter 38.

As recorded in Isaiah chapter 38, the prophet states that in those days, prior to the Assyrian direct threat against Jerusalem, Hezekiah became sick and Isaiah told the king that he was to prepare himself for death, vs. 1. Upon hearing this, Hezekiah prayed for The LORD to remember the king’s faithfulness to Him, vss. 2-3. The LORD responded to this prayer by telling Isaiah to declare to Hezekiah that the LORD had heard the king’s prayer and would add fifteen years to his lifespan and that the LORD would deliver the king and the city of Jerusalem from the hand of the king of Assyria, vss. 4-6. Isaiah calls to have an ointment of figs applied to the boil affecting Hezekiah which would bring about the healing of the king, vs. 21. Hezekiah in vs. 22, asks for a sign from the LORD to confirm the LORD’s promise to him. The LORD gave a sign to Hezekiah as an indication He would do what He had promised. The sign was that sun’s shadow on the steps next to the sundial of Ahaz would go backward ten steps, vss. 7-8. In Vss. 9-20, Isaiah records the thoughts of Hezekiah regarding the promise of the LORD to extend his life. Hezekiah laments that he so soon must face death but acknowledges the LORD’s faithfulness to him. Note insertion of vss. 21-22 before vs. 7.

Outline of Chapter 38
The King’s Illness: 38:1
The King’s Prayer: 38:2-3
The Lord’s Promise: 38:4-6, 21
The Lord’s Sign: 38:7-8, 22
The King’s Response: 38:9-20

The King’s Illness: 38:1

38:1 In those days Hezekiah became sick almost to death. Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "This is what the LORD says, 'Set your house in order; for you will die, and will not live.'"

Prior to the threat by the Assyrians to destroy Jerusalem, chapters 36-37, Hezekiah became mortally ill. The timing of these days was likely 702 B.C. See J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, TOTC, page 233, note 2. Isaiah visited Hezekiah, 38:1 and told him: “This is what the LORD says, set your house in order; for you will die, and not live.” The statement of the authoritative “this is what the LORD says,” would have been a devastating blow to Hezekiah. He knew it was a certainty and not just the opinion of the prophet. It is the sole prerogative of God to intervene with a life-threatening event just prior to a promised significant happening in the lives of
those who serve Him. The command of God to Abraham to sacrifice the promised son, Genesis 22 is one example. Another is the attempt on the life of Moses by the Lord while Moses was on his way back to Egypt, Exodus 4:21-26 and another is the shipwreck of Paul while on his way to Rome following God’s promise that Paul would witness at Rome, Acts 23:11 and 27:13-44.

God had promised that He would not allow the Assyrians to destroy Jerusalem: Isaiah: 31:4-9. Hezekiah was the ruling Davidic king and who was in the prime of his life and yet without an heir. Was God going to cut his life off so that he would not witness the miraculous work of God in the protection of Jerusalem and was their now to be no heir to continue the royal line of David on the throne of Judah? The authoritative “thus says the Lord” had been spoken. What hope did Hezekiah have of any future?

God desires complete trust, faithfulness and obedience from His servants. From the context of Isaiah chapter 38, it appears that God was giving Hezekiah an unspoken ultimatum. Hezekiah who had started his reign with faithful actions, 2 Kings 14:1-6, later failed to trust God when Jerusalem was threatened by the Assyrians. Hezekiah sent a delegation to Egypt, Isaiah 28:14-15; 30:1-17 seeking their help instead of going directly to the Lord in prayer. The Lord had given Hezekiah the proper course of action, “In returning (repentance) and rest you will be delivered (saved), quietness and trust will be your strength, but you rejected it.” Isaiah 30:15. Isaiah had repeatedly warned the leadership of Jerusalem (Isaiah chapters 13-33) not to trust in other nations for protection against the Assyrians but Hezekiah did not listen. Now was Hezekiah’s time to listen!

The command of the Lord recorded in 38:1 for Hezekiah to “set your house in order” could be understood in many ways but the two most likely were (1) get your official business and political affairs and records ready for your removal and replacement and (2) prepare whatever may be necessary for a succession plan. This latter need would be most grievous to Hezekiah as he had no heir to succeed him. What was he to do?

The King’s Prayer: 38:2-3

38:2-3 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD.
3 “Remember now, O LORD, I beg you, how I have walked before you faithfully and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Hezekiah faced with death finally took the Lord’s advice, Isaiah 30:15and prayed to the Lord with tears of bitterness. His prayer was short but to the point. He pleaded with the Lord to remember his faithful and wholehearted walk with God and obedience to Him by doing good. Isaiah who had delivered the grim news to Hezekiah had walked away before Hezekiah prayed.

The Lord’s Promise: 38:4-6, 21-22

38:4-6 and 21-22:
4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, 5 “Go, and say to Hezekiah, This is what the LORD, the God of David your father says, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Look, I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.’ 21 Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take an ointment of figs, and apply it to the boil, and he will recover." 22 Hezekiah also had asked, "What sign will confirm that I will go up to the house of the LORD?"
Before Isaiah had walked out of the middle court of the King’s house, 2 Kings 20:4-5, the Lord instructed the prophet to return to the bedside of Hezekiah with a new message recorded in 38:5-6. The Lord’s unspoken ultimatum had been met by Hezekiah. The prayer of Hezekiah may seem to be all too brief and without any obvious words of repentance. He may have had passages from the Law such as Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:33; 7:12-15; and 30:16 in mind when he reminded the Lord of his truthful walk and his good works. See Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 172. The parallel account in 2 Kings 20:3-6 adds more details to the response of God when He instructed Isaiah:

3 "Remember, O LORD, I entreat you, how I have walked before you in truth with a perfect heart, and have done what was good in your sight." Then Hezekiah wept bitterly.

4 Before Isaiah had left the middle courtyard, the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

5 "Go back, and tell Hezekiah the leader of my people, 'This is what the LORD says, the God of David your father, "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. I will heal you. In three days you will go up to the temple of the LORD."

6 I will add fifteen years to your life and will rescue you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake.'" (2 Kings 20:3-6).

God promises Hezekiah, whom He calls “the leader of My people” that the King would go up to the house of the Lord in three days thus indicating he would be healed in as little as three days. Also, God stated that He would add fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah. Historical records indicate that Hezekiah died in (about) 687 B.C. which suggests that the date of Isaiah chapter 38 was (about) 702 B.C. See also Geoffrey W. Grogan, Isaiah, page 238, note 5.

The Lord answered more than Hezekiah’s plea to live. God added that He would deliver the King and Jerusalem from the hand of the king of Assyria. 2 Kings 20:6; Isaiah 38:6. In the account stated in 2 Kings 20:6, God gives the reason for the protection of Jerusalem. He stated, “I will defend this city for My own sake and for my servant David’s sake.” It was not for any good works performed by Hezekiah nor was it for the king’s faith in God that motivated God to protect the city. God in His own righteous prerogative and purpose acted on behalf of His own sake (Psalm 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11; Isaiah 48:9, 11; Jeremiah 14:21; Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22, 44; Daniel 9:19) and for the sake of David his servant. God is a covenant keeping Sovereign who remembers His promises. He will keep his promise to David (2 Samuel 7:8-17). God still keeps this promise. David’s greater son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will return to earth to reign on David’s throne for a thousand years and then He will reign with His Father in heaven forever.

It is most certain that Isaiah 38:21-22 starting with “now Isaiah had said” should be inserted in between 38:6-7. Isaiah in vs. 21, gives instruction for the healing of Hezekiah. Also, 2 Kings 20:7 states, "Bring here a fig poultice." So they took and spread it on the boil, and he recovered. Both Isaiah 38:21 and 2 Kings 20:7 do not reveal the nature of the boil or why applying the cake of figs would heal the king from his sickness. The figs may or may not have had any natural healing qualities. Perhaps the application of obedience on the part of Isaiah and the attendants to the King in following God’s instructions was intended. See also the healing of the blind man by Jesus with an application of clay made by the spittle of Jesus. John 9:1-12.

The Lord’s Sign: 38:7-8

38:7-8 "This will be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he has spoken:

8 I will cause the shadow on the steps, which is gone down on the dial of Ahaz from the sun, to go backwards ten steps." So the sun went back ten steps on the dial on which it had gone down.
Isaiah had declared the word of God to Hezekiah, that the king would go up to the house of the Lord on the third day. 2 Kings 20:5. Hezekiah requested a sign from God to confirm his healing. 2 Kings 20:8. Isaiah answered by giving Hezekiah a choice of the nature of the sign. "This will be your sign from the LORD, that the LORD will in fact do the thing that he has promised. Do you want the shadow to go forward ten steps, or to go backward ten steps?" 2 Kings 20:9. Hezekiah replied to Isaiah’s question, in 2 Kings 20:10, "It is simple for the shadow to lengthen ten steps (its natural progression during the day). Rather, let the shadow move backward ten steps." The place for the movement of the shadow was stated in 2 Kings 20:11. The sign to confirm the healing of Hezekiah was that the shadow of the sun would reverse itself (go back up) by the measurement of ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz. 2 Kings 20:11. It is not a coincidence that Ahaz’s name is mentioned in connection with this sign. Ahaz, Hezekiah’s father had been offered a sign by the Lord, also through Isaiah, to confirm the protection of Judah from its enemies. The sign offered was vast in its extent, either in the depths of Sheol or in the heights of heaven. Ahaz, however, in his pompous piety refused to ask for a sign and the Lord Himself gave the wondrous sign of the virgin birth of the coming Messiah. Isaiah 7:10-16.

In the Isaiah 38:7-8 account of this incident, Isaiah briefly states the outcome of his conversation with Hezekiah regarding the events of his fatal illness and healing. It has the form of a psalm or a song written after a dramatic and climatic event such as the first Song of Moses, Exodus 15:1-18 and Miriam’s response, Exodus 15:21, following the escape from Egypt. But it cannot be favorably compared to this song by Moses. Hezekiah’s psalm or song describes his feelings about his mortal illness and his plea to God to allow him to be healed and live and his thankfulness to God for healing him. It is similar to a lament psalm full of emotion and self-centeredness. Hezekiah writes mostly about himself and how he felt about his sickness. Hezekiah spends far too little time in thanking God for his healing and too much time rehearsing his bitterness about being ill. 2 Chronicles 32:25 aptly sums up Hezekiah’s heart after receiving the sign from the Lord. "But Hezekiah was not grateful for the benefit done to him, for his heart became arrogant. Therefore, wrath came on him, Judah and Jerusalem.” This could also refer to Hezekiah’s pride in showing all the wealth of the temple and the court to the ambassadors from Babylon.

38:9 The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, but had recovered from his sickness.

Isaiah records the writings of king Hezekiah regarding the events of his fatal illness and healing. It has the form of a psalm or a song written after a dramatic and climatic event such as the first Song of Moses, Exodus 15:1-18 and Miriam’s response, Exodus 15:21, following the escape from Egypt. But it cannot be favorably compared to this song by Moses. Hezekiah’s psalm or song describes his feelings about his mortal illness and his plea to God to allow him to be healed and live and his thankfulness to God for healing him. It is similar to a lament psalm full of emotion and self-centeredness. Hezekiah writes mostly about himself and how he felt about his sickness. Hezekiah spends far too little time in thanking God for his healing and too much time rehearsing his bitterness about being ill. 2 Chronicles 32:25 aptly sums up Hezekiah’s heart after receiving the sign from the Lord. “But Hezekiah was not grateful for the benefit done to him, for his heart became arrogant. Therefore, wrath came on him, Judah and Jerusalem.” This could also refer to Hezekiah’s pride in showing all the wealth of the temple and the court to the ambassadors from Babylon.

38:10-14 I said, "In the prime of my days I must enter the gates of Sheol, I am deprived of the rest of my years."

11 I said, "I will no longer see the LORD in the land of the living. I will no longer see human beings among the inhabitants of the world."
Hezekiah discusses his feelings about being mortally ill. In 38:15 he bemoans that he is about to enter Sheol when he was in the middle of his years. In 38:16 he decries that he will no longer see the Lord in the land of the living nor will he see those who are living in his midst. In 38:12, Hezekiah complains that his living is like a shepherd’s tent that has been pulled up and removed (literally taken captive). Also in 38:12 Hezekiah laments that his life was like a weaver who has been cut off from the loom and he bitterly added, “day and night you make an end of me.” In 38:13 Hezekiah continues his rant about God’s intrusion into his life. God is said to be like that of a lion who breaks all of Hezekiah’s bones. The king then repeats his refrain, “day and night you make an end of me.” In 38:14, Hezekiah likens his condition to the twittering of a swallow or a crane and the moaning of a dove. Finally, after looking up to God (to the heights), the king states, “O Lord, I am oppressed, help me!” The tone of Hezekiah’s lament, with his plea to the Lord to be his security, now becomes more positive and in the following verses he begins to acknowledge that the Lord’s working in his life has had a positive and restorative purpose.

38:15-16 What can I say?

For he has spoken to me,
and he himself has done it.
I will walk slowly all my years
because of the bitterness of my soul.

O Lord, by these things people live;
the life of my spirit is wholly bound up in these.

Restore me,
and let me live.

Hezekiah asks, how should he spend the rest of his years, now that the Lord has healed him? The NKJV translates Isaiah 38:15, “What shall I say? He has both spoken to me, And He Himself has done it. I shall walk carefully (humbly) all my years in the (because of) bitterness of my soul.” The NKJV translation leads more smoothly into the next sentence as recorded in 38:16 (NKJV), “O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit; so you will restore me and make me live.”

38:17 Look, this great bitterness was for my welfare,
but in love you have rescued my soul
from the pit of corruption;
you have thrown all my sins behind you.
Hezekiah, as recorded in Isaiah 38:17, is very honest with the Lord. He recognizes the work of the Lord in bringing this great bitterness to him for it was a benefit to him. The Lord was working for his welfare in rescuing his sole. Hezekiah implies that this corrective action of the Lord in bringing his near fatal sickness resulted in the rescue of his soul from the “pit of corruption.” It is true that power corrupts and Hezekiah was agreeing with the Lord that he had become corrupt in his relationship with others and the Lord. The words, “you have thrown all my sins behind you,” lead to the climax in 38:18-20. Hezekiah recognizes rightly that God has not only healed him and added years to his life, but God also has forgiven him of his sins.

38:18-19 For Sheol cannot thank you,  
death cannot praise you.  
Those who go down into the pit  
cannot hope for your faithfulness.  

19 The living, yes, the living,  
they are the ones who praise you,  
even as I do this day.  
The father of children will make known your faithfulness.

Therefore, as stated in Isaiah 38:18, the king has been spared the dread of Sheol (contrast the lament of Hezekiah, 38:10), also called the pit where no one can thank or praise God or hope to see the Lord’s faithfulness. Hezekiah continues this line of reasoning in 38:19 by stating, “the living are the ones who praise you, even as I do this day.” As a living and ruling king in the line of David, Hezekiah acknowledges a higher and greater sovereign and gives Him thanks for preserving his life. Hezekiah now looks forward to having sons to whom the king will tell them about the faithfulness of the Lord.

38:20 The LORD is ready to save me.  
Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments  
all the days of our life in the house of the LORD.

Hezekiah likens his song to a joyful psalm where songs will be played on stringed instruments every day in the house of the Lord, because God will save (had preserved) his life. There is no record of whether or not Hezekiah kept this promise. In light of the words of 2 Chronicles 32:25 and his display of pride, recorded in Isaiah chapter 39, he may have forgotten this specific promise to God.

For comment on verse 21-22 see notes on verses 4-6 above.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 38:
The King’s Plight (sickness): 38:1  
The King’s Prayer (supplication): 38:2-3  
The Lord’s Promise (survival): 38:4-6, 21  
The Lord’s Prophecy (sign): 38:7-8, 22  
The King’s Psalm (song): 38:9-20

C: The Foolishness of Hezekiah: Chapter 39

Introduction  
Hezekiah (is) Flattered 39:1  
Hezekiah’s Folly 39:2  
Hezekiah’s Future 39:3-8
Introduction: Isaiah Chapter 39

Chapter 39 describe an event that happened before the dramatic days of the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians recorded in chapters 36 and 37 and soon after the sickness of Hezekiah recorded in chapter 38. God had just healed Hezekiah from a sickness that would have led to his death and He now was to test the king to as to his faithfulness and whether Hezekiah would really depend wholly on the Lord. The words of 2 Chronicles 32:31 provide an understanding of God’s perspective, “However when the envoys of the officials of Babylon sent to him to inquire of the incredible wonder that had been done in the land, God left him to test him in order to know all that was in his heart.” After all that had recently happened to Hezekiah, Isaiah chapter 38, and following all that the prophet Isaiah had declared about trusting God rather than powerful nations for protection, Isaiah chapters 13-35, had Hezekiah learned to completely trust in God? The visit by the ambassadors to Hezekiah would soon answer this vital question. See also 2 Kings 20:12-19.

As recorded in Isaiah chapter 39, the prophet states that, “at that time,” the days of Hezekiah’s illness and healing, Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon sent representatives with a letter and a gift to Hezekiah, vs. 1. Hezekiah welcomed the envoys from Babylon and showed them everything in his palace and his kingdom revealing the wealth of the kingdom, vs. 2. Isaiah, soon after, asked Hezekiah about the country of origin of these envoys and what they had said to Hezekiah, vs. 3. Following Hezekiah’s response, Isaiah then asked, what these men had seen in the king’s palace, to which question Hezekiah revealed that there was nothing among the king’s treasuries that he had not shown to these men, vs. 4. Isaiah, then declared the word of the LORD to Hezekiah that in days to come, everything in the king’s house and storerooms would be carried off to Babylon including some of the king’s sons that were to be born to him and these sons would be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon, vss. 5-7. Hezekiah responded that the word from the LORD was good for he thought, “there will be peace and security in my days,” vs. 8.

Hezekiah (is) Flattered: 39:1

39:1 At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.

Isaiah 39:1 begins with, “as that time” which places the events of chapter 39 just after chapter 38 and before chapters 36-37. See introduction to Chapters 36-39 for an explanation of the chronological order of these chapters. Hezekiah had recently been healed of a mortal illness, see Isaiah chapter 38, and had humbled his great pride and had petitioned God for healing. Many others in the surrounding kingdoms had heard of the healing of Hezekiah and one of those was a powerful pagan monarch. The king of Babylon sent envoys to Hezekiah with letters and a gift. Thomas Constable comments:

“The phrase "At that time" (cf. 38:1) anticipates a specially significant event and ties it to what preceded in chapter 38. As this verse explains, the events that follow happened after Hezekiah had recovered from his illness (38:5). This was most likely during the year 701 B.C. before Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem (chs. 36—37; cf. 38:6; 2 Kings 18:16).

"Merodach-baladan" (Cuneiform "Marduk-apal-iddina," lit. "the god Marduk has given a son") raised Babylon to a position from which it threatened and eventually overthrew Assyrian dominance in the ancient Near East (cf. 21:1-10). He was the first king of Babylon, and he led that nation during two periods: 721-710 B.C. and 703-702 B.C.

The historians vary in their dating of the ancient Near Eastern kings' reigns by a few years, but I believe the dates above are fairly accurate. In 710 B.C. Sargon, another Babylonian leader, ousted him, but in 702 B.C. the Assyrians defeated Merodach-baladan. After this defeat, he continued to foment revolt against Assyria in the
Fertile Crescent. This seems to have been his motivation for cultivating Hezekiah's friendship by sending letters and a present when he heard of Hezekiah's recovery.” 429 [Note 429: See Leon J. Wood, A Survey of Israel’s History, p. 363.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 176-177).

The contents of the letters sent to Hezekiah are not known but they may have contained an intriguing temptation for Hezekiah to consider. These were fateful days for both the king of Babylon and the king of Judah. Assyria was advancing in conquest and both nations were threatened. One nation was expanding and growing in power and influence and the other was diminishing and becoming weaker. The letters may have contained an invitation to Hezekiah to join Merodach-Baladan in resisting the advance of the Assyrians. Hezekiah would have been greatly flattered to be asked for assistance from Babylon. See J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, TOTC, page 240. Along with the letters, the Babylonian ambassadors had sent a gift. It is not known what the gift was but along with the letters the gift may have been immediately tempted to join Babylon in their resistance against Assyria and more importantly, the alliance with Babylon would provide protection for Judah if the Assyrians attacked this tiny nation. Perhaps this was the test that is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 32:31. How would Hezekiah respond to this test?

Hezekiah’s Folly 39:2

39:2 Hezekiah welcomed the envoys, and showed them the treasury, including the silver, gold, spices, and the precious oil, along with the whole armory, and everything found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his palace, or in his entire kingdom, that Hezekiah did not show them.

Hezekiah’s response to this test is recorded in 39:2. Why would Hezekiah show the Babylonian ambassadors all of the treasures and armaments of his kingdom? Was it not to impress them that he, king of Judah, had great resources and he would be a worthy ally to support them in their resistance against the Assyrian armies. Hezekiah’s great pride had surfaced and his humility, which was evident just a short time before this, chapter 38, was pushed to the background. 2 Chronicles 32:25 states this well, “But Hezekiah was not grateful for the benefit done to him, for his heart became arrogant.” The king should also have remembered Isaiah’s warning about putting any hope in Babylon. Isaiah 13:1-22; 14:1-23 and 21:1-10.

Hezekiah’s Future 39:3-8

39:3 Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and asked him, "What did these men say? Where did they come from?" Hezekiah replied, "They came from a far country to me, from Babylon."

The news of the visit of the ambassadors from Babylon may not have been known by many in the kingdom of Judah but God also was aware and most certainly urged Isaiah to visit the king. It was not often that Isaiah personally visited Hezekiah. His first recorded visit to Hezekiah was when the king was ill and now, just a short time later the prophet directly confronts Hezekiah. Previously Isaiah had sent a message to the king, 2 Kings 19:20; Isaiah 37:6, 21. In 39:3, Isaiah asked Hezekiah, “What did these men say? Where did they come from?” Isaiah evidently either did not know the home country of these visitors or he was testing Hezekiah to see if the king would tell the truth. The answer to this question is important because if Isaiah really did not know, then God must have given the prophet an immediate revelation in response to the king’s account of what he had shown to the Babylonians. If Isaiah had come prepared with a message from the Lord, then he was testing the king to discern his truthfulness. This latter suggestion may be implied from 2 Chronicles 32:21. However, the king did reply truthfully to Isaiah, 39:3, “They came from a far country to me, from Babylon.”
Then Isaiah asked, "What have they seen in your palace?" Hezekiah answered, "They have seen everything that is in my palace. There is nothing among my treasuries that I have not showed them."

The king had no official reason to reveal his actions to Isaiah. The prophet did not hold any political position of authority in the kingdom or in the kings’ court. Perhaps the reason Hezekiah did respond to Isaiah was that the king recognized that Isaiah was a true prophet and the only spokesman for God who was a much greater king than any earthly ruler. Hezekiah would also have had the recent events of his healing and Isaiah’s role in this incident in mind when he replied to the prophet. However, Isaiah’s earlier declarations would have been an irritant to Hezekiah and the king may have had a great personal dislike for Isaiah as did many of the kings of Israel and Judah towards the prophets of God.

Isaiah delivers a stunning prophecy and rebuke to Hezekiah. Isaiah declared: “Hear the word of the Lord of hosts, Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

The prophecy is a remarkable declaration of God’s knowledge of future events. Many, who deny God’s miraculous powers and foreknowledge, place the writing of these words far in the future, thus robbing them of any prophetic importance. However, there is nothing in the text that would obviously lead to such a conclusion. Isaiah had delivered many prophetic messages about Assyria’s failure to conquer Jerusalem and other messages about the birth and ministry of the Messiah. To deny the foreknowledge of God would be to completely discredit the inspired Word of God and hold in disdain any prophetic writings of the Scripture. The student of Scripture must allow the words of God to stand for itself and let Scripture interpret Scripture. These questions must be asked, (1) under what authority, do those who are critics of God’s word, and deny his supernatural powers, claim to make such allegations? (2) Who is the judge of God? (3) Shall God be put to the test? Isaiah answers these questions so dramatically in chapter 40:12-31. God also gives His great response recorded in Job chapters 38-41 and 42:7-9.

The prophetic declaration by Isaiah to Hezekiah, 39:5-7, has three major statements, The first was the coming destruction of the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. This occurred in 586 B.C when Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army conquered Jerusalem and removed from it, its wealth and many prominent inhabitants including a young man with the Hebrew name of Daniel. Daniel 1:1-7. See also: 2 Kings 24:10-16; 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 and Jeremiah 39:1-10. The prophecy of Isaiah declared to Hezekiah was most likely in 702 B.C. and its fulfillment came in 586 B.C which was 116 years later. This was only a short time in comparison to Isaiah’s earlier prophecy regarding the virgin birth of Jesus Christ which as declared by Isaiah in 735 B.C. The second major statement was the announcement that Hezekiah, would have male descendants. At this point, Hezekiah, who knew he only had fifteen years to live, Isaiah 38:5, must have worried about the possibility of having an heir to assume the role of king on David’s throne. Isaiah provides divine assurance that he indeed will have male descendants who will be kings over the nation of Judah. The third major statement is that Hezekiah’s descendants who would be among those taken to Babylon and would become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon. Daniel 1:1-10; 1:18-21; and 2:46-49.

Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my days."
Hezekiah responded to the prophecy of Isaiah, “The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good.” The spoken response from Hezekiah rightly acknowledged that the authority and prerogative of God was good. Also, it was good in the sense that the king was promised to have heirs who would reign as kings in Judah. However, the prophetic words were anything but good in respect to the future of Jerusalem. Because of the actions of Hezekiah, Jerusalem would be conquered, the reign of the kings of Judah on the throne of David would appear to come to an end and many would die a brutal death at the hands of the Babylonians. However, Hezekiah’s thoughts, revealed by the inspiration of God, gives the underlying reason why the king could call this prophecy “good”. Hezekiah reasoned, “There will be peace and security in my days.”

The king’s thoughts are certainly open to many interpretations. (1) Was he being self-centered and prideful in thinking that his remaining days would be peaceful? (2) Was he righteously concerned for the present safety of Jerusalem knowing that it would be spared from the assault of the Assyrians? (3) Was he thankful to God for sparing his life and promising that he would have sons to sit on the throne of David, ruling over Judah? We do not know Hezekiah’s heart like God did. It appears at least on the outside that Hezekiah, failed the test God had given him. The closing verses of 2 Chronicles 32, verses 27-33 do provide some insight into the overall impact of Hezekiah on the kingdom of Judah:

27 Hezekiah was very rich and highly honor. He built treasuries for his silver, gold, precious stones, spices, shields, and for all kinds of valuable possessions.
28 He also built store-houses for the harvest of grain, new wine and olive oil; as well as stalls for all kinds of cattle, and flocks in pens.
29 He built cities and acquired flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him great wealth.
30 This Hezekiah also stopped up the upper spring of the waters of the Gihon spring, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his endeavors.
31 However when the envoys of the officials of Babylon sent to him to inquire of the incredible wonder that had been done in the land, God left him to test him in order to know all that was in his heart.
32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his good deeds, they are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, in The Annals of the Kings of Judah and Israel.
33 Hezekiah slept with his forefathers, and they buried him on the ascent of the tombs of the sons of David. All Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him at his death. Then Manasseh his son succeeded him as king.

However, we decide about the account of Hezekiah and the ambassadors from Babylon, it would be worthwhile if we pondered what our response would have been had we been in his position and how would we have acted. Would we have passed the test of God?

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 39
Hezekiah (is) Flattered 39:1
Hezekiah’s Folly 39:2
Hezekiah’s Future 39:3-8
III God’s Servant and Salvation: Chapters 40-66

The prophet Isaiah presents a dramatic shift in emphasis in chapters 40-66 compared to the preceding 39 chapters. This shift was so striking that many scholars have concluded that the author of chapters 40-66 was someone other than the author of the first 39 chapters. The question of the authorship of the prophecy of Isaiah has been discussed by many conservative and evangelical scholars such as Bryan E. Beyer, Victor Buksbazen, Geoffrey W. Grogan, Gary V. Smith and Herbert M Wolf who have concluded that the prophet identified as Isaiah chapter 1 vs. 1 is the sole author of all sixty-six chapters of this prophetic book. The understanding that Isaiah was the sole author of all sixty-six chapters is the position taken in this series of studies. For those who wish to examine the evidence for the single authorship of Isaiah, it is recommended that the writings on Isaiah by the above noted authors be consulted.

The first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy consisted of warnings and judgments on the people of Judah for their rebellion against God during the looming threat of the expansionist movement by the Assyrians who were growing in power and influence during the early years of Isaiah’s public ministry. The fierce Assyrian armies had captured much of the territory to the north of Judah including the nation of Israel which was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and most of its people were taken into captivity. The later chapters of the first great section of Isaiah dealt with the impending threat of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Assyrians who had already captured most of the smaller cities of Judah. The final four chapters of this section give details of the great victory of God over the Assyrians who although they threatened to destroy Jerusalem never successfully laid siege to the City. Chapters one to thirty-nine, are not just about the Assyrian threat. In these chapters, Isaiah declared many wonderful messianic prophecies about a coming Messiah who would rule the nations of the world in the latter days from Mount Zion.

Chapters forty to sixty-six of Isaiah also contain many additional prophecies about the Messiah to come. Details regarding His first coming, including His suffering and death and His second coming including His victorious and dramatic appearance and the establishment of His messianic kingdom are highlights of this great second section of Isaiah. The external threat to Jerusalem in this section deals not exclusively but mostly with the rise of the kingdom of Babylon which would not only threaten the city but actually conquer and destroy it and take many of its prominent citizens into captivity and transport them to the city Babylon, the capital of the kingdom. Isaiah speaks of these events which would happen many years in the future. One of the most amazing prophecies of these chapters is the name of a foreign king, Cyrus, who will issue an edict allowing the exiled Israelites to return to their homeland. One of the great themes of this section of Isaiah is comfort for those who have just experienced the wrath of the Assyrians and for these returning exiles who will be making the return journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. The final chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah deal with the messianic and eternal kingdoms. These chapters provide many details about these kingdoms that are not discussed in such detail in New Testament passages.

Chapters forty to sixty-six are usually sub-divided in three sections by scholars and students of Isaiah. The first section covers chapters 40 to 48 which deal in a large degree with the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity. This first section ends with the 22 verse of chapter 48 which states, “There is no peace, “says the LORD, for the wicked.”

The second section, chapters 49-57, deal with the magnificent prophecies of the Servant of the Lord and specifically with the atoning death of the Messiah which is highlighted in the passage 52:13 to 53:12. This section of Isaiah is arguably the pinnacle of Old Testament teaching on the salvation of the Lord. It may have been the passage Paul referred to when discussing salvation learned from the Scriptures (the sacred writings)
as it applied to Timothy. (2 Timothy 3:15). Similar to the ending of the first section, Isaiah states in verse 21 of chapter 57, “There is no peace,” says My God, “for the wicked.”

The third and final section, comprising of chapters 58-66, deal mostly with the future Messianic Kingdom to be ruled by Jesus Christ, the Messiah from Mount Zion. Many wonderful prophecies about the Messiah are contained in this final section including the first six verses of chapter 63 which provide rich detail about the dramatic return of Jesus Christ, not as a humble Servant, but as a conquering warrior who has stained His garments with the blood of those whom He has defeated. As with the first two sections, this final section concludes in verse 24 of chapter 66, with details about the eternal destiny of the wicked who will find neither rest nor peace.

Victor Buksbazen provides a brief outline of chapters 40-66:

“The twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah, part 2 are a series of messages of comfort and promises of deliverance. This part of the book can be readily divided into three equal sections, of nine chapters each. The first two end with a stern warning to the unrepentant: “There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked” (Isa. 48:22; 57:21).

The third section also ends with an ominous warning to the wicked (66:24).

The major theme of the first section (ch. 40-48) is the comforting prediction of the approaching deliverance from the Babylonian exile, through God’s chosen instrument, Cyrus, the king of Persia.

The omnipotence and omniscience of Jehovah is compared with the helplessness and futility of the pagan idols.

Both national Israel and a certain individual personality, are called “the servant of Jehovah.” However, Israel is described as “the deaf and blind servant” who had failed to accomplish the task which Jehovah entrusted to him. The individual servant of Jehovah is always well pleasing to Him and carries out His will. This servant is the mediator of the new covenant with Israel and brings light to the nations of the world.

In the second section (chapters 49-57) an even more glorious spiritual redemption is envisioned. Here the central is “the servant of the Lord,” who by his suffering and vicarious death, described in chapter 53, the center of the second part of Isaiah, brings redemption to His people and to mankind.

In the third section, chapters 58-66, the universal message of redemption reaches a majestic climax. The repentant and regenerated remnant of Israel will finally become a blessing to the nations of the world, and Jerusalem will be the spiritual center of all nations. The vision of a new Jerusalem where there shall be “no sound of weeping, or cry of distress” blends with the vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17-19 and 66:18-23). At this point Old Testament prophecy reaches its glorious climax. It was later beautifully amplified by John in Revelation 21:1-4.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 329-330).

A: God’s Promises to Provide Protection for His People: Chapters 40-48

It is within these nine chapters that Isaiah lays the foundation for the future ministry of the Messiah as the Servant of the Lord and the comfort and hope of Israel who can look confidently to a time when God will ransom and redeem His people. God will destroy the future enemy Babylon in a prescribed time after the Babylonian armies will have conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. Those who had been taken captive to be exiled in the capital Babylon will one day be released to return to Jerusalem. The name of the king who issues the edict for the Jews to return to Jerusalem is named by Isaiah as Cyrus. The time of the release of the
Jews to return to Jerusalem was about 190 years in the future from when Isaiah declared this prophecy. Even though God will comfort and redeem His people, they will still need to repent and turn to God and completely trust Him. However, not all of chapters 40-48 nor all of chapters 40-66 refer to the days of the return of the exiles from Babylon. See notes on 41:9 and 41:15-16.

John A Martin comments on Chapters 40-48:

"In these chapters the prophet reminded the people of their coming deliverance because of the Lord's greatness and their unique relationship with Him. He is majestic (chap. 40), and He protects Israel and not the world's pagan nations (chap. 41). Though Israel had been unworthy (chap. 42) the Lord had promised to regather her (43:1-44:5). Because He, the only God (44:6-45:25), was superior to Babylon He would make Babylon fall (chaps. 46-47). Therefore Isaiah exhorted the Israelites to live righteously and to flee away from Babylon (chap. 48). Judah's people are viewed as being in Babylon (43:14; 47:1; 48:20) and Jerusalem in ruins (44:26)." (John A. Martin, *Isaiah*, page 1091, © 1985 John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament is published by David C Cook. All rights reserved).

**Outline of Chapters 40-48:**

**God's Promises to Provide Protection for His People**

1. The Comfort and Greatness of God: 40: 1-31
2. God is With the People of Israel: 41:1-29
5. God’s Promise to Redeem Jacob: 43:1-7
7. Further Blessings to Israel: 44:1-8
8. The Futility of Idolatry and the Forgiveness of God: 44:9-22


Thomas Constable comments on Chapter 40:

“This chapter is an introduction to the remainder of the book, in that it deals with the basic issues and sets the stage for what follows. It also serves as a bridge carrying over such themes as comfort (ch. 12), the highway (chs. 11; 19; 33; 35), and hope (ch. 6). Also, the revealed Word of God is prominent again as the source of hope for God's people. Chapter 40 also contains an expansion of Isaiah's call (ch. 6; cf. 40:1-11 and 6:1-13; 40:3 and 6:3; 40:5 and 6:3; 40:6 and 6:4; 40:9 and 6:11).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 181).

Basic Outline of Isaiah Chapter 40

1. 40:1-11: The Comforting God
2. 40:12-31: The Incomparable God

40:1-11: The Comforting God

As recorded in Isaiah chapter 40:1-11, the prophet declares a call from God for comfort to his people and for the prophet to speak kindly to them for their warfare had ended and their sins have been pardoned for they have received from the LORD, double for all their sins, vss. 1-2. A voice is heard crying out to prepare the
way of the LORD in the wilderness and in the desert, with the lifting up of valleys and lowering of mountains and the smoothing of rough places for then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and everyone will see it, vss. 3-5. Another voice cries out, that all people are like grass which fades like the flowers of the field because the breath of the LORD blows on it, but the word of our God stand forever, vss. 6-8. The messenger of good tidings, Zion, is to with uplifted voice, to announce good news to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, announcing, “Here is your God!” vs. 9. The sovereign LORD will come with might and He will rule. His reward and prizes are with him. He will feed and care for the flock like a shepherd, vss. 10-11.

Isaiah 40:1-2: The Call of Comfort from the Lord

40:1-2 Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
2 Speak kindly to Jerusalem;
announce to her
that her warfare is over,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

Students of God’s Word must remember that the prophecy of Isaiah and specifically the great scroll of Isaiah found in the caves of Qumran near the Dead Sea did not have chapters and verses like the modern versions of the Scriptures. The great scroll of Isaiah has no discernable break between what we know as chapter 39 and chapter 40. Isaiah, as recorded in 39:5-7, proclaimed a prophetic message to king Hezekiah regarding the future destruction of the house of the king (implying the city itself) by (forces from) Babylon. Even King’s Hezekiah’s sons (grandson’s etc.) would be taken captive to this pagan capital. The news that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and its leaders taken captive must have been devastating to the people of God. The people of God may have cried out in anguish after hearing the doom of Isaiah’s prophecy. They may have called out to God: Would there be no Jewish nation left on the earth? Would the kingly line of David fail? Would all of God’s promises and specifically His covenants with the Jewish people come to nothing? Is there any hope for the chosen people of God?

God, through his prophet and servant Isaiah, gives a ready answer to the cries of His people who were left with no hope of a future for their nation. Isaiah in the first words of the first verse of chapter 40, declares God’s words: “Comfort, O comfort my people.” God is offering hope for the future through someone who will bring comfort. It may be that it was Isaiah the prophet who was being called upon to bring comfort to the people of God. D. L. Cooper suggests:

“These words are directed by the Lord to a certain people who worship the God of Israel as their God. Thus Isaiah brought a message from the eternal God to this group, whom he urges to comfort His Chosen People. Obviously, the ones addressed are able to comfort others. The Lord would never command them to do that which they cannot accomplish by His help. We may believe that these who are addressed have a comforting, consoling message for His people. When I read this verse in the light of the entire revelation of God, I know the ones to whom the Lord here speaks. They are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who have the comfort of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and who are able to bring a message of comfort to those in distress.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-January 1945).

Even though the words “comfort, comfort” are plural imperatives implying that the Lord is requesting others (plural) to obey His request it is ultimately the Lord who brings comfort to His people. He may indeed do this through the ministry of His servants, but it is His loving care for His chosen people that moves Him to bring
hope to the hopeless and comfort to those who mourn. See also, J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 243 for a discussion on Isaiah 40:1-2. Victor Buksbazen comments on the role of the Lord and the Holy Spirit in bringing comfort to the people of God:

“It is significant that in rabbinic literature, one of the Messiah’s names is “Menachem” – the Comforter. This is reflected in the words of Jesus: “And I will pray to the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.” (John 14:16).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 332).

A few passages on comfort from Isaiah and other Scriptures are worthy of contemplation and study. See Psalm 23:4; 86:15-17; 119:81-82; Isaiah 49:13; 51:3, 12; 52:9; 61:2; 66:13; Zechariah 1:17; Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; and 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.

In Isaiah 40:2, the prophet continues the message of the Lord by requesting that Isaiah speak kindly to Jerusalem and tell her that, (1) her warfare has ended; (2) her iniquity is pardoned and (3) she has received from the Lord, double for all her sins. Do the words “her warfare is over” apply to the recent threat of destruction by the Assyrian army? The Assyrian army did not actually attack the city. Therefore, the words of 40:1-2 must apply to another time and circumstances that Isaiah has just recently, 39:6-7, declared to Hezekiah. These words refer to the dreadful and chaotic experience Jerusalem and its inhabitants will have with Babylon in the future.

The prophet and others are to speak kindly to Jerusalem delivering a fourfold message. It is (1) a message of comfort; (2) a message that her warfare has ended; (3) a message that her iniquity is pardoned; and (4) a message that Jerusalem has received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.

It is a message of comfort because of the great turmoil and upheaval the people of God in defeat, captivity and exile have endured. It is a message of comfort because they are reminded many years before it will happen that the Lord will not forget them when they will suffer the atrocities of the Babylonians who will conquer their city, put many thousands to death, remove their king, destroy their temple, displace their priesthood, put an end to their sacrificial system of repentance and worship, carry away their valued treasures, demolish their homes and way of life, remove the elite and educated among them to a foreign, brutal and pagan environment and keep these exiles in captivity for seventy years. It is little wonder the psalmist remembered these years in sadness, Psalm 137.

Only the very young who were taken captive would have endured to return to Jerusalem and it is to these retuning captives that this message of comfort is most applicable. All of the Lord’s children can take comfort in the nurturing care of the Lord yet this specific message is addressed to those who will return to Jerusalem following the decree of Cyrus the Persian king in approximately 539 B.C.

It is a message that Jerusalem’s warfare has ended. This does not mean her days of distress have ended or any future warfare will not occur for they certainly will: against Rome and other nations and finally against the armies of Antichrist. The Lord’s message is that their warfare with the Babylonians has come to an end and the exiles can return to rebuild the ancient city. At another time in the far future, it will be true that warfare for Jerusalem will finally be ended. At that time the city will enjoy an extended time of peace when King Messiah rules the world from His capital city Jerusalem.

It is a message that the iniquity of the inhabitants of Jerusalem who rebelled against the Lord has now been removed. The most insidious evil continually practiced by the people of Jerusalem was idol worship. It is to this persistent and intolerable practice that the Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, repeatedly warned His people to stop and repent of their sin and return to Him. See Isaiah 2:6-8, 18-22; 10:10-11; 31:7; 40:19-20;
42:17; 44:9-20; 48:5; 57:13; and 66:3-4. The people of God had been warned by the Lord many generations in the past that they would forsake the Lord and turn to other gods and God would hide His face from them. (Deuteronomy 31:14-18). The Lord had also warned them through the writings of Jeremiah, 13:12-27; 15:1-14; 16:1-13; 22:1-12; and 25:1-11. See also Habakkuk 1:5-11; and 2:2-20; and Zephaniah 1:2-13. It is in Jeremiah 25:11-12 that the length of the captivity (70 years) is revealed. The iniquity of idol worship had been removed during the 70 years of captivity. Yet there is more implied in this message and Isaiah reveals details about the removal of the iniquities of the people in chapters 52:13-53:12 which describe that the Lord’s Servant will have the iniquities of all (people) fall upon Him. Isaiah 53:6.

It is a message that Jerusalem had received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. Some may understand this as a double judgment of God on the people of Jerusalem for all their sins and the time of judgment is now over. However, this does not fit the overall message of comfort that God wants to convey to His people. It seems best to understand this as a future reference to a time when: “Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of dishonor, they will rejoice in their land inheritance.” Isaiah 61:7. For a more extended discussion see Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, Page 95). Thomas Constable also comments:

“Indeed, Israel had received a double pardon, by God's grace (cf. 61:7). She had also suffered a double penalty for her sins (cf. 51:19). Paying back double may be an expression indicating proportionate payment, making the punishment equivalent to the crime. 452 I tend to believe that the meaning is that Israel will receive twice as much blessing as she had received judgment (cf. Jer. 16:18; Zech. 9:12; Rev. 18:6).” [Note 452: See The New Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Archaeology,” by D. J. Wiseman, pp. 60-76.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 183).

Isaiah 40:3-5: The Call of Preparation for the Lord

Isaiah 40:3-5 contain a significant prophecy regarding the future revealing of the glory of the Lord following the preparation of a way for the Lord, a highway to be built that will require valleys to be lifted up, mountains to be lowered and the rough ground and the rugged terrain to be made smooth. It is certain that this is a prophetic message and the discernment of its meaning needs careful consideration.

40:3 The voice of one crying out,
"Prepare in the wilderness the way of the LORD;
make level in the desert a highway for our God.

Isaiah announces that a voice is calling. Isaiah as a true prophet of the Lord receives his messages directly from the Lord. For example, see Isaiah 8:1; 18:4; 28:14; 29:13; 30:12; 31:4; 40:1 and many other passages. It should be plain that this voice who is calling also comes from the Lord, 40:5 and is a direct command for action, likely by the people of God, to be performed in a future time. The command of the “voice” 40:3, is for a way (an unobstructed passage way) to be prepared in the desert (wilderness) for use by the Lord and to make a level highway in the desert for use by God, the Holy One of Israel who is their redeemer and Messiah. A question would naturally arise, why does God need a highway to travel on? Another question may be asked, do the references to this passage from Isaiah by John the Baptist, in the Gospels completely fulfill this prophecy? For example, see Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; and John 1:23.

Isaiah declares in 35:8-10 and 51:11 that a highway will be prepared for the ransomed of the Lord, the remnant, to walk on as they proceed joyfully to Zion. This is a very clear reference to the days of the second coming of the Messiah who will rescue His people who have escaped into the desert to flee the armies of the Antichrist. The highway mentioned by Isaiah in 40:3 is within the context of the comfort to be brought by God to His people. Not all Biblical scholars agree, but students of Scriptures have every confidence to
understand that the highway of 40:3 is the same as 35:8-10 and 51:11. The reason Isaiah declares that this way is for the Lord and is a highway for our God, is that Messiah, the returning Lord, will Himself walk upon it leading the faithful remnant. Zephaniah 3:15 is a message to the remnant:

The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;  
he has cast out your enemy.  
The King of Israel, even the LORD,  
is in your midst;  
you will never again fear disaster.

And Micah 2:12-13 is also a message to the remnant:

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob;  
I will surely gather the remnant of Israel;  
I will put them together as the sheep  
in the midst of a pasture;  
it will be noisy because there will be so many people.  
13 The leader who breaks out will go up before them,  
they will break out and pass on through the gate,  
and leave.  
Their king will pass on before them,  
and the LORD will be at their head."

John the Baptist was the one who prepared the way for the Lord at His first coming. The Gospel writers applied the words of Isaiah 40:3 to John and his mission, however John denied that he was the prophet Elijah, John 1:21, who was predicted to be sent by God, “before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.” Malachi 4:5. The Malachi prophecy is clearly about the far future times of the “day of the LORD” which refers to the second coming of the Messiah and not His first coming. The angel of the Lord clarified John’s role, “He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:17. Thus, even though the Gospel writers applied Isaiah 40:3 to John the Baptist, its complete fulfillment would be in the far future days, yet to come, when Elijah will be sent to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” Malachi 4:6.

40: 4 Every valley will be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill will be made low;  
the uneven ground will be leveled,  
and the rough places made smooth.

In the preparation for the highway that will be ready for the coming of the Lord during His second coming, Isaiah states that every valley will be lifted up and every mountain will be lowered and by implication all uneven places will be levelled and made smooth. Some scholars understand that Isaiah 40:3-4 also refers to the return of the exiles from captivity in Babylon which can be implied from 40:2. However, 40:3-4 refer to a far future time. It is not unusual for Isaiah to telescope both near and far future events within the same prophetic message as was seen in Isaiah 7:14-16. See notes on chapter 7. Some, who do not see this telescoping of near and far prophetic events, seem to ignore the obvious response to the question, who will prepare this highway and raise valleys and level mountains and hills for those who are returning? It certainly
would not be the freed exiles from Babylon. Victor Buksbazen comments that the highway is prepared by God Himself:

“When God leads, every obstacle or hindrance which stands in the way of His redeemed people is swept away. It should be noticed here that the theme of a safe God-prepared highway, echoing the exodus from Egypt, is common to both parts of the book of Isaiah (Isa. 11:16, 35:7-10, 40:3-4, 41:18-19, 42:15-16).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 333).

40:5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.

The reason for the preparation of the highway is revealed in 40:5. Everyone in the world will see the revelation of the glory of the Lord. It is certain for the prophet authoritatively avows that this is the spoken word of the Lord. Isaiah 40:5 gives both the reason and the timing of the events revealed in 40:3-4. The reason is that highway, prepared by God Himself and to be walked upon by the Messiah as He leads the faithful remnant to Zion will be the means for all flesh to see God’s glory. It will happen when the Messiah returns to rescue the remnant from pending destruction from the armies of the Antichrist and by doing so the majestic glory of the Lord will be seen by everyone on the earth. Isaiah in 52:10 states:

The LORD has bared his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

The certainty of this event is ensured by Isaiah’s concluding comment that: “the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” See also Isaiah 1:20; 58:14 and 62:2. It has the same divine authority as the prophet Zechariah’s often stated, “Thus says the LORD.” The meaning of the words “all flesh” are repeated in 40:6 as “all people” for they pertain to the necessity that the return of the Lord will be revealed to everyone on the earth 40:5, and that everyone on the earth will live but a moment in time compared to the eternal word of God, 40:6.

Verses 6-8: The Call of God’s Eternal Word

40:6 A voice said, “Cry out.” So I asked, "What should I cry out?" "All people are like grass, and all their beauty fades like the flowers of the field.

Isaiah states in 40:6 that another voice speaks and states “Cry out.” It is a message from God (implied) for the prophet to “cry out” the message of comfort to God’s people. The question Isaiah asks in response to the command to call out is “What shall I call out?” 40:6. The answer is immediate, “All people are like grass, and all their beauty fades like the flowers of the field.” The word “beauty” is the Hebrew word chesed which can be translated as “goodness” or “kindness.” The KJV has “goodliness,” while the NKJV has “loveliness.” The ESV translates chesed as “beauty” and the ESV marginal note has “constancy”. The NIV translates chesed as “glory.”

The obvious meaning is that humans will not have lives that are considered long in duration while living on the earth. They are compared to grass and flowers which last but a season. Isaiah 40:7-8 provides God’s
intended meaning for humans who are like grass and flowers and live for a brief time, but the word of God is
eternal. The Apostle Peter quotes from these verses in 1 Peter 24-25, following his comment, “You have been
born again, not from perishable seed, but from imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”
1 Peter 1:23. See also James 1:10-11 for a similar discussion on the short lives of those who are rich.

40:7 The grass withers,
the flower fades,
because the breath of the LORD blows on it;
surely people are like grass.

It is not just that humans will not endure long on the earth. God explains the cause of their demise, “because
the breath of the LORD blows on it.” The word breath is ruah in the Hebrew and can be translated as spirit,
wind or breath. In the book of Isaiah, the word ruah occurs several times. It is translated breath in the DASV
in 25:4; 30:28; 33:11; 40:7; 42:5; and 57:16. In Isaiah 33:11, God, in declaring judgment on the enemies of
Israel, states “My breath will consume you like a fire.” (NASB). In the New Testament, James discusses the
humbling of the rich in similar terms, “But the rich should take pride in God’s humbling, because as the
flower of the field, he will pass away.” James 1:10-11.

Isaiah also often translates ruah as the Spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit, in 11:2 (4 times); 30:1; 32:15; 34:16;
40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:21; and 61:1. Isaiah translates ruah as the Holy Spirit in 63:10 and 11 and
records the phrase “Spirit of the LORD” in 63:14. See the notes on these verses for a discussion on the Spirit
and the Holy Spirit.

40:8 The grass withers,
the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah provides God’s reason for comparing the lives of created humanity to grass and wild flowers. Isaiah
states “But the word of our God will stand forever.” Taken in context of the call to comfort His people, God
is assuring them that they can wholeheartedly trust in the endurance of God’s word. When everything else is
failing or perishing, there exists the certainty that like God Himself, His word is eternal and will not fail or
fade away. The prophet will later in 55:11, state on the reliability of God’s word:

So will my word be that goes forth out of my mouth;
it will not return to me empty,
but it will accomplish what I desire it to,
and it will succeed in the matter for which I sent it.

See also Psalm 105:8; Psalm 119:89, 160; Isaiah 59:21; Matthew 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17 and
21:33.

Isaiah 40:9-11: The Call of God’s Coming

The prophet proclaims a third call of comfort from God to His people as recorded in Isaiah 40:9-11.
Following His marvelous statement that His word will stand forever, 40:8, God calls for good news to be
proclaimed. But who is to proclaim the good news and to whom is it to be proclaimed? Isaiah 40:9 in the
DASV is translated, “Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, messenger of good tidings. You who announce
good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength; do not be afraid. Announce to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" The NASB, updated edition translates 40:9 as “Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, Here is your God.” The KJV, NKJV, and ESV translate this verse similar to the NASB, however the NIV translates 40:9 as “You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, Here is your God.” The DASV, KJV, NKJV, NASB and ESV state that the good news is to be proclaimed at least to the cities (towns) of Judah, while the NIV states this news is also to be proclaimed to Zion / Jerusalem. The other versions mentioned above, state that it is Zion and Jerusalem, by implication its people, who are to proclaim this good news to the cities of Judah. Scholars also have differing opinions on which version provides the best translation. The weight of evidence seems to favor the DASV and the NASB rendering of these words. It is interesting that Luke, recording the words of Jesus, addressed to the disciples, states in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” God’s words, addressed to His people, as recorded in Isaiah 40:9, have a similar intent. It is the Jewish people themselves who are to be evangelists to their own people first and then to the nations. See also Psalm 98:2; Isaiah 42:1, 6; and 49:6 (the work of the Servant) and Acts 26:23.

40:9 Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, messenger of good tidings.
You who announce good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength;
do not be afraid.
Announce to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

The message of the good news, begins with the last phrase of 40:9. It is first, “Here is your God.” It is a reminder of the meaning of the name for the coming Messiah, Immanuel, “God with us.” See Isaiah 7:14, and 8:8-10. It is also a reminder of one of the most treasured words in all of Scriptures, “tabernacle,” which from the earliest days of the sojourn of the people of Israel in the wilderness to the eternal state, is a word rich with intent, which is, God is dwelling (living) with His created people. For example, see Leviticus 26:11-12 and Revelation 21:3. Isaiah later declared a similar message of “good news” that is also proclaimed on the mountains, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, who announces peace and brings good news, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns!” Isaiah 52:7. The good news in Isaiah 40:9 and 52:7 will ultimately be fulfilled at a future day when God will deliver His people and bring them joyously and triumphantly to Zion and yet by having faith in the God of good news, those who trust in Him for salvation can rest assured that they will enjoy the benefits of His presence immediately. This is what God wants them to do. One purpose of His proclamation of good news is so they can be comforted and trust confidently and completely in the One who is the Shepherd and Guardian of their souls, 1Peter 2:25. For other examples of “good news,” see Isaiah 41:27; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1 (the Messiah is the preacher of good news); Nahum 1:5; Luke 1:19; 7:22; 8:1; Acts 8: 4,12; 10:36; 13:32 15:35; Romans 1:15; 10:15-16; and 1 Corinthians 15:2. This good news is the message that a loving God has rescued, ransomed and redeemed all who would trust in Him, the Messiah who was sent by God the Father in His great love to be the perfect atoning sacrifice which God righteously and justly demanded to remove the guilt of sins from all mankind. No one is exempt from needing to respond to this good news by having faith in the Messiah who is the bearer of this good news. Referencing Isaiah 40:9-11, David L. Cooper advocates for Christian workers to evangelize the Jews:
“The third division of Isaiah, chapter 40, is "Instructions for workers among the Jews." These are found in verses 9-11. This message is for those who are responsive to God's call to evangelize Israel. That this paragraph is addressed to Christian workers is evident from the command, "0 thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on a high mountain; 0 thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." In the Common Version the translation is exactly the reverse and reads, "0 Zion, that bringest good tidings," etc. But the marginal reading is the same as the text rendering of the American Standard Version. The Hebrew is capable of either of these translations. Thus, we must determine which accords with all the facts of this context in order to know which rendering we should choose. When we remember that what we have already seen in verses 1-5 is addressed to those who have the message of comfort, and who are commanded to give it to the Jews, we see that the text of the Revised Version is the only possible one. In view of these facts, I have put as the heading of the third section, "Instructions for Workers among the Jews."

The worker in Israel who brings the good tidings from the Lord is not to be timid; he is exhorted in these words, "lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." A person should know his message: he should know how to deliver it--and should do it with confidence, conviction, strength, and power in order that it might reach the heart of the hearers. He is to preach with no uncertain sound, speaking the truth in love.

The worker is to cry to the cities of Judah, to the daughter of Zion--the Jewish people. The gist of the message is, "Behold, your God!" The word rendered "behold," as Professor Franz Delitzsch has well pointed out, calls attention to something in the future. Thus these missionaries are to direct Israel's attention to the future. But what is central in their message? This question is answered in the next verse: "Behold, the Lord Jehovah will come as a mighty one." Here the messengers are to tell Israel that the Lord Jehovah will come as their Deliverer. In Psalm 45:3-5 we see the Lord coming as a warrior--victorious over all enemies. The very word used by Isaiah was employed by the psalmist. It occurs again in Isaiah 9:6 in connection with God and is rendered "mighty God." I can just as accurately render it "God the Mighty Warrior." From this verse, therefore, we see that God urges believers to evangelize Israel before the Messiah's advent and to tell her of His coming as a warrior. Clearly, this ministry is to be conducted before He comes, because the messengers are to tell Israel that He will appear in this role.

On the other hand, we are sometimes told by earnest students that we are not to evangelize the Jews; for they, according to this erroneous hypothesis to which I have already called attention, are to be converted by looking upon the Lord personally at His return. This theory is contrary to the plain instructions in this passage regarding Jewish evangelization.

Furthermore, the messengers to Israel are to inform her that, when the Lord Jehovah comes as a mighty warrior, He will take the reins of government and will rule. From other passages we know that He will reign from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth, and of the increase of His government there shall be no end upon the throne of David (Isa. 9:7). When He returns in fulfillment of this passage, He will come with His reward and recompense. Then He, the Good Shepherd, will tend His sheep according to verse 11. This flock can be none other than the faithful remnant which survives the Tribulation, after the apostate portion of the nation has been swept away by the judgments of the great Tribulation.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – January 1945).

40:10-11  Look, the sovereign LORD will come with might,  he will rule with his strong arm;  his reward is with him,  and his prize goes before him.  11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  he will gather the lambs in his arms,  and carry them in his bosom,  he will gently lead those sheep with young.
In 40:10-11, Isaiah records the rest of the message to be proclaimed. The second part of this message is that the Sovereign LORD will come with might, He will rule with his strong arm.” Isaiah 40:10. This statement identifies the time of the Lord’s coming. These are great words of comfort for His people from Isaiah’s day to this day. The Lord Messiah will come with power and authority to rule the nations. This was not fulfilled during Messiah’s first coming. Both the Jews and the Gentile nations await a day to come in the future when all will witness the coming of the Lord as a great warrior, conquering the rebellious people who oppose Him and also as the King of kings to rule the earth from Mount Zion, in His capital city Jerusalem. The words “He will rule with his strong arm,” are an anthropomorphism for the often-stated portrait of God who demonstrates His great power and salvation by means of His hand and arm. See for example, Exodus 6:6; Psalm 44:3, 89:10, 21; 98:1; Isaiah 30:30; 51:5; 52:10; 59:16; 63:5; Jeremiah 27:5; 32:17; Ezekiel 20:33-34 and Luke 1:51.

Isaiah continues with the content of this message. It is third, “His reward is with him and his prize goes before him,” 40:10. The words reward and prize (recompense) seem to be synonyms suggesting that the Lord will deliver righteous justice to those living on the earth when He returns. He will punish those who rebel against Him and reward those who are faithful to Him. All of His actions when He returns, can be understood as being defined by these two words which are rightfully His to dispense which He alone determines according to His good pleasure.

Isaiah uses another metaphor for the Lord in 40:11 in continuing the content of the great message of comfort to be proclaimed to the faithful remnant of God who await His coming. The fourth part of the content of the message of good news is “He will feed his flock like a shepherd.” This fourth part of God’s comforting message itself contains four portraits of a “gentle shepherd”. The first portrait in 40:11 is, like a shepherd He will “feed” or tend to His flock. One of the most enduring portraits of God in the Scriptures is that of a Shepherd who lovingly and gently cares for His sheep, which is a very apt and suitable metaphor for the people of God. The following selected verses, remind the student of God’s word, of the precious ways the Messiah cares and tends His flock. See Genesis 48:15; 49:24; Psalm 23:1; 28:9; 80:1; Isaiah 63:11-14; Ezekiel 34:11-24; 37:24-28; Micah 5:4; 7:14; Matthew 2:6; 18:10-14; John 10:11-18; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4 and Revelation 7:17. This portrait of God as Shepherd is one that is found starting in Genesis and continuing to Revelation. It is similar to the portrait of God as Saviour which also is found early in Genesis and continues through to the end of Revelation.

The second portrait of the Lord as Shepherd stated in 40:11 is, “He will gather the lambs in his arms.” This portrayal of God’s arm is vastly different than the image given in 40:10. God who demonstrates His mighty power and ruling authority by His arm also uses (anthropomorphically) His arm to gather His lambs. The picture here is that of a loving and gentle shepherd shielding a vulnerable lamb from any harm. In the Gospel of John, Jesus states that He fulfills this role and goes beyond just shielding His lambs from danger. Jesus stated, “I lay down my life for the sheep,” John 10:15

The third portrait of the Lord as Shepherd stated in 40:11 is, “and carry them in His bosom.” This is a portrait of loving and tender care for His sheep who are His faithful people. It is more than just picking up a scared and perhaps sickly lamb in His arms. The Messiah carries (embraces) them close to His heart. It is a scene of loving protection and devotion by the great creator of the universe who so beautifully elects to leave the glories of Heaven to provide salvation for those who are but helpless sheep. Philippians 2:5-11.

The fourth portrait of the Lord as Shepherd stated in 40:11 is, “He will gently lead those sheep with young.” King David as recorded in Psalm 23:2 stated that the Lord as his shepherd, “leads me beside still waters.” Still waters can also be translated as “waters of quietness or rest”. It is a comfort to all the people of God that He like a gentle shepherd leads those who are most vulnerable and in need of care such as those nursing ewes
who are caring for their own little ones. The God of comfort is also a Shepherd who carefully tends, protectively gathers, lovingly carries and gently leads His sheep who have placed their complete trust in Him.

Two important Old Testament passages regarding the Lord as shepherd are stated in Ezekiel 34:11-24 and 37:24-28. The longer passage in Ezekiel 34:11-24 comes immediately after the Lord’s declaration of woe against the shepherds of Israel who have failed to feed the hungry, strengthen the sick, heal those with diseases, restored the broken, recovered the scattered, nor have they searched for the lost. The stricken of Israel were scattered throughout the earth for lack of a shepherd and no one sought after them. The Lord Himself would deliver the flock from the mouths of the shepherds who were devouring them. Ezekiel 34:1-10. In Ezekiel 34:11-24, the Lord promises to seek out the scattered flock of Israel and will judge between those who are fat (those with no concern for the hungry and ailing) and the lean (those who are needy). The Lord proclaims an outstanding promise which refers to a time in the future, which in the context of the following verses, refers most certainly to the messianic kingdom. “I will set up one shepherd over them, and he will feed them, even my servant David; he will feed them, and he will be their shepherd. 24 I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.” Ezekiel 34:23-24. This one shepherd who is David, the servant of the Lord, refers to the greater son of David, the Messiah. See also Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:5 and Zechariah 14:9. The Messiah is also described as a prince which can be understood as a regal title. Ezekiel 37:24-28 is stated below.

24 My servant David will be king over them; and they will all have one shepherd. They will also walk in my regulations, and observe my statutes, and do them.
25 They will live in the land that I have given to Jacob my servant, in which your forefathers dwelt. They will live there, they, and their children, and their children's children forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.
26 I will make a covenant of peace with them, it will be an everlasting covenant with them. I will settle them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them forever.
27 My dwelling also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people.
28 Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary will be in their midst forever.”

The above Scriptural references regarding the Shepherd remind the Christian of a beloved hymn, “Saviour Like A Shepherd Lead Us” attributed to Dorothy A. Thrupp (1836) and composed by William B. Bradbury (1838). From a study of Isaiah 40:1-11, the student of the Scriptures is prepared to understand the remainder of Isaiah’s prophecy with anticipation of the glories that are to come both in the text of the prophecy and in the realization that what Isaiah declares, that this is not an ancient writing buried in the past, but the living word of God which proclaims the message of salvation by a God who loves His creation. The second half of Isaiah chapter 40 compels the student to contemplate the majesty and incomparable wonder of this God who decrees in His wisdom to bring comfort to His people. In a later section of Isaiah, the suffering Servant is emphasized which also anticipates the glories that will follow. The apostle Peter stated, “Concerning this salvation the prophets, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you, sought and searched diligently. 11 They searched for what person and time the Spirit of Christ which was in them was pointing to when it testified beforehand about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow.” 1 Peter 1:10-11.

40:12-31: The Incomparable God

In verses 12-31 of Isaiah chapter 40, the prophet describes the splendors, majesty and incomparable uniqueness of the one declared in 40:9 as “here is your God!” Isaiah is expanding on the revelation of the Lord that he witnessed and recorded in Isaiah chapter 6. The Lord who is lifted up (exalted), completely holy and fills the whole earth with His glory is described in this passage as a being with no equal anywhere in the
There is no one like Him. There is no one wiser, no one greater, no one more powerful, no one more enduring, no one as creator, no one who sustains all things, no one who redeems His creation and no one worthy of the world’s praise than the great triune God, the Holy One of Israel, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Saviour, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Prince of Peace, and the Holy Spirit. Isaiah later declares, “There is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is no one besides me.” Isaiah 45:21. The student of the Scriptures should compare Isaiah 40:12-31 with Job chapters 38-41 to begin to grasp the significance of this incomparable God who is revealed in the pages of the Bible. From this foundation, the student will marvel at the revelation of God’s supreme greatness as it is unfolded throughout the entire Word of God.

Those who read the revelation of God in Isaiah 40:12-31 should meditate on these inspired words and then unreservedly worship their Creator and humble themselves before His majesty and glory in reverent fear. It is to the shame of the modern church that God’s character and attributes are not widely proclaimed, preached and taught as they were generations ago. Theology, the study of God, was once the greatest educational pursuit of universities and it is now abandoned, shunned and vilified by those who would deem to call themselves academics. Many in this present day who profess to be Christians and disciples of the Lord are arguably not familiar with nor seem to have the patience and desire to enter into a deep contemplative study of the character and attributes of God. This study should include (selected only – not exhaustive) God’s: eternity, infinity, holiness, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, sovereignty, love, patience, and wisdom. One wonders at the outcome, if those who attend the modern Christian worship service could be given a blank sheet of paper and be challenged with providing a Biblical definition of these few characteristics of God just mentioned. The student of God’s Word should attend most carefully and meditatively to the words of the Lord that are recorded in the second section of Isaiah chapter 40.

The second section of Isaiah chapter 40 comprise a series of rhetorical questions of which the answer for each is “no one” for they all point to the obvious conclusion that there is no one like God, anywhere or at any time. These questions and their response are designed to bring hope and comfort to those first in Judah, 40:9 and to all who would read the messages of the prophet Isaiah. The people of Judah including Jerusalem had just witnessed a very stressful period of threats to the capital city and actual capture of many Judean cities by the armies of Assyria. Many scholars suggest that the words of Isaiah chapter 40 were written for those either in captivity in Babylon or just returning to Jerusalem following the 70 years of this captivity. While these words may fit that situation, specifically 40:1-2, there is no actual reference to the Babylonian captivity in this chapter. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah 40-66, pages 103-105 for an expanded discussion of the historical setting of chapter 40.

The rhetorical questions in this passage are:
40:12: Who has measured the waters; marked off the heavens, calculated the earth’s dust, or weighed the mountains or hills of the earth?
40:13: Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD or has been His mentor or counsellor to inform Him?
40:14: Who was God’s consultant, or gave Him understanding, or taught Him justice, knowledge and understanding?
40:18: To whom will you liken God or what likeness or image will you compare with Him?
40:25: “To whom will you compare him or who is His equal?”
There are other questions to which the people of God must respond which stated in Isaiah 40:21, 27 and 28. To these non-rhetorical questions, a much more in-depth response is required. For it is in their response that the true heart condition of the people is revealed. The purpose of the rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions is to invoke trust in the Lord alone for wisdom, guidance, purpose, safety and salvation and for those who wait for Him, the Lord grants new strength to achieve great things for Him. For an extended discussion on Isaiah 40:12-31 see J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, page 246.

Isaiah 40:12-17: None equal to God

40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,  
and measured out heaven with the span of his hand,  
and measured out the dust of the earth by the basketful,  
and weighed the mountains in scales,  
and the hills on a balance?

The prophet begins his rhetorical questions with comments similar to those He had when he encountered Job with the beginning question, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” Job 38:4. Like Job, the people of Judah would have no response but to acknowledge God’s divine right to create the world without any assistance or permission from anyone. In the beginning, there was only God, who exists forever without any beginning in Himself. He existed as a triunity as we understand from Scripture, God exists eternally as One God yet having three distinct personalities, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God (the Creator Elohim) asks a series of questions in 40:12 that must have as their answer, no one but God. The four questions in Isaiah 40:12 relate to the creation of the earth.

(1) “Who measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?” The earth’s entire expanse of water totally unknown to even the wisest scholar in Isaiah’s day was known to the Creator and considered so small that its volume could be measured in the hollow of God’s hand. The anthropomorphic portraits, such as God’s hand, help the human reader/listener to grasp the insignificance of the amount/volume of created matter from God’s point of view. A measure of liquid in the hollow of a human’s hand would be a trifle, almost nothing in comparison to all that is known by humans of the amount (volume, weight, mass etc.) of matter contained in the created heavens and the earth. How much more insignificant is the volume of water in the entire earth compared to what God’s knows about what He has created in the universe? No one else but God who is indescribably infinite could make such a claim. The question, could God create something larger than Himself? is answered with a resounding “no”; for all of created matter including the immensity of the universe is something God can easily measure with something, humans can relate to, the size of the hand.

(2) “And (who) measured out heaven with the span of his hand?” The second question is also related anthropomorphically to the hand of God. The span is the distance between the tip of the thumb and the little finger when the hand is stretched out. God is describing that to Him the distance scale of the universe can be measured by Him simply by stretching out “His hand”. It is an insignificant distance to an infinite God but to humans it is immeasurable and beyond comprehension for it appears limitless. The Scriptures attest that God made the heavens (stretched them out) with his hands, Psalm 102:25; Isaiah 45:12; 48:13 and Hebrews 1:10.

(3) “And (who) measured out the dust of the earth by basketful?” The word interpreted as “measured” in the DASV is the Hebrew word kuwl which has the meaning of “to keep in,” “to measure,” “to contain,” or “to comprehend.” This question can be re-phrased as: Who had the ability to contain and measure the amount of the dust on the earth when the earth was created? The Lord in 40:12 describes the materials of the earth which He alone could produce and measure.
(4) “And (who) weighed the mountains in scales and the hills on a balance?” Who is large enough (larger than the earth) to be able to weigh the hills and the mountains? Like the first three rhetorical questions, this one has only one possible answer. God by asking these questions is not satisfied with a response by His people of “we don’t know”. He demands they face the reality of His creative works and His ability to maintain and superintend His creation. If God can create and maintain the heavens and the earth He certainly can look after His people whom He also created for His glory, Isaiah 43:7.

40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or instructed him as his mentor?

The prophet continues with the Lord’s rhetorical questions about His actions and the reasons for His actions. “Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD?” The NIV translates this phrase as “Who has understood the mind of the LORD?” The word “directed” is the Hebrew word tikken, which has several meanings in the Old Testament. It can be translated as to regulate; to balance; to measure; to test; or to prove. The word “Spirit” is translated as “mind” in the NIV. It is the Hebrew word ruah, which is often translated in the Old Testament as spirit, wind, or “breath. See notes on Isaiah 40:7 above. Scholars have struggled as to how best to translate ruah. Thomas Constable comments:

“We could interpret "Spirit" as the mind of the Lord (cf. Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). This is how the Septuagint translators rendered ruah here and in 1 Chron. 28:12 and Ezek. 20:32. It may refer to the volitional, effective, and cognitive aspects of God's intelligence, in other words, His inner workings. God alone saw to the heart of things in creation and made the correct decisions at the proper time. No one advised Him in His creation or in His administration of the world. Now His omniscience is in view.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 186).

Isaiah continues the rhetorical question as recorded in 40:13 with the second part of this question: “Or (who) instructed him as his mentor? The word “mentor” is the Hebrew word etsah, which can be translated as counselor, advice or plan. The word etsah occurs several times in Isaiah and is most often translated as counsel in English versions. See Isaiah 5:19; 8:10; 11:2; 14:26; 16:3; 19:3, 11, 17; 25:1; 28:29; 29:15; 30:1; 36:5; 40:13; 44:26; 46:10, 11; and 47:13.

The implication here as with Isaiah 40:12 is that there was no one present with the Lord when He created the heavens and the earth nor was there anyone capable of informing Him of anything regarding His actions at the time of creation or at any time. There is no one that any person could bring forward as a witness to the creative actions of God nor is there anyone who could claim to have been God’s counsellor or consultant to bring Him knowledge or to inform Him about anything. The Apostle Paul cites Isaiah 40:13 in his letter to the Christians in Rome, Romans 11:34 and in his first letter to the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 2:16.

The rhetorical question stated in 40:13 is re-stated in 40:14 so as to emphasize the obvious point that God acts completely alone and is responsible to no one. God has no need of anyone to consult Him or for anyone to give Him understanding in anything. No one has been His teacher to instruct Him in any course of knowledge or justice. In 40:14 the words enlighten (or understanding) and understanding are closely related to knowledge which is also stated in this verse. These words are linked to wisdom in describing the attributes of the Messiah in Isaiah 11:2. The attributes of wisdom and understanding are ascribed to God in Job 12:13; Proverbs 3:9; Isaiah 11:2; Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15; as are the attributes of wisdom and knowledge in Isaiah 11:2; 33:6; Romans 11:33 and Colossians 2:3.

40:14 With whom did he consult to enlighten him? Who taught him the path of justice?
Who taught him knowledge,  
or showed to him the way of understanding?

A very important characteristic of God, stated in 40:14 is “justice.” The concept of God’s justice, the Hebrew word misphat, is often discussed by Isaiah. For example, in Isaiah 30:18, the prophet stated, “For the LORD is a God of justice.” God is righteous and holy and rules His kingdom with justice that He Himself has determined is the benchmark for discerning what is right and just. There is no other being, teacher, consultant or counsellor that makes this determination of deciding what is absolutely just as God sees fit to both define and administer it. To who else can the people of God cry out or appeal to for justice to be meted out? Every action, thought and deed by every person on the earth will be justly examined by God. Those who trust in God will have no cause to be afraid of His righteous justice. God can be depended upon to dispense this justice in every situation and circumstance in which His people find themselves seeking God’s intervention. He will remain true to His word and to Himself. God’s people are to take great comfort for they can completely trust God to dispense His justice even if, for the moment, it seems that life’s circumstances seem unfair and unjust. One day, God will leave no unjust act unresolved or not treated with holy and righteous justice. For a word study of justice in the prophecy of Isaiah examine these verses, 1:17; 1:21; 1:27; 5:7; 9:7; 10:2; 16:5; 28:6; 28:17; 30:18; 32:16; 33:5; 40:14; 40:27; 42:1; 42:3; 42:4; 49:4; 51:4; 56:1; 59:8; 59:9; 59:11; 59:14; 59:15; and 61:8.

As recorded in Isaiah 40:15-17, the prophet gives God’s answer to His own rhetorical questions. If the answer seemed obvious in that no one is equal to Him, God explains that not only are there not any who are equal to Him, there are none that can even compare to Him in any way. It is not that any being cannot compare to Him, it is stated by God that all nations are less than nothing in comparison to Him. Because He is the infinite omnipotent Creator who cannot be affected by His creation including the beings He has created, of what value or use are the nations of the earth to God.

40:15 Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket,  
and are regarded like dust on the scales;  
he picks up the islands like fine dust.

Isaiah states that the nations are considered as a “drop in a bucket” or “like dust on the scales”. Compared to God, they are so insignificant as to be not worthy of consideration. That is why when the nations, at the end of the millennial kingdom era, conspire to assault His anointed king, the Messiah when He will reign on Mount Zion, God will scoff at them and laugh, Psalm 2:4, for they will be reduced to the ashes in an instant Revelation 20:9. Isaiah further states in 40:15, “he picks up the islands like fine dust.” In comparison to the insignificant and meaningless dust on the scales, God lifts up or considers the ends of the earth (the islands) as if they were merely fine dust. They will blow away with the slightest breath of wind. The prophet next turns his attention to what offering will be sufficient for God from the entire earth before returning to the hopeless might of the nations in comparison to God. See also Isaiah 17:13 and 29:5.

40:16 Lebanon is not enough to burn for sacrificial fire,  
nor are its animals sufficient for a burnt offering.

The prophet considers what resources are available on the earth to provide a suitable and adequate burnt offering to God. Even prior to the dictation by God to Moses of the requirements of the sacrificial system, burnt offerings were made to God. For example, by Noah as recorded in Genesis 8:20. Also they were requested by God. Refer to the story of Abraham Isaac on the mountains of Moriah, Genesis 22:2-13. They were important to the Israelites, for example, Moses before Pharaoh, Exodus 10:25; and were important to
Jethro, the father in law of Moses, Exodus 18:12. As significant as this pre-law practice of sacrifices being offered to and requested by God, in His relationship with mankind, there really was no burnt offering large enough in the entire earth adequate to satisfy the full demands of God’s holy justice. God is so immense and magnificent above and beyond anything He has created, that nothing within the confines of this created order can have any impact upon Him or satisfy Him in any way. See for example, Acts 17:25.

40:17 All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.

Isaiah sums up God’s response to the first set of rhetorical questions by stating that not only are the nations considered to be like dust on the scales or like a drop of water in a bucket, 40:15, they are actually less than that in God’s view. In 40:17, God bluntly declares that the nations, the peoples of the world who defy Him and rebel against Him, are counted as less than nothing and are considered as worthless. It is significant that the pagan peoples of the world who have rejected God and worship idols, actually worship nothing for the meaning of the word idol is “worthless.” What else can be said that would, in the slightest instance from any person or nation on earth, be of any consequence to God? The earth’s greatest conqueror or its most powerful nation or a combined army of all the nations on the earth conspiring against God would not influence Him in any way. Psalm 2 provides God’s response to an attempt by the kings of the earth to overthrow the Messiah’s rule. The words of Isaiah 40: 15-17, are meant to instill reverent fear within the nations of the world and to the people of God. To the nations of the world who seek to rebel against God, they should know the folly of their intent and their sure defeat even before they begin any action against God. However, this incomparable God who transcends His created order and the beings He has created is also a God of immeasurable grace. Even though the nations are considered by God as less than nothing in might or power, He still loves them and sent His Son to die for them. See John 3:16 and 17:23-26.

To the people of God, this message brings great comfort. They should know that only by putting their complete trust and faith in God will they have eternal protection from any worldly conflict or affliction. God is bigger than any problem or enemy. He is able to defend His people and to rescue them from any harm and to redeem them, so they will live forever with Him in his heavenly kingdom.

Isaiah 40:18-20: None comparable to God

The prophet next turns his attention to the detestable practice of idol worship and how it is no comparison in any way to the true worship of God. God’s reaction to the rebellious and wicked practice by the nations of idol worship is a common discussion in the prophecy of Isaiah. One of the less known results of the exile of the people of Jerusalem during the Babylonian captivity was, that upon their return to Jerusalem, idol worship by the people of God is not mentioned. One of the reasons God caused His people to be exiled, was to cure them from many sinful practices including the rebellious act of worshipping idols instead of the One true God.

40:18 To whom then will you compare God? What image will you equate him to?

Isaiah asks two most thought provoking rhetorical questions: “To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?” These questions sum up the preceding section, 40:12-17, and prepare Isaiah’s audience for the discussion about God in 40:21-31. The obvious answer to both of these questions is: no one or no idol. There is no one who has ever lived or who will ever live that can be compared with God or whom any idol crafted by man could compare with God. Hannah, when giving praise to God for the birth of
her son, Samuel, declared, “No one is as holy as the LORD, for there is no one besides you, there is no Rock like our God.” 1 Samuel 2:2. See also Exodus 8:10; 15:11; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; Psalm 86:8; Isaiah 40:25; 44:8; 45:5, 14, 21, 22; 46:5, 9; Daniel 3:29; Joel 2:27; Micah 7:18; and Acts 17:29.

40:19-20 An idol? A workman casts it in a mold, and the goldsmith overlays it with gold, and fashions silver chains for it. Or if someone is too poor for such a sacrifice they may choose wood that will not rot and then find a skilful craftsman to set up a carved idol that will not topple.

Isaiah next discusses the practice of making an idol. The word “idol” in 40:19-20 is the Hebrew word pesel which is a carved image. In other passages in the Book of Isaiah, (eg. chapter 2), Isaiah uses the Hebrew word elil which has the deeper meaning of “worthless.” Isaiah discusses idols in verses 40:19-20 and in 2:8, 18, 20; 10:10-11; 19:1, 3; 31:7; 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 48:5; 57:13 and 66:3. Related words are image and images which are discussed by Isaiah in 10:10-11; 21:9; 30:22; 41:29; 42:8, 17; 44:9-20; 44:17; 46:1 and 48:5. Isaiah discusses the craft of idol making in 40:19-20 as a contrast with the one true God. As in other passages, Isaiah makes clear that there is no comparison whether the idol maker is rich or poor, for as Isaiah had stated in 40:18 “what image will you equate him to?” The vile and rebellious activity of making idols was often addressed by Isaiah as that which deeply offended God and was abhorrent to Him. This activity was directly in opposition to the second commandment, Exodus 20:4-6 and continued persistently up until the days of the Babylonian captivity. However, in the far future it would again be a practice condemned by God, Revelation 9:20-21. David L. Cooper comments on the making of idols and the creative power of God:

“This mighty Creator is infinite in all His attributes; therefore it is inconceivable for one to make any image of Him. It is folly on the part of anyone to think that men with their limited, finite minds could conceive of any form by which to picture Him to others. It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers. It is He who stretches out the heavens as a curtain and spreads them out as a tent in which to dwell. He raises up princes and brings them to naught. He dethrones kings. He abases the judges of the earth. He overrules and controls the affairs of men.

This very Creator, whose coming the works are to announce to Israel, is the one who created the starry heavens above and whose power keeps each of these bodies in its proper orbit. He calls them all by name, and, because He is so very powerful, not one of them is lacking.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – January 1945).

Isaiah 40:21-24: None eternal like God

40:21 Do you not know? Have you not heard? Have you not been told from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

The prophet records God’s rhetorical questions regarding their knowledge and understanding of Him that was declared to the people of Judah, and all earth’s inhabitants from the foundation of the earth. They were make known in the written text of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament and were made known by creation itself. Psalm 8:1-9 and Psalm 19:1-6 would have been known to the people of Judah and
they should have listened to the message God had written in His Word and in His creation. In a far future
time, the apostle Paul would record in Romans 1:18-31 a further testimony of what is known about God
within each person on the earth. Romans 1:18-20 states, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven
against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness,
because what can be known about God is clear to them; for God has shown it to them. For since the creation
of the world, his invisible attributes are clearly seen, even his everlasting power and divinity, being seen
through the things that are made. So they are without excuse.”

40:22 He sits above the circle of the earth;
its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

God’s perspective is described as “He sits above the circle of the earth.” This is not a statement about
Isaiah’s knowledge that the earth was round and not flat. The “circle of the earth” most likely refers to the
visible horizon where the stars “circled” each night. It has the meaning that God resides above the earth and
is knowledgeable about every person as the next phrase describes in a most graphic comparison, “its
inhabitants are like grasshoppers”. This descriptive term for humanity fits the preceding verses regarding the
miniscule or zero might of the nations of the world. God is next described as One “who stretches out the
heavens like a curtain.” The descriptive phrase “stretching out the heavens” is often used by Isaiah and other
writers of Scripture to describe God’s creative powers and His infinity. See also Exodus 15:12; Job 9:8; 26:7;
38:5; Psalm 104:2: Isaiah 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13; Jeremiah 10:12; 51:15; and Zechariah 12:1. The last
phrase of Isaiah 40:22, “and spreads them out like a tent to live in” reminds the student of Scripture, of
God’s living or dwelling place which is often described as a tent (or tabernacle) within which God has
elected to live with His people. See also Leviticus 26:11-12; Deuteronomy 12:5; and Revelation 21:3.

40:23 He reduces rulers to nothing,
and makes the judges of the earth worthless.

The prophet reminds the people of Judah that their God is the One who “brings the princes to nothing and
makes the judges of the earth as vanity” KJV (language updated). This re-emphasizes Isaiah’s comments
about the insignificance of the nations in 40:15 who are described as being, like a drop in a bucket, or as a
speck of dust on the scales and in 40:17, as less than nothing. The rulers of so-called mighty nations who
boasted of their might and glory (Isaiah 36:4-10 and 13-20 and Daniel 4:30), have been reduced to nothing as
have the judges of the earth before the almighty Creator.

40:24 Scarcely are they planted,
scarcely are they sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows on them,
and they wither,
and the whirlwind blows them away like stubble.

Isaiah describes the comparison of the rulers and judges of the earth as being like fragile flora which wither
and are blown away by God’s slightest breath as soon as they are planted. Even the most powerful and
mighty of the earth live but a moment in comparison to God who lives eternally. The message of the prophet
in 40:21-24 was meant to instill confidence in God’s people in Judah who were terrified by recent events
during the crisis of the threat of conquest by the Assyrians. Where are the Assyrian warriors now? Where is
the great and mighty king of Assyria? God alone stands forever with His people and lives with them under the tent He has spread for their protection. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 40:23-24:

“People of position and office, as well as the decision-makers of the world, may appear to wield power, but they are really under the enthroned God's authority. He can dispose of any human leader because He is over all of them. He can dispense with them just as easily as He can make flowers wither and blow chaff away (cf. vv. 6-8). He can reduce them to a state of comparative nothingness (Heb. tohu; cf. Gen. 1:2). Thus He is not only superior but sovereign. Furthermore, He is imminent as well as transcendent. God did not just create the world and then abandon it, as deism teaches.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 188).

Isaiah 40:25-26: None mighty as God

**40:25-26** "To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see. Who has created these? He brings them out in ranks by number; he calls each one of them by name. Because of the greatness of his might, and because of his strong power, not one of them is missing.

In comparison to the impotent and short-lived rulers and judges of the earth who are no match for God in any category, God, the Holy One, asks the people of Judah in Isaiah 40:25, “To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal?” This is a repetition of the question asked by Isaiah as recorded in 40:18 and summarizes the thoughts stated in 40:12-24. This is an emphatic rhetorical question that has only one possible reply: No One is God’s equal. God next requests, as recorded in 40:26 that the people of Judah look to the heavens and ponder who created the stars and who directs and names each one. Psalms 147:4-5 states:

4 He counts the number of the stars; he calls all of them by name.
5 Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; his understanding is limitless.

God accomplishes His mighty works due to the greatness of His might and powerful strength and because of this not one of the stars under His guidance is missing. The obvious meaning of these statements by God is that if God has the power and might to create and superintend the stars (by implication the entire universe), then who is equal to Him? This question was meant to be answered by the people of Judah and by the nations. By acknowledging the mighty power of God in creation and in overseeing His creative works, humans can have complete confidence and trust in God, that He will comfort and look after them. It is the height of folly for anyone to imagine they can manage or even take the reins of their own destiny for even a moment.

Isaiah 40:27-31: None enduring as God

In Isaiah 40:27-31, the prophet concludes this magnificent proclamation of the Lord’s eternal power and His comfort and care for His people. As recorded in 40:27, the Lord confronts the people of Judah because of their assertion that God does not notice them nor gives them the justice they feel is their due. After all God
has just proclaimed about His presence with them, 40:9 and His tender mercy towards them, 40:11 and His great power, 40:12-17 and His Creative majesty, 40:18-26 and particularly His protection of the City of Jerusalem, Isaiah chapter 37, how can these people complain that the Lord does not know them or provide justice to them? The Lord answers this spurious claim in 40:28-31.


40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and claim, O Israel, "My way is hid from the LORD, and the justice due me is ignored by my God?"

The prophet records the complaint of the people of Judah against the Holy One of Israel. These ungrateful and untrusting members of the covenant people of God, complain that God does not notice them, for their ways seem hidden from Him. This is a stark contrast to an earlier claim by the people recorded in Isaiah 26:8, 15; but is similar to the way God sees them, as the prophet stated the words of the Lord in Isaiah 29:13. The additional complaint that the justice due to them escapes God’s notice is also a sign of their blind eyes, deaf ears and hard heart that God told Isaiah would characterize these people, Isaiah 6:8-13.

Isaiah 28-31: God’s Response.

40:28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, He does not faint or get tired; his understanding is unfathomable.

God again asks rhetorical questions about His eternality, His role as creator, His ever-present strength and vitality, and His unfathomable (inscrutable) understanding. The two-fold question “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” is answered by God in four declarative statements:

First, God is everlasting or eternal (olam in the Hebrew). The Old Testament speaks about the eternal existence of God, for example in Genesis 21:33; Deuteronomy 33:27; 1 Chronicles 16:36; Psalm 41:13; 90:2; 93:2; 106:48; Isaiah 9:6; 43:13; Jeremiah 10:10; Micah 5:2; and Habakkuk 1:12. Moses in Psalm 90:2, expressed God’s eternity very succinctly, “from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.”

Second, God is the Creator of all the earth. The Scriptures open with the plain statement, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1. It is surprising that God would have to ask His people: have you not known, or have you not heard that He was the Creator of the ends of the earth? Yet the people of God had forsaken Him and forgot His creative works and abilities on their behalf. The word Creator is a title for God as well as a descriptive term for his creative activities. Many Old Testament verses ascribe the creation of the world and its inhabitants to God. In Isaiah God’s activity of creation is mentioned in 4:5; 40:26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; 45:7, 8, 12, 18; 48:7; 54:16; 57:19; 65:17, and 18. See comment on these verses in this study of Isaiah. Not only do the Scriptures declare that God created the heavens and the earth, but He will re-create them in the future, Isaiah 65:17, although some understand this as a renewal rather than a new creative act of God. It is best to take God at His word and if the word of God states plainly that He will create new heavens and a new earth, then this is exactly what he will do!
Third, God never tires nor faints from exertion. A few of the many magnificent compound names for God describe His everlasting strength, power, and might. For example, Elohim means the powerful and mighty God. El-Shaddai has the meaning of God almighty. El-Olam means the everlasting God and El-Roi means the God who sees. God, in the context of Isaiah 40:18-31, has described His creative and superintendence works including knowing and naming all the stars of heaven and declares in 40:26, “because of the greatness of his might, and because of his strong power, not one of them is missing.” In God’s work of sustaining His creation, He never grows weary, tires or faints from exhaustion. God hears the prayers of the people of the world. He establishes and disposes rulers, leaders, kings and presidents. He never stops in working out His perfect plans for His world. He comforts the sorrowful, heals the sick, protects the weak and vulnerable, gives hope to the despondent, and most importantly redeems the lost. He ceaselessly governs His universal kingdom both in heaven and on earth. In all this He never lacks for strength and power. In contrast to God’s divine strength is the youth of the world who will faint and grow weary and with not much exertion will fall exhausted, 40:30.

Fourth, God’s understanding is unfathomable (or inscrutable). The word “unfathomable” in the DASV is a translation of two Hebrew words ayin cheqer and can be also translated as unsearchable or inscrutable. The basic meaning is that God’s understanding is “beyond comprehension” to humans. Isaiah states it another way with the same meaning in 55:9, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” The people of Judah in Isaiah’s day and all God’s people in any time can trust God without reservation or doubt for He will look after His world and His people because of the unfathomable depth of His knowledge and wisdom. He has never failed and will never fail in His marvelous plans for His creation. Isaiah in 46:10 declares the words of God, “I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that have not yet happened; saying, My purpose will stand, and I will fulfill what I have planned.”

40:29-31 He gives strength to the weary; to the weak he increases strength.
30 Even youths will faint and grow weary, and vigorous young men fall exhausted,
31 but those who wait for the LORD will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run, and not grow weary; they will walk, and not faint.

Isaiah declares that God strengthens the weary and increases power to those who lack might. Those including the youth and young men who tire, grow weary and stumble, if they and any others wait upon the Lord, they will be strengthen by God for the task God has assigned them. The lesson to those who need the strength of God is that they must “wait for the LORD.” 40:31. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Here is one of the most beautiful promises given to those who put their trust in God. They shall forever renew their strength. They shall always rise above seeming defeat and soar up to lofty heights. God Himself will enable them to run their course, even where much younger and stronger men stumble and fall. Their secret is that “they wait upon the Lord.” Jehovah Himself is the inexhaustible fountain of their strength.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 336).

As a patient and compassionate Shepherd to His people, God again extends an invitation to wait upon Him. To wait upon Him is first to trust that He has the ability to accomplish what He promises and second to act
upon that trust by stepping out in faith and obedience to complete the task that God has purposed. This was
the message of Isaiah, 700 years before the birth of Christ and it is the message of the New Testament in the
present day. It is an eternal message that all who are called the children of God must understand and by faith
undertake.

Many scholars see, in these verses, a reference to the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity in
which during the long return journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, God will be working in the midst of His
people to strengthen them to be able to complete this journey and complete the task of rebuilding the walls of
Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. Others understand that these promises are applicable to every
situation the people of God find themselves in that requires the help and strength of God to endure. A few
scholars apply these promises to the time of the return of the Messiah when the faithful remnant will need the
supernatural help of God to endure the perilous times they are encountering. For example, one who adheres
to this third understanding of these verses is David L. Cooper who writes:

“THE message to be delivered to Israel ends with an appeal in verses 27-31. Herein the prophet calls Israel's
attention to the fact that this God is omniscient and omnipresent. She must believe Him. She must trust Him,
even though she cannot understand and comprehend His existence and being. All of them must yield their lives
to Him; they must give Him their hearts; they must follow Him. It is He who gives power to the faint; it is He
who gives increased strength; it is He who, coming to Israel in her last great struggle, will, as she waits for His
appearing, renew her strength, so that she shall mount up with wings as eagles; so that she shall run and not be
weary; and may walk and not faint.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly –
January 1945).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 40:
1-11: The Comforting God
  1-2   The Call of Comfort from the Lord
  3-5   The Call of Preparation for the Lord
  6-8   The Call of God’s Eternal Word
  9-11  The Call of God’s Coming
12-31: The Incomparable God
  12-17 None equal to God
  18-20 None comparable to God
  21-24 None eternal like God
  25-26 None mighty as God
  27-31 None enduring as God

2. God is With the People of Israel: 41:1-29

Outline of Isaiah Chapter 41:
41:1-20: The True God of Israel
  The Rule of God: Verses 1-7
  The Strength of God: Verses 8-16
  The Blessings of God: Verses 17-20
41:21-29: The False gods of the Nations

Many scholars suggest that chapters 40-41 of Isaiah were written by the prophet to bring comfort and
encouragement to the exiles returning to Jerusalem following the seventy-year Babylonian captivity and that
chapter 41 speaks prophetically of Cyrus the Persian leader who will be God’s chosen one to fulfil God’s
plans for the destruction of Babylon and the one who would issue the decree allowing the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem. The main message of chapter 41 is that God is stronger than any nation and their idols (their so-called gods) and the people of God can completely depend on Him for protection and help.

Isaiah 41:1-7: The Rule of God

In verses 1-7 God calls the ends of the earth (the islands) to listen in silence as His witness as He declares His just decree as the one and only ruler of the world. God will bring someone to subdue kings and conqueror nations and the nations in response will rely on worthless idols for their help. In verses 2-7, God asks two rhetorical questions (vs. 2 and 4) about someone to come who will accomplish His purposes by subduing nations and causing the ends of the earth to tremble. The person who God calls is not mentioned as it seems that the intent of Isaiah is to just introduce him in this declaration and then later provide more revelation from God about him. The initial purpose of verses 2-7 is to declare that it is God alone who decrees the outcome of history and only God can do this. Isaiah returns to this declaration in verses 21-29 of this chapter.

41:1 Be silent before me, O islands.
Let the peoples renew their strength;
let them come near;
let them speak;
let us come together for judgment.

Isaiah records that God calls the nations (the islands) and all peoples to listen to Him in silence as He declares His justice upon them. See Habakkuk 2:20 and Zechariah 2:13. These nations by obeying God’s call, will gain new strength as will the people of Judah in a future time. See Isaiah 40:28-31. These nations are invited to speak in God’s presence as if before a judge who brings judgment. In 41:21, the prophet records God’s command to these nations to state their case before Him and declare their strong arguments. The purpose of God is to allow the nations to see for themselves their folly in trusting idols instead of the One true God. If they trust in Him alone, they will gain new strength. The far nations will in the end times finally acknowledge that the Holy One of Israel is their God and they will come and worship Him along with the people of Israel. See Isaiah 19:18-25 and 27:12-13.

41:2-3 Who has roused up one from the east?
Who calls him in righteousness into his service?

He gives nations to him,
and enables him to subdue kings.
He makes them like the dust by his sword,
like the windblown stubble by his bow.

3 He pursues them,
passing on in safety,
by a path that his feet have never traveled.

God describes one He calls from the east and who is called in righteousness to the feet of God and who will deliver up nations, subdue kings and makes nations and their kings like dust with his sword and like chaff with his bow. This one will also pursue kings, passing them by in safety while travelling in a way he had not been before. The identity of this one is not stated by Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 40. The majority of scholars link this passage with Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 in which the prophet states the name of Cyrus as being God’s
shepherd who will perform the desire of God and is also called the Lord’s “anointed” which in the Hebrew is “messiah”.

41:4 Who has performed and done it, summoning each generation from the beginning?

I, the Lord, am the first,
and will be with the last of them, I am the one.

The prophet records God’s question and His own response. God asks the assembled nations, 41:1 and 21, who it was that performs and accomplishes the great things He has just announced? And who it was that has called forth (created) the peoples of the earth from the beginning (when they were created)? God continues to address the nations with questions, 41:2, of which the nations must acknowledge that the great Creator, the Self-existent One, the Eternal God is exactly who God declares, in response to His own claim, “I the Lord, am the first and will be with the last of them, I am the one.” 41:4. This is one of the greatest declarations in Scripture of God regarding His eternality. The statement that He is the first and will be with the last is again recorded by Isaiah in 44:6 and 48:12. This statement is repeated by Jesus Christ as recorded in Revelation 1:17; 2:8 and 22:13 as pertaining to Himself as the risen Lord. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John records the Greek alphabetic rendering of “alpha and omega,” in 1:8; 21:6 and 22:13, as descriptive of God’s eternality. The great triune God proclaims that He is the Eternal One always existing and the One who creates, controls and directs all things including the peoples of all the nations. The last phrase of 41:4, “I am the one” is an emphatic statement of identification so Judah and all nations would clearly understand that He alone is God, there is no other and that His name can be stated with the deepest of reverence as “I am.” See also Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 42:8; 43:10, 13; and 46:4.

41:5 The coastlands have seen, and fear;
the ends of the earth tremble;
they draw near and come.

The result of God’s existence and His creative power is explained by God. Those who see Him will tremble and will be afraid of Him. Isaiah often stated that the world and its inhabitants will tremble at the presence of the Lord, 2:19, 21; 13:13; 14:16; 19:1, 16; 23:11; 64:2 and 66:5. See also 1 Chronicles 16:30; Psalms 96:9; 97:4; 99:1; 114:7; 119:20; Jeremiah 33:9; Ezekiel 7:27; Joel 2:1 and 3:16. Isaiah the prophet expressed his great fear of seeing God by exclaiming “Woe is me! For I am doomed; for I am a man of unclean lips and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Isaiah 6:5. Isaiah also stated in 8:13, “The Lord of hosts is the one you must recognize as holy, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” See notes on Isaiah 8:13. It is to the great and terrifying God that the nations of the earth have been called to face. How they react to this summons is stated in 41:6-7.

41:6-7 They help each other;
each says to his brother, “Be strong.”

7 So the craftsman encourages the goldsmith,
the one who smoothes with the hammer
encourages him who strikes the anvil,
saying of the welding, “It is good.”
Then he fastens it down with nails
so that it will not tip over.
The nations react to the summons of facing their Creator, the almighty God. Instead of humbling themselves before Him in reverent fear the nations sought courage and strength from the presence of their neighbors. King Ahaz rejected the plea of Isaiah to trust in God and not to seek the aid of Assyria, Isaiah 7:1-16. The consequences of Ahaz’s refusal to trust in God is stated in 2 Chronicles 28:16-27. Isaiah had to warn the people of Judah not to seek protection from the threat of Assyria from neighboring countries that God declared would be useless and too weak to help them nor to count on their own defenses. See Isaiah chapters 18-23 and 28-31. The Gentile nations were just like Judah in that they sought help from others and they depended on idols instead of trusting in God. The judgement of God against the idolatrous practices of the nations and Judah is a major theme of the book of Isaiah. See notes on Isaiah 40:19-21.

Isaiah 41:8-16: The Strength of God

This section of Isaiah chapter 41 is a beautiful statement of God’s promises to lovingly care and strengthen His people. Although they had failed to trust Him many times in the past and had sought the help of neighboring countries and had trusted in idols, God remembered His unconditional covenant with Abraham and offered to once again come to the aid of those He calls “My servant,” 41:8. For an extended discussion on God’s covenant with Abraham, refer to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Genesis Commentary, Ariel Ministries, 2008, pages 239-343.

41:8-9 But you, Israel, my servant,
   Jacob whom I have chosen,
   the seed of Abraham my friend,

9 you whom I am bringing back from the ends of the earth,
and summoned you from its remotest corners,
and told you, 'You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you away."

God, through the prophet, made the declaration in 41:8a: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen.” The description of Israel and Jacob, the chosen people of God, as the servant of God is found often in the Old Testament. This description of servant occurs often in Isaiah beginning with Isaiah 41:8. Other references in Isaiah are 41:9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21 (2x); 45:4; 48:20; 49:3; 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 64:14; 65:8, 9, 13 (3x); 14 and 15. But in which sense is Israel/Jacob the servant of God? Each reference must be taken in its context. In 41:9, God described His servants as those “whom I am bringing back from the ends of the earth, and summoned you from its remotest corners.” Thomas Constable comments:

“41:8 The Lord turned from addressing the nations to speaking to Israel. God had chosen the Israelites for special blessing because He chose to love them more than other peoples. Election rests on love (cf. Deut. 7:7-8). The reference to Jacob recalls the unworthiness of the Israelites, and the mention of Abraham the fact that Abraham loved God (Gen. 18:17-19), the proper response to electing love (cf. 1 John 4:19). Both references also connect to God's covenant with the patriarchs. God had called Israel to be His servant. This is the first of 31 references to a servant of the Lord in Isaiah.476

41:9 God reminded His people that He had called them from the remotest part of the earth to be His servant. He did this in Abraham's case when He called him out of Ur into the Promised Land, and He did it in Jacob's case when He brought him back into the land from his sojourn near Haran. God had determined not to reject His people. Israel had nothing to fear (cf. John 15:14-15).” [Note 476: See Allan A. MacRae, "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah," Bibliotheca Sacra 121:483 (July 1964):218-27, for a study of the progressive revelation of the servant of the Lord in Isaiah. For a good overview of the title "Servant" in Isaiah, see Willis J. Beecher,

In Isaiah 41:9, the prophet declares “you whom I am bringing back from the ends of the earth, and summoned you from its remotest corners.” The word “you” in these two phrases must refer to the remnant whom Isaiah had earlier discussed within the context of the beginning of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah as recorded in Isaiah 11:12:

*Then he will set up a signal flag for the nations,*  
*and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,*  
*and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.*

The faithful remnant of Israel, described by many words such as “outcasts” and “dispersed” in Isaiah 11:12, are those whom God will gather from all parts (corners) of the earth to populate the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. They will be those who have come out of the horrible days of the Tribulation and will rejoice when they meet their Messiah for whom they have sought in repentance for the great sin of their ancestors whom rejected their Messiah when He first walked among them. For further Biblical evidence of the gathering of the remnant, see for example, Isaiah 14:2; 27:13; 43:5; 49:8-23; 54:7; 56:8; 62:10-12; 66:20-21; Jeremiah 16:14-15; 31:10-14; and 32:37:41. For an extended discussion of the faithful remnant of Israel, refer to The Remnant of Israel: Past, Present and Future, Messianic Bible Study, MBS 191, Ariel Ministries, by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum.

Some scholars attempt to combine a near fulfillment, the return of the captives from Babylon to Jerusalem, and the far-future calling of God for His people, the faithful remnant of Israel, to travel from the far reaches of the earth to Israel. This combination or “two fulfillments” would at first glance seem to contradict the “single meaning” hermeneutical approach to understanding a Biblical text. Many conservative, evangelical authors of previous generations, who held to a strong pre-millennial viewpoint of the OT and NT, often saw two or more fulfillments from a single text. They also saw many types and antitypes in the Scriptures that modern scholars do not necessarily endorse. Does this mean that these godly scholars of a previous generation were wrong in how they interpreted and applied Scripture? Not in the least! These scholars held to the highest possible belief in the inspiration, sufficiency, inerrancy, clarity and authority of all Scripture. They would have agreed to the “single meaning” hermeneutical approach to Biblical interpretation. However, they would differentiate between a “single meaning” in which the Biblical text needs to be interpreted as it is written in its context, and a dual application, in which the text can apply to the then present day, the historical period in which the author wrote the text, and to a future day. For example, many commentators understand Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32 on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:16-21, as being “applied” to the day of Pentecost and also to be completely fulfilled in the days just prior to the second advent of Christ. For example, refer to the section, Joel 2 in Acts 2 in The Coming Kingdom, Andrew M. Woods, Grace Gospel Press, 2016.

Another issue that needs further discussion is the comparison in the writings of Isaiah of “Israel/Jacob” as God’s servant with another (an individual) who is called God’s servant. This issue has great implications for the understanding that Isaiah reveals in his Book, that a person who is called God’s servant is the promised Messiah and that He will rule over a future messianic kingdom. Many who deny that the Old Testament contains direct and clear revelation of the person and work of the Messiah assign the individual/servant passages to Israel as a singular corporate identity. An excellent study of this topic is presented by Michael Rydelnik in his book: The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic? Reference to this resource has been previously made in the notes on Isaiah 7:14-16. This issue will be addressed throughout the remainder of the study of the Book of Isaiah. One of the major themes of this study of Isaiah is that the
prophet proves quite convincingly that the birth, life, death, resurrection and significance of the Messiah’s first coming and many aspects of His second coming and kingdom has been revealed in the prophet’s writings. There is so much detail about the first and second appearances of the Messiah, who is later revealed in Scripture as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that any comprehensive study of the revelation of Jesus in the Scripture that ignores the writings of Isaiah would need to be declared as deficient.

The words of Isaiah 41:8-9 and the following verses would have been in Isaiah’s day and continue to day to be a great source of comfort, for those who are the faithful remnant of the people of Israel. Those who have faith in the Messiah know from the Scriptures, that their faith has been counted as righteousness, Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4. They have the very promise of God that they have been accepted and declared righteous by Him. Victor Buksbazen links Isaiah 41:8-9 with the preceding verses and those that follow:

“For His dispute with worshippers of the worthless idols, Jehovah now turns to Israel. This whole passage breathes a spirit of great compassion and affection. God sees Israel not as they are in reality, but as He intends them to become. Israel is called “the servant of Jehovah” by virtue of His sovereign grace and election. This election is of an indelible character, and does not depend on Israel’s merits or lack of them, but rather on God’s own faithfulness and integrity. If Israel disobeys Him, their disobedience brings upon them disaster and punishment. Nevertheless they remain His servant and chosen people.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 339).

The words of Isaiah 41:9 “I have chosen you and not cast you away” are a precious promise to the faithful remnant of God. A study of why God chose the people of Israel and why He has not rejected them will be of tremendous benefit for the student of the Scriptures. God chose a small (in numbers), weak and sinful people from among all the nations of the earth to be called “His chosen people.” The Scriptures explains why God had chosen them. First, He chose them because of His love for them and because He kept the oath He had sworn to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and therefore He redeemed them with a mighty hand from Egypt, from the house of slavery and from the hand of Pharaoh. “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be his own special people, above all peoples on the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set his love on you or choose you because you were more numerous than any other people, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 Rather it was because the LORD loved you and was keeping the oath he promised to your forefathers when the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of slavery from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

Second, He chose them to spread the fame of His great name. “For the LORD will not abandon his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you his very own people.” 1 Samuel 12:22. Also it is stated, “What other nation on the earth is like your people Israel? Is there another nation whom God redeemed as a people for himself, to make a name for himself, by performing great wonders and awesome deeds and by driving out nations and gods for those whom you redeemed from Egypt?24 You established your people Israel to be your people forever, and you, O LORD, became their God.” 2 Samuel 7:23-24. God also protects His people and will not ultimately reject them so that His name will be proclaimed throughout the earth. “But for this reason I have raised you up, to show you my power and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.” Exodus 9:16. See also Romans 9:14-18.

The Scriptures declare that God has not rejected His people, Romans 11:1-32. God’s word in Isaiah 41:9, “I have chosen you and not cast you away,” is as true today for the Jew as it was during Isaiah’s day. The truth that God has chosen and not rejected His people for His great name’s sake has also not changed, for God has bound the fame of His name with the people He has chosen. One of the grand conclusions of this study of Isaiah is that God created the heavens and the earth for the purpose of the display of His glory, Psalm 19:1, and to have His image bearers righteously display and declare His glory to all creation. This will be
accomplished by the faithful remnant of God and by all those who are redeemed by their faith in the Messiah who brought salvation to the earth. Those who have been redeemed, have the glorious responsibility and privilege to display and declare the great and incomparable glory of God to all of God’s creation. This is their responsibility while living on the earth and will be during the endless days of the eternal state when they pass from earth’s work and toil to heaven’s reward and glory.

41:10: Do not be afraid,
for I am with you;
do not be troubled,
for I am your God.
I will strengthen you;
yes, I will help you;
yes, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

In keeping with the above brief discussion on the “single meaning” of a Biblical text, do the words of 41:10 apply only to the faithful remnant of Israel? Can they also apply to all who have faith in Christ? The Apostle Paul’s gave the world a wonderful explanation of justification (declared righteous) through faith in Christ as applying to Abraham and to all, even Gentiles, who have faith, Romans 3:21-4:25. Paul also declared, “For whatever things were written in former times were written for our instruction, so that through the endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4. A proper understanding of the words of Paul make it clear that all believers can apply the promise of Isaiah 41:10 to their lives.

By claiming that all Christians can apply the truth of Isaiah 41:10 and other parts of the Old Testament to their lives is not in any way saying that the “Church” has replaced the true Israel (the faithful remnant of Israel) in God’s current and future plans for Israel as a nation. God has not rejected His people as Isaiah 41:9 clearly states. He is working out His perfect plan for them today and will continue to perfect His plan for them for all eternity. Chapters 9-11 of Romans reveal that God has not rejected His chosen people. Paul stated “For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you become conceited: a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, “There will come out of Zion the Deliverer; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob.” 27 And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” Romans 11:25-27. Paul in these verses, quoted from Isaiah 59:20-21. More discussion on God’s preservation of His people will be provided in the notes on Isaiah chapter 59.

The words of Isaiah 41:10 are very precious therefore to all who believe in Christ. Isaiah wrote these words for the encouragement of the people of Judah. The prophet wrote these words to the people of Judah many years before the Babylonian captivity. Isaiah’s message in chapters 40-66 therefore would have been a source of great comfort to his countrymen. The people in Judah would have immediately applied Isaiah’s message to their lives and would not have understood them to apply to a future time. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 42-48 for an excellent defense of the fact that the audience of Isaiah for his messages in chapters 40-66 were Jews living in Judah and not in Babylon.

Many still have fond memories of this verse in the KJV and for its inclusion (adaptation) as a verse in the old hymn, How Firm a Foundation. David Powlison has written a thought provoking discourse on this hymn in Suffering and the Sovereignty of God, Crossway Books, 2006, chapter 7: God’s Grace and Your Sufferings, pages 145-173.

God gives the believer much to consider in Isaiah 41:10:
“Do not be afraid.”
Often God and His holy angels have spoken these words to those who have faith in God. When a messenger from God approached or God spoke directly to someone in Scripture, it was not uncommon for the first words spoken to be “fear not” or “do not be afraid.” This applied to Abraham, Genesis 15:1; to Isaac, Genesis 26:24; to Joshua, Joshua 8:1; to Gideon, Judges 6:23; to Daniel, Daniel 10:12; to Joseph, Matthew 1:20; to Zacharias, Luke 1:13; to Mary, Luke 1:30; to the shepherds on the night Christ was born, Luke 2:10; and to John, Revelation 1:17. The words in Isaiah 41:10 “do not fear” were comforting words that Isaiah would often repeat in his prophecy. See 7:4, 25; 8:12; 10:24; 35:4; 40:9; 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2; 51:7; 54:4, and 14. The intent of the message from God “do not fear” is that, in God, believers have nothing to fear for the reason God gives is the next phrase of Isaiah 41:10.

“For I am with you.”
This is a source of the greatest comfort for all believers. No one can replace, compare to, or have in any way, the protective power of the Lord of the universe. The wonderful promise God gave through Isaiah to king Ahaz was of the Son to come who would be given the name “Immanuel,” (God with us), Isaiah 7:14. This promised name was for the Messiah, Jesus Christ: Matthew 1:23. Isaiah would again bring the great news about God’s presence in Isaiah 43:5. The blessing of God’s presence (to be with us) is a recurring theme of Scripture. See Genesis 26:24; 28:15; 48:21; 1 Chronicles 22:18; 2 Chronicles 13:12; Isaiah 8:10; Jeremiah 1:8, 19; 15:20; 30:11; 42:11; 46:28; Haggai 1:3; 2:4; Matthew 28:20; and Acts 18:10.

One of the most precious portraits of the Scriptures is that of God as a “tabernacle” (a dwelling) among His people. This picture of the tabernacle portrays God’s awesome and comforting presence with those who believe in Him. Psalm 27:5. In John’s vision of heaven, he heard a voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.” Revelation 21:3 (NKJV). Those who trust in God have a precious promise from Him that He will live among them. He will never forsake them or leave them. Not only is God with them, but He also stands for them and will live in them. The Scriptures state, God is with us: Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23); God is for us (Romans 8:31); and God is in us, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27).

“Do not be troubled.”
The believer has no need to be anxious or troubled for any reason. An anxious look is to show worry as if everything is not under control. Those who are anxious are to look to God for comfort and peace, Psalm 94:19; 139:23; and Isaiah 35:4. The Apostle Paul stated that believers are to be “anxious for nothing.” There is no need to be anxious. It should be noted that the NASB has the word “anxious” in a few texts which has the meaning of fervently looking as in Daniel 2:3; Luke 2:48; Romans 8:19 and Jude 1:21. This is not the same as sinful anxiousness. The New Testament has much to say about anxiousness as worry, Matthew 6:31, 34; 10:19; 13:22; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11, 22, 25, 26, 29; and 1 Corinthians 7:21.

“For I am your God.”
This great statement should cure all worry and anxiety of the believer. This is one of the greatest statements of comfort in all of Scripture. The only true God, the all-powerful Ruler of all things, the awesome, majestic, glorious and fearsome God who alone created, upholds and lovingly cares for the people of this world is the God of the believer. God often reminded His people (throughout the Old Testament) that He was their God. It is also part of the covenant formula, which states that “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” See for example, Jeremiah 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; 32:38; Ezekiel 36:28; 37:23; and Zechariah 13:9. Isaiah frequently declares the truth from the Lord, that He is their God. See 41:10; 41:13; 43:3; 48:17 and 51:15. The prophet Joel declared in 2:27:
You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, 
and that I am the LORD your God, 
there is no other. 
My people will never be put to shame.

"I will strengthen you."
God promises to give strength to those who believe in Him. God strengthens the believer in many ways. He gives confidence when a believer’s self-esteem is low. He fortifies the believer to meet seemingly overwhelming challenges. He provides strength during times of loss, bereavement, and calamity. He gently supports and comforts the believer during the storms of life. He comes alongside the believer during times of loneliness, doubt and during the dark times when all seems to be in confusion. The words of Psalm 23 are an apt commentary on the words of God in Isaiah 41:10, “I will strengthen you”. Isaiah often spoke of the strength the Lord has given and will give to His people. See 12:2; 28:6; 33:2; 35:3; 40:29, 31; 41:1, 10; 45:24 and 58:11.

"yes, I will help you."
The significance of the promise of the Lord’s help to the believer is stunning. Those who trust in God have this beautiful promise that God Himself is present at all times to aide and help them. There is no greater, better, perfect, or timely help that could ever be provided to the believer than the help God promises. Any help God gives is in His perfect and holy will to accomplish His plans and is always for the best interests of and for the best good of the believer. The psalmist in Psalm 46:1 proclaimed: God is our refuge and strength, always there to help in trouble. The Scriptures assure the believer of the availability of the help of God. Selected references in Isaiah include 25:4; 41:10, 13, 14; and 44:2. The Psalms are full of pleas for God’s help and praises when God provides help. The New Testament speaks often of God’s help. See Luke 1:54; Romans 8:26; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 2:16; 4:16 and 13:6.

"yes, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
One of the most assuring anthropomorphisms in Scripture is that of God’s sustaining and keeping power described as being provided by God’s “right hand.” The portrait of God’s right hand is that of being powerful for many people are right handed and their right hand has more exercise and strength than their left hand. So, with His righteous and powerful right hand, God describes Himself as upholding (holding fast, keeping for God’s own use) the believer with His full strength. This is not to say God’s left hand is weak. This anthropomorphism must be seen as a picture of God’s provision in a manner that those who heard Isaiah, and those who read Isaiah’s words would easily understand. See also Psalm 63:8. The right hand of Jacob was used for blessing, Genesis 48:8-22. The right hand of God is a source of righteousness as declared by the psalmist in Psalm 48:10:

Like your name, O God, 
your praise extends to the ends of the earth; 
your right hand is full of righteousness.

Also, another psalmist declares in Psalm 89:13:

You have a mighty arm; 
strong is your hand, 
and high is your right hand.

Several Old Testament texts declare the power and righteousness of God’s right hand. For example, see Exodus 15:6, 12; Psalms 16:11; 17:7; 18:35; 20:6; 48:10; 60:5; 63:8; 89:13; 98:1; 108:6; 118:15-16; and
138:7. Isaiah also declared this truth in 41:10, 13; 48:13 and 62:8. God’s right hand is not just powerful, it is also righteous. Charles Ryrie provides a description of righteousness:

“Though related to holiness, righteousness is nevertheless a distinct attribute of God. Holiness relates to God’s separateness; righteousness to His justice. Righteousness has to do with law, morality and justice. In relation to Himself, God is righteous; i.e., there is no law, either within His own being or of His own making, that is violated by anything in His nature. In relation to His creatures, he is also righteous; i.e., there is no action He takes that violates any code of morality or justice. Sometimes these two aspects of righteousness are called absolute (in relation to Himself) and relative (in relation to His Creation).” (Charles C. Ryrie, Basic Theology, page 48).

41:11-13 Look, all those who are angry with you will be put to shame and disgrace.
Those who dispute with you will come to nothing and perish.
12 You will look for your opponents, but not find them.
Those who attack you will come to nothing at all.
13 For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, "Don't be afraid; I will help you.

Following the precious promises of 41:10, Isaiah described the effect that these promises have on the believer in God. Endued with God’s presence, help, strength and being upheld by God, believers have the assurance that any enemy, 41:11, who are angry (burning, or kindled with anger) with them, will be put to shame and be dishonored. Also, any who disputes (contends with strife) with them will be considered as nothing and will ultimately perish (to become as nothing). In 41:12, Isaiah repeats the intention of 41:11. Those who quarrel or dispute with God’s people will not be found and those who war (fight against) them will be as nothing and will be non-existent. Many would understand these verses as applying to any enemies of God’s people in Isaiah’s day and also applying to a far future day. However, Gary V. Smith suggests an applicable historical setting for these verses:

“41:11–13 God’s presence and strengthening will result in the defeat of Judah’s enemies (41:11–12). The identification of these enemies is very important if one desires to discover the setting of the prophet and his audience, but relatively few commentators labor to discover the impact of these words. J. D. W. Watts believes these words “point to Israel’s opponents in all the conflicts of the past,” but the imperfect verbs in these verses most likely point to a defeat of Israel’s enemies at some point in the future. It also is difficult to suggest that this is God’s promise to the exiles about the imminent fall of Babylon, for the prophetic books referring to the exile never refer to the Babylonians or the Persians being enraged with or at war against the Jewish people while they were in exile. A. Schoors admits that it is very difficult to fit this chapter into an exilic setting in Babylon for “it is hard to accept that Israel was at war (milḥāmā) with any nation” during those days. But if the text does not fit a peaceful exilic context in Babylon, then this literary unit must be set in a different historical setting where a major conqueror from the east defeated many nations and made war against God’s chosen people (41:2–3). The most natural setting is during the Assyrian attack on Judah (701 BC) or the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem in 587 BC.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 135-136).
Isaiah 41:13 is similar to 41:10 and may be overlooked as a repetition for the sake of emphasis. However, the reader should note that Isaiah records in 41:13 that God holds (upholds) their right hand whereas in 41:10 God declares “I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” The difference is very important. In 41:10 it is God who takes direct action to uphold (sustain, hold fast, keep) the believer. In 41:13, Isaiah states that God stands with the believer to strengthen the works and actions of the believer through times of difficulty which, in the context of chapter 41, it is most often applicable when enemies afflict and assault them. For comparison see Isaiah 42:6; 45:1; 48:13; 62:8 and 63:12.

41:14 Do not be afraid, O Jacob, you worm. You men of Israel, I will help you,” says the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

God again, as in 41:10 and 13, addresses His people with the comforting words, “do not be afraid.” For an extended note on God’s command for them: “do not be afraid”, see notes on 41:10 above. God’s description of His chosen people as “O Jacob, you worm” is fitting within the context of chapters 40 and 41 of Isaiah. Isaiah, in 40:17, declares that “all nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.” From among all these “worthless nations,” God in His sovereign choice (election), selected a people whom He called Jacob/Israel. He chose them not because they were large in number or had done anything that would impress God, but because of His great name, 1 Samuel 12:22. This great truth of God acting to make a name for Himself is most clearly seen in 2 Samuel 7:23, “What other nation on the earth is like your people Israel? Is there another nation whom God redeemed as a people for himself, to make a name for himself, by performing great wonders and awesome deeds and by driving out nations and gods for those whom you redeemed from Egypt?” Also, Isaiah would later declare that God led His people to make for Himself a glorious name, Isaiah 63:14. Therefore, it is not that God is intentionally disparaging His people, but He is declaring a wonderful message of help, hope and Godly care to those whom He has chosen so that His name would be great in all the earth. This truth is certainly most pronounced in the prayer of Jesus to His Father, recorded in Matthew 6, often called the “Lord’s prayer.” Jesus begins His model prayer with the request, “hallowed be your name.” Matthew 6:9. See also Luke 11:2. It is the prayer of the Son that the name of the Father be hallowed (glorified, known, revered, worshiped, exalted, uplifted) throughout all the earth.

God, as recorded in Isaiah 41:14, reveals some parts of His name that He holds most high over all names. First, He calls Himself their “Redeemer.” The Hebrew word is go’el which has the meaning of kinsmen redeemer. The Biblical book of Ruth is a beautiful story of a man, Boaz who acts as a kinsmen redeemer for his relative, Ruth. Victor Buksbazen comments on the role of the kinsmen redeemer in Israel:

“Redeemer – Hebrew “goel”, a kinsman, who pays up the debt in order to redeem a near but impoverished relative, who was forced to sell himself or his property to satisfy a debt. (See Lev. 25:25, 32, 48, also Isa. 59:20). (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 340).

God as Israel’s (Judah’s) Redeemer is a major theme of the book of Isaiah. God is described as the Redeemer (go’el) in Isaiah 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. The action of God in redeeming His people (go’el) is declared in Isaiah 35:9; 43:1; 44:22; 44:23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 62:12; and 63:9. Not only was this description of God as a Redeemer (go’el) a source of great eternal comfort for His people in the Old Testament but it is also the believer’s great hope for an eternal destination with God through the great accomplished word of God’s Son, the believer’s Saviour as described so clearly in the New Testament. See extended comment on “go’el” on the notes for Isaiah 35:9 in this study.
Second, God in Isaiah 41:14 describes Himself as the “Holy One of Israel”. This is a very special name for God, that occurs 28 times in Isaiah. See 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:17, 20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41: 14, 16, 20; 43: 3, 14, 15; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9 and 14. Isaiah also uses “Holy One” as a title 4 times in 10:17; 40:25; 43:15; and 49:7 and “Holy One of Jacob” once in 29:23. The repetition of this title in Isaiah must not be overlooked as just a common title. It is a most sacred name for God. He declares Himself to be the “Holy One.” The word “holy” as applied to God is a description of His essential nature. It has a variety of meanings but its most basic meaning is glory, honour, abundance (literally: weight) and is the opposite of anything evil, profane or common. Hosea 11:9 states, “For I am God an and not a man, the Holy One in the midst of you.” The spectacular revelation of the Scriptures is that the Most High God, whose holiness is Himself, (and not just one of His attributes), has elected to live among His chosen people. There is none like Him, no holy like Him, and there is no other God, anywhere, at any time Who has come to live among mankind. He therefore is no far from anyone but close to all. The New Testament reveals a divine mystery. This Holy One comes even closer to those who profess faith in His Son by entering into residence within the believer through the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 3:16 and Colossians 1:27. For an extended article on the holiness of God, refer to the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3; Holiness: pages 173-183.

41:15-16 Look, I will make you to be a new sharp threshing instrument having many teeth.

You will thresh the mountains,

Having crush them and make the hills like chaff.

16 You will winnow them and the wind will carry them away,

And the whirlwind will scatter them.

Then you will rejoice in the LORD;

You will glory in the Holy One of Israel.

In the context of chapter 41, and specifically with reference to 41:9, the message of Isaiah in 41:15-16 would not easily apply to the returning exiles from Babylon. Many Biblical scholars claim the message of Isaiah chapters 40-66 are mostly directed to these returning exiles. However, this claim needs to be examined closely. Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 41-51 has provided an excellent discussion on this issue. There are certainly specific references to Babylon within chapters 40-66: 43:14; 44:24 - 45:7; 45:11-13; 46:1-13; 47:1-15; and 48:12-22, but it would be unwise and not exegetically sustainable to consider that these references indicate that all of chapters 40-66 are about the return of the exiles from Babylon. Isaiah 41:15-16 certainly does not fit the days of the return of the Babylonian exiles to Jerusalem. The question then must be asked, to what days or time do these verses apply? As was discussed in the notes on 41:9, these verses must apply to some day or period in the future that has yet to be fulfilled. The days that best apply to these verses therefore, would be at the second coming of Jesus Christ, when He, as a warrior King, will defeat the enemies of the faithful remnant and then He will establish His Messianic kingdom. For example, Micah 4:11-13 refers to the future days when Israel will arise and thresh and pulverize many nations (through the strength the Messiah will instill in them). This prophecy comes immediately after a reference to Babylon, Micah 4:10. When the time arrives, Isaiah 41:15-16, God will make His people like a threshing sledge to pulverize the mountains so that nothing remains and then His people will rejoice in Him and glory in “the Holy One of Israel.” J. Alec Motyer comments on these two verses:

“15–16. Note the balance between I will make and you will winnow. The Lord’s transforming power is not meant to immobilize but to enable his people. A threshing-sledge was a heavy wooden platform with sharp cutting edges fitted underneath. Thresh the mountains: i.e. tackle the seemingly impossible, remove the seemingly impenetrable (Zech. 4:7). Wind ... gale: the ‘forces of nature’ are often used as symbols of divine
action (Pss 18:7–15; 104:4). So, here, the Lord who transforms (15a) and mobilizes (16a) his people leaps in powerfully on their side to scatter and remove what stood in their way. The LORD ... the Holy One of Israel occurs here as the end ‘bracket’ matching verse 14. Rejoice ... glory: joy, here (cf. the singing of 54:1) symbolizes glad entrance into what the Lord has done for us; he is the Agent, we the beneficiaries; his the work, ours the joy.” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 255).

Isaiah 41:17-20: The Blessings of God

These verses are a declaration of God’s care and saving acts on behalf of His people. These words from God as recorded by Isaiah were addressed to the people of Judah. Isaiah delivers a message of hope and comfort for a future time when God will restore the natural world that has been under the curse of God since the fall of earth’s first parents. The location of this restoration will undoubtedly be the kingdom of Messiah where His people Israel will live in harmony with nature and under the rule and nurture of their divine King. The description of God’s restorative work complements similar promises found in the writings of the prophets. See Isaiah 11:6-10; 30:19-26; 32:15-18; 35:1-10; 43:19-21; 44:1-5; 55:13; 65:17-25; Ezekiel 34:23-31; Hosea 2:18-23; and Amos 9:11-15.

41:17 The poor and needy seek water, but there is none. 
Their tongue fails for thirst; 
I, the LORD, will answer them, I, the God of Israel, will not abandon them.

At the end of the chaotic and terrifying days of tribulation, the remnant of God’s people (the afflicted and needy) will be seeking relief from their thirst but they will not be able to find water in the desert lands where they have fled. But God will nourish them. Revelation 12:13-14. See also Zechariah 14:1-8. God will take upon Himself the care of His afflicted people. As the God of Israel, He will not forsake them. This is one of the most comforting promises for the people of God. In 41:9, Isaiah declared a similar promise, “I have chosen you and not rejected you.” See also Isaiah 43:1-7. The Apostle Paul wrote, “I ask then, has God rejected his people? Certainly not!” Romans 11:1. The writer of Hebrews, quoting Deuteronomy 31:6, stated, “for he has said, I will never leave you or forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5. One of the reasons for God’s care for His people is stated in Isaiah 41:20. God jealously guards His reputation and accomplishes great things so that the whole earth will know of Him and glorify His name. See notes on 41:14 above.

41:18 I will open rivers on the bare heights, and springs in the midst of the valleys.
I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

God promises that His care for his thirsty people will involve a supernatural transformation of areas known to be devoid of water: the bare heights, barren valleys, wilderness areas, and dry land. To these areas, God will cause water to flow like rivers, springs to rise up, pools and fountains of water to emerge. Isaiah gives a dramatic picture of this transformation as recorded in 43:19-21.

19 Look, I will do a new thing. Now it springs forth. Can’t you see it? I will even make a way in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert.

20 The wild animals of the fields will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; because I provided waters in the wilderness, and streams in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen, 21 the people I formed for myself, that they might declare my praise.

God will create waters in the desert to give drink to His chosen people.” Isaiah 43:20. The result of God’s life preserving work in these dry and arid places will be for the people whom He had formed for Himself and they will declare His praise. Isaiah 43:21.

41:19 I will grow in the wilderness the cedar, acacia, myrtle, and olive trees. I will set in the desert the cypress, fir, and pine tree together.

God, not only will provide a supernatural water supply to dry and waterless places, but He will also grow (set) trees in the wilderness and desert. The supply of water will be necessary for the trees to survive. Not only does God miraculously care for His people but He transforms the natural world by the supply of trees that support animal life, provide shade and shelter for people and create beauty from bareness. As in many other passages in Isaiah, 41:19 demonstrates God’s care for His created world. For example, in 32:15 Isaiah predicts:

Until the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field considered a forest.

Refer also to the greater context of Isaiah 32:15-20. There are seven trees described in 41:19: cedar, acacia, myrtle, olive, cypress, fir and pine. These are all native to Judah and its immediate surrounding areas but not to other parts of the Near Eastern geographical area. The cedar will once again be the glory of Lebanon and the myrtle will have much significance. In the future days of the Messianic kingdom, God will restore a specific feast to honour His presence. The Feast of Tabernacles (or booths) will be celebrated. See Zechariah 14:16. In preparation for the feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites gathered branches from leafy trees including the myrtle to use in the construction of booths, Nehemiah 8:15. The requirements for the Feast of Tabernacles are described most specifically in Leviticus 23:33-44 and Deuteronomy 16:13-17. Peter, the disciple of Christ, was overwhelmed by Christ’s transfiguration and, as he understood it, desired to make booths, Matthew 17:4, Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33. Peter may have had a sense of the reason for the Feast of Tabernacles for it celebrates the truth of God’s dwelling among His people. The Lord will provide abundant leafy trees including the myrtle so that every year, in the Messianic kingdom, everyone will participate in this glorious feast to celebrate the presence of the Lord among them. The significance of God’s usage of “tabernacle” in Revelation 21:3 should not be missed!

41:20 This is done so they may see, know, consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.
The ultimate reason the Lord will supernaturally give water and trees to dry and arid places during the future Messianic kingdom is revealed in Isaiah 41:20. It is true that He will do this so that His people will have water to survive and trees to provide shelter and shade and for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, but the core reason is that His people and all peoples on the earth will see, recognize and give glory to God because it is God Himself who has done these works. God above all else, desires that His name be hallowed in all the earth. Matthew 6:9. He has an intense desire for the recognition of His great name. 1 Samuel 12:22; and that His name would be magnified forever, 2 Samuel 7:26. He does miraculous things, such as parting the waters of the Red Sea, to make for Himself an everlasting name, Isaiah 63:12. A study of the name of the Lord in Scripture will reveal many such passages that declare the truth that the Lord could not accomplish His marvelous works in the name of any other being, human or spiritual. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts declared, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among humans, by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12. According to the Scriptures, there is “no other name.” There is no name greater, more exalted, more worthy to be praised, none higher, none to be worshiped forev er than the name of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. God could not accomplish what He does in any other name or exalt any other name. It is entirely holy and righteous for God to exalt His own name. No one could think or suggest a higher more worthy name to praise, so God exalts and glorifies His name as the ultimate reason for His works among mankind.

Isaiah 41:21-29: The False gods of the Nations

41:21-24: The Challenge to the Idols

This Messianic study of Isaiah suggests that chapter 41 contains a prophetic message from Isaiah that has its fulfillment at the end of the tribulation period and the beginning of the messianic kingdom and yet would be an applicable lesson for Isaiah’s immediate audience. Many scholars, however, suggest that this chapter is a prediction of the return of the exiles from Babylon following the edict from the Persian king Cyrus, yet there is no Biblical evidence that the returning exiles from Babylon brought with them idols from this nation or any other nation. However, idols will be present in the end times, Revelation 9:20, and will be an abomination to the Lord then as they were during the days of Isaiah. Therefore, Isaiah’s audience regarding God’s taunt regarding idols (gods: Isaiah 41:23), would understand the message as they would have understood Isaiah previous messages. See Isaiah 2:8-24; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 31:6-7; and 40:18-20. They would have also understood God’s wrathful judgment regarding idols in Isaiah’s coming messages recorded in 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16-25; 48:1-11; 57:13 and 66:3-4. The prophet in 41:21-24 is declaring that worthless idols have no ability to either predict what is going to happen in the future or to explain what has happened in the past with the conclusion that anyone who would choose to worship an idol is an abomination to the Lord.

41:21 "Present your case,"
        says the LORD.
    "Put forth your best arguments,"
        says the King of Jacob.

In contrast to Isaiah 41:1, where God calls His audience to be silent, the prophet declares God’s command in 41:21 to present their case. Isaiah 41:21 and the following verses, are presented in a courtroom setting where God is both the divine prosecutor and judge. God’s demand for the nations to speak up stem from His claim of His sovereign works recorded in the previous verses of this chapter. The charge directed to these nations is presented in 41:22. The words “the King of Jacob” are very significant for they are God’s self-declaration that He is their King. As King, He righteously reigns over His people and demands that they not only worship Him as their one true God but obey Him as their divine King. The words “King of Jacob” occur only
in this verse. The words, “King of Israel” referring to God alone occur in Isaiah 44:6 and Zephaniah 3:15 in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the words “King of Israel” are ascribed to the Messiah in John 1:49 and 12:13. As King, God is exalted and rules with righteousness. Selected verses in the Old Testament for reference for God as King, the One who reigns include, 1 Chronicles 29:12; Psalm 22:28; 47:8; 59:13; 66:7; 72:8; 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1; 103:19; 110:2; 146:10; Isaiah 19:4; 24:23; 32:1; 40:10; Jeremiah 23:5; and Micah 5:2. In the New Testament see Matthew 2:6; Romans 15:12; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 1:5; 2:27; 12:5; and 19:15. Specific references in the Old Testament to God as a King ruling over His Kingdom include Psalm 22:28; 45:6; 145:11-13; 148:11; Isaiah 9:7; 24:21; 49:7, 23; 52:15; Daniel 4:3, 34; and 7:27. In the New Testament there are numerous references to God’s Kingdom either stated as the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Many of these occur in the four Gospel accounts. See also Revelation 11:15 and 12:10. Another expression of the rule of the King in the New Testament is “King of kings and Lord of lords.” See; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. The term Lord of lords is also found in Deuteronomy 10:17. A highly recommended resource for understanding the Kingdom of God and God as ruler of His Kingdom is, He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God, Lampion Press, 2017, author: Michael Vlach.

41:22 Let them bring in their idols.
Tell us what is going to happen.
Declare what things happened in the past,
what they were,
so that we may consider them,
and check whether they actually happened
or tell us what things are to come.

The initial charges against the nations are recorded in Isaiah 41:22. First, God calls upon them to declare what is going to take place in the future. Second, God calls upon them to reveal what where previous events, which may have reference to God’s work among His people. They are to reveal these events, if they knew them so God, speaking in the plural, can consider or weigh them and know their outcome. Third, in the last line of 41:22, is a repeat of the first: “tell us what things are to come.” There is no doubt that this is a taunt from God, for it is obvious from earlier messages by Isaiah that idols are worthless. See references within the Book of Isaiah to idols in the notes on the introduction to 41:21-24.

41:23 Predict the things that are to come in the future,
that we may prove that you are gods.
Yes, do good, or do evil,
so that we may be frightened and be in awe.

In Isaiah 41:23, God continues his taunt against the idols of the nations. Again, He charges these worthless idols to declare future things and now God adds, “that we may prove that you are gods.” One certain sign of divinity as God explains is the supernatural ability to declare with accuracy future events. This is similar to God’s judgment upon false prophets as recorded in Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:15-22; and Jeremiah 23:15-40. God’s taunt is next directed at the very core of the inability of any idol to perform any task or to accomplish anything at all. God demands these idols “do good or do evil that we may be frightened and be in awe.” If they could perform any task, either good or evil, then there would be cause for concern, but God is neither fearful nor ignorant of the abilities of these idols. Refer to J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 257 for a discussion on the impotency of idols.
41:24 Look, you are nothing, and your work is nothing at all. The one who chooses you is an abomination.

God declares His judgment in this courtroom setting. The first judgment is upon the idols. There are two aspects to this judgment. First God states, “you are nothing.” A common Hebrew word in the Scriptures for idol is elil which has the meaning of “worthless.” In 41:24 in the NIV, God declares these idols to be “less than nothing.” The second aspect of the first judgment of God upon the idols is that “your work is nothing at all.” The NIV has “utterly worthless.” Idols as described by God have no value, nor can they accomplish anything whatsoever. The second judgment declared by God regards those who chooses idols to be their gods. God stated, “He who chooses you (an idol) is an abomination.” Those who choose to carve, fashion and worship idols have this condemnation from God upon them. This condemnation was as dramatic and eventful in the long days before Isaiah’s ministry and continues in the millennia following the days of Isaiah. God’s judgment upon those who choose idols has not changed and will not change, Revelation 9:20-21. The Apostle Paul stated, “We know that an idol doesn’t exist in the real world, and that there is no God but one.” 1 Corinthians 8:4.

41:25-29: God’s Prediction of One to Come
(God alone and not any idol can accurately and perfectly predict the future)

41:25 I have stirred up one from the north, and he is coming, from the rising of the sun one who calls on my name. He will trample on rulers like mud, and like the potter treads clay.

In keeping with the context of the preceding verses, God makes a declaration of great prophetic importance to prove that He alone can perfectly and accurately declare the things that are going to come in the future. God is proclaiming to all the earth that, because He can do this, His name therefore is above every name and He alone is the God of creation and the universe and that the words of 41:20 apply only to Him. God words in 41:25 must apply to someone and the majority of evangelical conservative scholars are of the opinion that this someone is Cyrus whom Isaiah speaks more about in 45:1. Not everyone is convinced however, that king Cyrus is the identity of the one that God has “stirred up (aroused) from the north and he is coming.” The NASB states in 41:25, that “he has come.” Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 148-149 provides a detailed discussion on the possibility that the one referenced as the “one from the north” is king Sennacherib of Assyria. For a discussion in support of the view that Cyrus is intended as the identity of this “one from the north,” see Robert B. Chisholm Jr., Handbook of the Prophets, Baker Academic, 2002, pages 98-99. Refer also to Herbert M. Wolf, Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah, Zondervan Publishing House, 1985, page 190.

If it is understood that Cyrus is the identification of this “one from the north,” then the words regarding this coming one in Isaiah 41:25, “he will trample on rulers like mud, and like the potter treads clay.” describe the way in which Cyrus, in the future (to Isaiah’s day), will go about his conquest of nations. Historical records confirm that Cyrus faced little opposition in his military campaigns and no more so than in the conquest of Babylon. See comments in the notes of this study on Isaiah 45:1-7. The student of Scriptures should take careful notice of the English grammatical tenses of 41:25. The verse begins with the past tense “I have stirred up” and the present tense “he is coming” and then proceeds to the future tense ‘he will trample.” The NIV translation contains all present tense actions while the KJV has two tenses, the present and the
future. The point here is not to engage into an exacting study of the Hebrew verbs but to understand that God sees the past, present and future unlike humans see or perceive time. God experiences time and eternity as a constant experience. He does not simply know about the past, present and future as a constant but experiences them in the “eternal now.” By doing so, God can with precision declare a far future event with divine confidence so that the believer can have absolute assurance that what God declares about the future will take place exactly as He says it will. In 41:26-29, Isaiah expounds on this supernatural ability of God to proclaim the future.

41:26 Who has declared it from the beginning, that we may know?
   Who has announced ahead of time,
      that we may say, "This one is right"?
   Yes, none of them has predicted it,
      yes, there is none of them who have proclaimed it,
      yes, there is none of them who heard your words.

God stands alone in foretelling the future. He asks, “Who has declared it from the beginning, that we might know?” He asks this question to the assembled nations accompanied with their idols in a court room setting, 41:21 and following verses. The Lord asks those in the courtroom if they could identify who declares the choice of a specific person “from the beginning?” Perhaps the meaning here is that it is from the beginning of human history. This rhetorical question continues with, “who has announced ahead of time” with the response that God (plural “we”) would state in His decision that “This one is right!” The implication of the rhetorical question is that only one positive response is possible. Only the Holy One of Israel is right for He alone accurately and with precision foretells the future. The words “This one” in the third line of 41:26, may refer to king Cyrus, whom God has stirred up, 41:25; or perhaps more accurately, it refers to one who from the beginning could announce ahead of time the declaration of prophecy of the person from the north who is to come.

The second part of 41:26 answers the question in a negative sense with God stating that with the thrice repeated “none of them” who predicted, proclaimed or heard God’s words. There were no words to hear because the worthless idols of the nations could not declare or proclaim anything. See a similar question/response in 41:4 and a similar demand in 41:22-23.

41:27 I first declared to Zion,
      'Look, here they are,'
    I gave Jerusalem a messenger bringing good tidings.

God verbally strikes out against the worthless idols of the nations by stating that He had indeed declared good news to Zion and Jerusalem (His people); See also 40:9 and 52:7. The words in 41:27, “Look here they are” and “I gave Jerusalem a messenger bringing good tidings” possibly refer to the prophet Isaiah. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 150. Also, Gleason L. Archer commenting on the KJV, considers this possibility:

   “27. Behold them: ie., behold the fulfillments of my predictions. Render the verse thus: “(As) the first (to say) to Zion, ‘lo and behold them,’ I was giving to Jerusalem a messenger of good news” (i.e., Isaiah himself).” (Gleason L. Archer, Isaiah, page 638).

Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 197, suggests that this messenger was Cyrus and Victor Buksbazen adds:
“In stark contrast to the pagan idols who cannot foretell the future nor do anything good or bad, Jehovah has sent a messenger of good tidings, who long before the event, predicted the deliverance of His people from the Babylonian exile (Isa. 11:10-16, 21:1-10, 35:10). The whole of Isaiah 13 was a prediction of the future defeat of the Babylonian empire at the hands of the Medians.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 343).

However, another possibility for the identification of this messenger is suggested. If the words in Isaiah 41:27, “I gave Jerusalem a messenger bringing good news,” refers to the Lord’s message in Isaiah 40:9 and looks forward to Isaiah 52:7, it is possible that the messenger is the Messiah who brings good news to Jerusalem. See notes on Isaiah 52:7 for an extended discussion.

41:28-29 I look but there is no one.
   There is no sage among them,
      that I might ask them and receive an answer.
29 Look, all of them are nothing.
   Their deeds are empty.
      Their metal images are nothing but an empty wind.

The last two verses of chapter 41 of Isaiah conclude God’s courtroom drama and His final judgment on the idols of the nation. God has declared in 41:25-27 that He alone delivers to His people a true prediction of coming events and it is He who gives them a messenger of good news. God looks among the nations and finds no one, no counsellor who can give an answer to any question God (or anyone else) could ask of them. God’s final statement of judgment is recorded in 41:29, “Look, all of them (the nations of the world) are nothing. Their deeds are empty,” (they can perform no works worthy of God’s standard). Isaiah 41:29 concludes with, “Their metal images are nothing but an empty wind.” Their idols are absolutely worthless and of no value to themselves or to anyone else. Thomas Constable comments on verses 28-29:

“When the Lord looked for a messenger from another god who predicted the coming of Cyrus, He could find none. Not one of them could give any information about his coming (cf. 40:13). So He concluded as He began (v. 24), but this time passing judgment on the idolaters rather than on the idols. "Behold" ends each subsection (vv. 24, 29). The idolaters are false in the sense of being untrue and delusive. Their works—the idols—are worthless, and their idol images amount to nothing.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 197).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 41:
41:1-20: The True God of Israel
   The Rule of God: Verses 1-7
   The Strength of God: Verses 8-16
   The Blessings of God: Verses 17-20
41:21-29: The False gods of the Nations
   God’s Challenge to the Idols: Versus 21-24
   God’s Prediction of One to Come: Verses 25-29


Isaiah, beginning with chapter 42 introduces a magnificent series of prophecies on the Messianic Servant of the Lord. Scholars often refer to these series of prophetic messages as the Servant Songs. They are not really songs but divine declarations regarding One who is to come who will later in Isaiah be revealed as the One upon whom “the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all.” Isaiah 53:6. This Servant will therefore be revealed as the coming Messiah whom the New Testament ascribes the name of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.
Four Messianic Servant messages are usually understood to be recorded in Isaiah 42:1-13; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12.

Chapter 42 is easily divided into two sections regarding the servants of God. The first 13 verses refer to the great Messianic Servant of God (vs. 1: Behold My Servant). This Servant is the Son of God, the Messiah who is revealed in the New Testament as the Lord Jesus Christ. This Servant brings light to His people and to the nations of the world. The second section, verses 14-25 refer to the people of God as the blind and deaf servant of God. The blind and deaf people of God cannot bring light to the nations (or to themselves) and they need, as do all nations to be enlightened by the great Messianic Servant of God.

As recorded in the first section, vss. 1-13 of Isaiah chapter 42, the prophet declares, Look (or behold) my servant, whom I (God) support, my chosen, in whom my (God) soul delights. I (God) will put my Spirit upon him; and he will bring forth justice to the nations, vs. 1. This servant will be meek and humble and will not grow faint or be discouraged. He will establish justice on the earth and the distant nations will wait for his teaching, vss. 2-4. The LORD who is the creator of the heavens and the earth and who gives breath to the people of the earth, has called His servant in righteousness and protects him. God makes the servant a covenant for the people and a light for the nations to open blind eyes and release captives from the prison of darkness, vss. 5-7. God will not give His glory to another or His praise to idols. The things God has predicted have happened, vss. 8-9. The peoples of the earth are therefore to sing praises to God and give Him glory, vss. 10-13.

In the second section, vss. 14-25 of Isaiah chapter 42, the prophet declares that God had held His peace for a long time but now will act forcefully for He will demolish mountains and dry up waters. He will lead the blind and turn darkness into light and make smooth the rough places and will not forsake them, vss. 14-17. Those who are called His servant (His covenant people), are declared to be blind and deaf and cannot comprehend what God is doing. They are people who have been robbed and plundered and no one rescues them, vss. 18-22. Who will listen to God’s message? God has given up Jacob and Israel to be plundered for they had sinned against Him. Therefore, He has poured on them His fierce anger and punished them with burning but they did not listen to Him, vss. 23-25.

Much scholarly debate has arisen over the identity of the Servant in the four prophetic messages, commonly called the “Servant Songs,” Isaiah 42:1-13; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. This study intentionally does not review the volumes of literature regarding this debate. Many excellent scholarly works are available for those who seek to engage in a study of this topic. A few suggested sources are listed below for this purpose. As has been observed, this study stands solidly for a Messianic understanding of the content of Isaiah including the four Messianic Servant messages listed above. Three suggested sources for a deeper engagement in the study of the Messianic Servant Messages are:


These extended comments by Victor Buksbazen on Isaiah 42:1-7 are provided as an example of conservative evangelical scholarship regarding the Messianic identity of the Servant:
“1 Behold My Servant
The identity of “the servant of Jehovah” has for many centuries been the subject of a heated controversy. In this passage “the servant” clearly appears to be an individual personality, chosen and appointed by Jehovah to bring salvation to Israel and to be a light to the nations. However, further in this chapter (v. 19 ff.), the “servant of Jehovah “ is distinctly Israel as a people, about whom the Lord complains that they are blind and deaf, unfaithful and hard of understanding. Many Jewish and liberal Christian commentators have maintained that “the servant of Jehovah” always refers to Israel, either as a collective body, or to “ideal Israel,” or to “a faithful remnant of Israel.” Nevertheless the majority of ancient Jewish scholars have interpreted Isaiah 42:1-4 and other related passages, as referring to the Messiah.

Thus, the Palestinian Targum, an ancient Aramaic paraphrase of the Old Testament, renders “Behold my servant” as “Behold the Messiah my servant.” The difficulty in the proper identification of “the servant” is due to the fact the same adjectives are often applied both the servant as a people, and to the servant as a person. Delitzsch explains the seeming contradiction by comparing Israel to a pyramid, the base of which is the whole of Israel, the central part is the spiritual remnant and the apex is the personal mediator of salvation, the Messiah, who is destined to accomplish that which Jehovah intended Israel to be, was not. (Delitzsch Commentary to Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 174-175, Eerdmans).

Usually the context of the servant passages makes it quite clear whether “the servant” is collective Israel or the individual representative of the true Israel, the anointed mediator and saviour. In the second part of Isaiah there are four distinct Messianic “servant of the Lord” prophecies which apply to the person of the Messiah. These are Isaiah 42:1-7, 49:1-7, 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12.

Israel is also collectively referred to as the servant in 41:8-16; 42:18-21, 43:10, 44:1-5, and v. 21. It is important that we at all times distinguish between the two types of “the servant of the Lord” prophecies or songs, as they are sometimes called.


In chapter 42:1-4, the servant of Jehovah is an individual personality, as in Isaiah 11:2, is endowed with the spirit of the Lord, and is called to establish true justice for all nations. The Messianic servant of the Lord is humble, unobtrusive and compassionate (v.2). He does not crush the weak or the broken, but heals them (v. 3). He never wavers and is not crushed by His adversaries, nor by the enormity of His task, but will in the end accomplish His divinely appointed task.

And for his law the islands shall wait

The implied thought here is that in the hearts of all men there is an unconscious longing for the manifestation of God’s eternal law, for His truth and justice, which the servant will reveal to all nations.

The New Testament and the early church saw in the servant passages a unique prophecy concerning Christ, remarkably fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Most Jewish and liberal Christian scholars have generally applied all these passages to national Israel. However, this interpretation does violence to the obvious sense of the text.

5-7 Thus says God who is Jehovah

With majestic solemnity Jehovah, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, introduces His servant declaring that He has appointed Him to be a covenant to the people Israel and for a light to the nations. The servant of this passage is to be a covenant to the people. This is “the covenant of peace” mentioned in Isaiah 54:10 and “the eternal covenant” of 61:8. It is also the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 16:60. The servant will heal Israel from spiritual blindness. The personal character of the servant is clear, and presents
a sharp contrast to national Israel who is still blind, and dwells in darkness in a spiritual dungeon (v. 7).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 343-345).

John A. Martin, also comments:

“42:1–4. Some Bible students say My Servant here refers to Israel, which is clearly the case in verse 19. True, Israel was upheld and chosen by the Lord, and was His delight. However, the statements in verses 1b–4 suggest that here the Servant is the Messiah. This One has the Spirit of God on Him (cf. 11:2), and He will bring justice to the nations (cf. 9:7; 11:3–4; 16:5). He will be gentle (42:2–3a)—most people would break a weak, useless reed, but He will not do so—and He will be faithful (v. 3b) and not … discouraged (v. 4). He gave the Law in which the islands (i.e., people in remote parts; cf. 41:1) will … hope. Matthew 12:18–21 quotes Isaiah 42:1–4 with some minor variations, relating it to Jesus and His ministry in Israel. As God’s Servant, Jesus did what Israel could never do. He perfectly carried out the will of the father so that people everywhere may believe in the Holy One of Israel.” (John A. Martin, Isaiah, page 1095, © 1985 John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament is published by David C Cook. All rights reserved).

Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer add:

“Despite the potential options, it appears best to identify the servant in the Servant Songs of the book of Isaiah as a prediction of the Messiah. As such the NT identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the referent to these passages. The NT’s acknowledgement of Jesus as Messiah and, thus, as the Servant of the Lord, makes clear that He is the true referent of the Servant Songs (cf. Mt 8:14-17; Lk 22:37; Ac 8:30-35; 1 Pt 2:21-25).” Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary, page 1065).

42:1 Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. (NASB)

Isaiah begins the first Messianic servant message with these most beautiful and affectionate words from God:

“Behold My Servant” (NASB)
The NASB rightly interprets the Hebrew word *hen* in 41:29 and the next verse 42:1 as a call to seriously consider the contrast between the worthless works and worship of the heathen nations and the One who is God’s Servant. There is a divine reason for this call of God to seriously consider His Servant. God is heralding the future ministry of this Servant to all nations. The nations have just been found totally unable to give counsel regarding past or future events or to pronounce any good news. The idols of these nations have also been declared in God’s court of justice to be nothing but an empty wind, 41:29. God was looking for a counsellor, who was not to be found among the nations, so He now abruptly announces to these same nations that they behold His Servant. This is strikingly similar to the words of the returning warrior king (the Messiah) as recorded in Isaiah 63:5:

I looked, but there was no one to help; I was shocked that there was no one to lend support. Therefore my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath sustained me.

The words of Isaiah 42:1 describe an earlier portion of the earthly work of the Servant of God while the words of Isaiah 63:5 describe a much later earthly work of this same Servant. Both of these prophetic
passages were still far in the future for Isaiah and his contemporaries. The Isaiah 63:5 passage may refer to a time that is perhaps close in the future for the modern reader of the book of Isaiah.


“Whom I support”
God promises to support (uphold or hold fast) His Servant. God had previously stated that he would uphold (hold fast, keep for Himself) His people (41:10). The idea is similar in meaning to the psalmist’s words in Psalm 41:12, “As for me, you uphold me because of my integrity; you set me in your presence forever.” There will be no release or relaxing of God’s hold on His Servant (the Messiah, the Son of God). God keeps a “grip” on His Son so that everything God has required of His Servant will be accomplished. No one can or will ever thwart or ambush God’s divine plans for His Servant because God keeps Him held fast to Himself. See also the words of Jesus recorded in John 5:36 and 14:10. J Alec Motyer, comments on the intent of God’s “holding fast” of His Servant in Isaiah 42:1:

“Uphold: literally ‘grip fast’. The idea is not so much of imparting strength as of the Lord’s rights over his Servant and his determination to keep his Servant for himself.” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, pages 259-260).

“My chosen one” (NASB)
The Messiah, the Servant, is also God’s Son. There is a unique eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. When God declares that the Servant is His chosen one, it has a deeper and greater significance than God stating that He has chosen any other servant (ie. Moses, Psalm 106:23; or David, 2 Chronicles 6:6; or Solomon, 1 Chronicles 29:1; or Israel/Jacob, Isaiah 44:1). The plan of God from all eternity was to have His chosen One, who is His Son, the Messiah, to accomplish His great act of love for the world, John 3:16, so that whosoever would believe in His Son would have eternal life with the triune God, Father Son and Spirit. The Servant, who is the Messiah, was chosen by the Father to accomplish an act of grace (by His atoning and sacrificial death) that was so infinitely superior and eternally significant than what had been or could be accomplished by any other servant of God. The intimate relationship between God as Father and as Son is of such glorious magnificence in its holiness and beauty, that for God to describe the Servant (His Son) as His “chosen one” is for God to say “We have by our divine decree and holiness of design elected to perform a work of love beyond that which anyone else, spirit or flesh, could ever imagine, devise or accomplish.” God the Father chose to have God the Son accomplish this work as His chosen Servant. What it cost the Son to complete His work as a Servant of the Father is revealed in the New Testament. See Philippians 2:5-11 and Hebrews 12:3. A glimpse of this cost was prophesied in the Old Testament. See Psalm 22; and Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12. See also Luke 9:35 which record the words of the Father from heaven regarding His Son: “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to him!” (ESV)

“in whom my soul delights”
God is speaking about His unique relationship between Himself and the chosen Servant whom He upholds. There is no greater, no holier, more intimate relationship than between the individual members of the
Godhead. Indeed they, the plural singularity that defines the Triune God, can never be separated nor have any disagreement. God states that His soul delights in the Servant, who is the Messiah, His Son, Jesus Christ. God is declaring that He delights (favors, accepts, approves, has pleasure) in the Servant with His whole being, for in reality He is delighting in Himself as the triune God. This special relationship is witnessed in the New Testament. At the baptism of Jesus Christ, the words of the Father are heard from heaven as recorded in Matthew 3:17, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” The words of the Father are heard again from heaven on the mount of transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17:5, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.” Matthew 17:5 See also Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22 and 9:35.

“I have put My Spirit upon Him”
Isaiah earlier had declared this blessed prophesy in 11:1-2 and would later state it in 61:1. See notes on these verses. The purpose of the placement (anointing) of the Spirit upon this Servant is for the purposes of accomplishing the mission and task assigned to the Son by the Father. At the beginning of the Messiah’s public ministry, at His baptism, this placement of the Spirit on the Son was witnessed by those present. Matthew declares, “After Jesus was baptized, when he came up out of the water, suddenly, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him.” Matthew 3:16. See also Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22 and John 1:32-34. The Servant, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was anointed by the Spirit to carry out His divine work, perform miracles, endure earthly temptations and sufferings and to rise from death.

“He will bring forth justice to the nations.”
One of these tasks of the Servant (after having the Spirit descend upon Him) that Isaiah highlights is the establishing of justice (Hebrew mishpat) to the world. This work of establishing justice is mentioned three times in this passage, 42:1, 3 and 4 which is highly significant. That God is One who righteously dispenses justice is a major theme of the Scriptures. The first mention of justice occurs in Genesis 18:19 in the context of a discussion God holds with Himself regarding Abraham, “For I have chosen him, so that he may instruct his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what he has promised him”. During another conversation, Abraham challenges God to be just, as recorded in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” The justice of God is an important theological theme of the Psalms: 25:9; 33:5; 37:28; 89:14; 97:2; 99:4; 101:1; 111:7; 140:12 and 146:7. God’s justice is also a significant theological theme of Isaiah: 1:27; 9:7; 16:5; 28:6, 17; 30:18; 32:1, 16; 33:5; 40:14; 42:1, 3, 4; 51:4; 58:2 and 61:8. The prophet Jeremiah considers the justice of God worthy of boasting about in 9:24. Jeremiah also declares the justice of the Messiah during His millennial reign in 23:5 and 33:15. The justice of God is declared in Daniel 4:37 and in the Minor Prophets: Hosea 2:19; Micah 7:9 and Zephaniah 3:5. In the New Testament see Matthew 12:18-21 (quoting from Isaiah 42:1-4) and Luke 7:29. Refer also to Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 161-162 for an extended discussion.

42:2-4 He will not cry out, or raise his voice, or make his voice heard in the street.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick will he not extinguish.

He will bring forth justice with faithfulness.

He will not grow faint or be discouraged until he has established justice on earth; the coastlands will expectantly wait for his teaching.
Following the great introductory verse, Isaiah 42:1 describing the person and role of God’s unique Servant, the Messiah, Isaiah provides more personal details about the Servant’s character when He will carry out the work of establishing justice to the nations (see also Isaiah 32:1) by the literary device of seven negative phrases in 42:2-4. The Servant (1) will not cry out; (2) nor raise His voice; (3) will not make His voice heard in the street; (4) will not break a bruised reed; (5) will not extinguish a faintly burning wick; (6) will not grow faint (be disheartened); and (7) nor will He be discouraged (crushed), until He has established justice in the earth. There are also two similar positive statements in these verses. He will bring forth justice with faithfulness and until he has established justice on the earth which refer to the second advent of the Messiah.

(1) He will not cry out (2) or raise his voice (3) or make his voice heard in the street
The Servant will not be seeking personal attention and fame, 42:2 by loudly crying out or proclaiming Himself in public. The words “cry out,” Hebrew za’aq, depict a cry of anguish during a time of distress. Isaiah uses this Hebrew word in similar situations as recorded in 19:20; 30:19; 33:7; 46:7; and 65:14. See also Exodus 2:23; Judges 3:9, 15; 6:6-7; 1 Samuel 7:8-9; 8:18; 15:11; 1 Chronicles 5:20; 2 Chronicles 32:20; Psalm 22:5; 107:13, 19; 142:5; Jeremiah 11:11; 30:15; Lamentations 3:8; Ezekiel 9:8; Joel 1:14; and Micah 3:4. The prophecy that God’s Servant will not cry out was fulfilled in Messiah’s first advent when He suffered indignity before Roman rulers Luke 23:9 and at the hands of cruel Roman soldiers who beat him severely. See Matthew 27:26-34; Mark 15:16-21; John 19:1-16; Hebrews 12:3 and 1 Peter 2:23.

(4) A bruised reed he will not break (5) and a faintly burning wick will he not extinguish
(6) He will not grow faint and (7) He will not be discouraged
The Messiah emphatically declared that he came down from heaven not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him, John 6:38. See also John 4:34 and 5:30. The Servant will tenderly care for the weak and broken (the bruised reed and dimly burning wick, vs. 3). He will be a gentle shepherd to those whom He came to save. Matthew describes the ministry of Jesus and particularly the healing and caring aspect of this ministry without public fame by quoting from this passage in Isaiah. Matthew 12:15-21. See also Isaiah 40:11; 50:4; 61:1 and John 10:11. The two positive statements in 42:3-4 have to do with establishing justice on the earth by bringing forth justice with faithfulness (or by faithfully establishing justice on the earth). The farthest part of the earth, described by Isaiah are the coastlands which “will expectantly wait for His teaching,” 42:4 or as Matthew states it, “until he brings justice to victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles hope.” Matthew 12:20-21. One of the most significant works of the Servant will be to bring justice not only to His people Israel but to the Gentiles from all nations of the earth. Justice will only be accomplished in the earth when the Messiah returns at His second advent, to demolish the rebellion of the nations against Israel. See Isaiah 42:13, Psalm 2; Joel 3:2-4; Zechariah 14:1-3; and Revelation 16:14-16 – the battle of Armageddon, and by the establishment of the His earthly kingdom.

42:5 This is what the sovereign LORD says,
    he who created the heavens,
    and stretched them out;
    who spread out the earth
    and everything that lives on it;
    who gives breath to the people upon it,
    and spirit to those who walk in it.

In Isaiah 42:1-4 the Lord talks about His Servant and in 42:5-7, He talks to His Servant. To begin His declaration to His Servant the Lord describes His name and creative and sustaining power to underscore His sovereign authority over His creation. There is no doubt Who is speaking and what He has accomplished. This is a statement to the nations and to His people that there is a supreme being who is the true God who has
unimaginable powers in comparison to the idols of Israel and the nations who are worthless and can accomplish nothing. These worthless images (carved idols) are mentioned in 42:8. They can predict nothing. But God can declare new things as He has proved that the former things He has predicted have occurred.

Isaiah introduces this passage in 42:5 with a description of God as “the sovereign LORD” as or literally God YHWH. See also Psalm 85:8. “God” is the Hebrew word el meaning mighty or almighty denoting in the context of 42:5 His power in creation. Coupled with el, is the word LORD which is the Hebrew word YHWH or with the vowels added, Yahweh. YHWH is the Jewish national name for God. God described His name to Moses, Exodus 3:14 as “I AM WHO I AM” which has the meaning of being self-existent and eternal.

With this introduction of Himself, God declares that He is the great transcendent One who was the creator of the heavens and stretched them out and spread out the earth. Along with His creative powers, God declares it is He who gives breath (Hebrew: nesama) and spirit (Hebrew: ruah) to the people of the earth. To the first person created, Adam, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and Adam became a living being, Genesis 2:7. Along with breath God gave each of His created human beings a spirit (or soul) which differentiated them from all other living creatures. Upon the death of a human, their spirit returns to God who gave it (their spirit) to them, Ecclesiastes 12:7. God alone gives, maintains and takes life. He is in absolute control of His created universe, including the earth and those who live on the earth. It is this God, this supreme Creator, that is introduced as having all authority who talks to His Servant in the following verses.

42:6 I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand
and protect you.
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
and a light for the nations.

The Lord reiterates His self-identification as “I the LORD” or “I am the Lord” in some English versions. See also Isaiah 41:13; 42:8; 43:3, 11, 15; 45:5, 6, 7, 18; 48:17; 49:23; and 51:15. There should be no doubt as to the identification of the One who has done the calling (the LORD), and no doubt to the identification of who is called (His Servant). See 42:1, “my chosen one” (NASB). The calling of this Servant, who is His chosen one, was much different than the calling of other servants. From all eternity and within the divine counsels of the intimacy of the Godhead, the Lord has elected (chosen) by His decree to select One whom will complete the greatest mission ever conceived to be undertaken in all creation. No other servant can compare, nor is there any scale of comparison, between this Servant and His divine task. As the prophecy of Isaiah now unfolds, more details regarding this marvelous mission is provided. This first and the other great messages (songs) of the Servant, Isaiah 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12, are the key disclosures by God regarding this divine mission. This mission had to be completed perfectly and in complete accordance with God’s will. Without its completion, humanity would not have an opportunity, by faith in the Messiah and His atoning sacrifice, to escape the penalty of death which all humanity deserves for their sinful thoughts and actions.

I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness
This calling in righteousness has at least two major meanings, (1) the One that does the calling is righteous and has a righteous work or mission and (2) the One being called is righteous and has a calling to a righteous work or mission. Both meanings are correct, and they should be taken together to be understood as one combined righteous calling. The righteousness of God and the Son has deep Biblical roots. See notes on Isaiah 41:10 for a definition of righteousness as related to the nature of God. See also the definition of God’s righteousness and justice by Henry Clarence Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Revised Edition, 1979, page 85.
Among many wonderful passages which speak of the righteousness of God throughout the Scriptures the following selected verses in Isaiah are worthy of the student’s attention and study. For the righteousness of God (Yahweh) and His works see, Isaiah 5:16; 24:16; 33:5; 41:10; 42:21; 45:19, 21, 23, 24; 46:13; 48:18; 51: 5, 6, 8; 54:14; 56:1; 59:16 and 17. For the righteousness of the Son (the Servant) and His works see Isaiah 9:7; 11:4; 5: 16:5; 32:1, 16, 17; 53:11 and 63:1. See also Jeremiah 23:1-6; 33:14-18 and Zechariah 8:1-8. In the New Testament, Paul explained that the righteous of God (the Son) is imputed (credited, reckoned) to the believer through faith in the Son, Jesus Christ. See Romans 3:21-26 and 4:1-25. This crediting of righteousness is also seen in Old Testament in the case of Abraham as recorded in Genesis 15:6, “and Abram believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.” It is also mentioned in Habakkuk, “the righteous will live by his faithfulness.” Habakkuk 2:4. This verse is the theme of Romans, see Romans 1:16-17.

I will take you by the hand and protect you
(and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee) KJV

This is a tender promise of the Father to the Son. The Father promises to hold the Servant “by the hand” during the Servant’s earthly ministry. This is a most precious complement to the Father’s earlier promise, 42:1, that He upholds (grips firmly) the Servant. By holding the Servant by the hand, the Father promises never to leave Him or desert Him. The Servant has the assurance of His Father’s continual presence, support and strength. Nothing can prevent the Servant from accomplishing His ministry and great mission while being held by the hand by His Father. The Father also promises to watch over the Servant. His gaze will never leave Him, nor will His caring love ever be absent from the Servant. As students of Scripture will discover, this great care and love from the Father to the Servant, His Son, is also promised to those who believe in the Son. Wonderful passages of Scripture such as Ephesians chapter 1 are replete with precious promises to the Christian who have been adopted as sons. Believers are also called fellow heirs with Christ, Romans 8:17. See notes by John MacArthur, NASB, on Romans 8:17. For those wanting a more extensive discussion, see Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, commentary on Romans 8:17, pages 504-506

Isaiah had previously declared that the people of God had the assurance that they also would be upheld by God’s righteous hand, 41:10 and that He would uphold their hand, 41:13. By this assurance God was saying to His people, just as He had said to His chosen Servant, that He would help and strengthen them and never forsake them.

I will give you as a covenant for the people

Many suggestions have been made by scholars as to the identification of this “covenant.” For examples of this, refer to J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, pages 261-262; John MacArthur, NASB, page 997; and Robert B. Chisholm, Handbook on the Prophets, pages 100-101. Victor Bukszazen states:

“The servant of this passage is to be a covenant to the people. This is “the covenant of peace” mentioned in Isaiah 54:10 and “the eternal covenant” of 61:8. It is also the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 16:60.” (Victor Bukszazen, Isaiah, page 345). (bold added for emphasis).

Thomas Constable adds:

“The Servant would fulfill the covenant requirements and promises that God had given His people, becoming a covenant to them in that sense, and so bring them into intimate fellowship with Himself (cf. 49:6-8). Thus this Servant cannot be all of Israel or even saved Israel or the prophets. Some commentators view this covenant as the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), which Christ would ratify with His blood.
I think both the Old and the New Covenants may be in view, since Christ ended the Old and inaugurated the New. Still others believe that this is a reference to the "covenant of grace" that Christ made available to people by dying on the Cross. The coming conqueror would drive the nations further into idolatry (41:5-7), but the Servant would lead them to God by serving as "a light to the nations" who sit in darkness (cf. Luke 2:32; John 14:6). The Lord Himself would do all this through His Servant (cf. Exod. 3:15; 6:3).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 200-201).

Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer add:

“The phrase a covenant to the people is a figure of speech, a metonymy of effect (covenant) for cause (mediator), and means a “covenant mediator for the people.” Like Moses, the Servant will mediate a covenant for Israel’s benefit, specifically the “new covenant” for the messianic age (cf. Jr 31:31-34). Since the Servant is the mediator of the covenant for Israel, the Servant clearly cannot be Israel.” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary, page 1066).

Isaiah would later state, regarding this same chosen Servant, in 49:8:

*I will give you as a covenant for the people,*
*to restore the land,*
*to re-establish their desolate inheritances.*

There are certainly many possible understandings of the precise meaning of the word “covenant” in Isaiah 42:6. It is helpful to understand the concept of the Messiah as the “covenant” from the viewpoint of the complete Scriptures. When the Old and New Testaments are examined, it becomes apparent that the statement in Isaiah 42:6 that the Servant will be given as a covenant for the people is a direct reference to the new covenant. For example, for those who understand that the Servant is the Messiah, Jesus Christ will know that Jesus as recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:25 stated, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” Jesus, the author of salvation (Hebrews 2:10), is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:15-22; 12:24). Does this mean that the other unilateral covenants, specifically the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, have been replaced by the new covenant? Not in the least! The new covenant replaces only the old conditional Mosaic covenant. The other covenants God made with Israel are unconditional and God will keep His promises to Israel made by His oath by these covenants. It is through the new covenant, specifically by faith in Christ and that it is “in Christ” that all who believe participate presently in the unilateral Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. However, the Abrahamic, Davidic and new covenants will be completely fulfilled during the glorious days of the millennial kingdom to come. For an excellent discussion on the new covenant and its complete fulfillment in the millennial kingdom, see R. Bruce Compton, Dispensationalism, The Church, and The New Covenant, Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal, DBSJ 8 (Fall 2003): 3–48. See also notes on Isaiah 49:8 for a listing of resources related to a study of the covenants.

As a light for the nations
In Isaiah 42:6, the Lord promises to uphold the Servant as He undertakes two identified tasks, (1) as a covenant to the people and (2) as a light to the nations. Only this Servant, the Messiah, could accomplish both of these tasks. The other “servant” (Israel) identified in Isaiah 42:14-25 is blind and deaf and Israel itself is in need of the mediatorial and light bearing work of the Messiah. The word “light” in Isaiah 42:6 is the Hebrew word “or” and is the word for light first introduced in Scriptures in Genesis 1:3, “Let there be light.” Isaiah often referred to the significance of light in his prophecy. See 2:5; 5:20, 30, 9:2; 10:17; 13:10; 30:26; 42:6, 16; 45:7; 49:6; 51:4; 58:8, 10; 59:9; 60: 1, 3, 19, and 20. Isaiah would again reference this ministry of the Messiah as a light to the nations in 49:6. The New Testament reveals that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles (nations) in Luke 2:32 and Acts 26:23. He referred to Himself as the light of the world in John
8:12; 9:5; and 12:46. The people of God are also to be a light to the nations, as Isaiah declared in 60:3 and as the New Testament confirms as recorded in Matthew 5:14; Acts 13:47 and Philippians 2:15.

The Messiah as light is a beautiful metaphor of His ministry to the world. See Luke 2:32; John 1:4-5; and 1 John 1:5-7. In contrast to the darkness of sin and its grasp on the world, Jesus, as a light to the nations, overcomes (exposes, overwheels, conquerors) the darkness so that the people of the world can see the glorious light of the gospel of Christ. Paul eloquently describes this contrast in what undoubtedly is one of the most hope-filled passages in the Scriptures as recorded in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, by God’s mercy, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the hidden shameful deeds and underhanded practices, and handling God’s word deceitfully, but by the open declaration of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is God who said, “Let there be light shining out of darkness,” who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

42:7 to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and those who sit in darkness out of the prison.

More specifics of the task that God has given His Servant are revealed in Isaiah 42:7, specifically (1) to open blind eyes and (2) to release prisoners from prisons who sit in darkness.

To open the eyes of the blind
If there was any inclination to understand the identity of the Servant in Isaiah 42:1-13 as being Israel, this phrase, “to open the eyes of the blind” should remove any consideration of the identification of God’s chosen people Israel, as this Servant. The people of God are declared a few verses later, 42:19 to be both blind and deaf and it would be impossible for those who are blind and deaf to open blind eyes. Indeed, they are the ones who need to have their blind eyes opened. The only One who could possibly open their eyes is God who will do so through the ministry of the Servant (the Messiah) who He has chosen, Isaiah 42:1. The opening of blind eyes certainly has to be understood as a spiritual opening for the people of Israel and the nations would have physical eyes that are open, but they would be blind to the spiritual truths God is declaring to them through His Servant. It is Satan who is blinding the minds of the unbelievers so they cannot “see” the light of the gospel, 2 Corinthians 4:4. The Messianic Servant, who will be a light to the nations, Isaiah 42:6, will enlighten the people of the earth by shining His light in their hearts so that their eyes will be open “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6.

During His first earthly ministry, Jesus opened physical eyes, made the lame walk, cleansed (cured) lepers, gave hearing to the deaf, raised some who were dead and preached the gospel to those who were poor, Matthew 11:4-5. Jesus declared His spiritual ministry regarding “seeing” Him as recorded in John 12:46, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness.” Isaiah had earlier referred to the ministry of God (God as Messiah) as opening blind eyes and deaf ears. See notes on Isaiah 9:2 and 35:5. It is only the Messiah as the Servant as introduced in these verses, Isaiah 42:1-13, who could perform both a physical healing of opening blind eyes and of opening blind spiritual eyes. Those who have had their physical eyes opened have only a temporary healing (perhaps until death). But those who have had their spiritual eyes opened have an eternal healing, so they can see Christ as their savior and believe in Him.
To bring out the prisoners from the dungeon
and those who sit in darkness out of the prison

These words could refer to a physical release of certain individuals from dungeons and from the darkness of prisons but there is no evidence that the Servant during His first advent, had such a widespread ministry of releasing captives. Peter’s release from prison, Acts 12:6-19, and the earthquake that resulted in the release of Paul and Silas from a jail in Philippi, Acts 16:16-36, were isolated incidents that happened after Jesus Christ had completed His first earthly ministry. Indeed, if physical release from prisons is the intent of the latter part of Isaiah 42:7, why would Christ not have caused His cousin John to be released from prison before Herod had ordered John to be killed. Refer to Matthew 14:3-12; Mark 6:14-29; and Luke 9:7-9. The best sense of releasing prisoners from dark dungeons and prisons is to understand this as referring to the ministry of the Servant, as the Messiah, who, during His earthly ministry, opened blinded eyes and released people from spiritual dungeons of darkness so that the glorious light of the gospel could be seen. The Apostle Paul also had this ministry which he received directly from Christ, Acts 26:12-18. This spiritual ministry has not ceased to this day and will continue until Christ returns, for it is implicit in the great commission that Christ has given this ministry to all who believe in Him and are His disciples, Matthew 28:16-20. The salvific ministry of Christ’s faithful followers, results in those being held in spiritual prisons, being released to freedom and new lives when they trust in Christ for salvation.

42:8 I am the LORD, that is my name;
and my glory I will not give to another,
or my praise to carved idols.

Following the message of God about the Servant, Isaiah 42:1-4, and His message to the Servant, 42:5-7, God again makes a great declaration about Himself. See also 42:5. God surrounds His message to His Servant (His Son) with a statement of His (the Father) authority and glory. God declares his great name as the covenant keeping Lord who is faithful and true to His covenants with Israel. He is the only God and there is no other god and therefore He will not allow His glory to be given to another. There is no other! It is righteous and holy for God to both glorify Himself and expect that His creatures will glorify Him. It is the same with the praise He gives to Himself and with the praise His creatures give to Him. God can glorify and praise Himself for there is no one higher, or more worthy, or more excellent, deserving of this glory and praise. The song of heaven is one of praise and glory for both the Father and the Son. See Revelation 4:11; and 5:9-14.

The Lord will not allow any glory and praise rightfully belonging to Him to be given to carved or graven images. This statement by God emphasizes by repetition, Isaiah’s most recent message regarding idols in chapter 40:15-20 and chapter 41. Also, in 42:17 the prophet declared God’s message regarding His people’s trust in idols and molten images as a summary of His hatred for idol worship. See notes on Isaiah 2:8, 18-20; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 21:9; 30:22; 31:7; 40:15-20; 41:7-8, 23-29; 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20-21; 46:1-7; 48:5; 57:13 and 66:3.

The zeal of God in jealously guarding His glory and praise is boldly emphasized in 42:8. See also 48:11. God demands that His created beings recognize His greatness and power by devoting their worship to Him alone. To give any of this worship of praise and glory due to God to another is rebellion and anarchy. It is a statement that there is someone else more worthy of human’s devotion. God will not long endure this rebellion. The Scriptures declare that God alone is to be worshiped. This is evidenced from the earliest record of man’s existence, from the worship of Cain and Abel in bringing offerings to God, Genesis 4:4-5; to the worship of God in heaven, Revelation 4:11, 5:9-14; and 22:9. Paul gives a brief explanation as recorded in 1
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Timothy 6:15-16, “which he, who is the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, will reveal at just the right time. 16 He alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no human has seen, nor can see. To him be honor and power, forever! Amen.” Also, Paul in Romans 11:33-36, summarizes his doctrinal teaching to the church at Rome by this magnificent statement of worship:

33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
   How unsearchable are his judgments,
   and how unfathomable are his ways!
34 For who has known the mind of the Lord?
   Or who has been his counselor?
35 Or who has first given to God,
   so that he is obligated to repay him?
36 For from him, and through him, and to him, are all things.
   To him be the glory forever. Amen.


42:9 Look, the earlier predictions have come to pass,
   and now I prophesy new things;
   before they spring forth I tell you about them.

God declares a second “Behold” (“Look” in the DASV) to serve as a maker between the first and last parts of the narrative of this first Messianic Servant Message recorded in Isaiah. Isaiah 42:10-13 is a praise song to God that the prophet requests his people sing in worship of Israel’s great covenant L ORD and Creator. In 42:9 God declares to His people and to the nations that what He had promised in times past have come to pass. They happened just as God said they would. These “earlier predictions” that God had promised are not stated and it would be pure speculation to try to identify exactly what God was referencing. The point of the first part of 42:9 is that God alone can predict the future with absolute accuracy because He sees and experiences the future just as He sees and experiences the past and present. God’s chosen people and the nations can have assurance that whatever God declares to happen will happen. This is in contrast with the earlier discussion regarding idols in chapters 40 and 41 and specifically 41:21-24. Idols can predict nothing for they see nothing because they are nothing. In the latter half of 42:9 God advances the narrative in contrast to the worthless idols by stating that He will declare and proclaim new things to His audience, before they “spring forth.” Thomas Constable comments:

“This is the first of six times, God claimed to predict the future in Isaiah (cf. 44:7-8; 45:1-4, 21; 46:10; 48:3-6).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 201).

The choice of words “spring forth” is highly significant as Gary v. Smith observes:

“The new events surrounding the coming of the servant of God are presented as another new way for God to demonstrate his divinity, for God states “I” (implying no one else) “am declaring” to the people on the earth what will spring forth in the future. The idea of “springing up” (ṣmḥ) is used of plants growing (55:10), of people springing up like grass (44:4), the sudden appearance of righteousness/salvation in God’s people (45:8; 58:8), and the surprising springing up of the praise from the nations (61:11). In each case the idea is associated with the sudden introduction of something new (43:19) that is connected to God’s eschatological work of transforming humanity and nature. The use of “spring forth” in association with this servant’s role suggests
that his work is connected with these future events. It may not be accidental that the noun form derived from this root (ṣmḥ) refers to the “Branch” of the Lord (4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8), a messianic term for the Davidic Messiah. The “new things” refer to what God will do through his servant, but the ultimate purpose in sending this servant is not just to open people’s eyes and free them from the darkness of their ignorance. The ultimate purpose is for these enlightened people to glorify God, for now they know for certain that he alone has the power to accomplish what he has foretold. These factors demonstrate to every reader that all praise and honor should be lifted up to honor this glorious God. He can open the eyes of the blind to experience the reality of his power by transforming the hearts and minds of all people through the revelation and accomplishment of his words and through the work of his servant.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 170-171).

42:10-13 Sing to the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth. You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, the distant coastlands and those who live there. Let the desert and its towns lift up their voices, the villages that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing; let them shout from the mountain tops. Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare his praise in the coastal regions. The LORD goes out like a war hero; he will stir up his zeal like a warrior. He gives the battle cry, yes, he shouts out loud; he shows his might against his enemies.

Isaiah 42:10-13 is a song of praise proclaimed by the prophet in response to the revelation of the future ministry of God’s Messianic Servant. It is not unusual that Isaiah completes a dramatic passage of his writings with a song of praise. See also Isaiah 12:1-6; 44:23; 49:13; 55:12-13; Psalm 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; and 98:1. In the New Testament see Revelation 5:9; and 14:3. Because this revelation from God about His Messianic Servant is new and spectacular to Isaiah and his audience, the prophet declares that a new song of praise needs to be sung, not just in Jerusalem but also is to be sung in all of the earth. Isaiah defines the “end of the earth,” as those who traverse the sea, all creatures of the sea, all those who live in distant coastlands (or islands) in 42:10. This definition includes all who live in the desert, the villages of Kedar and inhabitants of Sela and it is to be shouted from the mountain tops in 42:11. Also, the peoples of the earth are to give God glory and declare His praise in the coastal regions which would include all areas of the world, 42:12.

Isaiah, as recorded in 42:13 extends the song of praise with a prophecy of the future that Israel’s covenant making and covenant keeping God (the LORD) will go forth as a zealous “war hero” and a warrior who will raise His voice with a shout as a cry of battle and He will be victorious over His enemies. This is undoubtedly a prophecy of the second coming of the Messiah when He returns as a warrior to defeat the enemies of His people. See Isaiah 63:1-6; Zephaniah 3:17; Zechariah 9:11-17; 12:6-9; 14:3-5; and Revelation 19:11-21. Isaiah therefore, exhorts the people of Israel/Judah to sing a joyful song of praise for not only what the Lord has done in the past but what He will accomplish for them in the far future. This is not a song of praise which the returning exiles from Babylon would be expected to sing. But it is a song of the great day of the Lord when the Messiah will return to conqueror the armies of those nations who have set out to destroy God’s chosen people and then the Messiah establish His millennial kingdom of justice and peace.

Included in the greater section of Isaiah 42:14-25, verses 14-17 are placed as a bridge between the first Servant Message, including Isaiah’s song of praise, 42:1-13 and the prophet’s discussion of Israel as the blind and deaf servant of God in 42:18-25 and continuing into chapter 43. Some scholars suggest that 42:14-17 describe God’s provision for the Jewish travelers who are returning to Jerusalem after their long exile in Babylon, but there is no indication in the text that this is the intended meaning of God’s words. These verses are set within the greater context of chapter 42 are better understood to fit the time of the future ministry of God’s great Servant (Messiah). The message of 42:14-17 is about God’s wonderful care for His people who are obedient to Him and His contempt for those who reject Him and trust in worthless idols. God’s description of leading the blind and making darkness into light, 42:16, serves as a vivid introduction of the message regarding God’s blind and deaf servant, His people Israel. David L. Cooper provides a brief comment on verses 14-17:

“In the next paragraph (vss. 14-17) the prophet again drops into his method of impersonation. On this occasion he plays the role of King Messiah who, at the psychological moment, when these evangelists have performed their world-wide task of proclaiming the gospel, will declare, "I have long holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry out like a travelling woman; I will gasp and pant together ..." Thus at the end of the Tribulation Messiah will come forth as a mighty warrior and He will bring judgment and destruction upon all the wicked and ungodly.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1945).

42:14 I have held my peace for a long time;
    I have been still, and restrained myself.
    Now I will cry out like a woman in labor;
    I will gasp and pant.

The transition between the two messages of God’s servants in chapter 42 is dramatically introduced in 42:14. God states that He has kept silent (held his peace) for a long time. There is no discernable marker in the verse to indicate the historical period of His silence. If it is correct to understand this period of silence as pertaining to the future ministry of God’s greater Servant, then this period could be either the years of silence between the writings of Malachi and Matthew, preceding the first advent of Christ, or the period of the Tribulation in the last days, preceding the second advent of Christ, as David L. Cooper suggests in the note above. The years preceding the first advent of Christ, were certainly fraught with much upheaval and distress including the days of the Maccabean revolt. However, as there is no prophetic reference to any specific geographic upheaval described in 42:15 to the period preceding the first advent of Christ, it is more likely that this period pertains to the period preceding the second advent of Christ. God states that He will break His silence not with words of a stately and dignified discourse but with groaning, gasping and panting, like a woman who is in labor, and with climatic actions as 42:15 graphically details. The reference to a woman in labor may be understood as describing a new era birthed by God which will mark a great transition for God’s covenant people of which Isaiah will later describe in 66:7-9.

42:15 I will lay waste mountains and hills,
    and dry up all their vegetation.
    I will turn rivers into islands,
    and dry up the pools.

The actions of God, crying out, gasping and panting, 42:14 include catastrophic upheaval to unidentified geographic locations. Although unidentified, it may be best to understand these locations within the context
of His purposes with His people. It could refer to the area surrounding Israel that is being so dramatically affected or lands from which the scattered remnant will be gathered. Some may suggest that the words of Isaiah 42:15 should not to be taken literally but there is nothing in the text that would support such a conclusion. When God says, He will lay waste (reduce in height) the mountains and hills and wither the vegetation upon them and make coastlands of rivers and dry up waters such as ponds, it is best to take these things literally. He will do these things for the purpose of leading and guiding His people, 42:16. Isaiah will later expand on this work of God in the second Servant Message, Isaiah 49:1-13. See also Isaiah 11:11-16; 19:23; 35:8-10; 40:1-5; and 62:10-12.

42:16 I will lead the blind by a way they do not know; in unknown paths I will guide them. I will turn the darkness into light before them, and level the rough places. These things I will do, and I will not forsake them.

The reasons for God’s dramatic works of upheaval are explained in 42:16. God states that He will lead the blind by a way that is not known to them. This reference to the blind in the context of this passage most likely refers to His blind servants of whom the prophet will discuss in 42:18-25. Isaiah 42:14-17 acts as a transition between His greater Servant, the Messiah, 42:1-13 and His lesser servants, the Israelites. It is these blind servants that God will guide on paths they as yet, do not know. Refer also to Isaiah chapter 35:1-10 and 51:4-11. This will occur in the period known as the day of the Lord when He will gather the faithful remnant from all parts of the earth and guide them to Jerusalem and Mount Zion. See notes on chapter 35 for an extended discussion on these days.

God further states in 42:16 that He will make darkness into light before “them,” who are His faithful remnant. The description of God changing darkness into light and bringing His people from the darkness into light is one of the great themes of the Scriptures. See for example, Psalm 18:28; 112:4; Isaiah 9:2; 58:10; Micah 7:8; Matthew 4:16; John 1:1-14; 8:12; 12:46; Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5 and 2:8.

Also, in Isaiah 42:16, God states that He will “level the rough places.” This is a further elaboration of 42:15 and of the first part of 42:16 in which God states He will lead the blind. By levelling the rough places, likely implying making them into plains, it will be easier for God’s faithful remnant to make the journey from the remote parts of the earth, Isaiah 41:8-9, to God’s beloved Jerusalem (Ariel: the hearth of God). God adds, “These things I will do and I will not forsake them.” The word “forsake,” is the Hebrew azab, meaning to forsake, leave or desert. This word first occurs in Genesis 2:24 depicting the time when a man leaves his parents to be joined to his wife. Although it often occurs regarding those who forsake God and for the times God temporarily forsakes His people, it is most emphatic occurrence is the promise that God will not forever forsake His covenant people. See Genesis 28:15, Deuteronomy 31:6, 8: Joshua 1:5; 1 Kings 6:13; 1 Chronicles 28:20; Ezra 9:9; Psalm 9:10; 37:28; 94:14; Isaiah 41:17; 42:16; and 62:12. A related Hebrew word is natash, occurring in this context in 1 Samuel 12:22 and Psalm 94:14. The words azab and natash occur in Psalm 94:14 “For the LORD will not forsake (natash) his people, nor will he desert (azab) his inheritance.” The occurrence of natash in 1 Samuel 12:22 is significant theologically, as Samuel declares to the Jewish people, “the LORD will not abandon his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you his very own people.” It is for the sake of the LORD’s great name that He will not forsake His chosen, covenant people. In the New Testament the truth of God not forsaking His people is stated in Hebrews 13:5 with the Greek word, enkataleipo, translated as forsake.
This last phrase of 42:16 concludes what God will do for His people who have been scattered to the remote parts of the earth. This prophetic message would have been a source of comfort for all who heard or read Isaiah’s declarations in his day and for all who are the faithful remnant of God today who await their call to be restored to their God in His holy city. This day will come in the midst of great turmoil when all seems lost and when God seems to have forgotten them. But as God states in 42:14-16, He will break His long silence and prepare the earth for the calling of His people to be guided in their journey to Israel.

42:17 *Those who trust in carved idols,  
will be turned back,  
and be utterly put to shame;  
those who say to metal images,  
"You are our gods."

In contrast to the faithful remnant, who trust solely in God, those who reject God and put their trust in idols will not be guided by Him and they will not make the journey to God’s beloved city. God will ensure that these rebellious people will be put to shame because they have rejected Him and replaced their knowledge about God with trust in worthless things. Paul, in Romans 1:18-32, discusses humanity’s descent into total depravity, where there is no escape. See also Psalm 97:7; Isaiah 1:28; 44:9-20; and 45:16.

Verses 18-25 Israel: The Blind Servant

In Isaiah 42:1-13, God reveals His beloved Servant and in 42:18-25 God discusses His blind servant. Isaiah 42:14-17 act as a bridge between these two segments. In 42:18-25, God issues a declaration of judgment against His blind servant if they will not obey His word. Yet there is hope. Following God’s threat of judgment against His blind servant, He offers a message of hope and salvation for them in 43:1-7. The blind servant of 42:18-25 cannot be the same Servant as God reveals in 42:1-13. Later revelation in the Scriptures leave no doubt as to the identification of God’s beloved Servant who is the Messiah, who is called Jesus is the New Testament. The blind servant of 42:18-25 is called a people in 42:22 and must refer to the people of Israel whom God has called to serve Him.

How were God’s chosen people to serve Him? The following is a very brief discussion with selected O.T. Scriptures as suggested partial responses to this question. God’s covenant with Abraham contained a blessing to the nations as recorded in Genesis 12:3: “*Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*” The nations would be blessed as the descendants of Abraham, the chosen people of God served God by declaring His name to all peoples of the earth. See also Genesis 18:18-19; 22:18; 26:2-4; and 28:14. Israel was also to serve God by being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, Exodus 19:4-6. During Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, he expressed an understanding of Israel’s role as the servant of God. 1 Kings 8:41-43. A very clear understanding of Israel as God’s servant is recorded in Psalm 67:1-2:

1 *May God be gracious to us, and bless us,  
and cause his face to shine upon us;  
then your way will be known on earth,  
your salvation among all nations.*

See also Psalms 96 and 117. Although Israel, as the people of God, knew all this from the writings of Moses and others, they did not fulfill God’s purposes for them and later profaned His name among the nations where they had been sent, Ezekiel 36:20-23. God therefore, gave the mission of proclaiming His name as a light to the nations to His beloved Servant, the Messiah, Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. Note: This is not to be understood as

42:18-20 Listen, you who are deaf; 
look, you who are blind, 
that you may see.

19 Who is blind but my servant? 
Who is deaf but my messenger who I send? 
Who is blind as my covenant partner, 
and blind like the LORD's servant?

20 You see many things, 
but you do not comprehend them; 
your ears are open, 
but you do not hear.

God demands that His blind and deaf servant look and see and hear Him. God had previously told Isaiah that his mission to God’s people would result in their eyes being dim; their ears dull; and their hearts insensitive to God’s desire for them, Isaiah 6:8-13. It is not that God’s people could not see or hear but that they refused to look upon His great and glorious law, 42:21. They also refused to hear and heed God’s word as delivered by His messengers including His prophet Isaiah. Although the people had witnessed (seen) God’s marvelous works among them they failed to observe them in a way that brought them to trust in Him. The people had been sent by God to be His servant as a messenger to the nations. Refer to above discussion. Although His people were “positionally” at peace with Him because of His covenants with them, they willingly became blind and deaf to His calls to serve Him in truth and trust. This “positional” peace with God was not the same as those who had faith in Him and were counted (reckoned, declared) to be righteous, Romans 3:21-26. It was not enough for Jewish people, to have a position of peace with God, because of God’s unilateral covenants with His them. These covenants will not fail, but individuals within God’s covenant community can forsake God and fail to benefit from these covenants with the result of being declared wicked as those who have no peace, Isaiah 48:22 and 57:21

42:21 It pleased the LORD for his righteousness’ sake, 
to magnify the law and make it glorious.

Among the declarations of God regarding Israel as His blind and deaf servant who failed to serve or trust Him is a beautiful declaration by the prophet regarding God’s word. Isaiah states that it the Lord was pleased for the sake of His righteousness to magnify (gadal in the Hebrew) the law. Isaiah often used the word gadal in several contexts such as, 1:2 (to bring up); 9:3 (increased); 10:15 (extol); 23:4 (brought up); 28:29 (excellent); 44:14 (nourish) 49:21 (raise up); and 51:18 (brought up). See also Psalm 34:3; 35:27; 40:16; 55:12; 69:30; 70:4; 92:5; 104:1; and 126:2-3. The Lord will also make the law glorious, (adar in the Hebrew). This word adar, only occurs in Isaiah 42:21 and in Exodus 16:6 and 11. The KJV translates this word as “honorable.” Victor Buksbazen’s comments are very appropriate:

“In spite of Israel’s blindness and unfaithfulness, the Lord is determined to accomplish His purpose to make His law glorious and supreme in the eyes of all mankind. What Israel, as a people, has failed to accomplish, the faithful Servant, the Messiah will. In this very chapter (v. 18-21) where the servant Israel is portrayed as blind, deaf and disobedient to God, the personal Servant of God is portrayed as completely obedient and well pleasing to Jehovah (v. 1-6). The distinction between the two servants is clear and beyond the possibility of confusion.
And yet there is an umbilical cord between both types of “the servant.” Both are rooted in God’s choice of Israel as His people, and in His covenant with them. In the final analysis Christ, the Servant of Jehovah, is the perfect representative of Israel who restores the broken covenant relationship between Jehovah and His people. In this sense Israel and her Messiah are one.” (Victor Bubsbazen, Isaiah, page 348).

42:22 But this is a people robbed and plundered; they are all trapped in holes, and hid in prisons. They have become plunder with no one to rescue them, carried off as spoil with no one to say, "Bring them back."

In spite of the wondrous revelation of God’s word, 42:21, and God’s works on their behalf, 42:20, and in spite of God’s covenant with His people through their Messiah, 42:6, the blind and deaf servant find themselves robbed and plundered, trapped in holes (caves) and hidden in prisons. They also find themselves a victim of those who prey upon them and a spoil of war and most importantly they find themselves without a defender or champion who will cry “bring them back”. Why are they in this dire predicament? Isaiah in 42:23-25 records the answer and it is not an answer the people would expect. The Lord paid out upon His people His anger because of the reprehensible sins of His people.

Many scholars suggest that Isaiah’s message is directed to those who have endured a seventy-year exile in Babylon. While this explanation may seem plausible, there is no record of the Jews hiding in caves during their sojourn in Babylon. It was the Lord’s intention to preserve His people during this period and for His people who were sent to Babylon it was arguably the safest place on earth for them. Another possible setting for this declaration of judgment upon His people was the Assyrian assault on the towns and cities of Israel and Judah. The destruction and suffering inflicted by the Assyrians would, at the time of Isaiah’s message recorded in chapter 42, be acutely felt by the people of Judah, who were living outside of Jerusalem. Many were taken captive with no one to rescue them. Many were carried away to prisons and many possibly hid in caves. The Lord spared the city of Jerusalem but allowed the nation of Judah to be plundered and despoiled by the Assyrian army. Isaiah had earlier prophesized about the infliction of God’s anger upon His people by Assyria, His selected agent. See Isaiah 10:1-11. The judgment of God was also upon the northern kingdom of Israel which was completely overrun by the Assyrians with no help or defense from God.

This verse begins in the present tense, “But this is a people robbed and plundered,” which could be understood as a “prophetic perfect” tense, in that it is stated in the present but refers to a future time as if it had occurred or is occurring. If this is a correct understanding of Isaiah’s intention, then the time-frame for this prophecy is most likely during the days of the Tribulation just prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom, which fits within the context of Isaiah 42:14 and following verses. These days are called the time of Jacob’s trouble (or distress), Jeremiah 30:7. During these days, the people of Israel will suffer with a great loss of property, freedom, jobs, and many will be put to death. Because of their rejection of the Lord during His first advent, Israel has in the past and still faces God’s judgment upon them. This judgment is seen in His fierce anger and the fierceness of the battle from their enemies who will surround them, with the result that they will be burned up, 42:25. Only upon their repentance and calling on their Messiah to return and save them will He descend to rescue His people and lead them in triumph to Zion where He will reign as their righteous, just and peaceful Sovereign. See also Isaiah 2:2-4; 4:2-6; Hosea 5:15-6:3; Micah 2:12-13; 4:1-7; Zechariah 9:11-17; 10:6-12; 12:1-14; and 14:1-21.

42:23-25 Who is there among you who will listen to this? Who will pay attention and hear in the time to come?
24 Who gave Jacob up for spoil,  
and Israel to the robbers?  
Was it not the LORD  
against whom we have sinned?  
In whose ways they refused to walk,  
and whose law they would not obey.  
25 Therefore he poured on them his fierce anger,  
and the fierceness of battle.  
It surrounded them with fire,  
yet they did not understand;  
it burned them up,  
yet they did not take it to heart.

Isaiah states in 42:23, that the LORD demands a response from His covenant people. Who was able among His blind and deaf servants to give an ear to His judgments? Who among these sinful and rebellious people would be able to heed God’s words and listen to Him? The obvious answer to these rhetorical questions is no one! Isaiah in 42:24 continues to declare the LORD’s questions, which are a devastating blow to the pride of His people. Who gave Jacob and Israel, God’s chosen people, to suffer plundering and despoilment at the hands of those who were assaulting them? This time the answer is not rhetorical. Isaiah promptly gives the response: “Was it not the LORD against whom we have sinned?” Two additional questions in 42:24 are then stated, (1) “In whose ways they refused to walk;” and (2) “and whose law they would not obey.” These last two questions did not need a response for the guilty party was obvious.

As a result of the people’s rebellion against God in refusing to obey Him, and also walking in their own way in defiance of His law, Isaiah records God’s judgment upon them, 42:25. His judgment was poured out upon them, which is described as His fierce anger which resulted in His people being conquered by their enemies in the fierceness of battle and in being “surrounded by fire.” Even though this message to God’s people of the future reality of being afflicted with the burning of God’s judgment, they did not recognize it as His judgment and they paid no attention. The words “he” and “his” in 42:25 refer to God who will bring judgment upon the unrepentant people of Israel in the terrifying days of the Tribulation. The words “them” and “they” in 42:25 refer to Israel as the blind and deaf and rebellious servant of God. All of God’s people are depicted as one servant in receiving the fierceness of God’s wrath.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 42:
42:1-13 The Beloved Servant  
1-4 God talks about His Servant  
5-9 God talks to His Servant  
10-13 Praising God for His Servant  
42:14-17 The Blessed Savior  
42:18-25 The Blind Servant  
18-20 The Blind Servant Described  
21 The Beauty of God’s Word  
23-25 The Blind Servant Defeated

5. God’s Promise to Redeem Jacob: 43:1-7

Biblical scholars have understood these verses from several different viewpoints. Many scholars including Gleason L. Archer and Thomas L. Constable, suggest that chapter 43 is a continuation of Isaiah’s prophetic
message in chapters 40-42 to the returning Jewish exiles who are travelling from Babylon to Jerusalem. Gary V. Smith suggests that the context of these verses may best fit the Assyrian invasion of Judah. Geoffrey W. Grogan and J. Alec Motyer suggest that these verses point to the historical past where God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt. While others posit a viewpoint that these verses are prophetic of the far future when God will rescue His faithful remnant during the days just before the second advent of Christ. For example, David L. Cooper comments:

“In the first seven verses of chapter 43 is a special message which God will send to the nation as she lies prostrate in helplessness before the Lord. He begins this special message by calling attention, through the prophet, to the fact that He created the Jewish nation for a purpose and that He has redeemed her. When Abraham and Sarah were past the age of parenthood, God performed a biological miracle which made possible the birth of Isaac. Not only has He created the Jewish nation and preserved it, but He has wrought redemption for it. This salvation was worked out at Calvary nineteen hundred years ago.

According to verses 2-4 those of Israel at that time who heed His message are not to fear anything regardless of what may come into their lives; for the Lord assures her that He will be with her in her experience; that is He will be with those who accept the message and bring them safely to the other side of the Tribulation.

In verses 5-7 is a vision of the regathering of the faithful remnant through whom God will be glorified throughout the entire Millennial Age, for He has created them for His glory.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-April 1945).

This Messianic study of Isaiah suggests that in Isaiah 43:4-7, the prophet is prophesying about the days of the far future when He will gather His people, the faithful remnant, from all nations of the earth and bring them safely to the Jewish national homeland. In making this prophetic declaration, Isaiah is bringing a message of hope and comfort to the people of Judah who have just faced the devastating assault on the cities and towns of Judah and the unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians. This message was also written in the great scroll of Isaiah so that future generations of God’s people could face with confidence that God will still be with them even during national tragedies such as the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Romans and the attempted annihilations of the Jewish people in more modern times. Isaiah 43:1-3 are words of comfort that alternate between the past (“I have”) and the present and near future (“I will”).

43:1 But now this is what the LORD says,  
the one who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
"Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by your name;  
you are mine."

The link to the previous message in chapter 42 is made with the emphatic “But now.” Even though God has declared that He will bring judgment on His chosen people who are blind and deaf to His instructions and teachings, He will not desert them. God addresses His people as the LORD, Israel’s covenant God, and as their Creator. As their Covenant-God and Creator, He will not desert them but provide His redemptive care for them and He states that He has redeemed them and called them by His name for they are His possession. The historical setting of this verse is in the past. God has already “formed them” as their Creator. He also has redeemed them as their covenant God. This redemption points to past glorious miraculous acts of God such as the exodus from Egypt in the distant past and more recently the sparing of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. By calling them by name, God asserts that they are his possession for it is the right of parents to name their offspring. This verse ends with the emphatic declaration by God: you are mine!
As noted above, some scholars suggest that the first seven verses of chapter 43 as well as many passages from the early chapters of the greater section of Isaiah 40-66 refer to the return of the exiles from Babylon, however there is no direct evidence of this from these verses. So, students of Scripture must look at Isaiah 43:1 within the context of the verses that follow and precede it, to understand the correct interpretation of God’s declaration.

43:2 When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and cross through the rivers,
they will not overwhelm you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned,
nor will the flame consume you.

God promises to be with His people in the present, and foreseeable future, when trials and suffering come upon them. He does not prevent these incidents of testing but assures them that He will be with them so that these occasions will not destroy them. See notes on Isaiah 41:10 for a discussion on the implications of God’s promises to be with them. God promises to be with His people when they pass through waters and rivers as they will not overflow them. This may have reminded Isaiah’s audience of events long ago such as the parting of the Red Sea at the beginning of the exodus experience and the crossing of the Jordan River when entering Canaan. However, the promise is for the future and God’s people are not to fear troublesome times for their God is with them. The same applies for the picture of walking through fire which will not burn or scorch them. J. Alec Motyer has a brief but important observation about the mention of fire in vs. 2:

“With great drama, Isaiah moves from the Lord’s people in the Lord’s fire (42:25) to the Lord who will not allow the fire to burn them (43:2).” (J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, page 267).

Thomas Constable also provides a short comment:

"Water" and "fire" are traditional symbols for testing that suggest totality when used together (cf. Ps. 32:6; 42:7; 66:12; James 1:2). God promised to protect His people from total destruction when they underwent their various trials. He had done this in the past, and He would do it in the future because He would be with His special people (cf. Dan. 3; Rom. 8:31-39).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 205).

43:3-4 *For I am the LORD your God,*
*the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*
*I have given Egypt as your ransom,*
*Ethiopia and Seba in return for you.*

*4 Since you have been precious and special in my sight,*
*and I love you,*
*therefore I will give other people in return for you,*
*and nations instead of your life.*

God, as He has often done and will do again, as recorded in the writings of Isaiah, asserts His great name and reminds His people of Who He is. The titles or names God ascribes to Himself are significant reminders of God’s covenant promises, His power, holiness and redemptive work. “LORD” is Yahweh, Israel’s covenant making and keeping God. “God” is Elohim, Israel’s great and powerful God Who is above all other gods. The name Elohim is plural suggesting singularity within a plurality, ie. the great Triune God. The “Holy One
of Israel” is a compound name indicating God’s unique relationship with His chosen people Israel as “their God” who is described as and should be understood as “holy.” This is descriptive of God being set apart or being “wholly other” from His creation. There is no comparative description or level of comparison that His creatures can conceive, that would adequately explain the fullness of meaning for this name as the Holy One. “Savior” is a beloved title describing His past, present and future work of redemption on behalf of His people. A similar title is “Redeemer” which often describes His work of redemption as the “kinsmen redeemer” of His people, to whom as a “Father,” He has loved and chosen them.” However, the saving work of God in the Old Testament is not always spiritual or eternal and often relates to saving or preserving His people from danger and harm as God states in 43:2.

These rich compound names for God are found often in Isaiah’s prophecy. For example, the compound names for God including the word “Redeemer” are found in Isaiah 41:14, 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. See notes on these verses. This Messianic study of Isaiah will provide comment on other compound names, including “the Holy One of Israel” and “Lord God of Hosts” and many others in the context of the verses in which these names occur. It is these wonderful compound names in which God has chosen to reveal Himself that makes a study of Isaiah so inspiring for the student of God’s Word. Refer also to notes on Isaiah 9:6-7 for a short discussion of some of the most beautiful names for the Messiah, the Son of God, recorded in all of Scripture. When God refers to Himself with these names, He is allowing His people to understand great truths and is revealing glorious attributes about Himself. He also is assuring His people that they can completely trust in Him and have faith in His plans and purposes for them.

The action of God in having gave “Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in return for you” has been the source of much speculation by Biblical scholars. Many suggest that God is referring to an event in the future for Isaiah and his contemporaries in which God will hand over Egypt, Cush and Seba to Cyrus to conquer. However, the verb tense is a past reference and it is something God has already done and also there is no historical record of Cyrus conquering these nations. This past event may refer to the defeat of Egypt at the time of the exodus, although neither Cush nor Seba is mentioned in the Biblical record for the exodus event. Also, it may refer to a more recent event, in Isaiah’s time, of Egypt’s defeat at the hands of the Assyrian army. As God, through the writing of the prophet Isaiah, did not reveal any historical details, Biblical scholars can only suggest some possible events, past or future that may apply to these words. Refer to J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 268 for a discussion on the ransom in 43:4 as applying to ancient Egypt. Micah 6:4 is also helpful in understanding Egypt as a ransom:

“For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, redeemed you out of the house of bondage; I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before you.”

The word “ransom” in 43:3 is the Hebrew word kopher and it refers to the price of a life and can also refer to a bribe. Selected verses where this word is found in the Old Testament include Exodus 21:30 (ransom, KJV: sum of money); Exodus 30:12 (ransom); Numbers 35:31 and 32 (ransom, KJV: satisfaction); 1 Samuel 12:3 (bribe, KJV margin note: ransom); Job 33:24 (ransom, KJV margin note: atonement); Job 36:18 (ransom); Psalm 49:7 (ransom margin); Proverbs 6:35 (ransom); Proverbs 13:8 (ransom); Proverbs 21:18 (ransom); and Amos 5:12 (bribes, KJV margin note: ransom). The English word “ransom” in Isaiah 50:2 is the Hebrew word peduth which is also found Exodus 8:23 (put a division or set a ransom); Psalm 111:9 (redemption); and Psalm 130:7 (redemption). The past tense “ransomed” is the Hebrew word padah and is found more frequently in the Old Testament and is most often translated as redeemed. Padah is found in Isaiah 1:27 (redeemed) 29:22 (redeemed); 35:10 (ransomed); and 51:11 (ransomed). Refer to notes on Isaiah 35:10 and 51:11 in this study of Isaiah. The above notes are not an exhaustive listing of the occurrences of the word “ransom” in the Old Testament but is representative of the importance of this word. See also Psalm 31:5;
69:18; Jeremiah 31:11, Hosea 13:14 and Micah 6:4. A Biblical explanation of the use of the word ransom in Isaiah 43:3 is found in Proverbs 21:18, “The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the treacherous is in the place of the upright.” (NASB). See also the KJV, NKJV, NIV, and the ESV. The DASV for Proverbs 21:18 states, “The wicked is punished in place of the righteous, and the traitor instead of the upright.” As stated above, the word “ransom” in Proverbs 21:18 is the Hebrew word kopher, which is the same Hebrew word for ransom in Isaiah 43:3.

The salvific significance of the word “ransom” is also implied in Isaiah 52:13-53:1-12 regarding the redeeming/ransoming role that God’s beloved Servant, the Messiah, will have for God’s people and all mankind. This salvific work is fully developed, or completed, as revealed in the New Testament, as it applies to the cross-work of the Messiah on behalf of those who trust in Him. See Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Timothy 2:6. See Thomas Constable’s Matthew Commentary on Matthew 20:28 for an expanded discussion on the meaning of “ransom” in the New Testament. See also, Stanley D. Toussaint, Behold the King: A Study of Matthew, Kregel Publications, 1980, pages 234-235.

Isaiah 43:4 re-emphasizes the main idea of “ransom” stated in 43:3 and adds the significant words, “Since you have been precious and special in my sight, and I love you, therefore I will give other people in return for you.” This reads like an affectionate letter from a loving Father to His children for this is exactly what it is! The word “precious” in 43:4 is the Hebrew word yaqar which has the meaning of valuable, precious, prized, and costly. The word yaqar occurs 11 times in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 18:30; 26:21; 2 Kings 1:13, 14; Psalm 49:8; 72:14; 139:17; Proverbs 25:17; Isaiah 13:12; 43:4; and Zechariah 11:13. Psalm 72 is a recognized as messianic and vs. 14 of this Psalm states, “He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence; and precious shall their blood be in His sight.” (KJV) The word “He” in Psalm 72:14 is the Messiah.

The word “special” in Isaiah 43:4 is the Hebrew word kabad or kabad which has the meaning of honored, heavy, weighty or burdensome. It occurs several times in Isaiah, translated with different English words in the DASV: 3:5 (honorable); 6:10 (deaf); 9:1 (glorious); 23:8 (honored); 23:9 (honored); 24:15 (glorify); 24:20 (heavy); 25:3 (respect); 26:15 (glorified); 29:13 (honor); 43:4 (special); 43:20 (honor); 43:23 (honored); 47:6 (heavy); 49:5 honored) 58:13 (honorable); 58:13 (honor); 59:1 (deaf); 60:13 (glorious); and 66:5 (glorified). Isaiah will later state in 49:5, regarding God’s beloved Servant, “For I will be honoured in the eyes of the LORD.” Many verses in the Old Testament speak of honor to God, for example, Leviticus 10:3 and Deuteronomy 28:58. Also one of the most beloved commandments is stated in Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.” It is a very loving God who desires honor from His creation, to say to His chosen people that they are honored by Him.

43:5-6 Do not be afraid, for I am with you.
   I will bring your descendants from the east,
   and gather you from the west.
6 I will tell the north, 'Give them up,'
   and to the south, 'Do not keep any of them back;'
bring my sons from afar,
   and my daughters from the end of the earth,
His covenant people that He is with them and they should have no fear of whatever issues or danger they face. God had just encouraged them not to fear for He has redeemed them, 43:1. The comforting message of “do not be afraid” is often spoken by God in the writings of Isaiah. See 10:24; 40:9; 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2; and 51:7. The bringing of the offspring of His people from all points of the earth is best understood as a reference to the days just preceding the millennial kingdom and thus this message of having no fear would be just as relevant today as it was in Isaiah’s day for all of God’s people who await the fulfillment of God’s kingdom promises to them. The gathering of His people from the far reaches of the earth is also expressed in Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:11-12; 27:12-13; 35:1-10; 49:5-26; 54:1-17; 56:8; 60:1-22; 62:10-12; and 66:18-21. This final gathering of God’s people is closely related to His land promise. See Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Isaiah 11:11-12; 27:12-13; 49:8-26; 60:10-22; Jeremiah 30:10-11, 18-24; and Ezekiel chapter 37.

43:7 everyone who is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed, yes, whom I have made.

Isaiah 43:7 is linked closely with 43:5-6. In the DASV and NASB there is no period at the end of the verse signifying that the “everyone,” at the beginning of vs. 7, refers to God’s people whom He will call from all areas of the earth to gather in Zion to begin the messianic kingdom of the Messiah. God declares that it is His own people whom He has created, who have been formed and made for His glory. See also Isaiah 44:23. Someone may ask, what is the meaning of God’s glory? The word “glory” in 43:7 is the Hebrew word kabod which is the most used Hebrew word for glory among many others in the Old Testament. The meaning of glory is “weight,” “heaviness,” “worthiness,” “reputation,” and “honor.” Therefore, when God states that He has created His people for his glory, He is saying that His reputation, honor and worthiness is “heavy” upon Him. God cannot ascribe, give or exalt anyone or anything’s glory above His own glory. To do so would be idolatry for God’s glory is the highest, most exalted and most praise-worthy glory of the universe. To say that God, in seeking His own glory and praise, is selfishness or egotistical is entirely in error. God cannot seek any glory or praise or honor or reputation above that which rightfully belongs to Him. To whom could God give glory and praise other than Himself? There is no one greater, more exalted, more worthy of praise and glory than God Himself. It is entirely within His holiness and righteousness for Him to seek the highest source of glory to ascribe, praise, and honor – His own worthiness.

Glory in one sense is an abstract concept and not physical. To understand glory one must transcend the physical and sense the spiritual and eternal essence of God. That is why when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John, Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36, the words used to describe Him are full of superlatives, “His face shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light.” Matthew 17:2. It would not be wrong to also understand glory as “luminous brilliance” for glory attracts the eye and the attention of all around it. In the eternal state, there will be no need of the sun or the moon for God will illuminate the people who inhabit eternity. Revelation 22:5. God’s glory can also be understood as His name or reputation which He jealously guards and protects. See Isaiah 48:11 and 52:5 as representative examples of many in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, as mentioned often in this study of Isaiah, one of the greatest texts revealing God’s glory is stated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6.


Verses 8-13: The Witness of God’s Blind Servants
Verses 14-21: The Lord to Redeem God’s Servants
Verses 22-28: The Sinful Condition of God’s Servants
The Witness of God’s Blind Servants: 43:8-13

Victor Buksbazen gives an overview of these verses:

“There are striking similarities between the servant of Jehovah as a nation and the servant of Jehovah as a person. Both are chosen of God (42:1, 43:10). Both are beloved (42:1; 43:4). Yet the differences between the two are basic. Obedient or disobedient, “the servant” Israel is a witness to the faithfulness of God and the fact that there is no other God who is like Jehovah. Collectively Israel is a blind (v. 8) and essentially passive servant (v. 10). By contrast the individual Servant of Jehovah is God’s active agent to accomplish His divine purpose for mankind. The individual Servant of the LORD, the Messiah, is the absolutely obedient messenger of God who delights to do His will (42:4).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 351).

David L. Cooper also provides a discussion on Isaiah 43:8-13:

“The message concludes with the paragraph consisting of verses 8-13. Here the prophet again calls for an ideal convocation in which idolaters are to present their reasons for their faith and for their worshiping idols. He likewise calls upon the people of Israel to present the case for the existence of God and for the truth of His revelation.

Finally the prophet, speaking to the faithful remnant, says, "Ye are my witnesses, saith Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: ..." God has chosen this remnant that they might believe Him, understand Him, and know that He alone is God. Though Israel is at the present time on the siding, figuratively speaking, the remnant will come back upon the main line of God's plan and purpose and be used of Him in the proclamation of the truth to all nations.

Back in the eternity of the past there was no God except Jehovah. He created the heavens and the earth and has sustained them through the millenniums of their existence. The present heavens and earth will pass away after the Millennial Age (Ps. 102:23-28; Heb. 1:10-13; Rev. 20:11). After the dissolution of the present material universe, God alone will exist. After that time He will create the eternal order (Rev. 21; 22).

The one Eternal God is Jehovah. But what is the meaning of Jehovah? Etymologically speaking, it means "He who causes all things to come into existence." Concerning Jehovah Moses declared, "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah, our Gods, is Jehovah a unity." Whenever we see the word Jehovah in the Old Testament, we may know that it has one of four connotations which are: (1) Jehovah the Father, (2) Jehovah the Son, (3) Jehovah the Holy Spirit, (4) or, Jehovah the Holy Trinity. We must consult each context to determine which of these meanings "Jehovah" has in a given case.

At the present time Israel does not believe the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. But God has chosen the remnant to understand that message and to declare it to the world. She is to witness to all nations that, since the beginning of time, God alone existed; that He is the one who is overruling in the affairs of men; and that, when He purposes to do anything, He will perform it, and no one can reverse it.

How can Israel testify to these marvelous and fundamental truths since she does not know them? She misunderstands her mission in the world. There is but one way by which she can get the truth: We who have it must give it to her. May the Lord God Omnipotent, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stir His church, which has the message concerning these great subjects, to give it to her now that she, in turn, may come into a knowledge of these great spiritual realities and proclaim them to the world in fulfillment of this prediction.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1945).
Bring out the people who have blind eyes, and those deaf who have ears.

God calls for the people who are blind and deaf to be brought out. The identification of these people in the context of chapters 42 and 43 must be the people of God who are called His blind servant and His deaf messenger even though they have eyes and ears, 42:16-20. The blindness and deafness of God’s people is a common theme in the prophecy of Isaiah. See 6:9-10; 29:9; 42:16-20; 56:10 and 59:10. The purpose for these blind and deaf people to be brought out is to witness that God is the one true God before the nations and to witness that God is also the world’s only savior, 43:10-13. It is ironic that only God can call those who are “blind” and “deaf” to be a witness of His greatness to the nations of the earth.

Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the peoples assemble. Who among them reported this? Who foretold us earlier things? Let them bring in their witnesses, so that they may be proven right. and let them hear and confirm, “It is truth.”

God states that Let all the nations be gathered together and assembled. The reason that this gathering of the nations has been called is for them to give account to God regarding their ability to declare beforehand what will take place. This charge to the nations is a re-emphasis of the former charge against them and their worthless idols, 41:1-7, 21-24. God has called His witnesses, 43:8, 10, who are His blind and deaf servant Israel and now God is calling the nations to present their witnesses, who are blind and deaf idols, 41:21-14 to determine if they can accurately state what past events they have accurately predicted.

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he. Before me there was no other God formed, neither will there be after me.

In the presence of the assembled nations, God declares that His chosen servant, His blind and deaf people, are witnesses to His greatness for the purpose that they will believe Him and know and understand that God is unique, and that no God has ever existed besides Him. He alone is God for He states, “I am he.” God announces to the assembled nations and to His own people that He is the One who made His great name known to Moses (and to His captive people in Egypt). His great name is “I AM WHO I AM” or shortened as “I AM.” God declared that this was His eternal and memorial name which is to be known to all generations. See Exodus 3:13-16. As God’s servants, His people are called to be His witness before the nations. See Exodus 19:4-6; 1 Chronicles 16:23-24; Psalm 67:1-7; 96:1-13. Since they have failed to do this, God has assembled the nations to make this declaration before them in the presence of His servant nation as His witness. These verses 43:10-13, point to the ministry of God’s beloved Servant, His Son, the Messiah. What His chosen blind and deaf servants, His covenant people, have failed to do in proclaiming God’s greatness and His great name to the world, God Himself will accomplish, through the ministry of His beloved Servant, the Messiah. Near the end of the first earthly ministry of God’s beloved Servant, this Servant Himself will
call another group of servants, who are indwelt by His Spirit, to be His witnesses to all the earth. See Matthew 28:18-20; and Acts 1:8.

43:11-13 I, even I, am the LORD, besides me there is no savior.

\[12\] I have declared, delivered, and proclaimed; and there was no foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God.

\[13\] Yes, from eternity I am he. There is no one who can deliver out of my hand. I act and who can undo it?"

In the final three verses of this summoning by God of the nations and His people to be witnesses of His greatness, the LORD emphasizes that He alone is the world’s savior. He alone is the only God who can, with divine authority, make declarations and proclamations that He is their savior. The assembled peoples are witnesses that He is God and He has existed from eternity. They are also witnesses to God’s sovereign and omnipotent power for none can defeat Him, deliver out of His hand, and when He acts or performs anything, there is no one who can reverse His works. These declarations by God are likened to a classroom where God is teaching theology, the great truths about God, to those who have been called to attend these divine lectures. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 43:11-13:

“Yahweh alone, among all the "gods," is the only real deliverer, the one who knows the future, and the sovereign. He is unique. None of the idols was Yahweh. The Israelites could bear witness to that, but they were blind and deaf. Therefore the Lord had to testify in His own behalf.

Yahweh was the only God from the very beginning. Since He is the only deliverer, no other god can deliver people from His hand or overrule His decisions. It was foolish, then, for the Israelites, as it is for all God's people, to look to anyone or anything else for salvation.

In the future, God would use Israel to demonstrate to the world in a fresh way that He was the only Savior, as He had done in the past. He would make His people the evidence of His deity by delivering them from captivity in Babylon (43:14—21) and from their sins (44:1-5). His salvation would be in spite of their lack of righteousness (43:22-28).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 207).

The Lord to Redeem God’s Servants: 43:14-21

Following the Lord’s declaration of His uniqueness and eternality as the earth’s only God and the declaration of His omnipotent power and the earth’s only savior, verses 8-13, God illustrates His abilities to save His people in verses 14-21. God uses Babylon, as a near future reference, as an illustration to save His beloved people, verses 14-15, and He then points to the far future where He will once again redeem His chosen people, vs. 20, by providing safe passage for them so that they will declare His praise, verses 15-21. There are as many suggestions as to the interpretation of these verses as there are interpreters or scholars. Some see only a reference to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon. Others see a blended portrait of God redeeming His people from Babylon and a reference to the days just prior to the second advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Others see only a far future reference where God saves His people from a future restored Babylon and brings His people from all parts of the earth to participate in the beginnings of the messianic kingdom. This study sees merit in a blended view of verses 14-21, where God uses an historical incident such as a near future event of the return of the exiles from Babylon, as an illustration of
what He will do, redeem His people, in the far future just prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

43:14-15 *This is what the LORD says,*

your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

"For your sake I will send to Babylon, and I will force them to become as fugitives; the Chaldean's shouts of celebration will be turned to mourning.

15 I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."

Isaiah 43:14-21 begins with the imperative, “*This is what the LORD says,*” as a declaration of the authority of God to proclaim truth to His people and as an imperative decree for them to listen to Him. Isaiah, once again describes God with majestic compound names. See notes on 43:1 and 3 above. The LORD, 43:14 is Yahweh, Israel’s covenant making and keeping God. He is also their “Redeemer,” ga’al, who is their great kinsman. He redeems His “family” people as they are His beloved ones. He is also the “Holy One of Israel” who is intrinsically holy. To say God is holy is to describe who He is. See notes on Isaiah 6:3. Israel’s holy, sovereign and incomparable God, who as their savior describes, in 43:14, what He will do for the sake of His beloved people. It must be kept in mind that God had previously described His people as His blind servant and deaf messenger, 42:19. See also Isaiah 6:8-13. It is not because they had done anything to deserve His saving works on their behalf, but He accomplishes this work for the sake of His great name. For further study, refer to the following selected verses, Psalm 79:9; 106:8; Isaiah 48:9, 11; Jeremiah 14:7, 21; Ezekiel 9:9, 14, 22, 44; and Ezekiel 36:22; 1 John 2:12.

The redemptive work of God on behalf of His chosen and beloved people on this occasion is described as “*for your sake.*” God works on behalf of His covenant people. It is for their sake, because His work for them advances and protects the glory of His great name, which as described in 43:14-15, will result in the downfall of their enemy, the Babylonians. God will bring the Chaldeans, the people of the kingdom of Babylon, down as fugitives “in ships” as the KJV and other English versions state. The Babylonians had a great love for their ships and it is in these ships that they will flee as fugitives from their conquerors. Just as God’s people would be “brought down” as fugitives and exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon, so God will also make their captives, the Babylonians, fugitives fleeing from an enemy who is conquering them. This may refer to the destruction of Babylon by the army of the Assyrians under Sennacherib in 689 B.C. which was in the near future to Isaiah’s day. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah,* Vol. 2, page 206. It alternatively may refer to the defeat of the Babylonians by the Persians under King Cyrus in 539 B.C. as many scholars suggest. It must be noted that this was not the first mention of Babylon by Isaiah in the DASV and NKJV. Refer to 13:1, 19; 14:4, 22; 21:9; 39:1, 3, 6, and 7 and it would not be the last, see 47:1; 48:14 and 20. Because of Isaiah’s frequent mention of Babylon in his prophecy, some scholars suggest that many passages in chapters 40-66 have Babylon as the background to Isaiah’s messages. However, Babylon is only mentioned in the DASV and NKJV four times in chapters 40-66 and nine times in chapters 1-39. References to the Chaldeans occur twice in chapters 1-39 and five times in chapters 40-66. Combing these references, Babylon and Chaldean are mentioned eleven times in chapters 1-39 and nine times in chapters 40-66.

Based on the evidence of the number of references to Babylon and Chaldean in chapters 40-66, it appears puzzling that many scholars state that it is from Babylon that God is gathering His people, specifically within passages that mention God’s gathering of His people from various points of the earth. This Messianic study of Isaiah does not describe or apply many of these passages in this way. Each passage must be understood
within its context and if Isaiah describes God’s people as being gathered from several points of the earth, this must not be a reference to Babylon but to a future time, not yet realized when God will gather His people from all nations to populate the coming messianic kingdom. Many conservative Biblical scholars, teachers and students, however, do not agree with this position. It is not the scope or intent of this study to engage, interact or refute with the positions held by others. Complex and intricate debates involving differing opinions on exegetical issues are best left to technical commentaries on Isaiah which are intended for the seminary classroom and scholarly review. See the Introduction section for additional comment.

In Isaiah 43:15 the prophet again authenticates the message by another declaration by God of a glorious set of His compound names. This message is from the One who is the “LORD”, Yahweh, the great I AM. He is also Israel’s “Holy One” to emphasize His innate holiness and “rightness” and to indicate His desire that His people also be holy. See Leviticus 11:44-45. God is also Israel’s “Creator,” a title of which He often reminds His people so that they will know they have been created for His glory. See, for example, Isaiah 43:7. In this set of compound names, Isaiah declares that Israel’s God is also their “King.” Isaiah had previously seen this King when he was commissioned by God to proclaim His message to His obstinate people, Isaiah 6:1-13. Other references in Isaiah to this glorious King, Israel’s Messiah, who is the beloved Servant of God are found in 32:1; 33:17, 22; and 44:6. In a later day, some would make a great journey bearing presents fit for royalty and ask, “Where is he who is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star rising in the eastern sky, and are come to worship him,” Matthew 2:2. Those in Isaiah’s day, and in the day of the first earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, and in our day, must seek the Messiah in order to worship Him. Worship is the joyous occupation of the citizens of heaven, Revelation 4:9-11 and 5:9-14 and should be for those on earth who belong to God’s holy family, having believed by faith in His Son, who is God’s beloved Servant, the Messiah. In saying that we must seek the Messiah is not to say that His kingdom is currently established on the earth, for it is not. For a defense of the truth that the earthly messianic kingdom is yet in the future refer to: Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, BMH Books, 1959; Andrew M. Woods, The Coming Kingdom: What is the Kingdom and How is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church, Grace Gospel Press, 2016; and Michael J. Vlach, He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God, Lampion Press, 2017.

43:16-17 This is what the LORD says, who makes a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the warrior.

They lie down, they cannot rise. They are extinguished, snuffed out like a wick.

In Isaiah 43:6-17, the prophet declares God’s reminder to His people of His past miraculous works. This reference to these past works begin with the authoritative declaration in the DASV, “This is what the LORD says” or as other English versions state, “Thus says the LORD.” God, often in the Scriptures, begins an important declaration with these words with which He demands the attention of His people to listen and obey what He has to tell them. This authoritative declaration of the Lord is recorded 38 times in Isaiah but even more frequently in Jeremiah, 151 times and in Ezekiel, 126 times. Before stating the words that need to be obeyed in Isaiah 43:18, God reminds His people of His credentials. He is the One who “makes a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters,” 43:16. He also is the One who brings forth the chariots, the horse, the army and the warrior, to be snuffed out like a wick in the mighty waters, 43:17. Most students of Scripture would understand these words to be a reminder of God’s great work on behalf of His people during the escape (exodus) from Egypt in which the waters of the Red Sea parted safely for the people of Israel to escape the pursuing Egyptian army. The Egyptian army however, was led or brought forth by God into these
same waters only to be engulfed by them and to become their burial place, Exodus 14:23-30. The mention of the “mighty waters” in 43:16 as a description of the Red Sea is important for students to understand, that the crossing of these waters was not in some reedy and shallow wetlands, as some scholars claim. These waters were deep enough to completely engulf and drown the ensuing Egyptian army with their horses and chariots.

The miraculous parting of the waters of the Red Sea to provide a safe escape for the people of Israel from the Egyptian army is often cited by the writers of the Old Testament as a reminder of God’s divine care for His people as these few examples attest, Exodus 15:19; Psalm 77:19-20; Isaiah 51:10; and 63:11-14. The prophet Isaiah uses this historical record of this miracle of God as a pictorial backdrop to predict what God will do in the future with a similar picture of God’s protective care as Isaiah 43:19-22 indicates. Isaiah had previously discussed the creation of a roadway that God will provide for a safe return of the faithful remnant, who will journey from all nations to Zion, the capital of the coming messianic kingdom. See Isaiah 11:16; 19:23; and 35:8-10. Isaiah will also later discuss this roadway in 49:10-13; and 51:10-11.

43:18 Do not remember the former things, or focus on the past.

In what at first may seem incongruous or out of place, for God to state that His people are not to remember, call to mind, the former things, or ponder or focus on the things of the past. God is saying that they must not cling or hold fast to these former things as a means of present or future salvation. What God has done in the past was certainly miraculous and wonderful, but to look upon them as one would look upon an idol is abhorrent to God. For an example of this, refer to the story of the bronze serpent, which in the past was a device used by God for healing, Numbers 21:4-9. But it had been kept for generations as a religious icon and the people had turned it into an idol, 2 Kings 18:4. The reason God does not want them to cling to the past is revealed in Isaiah 43:19-21. The prophet Jeremiah also makes a similar point regarding the contrast between God’s past work and His far future work, Jeremiah 23:7-8.

43:19-21 Look, I will do a new thing. Now it springs forth. Can't you see it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

20 The wild animals of the fields will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; because I provided waters in the wilderness, and streams in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen,

21 the people I formed for myself, that they might declare my praise.

God reveals, that in contrast to what has happened in the past which He has requested that His people not ponder or call to mind, 43:18, He will now do something new. God delights in declaring something new to His people as the context of Isaiah 42:9; 65:17; Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:26; John 13:34; and Revelation 21:5 attest. The something “new” in Isaiah 43:19 will be God’s making of a way, (roadway) in the wilderness and streams (rivers) in the desert. Both the new roadways and rivers are for the benefit of the faithful remnant of Israel who will be gathered from all nations of the world, in the far future following the terrifying days of the great tribulation. They will be brought to Immanuel’s land to populate the messianic kingdom in the presence of their Messiah who will be reigning on the physical throne of David. Most commentators...
understand Isaiah 43:19-21 as a reference to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem from Babylon, but there is nothing in the context of this passage to confirm this viewpoint.

The reason, stated in Isaiah 43:20, that God “provided” (a prophetic perfect term), “waters in the wilderness and streams in the desert” is so that the animals will glorify Him, by their enjoyment of this sustenance, and that God’s chosen people, whom God has formed for Himself (see Isaiah 43:7), will have water to drink and will verbally declare His praise, 43:21. The Apostle Peter quotes from Isaiah 43:21 in 1 Peter 2:9. Following the awful days of the Tribulation in which the earth will be almost totally ruined, the establishment of the millennial kingdom will witness a refreshing re-creation of the earth’s bountiful resources to become as a new Eden. See also Jeremiah 16:14-15; 32: 37-44. For an extended discussion on the gathering of the faithful remnant from the nations of the earth to participate in the millennial kingdom, see Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, chapter XVI: The Establishment of the Prophetic Kingdom, pages 178-205.

David L. Cooper also understands these verses as applying to the far future:

“According to verse 19 God promises to do a "new thing," something that He has never, in all the annals of human history, done before. Having his eyes focused upon this future time, the prophet declares: "Now shall it spring forth; shall ye not know it?" The works which the Lord will perform yet in the future in order to deliver Israel will be so very mighty and stupendous that the miracles which He performed at the time of the Exodus will seem as nothing in comparison--they will be overshadowed by the greatness and the power of these future delivering acts. On this point hear the Prophet Jeremiah: "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that they shall no more say, As Jehovah liveth, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, As Jehovah liveth, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them. And they shall dwell in their own land" (Jer. 23:7,8).

The first of these future acts of the Lord is that He will "make a way in the wilderness." This way of which the prophet is speaking will not be something that man has constructed. It will be by divine power, just as the way which the Lord made through the Red Sea. It will be just as literal and as actual as the opening up of the Red Sea. The second thing mentioned is that the Lord will make "rivers in the desert." Water is a great necessity. Without it no life would be possible. There are vast stretches of the earth's surface that are desolate, dreary wastes, impassable to man. Not so will it be at the time when God delivers His people, Israel. In a miraculous manner He will cause rivers of water to flow in the desert for them. The Lord provided food and water for Elijah, His faithful servant. He supplied water and manna for Israel when she was in the wilderness, and He will, for the chosen, faithful remnant again provide food and water. This promise is made in Isaiah 33:13-16--especially in verse 16: "... his bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." This abundance of food and water will be especially provided, declared the Lord, "... to my people, my chosen." At the same time the beasts of the desert will enjoy refreshment from the water which the Lord, at that future time, will supply for His people.

Let us notice that God will meet the physical needs of His people Israel "... which I [Jehovah] formed for myself, that they might set forth my praise" (vs. 21). When the Lord created the Hebrew nation, He had a definite purpose in view, which is expressed in the words, "that they might set forth my praise." Israel's mission in the world is a spiritual one. She has never performed the task for which she was created. It is true that individuals of that race have done the will of God in a limited way and have thus glorified Him, but this passage speaks of the Lord's delivering the remnant of His people whom He has formed to set forth His glory and praise. God never will be praised and glorified in the proportion set forth in the prophetic word till this part of the nation, the remnant, is given the truth, turns to Him with all of its heart, and becomes an empty channel through which His power may flow every day and every hour. God created Israel for His glory and she shall yet fit into this international picture, passing on the divine blessings to the world.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-May 1945).
The Sinful Condition of God’s Servants: 43:22-28

As is so common in the prophetic writings of Isaiah, promises of salvation follow declarations of judgment and judgment passages follow directly after salvation promises. Verses 22-28 are no exception. After declaring that His people, whom He had formed for Himself, will declare His praise, vs. 21, God proceeds to pronounce judgment upon His people for their unfaithful worship. He berates them for their failure to honor Him with the sacrifices that His law had required and for wearying Him with their iniquities, vss. 22-24. See also Isaiah chapter 1. The words of God recorded in these verses are not addressed to exiles in Babylon as some would indicate. God is speaking to Isaiah’s audience in Jerusalem where the temple was the center of their worship. Not only had this generation continued in their sin but they had followed in the sinful footsteps of their forefathers and past spokesmen. The consequence of the never-ending sinfulness of these people is that God will cause the pollution of the princes of the sanctuary (by implication polluting the temple itself) and God will consign His people (Jacob/Israel) to be destroyed and reviled, vss. 25-28. These stunning words of judgment are then followed by comforting words of future restoration and blessing, 44:1-8. Although, God will punish His people for their sins, He never completely forsakes them and will ultimately establish a majestic peaceful kingdom upon the earth, ruled by their Messiah, which Revelation 20:1-6 states will endure for a thousand years.

43:22 But you did not call upon me, O Jacob;
you have grown tired of me, O Israel.

God laments that His people have failed to call on Him, which could be understood as their lack of prayer in seeking forgiveness and guidance from their Lord who is their Creator, Holy One and King, Isaiah 43:15. They also have become weary of God indicating that their worship of God was a mere formality without any heartfelt devotion to Him as the following verses testify. The problem of stale lifeless worship by those whose hearts are full of sin was common among the people of God during Old Testament days and continues to this day. Isaiah addressed this issue at the beginning of his prophecy, Isaiah 1:11-14. See also Isaiah 66:1-4; Jeremiah 7:1-15; Hosea 6:4-11; Amos 4:1-13; and Micah 6:1-16. These are selected verses only as the lack of heartfelt worship to God by His people is an all too common complaint of God which leads to His just punishment and retribution.

43:23-24 You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings,
or honored me with your sacrifices.
I have not burdened you with offerings,
or wearied you demanding frankincense.
24 You have bought me no sweet cane with money,
nor have you satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.
But you have burdened me with your sins,
you have wearied me with your iniquities.

God claims that His people’s failure to worship Him with all their heart has led to their slackness in obeying the law by not bringing the required sheep for burnt offerings. Nor have they brought sacrifices which would honor Him. God has been gentle to His people by not overly demanding offerings and incense. This gentleness on God’s part may have been due to the destruction of the agricultural lands in Judah by the army of Assyria which would have destroyed crops and vegetation. God further laments that His people have not offered Him sweet cane (calamus) or money offerings, Exodus 30:22-33, nor have they sent up to Him the sweet smell of the fat which ascended from their required burnt offerings, Exodus 29:10-25. Instead they
have only “offered” God the stench of their sins and iniquities. Refer to Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 214-215 for a discussion of the purpose of the sacrificial system:

43:25 *I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; I will not remember your sins.*

Following His lament about the heartless worship of His people in neglecting the requirements of the law regarding sacrifices and offerings, God delivers an astounding message of salvation. It is not that ritual worship in itself is the key to having sins forgiven but it is because God will forgive sins (wipes out your transgressions) and does not remember them for His own sake. The words “blots out” in the DASV are *mahah* in the Hebrew which has the meaning of wiping away or blotting out. The first occurrence of *mahah* in the Scriptures is recorded in Exodus 32:32-33. Moses was discussing with God, Israel’s sin of making and worshiping a calf made of gold. Moses pleaded with God to forgive this great act of rebellion by the Israelites and said, “please forgive their sin, but if not, then blot me out of your book that you have written,” Exodus 32:33. The LORD responded by stating, "Whoever has sinned against me, that person alone will I blot out of my book.” Exodus 32:33. If it is incorrect to assume God has a physical book, it certainly would be correct to understand He keeps a permanent record of the acts of those He has created. This “book” is also mentioned in Psalm 69:28; 139:16; Daniel 7:10; 10:21; 12:11; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15 and 21:27. The action of blotting out or erasing a name from this book may indicate that this name was originally stated in the book. However due to the unregenerate condition of the person, the name of the person is wiped out of the book, thus eliminating that person from entering the eternal state, heaven.

In Isaiah 43:25, the action by God is not blotting a person’s name from the book of life, but God is blotting or wiping away any record of transgressions (Hebrew: *pesha’*), thus God states, “*I will not remember your sins.*” See also notes on Isaiah 44:22. Thomas Constable explains:

“The Lord Himself (cf. v. 11) would forgive His people for His own sake, not because they had earned forgiveness with their worship. Forgiveness of sin is a divine prerogative (cf. Matt. 9:2-6). He pictured forgiveness as erasing something previously written on a record (cf. 44:22; 2 Kings 21:13; Ps. 51:1, 9).

Another figure, forgetting sins committed against Himself, strengthens the promise of forgiveness (cf. Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:18-19). Since God is omniscient He never forgets anything, but in this promise He compared Himself to a person who does forget things (an anthropomorphism, cf. v. 24) to illustrate the fact that He would not hold their sins against them. He would not call their sins to mind with a view to punishing them. It was sin, not captivity, that was the root trouble that needed dealing with. Later, Isaiah revealed that God would deal with it through His Servant’s ministry (53:10-12).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 209).

43:26-27 *Remind me; let us argue this out in court; present your case, so that you may prove your innocence.*

27 *Your first father sinned, and your spokespersons have rebelled against me.*

In a courtroom setting, see also 41:21, God demands that His people remind Him by their argument (presentation of their witness) regarding their worthiness and righteousness and why they have seen fit not to honor God with the required offerings and sacrifices. This verse is reminiscent of the beginning of Isaiah’s prophecy where God called His people to reason together with Him: 1:18. In 43:26, God calls upon His people to “argue this out in court; present your case,” (DASV). This is a paraphrase. The KJV has “let us
plead together, declare thou,” and the NIV has “let us argue the matter together; state the case.” One scholar translates these words as “let us judge this together, declare thy case.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 353). This should not be understood as a discussion between equals nor an opportunity for sinful Israel to use persuasive arguments to free them from the consequences of their sinfulness. God is simply giving them opportunity to acknowledge and state that they have rebelled against Him. It is best to see this as a gracious invitation by the LORD to His covenant people to recognize and admit their sinfulness and to repent and return to obedience and true heartfelt worship of God. In 43:27, God states His position as the prosecutor of the case. God bluntly states that their “first father” (forefather or literally father) sinned. This could be a reference to Adam, Abraham or Jacob but it is not stated to whom God is referencing. God next avows that their spokesmen, literally interpreters, have rebelled against Him. These interpreters could have been false prophets, ungodly priests or rebellious princes or kings. The Scriptures do not hide the sins of the forefathers nor those of other leaders of the Hebrew people. God has been dealing with these sins since calling them as His chosen people and continues to deal with them today. Mankind’s sinful inclinations have not changed, and God, in His divine grace, offers to forgive these sins and remember them no more as 43:25 states. God continues to forgive sins today to any who will call upon Him in confession of their sins. The apostle John stated, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9.

43:28 Therefore I defiled your princes of the sanctuary; I delivered Jacob over to destruction, and Israel to insults.

The KJV translates the second sentence in 43:28 as “and have given Jacob to the curse.” The NASB has the word “ban” instead of “destruction” (DASV). The climax of this short courtroom like drama is stated in 43:28. God, now as the Judge, declares His verdict. Since there can be no defense to the people’s sinfulness in rebelling against Him, God declares His righteous judgment. He will pollute (pierce through) the princes (holy princes or priests) of the sanctuary and consign His people to the ban (complete destruction) and to revilement. The word “destruction” is the Hebrew word herem, which has the meaning of things devoted to destruction. Among its many occurrences in the Scriptures is that of Deuteronomy 7:26 where it is translated as “a cursed thing” in the KJV and “set apart for destruction” in the NIV. It occurs also in Isaiah 34:5 translated as “doomed to destruction” in the DASV and “of my curse” in the KJV and “devoted to destruction” in the NASB. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 43:28:

“God would also pollute the priests with guilt since they had for generations polluted His sacrifices with their guilt (cf. 2 Chron. 24:5). They, of all people, should have been holy since they dealt with the holy things connected with Israel's worship (cf. 65:2-5; Lev. 10:3). God would consign the whole nation to the ban (Heb. herem), something devoted to destruction. Israel had become like Canaan (cf. 1:9-10; Josh. 6:17; 1 Sam. 15:21), and it would become the object of Gentile reviling as Canaan had been for the Israelites.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 210).

J. Alec Motyer discusses the meaning of the ban as destruction:

“Destruction (ḥērem) is not ‘destruction’ pure and simple but the utter ‘separation’ from the face of the earth of that which the Lord abhors (Josh. 6:17; 8:26). What a verdict!—not pardon (26) but the divine curse (28).” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 275).

The final phrase of 43:28 is “and (have delivered) Israel to insults” The word “insults” in the DASV is the Hebrew word “gidduph” literally meaning to be reviled as translated in the NASB. It occurs only in two other verses in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 51:7, it is translated as “mocking” in the DASV and “revilings” in the
KJV and NASB. In Zephaniah 2:8 it is also translated as “revilings” in the KJV and NASB but as “ridicule” in the DASV.

But as terrifying and final as this judgement appears, all is not lost. Isaiah frequently in his prophecy, follows a message of judgment and punishment with a declaration of salvation and hope. The passage, 44:1-8 is an excellent example of this pattern. In this next section, God tells His people to not fear for He has made wonderful provision for them for He is the LORD of hosts, their King, and their Redeemer who is the first and the last. He is also their Rock and there is no One like Him for He alone is God.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 43:
43:1-7: The Redemption of God’s People
43:8-13: The Reminder to God’s People
43:14-21: The Restoration of God’s People
43:22-28: The Rebellion of God’s People

7. Further Blessings to Israel: 44:1-8

Chapter 44 of Isaiah is another beautiful declaration of God’s love, salvation and protective care for His people. Verses 1-8 contain promises of the blessings of God during the far future messianic kingdom. These verses also contain majestic compound names for God, vs. 6 and many terms describing His work on their behalf. The middle section of this chapter, vss. 9-20, contain a lengthy discussion on the foolishness of crafting and then worshipping idols. Isaiah often inserts excurses on idolatry as it was such an impediment to the true worship of God as the Holy One of Israel and a practice in which God hated and would not tolerate. The final section of chapter 44, vss. 21-28 contains two distinct sections. Verses. 21-23 are a wonderful statement of God’s salvation and a call for His people to return to Him, likely referencing their previous evil practice of idol worship. Verses 24-28 contain a specific reference to Cyrus, vs. 28 and to the re-inhabitation of the cities of Judah including Jerusalem, vs. 26 and to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple, vs. 28. As vss. 26-28 of chapter 44 do contain specific references to the return of the exiles from Babylon and to Cyrus, it is fitting for students to interpret these verses literally and understand that only God could identify a person by name, Cyrus, over 160 years (701–538 B.C.) before this king would fulfil the role given to him by God.

44:1 Now listen, O Jacob my servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen.

Isaiah 44:1 begins with an emphatic “Now listen” (“But now listen” in the NIV and NASB) linking it to the previous message in 43:22-28. This ominous and devastating pronouncement of judgment by God on His people includes destruction, 43:28. In the previous section, 43:22-28, God’s judgment seems to be final, but it is immediately followed by a comforting message of God’s future salvation, 44:1-5. A survey of the messages of Isaiah contained in his prophecy will reveal that Isaiah often followed a declaration of judgment with a blessing of salvation. For example, the judgment of God upon His people in chapter 1 is followed with a declaration of hope and salvation in a future day as recorded in chapter 2:1-4. See also the contrast between judgment in 42:19-25 and future salvation in 41:3-7.

God calls his servant “Jacob/Israel” whom he has calls to listen to him. The combination of Jacob and Israel is often used by Isaiah to refer collectively to God’s people. See 9:8; 10:20; 14:1; 27:6; 29:23; 40:27; 41:8, 14; 42:24; 43:1, 22, 28; 44:1, 5, 21, 23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1, 2; 49: 5, and 6. A close parallel to Isaiah 44:1-2 occurs in 41:8; 43:1 and 44:21. God’s people are often designated in the Scriptures as the “sons of Israel” and “My people Israel.” The reference to Jacob as a synonym of Israel is also appropriate for Jacob was the
father and patriarchal head of the tribes of Israel. At his birth, he was given the name Jacob, but God later decreed that his name was to be Israel, Genesis 35:10. God at that time declared that the covenant He had made with Abraham and Isaac was to be made with Jacob and his descendants, Genesis 35:11-12.

As recorded in Isaiah’s prophecy, God often refers to Israel as His servant See 41:8, 9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21, 26, 45:4; 48:20; and 50:10. See notes on the previous verses, 41:8-9; 42:19; and 43:10, for further comment on the role of Israel as God’s servant. Another common expression of God for His people is “chosen.” See Isaiah 41:8, 9; 43:10, 20; 44:1, 2; 45:4; 49:7; 65:15, and 22. God’s choice of the Jewish people was not because they were mighty in numbers or because of anything they had accomplished or because they were in any way deserving to be His chosen people. He chose them for His own name’s sake to declare His glory to the nations of the earth. See 2 Samuel 7:23; Isaiah 43:7 and 44:23.

44:2 This is what the LORD says who made you, and formed you from the womb, who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

Isaiah authenticates God’s message with the imperative “This is what the LORD says” which is intended for God’s people to listen and take notice of what He is about to declare to them. See note on Isaiah 43:16-17. He reminds His people that it was He who had formed them from the womb. See also 43:1, 7, 21; 44:21, and 24. God is stating that these sinful, obstinate, rebellious, blind and deaf people are His family whom He, in holy love, intimately cares for and protects. It is extremely exceptional that God makes a similar statement about His most beloved Servant, His Son, the Messiah in Isaiah 49:5. This family relationship, Exodus 4:22, is further developed in the New Testament, not only between the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ, John 6:40, but also between the Father and all believers whom are called the children of God and fellow heirs with Christ, Romans 8:16-17.

God again, (see Isaiah 44:1), calls His people His servant and the ones He has chosen. This repetitive description of the special relationship between God and these people is to assure them that He has not forsaken them, and He has a plan and purpose for them. Following the statement of coming destruction upon them, 43:28 and the connecting “now listen” of 44:1 these chosen servants of God can rest in the knowledge that it is not God’s intention to annihilate them, but to discipline them and following this chastisement, He will restore them. God calls Israel, “Jeshurun” which has the meaning of “upright” and “righteous.” See also Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5 and 26. By calling His people “upright” or “righteous”, God is not stating that they have this characteristic as an intrinsic attribute but that this is His purpose for them. He calls them to be holy in Exodus 19:5-6 and 22:31.

44:3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.
I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing upon your offspring.

The restorative work of God as stated in Isaiah 44:3, on behalf of his chosen servants is announced for a far future time when God will bring refreshment to the earth for He will, “pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground.” This work of God is a repeated promise in the prophecy of Isaiah. See 12:3; 30:23-25; 32:1-2; 35:1-7; 41:17-20; 43:19-21; 44:4; 49:10; and 58:11. The earth will be restored and refreshed during the days of the messianic kingdom where nature, animals and humans will all benefit from
the work and presence of God who is the Messiah who will reign in righteousness from Mount Zion, Isaiah 61:11.

But there is more to this verse than the physical restoration of the earth and its inhabitants. God promised that, He will also “pour” His Spirit upon the descendants of His people and (pour out) His blessing on their offspring. This is a future promise that the generation of Isaiah’s day could invest their trust. The generation of our current day also patiently hopes for its fulfillment. Thomas constable rightly observes:

“The Lord promised to pour out His Spirit on the Israelites in the future. This gift would have the same effect for the nation as pouring water on dry ground would have for the landscape. It would bring refreshment and new life, indeed, a whole new spiritual attitude (cf. 32:15; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27; 37:7-10; Joel 2:28-29). Blessing would come to the descendants of Isaiah's audience. Isaiah in this verse may have meant that God would bring both physical and spiritual refreshment. Other passages reveal that He will send physical refreshment (cf. 35:6-7; 41:18).

Since this is a promise specifically to the Israelites, they would be the special recipients of this outpouring. Thus it must still be future. The giving of the Spirit in the apostolic age, first on the day of Pentecost and then on several subsequent occasions, was not a gift to Israel but to the church, not to Jews uniquely but to Jews and Gentiles equally (cf. Acts 11:15). Both outpourings have the result of making the recipients witnesses.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 210-211). (Italics added).

Victor Buksbazen adds:

“The primary sense of the passage is spiritual and speaks of the future regeneration of Israel which will bring blessing to all of mankind. Their turning to God will attract others to Jehovah and to the people of Jehovah. In contrast to Israel’s former state when they were delivered to the gentiles to be treated with contempt and as an object of blasphemings (Isa. 43:28), they will in the future become an honored people with whom non-Jews will seek to identify themselves and also with their God.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 355).

44:4 They will spring up among the grass,
like willows by flowing streams.

God adds to the marvelous promise of the outpouring of the Spirit upon the future descendants of the Jews who were the recipients of Isaiah’s message. In a far future day these descendants will occupy the land in such numbers that they will “spring up” like grass or like popular trees by the water side. Isaiah will later declare the words of God, as recorded in 66:7-8 stating:

Before her labor pains began,
she gave birth;
before her pain came,
she delivered a boy.

8 Who has heard of such a thing?
Who has seen such things?
Can a country be born in a single day?
Will a nation be born in a second?
Yet as soon as Zion went into labor,
she gave birth to her children.
The faithful Jewish remnant who enter the messianic kingdom will rapidly populate the land and witness the replacement of the effects of devastation that were evident during the dreadful days of the Great Tribulation, with a land of restored nature, peace and longevity ruled by their Messiah.

44:5 One will say, 'I am the LORD's;

another will call himself by the name of Jacob;
yet another will write on his hand 'The LORD's,'

and take the name 'Israel' as his own.

In that great messianic day described in 44:3-4, those who populate the land will belong to the Lord. They will call themselves by the name of Jacob and give honor to the name of Israel. Some will even write on their hand as a visual display, “The LORD’s” (“Belonging to the LORD.” NASB). The prophet Zechariah spoke of that day as recorded in Zechariah 14:20-21, “On that day, there will be inscribed on horses' bells, "Holy to the LORD." The pots in the LORD's house will be like the bowls in front of the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that everyone who sacrifices can come and take of them, and use them to boil their sacrifices in. On that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.” David L. Cooper commented on these glorious days:

“Those who will take heed to the warning, will come and throw themselves upon His grace and mercy by accepting the long-rejected Messiah need not fear, because the Lord has chosen them. This assurance of protection is reiterated time and again throughout the second half of Isaiah.

In verse 3 the remnant of Israel is represented as thirsty ground, dry land, upon which God promises to pour water, and over which He assures the people that He will send streams of refreshing. That He is not talking about literal deserts is clear from the statement parallel to this one in the latter half of the verse: "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ..." This is the promise that God will pour out His Spirit upon the faithful remnant. On the last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles, the great day (six months before the crucifixion), our Lord Jesus called upon those who were thirsty to come to Him and drink (John 7:37f). The Apostle John explained that this language was not to be taken literally, but stated that Jesus was referring to the pouring out of the Spirit upon those who should believe on Him. The language is clearly an echo of this promise which the Lord makes to the nation of Israel in the passage under consideration. The individual now who accepts Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Saviour receives the Spirit. When this prophecy is fulfilled, the entire nation of Israel living then will receive Him and thus upon each one the Spirit of God will come and satisfy the thirsty soul. At that time "One shall say, I am Jehovah's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto Jehovah, and surname himself by the name of Israel" (vs. 5). At that time anti-Semitism will have vanished from the earth. Every Hebrew living then will be rejoicing in the fact that he is of Jewish origin and will write with his own hand, "Unto Jehovah." The marginal reading of this quotation is write on his hand, unto Jehovah. Both renderings are possible. Everyone of Israel who survives to that time will become a consecrated, devout follower of Messiah and will have the name of God in some way connected with his name.

Isaiah, in 4:3, speaks of those who remain in Jerusalem after the Tribulation as being written among those who are living in Zion. A reference to this future register is found in Psalm 87:5,6.

Thus in Isaiah 44:1-5 we see an invitation to Israel to accept her Messiah. Here we get a glimpse of the great Millennial Era when our Lord shall reign in glory and splendor over the earth. At that time Jerusalem will be His capital.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-May 1945).

44:6 This is what the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts says,
I am the first, 
and I am the last; 
besides me there is no other God.

The repetitive, "This is what the LORD.....says," (compare 44:2), is declared by God to assert His divine authoritative right to demand attention from His people. The magnificent compound names for God in 44:6 are similar to many others within the prophecy of Isaiah. See, for example notes on Isaiah 19:20; 37:16, 21; 43:3, 11, and 14-15; 44:24; 45:21; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 60:16; and 63:16 (selected verses only). See also the Introduction for a listing of all the names for God in Isaiah.

There are four designated names for God in 44:6 and two descriptive phrases. First, the title “LORD” is Israel’s covenant making and keeping God, translated LORD from YHWH. Older commentaries and studies translated YHWH as Jehovah, but this practice is mostly obsolete and has been replaced in more recent years with Yahweh with the vowels a and e added. Second, “King of Israel” is God’s designated title for His role as the theocratic ruler of Israel even though the people of Israel refused Him as King, hundreds of years earlier and demanded a human king, 1 Samuel 8:1-22. See also God’s prediction of Israel’s demand for a human king to rule over them, Deuteronomy 17:14-20; and 28:36-37. Third, “Redeemer” is a beloved title for God who acts as their kinsmen to redeem them from disaster both physical and spiritual. See also Isaiah 41:14, 43:14; 44:24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 69:20; 60:16 and 63:16. Fourth, “LORD of hosts” is a name designating YHWH as the commander of armies (on earth and in heaven) and the Lord of the hosts of heaven. As commander of armies, God is completely sovereign in all dealings with corrupt mankind who can do nothing to thwart God’s purposes for His creation.

In in 44:6, God also describes Himself as the “first and the last.” Gary V. Smith comments on this this descriptive phrase for God:

“God announces that “I am the first and I am the last,” a phrase that is not just a title but also a description of his unique sovereignty over all events. He knows what happened in the past and has planned and revealed to his people some of the things that will happen in the future. This is not an abstract philosophical statement of his eternality but a reminder that his works span the whole scope of history from the beginning to the very end of time. This claim would give assurance to the audience that God knows all about their past problems and will be around to help them in the future. This point anticipates the argument that will be presented later in the narrative where a craftsman brings an idol-god into existence many years after he planted a seedling. When God claims to be the first (41:4; 48:12), it indicates that he preceded the first events of creation and will continue as the sovereign Ruler over creation until the very last events.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 225-226).

In the final descriptive phrase in 44:6, God states that “besides me there is no other God.” This description of Himself sets up the following discussion on the futility of crafting and worshipping idols. God repeats this claim in 44:8 and in 45:5, 6, 14, 21, 22; and 46:9. See also Isaiah 43:11 where God states, “besides me there is no savior”. The plain truth of Scripture is that God alone is the Creator and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth, Genesis 1:1; and Isaiah 42:5. He alone is the only Savior of mankind, Acts 4:12.

Those who refer to any other God are making a patently false claim. The only true God, as revealed in the Scriptures, has called the nations to make any claim that their so-called gods can do anything at all, Isaiah 41:22-24. The result of this claim is the same as that which Elijah encountered, 1 Kings 18:20-40. False gods cannot make any response or do anything. The most hideous and grievous sin of mankind has been the rejection of the One true God and the replacement worship of something mankind has created to become
their God. Therefore, God has given mankind over to the futility and deadly consequence of their rebellion against God who allowed this sin to have its full impact. See Romans 1: 18-32.

44:7 Who is like me?

Let them announce it,
and let them declare it and set it before me,
since I established an ancient people.

Let them predict future things to come,
and let them explain what will come to pass.

God, in 44:7 is challenging those who are described in 44:9 as “All those who make idols are nothing.” Not only are their idols worthless and accounted as nothing but they are seen in God’s eyes, as recorded in Isaiah 40:17, “All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.” The subject of the pagan practice of making and worshiping idols and the worthlessness of idols is a common theme in Isaiah. See 2:8, 18, 20; 10:10-11; 19:1, 3; 21:9; 30:22; 31:7; 40:18-20; 41:21-29; 42:8, 17; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 48:5; 57:13 and 66:3. In 44:7, God challenges the makers of these worthless idols to have these idols announce declare, predict or explain anything that would compare them to God or to do anything that God can do. God had previously asked in 40:18, “To whom then will you compare God? What image will you equate him to? See also Isaiah 40:25 and 41:26.

There are three issues of challenge in 44:7 that God is addressing with the words “let them” as the basis of these challenges.

First, God asks, “Who is like me? Let them announce it.” This rhetorical question can only be answered with a resounding, No one is like God! The Scriptures often proclaim that there is no one like God nor is there anyone who can compare with God. For example see, Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 15:11; Deuteronomy 33:26; 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 7:22; 1 Kings 8:23; 1 Chronicles 17:20; 2 Chronicles 6:14; Job 36:22; Psalm 40:5; 71:19; 77:13; 86:8; 89:8; 113:5; Isaiah 40:18; 46:9; Micah 7:10 and 18. A similar declaration is that God is described as a rock and is incomparable. See 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 22:32; Psalm 18:31; Isaiah 17:10; 26:4; 44:8; and Habakkuk 1:12.

Second, God requests that let them declare things in the past. The NIV states in 44:7: “Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people.” This question was asked previously of those who were called to present their case for trusting in idols as stated in 41:22, “Declare what things happened in the past, what they were, so that we may consider them, and check whether they actually happened.” The only answer possible to this request is that only God can declare what has happened in the past as He was the only One who made and arranged past events. They did not happen by chance. Third, God requests: “Let them predict future things to come and let them explain things that will come to pass.” God had also requested previously, as recorded in 41:22, “tell us what things are to come.” There is no one but God who can perfectly predict or declare the future. Some may predict some things that may happen in a general sense. But no one but God can with precision and accuracy foretell what the future holds.

44:8 Do not tremble, or be afraid.

Have I not announced and foretold long ago?
You are my witnesses.

Is there any God besides me?
There is no other Rock;
I know of none.
Before starting a lengthy discussion on the folly of idol making and worship, Isaiah completes the three-verse declaration by God of His uniqueness as recorded in 44:6-8. God lovingly requests that His people are not to be afraid or tremble as what the future holds for He has announced and foretold this future in days long past. See also Isaiah 45:21 and 48:5-7. Even though God has declared that His people as His servants are blind and deaf, Isaiah 42:18, 19 and 43:8, they are called His witnesses to what He has done in the past, what He is doing in the present and what He will accomplish in the future. God asks again, “Is there any God besides me?” The word for “God” in 44:8 is eloah in the Hebrew with the meaning of being the single or sole God. There is no other God. This is the only occurrence of eloah in the book of Isaiah. God also declares that for His people, “there is no other Rock.” The comparison of God to a rock is often seen in Scripture. For example, see 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 22:32; Psalm 18:31; Isaiah 17:10; 26:4; 44:8; and Habakkuk 1:12. God is also described as an unmovable, enduring and strong rock that can be compared to a fortress. See 2 Samuel 22:2; Psalm 18:2; 31:3 and 71:3. As the sole and only God of the universe, He is a protective refuge for His people. They can with confidence and assurance depend on Him to provide safety even amid the storms and conflicts to come and more importantly, He gracefully gives salvation to them so that they will be eternally safe and live with Him in peace and righteousness. See notes on 44:11 for a very brief discussion on the word “tremble” (Hebrew pahad), which occurs in the first phrase of 44:8.

8. The Futility of Idolatry and the Forgiveness of God: 44:9-22

Verses 9-20: The Folly of Idol Making and Worship

In Isaiah 44:9-20, the prophet describes the worthless activity of making and crafting a worthless object. Those who craft idols will be put to shame, vs. 9, for there is no benefit derived from a god that is a cast metal object, vs. 10. All the companions of the idol craftsman will also be put to shame for those who make such a god are mere humans, vs. 11. Those who with human skill make an idol become weary and they make their god just like themselves, a weak human with no divine power, vss. 12-13. With the same wood that is used for fuel for heat for warmth and fuel for cooking, idols are crafted to become an object of worship, vss. 14-17. Idol worshippers have no understanding of the folly of their false hope in a man-made object that can offer them nothing but a lie, vss. 18-20.

The discussion of the folly of making and trusting in idols follows Isaiah’s magnificent recording of the dialog by God, 44:1-8, which exalts the One true God. Isaiah 44:1-8 is set in sharp contrast to 44:9-20. There are several contrasts between the Lord and lowly worthless idols from this passage and from chapters 40-43.

First, instead of a weak and pagan human who chooses a piece of wood that is to be fashioned into an idol, 44:14, God has chosen a people to Himself: Jacob/Israel, 44: 1.

Second, instead of a corruptible heathen who makes an idol, 44:9-20, God has formed and made people 44:1, who have been made in His image, Genesis 1:27.

Third, instead of a man-made god who can be of no help to those who craft it, 44:18-20, God will give His people divine help, 44:1.

Fourth, instead of a useless crafted god that cannot affect the natural or spiritual realms, God can re-shape nature to pour out soothing and healing waters and pour out His Spirit on His chosen people, 44:3-4.

Fifth, instead of a man-made mark on a worthless idol, the people of God will write the name of the One true God on their hands, 44:5.
Sixth, instead of a crafted idol that had a beginning and an ending and can offer no help or salvation, God exists eternally as the only One, their divine King who can redeem His kindred people, 44:6.

Seventh, instead of a useless piece of crafted wood or a shaped molten metal who can offer no counsel or advice, God can declare the things that have come from ages ago and predict the future with precision and accuracy, 44:7.

Eighth, instead of an idol that needs to be fastened by nails, so it will not tip over, Isaiah 41:7, God is a secure and strong Rock and therefore His people are not to tremble or be afraid, 44:8.

44:9 All those who make idols are nothing;
the things that they delight in are worthless;
their own witnesses cannot see or know,
so they are put to shame.

Not only are idols, the things that are delighted in are worthless, so are those who make them. Those who make blind and senseless idols are witnesses who themselves are ignorant and blind and therefore put to shame both by their creating of a useless object of worship and by being woefully without any knowledge of their acts. The word “nothing” is often translated as futile. It is the Hebrew word tohu which has the meaning of “emptiness,” “formless,” and “vain.” It is translated as “worthless” in 1 Samuel 12:21, “Do not turn aside after worthless idols which cannot profit or deliver, for they are worthless.” The word tohu first occurs in Scripture translated as “formless” in Genesis 1:2, “And the earth was formless and empty.” It occurs most often in Isaiah in the DASV in 24:10 (wasted); 29:21 (false); 34:11 (chaos); 40:17 (worthless); 40:23 (worthless); 41:29 (nothing); 44:9 (worthless); 45:18 (chaotic); 45:19 (vain); 49:4 (nothing); and 59:4 (empty). The witnesses, (Hebrew ed), to the crafting and delighting in idols are blind and without knowledge. This description of these pagan witnesses is certainly a purposeful contrast by Isaiah to the nations who are called to be witnesses who are blind and deaf, Isaiah 43:8-9, and to God’s chosen people, His servants who are also blind and deaf, Isaiah 42:19, and are His witnesses, Isaiah 43:10. These blind and unknowing witnesses are put to shame (Hebrew bosh). The Hebrew word bosh occurs often in Isaiah. See 1:29; 19:9; 20:5; 23:4; 24:23; 26:11; 29:22; 37:27; 41:11; 42:17; 44:9, 11; 45:16, 17, 24; 49:23; 50:7; 54:4; 65:13; and 66:5. It is repeated as “shame” for emphasis in 44:11. Those who make and trust in worthless idols are put to shame by the One who is the only true God.

44:10 Who has fashioned a god,
or cast a metal idol that is of any benefit?

God asks a rhetorical question that can only be answered by the words “no one.” There has never been a god who has been formed or fashioned by a human that can have any benefit. The prophet Habakkuk, 2:18-19 declared that idols are good for nothing for they are without benefit and have no breath in them:

18 What benefit is an idol when a craftsman carved it?
   What good is a metal image, a teacher of lies?
   Why does even the one who makes them
   trust in speechless idols?

19 Woe to him that says to wood, 'Wake up,'
   To speechless stone, 'Arise!'
   Can it instruct?
Look, it is overlaid with gold and silver,  
and there is absolutely no breath in it.  
(Habakkuk 2:18-19)

The word benefit in Isaiah 44:10 is the Hebrew word ya’al, which is often translated as “profit” in the Old Testament. It also occurs in Isaiah in the DASV in 30:5 (benefit) 30:6 (help); 44:9 (worthless); 47:12 (succeed); 48:17 (good); and 57:12 (help).

44:11 Look, all his companions will be put to shame;  
its craftsmen are mere humans.  
Let them all be gathered together,  
let them stand up.  
They will be terrified and put to shame.

All who fashion an idol and all who worship them (their companions) will be “put to shame.” These craftsmen are “mere humans” who Isaiah had earlier described in 40:17 as “all nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and worthless.” The Apostle Paul, as recorded in Romans 1:21-25 also spoke of those who had rejected God and worshipped the things they had made. “For even though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, or give thanks to him; but became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images resembling corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to dishonor their own bodies among themselves. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” God “gave them up,” Romans 1:24, meaning that God allowed the natural result of their rebellion against Him to be their utter demise which would ultimately lead to their complete separation from God and to their spending an eternity in God’s ultimate solution for sinfulness, the lake of fire, Revelation 20:11-15. This ultimate solution by God for sinfulness is described by Isaiah in 44:11 as “they will be terrified and put to shame.” Just like fashioned wooden idols that are not secured by nails, those who fashion idols and worship them will not be able to stand up when summoned by God. The word “terrified” in the DASV is the Hebrew word pahad, which has the primary meaning to be in dread of or to fear. It also occurs in Isaiah in the DASV in 12:2 (afraid); 19:16 (fearful); 19:17 (terrified); 33:14 (afraid); 44:8 (tremble); 51:13 (afraid); and 60:5 (thrill).

44:12 The blacksmith makes it with his tools,  
and shapes it in the coals.  
He fashions it with hammers,  
and forges it with his strong arm.  
He gets hungry and his strength weakens;  
he drinks no water and he becomes faint.

In contrast to God who has made and formed His people from the womb, Isaiah 44:2, and will never tire nor grow weary for He is a strong and enduring Rock, Isaiah 44:8, worthless idols are made by humans such as blacksmiths who spends all their efforts, making, shaping, fashioning and forging metal idols. The blacksmith becomes hungry and his strength weakens and because he works without stopping for a drink of water, becomes faint. Isaiah is describing a scenario that his audience could not fail to understand. Why would anyone trust in an idol made by weak and fallible human beings? Why would anyone exchange the true worship of the eternal steadfast God for bowing down to an image that a blacksmith has fashioned? The
answer should be obvious, but the reality is that the “god” of this world has blinded the eyes of those who are perishing, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, so that they will worship created things rather than the Creator of all things.

44:13 The carpenter stretches out a line;
    he traces out its form with a pencil.
He shapes it with planes,
    and he marks its outline with a compass.
He shapes it in the form of a human,
    according to human beauty,
    to dwell in a shrine.

Isaiah next, in 44:13 describes another craftsman, a carpenter, who expends his energies in marking and shaping an idol (in wood) in the form of a human and the result of his handiwork will then reside in a shrine. The NKJV for Isaiah 44:13 translates these words as:

“The craftsman stretches out his rule,
He marks one out with a chalk;
He fashions it with a plane,
He marks it out with the compass,
And makes it like the figure of a man,
According to the beauty of a man,
That it may remain in the house.”

Isaiah must have had some knowledge of how a blacksmith and a carpenter perform their works. For the details of the process of shaping and forming their works indicate Isaiah’s familiarity with the skill necessary to produce a crafted image. The great sin Isaiah describes in 44:9-20, is that the human form is to be worshipped in contrast to the only One deserving of worship who is the creator. It would have been just as sinful for the craftsmen to form an idol or image of God as prohibited by the second commandment, Exodus 20:4-6. The finished work of the human shaped idol will reside in a “house” (NKJV) or a “shrine” (DASV), where it will be worshipped in a place where it will not face the elements because those who shaped it know how fragile it was and that it would not last long without protection of a shelter. The idol, shaped by a craftsman, is vulnerable and will deteriorate if not covered by another man-made structure. Only those blinded by their sin and by Satan will not recognize the futility of worshipping a fragile idol that cannot hear, see, reason or speak and can be of no benefit. See also Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 231-232 for a comparison between Isaiah 44:13 and 40:12 and 22.

44:14 He cuts down cedars,
    or chooses a cypress and an oak.
He let it grow strong among the trees of the forest.
He plants a cedar,
    and the rain nourishes it.

Prior to fashioning an idol, the carpenter (craftsman), 44:13, had taken the time to plant a cedar, or a cypress or an oak, and lets the rain nourish it. When it is grown sufficiently, the carpenter cuts these trees down for multiple uses that Isaiah describes in 44:15-17. The care and time taken to prepare a tree should not be quickly glossed over by the student of Scripture. Why would a seemingly otherwise sensible but pagan human being take such care for these trees. However, the carpenter places more value and treasure in created things such as trees and nature than in the care and development of a life of devotion and faith in the Creator
of these trees. Having considered the worship of something his hands has formed to be of great worth, he
consciously rejects that which is of far greater worth, far beyond any comparison. The easily seen and made
idol requires no faith but only requires blind devotion to a worthless object. Isaiah had earlier, in 40:18-20,
commented on the selection of a tree for use as an idol.

18 To whom then will you compare God?
   What image will you equate him to?
19 An idol? A workman casts it in a mold,
   and the goldsmith overlays it with gold,
   and fashions silver chains for it.
20 Or if someone is too poor for such a sacrifice
   they may choose wood that will not rot and
   then find a skilful craftsman to set up a carved idol
   that will not topple.

44:15-17 Then he uses it to make a fire;
   he takes some of it and warms himself;
   yes, he kindles a fire with it and bakes bread.
Then he makes a god and worships it;
   he makes it into a carved idol
   and falls down in worship before it.
16 Half of it he burns in the fire;
   with this half he cooks meat;
   he roasts it and is satisfied.
   He also warms himself, and says,
   'Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire.'
17 With the rest he makes a god,
   even his carved idol;
   he falls down in worship before it,
   and prays to it, and says,
   'Rescue me, for you are my god.'

The carpenter, having taken care to plant trees and then ensuring that these trees will be well nourished by
the rain that God alone provides, then harvests the trees for many uses. In 44:15, Isaiah describes four things
that the carpenter does with the tree he has chopped down. First, he uses the wood of the tree to make a fire
for warmth. Second, he uses the fuel from the burning tree to bake bread, so he can eat to nourish himself.
Third, the carpenter fashions an idol, a false god from the part of the tree that has not been used for warmth
and for baking bread and for cooking meat. Fourth, the carpenter falls or bows down before this carved piece
of wood and worships before it. It seems incredulous that any sane person would not know that wood that
has been used for fire for warmth and for baking and cooking could not also be a god that is worthy of
worship and a god that one would expect to answer prayers and provide rescue, safety and security.

Isaiah seems so intent in making this rather obvious point that he repeats the details of the story of the pagan
carpenter in 44:16-17. It seems that Isaiah is repeating the story because it is so incredible, yet it depicts what
actually happens. Isaiah may have repeated this story so that his audience could not possibly miss the point of
the hopelessness of trusting in man-made idols that are made from wood that has a greater value in being
burned than in being worshipped. Yet, as Isaiah has described in several passages in his book, the people who
have been chosen and cared for by God, willingly reject Him and bow before worthless idols to seek rescue and salvation. To those who may miss the point for today, idols have not disappeared but have merely changed in their shape and content. Humans, as the Apostle Paul has so strikingly written in Romans 1:18-32, are still desirous to worship created things. Modern society is no different from Isaiah’s or Paul’s day. Idols may have changed from carved or crafted objects to other types of manufactured items or to humans that are put on pedestals or to intangible objects such as wealth, fame or any other desired thing that is placed higher in human hearts for affection than the worship of the true God. Isaiah may have been amazed at the level of idol worship in his day. What would he say if he could comment on the idolatry of this modern age? Thomas Constable cites a quotation from Calvin that is just as valid today as when Calvin wrote:

“…man’s nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols.” 517

[Note 517: Calvin, Institutes…,1.11.8] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 213)

44:18-19 They do not know or understand, for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see; their hearts closed, so that they cannot understand.

19 No one calls to mind, nor is there knowledge or understanding to say, ‘I have burned half of it in the fire; with its coals I have baked bread and roasted meat and ate it.

Should I make an abomination with the rest of it? Should I fall down and worship a block of wood?

Those who fashion, and worship idols have no knowledge or understanding for their eyes are shut and their hearts are closed with the result that they cannot see with their eyes or comprehend with their hearts. The words in the DASV: “for their eyes are shut” are translated in the NKJV and the ESV as: “for He has shut their eyes,” which is similar to the KJV. The NIV has “their eyes are plastered over,” while the NASB has “for He has smeared over their eyes.” The differences in the translations reflect some of the difficulties in translating the Hebrew. The following translation may be closer to the intent of the Hebrew: “for their eyes are glued together.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 357). As it is not clear to the exact meaning of this phrase, it is best to understand that Isaiah is simply stating that these pagan idol worshippers have their eyes shut either by their own sinfulness or as a judgment of God upon them for their sinful behavior. They certainly would be those, described in 6:9-10 to whom Isaiah was to proclaim the message of God. God’s judgment will fall upon them as it would for a future generation as described in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11. See also 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 for the influence of Satan on those who are perishing in their sins.

Those who craft, and worship idols do not know or understand and cannot comprehend that their actions are just blind ignorance, for they fail to perceive that they worship a worthless image made of wood as Isaiah 44:19 very clearly explains. In 44:18, the word “know” is yada in the Hebrew. It is a very common word in the Old Testament and used quite often by Isaiah in the general sense of knowing and is a companion word to understand or understanding. The word “understand,” in the first line of 44:18 is the Hebrew word bin which can be also translated as “consider,” “realize,” or “perceive” which also occurs often in Isaiah’s writings. The word “understand,” which is the final word of 44:18 in the DASV, is sakal in the Hebrew. It can also be
translated as “comprehend” or “discern.” In 44:19, the word “knowledge” in the second line, is da’at in the Hebrew and is derived from the common word for “know” which is yada in the Hebrew. The word da’at is also translated as knowledge in Isaiah 5:13: “Therefore, my people will go into exile for lack of knowledge.” Isaiah also used the word da’at in 44:25 which speaks of an action of God which makes the knowledge of the wise foolish. Also, in 44:19, the word “understanding” in the second line, is tebunah in the Hebrew, and is most often translated as “understanding” in the Old Testament. Isaiah used tebunah in a positive sense in 40:14 and 28, and in a negative sense in 44:19. Moses, as recorded in Deuteronomy 32:28, stated, “For they are a nation without sense, and there is no understanding in them.”

44:20 He feeds on ashes;
   a deceived mind has led him astray.
He cannot save himself,
   or say, 'Is not this idol I hold in my right hand a lie?'

Isaiah concludes his discussion in this passage on the folly of crafting and worshipping idols in 44:20. Those who fashion an idol are like those who foolishly would use ashes from a fire for food. They would be considered less than stable in mind to eat ashes for it contains no nourishment or any value for food. They have a “deceived” mind which has led them astray. They also cannot save themselves or even comprehend that the idol they hold in their hand is nothing but a lie which cannot see, hear, reason, speak or do anything at all. The word “deceived” in 44:20 is talal in the Hebrew. It occurs a few times in the Old Testament, Job 13:9; Judges 16:10, 13, 15; Isaiah 44:20 and Jeremiah 9:5. The word “astray” is natah in the Hebrew and occurs frequently in the Old Testament often translated as aside or astray. It occurs often with the word “turn” which is also translated from natah. Isaiah uses these words in 30:11 in which he records the derisive words of the people of Judah to those who are God’s spokesmen: “Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel.”

Jeremiah 10:6-16 is an excellent summary of the comparison between false idols and the One true God:

6 There is no one like you, O LORD;
   you are great,
   and your name is great in power.
7 Who should not fear you, O King of the nations?
   This is what you deserve.
   For among all the wise men of the nations,
   and in all their kingdoms,
   there is no one like you.
8 But they are both stupid and foolish;
   the instruction of wooden idols is worthless.
9 They bring finely hammered silver for plating from Tarshish,
   and gold from Upaz,
   the work of an artisan and the hands of a goldsmith;
   blue and purple for their clothing,
   they are all the work of a skilled craftsmen.
10 But the LORD is the true God;
   he is the living God and everlasting King.
   The earth trembles at his wrath,
   and the nations cannot withstand his fury.
11 This is what you should say to them,
"The gods who have not made the heavens and the earth,
these will perish from the earth,
and from under the heavens.
12 The LORD made the earth by his power;
he has established the world by his wisdom,
and by his understanding he has stretched out the heavens.
13 When his voice thunders,
the rain roars from the heavens.
He causes the clouds to ascend
from the ends of the earth;
he makes lightning in the rain,
and brings the wind out of his storehouses.
14 Everyone is ignorant and without knowledge.
Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols,
for his image is bogus;
there is no breath in them.
15 They are worthless,
a work of delusion;
in the time of their punishment, they will perish.
16 He who is the portion of Jacob is not like these,
for he is the creator of all things.
Israel is the tribe of his inheritance:
the LORD of hosts is his name.

(Isaiah 10:6-16)

Isaiah 44: 21-22: Summary of “Remember These Things”

Isaiah 44:21-22 is often understood as the conclusion of a large section 42:10-44:22. These two verses summarize the message from the Lord, (“remember these things,” vs. 21), that He alone is the only God and He has formed His people which is opposed to the pagan idea that mankind fashions a god. The people of God are also to remember that they are His servant and that He will not forget them. God reminds them, vs. 22, that their sins have been blotted out or swept away. God’s final statement for this section is a plea for His people to return to their Redeemer.

44:21-22 Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel,
for you are my servant.
I have formed you;
you are my servant, O Israel,
I will not forget you.
22 I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud,
and your sins like a mist;
return to me, for I have redeemed you.

“Remember these things,” (44:21)
God calls upon His people to remember that He is the One who has chosen them to be His servant. He is their covenant-keeping, Sovereign who has created and formed them. He is the Holy One of Israel who demands that His people have no other gods before Him. He is their Rock they can trust for safety and refuge. He
loves them and will not forsake them, and He has redeemed them by causing their transgressions to be blotted out, so they can have a right relationship with Him. See also 1 Chronicles 16: 8-36; Isaiah 46:8-9.

“for you are my servant.” (44:21)
God reminds His people of their unique relationship with Him. He has deemed that they are to be His servant. They are very poor servants for God has called them blind and deaf, Isaiah 42:18-19, yet in this condition they have been called to be witnesses, 43:10-12; 44:8 of His glorious works for He has proclaimed the things that have happened in the past for He has ordained them, and He has with accuracy and precision declared what will happen in the future. However, there is another Servant whom God has called. This Servant is not blind nor deaf and He will fulfill what God has requested, which His blind and deaf servants failed to do. God declares in Isaiah 49:6:

“It is too insignificant that you should be my servant

to raise up the tribes of Jacob,

and to restore the survivors of Israel.

I will also make you a light to the nations,

that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

“I have formed you.” (44:21)
God reminds His people that it is He who has formed them. He is the One who is the Potter who formed them, Isaiah 29:16. He Has created and formed His people, 43:1, for purposes of His glory, 43:7; they were formed for Himself to declare His praise, 43:21; who as their Redeemer has formed them from the womb, 44:2, 24. See also Psalm 139:13 and Jeremiah 1:5.

“I will not forget you.” (44:21)
God promises not to forget His people whom He has created and formed to be His servant. He will not abandon His people, 41:17 and in the future, they will no longer be called “forsaken”, 62:4, 12. This promise by God is made to a people who have a history of forgetting the covenant relationship that God has established between Himself and His chosen people. They have rebelled against Him and have crafted worthless idols to worship which replaced their worship of the One true God. Their sins have ruined the relationship with their Holy God who calls upon them to be Holy. Yet in spite of their failure to trust in Him and obey Him, He will remember His covenant with them and never abandon nor forget them.

“I have blotted out your transgression like a cloud and your sins like a mist.” (44: 22)
This declaration by God was also stated in Isaiah 43:25, is one of the most precious promises of God recorded in the Old Testament. The word “blotted out” is the Hebrew word mahah, which has the meaning to wipe away. Thomas Constable discusses this action of God on behalf of His people:

“What Israel needed above all was forgiveness and cleansing from her sins (cf. 43:25). The Lord had taken the initiative to provide this for His people. He would blow their sin away as quickly and as easily as a wind blows a cloud or mist away.

Yet God's people must respond to His initiative by returning to Him. He had provided redemption in the Exodus, but it was only the first of several redemptions that He would provide. He would redeem them from captivity by using His servant Cyrus (v. 28), and He would redeem them from sin by using His Servant Messiah at His first advent. He would also redeem them from captivity in the Tribulation by using His Servant Messiah at His second advent.

The summary reference to redemption in verse 22 (cf. 42:10—44:22) prepares the reader for the next section of Isaiah's prophecy.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 215).
“return to me, for I have redeemed you.” (44: 22)

God completes this summary of the section 42:10-44:22, by His call to return to Him. Although they have forsaken Him, He will never abandon or forget His covenant people. They had repeatedly walked away from Him and had engaged in detestable pagan practices of the Canaanites, including inter-marriage with these pagans, that He had warned them not to commit, Exodus 34:10-17; and Deuteronomy 7:1-6. The people of God would also need future reminders, for following the return to Jerusalem after their long exile in Babylon, they again reverted to this evilness. See Ezra 9:1-4; Nehemiah 13:23-27 and Malachi 2:13-16. It will only be in the millennial reign of the Messiah when all Canaanite influences will be finally removed: Zechariah 14:21.

God calls upon His people to return to Him which is a clear call for repentance, for God states that He has redeemed them. They belong to Him in a divinely established covenant relationship. They also have been redeemed, for In His blotting out or wiping away of their sins, God has accepted their faith in Him as being counted as righteousness. See Genesis 15:6; and Habakkuk 2:4. These who have been redeemed still needed to repent and return to God. Even Christians who have been redeemed by having faith in the shed blood of Christ on the cross still need to return to Him in repentance, 1 John 1:8-9.


Some scholars understand 44:23 either as the ending of a section beginning in 43:8 or the beginning of a section ending in 45:25. Whatever way it is understood in relation to a larger unified section of Isaiah, it is a wonderful hymn of praise to God for what God has done for His people resulting in His glory being revealed.

This study will position 44:23 as the beginning of a section, 44:23 to 45:25 which is a description of two periods of restoration for the people of God. David L. Cooper chose to begin this section with 44:24. He writes:

“This block of scripture constitutes a single literary unit in the Book of Isaiah. The prophet introduced his message by addressing Jehovah, who is the God of creation, of providence, and of performance (44:24-28). The forecast covers Israel's restoration from Babylonian Captivity under Cyrus (45:1-13); her final restoration to the land from her world-wide dispersion (45:14-19); and finally, the call for all nations to come and accept the salvation of God, which prediction will be fulfilled in the great evangelistic campaign that will be conducted by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists of whom we read in Revelation, chapter 7.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-July 1945).

This unit of Scripture, 44:23-45:25, contains many authoritative declarations by God, “This is what the Lord says” or in some versions “Thus says the Lord.” These declarations occur in 44: 24; 45:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, 19 and 21. These repetitive statements are recorded by Isaiah to demonstrate the Lord’s grand purpose for His people whom He created for His glory. These declarations also highlight other repetitive statement of who God is and what He has done and will do for His people. He is the One who has and will redeem His people, 44:23, 24 including salvation, 45:8, 15, 17, 21 and 22. He declares to His people that He is the only God and there is no other, 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, and 22. He is the creator who formed the heavens and the earth and the people upon it, 44:24; 45:8, 9, 11, 12, and 18. He frustrates false prophecy and makes foolish the advice of the wise, 44:25; and puts idol makers to shame 45:16. He fulfills the prophetic word of His prophets (messengers), 44:26; and 45:21. He declares that Jerusalem and the towns of Judah will again be inhabited 44:26, 28; and 45:13 and the temple will be rebuilt, 44:28. He is the maker of light and darkness and peace and calamity, 45:7. He declares that every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will swear loyalty to Him 45:24; and all descendants of Israel will be vindicated Him and will boast in Him 45:25.
44:23 Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; 
shout, you lower parts of the earth.  
Break forth into singing, O mountains, 
O forest, and every tree in it.  
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, 
and will reveal his glory in Israel.

Because the Lord will restore His people to the land in the days of King Cyrus whom He will reveal by name in 44:28 and will again restore them following the terrifying days of the Tribulation, God calls upon His creation to sing and shout of His accomplishments. God states that He “has done it,” which is a “prophetic perfect tense verb that speaks of things in the future as though they had already happened in the past.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 216). The calling of God for His creation to praise Him occurs often in the Psalms and in Isaiah. See Psalm 69:34; 96:11-12; 98:7-8; 148:7-13; Isaiah 42:10, 49:13; and 55:12. One reason that creation is rejoicing in what God has done is recorded by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:19-22, “For the creation eagerly awaits the revealing of the children of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but by the will of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans with labor pains until now.” The other reason for the rejoicing of creation is revealed in the second half of Isaiah 44:23, “For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and will his glory in Israel.” The redemption of God’s people, Jacob is stated as a completed action and He is announcing it to the people of Isaacah’s day so that the faithful will have comfort and confidence in Him. In another generation, their descendants will face the destruction of Jerusalem including the temple and those who trust Him will look on these very words for comfort as they lean on Him for help.

It is obvious from Scripture that the reason the Lord will accomplish His great works in the earth and on behalf of His people is so that He will be glorified. The word “glory” in Isaiah 44:23 is the Hebrew pa’ar which occurs more often in Isaiah than in the rest of the Old Testament. See Isaiah 10:15; 44:23; 49:3; 55:5; 60:7, 9, 13, 21; and 61:3. The word for glory that is the most common in Isaiah and in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word kabod. One of the most beautiful expressions of “glory” occurs in Isaiah 46:13, which translates the Hebrew word tiph’eret, which has the meaning of royal splendor:

I will put salvation in Zion, 
for Israel my glory.

The final five verses in Isaiah chapter 44 are marked by ten occurrences of the word “who” which introduce the acts of the Lord which He has accomplished or will accomplish to “reveal his glory in Israel,” 44:23. The final “who” 44:28, introduces God’s act of calling by name, Cyrus, a person who will be His shepherd who will carry out God’s plans. See notes on 44:28.

44:24-28 This is what the LORD says, your Redeemer, 
he who formed you from the womb:
"I am the LORD, who makes all things, 
who stretches forth the heavens alone, 
who by myself spread out the earth, 
who frustrates the omens of the liars, 
and makes fools of fortune-tellers,
who reverses the advice of the wise,
and makes their knowledge foolish;

who fulfills the prophetic word of his servant,
and performs the prediction of his messengers,

who says of Jerusalem,
'She will be inhabited,'
and of the towns of Judah,
'They will be rebuilt,
and I will raise up her ruins,'

who says to the deep,
'Be dry, and I will dry up your rivers,'

who says of Cyrus,
'He is my shepherd, and will carry out all my plans,'
even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be rebuilt,'
and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'

These five verses begin with the divine authoritative declaration, “This is what the LORD says,” or as other English versions state, “Thus says the Lord.” These declarations also occur in 45:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, 19 and 21 of the section 44:23-45:25. The Lord has something important to declare as recorded in Isaiah 44:24-28, and He wants His audience to pay attention to Him. Before stating several actions that He has accomplished or will accomplish that begin with the identifying “who,” the Lord reminds his audience that He is their Redeemer. In chapter 44, Isaiah states that the Lord is the Redeemer 44:6, and 24 who has redeemed His people, 44:22-23.

The Hebrew word for “Redeemer” is ga’al, which has the meaning of a “kinsmen or family redeemer” and is so prominent in the book of Ruth. The Lord is stating that the people of Judah are His chosen family and He has decided to redeem them spiritually. This is the work of God in salvation in which He ransomed those who have faith in Him, from the punishment of His wrath. He also saves them physically. This is the work of God in providing safety. The faithful remnant will live in a future righteous and peaceful kingdom. The Hebrew word ga’al is translated as Redeemer in Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. This word ga’al is also translated as redeemed in Isaiah 35:9; 43:1; 44:22, 23; 48:20; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 62:12; 63:9 and 14. See notes on these verses.

In 44:24-28, Isaiah states several actions depicting the redeeming work of the LORD who is the Redeemer of the covenant people of God. Each of these actions begin with the word “who.” They stand high in Scripture as an exalted description of the work of the LORD on behalf of those whom He has redeemed.

“who formed you from the womb” (44:24)

In 44:2, Isaiah had recorded this magnificent truth that God is their Creator who fashions or forms humans from the womb. They are not just thought of or considered once they are born, but have great significance and worth from the time of conception. Since life begins at conception and not at birth, God states the involvement He has with life in the womb where He forms, fashions and shapes humans for their role in the world that He has ordained. Therefore, those who are faithful to God and His word should never condone abortion as an option by a parent who by doing so, decides to act like God determining who should be born into this world and who should not be born.
“who makes all things” (44:24)
In Isaiah’s day, as is true today, there were and are competing religious and scientific beliefs about how the universe was formed and questions about if the universe even had a beginning. The Lord reminds Isaiah’s audience, the people of Judah by the proclamation of Isaiah and God reminds future generations, by the printed Scriptures that contain this verse, that He alone made “all things.” God was not a part of some mythical council that decided who would “create” various parts of the created order. He boldly states He was the One who made all things. The Apostle Paul stated this in a concluding benediction to the first eleven chapters of the letter to the Romans, “For from him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” Romans 11:36.

“who stretches forth the heavens alone” (44:24)
God further explains His creative works as it pertains to the cosmos, the heavens. The word “stretches” is the very common Hebrew word natah, which is translated by several different words in the English versions of the Old Testament. Isaiah uses natah to describe God creating the heavens by stretching them out as He states in 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12 and 51:13. See also Job 9:8; Psalm 104:2; Jeremiah 51:15 and Zechariah 12:1. The action of stretching out the heavens speaks of God’s infiniteness for the heavens are, as understood from human reasoning, to be limitless. God states He stretches the heavens out by Himself. This is an action He has done without any assistance or guidance by anyone or anything. Refer to the notes for the verses in Isaiah where natah has been used to describe God’s action in creating the cosmos.

“who by myself spread out the earth” (44:24)
This phrase, while similar to the preceding phrase, has some subtle differences. The works “spread forth” is the Hebrew word raqa and has the meaning of to “beat out,” “to spread out,” or “to stamp.” Isaiah used very similar words in 42:5 to describe the creative act of stretching out the heavens and spreading out the earth. Isaiah in 40:19, used raqa in the phrase, “and the goldsmith overlays it with gold.” The words “spread out” thus, can be understood as the creative act of God where He has beaten or fashioned the earth or stamped it with His “signature.” See also Job 37:18 and Psalm 136:6. Again, God states that His creative act of forming the earth was accomplished by Himself. God had no connection with any other so-called gods nor needed their help nor sought the assistance or guidance from anyone or anything for the simple reasons that first, anyone or anything did not exist before God created the heavens and the earth and second, anything or anyone is completely useless to God and could not offer Him anything of help in any way.

“who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of fortune-tellers” (44:25)
The NKJV of this phrase is, “Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad.” God alone knows the end from the beginning. He knows perfectly what has happened in the past, what is happening in the present and what will happen in the future. Those who speak in terms of omens or signs which they claim predict the future, or explain a current or past event, are called babblers and liars. Those who claim to know the future and speak about it are called fools and are driven to insanity for they have no power to predict anything with accuracy.

“who reverses the advice of the wise, and makes their knowledge foolish.” (44:25)
Those who are considered “wise” in the ways of worldly wisdom will see that their counsel is turned backward and their understanding and knowledge will be proven to be only foolishness. How utterly foolish has the modern world, like the ancient world, clung to the words of those who are considered wise and by doing so have spurned the counsel and guidance of the One who truly knows the future and can offer absolutely true and divine wisdom. In 47:10, Isaiah speaks of the so-called wisdom of the Chaldeans and tells them that their wisdom and knowledge have misled them. Ancient kings had so-called wise counsellors to
offer advice, Exodus 7:11 and Daniel 2:27; and modern world leaders assemble a cabinet of learned and experienced people to assist them with decision making. Only God can provide true wisdom and guidance. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 44:25:

“God embarrasses astrologers, diviners, and fortunetellers by controlling history in ways that deviate from past patterns. Ancient and modern prognosticators usually base their predictions on the belief that things will work out in the future as they have in the past. But Yahweh can move future events in entirely new directions. Archaeologists have discovered many predictions of the future of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires among Babylonian writings, but they are consistently optimistic; none are messages announcing the fall of these kingdoms. 524 He can do things never before done.” [Note 524: See C. Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, pp. 156-57. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 216).

“who fulfills the prophetic word of his servant, and performs the prediction of his messengers.” (44:26)

In contrast to those who seek the advice of finite humans or useless idols, God accurately and with precision, fulfills the prophetic words of those who are His servant and His messengers. Many different suggestions have been given for the identification of His “servant” and His “messengers.” Instead of speculating on suggestions it is best to let Scripture explain itself. In many passages of the Scriptures, God refers to those He has called to be His prophets as “my servants the prophets.” See 2 Kings 9:7; 17:13; Jeremiah 7:25; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezekiel 38:17; Zechariah 1:6 and Revelation 10:7. See also Hebrews 1:1. In this regard Isaiah would certainly be considered as one of his servants, yet as the word “servant” is singular, its ultimate meaning can be understood as referring to the Messiah, Jesus Christ who is God’s Son who is so majestically described in Hebrews 1:2-3.

“who says of Jerusalem, ‘She will be inhabited,’ and of the towns of Judah, “They will be rebuilt, and I will raise up her ruins.” (44:26)

God, who had been mainly addressing those who rely on human wisdom and useless idols, by speaking of His creative works and the truth of the prophetic words from His prophets, now turns His attention to a specific future event and prepares His audience for a most unique announcement. It is most likely that Isaiah was delivering this prophetic message to those in Jerusalem who were inhabiting the city and those from the towns of Judah who had survived the Assyrian assault. To those within the secure walls of Jerusalem, this prophecy would have been difficult to understand. It would have more certainty to those in the towns of Judah who survived the advance of the Assyrians for it would seem as a near future promise that God would cause their towns and their ruins to be rebuilt. However, God was not declaring a near-future prophecy.

Those in Jerusalem who heard this message, may have been puzzled by the words “she will be inhabited;” and Isaiah’s words as recorded in 44:28, “even saying of Jerusalem, she will be rebuilt.” They were living securely in the walled city and had recently witnessed the miraculous act of God who destroyed the Assyrian army that was threatening the city. It is far easier for a modern audience to understand the meaning of this message and its implications. But for Isaiah’s audience, it would not have made much sense, unless some were perceptive enough to think that Isaiah was declaring a message from God about a future time when Jerusalem would not have been inhabited and would be in ruins. For those who were perceptive enough to understand the message, it would be unthinkable that God’s beloved City would or could be destroyed. Yet that was exactly the message the prophet was declaring to them.

This prophecy, combined with the naming of a future chosen figure in Isaiah 44:28, has led many liberal commentators to state that this message was not delivered by Isaiah in his lifetime but by some other prophet who lived after the days of the exile of the Jewish people in Babylon. Those who say such things have no regard for God who created the universe without any assistance or guidance and had repeatedly stated His ability to perform His creative works. For, If God can create the universe, it would be a small thing for Him
to predict with accuracy and precision the events of the future. This is the same issue that these commentators had to face with the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 7:14. The issue is, does God perform supernatural works? Did He actually create the universe? Can He infallibly predict the future? The answer anyone gives to these questions determines their belief or non-belief, not only in the first verse of the Scriptures, but in all of the verses of the Scriptures. This study of Isaiah confirms that God can do all that He claims. He has done so in the past, is continuing to do so in the present and will perform all He promises and claims without fail in the future. In short, God is a someone we can absolutely depend upon. This issue was the same that the audience of Isaiah had to face, and God had told Isaiah of the outcome of His messages to his people, as Isaiah 6:9-13 so graphically illustrates.

“who says to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up your rivers.” (44:27)
At first glance, it may be difficult to understand how 44:27 fits into the context of Isaiah 44:24-28. Yet, upon some reflection, its purpose will be made plain. God had just declared a stunning announcement of a future rebuilding of Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. He then reminded His people, that in the past He had performed the supernatural acts of drying up the deep (sea) which would have reminded His people of the escape of the ancient Israelites from the Egyptians by waking on dry ground through the backed-up waters of the Red Sea led by God’s servant Moses. Also, the reference of the rivers being dried up would have reminded them of the way the ancient Israelites marched into the promised land when the waters of the Jordan river were parted so they could walk on dry land. If God could perform these miraculous acts in the past, He could be relied upon to perform the works of restoration to Jerusalem and to the towns of Judah in the future.

“who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and will carry out my plans,’ even saying of Jerusalem, ‘She will be rebuilt;’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’” (44:28)
God completes this stunning announcement by declaring by name, Cyrus, the one who will be His shepherd and who will carry out God’s plans for Jerusalem and its temple. As perplexing as the naming of a certain individual was to Isaiah’s audience, it would have been inconceivable to them to understand that not only would Jerusalem need to be rebuilt, but their precious temple would also need to have its foundation laid, implying that it too would be destroyed in the future. There is much confusion among scholars both of an older generation and those of today who have difficulty with believing that God could so accurately predict the future. For an extended discussion on the decree of Cyrus for both the temple and the city of Jerusalem to be rebuilt see David L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, chapters 44:24-45:25, Biblical Research Monthly, July 1945. See also, Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 249-252. Victor Buksbazen comments on 44:28:

“Here is an unusual instance of a yet unborn king, mentioned by name about 150 years before the event…..The name Cyrus in Hebrew, “Koresh,” appears on ancient Persian monuments as Kuru, which is also the name of a river in southern Persia. It is generally assumed that the name Cyrus was derived from the name of that river.

According to Josephus, 2 when this passage of Isaiah, which mentioned Cyrus, as the liberator of the Jews, was brought to the attention of the king, he promptly decreed the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and gave them permission to rebuild the temple.” [Note 2: Josephus, Antiquities, XI, 2.] (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 360).

Thomas Constable also comments:

“God announced that Cyrus would be the person who would allow Jerusalem to be rebuilt and the temple foundations relaid. The mention of his name climaxes this prophecy (vv. 24-28). Cyrus would be the Lord’s shepherd, the one who would lead the Israelites back into their land by permitting its restoration. He would carry out all God’s desire (cf. 41:2-3, 25).
The title "My Shepherd" was one that God used of the Davidic kings (cf. 2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezek. 34:23). The fact that He used it here of a pagan monarch shows that God would use pagans to fulfill His wishes—since the Davidic kings had proved unreliable (cf. 7:13; 39:7). This was indeed a new thing that God had not done before (cf. 43:19).

Cyrus (559-530 B.C.) issued his decree to allow the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild Jerusalem in 538 B.C. 527 This happened about 190 years after Isaiah announced this prophecy. Josephus recorded that Cyrus read Isaiah's prophecy predicting that he himself—Cyrus—would send the Israelites back to Palestine to rebuild the temple, and that he desired to fulfill this very prediction. 528 Josephus also dated Isaiah's prophecy 140 years before the destruction of the temple, namely, about 726 B.C. The Persian monarch had not even been born at this time. When Isaiah made this prophecy his hearers probably said to one another: "Who did he say would do this? Who is Cyrus?"

This prophecy is the primary reason that critics on the unity of Isaiah have insisted that Isaiah of Jerusalem could not possibly have written this prediction. It must have been written, they say, sometime after Cyrus issued his decree. However, the point that Yahweh was making throughout this book was that He alone could predict and create the future. For a similar prophecy involving Josiah, who had not yet been born, see 1 Kings 13:2.” [Note 527: See Finegan, pp. 230-33. Note 528: Josephus, Antiquities of…, 11:1:2. Note 529: See Allis, pp. 51-61, for refutation of this common viewpoint.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 217-218).

David L. Cooper adds:

“Did Cyrus in fulfillment of this promise, issue a proclamation authorizing the rebuilding of both the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Some sincere brethren say that he issued a decree only for the re-building of the Temple. As proof of this position they refer to Ezra 1:1-4, which gives the proclamation that was decreed by Cyrus for the rebuilding of the Temple. But nothing is said in this passage about the restoration of Jerusalem. Because of this fact, many sincere brethren say that the decree of Cyrus included only the Temple—and not the city. They take this position because they cannot harmonize the Ussher chronology, which is accepted today universally, with the position that Cyrus issued the decree for both the building of the Temple and the city. The year in the accepted chronology for the issuing of the decree by Cyrus is 536 B.C. In Daniel 9:25 we are told that the beginning of the seventy weeks of years of this prophecy dates from the year of the issuing of the decree for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. According to Daniel, there would be 483 years from the issuance of the decree to rebuild the city to the cutting off of King Messiah. Cyrus issued the decree for the rebuilding of the Temple, according to the received chronology, in the year 536 B.C. Christ was crucified in the year 30 A.D. Then from the issuing of the decree to the crucifixion there were 565 years (one year is deducted in passing over from the B.C. dates to the A.D. dates.) But Daniel said that there would be 483 years from the issuing of the decree to rebuild the city to the crucifixion of the Messiah. There is an excess of 82 years in the received chronology. It is therefore concluded by these earnest, sincere scholars, that Cyrus did not do what God through Isaiah foretold that he would do, namely, to issue the decree for the rebuilding of the city.

When all the facts of the Book of Ezra are studied, one is driven to the conclusion that Cyrus did issue the decree for the building of both the Temple and the city. (For full proof of this position, see either of my volumes, The 70 Weeks of Daniel, or, Messiah: His first Coming Scheduled.)

When one makes an investigation of the chronology of the Old Testament and compares it with the received chronology, which we have accepted from Ptolemy, a heathen astronomer, one will see that Ptolemy guessed at the facts and gave us the wrong chronology. It is impossible to fit the scriptural facts into the false chronology which we inherited from a heathen chronologer. The B.C. dates are incorrect. Since God said that Cyrus would issue both decrees, we are confident that he did.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly, July 1945).
Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 44:
44:1-5: God’s Chosen Servant – Israel
44:6-23: God Condemns Sinful Idolatry
  6-8: Incomparableness of God
  9-20: Idols are useless
  21-22: Invitation to Return to God
  23: Invitation to Praise God
44:24-28: God’s Chosen Shepherd - Cyrus
  24: God’s Creative Acts
  25: God Causes Words of False Prophets to Fail
  26: God Causes Words of True Prophets to Flourish
  27: God’s Consideration of Past Miracles
  28: God’s Choice of a Future Shepherd

Isaiah 45:1-8
For an introduction and summary of the contents of Isaiah 45, see above comments on section 44:23 – 45:25.
In the first eight verses, Isaiah continues his introduction to the stunning announcement that God has chosen a pagan future king, whom He has named Cyrus to be His shepherd. It would not be the only time God would call a Gentile leader, His servant. In Jeremiah 25:9, 27:6 and 43:10, God calls Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon His servant because He will be used of God to accomplish His divine purposes for His chosen people. God has and will call upon any person or nation to accomplish His will and, in that regard, both Assyria and Babylon were “servants” of God because He selected them for a specific purpose to bring judgment upon His people who had constantly rebelled against Him. In vs. 1, God calls this selected future person, His anointed indicating that He has divinely appointed Cyrus to carry out His purposes. In verses 2-5, God speaks directly to Cyrus and reveals God’s plan for him, even though Cyrus will not know God (by acknowledging or worshiping God). In verses 6-7, God reveals why He has chosen Cyrus, by stating that His purpose is so that everyone in the world would know God (even though Cyrus will not know God). In vs. 8, God summarizes His calling of Cyrus by calling upon the heavens and the skies to “pour down righteousness” so that “salvation and righteousness may sprout up.”

45:1 This is what the LORD says to his anointed,
to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held,
to subdue nations before him,
and to strip kings of their war belts;
to open the doors before him,
and the gates will not be shut.

As is recorded 35 times in the prophecy of Isaiah, God introduces His declarations with the authoritative “This is what the LORD says.” In Isaiah 45:1, God introduces His revealed plan for a future pagan king. The time frame will be 190 years in the future. Cyrus ruled his kingdom from 559-530 B.C. The Lord calls Cyrus (Hebrew “Koresh”), His anointed. The word “anointed” is the Hebrew word mashiah (mashiah is the noun and mashah is the verb form) which has a rich meaning in the Old Testament. It applies to a person who has been specifically selected by God to accomplish His purpose. A related word, mishhah, refers to the use of oil for anointing. Those who were selected to be anointed were usually limited to prophets, priests and kings of Israel and Judah. An exception is recorded in 1 Kings 19:15-16, where Elijah was told by God to anoint Hazael king over Aram. Elijah was also to anoint Jehu king over Israel and Elisha was to be anointed to be a prophet replacing Elijah as God’s appointed prophet. Anointing was performed by the rubbing of grease or the pouring of oil upon an object or person. Olive oil was the most common oil used for these purposes. The
anointing of Cyrus was non-typical in that this Gentile king would not have been ceremonially anointed by an official representative of God. It was God Himself who enacted this anointing by His sovereign decree.

The word “anointed” (mashiah) has a messianic meaning when it is applied to a future King who is understood as Israel’s Messiah. The direct English translation of mashiah is messiah. Although, the word messiah is not mentioned in 2 Samuel 7:13, the promise to David, points to this promised king whom God will forever establish the throne of His kingdom. The one who is God’s anointed (mashiah) is stated in Psalm 2:2 which many understand as a direct reference to the Son of God as the Messiah. For an extended treatment of the Messiah in the Old Testament, see Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* NAC Studies in Bible & Theology. B & H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2010.

The Lord states of Cyrus, “whose right hand I have held.” The Lord had previously declared, as recorded in Isaiah 41:10, that He would uphold His people with His “righteous right hand.” Also, like Cyrus, God’s people would have their right hand held by God, Isaiah 41:13. God also promised to take His people’s hand to protect them, Isaiah 42:6. See also Isaiah 62:8 and 63:12. As the right hand is often seen as the hand of strength, God promises to uphold the strength of those whom he chooses to accomplish His purposes. What is different in the prophecy concerning Cyrus is that this Gentile king will not know God, 45:4-5.

The reason that God will hold the hand of Cyrus is so that this king will subdue kings, strip kings of their war belts and have doors and gates open before him that will not be shut. In a future reference, relating to the kingdom of Heaven, it is the Messiah who holds the keys to doors that He alone can open that no one can shut, and He alone can shut that no one can open, Revelation 3:7-8. The success of the armies of Cyrus is well attested by the writings of historians, of which the most popularly known record is *The Histories* by Herodotus. As impressive as the acts of Cyrus were, it must be remembered that it is God who was the divine One who actually performed these acts on behalf of Cyrus. The word “I” referring to God is so prominent in Isaiah 45:2-7 indicating that the audience who is listening to God’s declaration in 45:1 and His dialogue with Cyrus in 45:2-7, should clearly understand that the LORD is the One who molds and controls history.

45:2 *I will go before you, and level the rough places.*
   *I will break the doors of bronze in pieces, and cut through the bars of iron.*

In Isaiah 45:2-7 God holds a one-way dialogue with Cyrus, speaking directly to him, while Isaiah’s audience and those who read the prophecy of Isaiah witness the dialogue. As Victor Buksbazen has stated, see above under notes for 44:28, Cyrus when this passage was brought to his attention, promptly decreed that the Jews should return to Jerusalem with his permission to rebuild the temple. (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 360). The first sentence of 45:2 is a reminder of the status of Cyrus as a “messianic figure.” God promises to go before Cyrus to “level the rough places.” The work of smoothing out or levelling rough places was an action that was given to the people of God and specifically to God’s prophet to prepare for the coming of the Messiah as stated by Isaiah in 40:3-4. See also Malachi 3:1. See also Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4 and John 1:23. In this first sentence of 45:2, God is positioning Cyrus as a pre-figure of Christ although taking the “type” too far and identifying Cyrus with the promised Messiah must be cautioned against. God’s promise that He will “break the doors of bronze in pieces and cut through the bars of iron,” likely refer to the doors and barred gates of Babylon when the army of Cyrus entered the city in 539 B.C.
I will give you the treasures of darkness,
and riches hidden in secret places,
that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
who call you by your name,
even the God of Israel.

The repetition of the word “I” in Isaiah 45:1-7 is a reminder that God is the primary actor in carrying out His plans for the end of the exile. God has selected a Gentile king to do His bidding and no one should exalt this pagan king to any higher place than God permits. It is not that Cyrus was such a brilliant king and noble commander, but that He was being led by God and carried out his responsibilities as God had directed. One of the benefits God gave this king was the discovery of treasures and riches which had been hidden in vaults and secret strongholds. These may have been in the dark recesses of Babylon and in other cities that the army of Cyrus had conquered. These riches may also have been a “payment” made to Cyrus from God for releasing the Jewish exiles and permitting them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city, although there is no Scriptural proof for this gesture. See notes on Isaiah 43:3 and compare with Jeremiah 31:11. What is likely, is that God had allowed the discovery of these riches so that Cyrus would know that it was the Lord, the God of Israel who had done this and had called Cyrus by name many years before this king was born.

For Jacob my servant’s sake,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name.
I am giving you a special title,
though you do not know me.

God has called Cyrus by name many years before his birth for the sake of Jacob His servant and Israel His chosen. This dual reference to His people was a reminder that they had come from their father Jacob and were called by Jacob’s new name “Israel.” They were given the title and responsibility of servants even though earlier they were referred to as deaf and blind servants Isaiah, 42:19 and would not respond to Isaiah’s messages, Isaiah 6:9-13. They were referred to as God’s chosen people in Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2; 1 Chronicles 16:13; Psalm 105:6; 135:4; Isaiah 41:8-9; 43:10; 44:1-2; 49:7; 65:9, 15, 22; Ezekiel 20:5; and Amos 3:2. Because God always keeps His promises to His chosen people, He had called Cyrus by name with special titles, “shepherd” in Isaiah 44:28 and “anointed” in Isaiah 45:1. Cyrus was chosen to accomplish God’s plans for the release of the Jewish exiles from Babylon so the temple and Jerusalem could be rebuilt as God had promised, Isaiah 44:26-28. God would do these things for the sake of His chosen people and smooth the way for the success of Cyrus, even though Cyrus would not know God. It is the prerogative of a sovereign God, who has created the cosmos and all that is in it, who rules over all that He has created, and who has created all things for Himself, to use a pagan Gentile ruler to accomplish any purpose God has solely intended. This must have been a shock to Isaiah’s audience for them to realize first, that the City of Jerusalem and its temple would one day be destroyed and second, that their covenant keeping God would use a pagan Gentile to be pre-chosen to be instrumental in the release of their future exiled descendants, so the city and temple could be rebuilt. Some have likened this to a “second exodus” with a leader whom God has selected to lead the exodus. This analogy is somewhat contrived, however, because first, only a few thousand, not the entire number of exiles, returned to Jerusalem and second, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the exiles to return. He did not lead “his” people to the land once promised to their forefathers.
45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no one else; besides me there is no God. I will prepare you for battle, though you do not know me;

In Isaiah 45:5, the Lord reminds His people who are listening to this prophetic dialogue between God and Cyrus, that there is no God besides Him. He is the LORD, and there is no one else. The statement that the LORD alone is God and there is no other occurs often in the context of chapters 44–46. See 44:8; 45:5, 6, 14, 21, 22; and 46:9. Earlier Hezekiah, when faced with the pending destruction of Jerusalem by the Assyrians, also acknowledged that there was no other God but the Lord, Isaiah 37:20. God promised to prepare Cyrus for battle by signifying that Cyrus will be successful even though this Persian king will not know and by implication, not acknowledge God. See also notes on 45:4 above.

45:6 so that they may know from the rising of the eastern sun, to its setting in the west, that there is no one besides me, I am the LORD, there is no other.

Even though Cyrus who will be God’s chosen shepherd whom He has called His anointed will not know God, the success he will have in battle, will cause the peoples of the world to know God. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 45:6:

“God chose Cyrus so everyone would come to know that He is the only true God. Note the progression in the reasons for Yahweh's choice of Cyrus: that he might know, that Israel might know, and that the world might know who is the only true God. This is important, not because God has a huge ego, but because it is true and because only as people recognize Yahweh for who He is, that they will stop ruining their own lives with idolatry. God's use of Cyrus preserved the Israelites and thus made the Incarnation possible. That event, in turn, has made salvation available to the whole world.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 220).

45:7 I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create calamity. I am the LORD who does all these things.

In 45:7 Isaiah records one of God’s most misunderstood declarations of His creative powers. To accomplish His perfect will for the world, light and darkness along with peace and calamity all have their divine purposes. Darkness is contrasted with light not only in the physical sense of night and day but in the spiritual sense of the victory of light over the oppression of darkness. Isaiah in 9:2, had written:

*The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined.*

Isaiah 9:2 is quoted in Matthew 4:16 referring to the light bearing ministry of the Messiah. Luke, in Acts 26:18, states the words of the Apostle Paul regarding God’s mission for him to those whom he will bring the message of the gospel, “To open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” Paul elaborates on the spiritual significance of light and darkness in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For
it is God who said, “Let there be light shining out of darkness,” who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” There seems to be a correspondence between darkness and light. The glories of the light of the Messiah beams most brightly when contrasted with the gloom of darkness. His brilliant light is seen and understood most dramatically when compared to the darkness. The Apostle John in John 1:4-5 stated, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” There are some who suggest that the statement of God creating both light and darkness have an appropriate meaning for Cyrus. Victor Buksbazen explains:

“This verse is singularly appropriate for Cyrus, because the Persians believed that the world is ruled by two gods, Ahura Mazda, the god of light and goodness, and Ahriman, the god of darkness and evil. Our verse declares that Jehovah is the author of both, of light and darkness of peace and evil. The contrasting of evil as the opposite of peace is most significant for the prophetic mind. All the events of history and their strange convolutions are ultimately traceable to Jehovah.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 362).

Others, however are not as convinced that the reference to light and darkness was directly responding to the religion of Cyrus which became known as Zoroastrianism. With the full revelation of Scripture as our guide, it is best to understand God’s comments in Isaiah 45:7 as referring to both the physical and spiritual dimensions of light and darkness and the role of the Messiah in overcoming the darkness when He defeated the powers of darkness on the cross. See Colossians 2:8-15.

God also declares in 45:7 that He created both peace and calamity. The word calamity is the Hebrew word ra which is translated in the Old Testament as evil (per the KJV), distress, misery and calamity. Biblical scholars have suggested differing interpretations as to why God stated that He created calamity, or evil as some would translate the Hebrew word ra. God must be understood as absolutely sovereign in His creation and He will act within the world He created according to His purposes. The first two chapters of Job are illustrative of God’s divine right to do with His created people as He deems appropriate. Like darkness, evil or calamity have a purpose in God’s perfect plans for His world. The greater goodness of God seems to appear most awesome when seen against the backdrop of its opposite. God had considered this before the world was created as Revelation 13:8 reveals. God ends this stunning revelation with a reminder that He is the sovereign Lord who has done these things. Who are the created to argue with the Creator?

**45:8** Rain, O heavens, from above,  
and let the skies pour down righteousness;  
let the earth open,  
so that salvation and righteousness may sprout up;  
I, the LORD, have created it.

Isaiah 45:8 could be understood either as a hymn of praise as some have suggested or a summarizing statement by God which reveals His ultimate purpose in selecting Cyrus to accomplish His will for the release of those who will be exiled in Babylon in the future. God calls upon the heavens and the skies to rain or pour down righteousness and then calls upon the earth to open to accept the rain of righteousness so that both salvation and righteousness will sprout up. God’s statement in 45:8 is a magnificent transitional statement between two restoring works of God revealed in chapter 45. The first, in 45:1-13 refers to the future return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem from Babylon where they have been “held captive.” The second, 45:14-25, refers to the world-wide return of the Jews following the great tribulation where they will journey to live in the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. David L. Cooper comments on 45:8:
“In verse 8 of our passage the prophet, seeing the future by inspiration, was led to exclaim, "Distil, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, that it may bring forth salvation, and let it cause righteousness to spring up together; I, Jehovah, have created it." Here the restoration of Israel from Babylonian servitude furnished a kind of foretaste to the prophet of the great and final restoration of Israel in the future. He thought of the blessings that come to Israel and the world in terms of the showers and rains which produce fruitful seasons. He therefore called upon the skies to pour down righteousness. Moreover, he wanted the earth to open and receive the blessings sent from heaven. God's using Cyrus and various providential occurrences were to the prophet in this figure the showers from heaven; the fruit of these showers being that of salvation and righteousness with all their attendant blessings.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – July 1945).

The words “righteousness and salvation” are often paired together. See Psalm 24:5; 40:10; 51:14; 65:5; 71:15; 98:2; Isaiah 45:8; 46:13; 51: 5, 6, 8; 56:1; 59:16; 17; 61:10; 62:1; Romans 10:10 and Hebrews 11:17. Psalm 98:2 beautifully expresses this correlation:

The LORD has made known his salvation;
his righteousness he has revealed in the sight of the nations.

Isaiah 45:9-13: Introduction

Isaiah 9-13, which summarizes God’s message to His people regarding His calling of Cyrus in the future, consists of two sections, vss. 9-10, the presumptuous people and vss. 11-13, the Sovereign Creator. In the previous verses, it is stated that God wonderfully declared that the purpose for calling and enabling Cyrus to accomplish God’s will for him would result in righteousness falling from heaven like rain so that salvation and righteousness may sprout up. When the exiles in Babylon returned to Jerusalem they would establish a Jewish nation from whom would “spring” the Messiah who, by His death and resurrection, would bring righteousness and salvation to the earth. This most glorious result, would, however stem from a prior action that the people of Jerusalem and Judah in Isaiah’s day would not rejoice over. Their habitation and temple would be destroyed, with many being killed and many others being exiled against their will to Babylon. The realization of this terrifying future event may have prompted many to question God’s love for them. They also may have questioned how Israel’s covenant keeping Lord could abandon them to such a fate. They needed to be reminded, as do all peoples of all generations, that the future belongs to God’s righteous and “rightful” prerogative. Who are they to argue against their Maker? To do so would bring God’s judgment upon them as is evident from Isaiah’s declaration of a message of woe in vss. 9-13. God would again declare His purposes for raising up and enabling Cyrus to accomplish His will in vs. 13 as a final response to His disobedient and rebellious people.

45:9 Woe to him who argues with his Maker!
He who is a mere potsherd among the potsherds of the earth!
Does the clay say to the one who shapes it,
'What do you think you are doing?'
or the work of your hands complain,
'He has no skill in his hands?'

Isaiah often introduced a statement of God’s judgment and purposes by the word “woe which is the Hebrew word hoy in 45: 9. For occurrences of “woe” in Isaiah see 3:9,11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 6:5, 10:1, 5; 24:16; 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; 45:9, and10. Woe has the meaning of “alas” which introduces, in this instance, a strong rebuke from God. God rebukes those, whom He has created for His own divine purposes, for arguing against Him. The exact reason for this arguing, and by implication grumbling against, is not
stated. However, it can be surmised from the context, that when Isaiah’s audience heard and comprehended the message that their city and temple would need to be rebuilt, Isaiah 44:26-28, they questioned God and complained about His future plans for them.

God’s response was to state that, by their complaints against Him, they were in peril of judgment coming upon them. God says in essence, “Who do you think you are arguing with your Maker?” or “What right have you do question anything that your Creator does?” The response of God to their insolence against Him is stunning. God’s opinion of them is that they are merely common clay pots (potsherds) among all the other peoples (clay pots) of the earth. They have no voice or rights to speak against their Maker. God is their maker or shaper, like a potter who fashions clay. It is an act of hubris effrontery for “clay” to speak up and say to the potter, “what do you think you are doing?” It is even worse, and an act of vile blasphemy to say to God, “He has no skill in his hands.”

Isaiah had previously discussed the relationship between the potter and clay in Isaiah 29:16; 30:14; 41:25; and would again in 64:8 where in this final reference, Isaiah would confess, “But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; and we all are the work of your hand.” See also Jeremiah 18:1-12; Lamentations 4:2; Romans 9:19-21; and Revelation 2:27.

45:10 Woe to him who says to a father,
   'What is it you are trying to father?'
   or to a woman,
   'What is it you are in labor for?'

God uses another analogy in 45:10 to describe His abhorrence for the evilness of His people who were complaining because He had stated the future plans He has for them. It should be remembered that these future plans would result in the coming of the Messiah who would bring righteousness, peace and salvation to the earth. God’s rebuke of His people in 45:10 is the declaration of another “woe” of judgement against them. In their complaint against God, they are saying in effect: “What are you doing in giving birth?” or “What are you creating in giving birth?” Their complaint is an insolent rebellion against their creator. It is implied that they have a “right” to determine what kind of person they will be before they are born. This complaint goes beyond the physical birth of children to parents. It is an attack on God’s prerogative in creating humans on the earth. In doing so, they have set themselves as God’s judge to question Him on His purposes in creating them. Isaiah is pointing out the sinfulness of God’s people as was stated by God as recorded in the first chapter of his prophecy, “I have reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me,” Isaiah 1:2. The people had not changed or repented of their evil acts. Their minds still had no understanding; their ears were still deaf; and their eyes were still blind, and they would remain in this state “until (their) cities are destroyed without inhabitant, and houses uninhabited, and the land becomes absolutely devastated, and the LORD has sent everyone far away,” Isaiah 6:11-12. The people’s rebellious response to God for His stated plans for them had brought upon them God’s judgement. They will face the destruction of their cities and they will be removed from their land.

45:11 This is what the LORD says,
   the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker.
"Ask me about things to come!
   Will you really question me concerning my sons,
   and concerning the work of my hands?
In response to the complaints of His people, 45:9-10, the Lord, as He often had, as stated in the context of chapters 44 and 45, begins a declaration with the authoritative, “This is what the LORD says” or as in other versions, “Thus says the Lord.” God declares that He is the Holy One of Israel and Israel’s Maker. Refer to notes on Isaiah 1:4. See also Isaiah 17:7; 27:11; 29:16; 44:24; 45:9; 51:13. The psalmist in Psalm 149:2 declared, “Let Israel rejoice in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.” The proper response of God’s people Israel was to rejoice in their Maker, yet these people blasphemed Him with their rebellious complaints and arguments. God responded to them with what appears to be sarcasm, “Ask me about things to come!” The NKJV translates the second part of this verse as: “Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hand, you command Me.” The Lord is saying, who do you think you are to command Me regarding My sons (whom He has created) and concerning My works? The sons of God refer specifically to the people of Israel and His work of His hands refer not only to His creative acts but to His future plans concerning Cyrus and the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. The Lord’s judgment on His people for their rebellion against Him and His plans was all the more severe because of the glorious results of these plans. They will result in the coming of God’s Son, the Messiah who will bring salvation and righteousness to the earth, Isaiah 45:8. God is most protective of His beloved Son, and those who oppose the coming and ministry of the Son, will face the fiery wrath of the Father. In the not-to-distant future, in Isaiah’s time, the people of Jerusalem and Judah will face the heat of this wrath when a pagan king from Babylon will send his army to completely destroy Judah and the city of Jerusalem and demolish the temple. It was evident that Isaiah’s audience and their descendants did not heed the word of the Lord and therefore God brought upon them all the acts of His judgment He had warned them about.

45:12 I made the earth,  
and created people on it.  
My own hands stretched out the heavens,  
and to all their host I gave orders.

The Holy One of Israel, 45:11 is the One who “made the earth and created people on it.” The deaf ears of His people needed to hear repetitively that their God alone made the earth. See also 45:8 and 18 and 42.5. God also had often reminded them that He was their Maker, Isaiah 17:7; 27:11; 29:16; 44:24; 45:9; and 51:13; and their Creator, Isaiah 27:11; 40:28; 43:1 and 43:15. Not only did the Lord create the earth and its people but He stretched out the heavens, Isaiah 40:22; 42:5; 44:24 and 51:13; and gave the host of heavens their orders, for “He calls each one them by name,” Isaiah 40:26. The Lord’s reminder of His creative works stands opposed to the insolence of those whom He created (pots of clay 45:9) who dare question Him about His divine plans. Although the repeated reminders of His glorious creative acts are necessary for the enlightenment of all who heard Isaiah’s message or who have or will read it in the Scriptures, the message in Isaiah’s day fell on deaf ears of people who had no understanding. The results were disastrous for them and their descendants. God’s message is still relevant to all who read the prophecy of Isaiah. God still seeks those who will repent and turn to Him for salvation and righteousness.

45:13 I raised him up in righteousness,  
and I will make all his ways straight.  
He will rebuild my city,  
and he will let my exiles go free,  
not for price or reward,”  
says the LORD of hosts.

God completes this specific message about His plans for Jerusalem to be rebuilt with a declaration that “I raised him up in righteousness.” While not mentioned by name, it is obvious from the context of 44:24-45:13
that God is describing Cyrus. See Isaiah 44:18 and 45:1. God does not call Cyrus righteous but says that He
God, has acted in righteousness by selecting one not yet born to be raised up to accomplish God’s purposes. God will also prepare the way for Cyrus to fulfil God’s plan by making his ways straight. See notes on 45:2 on the words, “I will go before you and level the rough places.” God’s specific plans for Cyrus was the release of His people whom He calls “My exiles” from Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. These exiles will have been in captivity in Babylon and will in the future be released by a decree of Cyrus to return to rebuild the temple and by implication the City of Jerusalem. See Ezra 1:1-4 and 4:1-4. Cyrus as king, did not literally rebuild the temple. He did however, issue a decree which is inscribed on the Cyrus Cylinder, to allow exiles from many nations to return to their homelands. Cyrus also provided funds for the rebuilding of cities and sanctuaries such as temples. The inscription on the “Cyrus Cylinder” indicates that Cyrus decreed that those whom he released to their own lands would have the authority to rebuild their cities (dwelling places) and their sanctuaries. See James B. Pritchard, Ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd edition, with Supplement. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, pages 315-316.

God stated that he (Cyrus) would let His exiles “go free, not for price or reward.” God did not need to bribe or provide payment to Cyrus to issue his decree to free the exiles from Babylon. Cyrus was obedient to the divine call of God. See notes on 44:28 and specifically the comments by Victor Buksbazen. Although no payment or reward was called for or provided, God was gracious to Cyrus and allowed his forces to uncover vaults where treasures and riches were hidden. See notes on 45:3. This declaration by the Lord completes the stated plans of God in this section of Isaiah’s writings, regarding the return of the exiles to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus. The next section of Isaiah, chapter 45:14–25, refers to another return to the beloved City in the far future at the time of the beginning of the millennial reign of the Messiah.

Isaiah 45:14–25: Introduction
Isaiah 45:14–25 is a separate section of Isaiah’s prophecy dealing with the return of the faithful remnant of the Lord, from the nations where they have been scattered, to Jerusalem, by implication because it is not directly stated where “the fugitives of the nations” vs. 20, are to return. This section is further divided into two components, vss.14-19 and vss. 20-25. This section, Isaiah 45:14-25, is clearly eschatological in context as recorded first, in vs. 17, “Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation.” Second in vs. 20, “Assemble yourselves and come; come together, you fugitives of the nations.” Third in vs. 23, “Every knee will bow before me, every tongue will swear loyalty to me.” Fourth, in vs. 24, All who are angry against him will come to him and be put to shame.” Finally, Fifth, in vs. 25, In the LORD, will all the descendants of Israel be vindicated and will boast in him.”

45:14 This is what the LORD says,
"The labor of Egypt,
   and the commerce of Cush,
   and the Sabeans who are tall of stature,
   will come over to you,
   and they will be yours;
they will follow you,
in chains they will come over,
   and they will bow down to you.
They will plead with you,
"Surely God is with you;
   and there is no other,
   there is no God besides him."
To authenticate this new message, Isaiah again as in several other verses, declares the authoritative in the DASV, “This is what the LORD says.” Other English versions state, “Thus says the Lord.” See notes on Isaiah 43:16-17 for a brief discussion on this phrase. Many scholars interpret 45:14 and following verses to the days of the return of the Babylonian exiles to Jerusalem. However, as there is no direct or implied reference to Cyrus and his decree and as indicated in the introduction to vss. 14-25, the intention of these verses including 45:14 is eschatological as Victor Buksbazen explains:

“To whom does Jehovah address Himself? A rather difficult question to answer. At first glance Israel would seem to be the addressee, but Israel never waged war against Egypt or Ethiopia. Cyrus would appear to be the more logical addressee. But neither did Cyrus himself conquer Egypt and Ethiopia. This conquest was left to Camyses, the son of Cyrus. The only satisfactory answer is that this prophecy has an eschatological character. It is a vision of the ultimate things which will come to pass at the end of times. At that time the nations will voluntarily come over to the God of Israel. Verse 14 corresponds to the message of Isaiah 2:2-4. The history of redemption is telescoped to dramatize the ultimate purpose of God.” (Victory Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 364).

The return of the scattered fugitives, the faithful remnant of the Lord, from the nations of the world to Israel is a topic much beloved by Isaiah as he often wrote about it. See Isaiah 14:1-2; 43:1-6; 49:22-26; and 60:1-22. Isaiah of course did not know what the Scriptures would later reveal that the gathering of the covenant people of God would occur at the end of the great Tribulation and the beginning of the Messianic kingdom. The Scriptures would later reveal that the Lord will protect His faithful remnant during the tribulation, Revelation 12:13-17. At the end of this terrible period, the faithful remnant will stream from the nations where they have found refuge. They will not be left to their own resources as they travel to Jerusalem and Mount Zion to meet the Messiah. As recorded in Isaiah 18:7, 45:14 and 60:5-9, the proceeds from the labor of Egypt and the commerce of Cush (Ethiopia) will be given to the faithful remnant to finance both their travel and their establishment of their residences in the kingdom of their Messiah. Not only will the Gentile nations bring them their wealth, but they will also assist them in their travels, 49:22-23; 60:4 and once reaching Israel, the Gentiles who accompanied the faithful Jewish remnant will become servants to them, 14:2, and will rebuild the walls of Jerusalem 60:10, and they will minister to the faithful remnant who have taken up residence in the kingdom, 60:10.

Isaiah 45:14 also states that the Gentile Sabeans will not only come to the financial aid of the faithful remnant but will bow down to them, as will other Gentile peoples. See Isaiah 60:14. Many of the Gentiles will have survived the horrors of the great Tribulation will still be in chains, 45:14 and will seek out the faithful remnant whom God will esteem, and the Gentiles will be totally subservient to them. The Gentiles will beg them to allow them, the Gentiles, to accompany the faithful remnant as they journey to Jerusalem. Following the judgment of God on the world, during the great Tribulation, those who remain alive will become believers of God and acknowledge that, “Surely God is with you” (the faithful remnant), and they will avow that “there is no God besides him.” There will be no unbelievers among those who come to take residence in the Messianic kingdom, Zechariah 14:21. Some of the Gentile nations that will come to worship in Jerusalem are mentioned in Isaiah, 19:18-24.

The Apostle Paul quotes part of Isaiah 45:14 in his first letter to the Corinthians, 14:25, “After the secrets of his heart are exposed, and so falling on his face he will worship God, declaring, God is really among you.” Although the context of Paul’s remarks to the believers in Corinth is not about the return of the faithful remnant to Jerusalem, Paul applies Isaiah’s words to suit his teaching that those who are faithfully proclaiming the word of God will witness unbelievers coming to faith in the Messiah and acknowledging that God is with them.
45:15 *Truly you are a God who hides himself,*  
*O God of Israel, Savior.*

In contrast to idols, Isaiah 45:16, that can be seen but have no ability to do anything, God is invisible and transcendent. He is also called “Spirit” in John 4:24. Yet Israel’s God who cannot be seen, is a Savior who provides salvation for Israel, 45:17. Isaiah had earlier in 8:17, stated God’s hiding, “I will wait expectantly for the LORD, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, but I will put my hope in him.” Isaiah had confidence in the Lord who “hides himself” because Isaiah had seen and talked with Him in a vision in the temple. See Isaiah chapter 6. God also had revealed Himself to Isaiah many times by giving the prophet His words to declare to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah states in a positive way that God hides Himself so that, even though people cannot see Him, they can have faith in Him for He is their God who is their Savior. See also John 20:29. Although, people cannot physically see God, the evidence of His works and voice are everywhere. Refer also to Psalm 8:1-9; 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20; and Hebrews 1:1-3.

Isaiah’s hymn of praise to God comes after God’s revelation of the glories to come to Israel in the far future when God will finally restore Israel. He will also cause the wealth of the nations to be brought to the faithful remnant who will be brought from the nations to reside in the kingdom ruled by Israel’s and the world’s Messiah. In the brief hymn of praise, 45:17, Isaiah mentions that the God of Israel is their Savior. He could have also added many other descriptive titles for God which he has done in many places in his prophetic writings. Isaiah also describes God as a Savior in 43:3; 11; 45:21; 49:26; 60:16; and 63:8. In Isaiah 19:20, the reference to Saviour and defender (or champion) is a clear prophecy of the Messiah who will rescue those in Egypt, in the far future who have faith in God and will cry to the Lord for deliverance from their enemies.

45:16 *They will all be put to shame,*  
*and humiliated;*  
*they who make idols*  
*will go away disgraced.*

Isaiah discusses the folly of making and worshiping idols throughout his prophecy. See 2:8, 18-20; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 31:7; 40:19-20; 21:9; 30:22; 41:29; 42:8, 17; 44:9-17; 45:20; 46:1; 48:5; 57:13; and 66:3. It was such an evil and detestable practice that the prophet had to continually speak out against those who had rejected the worship of the true God and replace devotion to Him with the inconceivable and blasphemous practice of attributing deity to an image made of wood or metal and trusting in the worthless image for protection from enemies and for eternal salvation. Isaiah in 45:16 states that those who make idols (and by implication worship them) will all be put to shame. They will all be humiliated, and they will all go away disgraced. Idol worship by God’s people was one of the major reasons that God would bring forces from a pagan Gentile nation, Babylon, to destroy Judah, Jerusalem and the temple, in 586 B.C., just as He had brought Assyria against the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C.

The act of not attributing to God the worthiness He deserves is most heinous to God. When anyone or any people choose to make and worship idols, they are stating that the One who made the heavens and the earth and sustains all life and who is the only true God, is not worthy of their worship. They degrade and disgrace themselves by giving their praise (worship of worthiness) to a useless object. The people of the earth are to worship God because there is no One more esteemed, no One more worthy, no One greater than the God who has identified Himself as the Holy One of Israel, the Lord. When Jesus, the Messiah walked among His people He constantly gave praise to God, for there was no One greater to praise or worthy of praise.
45:17 But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation;
you will never be put to shame or humiliated.

In contrast to worthless idols who cannot save anyone, Israel will be saved by the Lord. It is not just a temporal salvation from enemies or harm. It is an everlasting salvation. This is a very clear statement of God’s eternal purposes for His chosen people. It is not a universal claim that all peoples of Israel will automatically receive eternal salvation. Other statements by God help to clarify the prophet’s meaning in 45:17. Beginning from chapter 1:18-20, Isaiah lays a foundation for understanding that those who trust in the Lord, (“willing” 1:19) and obey Him will have their sins forgiven. Isaiah makes clear, as he stated in 12:2, that trusting in God is the response that is necessary for salvation.

God is my salvation;
I will trust and not be afraid;
for the LORD, yes the LORD,
is my strength and song;
he has become my salvation.

Those who trust in the Lord, will never be put to shame or humiliated, as will those who spurn God and put their trust in worthless idols, 45:16. Eternal or everlasting salvation was understood from the writings of the Old Testament as Paul reminded young Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16. Isaiah certainly understood that salvation was more than an earthly refuge from harm. He proclaimed the message of salvation from the beginning to the end of his prophecy. Those who read and study the prophecy of Isaiah are invited to respond to God’s offer of eternal salvation by trusting in Him by faith.

45:18 For this is what the LORD says
who created the heavens,
the God who formed the earth and made it,
who established it and created it not chaotic,
who formed it to be inhabited.
"I am the LORD; there is no other.

To emphasize His purposes of salvation for all the earth, God reminds those who hear the message from the proclamation of Isaiah or read Isaiah’s writings, that he is the Lord who has the authority to deliver His message, “This is what the LORD says,” and He has the divine power to accomplish creative acts that no one has or could have done for He states, “I am the LORD; there is no other.” The authoritative statement, “For this is what the LORD says,” is repeated often by Isaiah in chapters 44 and 45. See 44:1, 6, 24; 45:1, 11, 14, and 18. The statement at the end of 45:18, “I am the LORD; there is no other,” is also repeated often by Isaiah in these two chapters. See 44:6, 8; 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, and 22. The frequency of these two statements underscores the importance of what God is saying to His people and to the peoples of the world. God is speaking, and His message must be heeded.

The statements of the Lord in 45:18 reinforce His actions of Creator of the cosmos including the earth and all that is in it. Four action words are used by God to describe His creative activities so that there will be no misunderstanding as to His power and authority and to emphasize that trusting in anyone else, especially idols, 45:16 and 20, is disgraceful, shameful and worthless and those who trust in idols will be humiliated.
The first action of God described in 45:18 is that He, “created” the heavens. The word ‘created’ is the Hebrew word bara which occurs in Genesis 1:1. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (KJV). It also occurs in Genesis 1:27 describing the creation of humans, male and female. This word occurs twice in 45:18 and often in Isaiah, 40:26; 41:20; 42:5; 43:7; 45:8, 12, 18; 48:7; 54:16; 65:17 and 18.

The second action of God in 45:18 is that He “formed” the earth and He “formed” it to be inhabited. The word, “formed” occurring twice in vs. 18 is the Hebrew word yatsar, which also occurs frequently in Isaiah, 25:1; 29:16; 43:7; 10, 21; 44:2, 21, 24; 45:18; 49:5 and 54:17. Like the other similar words in 45:18, yatsar also occurs in the creation account of Genesis: 2:7-8. See also Psalm 95:5; Jeremiah 1:5 and 33:2.

The third action of God, described in 45:18 is that He “made” the earth. The word “made” is the Hebrew word asah which also occurs often in Isaiah, 2:8, 20; 17:8; 22:11; 28:15; 31:7; 37:16; 43:7; 44:2; 45:12, 18; 57:16 and 66:2. See also Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15. It occurs in the creation account of Genesis chapters 1-3, Genesis 1:7, 16, 25, 31; 2:3, 4 and 3:1. It occurs frequently in the Psalms, 86:9; 95:5; 96:5; 100:3; 104:19, 24; 106:19; 111:4; 118:24; 119:73; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 136:5, 7; and 146:6.

The fourth action of God described in 45:18 is that He “established” the earth. The word “established” is the Hebrew word kun, which occurs less frequently in Isaiah, 2:2; 16:5; 54:14. See also Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15. It occurs often in the Psalms, 9:7; 24:2; 37:23; 89:21, 37; 93:1, 2; 96:10; 99:4; 102:28; 103:19; 119:5, 90; and 140:11.

Another important word in 45:18 is the Hebrew word tohu which is interpreted as “chaotic” in the DASV and “vain” in the KJV. The NIV may have the best translation as “empty,” due to the next sentence in 45:18, “who formed it to be inhabited.” This word occurs in Genesis 1:2, “And the earth was formless and empty; and darkness covered the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the waters.” The word tohu is translated as “empty” in Genesis 1:2 (DASV). This word also occurs often in Isaiah, 24:10; 29:21; 34:11; 40:17, 23; 41:29; 44:9; 45:18, 19; 49:4 and 59:4. See also Jeremiah 4:23.

The purpose of forming the earth is that it is to be inhabited, which is a confirmation of Genesis 1:28, in which God states that the people, male and female He had created were to fill the earth. It was and is God’s wonderful purpose for the earth He created to be enjoyed by those who inhabit it. God’s original purpose of fruitful inhabitation, Genesis 1:28, has been affected by the entrance of sin into the world. The original two inhabitants, Adam and Eve sinned against God and because of that action, God cursed the ground, Genesis 3:17. This curse still exists, and it will be the role of the King to come, the Messiah to rule in righteousness and “reverse the curse.” During the Messianic age, the earth will blossom in righteousness both physical and spiritually, so that God’s beautiful plan for the inhabitation of the earth will be realized.

45:19 I have not spoken in secret,  
in the land of darkness;  
I did not tell Jacob's descendants,  
'Seek me in vain.'  
I, the LORD, speak righteousness,  
I declare things that are right.

There are at least four ways that God has spoken as revealed in Scripture. First, in His created order, God “speaks” through what is seen in nature. King David, in Psalm 19:1-4 has stated:
The heavens declare the glory of God;
the sky proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day utters speech,
night to night reveals knowledge.

There is no speech nor are there words,
their voice is not heard,
yet their voice is gone out through all the earth,
their words to the end of the world.

In them he has pitched a tent for the sun,
which is like a bridegroom coming out of his wedding chamber.

Although there is no audible speech, Psalm 19:4, from the sky and heavens, yet a voice goes out to all the earth which declares the glory of God. Second, God has audibly spoken to His servants from time to time, (not an exhaustive list), to Adam and Eve and to Satan, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Moses and the elders of Israel, to Joshua, to David, to His servants, the prophets, to His Son, Jesus Christ, to the disciples, to Saul, later Paul, and to John on the island of Patmos. At times this speech was through a vision and at other times, humans directly heard the voice of God. Third, God, in these last days, has spoken to us in His Son, Hebrews 1:1-3. Fourth, God continually speaks to the people of the earth through the pages of Scripture. The words of Scripture are “God-breathed,” 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21, and through the reading of God’s word or hearing it being read, God speaks plainly for as Isaiah 45:19 states, God has not “spoken in secret.”

Some have understood that the words in Isaiah 45:19, “the land of darkness” refer to Babylon but there is nothing in the context of 45:18-19 that would indicate that Babylon is the place of darkness. The “land of darkness” is best seen within the greater context of 45:14-25 where the far future time of the days of the great Tribulation and its aftermath are in view and during the time, when as 45:23 states, every knee will bow before God.

God also declares, as recorded in 45:19, that Jacob’s descendants were not told to seek God in vain, meaning that they were to seek Him with the clear intention of finding Him. This is another reference to God speaking. Isaiah records that God is near. “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.” Isaiah 55:6. Moses stated in Deuteronomy 4:7, “For what other great nation is there that has a god so near them, as the LORD our God is whenever we call on him?” See also Psalm 73:28 and Jeremiah 23:23. Jacob’s descendants who will live during the terrifying days of Jacob’s trouble (distress) Jeremiah 30:7, will call upon God, who is near them, for refuge and strength.

The final sentence of Isaiah 45:19 states, “I, the LORD, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.” Those who draw near to Him, have the confidence that God always “speaks” righteously and “declares” things that are right. Moses stated, as recorded in Deuteronomy 32:3-4, “For I will proclaim the name of the LORD, ascribe greatness to our God. 4 He is the Rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are just. A faithful God who does nothing wrong. Just and upright is he.” See also (not an exhaustive list), Psalm 65:5; 71:19; Isaiah 5:16; 41:10; 45:8, 21; 56:1; 61:11; 63:1; Daniel 9:14; Zechariah 8:8; 2 Peter 1:1 and Revelation 15:3. In the context of Isaiah chapters 44 and 45 and specifically vss. 20-21 of chapter 45, God speaks righteousness and declares things that are right (true) in comparison to worthless idols who have no voice and cannot speak anything. God in 45:19, is stating that His people and the people of the earth need to trust in Him for there is no other in whom anyone can confidently place their trust. God emphatically states in 45:21, “there is no one besides me.”
David L. Cooper provides this introduction to Isaiah 45:20-25:

“Invitation to the Lost
In verses 20-25 the prophet gave the universal invitation to those who survive the Tribulation to assemble themselves and consider the real status of things. Idolatry is nothing. Images shall pass away. God from the beginning has declared the course of history and conditions and things shall develop exactly as He has foretold.

Since fulfillment has proved the inerrancy and correctness of the message of God, He calls to those surviving the Tribulation saying, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." Here is a universal call for all to look in faith to Him and accept Him in order that they might live. The Lord foretold that Israel—the remnant—"shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son ..." Zech. 12:10). The same idiom appears in both of these passages. The looking referred to in them is looking in faith to God for salvation. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. There is no other way than this. Thus the necessity for the proclamation of the truth.

God has sworn by Himself, according to Isaiah 45:23, "... that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." In view of this time of universal recognition of God and homage to Him, the prophet for the Lord plead (in verse 22) for all to accept God's salvation.

There is salvation and righteousness only in Jehovah. He also has strength, for those who accept Him. From the New Testament we learn of the righteousness which He has provided for all who wish to accept. The most concise and fullest statement of this righteousness apart from the law is set forth in Romans 3:21-31. An examination of our passage in Isaiah and a comparison of it with Paul's statement in Romans reveals the fact that both the prophet and the Apostle were speaking of imputed righteousness which is given to all who believe.

In Jehovah shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory" (vs. 25). Men cannot be justified by their good works or anything that they accomplish, have, or do. Only in Jehovah—Jehovah our righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ—can the Seed of Israel be justified. Because of this fact, the truth of the gospel must be proclaimed, by those who have it and who know God's plan, to Israel now. May the Lord God stir our hearts and open our eyes to see His truth and may He give us moral and spiritual strength, power, and courage to put into practice now what we learn from His Word. The blessings of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rest upon all who know and who love Him.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – July 1945).

45:20-21 Assemble yourselves and come;
come together, you fugitives of the nations.
They have no knowledge
those who carry the wood of their carved idols,
and pray to a god who cannot save.
21 Declare and present your evidence;
let them take counsel together.
Who predicted this long ago?
Who has declared this in the past?
Have not I, the LORD?
There is no other God besides me,
a righteous God and a Savior;
there is no one besides me.
As He had done previously to others, as stated in Isaiah 41:1, 21-29; and 43:8-9, God commands that the fugitive of the nations, those who will have endured the terrors of the Tribulation, to declare and present their evidence that their idols had predicted anything of the future. This is a purely rhetorical request for God, knowing that idols made of wood or any other substance could not speak, think, give counsel, let alone predict the future. God declares that He alone is the only God who can predict things that will surely happen, long before the predictions become reality. God again states that there is no other God besides Him, who is a righteous God and a Savior. See also Isaiah 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:6,14, and 22. The peoples of the world will still craft and worship idols in the future days of the great Tribulation, Revelation 9:20-21. Those who have rejected God by suppressing the truth they have known about Him, have exchanged God’s glory for vile images, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie for they worship something created instead of worshiping the Creator, Romans 1:18-32. There is only one true God who is righteous and a Savior.

The Apostle Peter reveals that the one who is this Savior is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter addresses his second letter “to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:1 NKJV). Isaiah often declared that God is the Savior, 19:20; 43:3, 11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16 and 63:8. One of the most significant New Testament verses regarding the present role of the Savior, to Israel is Acts 5:31, “God exalted him at his right hand to be a Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” God reminded those, whom He called to give account of their worthless worship of idols, that He alone is a righteous God, who can truthfully and accurately predict things to come, and that He is a Savior not only to Israel but to all nations of the earth.

45:22 Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.

There is perhaps no clearer call for salvation in the Old Testament than is recorded in Isaiah 45:22. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Here is one of the climatic points of prophecy. Jehovah’s love is not limited to Israel alone, God cares for all humanity and invites all men to “look unto me and be saved.” The text contradicts all those who maintain that the God of the Old Testament is a cruel, narrowminded and narrowhearted God. The word of Isaiah brings to mind the words of Jesus: “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 366).

The ESV, NIV and NASB versions have translated the first three words of Isaiah 45:22 as “Turn to me.” The word translated as look or turn is the Hebrew panah, which occurs often in the Old Testament including Isaiah. In Isaiah it occurs in, 8:21; 13:14; 40:3; 53:6; 56:11; 57:14; and 62:10. It is an imperative verb which occurs in the Psalms as a request for God to look upon the penitent, Psalm 25:16; 69:16; 86:16; and 119:132. However, in Isaiah 45:22 it is God who is requesting that the peoples of the world look upon Him.

In turning to God, there is a look of faith, implying that all who look to God in faith will be saved. In a remarkable event recorded in Numbers 21:6-9, God sent fiery serpents among the people as an act of judgment for their rebellious grumbling against Moses and God. When Moses interceded for them after they had recognized their sin, God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it upon a pole and God said all who have been bitten who will look upon the bronze serpent will live. The Apostle John makes reference of this incident in John 3:14-15 as a type or symbol of those, who will look upon and believe in the Son of Man (the Messiah) when He is “lifted up.” Those who do this will have eternal life. God in 45:22, is calling, “Look to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” It is a call not just to the people of Judah and Jerusalem but to all peoples of the earth. God has repeatedly declared that He alone is God of all the earth.
and the worthless idols of the peoples can do nothing to guide or counsel them or to accurately declare future events before they happen. He now makes a most startling announcement that if all peoples of the earth look to Him (faith is implied), they will be saved. This is a major theme of the Book of Isaiah, from chapter 1:18, (a call to reason together with God for salvation) to chapter 66:18, (people from all nations and tongues will come to Him).

It was God’s original plan, Genesis 12:3, that through Abram, all nations of the earth would be blessed. This is also expressed in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 and Galatians 3:8. The Israelites were to be a kingdom of priests, Exodus 19:6. The plan of God was that the nations would derive a blessing though the ministry of this priestly kingdom of Israel and come into a relationship with God. But this depended upon Israel’s faithfulness to God. In Jeremiah 4:1-2 the prophet stated, "If you will return, O Israel, " says the LORD, "if you will return to me, if you will put away your detestable idols out of my sight, and no longer be so fickle, and if you will swear, 'As the LORD lives,' in truth, justice, and righteousness; then the nations will be blessed by him, and they will boast about him." However, the covenant people of God did not fulfil their appointed role and the nations, during the long history of Israel, were not “blessed.” God’s ultimate plan for the nations to be blessed, however, was not defeated. God had someone through whom He would fulfil the covenant promise of Abraham to bless the nations. Isaiah spoke of this one in 42:6 who would be given as “a covenant for the people and a light to the nations.” Also, God stated in Isaiah 49:6 that this one, His servant would be “a light to the nations, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” This Servant was the promised Messiah, who was of the seed of Abraham, would accomplish God’s plans of bringing salvation to the ends of the earth through His sacrificial death as Isaiah prophesized in 53:5-12. The Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be crushed for the world’s sins, have the iniquities of the world to fall on Him and He would bear their sins and all who believe in Him will be saved, John 3:16 and Acts 16:31. Thomas Constable notes that God used Isaiah 45:22 to bring this light of salvation to the great English preacher Charles Spurgeon. (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 224).

45:23 I have solemnly sworn by myself,  
the word gone forth from my mouth is righteous,  
and cannot be revoked.  
Every knee will bow before me,  
every tongue will swear loyalty to me.

God, who has called for all the ends of the earth to look or turn to Him and be saved, 45:22, authenticates His call by a solemn oath sworn to Himself. See also Genesis 22:16, Psalm 89:35, Isaiah 62:8; Jeremiah 44:26; 49:13; 51:14; Amos 4:2; and 6:8. Because there is no One who is greater, more worthy, more important, or more exalted that Himself, God can with holiness and righteousness swear by His own name, that is Himself. God avows that the very word of His mouth is righteous. Every word that proceeds out of His mouth is righteous for He is holy in His essence and cannot do or say anything that is not true to His own holiness. See also Isaiah 5:16; 45:21; and 56:1. Isaiah prophesizes, that the Messiah when He returns will state “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save,” Isaiah 63:1 KJV. The righteous words that God speaks can never be revoked as Isaiah will later record in 55:9-11:

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so my ways are higher than your ways,  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven,  
and does not return there without watering the earth,  
making it produce and sprout,
giving seed to the sower,
and bread to the eater;
so will my word be that goes forth out of my mouth;
it will not return to me empty,
but it will accomplish what I desire it to,
and it will succeed in the matter for which I sent it.

God, in 45:23 declares that every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will swear allegiance or loyalty to Him. The contrast between God swearing an oath to Himself and everyone in all the earth swearing loyalty to Him is deliberate. God desires that everyone will call upon Him for salvation, Isaiah 45:22 and 1 Timothy 2:4 and acknowledge Him as the sovereign Lord of all created things. The Apostle Paul applied Isaiah 45:23 in Romans 14:10-11, stating that all believers will one day stand before the judgment (bema) seat of God and will bow before their Messiah and give Him praise. Paul also applied Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:10-11, stating that Jesus Christ, following His death and resurrection, will be highly exalted and before Him, (His exalted name) “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (NKJV). The New Testament application of God’s words in Isaiah 45:23 makes it plain that all peoples will acknowledge His Son as Lord. The N.T. does not imply that, by this acknowledgment, all peoples will be saved. Only those who look to the Savior in faith will be saved but they and all others, those who will not be saved, will bow before the Savior and confess that He is the Lord. The implication for Isaiah’s audience and those who read the prophetic writings of Isaiah is obvious. Do not wait to turn to God in faith for salvation. The call of God to come to Him for salvation is for all peoples of every tongue and nation. It is of the greatest importance. How much better to acknowledge the Messiah, Jesus Christ as Lord as a believer with great rejoicing, then to do so as an unbeliever with everlasting mourning and regret as Isaiah 45:24 so clearly states.

45:24-25 'Only in the LORD,' it is said of me,
'is righteousness and strength.'
All who were angry against him will
come to him and be put to shame.
In the LORD will all the descendants of Israel
be vindicated and will boast in him.

The first sentence of Isaiah 45:24 is a statement of praise that righteousness and strength is found only in the LORD. Because of His great works of creation and salvation, all peoples of the earth will acknowledge that His Son is Lord by bowing before Him and confessing loyalty to Him, 45:23. The second sentence of 45:24 describes the final destination of those who “are angry against him.” There will be no escape from God. Everyone will eventually appear before Him. Those who trust in Him for salvation will appear before the Messiah at the judgment (bema) seat, Romans 14:10-11; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, 4:1-5; and 2 Corinthians 5:10. Those who have refused to trust in Him for salvation will appear before Him at the great white throne judgment where there will be only punishment declared, Revelation, 20:11-15. This great section of salvation concludes, Isaiah 45:25, with an encouraging word for the descendants of Israel. They will be vindicated for all that they have suffered and will boast (exalt) in Him. This will be when the Messiah returns to set up His millennial kingdom. The faithful remnant of God, those Jews who have remained true to Him, will be gathered from all nations of the earth and will come rejoicing to Zion to live peacefully and securely under the sovereign rule of their great King. Isaiah has often spoke about these days. See Chart of Israel’s Future Kingdom, by John MacArthur, NASB Study Bible, page 1032. The Apostle Paul in summation of his great defense of his people Israel, concludes in Romans 11:26-27, “And so all Israel will be saved, just as it is
written, "There will come out of Zion the Deliverer; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 45:
45:1-7: The Selection of God
45:8-13: The Sovereignty of God
45:14-25: The Salvation of God


Some scholars group chapters 46-48 as one literary unit within Isaiah, but for purposes of this study, it is best to view chapters 46 and 47 as a unit which depicts the folly of Babylon’s people who worship worthless idols and the defeat of Babylon. Many scholars and students of the Scriptures see only the past historical destruction of Babylon which occurred in 539 B.C., while others see both an historical defeat of Babylon in 539 B.C. and a far future reference to the final destruction of Babylon as described in Revelation 18:1-19:6. For example, David L. Cooper explains:

“As stated in former discussions in this series, Babylon, with all her might and power, lay in the background of the oracles found in Isaiah, chapters 40-48. Woven into the warp and woof of the revelation contained in chapters 41-46 is the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity under the sovereignty of Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king. In chapters 47 and 48, however, the prophet was carried forward to the end of this age and saw Babylon the dominating world metropolis of this future time. But he was shown that it will be overthrown completely in one moment on a certain date. When this great catastrophe occurs, Israel's Messiah will save her. In anticipation, however, of this final deliverance, her expected but long-rejected Messiah issues a call for His people to leave Babylon before the overthrow and promises water and sustenance to them as they make their trek homeward across the barren deserts. A careful study of these two chapters reveals their unity and compactness. They therefore must be studied very carefully as a literary unit.

Along with these chapters one should carefully investigate Isaiah, chapters 13 and 14, and Jeremiah, chapters 50 and 51, which portions of scripture blend prophecies of the fall of Babylon under the Medes and Persians with a forecast of her future overthrow, giving the greater part of their attention to the final catastrophe in the end of the Tribulation. An examination of these passages will show that the major part of them has never been fulfilled. Since God's Word is infallible, we may be certain that He will literally carry out the plan announced and the threat made, as they appear on the sacred page.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

It should be noted that David Cooper’s statement that “Babylon….lay in the background of the oracles found in Isaiah, chapters 40-48,” is not the position taken in this messianic study of Isaiah, if by this statement, Cooper meant historical Babylon which was conquered by Cyrus. Although many evangelical and conservative scholars do understand that historical Babylon is the background to these chapters, a small minority are not so convinced. Each passage must be studied within its context and with this intent, it becomes apparent that many of the passages of chapters 40-48 have as their background, the far future Tribulation period followed by the Messianic kingdom. In many instances, Cooper would have agreed with this assessment.

Chapters 46 and 47 can easily be understood from an outline of its contents.
46:1-7: Pagan peoples carry their false gods vs. the true God who carries His people
46:8-13: The only real God who fulfills His purposes and brings salvation to His people
47: 1-15 Proud and Arrogant Babylon will fall with none to save it
46:1-7: Pagan peoples carry their false gods vs. the true God who carries His people
46:1-7: Pagan peoples carry their false gods vs. the true God who carries His people

Isaiah in 46:1-7 states that the false gods of Babylon stoop and bow down and need to be carried which are a burden to weary animals, vs. 1. These false gods cannot save themselves and they are taken into captivity, vs. 2. God calls upon His covenant people, the house of Israel and the remnant of the house of Israel to listen to Him. God has supported them from their conception and will support them to their old age, vss. 3-4. God asks to whom will they compare to Him and, who do they think is like Him? vs. 5. Idols who have been crafted by men are set and remain in their places and cannot answer or save anyone from trouble, vss. 6-7.

46:1 Bel bows down,  
Nebo stoops;  
their idols are carried on beasts and cattle.  
The images you carry around are  
a burden to the weary animals.

The discussion of idols by Isaiah, in 46:1-7, is an addition to previous discussions in his prophecy. See 2:8, 18-20; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 31:7; 40:19-20; 21:9; 30:22; 40:18-24; 41:5-10, 21-24, 29; 42:8,14-17; 44:6-20; and 45:16-20. Isaiah also discussed the folly of idol worship in 48:5; 57:13; and 66:3. Isaiah, throughout his writings, declares that idols cannot think, do, or say anything, nor can they save or protect their worshippers. These idols also cannot predict anything. It is only the one true God who can do all these things. He is the one who is the Creator of the cosmos and the world and He alone can accurately predict the future for the future is the outworking of His plans and purposes. In 46:1-2, Isaiah adds another comparison. Idols that are fashioned by humans, cannot move themselves or do anything. These idols have to be carried by the people who have made them. The heavier the idol, the greater the burden it is to carry them. God, however, does not need to be carried, but in great contrast to idols, He carries those who believe in and worship Him.

Bel and Nebo were names of false gods of ancient Babylon. Victor Buksbazen comments about their status and influence in Babylonian religion:

“Bel, the equivalent of the Hebrew baal (lord) was the generic name for any god. When uses as a proper name, it refers to Marduk, the supreme deity of Babylon. In Babylonian mythology he appears as the creator. The Greeks called him Zeus or Jupiter.

The magnificent and enormous temple of Bel stood on the banks of the Euphrates and is described by Herodotus:

The temple is a square building, two furlongs each way with bronze gates, which was still in existence in my time. It has a solid central tower on furlong square, with a second erected on top of it, then a third, and so on up to eight...On the summit stands a great temple...In the temple there is a second shrine lower down in which there is a great figure of Bel, all of gold on a golden throne, supported on a base of gold, with a golden table standing beside it. I was told by the Chaldeans that to make all this, more than twenty-two tons of gold were used. Outside the temple is a golden altar...The golden altar is reserved for sucklings only. 1

Nebo comes from the same root as the Hebrew word for prophet, nabi. In Babylonian mythology Nebo was the son of the supreme god Marduk and is presented as the spokesman of the gods, just like Mercury, mentioned in Acts 14:12. Nebo was also the supreme god of Nineveh and was supposed to be the god of learning and wisdom. At the approach of the victorious Persians, the worshippers of these gods sought to save them by loading them on beasts of burden (camels and elephants) and on cattle (horses, asses and oxen). [Note 1: Herodotus, Op. cit. 179-183].” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 367-368).
46:2 They stoop,  
   they bow down together.  
They could not save these burdens,  
   but they themselves are taken into captivity.

The idols of Babylon stooped low and bowed down when they were carried by the Babylonians in an attempt to save their worthless false gods from the advancing Persian army. The result was obvious. Neither the Babylonians nor their idols were saved. The Persians took the people and their idols captive when they became the new lords of Babylon. The Persians however, under the leadership of Cyrus did not destroy these idols or those who worshipped them. Cyrus incorporated the idols into the pagan worship rituals of the Persians who added their own false worship to that already existing in Babylon. However, Gary V. Smith comments on the difficulty of precisely defining the historical context of these verses.

“Hypothetically, the defeat of Babylon that the prophet announced could relate to: (a) the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III who defeated the Babylonian king Nabu-shuma-ukin around 729 BC; (b) Sargon II taking control of Babylon around 710 BC when Merodach-baladan ruled Babylon; (c) Sennacherib’s defeat of Merodach-baladan around 703 BC and again in 689 BC when the city of Babylon was decimated; (d) Cyrus’s taking control of Babylon in 539 BC; or (e) Xerxes’ defeat of Babylon around 400 BC. Since Cyrus (Hb. Koresh) was mentioned in 44:28–45:1, many commentators believe this prophecy predicts this conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Persian. This hypothesis is strengthened by the reference to God’s summoning a bird of prey from the east to carry out his purposes in 46:11, but almost any of the foreign kings mentioned above could fit this broad descriptive metaphor (10:5; 41:2). Although every piece of information is helpful, two major problems have developed because many interpreters have read later fulfillments into these prophecies. These are the problems of (a) the historicization of the prophecy and (b) the falsification of the prophecy.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 284).

46:3-4 Listen to me, O house of Jacob,  
   and all the remnant of the house of Israel,  
you who have been borne by me since birth,  
   I have supported you from your conception.  
4 Even to your old age, I am he;  
   even when your hair turns grey I will carry you.  
I have made you,  
   and I will support you;  
I will carry you,  
   and will deliver you.

God calls upon His people to listen to Him regarding the contrast between idols who have to be carried by their makers and the true God who carries, bears, supports and delivers His people. This declaration to listen is made to those of the “house of Jacob” and “all the remnant of the house of Israel”. This could be a reference to the audience of Isaiah who were living in Judah and Jerusalem just after the defeat of the Assyrian army by God in 701 B.C. Isaiah 37:36, and to the remnant, those remaining, of the northern nation of Israel which had been defeated and had most of the people taken captive and deported by Assyria in 722 B.C. God punctuates His care for His people by six declarations of the word “I” in 46:3-4. Prior to these six “I” statements, He declares that they had been “upheld by Me from birth” (NKJV). This can be understood as a reference to their individual births as Jews into the covenant people of God and to the corporate birth of the nation of Israel particularly from the days of the Exodus when God rescued His people from captivity in Egypt.
The six statements with “I” describing God’s actions are similar in meaning. First, God has “supported” (carried) them from their conception. Second, He has been with them continually from their birth to their old age. Third, He promises to keep carrying (bearing) them to old age, “even when your hair turns grey.” Fourth, He reminds them that He has made them, which is in contrast to the evil practice of making and worshipping idols which are worthless and can make nothing. Fifth, He will support them. They will have no need to support Him as if He were an idol that needed to be held in position so as not to fall and they will also have no need to carry Him around like they do with their idols and carved images. Sixth, God will deliver, (save, rescue) them from all harm and from their enemies. God will keep His covenant with them and preserve them. They must in response trust in Him and turn to Him for salvation, Isaiah 45:22. For similar statements regarding God’s support for them by bearing them and carrying them see, Isaiah 40:11 and 63:9. See also Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 1:31; 32:11; Psalm 28:9, 71:6; and Hosea 11:3. Another way that God will carry them is through the death of the suffering Servant the Messiah, who will bear their griefs and carry their sorrows, Isaiah 53:4.

46:5-7 To whom will you compare me or make my equal?
Who do you think is like me?
6 Those who pour gold out of the bag,
and weigh silver on the balance scales.
They hire a goldsmith,
and he makes it into a god.
Then they fall down,
and worship it.
7 They haul it on their shoulders;
they carry it.
They set it in its place,
and there it stays;
it does not move from its place.
If someone cries out to it,
it cannot answer,
nor is it able to save anyone out of their trouble.

God, as recorded in 46:5, is speaking to His people directly, see also 46:3 and to all peoples indirectly through the writings of the prophet. God challenges His listeners with three questions that are rhetorical. First, to whom will you compare me? Second, to whom will you make my equal? Third, who do you think is like me? The answers to these questions are similar, no one can compare with God, no one can be “made” His equal, and there is no one whom anyone could think of who is like God. God had addressed these and similar questions as recorded by Isaiah in 45:5-7; 14; 18, and 21. See also: Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 1 Samuel 2:2 and Psalm 86:8.

In Isaiah 46:6-7, God describes the practice of pagans who use valuable resources, gold and silver, and hire a goldsmith who fashions these riches in to a worthless god. See also Isaiah 40:18-20; 41:7; 44:9-20; and Jeremiah 10:14-15; and 51:17-18. After the idol is formed, these pagans fall down and worship it and then they need to carry it on their shoulders and then set it in its place where it cannot move itself. When anyone cries out to it, the worthless, deaf, dumb and mindless idol cannot respond. It is not capable of helping or saving anyone from their troubles. Just as the massive Babylonian idols Bel and Nebo, 46:1 have to be carried, for they cannot move themselves, the personal idols that have been made by humans also have to be carried. In contrast, 46:3-4, God who has created the earth and its people, hears all who cry out to Him. God
can respond, and He can help and save those who trust in Him. He also carries those who put their faith in Him. He does not need anyone to carry Him and there is no place where He can be set into position. As in many passages where idols are mentioned, the implication is clear. Why would anyone continue to worship a worthless idol or image? God desires that all people put their faith and trust in Him and worship only Him.

The repetitive passages in Isaiah regarding the useless worship of idols compared to the worship of the one true God, highlights the words of God to the prophet as stated in Isaiah 6:9-13. The preaching of Isaiah would serve only to harden the minds, make deaf the ears and blind the eyes of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. God’s repeated call to them to turn from their evil practices of idol worship and worship Him only continually is ignored by His people. Isaiah would later state in 48:4:

I know how obstinate you are;
   and your neck muscles are like iron,
   and your forehead like bronze.

The good news, however, is that, although God called His people deaf and blind, Isaiah 42:18-19, there would be some who would respond as implied from the words “holy seed” in Isaiah 6:13 and “remnant” in 10:20-22; 11:11; 16; 28:5; 37:31 and 46:3. God’s word will eventually come to fruition in the response and obedience of the remnant, for His word will accomplish all that He desires, Isaiah 55:10-11.

46:8-13: The only real God who fulfills His purposes and brings salvation to His people

Isaiah in 46:8-13 states that God calls upon His covenant people whom He calls rebels to remember and bring to mind His previous works on their behalf, for He states again that He is God and there is no other and no one is like Him, vss. 8-9. God declares from the beginning what will happen in the end. He has declared from times long past, things that have not yet happened. His purpose will stand, and He will fulfil what He has planned, vs. 10. He will call upon a person from a far country to fulfil His plan for it assuredly will be accomplished, vs. 11. God calls His people stubborn hearted who are far from righteousness to listen to Him, vs. 12. God brings near His righteousness and His salvation will not be delayed. God will put salvation in Zion, for Israel His glory, vs. 13.

46:8-9 Remember this and be assured;
   bring it again to mind, O rebels.
9 Remember the former things of old;
   for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like me.

In Isaiah 46:8, God calls for His people to remember what He had just declared regarding the foolishness of forming, carrying and trusting in worthless idols and the benefit of trusting in the one true God who has created humans and can carry them even to their old age and can deliver them from harm. He also wants them to remember what He will say which He states in 46:9-13. He calls His people rebels for they have on many occasions rebelled against Him and exchanged the worship due God for worship of idols which they have fashioned to resemble created things.

The sentence in the DASV, “Remember this and be assured” is translated very differently in the KJV as Victor Buksbazen advises:

The word “rebels” 46:8 in the DASV is translated as “transgressors” in the KJV, NKJV, NASB, and ESV and as “rebels” in the NIV. It is the Hebrew word pasha which can be translated either as rebels or transgressors. Pasha also occurs in Isaiah, as translated in the DASV, in 1:2 (rebelled); 1:28 (rebellious); 43:27 (rebelled); 48:8 (rebel); 53:12 (twice: transgressors); 59:13 (rebellings); and 66:24 (rebelled). Similar Hebrew words in Isaiah are, (1) marah, which has the meaning of rebel or disobedience, and occurs in Isaiah in the DASV as 1:20 (rebels); 3:8 (defying); 50:5 (rebellious); and 63:10 (rebelled); (2) sarar, which has the meaning rebel or stubborn, and occurs in Isaiah in the DASV as 1:23 (rebellious); 30:1 (rebellious); and 65:2 (rebellious); (3) sarah, which has the meaning of rebel and occurs in Isaiah in the DASV as 1:23 (rebellious); 30:1 (rebellious); and 59:13 (revolt); (4) marad, which has the meaning of rebelled and occurs once in the DASV as 36:5 (rebelled); (5) pesh, which has the meaning of transgress and occurs in the DASV as 24:20 (transgression); 43:25 (transgressions); 44:22 (transgressions); 50:1 (transgressions); 53:5 (transgressions); 53:8 (rebellion); 57:4 (sin); 58:1 (transgression); 59:12 (twice: transgression); and 59:20 (sin); and (6) meri, which has the meaning of rebel or disobedience and occurs once in Isaiah in the DASV as 30:9 (rebellious).

God again repeats his call to “remember” in 46:9 and His rebellious people are commanded to remember “the former things of old;” which is in contrast to an earlier command recorded in 43:18 (see notes on this verse). This time, God commands them to recall by memory the things He had done for them so that they will acknowledge that He alone is God and there is no other and there is no one like Him. J. Alec Motyer comments on the two occurrences of God in 46:9:

“God … God: the former is ’ēl, God in his transcendent deity; the latter ’elōhîm, God in the fullness of his divine attributes. He is the only (no other) and unique (none like) God.” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 294).

The reminder by God (Elohim) that there is no other occurs also in Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; Isaiah 44:8; 45:5, 14, 21, 22 and Joel 2:27. The corresponding statement that God states that “there is no one like me” occurs also in Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 1 Samuel 2:2 and Psalm 86:8. These repeated reminders in the Old Testament Scriptures and specifically in Isaiah were necessary for God to remind His audience of His unique existence, power, sovereignty, and His loving care for His creation, not only over the nations but particularly His chosen people. This is another call by God to His people to trust in Him for guidance, safety and salvation. No other god could provide any care. The idols that people create as their “gods” are completely worthless to provide anything that the one true God can provide.

46:10 I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that have not yet happened; saying, "My purpose will stand, and I will fulfill what I have planned.”

God’s omniscience is evident in His statement that “I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that have not yet happened.” Only the Holy One of Israel, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the One who is Elohim, 46:9 can know how things will work out and unfold and then with divine confidence declare them long before they occur. The idols that the people of Judah and Jerusalem have crafted and then worshipped have no ability to talk, think, hear or do anything. The Lord of hosts, who alone rules the universe He has created, is absolutely trustworthy so that whatever He says can be counted on to be true. God had previously reminded His people in Isaiah 41:4, that “I, the LORD, am the first, and will be
with the last of them, I am the one.” The ESV for 41:4 states, “I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.” Refer also to Revelation 1:8; 21:6; and 22:13.

God continues by stating, “My purpose will stand, and I will fulfill what I have planned.” Not only does God declare the end from the beginning but He plans (decrees) what will happen in the future and what He has decreed to happen will be fulfilled according to His good pleasure. The NASB translates 46:10 as, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.” For other occurrences of the accomplishment of God’s “good pleasure” see Isaiah 48:14; 53:10; Philippians 2:13 and Colossians 1:19. In Lamentations 2;17, Jeremiah declares, “The LORD has done what he purposed; he has fulfilled his word that he commanded in the days of old.” The declaration of the Lord’s fulfilling what He has planned in Isaiah 46:10 sets the context for one of these plans that is revealed in 46:11: the calling of someone “from the east” to accomplish His plan.

46:11 I call a bird of prey from the east, a person to carry out my plan from a far country. Yes, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass. I have planned it; I will also accomplish it.

Most Biblical scholars suggest that the person who is called the “bird of prey from the east,” is Cyrus who is mentioned by name in 44:28 and 45:1. Cyrus was called by God to conquer Babylon and release the captives of Judah, so they could return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city. See notes on Isaiah 45:13. God can use anyone He desires to fulfill His purposes, even a pagan king who would not know Him, Isaiah 45:5. Cyrus ruled a combined Medo-Persian empire from 559-530 B.C. Upon assuming the throne of his father Cambyses 1, who ruled Anshan, which was a region of eastern Elam, he quickly established the dominance of his empire and captured all he faced including the Lydians who were ruled by its wealthy king, Croesus. In 539 B.C., the army of Cyrus captured Babylon and slew its king, Belshazzar. See Daniel chapter 5 for a description of this event from the inside the walls of Babylon.

God repeats what He had stated in 46:10, that whatever He plans will be accomplished. No one can thwart God’s purposes and plans. There is no other deity who can declare the end from the beginning or accurately predict the future because He is the One who plans the future and His plans will succeed perfectly.

46:12-13 Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness. 13 I bring near my righteousness, it is not far off. My salvation will not delay. I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.

God calls upon His people to listen to Him. They were far from righteous as much of the writings of Isaiah, beginning from chapter 1 demonstrate. They were also stubborn-hearted as Isaiah was told at the time he was commissioned as a prophet as recorded in Isaiah chapter 6. God called them obstinate, with neck muscles like iron and with a forehead like bronze, Isaiah 48:4. To those who rebelled against Him and were continually
disobeying Him, God promised to bring His righteousness and salvation to them. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 46:12-13:

“Ishah, in the two closing verses of chapter 46, declared, "Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: 13 I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory" (vss. 12,13).

Again addressing the transgressors, or the stouthearted, who were far from righteousness, the prophet announced that God would bring near His salvation, that it would not tarry, and that "... I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." The marginal rendering of this passage in the Revised Version is give salvation in Zion, and my glory unto Israel. Both translations are grammatically correct and both convey the thought that was intended by the prophet. When this passage is viewed in the light of related ones, one immediately sees that the salvation of which the Lord was speaking and the glory which He foretold are those which will be brought to Israel at the second coming of our Lord. When the time arrives for Him to take the situation of Israel in hand, He will not tarry. He will speed the tempo of events and accomplish His purposes in short order. Malachi was speaking of the same event—the second coming of the Messiah—in 3:1-6 of his prophecy. When the Lord thus comes, all Israel living at the time will be saved and glory will be placed in Zion for Israel His glory. Then the Chosen People will no longer be the tail of the nations as they are now; but, on the contrary, they will be the head.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

Victor Buksbazen adds:

“There was apparently a rebellious and stubborn group of men who discouraged the exiles, saying the God does not care about them. The term “tsedakah” which usually means righteousness, has in this context the meaning of vindication, Israel and their faith in Jehovah are both vindicated.

The prophet assures God’s people that their deliverance will not be long delayed. Departing from the historical situation the prophet sees Israel’s glorious future. The Lord will place in Zion salvation and glory for His people Israel.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 370).

“I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory” (46:13)

God, promises a future time when salvation will reside in Zion. This is a clear reference to the days of the kingdom of the Messiah who will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace, Isaiah 9:6, who will reign in eternal and immaculate glory, Isaiah 9:7. The Messiah will be put to death for the sins of all peoples, Isaiah 52:13-53:12. He will bring salvation to the world by being gloriously resurrected so that all who believe in Him will be saved. At the appointed time of God’s own choosing, the Messiah will return to earth to rescue the faithful remnant and lead them to Zion where He will establish His kingdom. Israel will be seen by all peoples as the glory of the Lord. For specific Scriptural references, see Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 11:1-16; 25:6-9; 35:1-10; 40:9-11; 41:8-20; 42:1-13; 43:1-7; 44:1-8; 49:1-26; 51:11; 52:7-12; 54:1-17; 55:1-13; 56:1-12; 60:1-22; 61:1-11; 62:1-12; 63:1-6; 65:17-25; Hosea 5:15-6:3; Joel 3:9-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8; Obadiah vss. 17-21; Zechariah 12:1-14:21; Romans 11:25-27 and Revelation 20:1-6. (These are not an exhaustive list of Scriptural references).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 46:
46:1-7 The wantonness of worshipping idols
46:8-13 The wisdom of worshipping God
47:1-15 Proud and Arrogant Babylon will fall with none to save it
Thomas Constable provides a very brief introduction of chapter 47:

“The nation to be judged ch. 47

This section of Isaiah on "The Lord's redemption of His servant [Israel]" (44:23—47:15) has so far included: an announcement of redemption (44:23-28), the identification of the instrument of redemption—Cyrus (45:1-13), and a reminder of the uniqueness of the God of redemption (45:14—46:13). It now concludes, by depicting Babylon—the nation from which the Lord would redeem His people from captivity—as a proud woman full of self-confidence. In her case, as in so many others, pride goes before a fall. This section is another oracle against a foreign nation (cf. chs. 13—23; Jer. 46—51; Ezek. 25—31) and an oracle of salvation for Zion (cf. 45:14—46:13). The main point of this chapter is not primarily to predict Babylon's fall, however, but to glorify the power and grace of Yahweh, using the destruction of Babylon as a backdrop.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 227).

Many biblical scholars place the prophecy of Babylon’s demise in chapter 47 in the near future, about 539 B.C. which was approximately 170-180 years after Isaiah proclaimed the prophecy. A few scholars, while acknowledging that chapter 47 could loosely fit the conquest of Babylon under Cyrus in 539 B.C., see a far future fulfillment during the tribulation period. See commentary on Isaiah by David L. Cooper for Isaiah chapters 46-48. Gary V. Smith also has reservations about placing the setting for Isaiah’s prophecy in the 539 B.C. conquest of Babylon by the Medes-Persians under Cyrus. See Smith’s commentary on Isaiah for chapter 47 for a more detailed discussion.

Isaiah chapter 47 has a simple outline: 47:1-7: Babylon’s Ruling Leaders to be destroyed and 47:8-15: Babylon’s Religious Leaders to be destroyed. In this chapter Isaiah states that the virgin daughter of Babylon and the daughter of the Chaldeans are commanded to sit in the dust for their time of tenderness and delicateness is over, vs. 1. These women, (depicting the elite ruling class of Babylon) will be put to work grinding grain and they will be forced to wade through waters of rivers where their nakedness will be uncovered, and their shame will be exposed. The LORD will take vengeance upon them and He will not spare any of them, vss. 1-3. Isaiah reminds his audience that the LORD of hosts, the Holy One of Israel is their Redeemer, vs. 4. No longer will the “daughter of the Chaldeans,” (the kingdom of Babylon) be called “the Queen of Kingdoms,” vs. 5. God explains that He was angry with His people and gave them into the hands of the kingdom of Babylon, but they did not show mercy to God’s people, even to the elderly, vs. 6. The Babylonians claimed to be the Queen (of kingdoms) forever and did not consider the consequences of their treatment of God’s people, vs. 7. The Babylonians were full of pride and thought they would never experience their demise, described as never becoming a widow and never suffering the loss of children, vs. 8. Yet both of these calamities will come upon them “in a moment,” with full force. Their many sorceries and spells cast by their pagan religious leaders will not save them, vs. 9. Their trust in their wickedness and wisdom will be of no avail and evil will come upon them. Their charms (pagan spells) and money will not prevent the calamity coming upon them, of which they will be totally ignorant, vss. 10-11. God taunts them to stand firm in their trusting of their enchantments and sorceries and calls them to let their astrologers, star-gazers and monthly prognosticators stand up and save them from the things to come upon them (God’s judgment), vss. 12-13. Their pagan religious leaders will not save them, and the people and these leaders will both face the flames of God’s judgment. Everyone will wander off in confusion because no one can save them, vss. 14-15.

Some repetition of key words in chapter 47 help in the understanding of the theme of this prophetic message by Isaiah. For example, the word “sit,” the very common Hebrew word *yasab*, occurs in 47:1 (twice); 47:5; 47:8 (twice) and in 47:14. This word highlights that the once high and haughty Babylonians will be forced to “sit low,” even to the dust, 47:1, as an outcome of God’s judgement upon them. The short phrase, “come on you” occurs in the DASV, in 47:9 (twice); 47:11 (twice); and 47:13, emphasizing the things that will happen to them as God executes His judgment. See Gary V. Smith’s discussion of other repetitive words in chapter 47 in his commentary, that serve as useful markers of the cohesive message of God’s judgment upon the Babylonians.
47:1 Come down, and sit in the dust,
    O virgin daughter of Babylon;
sit on the ground without a throne,
    O daughter of the Chaldeans.
For you will no more be called tender and delicate.

As punishment for its mistreatment of the Jewish exiles, the Lord will bring judgment upon Babylon. The people of Babylon had become proud, arrogant and they had put their blind trust in the massive walls of the capital city to shield them from any harm. They had thought of themselves as above all other peoples and declared that they were the “Queen of Kingdoms,” 47:5; and even above God, 47:8. Their evil hubris had reached its end and God was about to bring them low, even to the dust of the earth. Sitting in the dust in the Scriptures represents mourning for loss of someone or something. Job’s “so-called” friends threw dust over their heads and sat down on the dusty ground next to Job and did not speak any words to Job for seven days and nights in a silent vigil of mourning, Job 2:12-13. The residents of Jerusalem would also be brought low to the dust as God’s judgment comes upon them, Isaiah 29:4. The far future depiction of the fall of Babylon includes the throwing of dust on the heads of those who mourn for Babylon, Revelation 18:19. The elite but very spoiled inhabitants of Babylon would not enjoy the benefits of being close to the throne and the soft and luxuriant life of the kingly court. They were to be put into hard, manual labor, working in the dust of the fields. They were called “virgin daughter of Babylon” because they had not tasted the scars of warfare within the city’s walls. They would be cast out of their comfortable homes, where they lived in luxury (tender and delicate) and would be forced to live as slaves.

47:2 Take the millstones,
    and grind grain;
remove your veil,
    strip off your robe;
uncover your legs,
    pass through the rivers.

The women (daughters) of Babylon, who had lived in luxury and self-exaltation will be forced to work as slaves grinding grain with millstones. They had been used to having meals prepared for them within the walls of the city and after its defeat, these women will know the hard and exhausting work of preparing meals for those who now rule over them. The reference to removing veils and robes and uncovering their legs is likely a necessity in their grain-grinding work and may also indicate that as slaves they were being deported to other countries where, during their journey, it was necessary to ford rivers. The daily tasks would also “grind” them down and remove any pride and arrogance they once exhibited in their previous life of luxury. Another possible meaning of the words, “pass through the rivers,” is that the women would have to ford a river or rivers to get to the fields where they would grind grain as slaves of a conquering nation.

47:3 Your nakedness will be uncovered,
    yes, your shame will be exposed.
I will take vengeance,
    and I will spare no one.

The Lord speaks indicating that it is His work of vengeance that has brought the women of Babylon to be put to shame for having their nakedness uncovered. This could be a scene of salves being forced to disrobe to perform their tasks or perhaps their disrobing was due to being ravished by conquering soldiers who often
forced themselves on the women of the city or nation that had been defeated. The word “vengeance” is the Hebrew word *naqam* (noun) which has the meaning of avenging for the wrongful actions of others. It is God’s righteous and “right” indignation to take vengeance upon those who have brought harm to His people or have sinned against Him. Isaiah often used *naqam* to describe the vengeance of the Lord. See Isaiah 34:8; 35:4; 47:3; 59:17; 61:2 and 63:4. See also Deuteronomy 32:35, 41; 43; Psalm 58:10; Ezekiel 24:8; 25:12, 15; and Micah 5:15. Earlier Isaiah had declared in 34:8, regarding the punishment of Edom, that, “For it is the day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.” (NKJV). When the Messiah returns to defeat His enemies, He will exclaim, as recorded in Isaiah 63:4, “For the day of vengeance was in my heart.” The righteous will rejoice when they see the vengeance of the Lord. An interesting parallel exists between the vengeance described in Isaiah 63:3-4 and Psalm 58:10-11.

Isaiah 63:3-4

3 I have stomped in the winepress alone;
   and none of the peoples joined with me.
   I stomped them in my anger,
   and trampled them in my wrath.
   Their juice splattered on my garments,
   and all my clothes are stained.
4 For the day of vengeance was in my heart,
   and the year of my redeemed has come.

Psalm 58:10-11

10 The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
   he will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.
11 So that people will say,
   "Surely, there is a reward for the righteous;
   surely there is a God that judges on earth."

The last phrase of Isaiah 47:3 is translated in the DASV as “I will spare no one.” Victor Buksbazen suggests an alternate translation:

“And will let no man intercede”
“Though the measure of Babylon’s wickedness is full to the brim, yet there is no man who is willing to intercede on her behalf, nor is the Lord willing to hear such intercession.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 373).

47:4 Our Redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name,
the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah, after declaring the words of God for the demise of proud Babylon, pauses to give an exclamation of the God who will make this happen. Isaiah calls God, “Our Redeemer,” The word “Redeemer” is the Hebrew, *ga’al*, which refers to Israel’s kinsmen (family) redeemer. It is the word for redeemer in Ruth 4:14 (DASV), “Praise the LORD, who has not left you this day without a family redeemer. May his name be famous in Israel.” Isaiah describes the Lord as Israel’s kinsmen Redeemer in 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16 and 63:16. See also Job 19:25; Psalm 19:14; 78:35; Proverbs 23:11 and Jeremiah 50:34.

Isaiah continues his declaration with, “the LORD of hosts is his name.” The word LORD is *Yahweh* which has the meaning of the One who is changeless and self-existent, Exodus 3:14, John 8:58, who is present with
His people as their covenant keeping God. The additive “of hosts,” Hebrew, *tsaba* in Isaiah 47:4, is also coupled with Yahweh in the Old Testament as the compound name, *Yahweh Sabaoth*, 1 Samuel 1:3; and 17:45. The word “hosts” refers to the Lord’s armies in heaven and when He deems necessary, human armies that are amassed to fulfill His plans.

Isaiah completes this brief exclamation with his often-used description of God as “the Holy One of Israel,” which occurs 25 times in Isaiah. See notes on Isaiah 1:4. This compound name for God reminds Isaiah’s audience and those who read his prophecy, that God is holy and has commanded His people to also be holy, Leviticus 11:44-45. The Apostle Peter would much later reference this command in Leviticus to exhort the Christian readers of his epistle to be holy, 1 Peter 1:15-16.

47:5 *Sit silent, and hide in the darkness,*  
*O daughter of the Chaldeans.*  
*For you will no longer be called*  
"The Queen of Kingdoms."

Isaiah, in 47:5, returns to the Lord’s declaration of judgment upon Babylon. Keeping with the theme of describing the Babylonians as a daughter, 47:1 (twice), Isaiah records God’s stinging words that Babylon, described as the “daughter of the Chaldeans,” would no longer be called, “the Queen of kingdoms” and a “Queen forever,” in 47:7, for she is commanded by God to sit in silence and to hide in darkness. Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 373, suggests that the reference to sitting in silence and darkness, in the Hebrew mind is associated with deep mourning. These descriptive words for Babylon begin to formulate the final statement of judgment by God on the far future kingdom of Babylon whose complete demise is described by the Apostle John in Revelation chapters 17 and 18. The verses that follow in Isaiah chapter 47 best fit the eschatological judgment upon Babylon just prior to the return of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The origin of the title for Babylon as the Queen of Kingdoms is not stated by Isaiah but it may have been a title assigned to Babylon by those nations that she had conquered and from who received tribute payment. See notes on 47:5 by Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, page 303.

47:6 *I was angry with my people,*  
*I defiled my inheritance,*  
*and gave them into your hand.*  
*You showed them no mercy;*  
*even on the elderly you laid your heavy yoke.*

The Lord explains, in 47:6, why His people had been taken captive by Babylon. It was not that Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and Judah because it was stronger than the LORD of hosts who was the Holy One of Israel. But it was that the people of God, His people and His inheritance were willingly given by God to the Babylonians as judgment upon His own people for God was angry with them for their continual rebellion against Him. God was the divine power behind the movement of the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem and Judah. They were not to think they had done this solely on their own but were instruments in the hand of God.

God had chosen Israel as his possession, (inheritance in the DASV). See Deuteronomy 4:20-21, 38; 1 Samuel 10:1; 1 Kings 8:51-53; Isaiah 19:25; Jeremiah 2:7; and 12:7-13. Even though the people of God were declared to be His heritage, they had repeatedly sinned against Him and rejected His repeated calls for their repentance and for them to return to Him. See Isaiah 6:10; and 44:22. Therefore, God explains in 47:6 that He has defiled or profaned, (Hebrew word *halal*), His inheritance (His possession) by allowing Babylon, a
pagan evil nation, to conquer His people and destroy the temple and the city of Jerusalem. However, Babylon had not treated God’s people with mercy and were particularly cruel on the elderly, upon whom they “laid your heavy yoke.”

47:7-9 You claimed, "I will be Queen forever."

So you did not think about these things in your heart,

nor did you reflect on the consequences.

8 Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures,

who sit securely,

who says in your heart,

'I am, and there is no one else besides me.

I will never sit as a widow,

nor will I experience the loss of children.'

9 But these two things will come on you in a moment

in one day:

the loss of children and widowhood.

They will come on you with full force,

in spite of your many sorceries,

and your numerous spells.

In their evil hubris, Babylon, who was given freedom by God to conquer His covenant people and destroy God’s beloved possession, claimed that she would be a Queen (of kingdoms) for all time. See also 47:5, and Revelation 18:7-8. God, knowing the intents of all hearts, even the prideful leaders of Babylon, brings an indictment against them. These leaders did not give any consideration for mercy to God’s people, nor did they think about (reflect on), what would be the consequences for their cruelty to their Jewish captives.

The leaders of Babylon had not considered the well-being of God’s people and did not extend any mercy to them, 47:6. They boasted that Babylon would be an eternal Queen of all nations, thereby ignoring God’s sovereign right to rule over His creation including the nations of the earth. God, therefore calls them to attention to hear his judgment, 47: 9. Prior to this statement of judgment, God brings another series of indictments against them, 47:8. God calls them lovers of pleasure, (sensual) who think they are sitting securely without concern for any outside influence. God states in 47:8, that they have said in their heart that “I am, and there is no one else besides me.” This is a most stunning insult to God. See also Isaiah 14:13-14. Assyria had made a similar claim, Zephaniah 2:15, as had the leader of Tyre, Ezekiel 28:2. It is evil enough for any nation to sit in false security and love pleasure far more than justice and mercy, Isaiah 47:6, but it is an entirely different matter for a nation’s leaders to avow that they are self-exalted above even God Himself. Only God could state with truthfulness that “I am Whom I am” Exodus 3:14. Isaiah had declared many statements of God’s uniqueness as the only God with no one equal to Him or like Him in any way, 44:8; 45:5, 6, 18, 22; and 46:9. See also Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 1 Samuel 2:2; and Joel 2:27. Any persons or nations that would exalt themselves above God are calling upon themselves God’s sure and swift judgment. God will not share His glory, praise or “worth” with anyone. Those who rebel against Him face wrath and scorn as Psalm 2 clearly indicates.

God also states, Isaiah 47:8, that the leaders of Babylon, who think of themselves as the eternal Queen of all nations, arrogantly claim that they will never be a widow or face the loss of children. By stating this, the leaders of Babylon boast that their kingdom is without any superior enemy and that they will continue forever in their sensual lifestyle without a thought of defeat or destruction. They forget to consider the God
who had called them into His service and used them as His instrument of judgment upon His covenant people. Now this proud and Godless instrument would face its own judgment.

God declares in 47:9, that these very things that the Babylonians had boasted about, never becoming a widow nor experiencing the loss of children, would come upon them in one day. In that day, they would be left as widows, without the strength of their husbands, the warriors and defenders of Babylon, and would also be left without children, those who would continue in their luxuriant lifestyle. God further states that even the sorceries and spells cast by their astrologers and sorcerers, will not save them. See also Daniel 1:20 and 2:2, and 27. The impotence of the astrologers and sorcerers are described further in Isaiah 47:10-15. The “day” that is referenced in 47:9, could not have been the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus as many commentators of Isaiah suggest. The armies of Cyrus were actually welcomed by the people of Babylon who were disillusioned by their pleasure-seeking leaders. A glimpse of the wantonness of these leaders is described in Daniel chapter 5. The sudden and complete fall of Babylon, prophesied in 47:9, is described in Revelation 18:1-8 which specifically mentions the claim of Babylon that she sits as a Queen who will not be a widow or will never see sorrow (mourning), which is predicted so accurately in Isaiah 47:7-8. David L. Cooper comments:

“...The complacency and sense of security of Babylon when she becomes mistress of the kingdoms of the world are set forth in these verses. She will feel that everything is in her own hands and that no calamity will ever overtake her. In other words, she will be embued with the idea that she is living in the era when there is a permanent peace, and that she is powerful enough to dominate the entire world. She will have no idea that any reverses or fortune can overtake her. Thus she will say, “I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children.” Nevertheless, the very thing which she says will never overtake her will come upon her suddenly—in a moment, in one day's time. That Babylon never did suffer such a fate as this is evident from her history. Though she was great and powerful in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, she had a gradual decline over a number of centuries and was in existence at the time when Peter wrote his epistles (I Pet. 5:13). Since no catastrophic judgment has ever overthrown her in the past and since the Word of God is infallibly inspired, we may be certain that she will rise again to the highest pinnacle of human power and authority and that suddenly, in a moment, on a given day this calamity here foretold will overtake her. When we read this prediction in the light of Revelation, chapter 18, we can understand our passage better. (One must not confound Revelation, chapter 17, with chapter 18. The former deals with the overthrow of Babylon the harlot—the ecclesiasticism of the end time—which occurs in the middle of the Tribulation, whereas chapter 18 foretells literal Babylon which will rise from the dust and be the dominating city of the world in the end time.)” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

47:10 For you have trusted in your wickedness;
you thought, 'No one can see me.'
Your wisdom and knowledge have misled you,
and you have said in your heart,
'I am, and there is no one else besides me.'

God further explains in Isaiah 47:10 why Babylon will face sudden and catastrophic destruction. Not only did the rulers of Babylon trust (feel secure) in their wickedness, but they also had exchanged their knowledge of God’s existence, Psalm 19:1-3 and Romans 1:18-32, for the wickedness of self-importance and self-exaltation. They were convinced in their evil hearts that there was “no one” who could look within their thick walls to witness their sinful rebellion against the God of the universe. They were proud of their so-called wisdom and knowledge gained by their astrologers and sorcerers. This pride led them to proclaim, as also recorded in 47:8, “I am and there is no one else besides me.” See notes on 47:8. Thomas Constable comments:
“Babylon felt secure in mistreating people because her great learning and wisdom in the magical arts had led her to conclude that she was superior and invulnerable. Knowledge puffs up, and one of the delusions it spawns is that people who know more are as morally and ethically responsible as everyone else, since they are not. A corollary is that if I can get away with something, it's all right. Such thinking forgets that there is a sovereign and righteous God in heaven to whom we are responsible.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 230).

47:11 Therefore evil will come on you; you will not know how to charm it away. 
Disaster will fall on you; you will not be able to get rid of it for a price. 
Calamity will come on you suddenly, which you know nothing about.

As in Isaiah 47:9, God in 47:11, declares judgment upon Babylon. Three descriptions of judgment are decreed by God. First, evil will come upon them. The Hebrew word for evil is raah which has the meaning of misery, distress and disaster. In Isaiah raah occurs in the DASV as “disaster” in 3:9; “evil” in 13:11; and “evil” in 57:1. This judgement of evil will not be “charmed away” by the sorcerers of Babylon. The word “charm” is the Hebrew word shahar which has the base meaning of dawn or morning. The KJV translates the first sentence of vs. 11 as “Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth.” The marginal note in the KJV has “its morning.” This Hebrew word shahar also occurs in Isaiah 8:20 translated as “dawn;” in 14:12 as “morning;” and in 58:8 as “dawn,” all DASV translations. In Amos 4:13 shahar is translated in the DASV as “dawn, “For, look here, he who forms the mountains, and creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to humans; who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the high places of the earth -- the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name.” So, the sense of the words “charm it away” in Isaiah 47:11 is that no spell or charm from any sorcerer of Babylon will be effective for evil (disaster) will come and no one in Babylon will know where it came from, like the dawn that rises in the morning.

Second, disaster will fall upon Babylon, Isaiah 47:11. The word “disaster” is the Hebrew word hovah with the meaning of ruin or disaster. It is translated as trouble in the NKJV and mischief in the KJV. It also is translated as “disaster” twice in the DASV in Ezekiel 7:26, “Disaster upon disaster will come.” Once this disaster comes, those in Babylon, “will not be able to get rid of it for a price.” The words “for a price” is the English translation of the Hebrew word kaphar which has the meaning of “to make atonement.” It also occurs in Isaiah in 6:7, translated as “and you sin forgiven;” in 22:14 translated as “this iniquity will not be forgiven;” in 27:9 translated as “Jacob’s iniquity will be forgiven;” and in 28:18 translated as “your covenant with death will be annulled,” all DASV translations. The NKJV translates this phrase in Isaiah 47:11 as: “You will not be able to put it off” with the marginal note “to cover it or atone for it.” There is no price or atonement available to the Babylonians that will remove or avert the disaster that is coming upon them.

Third, calamity will come suddenly upon the Babylonians, Isaiah 47:11. “Calamity” is the Hebrew word shoah which has the meaning of devastation, destruction, and waste. It occurs also in Isaiah 10:3 translated in the DASV as “devastation.” The Babylonians will have no prior knowledge, “which you know nothing about.” The calamity (devastation) that will come upon the Babylonians as judgement from God will be sudden and certain. There is no hope of atonement for their sins against God whom they had ignored and refused to acknowledge as the only unique and sovereign deity. Isaiah stated often that is no one or anything equal to God nor anyone or thing comparable to God, but the Babylonians thought they were exalted above Him. They were also judged by God for their cruel treatment of the God’s covenant people, 47:6.
47:12-13 Stand firm trusting your enchantments, and the multitude of your sorceries, in which you have labored from your youth.

Maybe you will succeed, maybe you will scare someone.

You are tired out from all the advice; let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save you from the things that will come on you.

The words of Isaiah 47:12-13 are a taunt from God for the Babylonians to trust in their sorcerers, astrologers and magicians who will keep on issuing sorceries and chants to disseminate wisdom and counsel. God was sarcastically prodding them to keep trusting in their source of wisdom and guidance because they have steadfastly refused to trust in God, who is the only one that can truly help and save them. The word “enchantments” in 47:12 is the Hebrew word *cheber*, which has the meaning of spell and also can be translated as company or association. The word also occurs in 47:9 above translated as spells. A related word, in both 47:9 and 12 is “sorceries” which is the Hebrew word *kesheph*, which has the meaning of sorceries. The KJV also translates *kesheph* in 47:9 and 12 as “sorceries” and as “witchcrafts” in the other occurrences in the Old Testament, 2 Kings 9:22; Micah 5:12 and Nahum 3:4. The Babylonians had “labored” in their spells and sorceries since their youth, which likely means from the beginning of Babylonian society. God taunts them to continue in these evil practices and sarcastically suggests that their spells may even succeed in their intent (be profitable) and may even cause other nations to be terrified of the magical arts of the Babylonians.

In 47:13, the first sentence can be understood as a question, “are you tired from all this advice?” God calls upon their astrologers and prognosticators, stargazers who predict the future, to arise and show they can actually do anything to save Babylon from its certain destruction. The astrologers and sorcerers of ancient Babylon kept their monthly astrological predictions, including the movement of the planets, in a series of clay tablets called the *Enuma Anu Enlil*. A modern equivalent would be the printing of horoscopes in daily newspapers. God’s taunt against the sorceries, enchantments and spells, is similar to His condemnation of idol worship which is one of the main themes of the writings of Isaiah. Whether one trusts in worthless idols or trusts in the enchantments of sorcerers, the result is the same. They cannot do anything to predict the future, provide counsel or save them from calamity. There is only one “Wonderful Counselor” Isaiah 9:6, “who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom.” Isaiah 28:29.

47:14-15 Look, they will be as stubble; the fire will burn them up.

They will not be able to save themselves from the heat of the flames.

It will not be a mere coal to warm by, or a bond fire to sit by.

Such will be those with whom you have labored, and have dealt with you since your youth.

They will wander off everyone in his own direction; there is no one who can save you.
Those who invoke spells and enchantments in Babylon will not be able to save themselves. Daniel 2:2, 10 describes them as “magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldean astrologers.” Their magic arts will be useless to save them from the fiery destruction that is to come upon them and all of Babylon. This is a reference to the final destruction of Babylon near the end of the Tribulation period as declared in Revelation 18:8. When the armies of Cyrus conquered Babylon is was for the most part a merciful conquest. There is no record of Babylon being burned by the Medio-Persian armies. The final destruction of Babylon in the future will completely and accurately fulfill the predictions of chapter 47 of Isaiah. The modern world is still fascinated with the occult and astrological predictions. They are as demonic now as they have been in the past and Christians need to keep well clear of their influence and trust only in the infallible Word of God as David L. Cooper advises:

“In verses 12-15 we see a very clear picture of the various methods of attempting to learn the future. The Babylonians, from the beginning of the ancient kingdom, believed in enchantments, sorceries, star-gazing, astrology, fortune-telling, and the like. This is clear from the tablets which have been unearthed in old Chaldea. These ancient methods of the occult world will be brought into full vogue and operation in the end time. The prophets, foretelling the complete and sudden overthrow of the Babylonians, challenged her to invite all her fortune-tellers, star-gazers, and prognosticators to reveal the future concerning her fate as he had done. The inference of the challenge is that they will not be able to give her any light as to the future. There is such a thing as fortune-telling, which is accomplished by the power of demons and Satan himself, but those who thus are in contact with the demon world are limited by the Lord Almighty and cannot reveal things as the Lord does. They are limited by the power of the Almighty. God has always hated every effort to unravel the future by fortune-tellers, astrologers, and the like. No Christian can afford to have any part or lot with anything that borders on the occult. If one wishes to know anything authoritatively, let him go to the sacred, holy, infallible Word of God and there see what the Lord has said. He has revealed the things which He wants us to know. If He has not spoken upon any subject, then we should not attempt to get information from any other source. "To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them" (Isa. 8:20).” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 47:

47:1-7  Babylon’s Ruling Leaders to be destroyed
47:8-15  Babylon’s Religious Leaders to be destroyed


Chapter 48 of Isaiah concludes the first of the three major sections of Isaiah 40-66. See introduction to chapters 40-48 for specific details regarding each major section, chapters 40-48; 49-57 and 58-66. Chapter 48 has two distinct parts. Verses 1-11 discuss the obstinacy, rebelliousness and treachery of God’s people who even though they called themselves after the holy city Jerusalem, they were far from God in their hearts and in their worship of Him. Verses 12-22 discuss the plea of God for His people to leave the influence of the Babylonians and God’s planned redemption of His people. Although many see only the return of the exiles from ancient Babylon in this chapter, it is best to understand it as a prophecy of a far future time, being the days at the end of the Tribulation period when Babylon will finally be destroyed as chapter 47 so clearly describes.

48:1-11: The Rebellion of God’s People

In Isaiah 48:1-11, the prophet records the words of the LORD, who calls upon the house of Jacob to hear His message. These are the people who are those called by the name of Israel, who were born from the loins of Judah and swear by His name, but they do this not in truth or in righteousness, vs. 1. God also states that these people call themselves after the holy city and they depend or lean on Him, the God of Israel whose
name is the LORD of hosts, vs. 2. God claims that He has from long ages ago predicted and proclaimed what would happen and His predictions have suddenly occurred for He has done them, vs. 3. God states that He knows the people are obstinate with their necks like iron and their foreheads like bronze, vs. 4. God had predicted events to them long ago, so they could not claim these events were commanded nor brought into being by their idols and carved images, vs. 5. God calls upon these people to acknowledge that He had predicted these things, vs. 6a. He will now show them new things which they had not previously known, vs. 6b. These things are occurring now, of which they had no prior knowledge, so they could not boast that they knew anything about them, vs. 7. Their ears were not open to these things for God knew how treacherously they would act and that from birth they were called a rebel, vs. 8. Yet for His own sake, God will defer His anger and for His praise, He will restrain His anger (wrath) upon them, so they would not be destroyed, vs. 9. God will, however refine them in the furnace of affliction for His own sake because He does not want His name to be profaned nor will He give His glory to another, vss. 10-11.

48:1-2 Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and born from the waters of Judah, who swear by the name of the LORD, and invoke the God of Israel, but not in truth or righteousness.

2 For they call themselves after the holy city, and depend on the God of Israel.

The LORD of hosts is his name.

God calls upon His people to “Hear this,” or “listen.” What God has to say is so vitally important. God repeats this call to hear Him several times in chapter 48. Each of the two main sections of chapter 48 begin with this call to hear Him, 48:1 and 48:12. Also, to emphasize how critical His message is to His people, God calls His people to “now look at all this,” 48:6; “look,” 48:7 and 10; “Assemble yourselves all you, and listen,” 48:14; “come near to me, listen to this,” 48:16; and “This is what the LORD says,” 48:17.

God describes His people with several descriptive terms that reveal their identity and their relationship with Him. The first descriptive term is “house of Jacob.” The name Jacob means “supplanter” or “following after.” See Genesis 25:19-34 for the context of the meaning of the name Jacob. This term, “house of Jacob,” first occurs in Genesis 46:27, which describes the total number of those from the line of Jacob at that time. It occurs frequently in Isaiah. See 2:5, 6; 8:17; 10:20; 14:1; 29:22; 46:3; 48:1; and 58:1. It also occurs in Exodus 19:3; Psalm 114:1; Jeremiah 2:4; 5:20; Ezekiel 20:5; Amos 3:13; 9:8; Obadiah vss. 17-18; Micah 2:7 and 3:9. It also occurs once in the New Testament in Luke 1:33 which has significance for the future of the house of Jacob, “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” The Messiah will forever rule over His elect and chosen people, who are called the “house of Jacob,” of whom He will not forsake nor abandon.

The second descriptive term is, “who are called by the name of Israel.” Often in Scripture, the names of Jacob and Israel are mentioned together. The origin of the name “Israel” is revealed in Genesis chapter 32. Jacob was returning to his homeland and was concerned about meeting his brother Esau. At Peniel (meaning the face of God), Jacob was met by an angel. See also Hosea 12:4. Jacob wrestled with this angel and prevailed over him and the angel gave Jacob a new name, Israel. Genesis 32:28 states, “Then he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.” See also Genesis 35:9-12. The name Israel means “ruling with God.” The significance of the name Israel is that it defines the relationship between God and His chosen people. They were to rule over the
inheritance God had given them. Israel, as a people, however chose to rebel against God and instead of fulfilling His purposes for them, they scorned their Creator and crafted and worshipped worthless idols. Isaiah in several sections of his prophecy, warns Israel against this vile practice and exhorts them to return to the Holy One of Israel.

The third descriptive term is, “born from the waters of Judah.” Other versions translate “waters” as line or loins, however the Hebrew word is mayim which literally means “water.” The use of the word water can be understood as the biological line of Judah “flowing” from the loins of the Judah. See also Numbers 24:7; Deuteronomy 33:28; and Psalm 68:26. It was Judah from whom the patriarch Jacob prophesized that the ruling scepter would never depart, Genesis 49:9-12. The name Judah means “praise.” The combination of the three names, Jacob, Israel and Judah indicate clearly that God is speaking to His chosen people whom He has make several covenants, in which they are to be God’s people and He is to be their God. God will redeem them. They are the praise of God, and He will give to them a permanent inheritance in the land which has for its capital city, the holy city, Jerusalem.

The fourth descriptive term for identifying this people is, “who swear by the name of the LORD.” The word “swear” is the Hebrew word shaba meaning to “swear” or “take an oath”. It also occurs in Isaiah in 14:24; 19:18; 45:23 (twice); 54:9; 62:8; and 65:16 (twice). The reference in Isaiah 48:1 to those who swear by the name of the LORD may stem from Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20. See also Psalm 63:11; 119:106; and 132:2. The point of this statement is that it specifically identifies those who are called Jacob and Israel and are from the line of Judah as those who would qualify as having sworn by the name of the Lord.

The fifth descriptive term for identifying this people is, “and invoke the God of Israel.” The word “invoke” is the Hebrew word zakar which has the primary meaning of “remember” and “mention.” It also occurs in the Old Testament in the sense of recalling or focusing the attention on what God has done on behalf of His people. The usage of zakar in Isaiah 48:1 likely has the meaning of “make mention of,” as is the translation in the KJV and the NKJV. Zakar also occurs in Isaiah (DASV) in 12:4 (proclaim); 17:10 (mindful); 19:17 (mention); 23:16 (remembered); 26:13 (remembrance); 36:3 (recorder); 22 (recorder); 38:3 (remember); 43:18 (remember), 25 (remember), 26 (remind); 44:21 (remember); 46:8 (remember), 46:9 (remember); 47:7 (reflect); 49:1 (mentioned); 54:4 (remember); 57:11 (remembered); 62:6 (remind); 63:7 (recall); 63:11 (remembered); 64:5 (remember), 64:9 (remember), 65:17 (remembered); and 66:3 (“burns” frankincense), (KJV margin note: “a memorial of”). As with all the other descriptions of these people, God is reminding them of their special relationship with Him and that God’s repeated call upon them to listen to Him is critical because of this unique relationship. The next phrase in Isaiah 48:1, however, is a stinging indictment of them.

The final phrase of Isaiah 48:1 is what God wants His unique covenant people to hear and take to heart. God indicts them by stating they have sworn by His name, and have invoked or made mention of His name, but they have done these things “not in truth or righteousness.” Although God has faithfully and righteously kept His covenants with them, they have been untruthful and evil in their relationship with Him. God knows and understands both the thoughts and utterances of his people along with their actions. No one can hide these things from God and He will not abide sinfulness and rebellion in anyway, whether it be by inward thoughts or outward deeds.

In Isaiah 48:2, God states that His people identify themselves with the holy city. The descriptive term “holy city” for Jerusalem is found a few times in the Scriptures, Nehemiah 11:1; 18; Isaiah 48:2; 58:1; Daniel 8:24; Matthew 4:5; 27:53; Revelation 11:2; 21:2, 10 and 22:19. It is perhaps surprising that it does not occur more often. The intent of God’s declaration that His obstinate people, 48:4, call themselves after the holy city seems to be that they identify more with the city of Jerusalem than with the God of the city. They had
thought that they were of a special status, protected from harm, because they were inhabitants of the city where God’s temple was located. God also, in 48:2, states that His people “depend on the God of Israel.” This dependence must be understood by the qualifying phrase in 48:1, “but not in truth or righteousness.” They swore by and mentioned His name in their religious ceremonies but in reality, God was only a token deity to them. God had previously spoke against their hypocrisy of honoring Him with their lips when their hearts where far from Him, Isaiah 29:13. They had also burdened Him with their sins and wearied Him with their iniquities but did not call upon Him, Isaiah 43:22-24. God, in the final phrase of 48:2, reminds them of His name. He is called by several names in the Scriptures. In Isaiah 48:2, He declares that one of His unique names is the LORD of hosts. God is Yahweh, the self-existent One, Exodus 3:13-14. He is also the Lord of armies who commands the hosts of heaven and earth to do His bidding and accomplish His purposes, Isaiah 5:25-30; 7:17-25; 46:10 and 48:14.

48:3 I have predicted things beforehand from long ago;
    yes, they went out of my mouth,
    and I proclaimed them.
    Suddenly I did them,
    and they came to pass.

God had previously mentioned “former things” in Isaiah 41:21-23; 42:9; 43:9, 16-17; 44:6-8; 45:18-25; and 46:8-13. In 48:3, God does not state a specific incident, but Isaiah’s audience may have remembered the exodus from Egypt in ancient times and the protection of God from the Assyrians in more recent times. God’s previous declaration, recorded in Isaiah 46:8-10 is worth comparing to His words in 48:3

8 Remember this and be assured;
   bring it again to mind, O rebels.
9 Remember the former things of old;
   for I am God, and there is no other;
   I am God, and there is no one like me.
10 I declare the end from the beginning,
    and from ancient times things that have not yet happened;
    saying, "My purpose will stand,
    and I will fulfill what I have planned."

(Isaiah 46:8-10)

As part of the message He wants His people to hear, 48:1, “Hear this.” God reminds them that only He can predict things that will accurately occur. He has done this in the distant past with the patriarchs of the Jewish nation. He was doing this during the days of Isaiah, Isaiah 46:11 and will do this in the future, Isaiah 62:1-12. God will allow no comparison with idols who cannot hear, act, speak or predict anything, nor will He share His glory with any other so-called god or with people or with anything created.

48:4-6a I know how obstinate you are;
    and your neck muscles are like iron,
    and your forehead like bronze.
5 Therefore I predicted it to you long ago;
    I announced it to you before it came to pass;
    so you could not say,
    'My idol did this,
    and my carved image,
and my metal idol commanded them.

6 You have heard my predictions; now look at all this. Will you not acknowledge it?

God fully knows that the people of Judah and Jerusalem had been and continue to be obstinate and rebellious. He had told Isaiah when He commissioned the prophet, as recorded in Isaiah 6:9-10:

9 He said, "Go, and tell this people: Keep on listening, but do not understand; keep on looking, but do not perceive.

10 Make the heart of this people insensitive, and make their ears deaf, and shut their eyes; so that they may not see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and repent and be healed."

Although God continued to remind His people of His protection, love and salvation that He offered to them, they refused to listen to Him. See also Isaiah 28:12; 30:9 and 66:4. In 48:4 God states, “I know how stubborn you are.” The word “you” in Isaiah 48:4 is singular and refers to the entire Jewish nation. The word “obstinate” is the Hebrew word qasheh, which has the meaning of hard, severe and stubborn. This word, which is translated in the KJV as “stiffnecked,” also occurs in Exodus 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deuteronomy 9:6; 13; and 31:27 It also occurs in Isaiah in the DASV translated as 14:3 (hard); 19:4 (fierce); 21:2 (harsh); 27:1 (terrible); and 27:8 (fierce). God declares that their foreheads are like bronze. Like Isaiah, the prophet Ezekiel was told to bring a message to the people of Israel, as recorded in Ezekiel 3:4-9:

4 Then he told me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and tell them my words. For you are not sent to a people of an unintelligible speech or a difficult language, but to the house of Israel – not to many peoples of an unintelligible speech or a difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you because they will not even listen to me. For the entire house of Israel is hard-headed and stubborn hearted. Look, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and made you as hard-headed as they are. I have made your head harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them, or terrified by their looks, for they are a rebellious house.”

The things God had predicted long ago, Isaiah 48:5, include the events of the exodus from Egypt and then onward up to the destruction of the Assyrian army as recorded in Isaiah 37:36. The reason God told them long ago things that would happen and then did happen just as God had declared, was so that His people could not say that their idols had commanded this. God was adamantly declaring that He alone is the only God who can declare the end from the beginning, Isaiah 46:10. Only God can do this, and He will not share His glory for His accomplishments with anyone or anything. In 48:6a, God announces to His people that they have heard His predictions and emphatically states, “now look at all this.” God calls His people to abrupt attention and then bluntly asks: “will you not acknowledge it?” The people of God need to answer Him. They must admit that they had knowledge of His accurate foresight and that He did predict things long ago that happened just as He declared. They must therefore acknowledge God’s greatness and His divine power to themselves and to the nations, so that first, no one could claim that their idols could hear, speak, act or
make any predictive declaration and so that second, and most important, God alone would be glorified in all the earth.

48: 6b-7 From now on I am showing you new things,
    hidden things which you have not previously known.
7 They are happening now, not in the past;
    before today you never heard of them;
so you cannot boast,
'Look, I knew them already.'

The statement by God in Isaiah 48:6b, “from now on I am showing you new things,” is in contrast with that of 48:3: “I have predicted things beforehand from long ago.” The things predicted from long ago were likely the promises made to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and major events such as the exodus from Egypt. The new things may refer to the role of Cyrus in releasing the exiles from Babylonian captivity and the ministry of God’s unique Servant, Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. These things had been hidden, Hebrew: nasar, which can also be translated as keep, guard or watch over. The word nasar also occurs in Isaiah in the DASV translated as, 1:8 (besieged); 26:3 (keep); 27:3(keeper and guard); 42:6 (protect); 49:6 (survivors - KJV marginal note: desolations); 49:8 (protect); and 65:4 (sit). In Isaiah 48:6b, the word “hidden” has the sense of things kept or protected by God until He is ready to reveal them. These things were being revealed now, Isaiah 48:7. They were not previously known to His covenant people and God kept these things from them, so they would not boast as if they had superior knowledge in themselves. These things were a new revelation to them of which they would have had no prior way of knowing about them nor would they have even conceived of them.

God states, in Isaiah 48:9 and 11, His deeper reason for making these new things known. It was not only because His covenant people were treacherous and rebellious, 48:8 and they would not have their ears open to understanding these things. However, it was for His own sake, so that His name would not be profaned and also so that His glory would not be given an any other (person or thing).

48:8 You never heard;
    yes, you never knew;
    yes, from long ago your ear was not opened to it;
for I knew that you would act treacherously,
    and that from birth you were called a rebel.

The surface reason God did not reveal these “new things,” 48:6b to His covenant people was because their ears were not ready to receive His truth. See also Isaiah 6:9-10, and that they were people who acted treacherously and were rebellious against God from their birth. Isaiah recorded this indictment at the beginning of his prophetic writings, 1:4:

O sinful nation,
    a people loaded down with iniquity,
an offspring of evildoers,
    children who act corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD;
    they have despised the Holy One of Israel;
    they have turned their backs on him.
The word “treacherously” is the Hebrew word bagad which has the meaning of traitor or deceitful. God’s people have acted treacherously, as rebellious traitors to Him. It also occurs in Isaiah in the DASV translated as 21:2 (treacherously); 24:16 (deceivers (twice) and deceitfully (twice) and 33:1 (traitor, betraying and betray). See also Psalm 25:3; 59:5; 78:57; Jeremiah 3:8, 11; 5:11; 9:2; 12:1, 6; Lamentations 1:2; Hosea 5:7, 6:7 and Malachi 2:10-16. The word “rebel” is the Hebrew word pasha which has the meaning of to rebel and to transgress. It also occurs in Isaiah in the DASV translated as 1:2 (rebelled); 1:28 (rebellious); 43:27 (rebelled); 46:8 (rebels); 53:12 (transgressors, transgressors); 59:13 (rebelling); and 66:24 (rebelled). Isaiah in 59:12-13, aptly explains how God’s people have acted treacherously and rebelliously against God:

12 For our transgressions are multiplied before you,
    and our sins testify against us.
Our transgressions are with us,
    and as for our iniquities,
    we are well aware of them:
13 rebelling and denying the LORD,
    turning away from following our God,
    talking about oppression and revolt,
    conceiving and uttering lies from the heart.

48:9-11 For my name's sake I will defer my anger,
    and for my praise I will restrain it for you,
    so that I do not destroy you.
10 Look, I have refined you, but not like silver;
    I chose to refine you in the furnace of affliction.
11 For my own sake,
    for my own sake, I will do it.
    For how can I allow my name to be profaned?
    My glory I will not give to another.

Beyond the surface reason, stated in 48:6b-8 for not revealing “new things” until now, 48:6b to His covenant people, God in 48:9-11, reveals His deeper meaning. First, God in 48:9, states He has deferred His anger against them due to their treachery and rebellion, for the sake of His name and second, He has restrained his anger so that He would not destroy them. God keeps His covenants with His chosen people. He has His name to defend. His name is to be glorified in all the earth. God’s actions for the glory of His name often include mercy and forgiveness of His people, 1 Chronicles 16:35; Psalm 79:9; 102:12-17; 106:44-47; and Isaiah 43:5-7. He jealously defends His great name and accomplishes marvelous things, including granting forgiveness and extending mercy, for the sake of His name, 2 Chronicles 6:32; Psalm 23:3; 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11; Ezekiel 20:9-44; 36:22-38; Daniel 9:19; and Romans 1:5. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 48:9:

“Even though Israel had been prone to idolatry (v. 5) and had been congenitally rebellious (v. 8), God had not cast her off. Why? He had made commitments to be gracious to Israel, and to honor Himself in His dealings with her, so that the rest of the world would trust Him. The fact that God did not abandon Israel when He could have done so justly manifested His grace.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 233).

The Lord in 48:10 declares that He has refined them, not like silver, but in the furnace of affliction. The reason for this refining was to purify them and change their stubbornness, rebellion and treachery into
compliancy, trust and obedience so that they would repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith. David L. Cooper suggests that this time of refining will be in the far future Tribulation period.

“Though Messiah does not cut off His beloved people because of their rejection of Him and His message, He holds on to them and will make them pass through the furnace of affliction and will refine them as silver is refined: "Behold, I have refined thee, but not as silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (vs. 10). In the past God has refined the nation, purging out the sinners and the wicked ones from her, but He has never subjected her to the-purging process similar, to that of refining silver. He does declare, however, that He will yet do this in future. The furnace of affliction, where she will be refined, is none other than the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), the time of Israel's affliction and trouble--the great Tribulation Period.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

In Isaiah 48:11, God re-emphasizes that He acts mercifully towards His covenant people for His own sake, so that His name will not be profaned (among the nations of the world) and also so that His glory will not be given to any other (person or thing). The prophet Ezekiel often declared God’s words regarding the profaning of God’s name among the nation by His covenant people. See Ezekiel 20:9,14, 22; 36:20-23 and 39:7.

48:12-22: The Redemption of God’s People

In Isaiah 48:12-22, the prophet records the words of God calling upon His covenant people to listen to Him. God’s covenant people are described as Jacob and Israel, God’s called ones. God describes Himself as I am, the first and the last, vs. 12. God reveals that it was He who laid the foundation of the earth and by His right hand, spread out the heavens. When God calls upon them, they stand up together, vs. 13. God calls His people, and perhaps all peoples, to assemble themselves and listen to Him. He asks who among them had predicted these things, specifically the one who is whom the LORD loves to perform the LORD’s pleasure on Babylon and the Chaldeans, vs. 14. God states that He has spoken and called and brought this one and his course of action will be successful, vs. 15. Another speaker now calls people to draw near and listen to Him. He states that from the beginning He had not spoken in secret and when predicted things occur, He is present when the occur. The speaker declares that the sovereign LORD had sent him along with his Spirit, vs. 16. The LORD, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel states that He is the LORD your God who teaches you what is good and leads you in the way you should go, vs. 17. God laments that if only they had obeyed His commandment, they their peace would have been like a river and their righteousness as the waves of the sea, and their descendants would have been like the sand and their name would not be cut off or destroyed before Him. vss. 18-19. God calls them to flee from the Chaldeans (Babylon) and to proclaim to the ends of the earth that the LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob, vs. 20. God’s people were not thirsty when He led them through the deserts for He caused water to flow out of the rock for them, vs. 21. In conclusion, God states that there is no peace for the wicked, vs. 22.

48:12-13 Listen to me, Jacob, and Israel, my called ones:
I am he;
I am the first,
and I am the last.

13 Yes, my hands laid the foundation of the earth,
and my right hand spread out the heavens;
when I call to them,
they stand up together.
The second major section of chapter 48:12-22 begins in a similar way to the beginning of the first section, 48:1-11. Isaiah 48:1 begins with “Hear this, O house of Jacob who are called by the name of Israel.” 48:12 begins with “Listen to me, Jacob and Israel, my called ones.” As with the first section, God punctuates the second with commands to listen to him, 48:12, 14, and 16. God again, as in 48:1, identifies His audience as those who are Jacob and Israel, thus indicating that it is His covenant people whom He wants to pay attention to His words for He has vitally important things to say to them. God’s statement in 48:12 is very similar to that of Isaiah 41:4:

Who has performed and done it,  
summoning each generation from the beginning?  
I, the LORD, am the first,  
and will be with the last of them, I am the one."

And Isaiah 44:6

This is what the LORD, the King of Israel, 
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts says,  
"I am the first,  
and I am the last;  
besides me there is no other God.

In 48:12, God first declares that Jacob and Israel are His called ones. They are not like any other nation for God had chosen them before they were even a family. He first called Abram to leave his father’s house and journey to a country where he would have to settle without deeded land rights. When God called Abram, He made promises and cut a covenant with him. The promises of the covenant are introduced in Genesis 12:1-3 and repeated in 17:1-21 with Abram, now Abraham, and with Isaac in Genesis 26:2-5 and with Jacob in Genesis 28:10-17. The covenant cut with Abram is recorded in Genesis 15:17-21 with the larger context including all of chapter 15. The lineage of Abraham flowed from the chosen son Isaac and then to Jacob and then to Jacob’s sons who would be the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. It was the patriarch Jacob, whom God changed his name to Israel, and from whom the entire race was named. God did not call this nation because their first fathers were outstanding in righteousness, for they were sinners just like all humans, nor because of the numbers of people included in this nation, for they were the smallest of nations. God called them because He loved them and chose them to be people for His own possession. See Deuteronomy 7:6-7.

Second, God declares three sets of “I am.” The first of these is that He is the unique, self-existing One, “I am He,” which should have reminded Isaiah’s audience of God’s self-identification to Moses, in Exodus 3:13-14 as Yahweh, “I AM.” The “I Am” statements in Isaiah include, 41:4, 10, 13; 42:6, 8; 43:3, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 25; 44:6; 45:5, 6, 7, 18, 22; 46:9; 48:12, 17; 49:23; 51:12, 15; 52:6; 58:9; and 65:5. The second of these three sets is God’s statement that, “I am the first,” which is coupled with the third set, “I am the last.” These statements that God is the first and the last describe His eternity. He existed before the heavens and the earth were created and He will continue to exist forever. He has no beginning and He has no end. He always existed. Revelation 1:17; 2:8 and 22:13 reveal that the One who is “the first and the last” is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ of whom, Isaiah has discussed as the Servant of God in 42:1-9 and will again declare more about this unique Servant in 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12.

These three sets of declarations of are in opposition to the idols, Isaiah 48:5, that His covenant people have formed and worshipped. The people of Israel, soon after being miraculously released from Egypt’s captivity, were quick to rebel against God and fashioned a golden calf to worship, Exodus chapter 32. Their idol worship continued from that day until the day of Isaiah and will continue up until the day the Messiah returns
to rescue them from their enemies and establish His millennial kingdom. Only those who faithfully trust in
the Lord for salvation will be citizens of the kingdom with the Messiah ruling them in righteousness. Those
who continue to worship worthless idols and fail to trust in the One true God, will never see this glorious
kingdom.

Third, in 48:13, God declares that He is the One who “laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand
spread out the heavens.” God, through the prophet Isaiah, often reminded His people of His creative acts,
Isaiah 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12. See also Psalm 24:2; 96:5; 102:25; and Hebrews 1:10-12. God reminds
them again that He had “spread out the heavens,” (or stretched out) as He had previously declared in Isaiah
40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; and would again in 51:13 God also stated that when He calls to them, they stand
up together, which is similar to His statement in Isaiah 40:22-26. The purpose of declaring to these creative
acts is to remind His people of His greatness and His worth so that they will trust Him completely and praise
and worship Him. This praise will continue in heaven as the Apostle John
witnessed, Revelation 4:11, “You
are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory, honor, and power; for you created all things, and
because of your will they exist and were created.” This praise will continue forever in heaven.

48:14-15 Assemble yourselves, all you, and listen.
Who among them has predicted these things?
He whom the LORD loves will perform his pleasure on Babylon,
and his arm will be against the Chaldeans.
15 I, even I, have spoken;
yes, I have called him.
I brought him,
and his course of action will be successful.

The Lord calls an assembly to listen to Him. Those called may have been all nations or just His covenant
people, compare Isaiah 48:1and 12. God asks a rhetorical question, “Who among them has predicted these
things?” The things predicted may refer to the new things, 48:6, or the predicted things of long ago, 48:3 and
5, or to God’s future actions against Babylon, 48:14. If the time of Isaiah’s message is approximately 720-
710 B.C, the future action against Babylon is about 180 -170 years in the future, as Babylon was captured by
Cyrus in 539 B.C. The point God is making, is that no one among His covenant people or among the nations
of the world could have or actually did, predict any previous things or any future things. God is again
reminding His audience that it is completely useless to trust in worthless idols who could create nothing or
predict anything. It is also an act of evil rebellion against God to trust something, such as a piece of wood,
and thus ascribe to it of more worth than God. God had just declared in 48:5, that the things predicted long
ago were announced to them, so they could not say their idols made a prediction or commanded predicted
things to happen.

Many scholars suggest that the latter part of Isaiah 48:14 and all of vs. 15 is God’s reference to Cyrus. For
example, Thomas Constable comments:

“48:14 The Israelites needed to listen because only the Lord could reveal what He would do. Specifically,
Yahweh revealed His love (choice, cf. Deut. 4:37; Mal. 1:2-3) of Cyrus, who would fulfill God's will on
Babylon by defeating the Chaldeans (cf. 44:28). The Israelites, in view of who their God is, should not resist
His choice of Cyrus or reject the revelation about him. The idols, "them," could not reveal this.

48:15 What God had decided and declared would stand. Cyrus would prosper in his assignment because God
had called him to do it. As surely as God had called the host of heaven (v. 13), Israel (v. 12), and Assyria (cf.
10:6), He had called Cyrus.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 234).
However, David L. Cooper, suggests an alternative viewpoint:

“Messiah then, in verse 14, calls for an ideal assembly of the peoples of earth and asks, "Who among them hath declared these things?" There is no one who can answer or take up the challenge thrown out by this question.

Continuing the Messiah declares, "He whom Jehovah loveth shall perform his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans." He is the one whom Jehovah in heaven loves. Thus He states that He will perform His pleasure on Babylon.

Verse 15 is somewhat difficult of interpretation: "I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him; I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous." Who is the speaker in this verse? Is it Messiah? If so, who is referred to by the pronouns he and him? The most probable interpretation of this difficult verse is the following: In the midst of Messiah's declaration regarding His performing the pleasure of the Almighty against the Chaldeans, God the Father speaks from heaven, showing His sanction and approval of all that Messiah does and says. Such a sudden and dramatic interruption in the speech may be illustrated by the baptismal scene of the Lord Jesus Christ. After Jesus was baptized and was coming up out of the water, the heavens were opened and a voice from God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (See Matt. 3:13-17.) Anyone can understand this dramatic interruption on the part of the Father. For one to understand that Isaiah 48:15 is a similar situation is to unlock the door to the prophecy. When Messiah speaks in the latter part of verse 14, stating that He has appeared to perform the Almighty's pleasure against the Babylonians, then the voice from heaven chimes in saying, "I, even I, have spoken ..." The I in this passage therefore is none other than God the Father, who assures the world that He has brought the Messiah forth and that He, Messiah, shall make His own way prosperous--under the blessing and guidance of God the Father.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

See also Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 327 and 328 for an excellent discussion on Isaiah 48:14b-15, regarding whom God is speaking about and its relevance.

48:16 Come near to me, listen to this. "From the beginning I have not spoken in secret; when it happens I am there.” So now the sovereign LORD has sent me, along with his Spirit.

There has been much debate among scholars and students of Scripture as to whom is speaking is Isaiah 48:16. This verse acts as a bridge between 48:12-15 and 17-22. It seems to be in place to both complete the message of previous verses and introduce the message that God is declaring at the end of chapter 48 which concludes the larger section of Isaiah chapters 40-48. As with previous verses, the speaker is calling His audience to come and listen to Him. But who is speaking? Some have suggested that it is the prophet Isaiah whom has been sent by the Lord, but Isaiah could not claim, in the context of chapter 48, of things predicted long ago that “when it happens I am there.” Nor could Isaiah claim to have been “from the beginning” if it is understood that the beginning in this context was the beginning mentioned in Genesis 1:1. Nor could the speaker be any other human, including Cyrus, for this reason. The speaker also was not the same as the One who had addressed His people from the beginning of chapter 48, because the speaker, in Isaiah 48:16 had been sent by the “sovereign LORD.” So, who is left to consider? The evidence must lead to the One who is the subject of the Isaiah’s prophecy which follows in just a few verses from 48:16. Isaiah 49:1-13 contains the second great “Servant Song.” See Isaiah 42:1-9 for the first Servant Song. The Servant is the Messiah who will come to fulfil God’s purposes to bring Jacob and Israel back to Him, 49:5. The Servant who is the
Messiah, therefore must be the One who is speaking in 48:16. He has been sent from the sovereign LORD and has been sent along with His Spirit. See also Isaiah 11: 1-2; 42:1 and 61:1.

If this identification is correct, as it must be for there is no viable alternative, then Isaiah 48:16 is one of the clearest affirmations of the Trinity in the Old Testament. The “Holy Spirit” is mentioned by name in Isaiah 63:10-11. Other references to the Spirit (selected verses only) occur in Genesis 1:2; Numbers chapter 11; 1 Samuel 11:6; 16:14; Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 11:1-5; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 59:21; 61:1; 63:14; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29; and Zechariah 4:6. References to the Son of God occur in Psalm 2 and Proverbs 30:4. See also Psalm 110:1. From the very beginning of the Scriptures, the divine trinitarian plurality of God is made clear in the plural name Elohim (God) in Genesis 1:1. As recorded in Genesis 1:26 God states “Let us make man in Our image.” See also Genesis 3:22 and 11:7.

48:17 This is what the LORD says,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
"I am the LORD your God,
who teaches you what is good,
who leads you in the way you should go.

Isaiah 48:17-22 concludes the significant section of Isaiah 40-48. God begins His concluding statements with the reminder that He is the LORD (Yahweh) who is the self-existing God who is to be known by this name, Exodus 3:13-14. Thus, He is the great “I AM” who alone is God for there is no other. See also Isaiah 26:13; 43:11; 44:8; 45:5, 6, 14; 45:21, 22; 46:9; and 64:4. God describes Himself as their “Redeemer,” (ga’al) with the rich meaning of their kinsmen or family savior. In Isaiah God is called their Redeemer in 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. In the Old Testament, see also, Ruth 4:14; Job 19:25; Psalm 19:14; 78:35; Proverbs 23:11; and Jeremiah 50:34. The Hebrew word ga’al also occurs in the Old Testament, in various English versions translated as, redeem, redeemed, redeems, ransomed, avenger, revenger, deliver, and kinsmen. The New Testament equivalent is Savior which identifies the Messiah as the One who is the “family redeemer” to the people of God and to all others who call upon Him for salvation. The next name for God in 48:17 is “the Holy One of Israel.” This name for God identifies the LORD as being holy in His being. The covenant people, Israel are to look upon Him primarily as holy and He because He is holy, he demands that they also be holy, Leviticus 19:2. See also 1 Peter 1:16. When Isaiah first saw the Lord, the Seraphim declared “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts,” Isaiah 6:3. See also Revelation 4:8. The name the Holy One of Israel occurs often in Isaiah as a reminder that the God of Israel is to be revered as holy. See Isaiah 1:4; 5:9, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9; and 14. Other occurrences in the Old Testament are 2 kings 19:22; Psalm 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; and Jeremiah 51:5.

The Lord reminds His covenant people in 48:17 that He is the One “who teaches you what is good, who leads you in the way you should go.” The role of God as teacher is one that the people of Israel often forgot. They did not look to the written Word of God for instruction and they ignored God repeated attempts to instruct them to trust in Him for guidance and salvation. Isaiah also mentions this teaching role of God in 2:3; 28:9, 26; and 30:20. In the glorious days of the millennial kingdom, the Messiah will teach His people, instructing them so that they will walk in His paths, Isaiah 2:2-5:

2 In the latter days,
the mountain of the LORD’s house will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will flow unto it.
Many peoples will come and say,  
"Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us of his ways,  
and we will walk in his paths."
For out of Zion the law will go forth,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
He will judge between the nations,  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not lift up sword against nation;  
they will not train for war anymore.  
O house of Jacob, come,  
let us walk in the light of the LORD.  
(Isaiah 2:2-5)

48:18-19 O that you had obeyed my commandments!  
Then your peace would have been like a river,  
and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.  
Your descendants would have been like the sand,  
and your offspring like grains of sand.  
Their name would not be cut off  
or destroyed from before me."

The Lord had started this final section of Chapters 40-48 with the self-identification of Israel’s Redeemer who is their Holy One, the “Lord your God,” 48:17, who teaches them and leads them in the way they should go. At the beginning of 48:18, the Lord laments, “O that you had obeyed my commandments!” This lament is not only for the failure of God’s covenant people to obey just the commandments He gave Moses on Mount Sinai but for all God’s commands to them since the exodus from Egypt to the time of Isaiah. If they had obeyed God, they would have enjoyed peace that “would have been like a river,” and would have exhibited “righteousness as the waves of the sea.” They would have fulfilled God’s purposes for them including the present enjoyment of God’s covenant promises to Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-21; 26:2-5; and 28:10-17. God’s lament that if they had obeyed Him, Israel’s descendants would have been so numerous no one could count them, “like grains of sand.” God had told Abraham, in Genesis 22:17, “I will surely bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will possess the gate of their enemies.” See also Genesis 28:14; 32:12, 1 Kings 4:20; Jeremiah 33:22; Hosea 1:10 and Hebrews 11:12. The Lord stated earlier in Isaiah 10:22, that “For though your people, Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will return.” See also Romans 9:27. By disobeying God, His people would suffer loss in great numbers, in the generation of Isaiah’s time, but as other Scriptures confirm they would still fulfill this promise in a future day. The promise of numerous people, however, would not result in eternal life for all of them as confirmed by Isaiah 10:22 and Romans 9:27. God would keep to Himself a remnant who will be faithful to Him. See comments on the “remnant” in the notes for Isaiah 10:20-22; 11:11-16; 28:5; 37:31-32 and 46:3-4.

God’s continues His lament, 48:19, by stating that if His people had obeyed Him, “their name would not be cut off or destroyed from before me.” This is a statement of God’s judgment on His people which was
evidenced when the people of Judah and Jerusalem were exiled to Babylon and Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and centuries later when the Israelites were conquered by the Romans with thousands killed and Jerusalem and its temple again destroyed and will happen in the far future when the armies of Antichrist wreak their destruction upon Jerusalem, Zechariah 14:1-2. This does not mean that God’s covenant with Abraham will be annulled for it is an irrevocable covenant that God will keep for the sake of His glorious name. The people of God’s temporal blessings within the covenant will however be removed due to their disobedience and rebellion against God. As the above referenced verses indicate, there will be a remnant of God’s people that will enjoy the full benefits of His covenant with them.

48:20-21 Leave Babylon, 
  flee from the Chaldeans. 
  Announce it with a shout for joy, 
  proclaim it to the ends of the earth. 
  Say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob." 
21 They were not thirsty when he led them through the deserts; he caused waters to flow out of the rock for them; he even split the rock and water gushed out.

To Isaiah’s audience in approximately 720-710 B.C., this message would have seemed confusing unless they had been perceptive enough to connect all that Isaiah had previously declared about the role of Babylon in the future. It is unlikely they would have understood the importance of this call from God as God had previously called them blind and deaf, Isaiah 42:18-19 and 43:8. Although many see the command from God to leave Babylon and flee from the Chaldeans as only relating to the end of the exile in ancient Babylon, a few understand that there is a far future prophecy which will be fulfilled at the end of the great Tribulation. For example, David L. Cooper comments:

“Messiah sees Babylon standing as the world metropolis in the end time. At that season many Jews will be residing in this commercial center. He sends His message to them to leave the doomed city, obeying the following injunction "... with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth: say ye, Jehovah hath redeemed his servant Jacob" (vs. 20). Thus the Jews of Babylon are, summoned to leave it and to tell their brethren as well as the world that the time has come for Jehovah to redeem His servant Jacob, the Jews.

According to verse 21, the Lord will provide streams in the desert (literally) for His fleeing people who start their long trek back to the land of their fathers.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – August 1945).

The reference in Isaiah 48:21, is most certainly a reminder that when the Israelites were rescued from captivity in ancient Egypt and travelled through the wilderness and deserts of Sinai, God look after His people by supplying water for them. In one instance God caused water to flow from a rock that had been split open, Exodus 17:6. God promises to also be with His covenant people when they flee the wicked environment of Babylon. God will make provision for them to meet their needs as they obey Him and return to “Immanuel’s land”, the promised land, where their Messiah will one day rule them in peace and righteousness. But not all will return, and they will not enjoy peace as the next verse emphatically declares.

48:22 "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

For those who remain in Babylon and do not return to Jerusalem, they will suffer the same punishment as the wicked Babylonians. They will have no peace, either temporarily on the earth or eternally. The wicked will
suffer the consequences of their evil hearts and rebellion against God. Unfortunately, many Jews decided to remain in Babylon after the decree of Cyrus to release them. They did not return to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its temple. Those who remained in Babylon were counted among the wicked who would suffer the immediate consequences of being conquered, Isaiah 47:1-3, and the eternal consequences of God’s judgment for their wickedness. The same destiny will meet those in the far future tribulation period for those who refuse to leave the evil influences of Babylon, for they will face the full wrath of God when the future Babylon is destroyed.

This timeless phrase, “There is no peace for the wicked,” applies to all peoples of all time and aptly concludes God’s call for obedience to His covenant people and to the peoples of the earth as recorded in the great section of Isaiah, chapters 40-48. This phrase also concludes the following great section of Isaiah, chapters 49-57 and acts as a divine warning, separating the latter half of Isaiah, chapters 40-66 into three equal nine-chapter sections. See introduction to chapters 40-48 for a brief explanation of each of these three major sections.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 48:

48:1-11 The Rebellion of God’s People
48:12-22 The Redemption of God’s People
Introduction to Isaiah Chapters 49-57

Within the Old Testament as a whole and within the Book of Isaiah and specifically within chapters 40-66, chapters 49-57 stand out as the pinnacle of the salvation message of the Lord. Three of the four Servant Songs of Isaiah are found in these chapters: 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. These Servant Songs reveal the Success of the Servant, 49:1-13; the Submission of the Servant, 50:4-11; and the Suffering of the Servant, 52:13-53:12. The overarching theme of the Servant Songs in these chapters is salvation. In the opening Servant Song of these chapters, the Servant proclaims the purpose of God for Him as recorded in 49:6b:

“I will also make you a light to the nations,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

In the middle Servant Song, the Servant exhorts his audience, as recorded in 50:10b:

“Let them trust in the name of the LORD,
and rely upon his God.”

In the final Servant Song, the prophet Isaiah describes the suffering of the Servant endured that resulted in the sins of the world being placed upon Him, as recorded in Isaiah 53:4-6:

4 Surely he has borne our griefs,
   and carried our sorrows;
   yet we thought he was being punished,
   smitten by God and afflicted.
5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,
   he was crushed for our iniquities;
   the punishment that made us whole was upon him,
   and by his stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
   we have turned everyone to his own way;
   and the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all.”

These Servant Songs also reveal a wealth of detail about the Servant’s commissioning, ministry, rejection by His own people of His mission and message, suffering and ultimate success. There is enough detail within these passages to identify the Servant. There is no doubt about the identity as the New Testament reveals. However, many liberal and non-Christian scholars including Jewish rabbincal teachers choose to ignore the obvious truth and posit that the Servant could be the nation of Israel, the prophet Isaiah, the coming King Cyrus, or any other person or people except what is made plain in the Scriptures. The Servant is an individual who brings salvation to the ends of the earth and who has the sins of the world’s people laid upon Him, so that all people, through faith in Him, would be spiritually healed, which is to be saved from their sins. Students of Scripture will readily acknowledge that this Servant is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ whom Isaiah had revealed regarding (selected only, not an exhaustive listing): His virgin birth, 7:14; His anointing by the Holy Spirit, 11:1-2; His ministry during His first coming, 61:1-2a; His atoning death for the sins of the world, 52:13-53:12; His second coming as a victorious warrior, 63:1-6; His future messianic kingdom, 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 25:6-9; 35:1-10 and chapters 60-66; and His glorious names which describe His majesty and role, 4:2;
7:14; and 9:6-7. See also, John MacArthur, NASB Study Bible, page 1032 for a chart of the content of Isaiah regarding the millennial kingdom of the Messiah.

Gary V. Smith has recognized a pattern within the scope of the Servant Songs in chapters 49-57 which comprises of the details of the three Servant Songs which are each followed by a message of Salvation for Zion. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 337. The details of chapters 49-57 can be readily understood by the following suggested outline.

B: Israel’s Redemption Through the Suffering Servant: Chapters 49-57

2. God Promises Blessings to Zion: 49:14-26
4. God’s Comfort for His People: 51:1-23
5. God Promises Good News to His People: 52:1-12
7. God’s Everlasting Compassion for His People: 54:1-17
8. God calls His People to Seek Him: 55:1-13
9. God’s Promises of Salvation and Blessings to His People and Others: 56:1-8


The major aspects of the Second Servant Song:

- God has called His Servant from before His birth. (vss.1, 5)
- God has empowered His Servant for the ministry intended for Him. (vs. 2)
- God has called Him “His Servant.” (vs. 3)
- God will ensure the success of the Servant even though the Servant views His ministry as a failure. (vs.4)
- God will honor His Servant. (vs. 5)
- God has given the Servant the task of restoring the survivors of Israel. (vs. 6)
- God has called the Servant to be a light to the nations that He may bring God’s salvation to the ends of the earth. (vs. 6)
- The Servant who will be despised and abhorred by His own people and the nations, will be praised by kings and princes of the earth. (vs. 7)
- The Servant will be given as a covenant for His people to restore the land for the inhabitation of His people. (vs. 8)
- The Servant will be used by God to be a comfort for His people upon whom He has compassion. (vss. 9-13).

1.a: The Commissioning of the Servant: Verses 1-7

49:1 Listen to me, O coastlands,
and pay attention, O distant nations;
the LORD has called me from the womb;
from the belly of my mother he has mentioned my name.

As with previous messages, the Lord calls upon the nations to listen to Him. See Isaiah 41:1; 44:1; 46:3, 12; 48:1, 12, 14 and 16. In 49:1, it is the Servant who addresses the nations described as coastlands and distant nations. From the very beginning of the second Servant Song, it is evident that the speaker assumes the authority of God. No human would have the right of world supremacy to make such a demand, no matter
how self-important or powerful they imagined they had become. No human ruler has yet, until the very short rule of Antichrist during the great Tribulation, commanded the attention of all peoples of the earth.

The first aspect of the second Servant Song is that the Servant was called by the LORD from the womb of His mother. David L. Cooper comments:

“Messiah, in beginning His message, calls upon the isles, the peoples of earth, to listen and to hearken to Him, declaring that the Lord Jehovah had called Him "from the womb; from the bowels of my mother” had He made mention of His name. An examination of messianic prophecy reveals that, whenever any mention is made of the Messiah's parentage, only the mother is spoken of. This fact in and of itself does not prove the virgin birth of Messiah; nevertheless it is in perfect alignment with the prediction of His unique entrance into the world. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Scripture always harmonizes. Thus Isaiah 49:1 perfectly dovetails into the prediction regarding the virgin birth.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – September 1945).

A collaborating passage is found in Psalm 22, which is a prophecy of the suffering of the Messiah on the cross. In Psalm 22:9-10, the Messiah declares:

9 Yet you are the one who brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust when I was at my mother's breasts.
10 I was cast on you from birth;
you have been my God since my mother bore me.

Not only did the Messiah claim that the LORD had called Him from the womb but from this place the LORD mentioned His name. This name, Immanuel, was first prophesized in Isaiah 7:14 and fulfilled with exact accuracy while Mary was pregnant with Jesus as recorded in Matthew 1:18-25. This display of the omniscience of God in knowing all things even before they occur is also evident in the calling of the prophet Jeremiah as God reveals, in 1:4-5 of Jeremiah’s prophecy:

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,
5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
    before you came out of the womb I consecrated you;
    I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

The Apostle Paul also made a similar declaration in Galatians 1:15-16a (NKJV):

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.”

49:2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword;
he hid me in the shadow of his hand.
    He made me a polished arrow;
    he has tucked me away in his quiver.

The second aspect of the Servant Song is that God has empowered His Servant for the ministry intended for Him. His mouth was made by the LORD to be like a sharp sword, the first metaphor of 49:2 and He was made to be like a polished arrow, the third metaphor of 49:2. Some scholars liken these metaphors of a sharp
sword and polished arrow to the powerful words the Servant will speak from His mouth. Victor Buksbazen for example comments:

“The LORD has called His servant from his mother’s womb and has given a message, which is a sharp as a sword or a polished shaft (v. 2), designed to penetrate and overcome the flinty hearts and stubborn minds of men.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 380).

John A. Martin adds:

“The Servant’s ministry to the Gentiles (49:1-6). 49:1-3. God’s Servant (vv. 3, 5-6) is the speaker in verses 1-5; God addressed Him in verse 6. Like the LORD, He called on the islands and the nations to listen to Him because of His special “calling” from the Lord. His mouth was like a sharpened sword, that is, it was a weapon to destroy the disobedient (cf. 1:20; also note Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 19:15). He was also likened to a sharp arrow. The Servant was to display God’s splendor (Isa. 49:3; cf. 60:21; 61:3).” (John A. Martin, Isaiah, page 1103, © 1985 John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament is published by David C Cook. All rights reserved).

Other scholars, however, understand the sharp sword and polished arrow to be references to the second coming of the Messiah when he will return to the earth at the end of the Tribulation period as a conquering warrior. See Revelation 1:16; 19:15. David L. Cooper, again comments:

“In verse 2 the Messiah declares that the Lord has made His mouth like a sharp sword, that He has hidden Him in His hand, that He has hidden Him a polished shaft; and that He has kept Him in His quiver. These words must be taken seriously. They stand for reality and are by no means draperies to adorn the prophecy. In the first place Messiah declares that God has made His mouth like a sharp sword. What does this signify? Does it refer to the message of grace and truth which He, when He appears upon the historic scene, proclaims to the meek and lowly? Instantly one replies with a most emphatic negative. The gospel message is an expression of kindness, grace, love, mercy. Thus in no wise could we interpret it as a reference to the ministry of the Lord at His first coming. Could it refer to what He will accomplish at His return? As we learn from parallel passages, we know that the Lord will return in wrath and indignation. At that time He "... will go forth as a mighty man [a man of war]; he will stir up his zeal like a man of war: he will cry, yea; he will shout aloud; he will do mightily against his enemies" (Isa. 42:13). In this quotation appears a prediction that the Messiah, when He returns at the end of the Tribulation, will come as a mighty warrior with the battle cry of vengeance against His enemies, whom He will slay as He purges the world of all wickedness and sin. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that in 49:2 Messiah asserts that God has made Him "a polished shaft," an arrow which He has hid--during the present dispensation--in the shadow of His hand and in His quiver. Messiah is God's polished shaft and His arrow which He at that time shoots, at the wicked world. Of course this is a figurative expression which is perfectly clear to all.

When Messiah is upon earth the first time, He delivers a great message of grace and truth to the people. After His rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection, He ascends to the right hand of God and is invisible from then and onward so far as the world is concerned. In the language of our passage He, the polished shaft, the arrow, has been hidden in the shadow of God's hand or placed in the quiver. The facts thus stated are apparent to anyone who will study this passage in the light of those which give the whole redemptive career of King Messiah, which consists of the two comings, separated by the period during which He is at the right hand of the throne of God. For instance, see Psalm 110.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – September 1945).

The declaration that God has hidden the Servant in the shadow of His hand, and tucked Him away in His quiver, the second and fourth metaphors of 49:2 could, therefore in light of the comments by David L. Cooper, be a prophecy that corresponds to the words of Jesus Christ the Messiah as recorded in Mark 13:28-32 which state that no one knows, except the Father when Christ will return. The hiding of the Servant in the
shadow of the LORD’s hand and in His quiver, is currently happening in the realm of heaven and will last as long as the Messiah is sitting at the right hand of the Father, advocating on behalf of those who have faith in Him. But, the seating of the Messiah on His Father’s throne will have its time of completion and at the command of the Father, the Servant, who is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will return to earth as a victorious warrior to conquer His enemies and to establish His messianic kingdom and to sit upon the throne of David upon Mount Zion. Refer to J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* for an extended discussion.

49:3 *He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, through whom I will be glorified."*

The third aspect of the Servant Song is that God has said to Him that He is God’s servant. Following the comma, after the word Servant, as is the case in the major formal equivalence translations (but of course not in the original Hebrew text where there is no punctuation marks) the verse continues as Israel through whom I will be glorified. This interpretation of this verse has led to much debate. First, some conclude that the Servant is called Israel and therefore the Servant must refer to the nation of Israel. A second viewpoint is provided by Gary V. Smith who suggests that there are two distinct clauses, the first being that the person identified as “me” is called God’s servant and the second being that God will be glorified in Israel. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 345-346. A third understanding is that the Servant is the “ideal Israel” because the nation of Israel has failed to fulfill its role and purpose to be a light to the nations. For example, Thomas Constable suggests:

‘Yahweh called His Servant "Israel." Israel would indeed prove to be an instrument of God by which He demonstrated His glory, but in the context, the Servant appears to be an individual. Messiah was "Israel," in that, He was the personal embodiment of the *ideal Israel*, what the nation should have been but never attained. Furthermore, He was the "Prince with God," which neither the nation nor its namesake ever fully became.

When God referred to His Servant as Israel, He was referring to the Servant's *function*, not His identity. Throughout this book we have seen that the nation Israel was not able to carry out her function of being "a light to the nations," because she was blind, deaf, and rebellious. God would provide an individual to do what the nation had failed to do.

This description eliminates Isaiah or any other simply human prophet as the possible Servant in view (cf. vv. 5-6).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 238-239).

Of the three suggested interpretations of the Servants title in 49:3, the first viewpoint that the Servant is literally the nation of Israel is not viable for the Servant in the context of chapter 49:1-13 is positively identified as an individual who is born from a mother’s womb, 49:1, who has the calling of God to bring Jacob back to Him and regather Israel to Him. Therefore, Israel as the nation 49:3, could not bring itself back nor gather itself, let alone bring salvation to the ends of the earth, 49:6 which Israel had failed to accomplish. This role is given to an individual, the promised Messiah, who would be born of a virgin, Isaiah 7:14, to accomplish. Regarding the other two viewpoints, the second has some has some positive elements but the suggestion that God will be glorified “in” Israel is a weak and unprecise statement. It is better to state that God will reveal His glory in Israel as recorded in Isaiah 44:23. The preferred understanding is the third which identifies the Servant as the “ideal Israel” for God reveals His glory in Israel through the Servant who is the Messiah. The people of Israel were the rebellious, deaf and blind servant of God who failed to bring glory to God. God’s glory was and is and will forever be most brilliantly displayed and most exalted and has the greatest weight or worth through the life and ministry of the Messiah, who is the Servant revealed in Isaiah 49:1-13. Perhaps the most passionate understanding of the glory of God in Christ as stated in the Scriptures, is described in the literary works of John Piper, who weaves Christ’s glory, and how it relates to the Father and the Holy Spirit, through the fabric of his collective writings.
49:4 But I said, "I have labored in vain;  
I have spent my strength for nothing, only futility.  
yet surely the justice due me is with the LORD,  
and my reward is with my God."

The fourth aspect of the second Servant Song is that God will ensure the Servant’s success even though the Servant views His ministry as a failure. The seemingly enigmatic first sentence in Isaiah 49:4 must be understood within the context of the life and ministry of the Servant, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. How would the Messiah understand that His work (labored, spent my strength), was in vain and only futility? In John, 1:10-11, the Apostle stated regarding Christ that, “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came unto his own things, and even his own people did not receive him.” Jesus would later lament over Jerusalem as recorded in Matthew 23:37-39, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kills the prophets, and stone the ones who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not! 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I say to you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'” Following three and one-half years of ministry to His own nation, the religious leaders and many Israelites rejected the Messiah and demanded that He be put to death, Matthew 27:22-26. The people who screamed for the Messiah to be crucified, responded to the doubts of Pilate. They loudly avowed the most remarkable statement recorded in Matthew 27:25 (NASB), “His blood shall be on us and on our children!” Those to whom Jesus came to rescue and bring peace and salvation, rejected Him and demanded that He be put to death. They did this with the chilling attestation, that even the blood of their Messiah would be held to their account and to the account of their children. From these occurrences in the life of the Messiah during His first advent, it is understandable that in the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 49:4, the Messiah, the Servant of God would perceive His earthly ministry to His own people as a work of futility. But, the Servant does not leave the summation or value of His ministry with those who rejected Him. The next word, “yet” leads to a deeper understanding of the total effectiveness of His ministry.

The fifth aspect of this Servant Song is that God will honor the Servant. This is revealed in 49:4, “Yet surely the justice due me is with the LORD” and in 49:5, “for I will be honored in the eyes of the LORD, my God is my strength.” The Servant, after reflecting prophetically upon the rejection of the Israelites of His ministry and Himself, understood that there was something behind His ministry to His people that was much deeper in meaning and ultimately eternally rewarding for Him. From the perspective of human reasoning, it was His own people who punctuated their hatred of Him by having Him put to death. But from the profound deepness of divine reasoning, His rejection and brutal death was all in accordance with the good pleasure of God as Isaiah would later explain as recorded in 53:4-10. The Servant, Jesus willingly suffered the rejection of Himself and His ministry, and He willingly suffered the most humiliating and painful beating and mocking by others and then willingly suffered an horrendous death for the reason recorded by the author of Hebrews in 12:2, that it was Jesus, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The Servant Messiah, before He came to the earth, knew that the righteous justice of God was due Him and that God would reward Him. This reward was the joy that awaited Him upon His return to heaven where He would be received with honor and exaltation by God. The Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:8-11 refers to this joy, honor and exaltation, “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross. 9 Consequently God highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
49:5-6 And now the LORD speaks
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
that Israel might be regathered to him
for I will be honored in the eyes of the LORD,
my God is my strength.

6 He said, "It is too insignificant that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob,
and to restore the survivors of Israel.
I will also make you a light to the nations,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

The sixth aspect of the second Servant Song is that God has given to the Servant the multi-faceted task of bringing Jacob back to God, to regather Israel to the LORD, 49:5 to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel, 49:6. The Servant declares in 49:5, that “now the LORD speaks.” The words that the LORD (Yahweh) speaks is recorded in 49:6-13 but in 49:1-6, it is the Servant Himself who is prophetically speaking about His future ministry. In 49:5, the Messiah identifies Himself as the LORD’s servant whom the LORD had formed in the womb. This is a further confirmation that the Servant is an individual and cannot be the nation of Israel. See also 49:1 for the declaration that the Servant was an individual who was called by name by God while the Servant was yet in the womb.

It is revealed in 49:5-6 that this individual, the Messiah, came to be born into the world was to be God’s Servant with the diverse tasks to bring Jacob and Israel back to God, to regather Israel to the LORD, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the survivors of Israel. One of the significant themes of Isaiah is that the covenant people of God had rebelled against and rejected the Holy One of Israel, their Creator and Redeemer. They had crafted and worshipped worthless idols instead of admitting that they themselves had been created for the glory of God and that they were to abandon their love for all other persons or things and worship only the One true God. Isaiah was confronted with the rebellion of his own people when he was commissioned by God to be a prophet. God told Isaiah, as recorded in Isaiah 6:9-10, that his ministry as a prophet would be declaring a message (Go and tell):

"Go, and tell this people:
Keep on listening, but do not understand;
keep on looking, but do not perceive.

10 Make the heart of this people insensitive,
and make their ears deaf,
and shut their eyes;
so that they may not see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their heart,
and repent and be healed."

Isaiah stated in 6:11-13,

11 Then I asked, "Lord, how long?" He answered,
"Until cities are destroyed without inhabitant,
and houses uninhabited,
and the land become absolutely devastated,
and the LORD has sent everyone far away, 
and the midst of the land is abandoned.

Even if a tenth remains in it, 
it will be destroyed again.

Just like a terebinth and an oak whose stump remains
when they are cut down;
so the holy seed will be its stump.

It was not for Isaiah to restore Jacob and Israel for his ministry was that of a prophet to declare the words of the Lord so that the covenant people of God would have no excuse before God for their rebellion and wickedness. The task of bringing back the people of God to their Lord was given to another servant, one who is divine and is empowered by God to complete the assigned task. It was not that every person who was a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be restored, but only a holy seed, called in Isaiah 6:13 as a stump. This “stump” was to be the remnant whom God, through the ministry of the Servant, the Messiah, was preserving for Himself. Isaiah often mentioned this remnant. See Isaiah 10:20, 21, 22; 11:11, 16; 15:9; 16:14; 17:3; 28:5; 37:4; 31, 32; and 46:3. The prophet Jeremiah also spoke often of this remnant. For example, Jeremiah 23:3 states: “I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and will bring them back again to their folds. There they will be fruitful and multiply.” The Apostle Paul also spoke of this remnant, quoting Isaiah 10:22, as recorded in Romans 9:27: “Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel, If the number of the children of Israel are as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved.” Paul also stated in Romans 11:25: “So in that same way, at this present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.” The ministry of the Servant in restoring Israel to God would not be one that would happen quickly for it is still to this day being undertaken and will only be completed when the Servant, Lord Jesus Christ returns to the earth to destroy the enemies of Israel and establish His messianic kingdom where this remnant will receive all the blessings of the kingdom ruled by their Messiah. In summing up the performance of this multi-faceted task, the Servant realizes that He will be honored in the eyes of the LORD (Yahweh) and that He will accomplish this task for He also realizes that God is His strength, Isaiah 49:5.

The seventh aspect of the second Servant Song is that the Servant is to be a light to the nations that He may bring God’s salvation to the ends of the earth. As important as the task is “to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the survivors of Israel.” Isaiah 49:6, God calls this ministry “insignificant.” Other English Bible versions state it as “too small or to light a thing.” The Hebrew word for “insignificant” is qalal which has the primary meaning of “to be slight,” or “trifling.” God sees this task of restoring the survivors of Israel as a mere trifle for His Servant and adds to His ministry a task that is world-wide in scope. This more significant task is that God will make the Servant, “a light to the nations, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” This is no small work and no other person would be qualified to complete it other than the One who is called the Servant of God. Thomas Constable comments:

“The Servant’s calling would be more than bringing Israel back to God in repentance and revival, a calling we have yet to see, since this was not Israel’s response to Jesus’ earthly ministry. It would include bringing the light of the knowledge of God and His salvation to people all over the world (cf. 5:26). The preaching of the gospel accomplishes both of these goals only partially. They will be fully attained in the Millennium when all Jews and Gentiles will turn to the Lord (cf. Phil. 2:10-11).

Clearly the Servant cannot be Israel in the light of these verses, neither can the believing remnant within Israel. Neither group has saved or can save the world. No merely human Hebrew prophet, including Isaiah, could be the savior of the world either. Cyrus’ calling was to restore Israel to the land of Judah, but Messiah’s calling, from His very birth, was to restore Israel and the Gentiles to God. Indeed, it was to be salvation (cf. Luke 2:32; Acts 13:46-47). The Servant marveled at God’s grace in choosing Him for this calling and affirmed His
dependence on God to accomplish such a great salvation (in the parenthetical statement in verse 5).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 240).

Gary V. Smith also comments:

“The two tasks that make up the mission of the Servant are introduced by infinitives that define the purposes of his life. In the first role God appointed him “in order to raise up, establish” (lĕhāqîm) and “in order to restore, reestablish” (lĕhāšîb) Israel. No parameters are put on this restoration, so one might assume that the total restoration would include both spiritual and physical aspects. The means of accomplishing the second task in 6b was for the Servant to function as a light to the nations (49:6). The figure of light is connected in other passages where God is the light (Ps 27:1), God’s law is a light that guides people (2:4–5; 42:16; 50:10; 51:4–5; Ps 119:105), and God’s righteous salvation is a light (49:6; Ps 37:6; Mic 7:9). There is not much of an explanation of what the Servant would do so that he would serve as this light. It is hypothetically possible to translate the last line in two distinct ways. If “my salvation” functions as the subject of the infinitive construct verb, the phrase would be describing the consequences of the Servant’s light on the world (“so that my salvation may exist to the ends of the earth” NASB, NRSV, ESV). This translation affirms that the Servant’s role as a light will allow God's salvation to have a worldwide influence. On the other hand, it is grammatically possible and actually preferable to view “my salvation” as the object of the infinitive, thus creating a translation parallel to what is found in the previous line. This approach would make the Servant be “a light to the nations and to be my salvation unto the ends of the earth.” This translation indicates that the Servant is not just a means of getting God’s salvation to the ends of the earth (45:20–24); somehow he himself will be God’s salvation. Just how the Servant “will be” (not “bring” as in NIV) God’s salvation will be explained in later oracles about the Servant (52:13–53:12).” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 348-349).

David L. Cooper adds this perspective:

“According to verses 5 and 6 of our passage, the Lord, at the time of the conversation between Himself and the Messiah, tells the Son that the task of bringing back the remnant to God and restoring the preserved of Israel is a task too small and insignificant for Him. He therefore lays before Him a larger ministry which is that of becoming a light to all the Gentile nations. When a person realizes that one soul is of more value in God's sight than the entire material universe, he wonders why the Father says to the Son that the restoration of Israel is such a small task for Him. The parenthetical expression--"(for I am honorable in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God is become my strength)"--may throw some light upon the question. Messiah, who is the God-man as we learn from many passages of scripture, is indeed honorable in the eyes of Jehovah and God gives Him unlimited strength and power. Being such a one and having all the power of Deity in His own hands, He is in a position not only to save the remnant of Israel, but to be God's light and salvation to every mortal upon the earth. When He returns, coming as the polished shaft and as the arrow of God's wrath, He will become, as we learn from parallel passages, God's salvation to all nations. Messiah therefore in these verses envisions a converted world with all the attendant blessings. This will occur at the second coming of our Lord, and these conditions will continue throughout His millennial reign.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – September 1945).

The Servant does not accomplish the tasks of restoring the survivors of Israel and world-wide salvation in isolation. Those who are faithful followers and disciples of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ are involved in this process as the Messiah made clear in a passage that is known as the great commission as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. The Apostle Paul understood his role in bringing the light of the gospel to the Gentiles as participating in the task of the Messiah. Paul, as recorded in Acts 13:46-49 explains from quoting Isaiah 49:6, that it was a command of the Lord that he and Barnabas (among others) were to bring the good news salvation to the Gentile: "46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. But seeing you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, 'I have set you for a light of the Gentiles, so that you might bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'” 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they
were glad, and glorified the word of God, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 The word of the Lord spread throughout all that region.” (Acts 13:46-49)

49:7 This is what the LORD says,  
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one who is despised,  
to one whom the nations abhor,  
to one who is a servant of rulers:  
"Kings will see and rise up in respect.  
Princes will bow down  
because of the LORD, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel,  
has chosen you."

Another message from the LORD (see beginning of 49:5) is recorded in Isaiah 49:7. The LORD (Yahweh), prior to speaking, is introduced by the Servant as the “Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One.” The LORD is Israel’s family Redeemer, ga’al, who is often described by Isaiah in this role. See 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16 and 63:16. The LORD as Israel’s Redeemer will protect and save His “family” and they can absolutely trust in Him. The repeated reminders by the LORD that He is their Redeemer serve to punctuate the fact that they most often forget about Him and rebel against Him. Yet as Isaiah also reminds them, a remnant from their midst will be saved. See notes on 49:6 above. The LORD also reminds His covenant people that He is their “Holy One.” This shortened form of the “Holy One of Israel” occurs also in 10:17; 40:25 and 43:15. The covenant people constantly needed reminding that their God is holy in His very essence. They knew from the law, the Pentateuch, that they had been commanded by God to be holy for He was holy, Leviticus 11:45. However, even though they knew this command, they needed to be reminded of God’s holiness often as impetus for them to be holy.

The eighth aspect of the second Servant Song is that the Servant, who will be despised and abhorred by His own people, will be praised by kings and princes of the earth. This testimony comes from the LORD who speaks on behalf of the Servant. The Servant is one who is despised and whom the nations abhor. This message from the LORD corroborates the testimony of the Servant as recorded in 49:4, in which the Servant laments, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing, only futility.” During the Servant’s first time of ministry on the earth, He was rejected and despised by His own people and during the years following His earthly sojourn, He continues to be abhorred not only by His own covenant people but by peoples from all nations. Isaiah will later, in 52:13-53:12 describe in vivid detail how this hatred for the Servant by His own people resulted in Him being shamefully and brutally treated and then put to death by those whom He had come to save and bring peace. Psalm 22 is a description of the hatred for the Servant being portrayed while He hung on the cross, dying for the sins of those who despised Him. The testimony of the LORD that the Servant is a “servant of rulers” could refer to His ministry of working on behalf of the world’s people to bring them justice, peace, and to release them from darkness. For a discussion on this possibility, see Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 352.

In the second part of Isaiah 49:7, the outlook for the Servant abruptly changes. Instead of being hated by His own people and all nations, the Servant will be the recipient the honor and adoration of the rulers of the earth. Kings will rise up in respect of Him and princes will bow down before Him. This is clearly a reference to the second coming of the Servant (the Messiah) who will establish His kingdom and people including kings and princes from all nations will come to Him and worship Him. The kings of the world will lead their nations in
assisting with the regathering of the remnant of Israel to the Messiah and will themselves bow before Him. See Isaiah 49:23; 60:3, 10, 11, 16 and 62:2. Isaiah also declared in 52:13-15:

13 Look, my servant will deal wisely; he will be exalted and lifted up, and will be greatly exalted.
14 Just as many were astonished at him, his disfigured face was marred more than any other, and his form beyond other human beings.
15 So he will sprinkle many nations; kings will shut their mouths before him. For that which they had not been told, they will see; and that which they had not heard, they will understand.

The latter part of Isaiah 49:7 gives the background to why the Servant will first suffer the hatred of the nations (so that He can redeem them) and then receive the praise of the nations. The background is that the faithful LORD who is the Holy One of Israel has chosen the Servant for this purpose. Whom the Lord chooses He enables to perform the Lord’s purpose for the world. Chapter 11 of Isaiah, is a beautiful example of the enabling of the Servant by being anointed by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the task of recovering the surviving remnant of His people and bringing justice and righteousness to the earth.

1.b: The Caregiving of the Servant: Verses 8-13

49:8 This is what the LORD says, "In the time of my favor, I answered you; and in a day of salvation, I helped you. I will protect you, I will give you as a covenant for the people, to restore the land, to reestablish their desolate inheritances.

The ninth aspect of the second Servant Song, is that the Servant will be given as a covenant for His people to restore the land for the inhabitation of His people. The parallel passage in Isaiah 42:6 adds “and a light for the nations” The reason that the Servant will be given as a covenant for the people is not only to restore the land so that it can be inhabited by God’s covenant people but the Servant will also more significantly be a light to the nations so that salvation may be brought to the ends of the earth, see 49:6. The time spoken of by the LORD is a future period when the Servant, the Messiah will be used of God to bring salvation to the nations. It will be a time spoken of as His favor, 49:8 which is the time of God’s own choosing. Just as it was a time of God’s choice to preserve a remnant to Himself in Paul’s day, Romans 11:5, God would, in a future day, from the time of Isaiah, enable the Servant to complete His task so that the means of salvation for all peoples would be accomplished. God promises to answer the request of the Servant to strengthen Him for the task and protect Him until the task is finished. In a stunning prophecy of the time Jesus hung on the cross, David fore-told through the inspiration of God, these compelling words of the Servant as recorded in Psalm 22:19-21:
19 But you, O LORD, do not stay far away!
   O my help, come quickly to help me.
20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
   my life from the power of the dog.
21 Save me from the lion's mouth;
   rescue me from the horns of the wild oxen.

(Psalm 22:19-21)

Psalm 22 begins with the prophetic words that Christ spoke when in agony, and while being crushed by the weight of His own body during the last moments of his physical life on earth, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Psalm 22:1. These words were spoken by the Servant, Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 27:46. In desperation and feeling utterly rejected, the Servant cried out to God who responded to Him and enabled Him to endure the crushing pain and have the insight and boldness to say as He breathed His last breath, that “It is finished,” John 19:30. With God’s gracious provision, the Servant completed His task during His first advent. He will also, with God’s help complete the task of restoring the land of Israel for His covenant people and re-establish them as they are gathered from all nations to take their promised place within the kingdom of the Servant.

The Apostle Paul quoted from Isaiah 49:8 in his second letter to the Church in Corinth. Paul understood that He was working along with the Lord as His servant, a co-worker, to accomplish the task of bringing salvation to the nations and that to those to whom Paul was ministering, Paul stated that now was the day of salvation. Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, “Now as God's co-workers we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain 2 For he says, "At an acceptable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I helped you." Look, now is the acceptable time. Look, now is the day of salvation.” See also Isaiah 61:1-2; Galatians 4:4-5; and Hebrews 4:7

The words of the LORD “I will give you as a covenant to the people” has been interpreted in various ways by scholars and Bible students. Without a tedious rendering of all the alternative viewpoints by various scholars, this study posits that the references in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 speak of the Servant being given as the “new covenant” as this best fits the context of these chapters in Isaiah and is confirmed most emphatically in the New Testament. Thomas Constable for example suggests:

“God would make the Servant a covenant of the people, namely, He would make a new covenant with His people that the Servant would embody (cf. 42:6; Jer. 31:31; 32:40; Ezek. 37:26; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-12). The Servant would fulfill God's covenants with Israel.

The Servant would restore the land, make the Israelites inherit desolate areas, and (v. 9) free captives. The terms used in this verse (v. 8) recall the relief that came to the Israelites in their Jubilee Year (cf. Lev. 25:8-22). The salvation in view will appear in the Millennium, which the Jubilee Year anticipated. Then too the Servant will represent Israel.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 241).

Victor Buksbazen briefly states:

“The prophet makes a clear distinction between the people (Israel) and the servant of God. He is to be God’s new covenant by means of which He will enter into a new relationship with Israel. The servant is the living link between God and His people.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 383).
Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer add:

“Despite Israel’s prophesied rejection of the Servant in vv. 4-6, this final part of the Servant’s call looks to the more remote future when Israel will ultimately believe in Him and experience redemption. At the appointed time, God will make the Servant a covenant to the people. This is the same expression used in the first Servant Song, meaning that the Servant would be a covenant-mediator for the people of Israel. The phrase is a figure of speech (metonymy of effect [covenant] for cause [mediator]) for “covenant-mediator.” This refers to the “new covenant” which includes both spiritual and material elements (Jer 31:31-34).” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, *Isaiah*, The Moody Bible Commentary, page 1082).

The result of the Servant being given by the LORD as a covenant for the people is that the land of Israel will be restored and the people of Israel, to whom the land had been promised, will be re-established in the land which is called “their desolate inheritances.” Although some scholars suggest that this restoration to the land was fulfilled by the command of Cyrus, there was relatively too few of those exiled in Babylon who actually returned to Jerusalem. There also was no historical record that these exiles were kept as prisoners, hidden in darkness within Babylon. The sad truth was that far too many of the sons of Israel felt more comfortable within Babylon to take the long journey back to Jerusalem. The restoration of the land and the re-establishment of the people in the land will yet be realized when the Servant, the Messiah returns to earth to defeat the enemies of the people of Israel and establish His kingdom in a restored land of peace, righteousness and justice.

That the Servant understood His appointment by God as being given as a covenant for the people is clear in the account of the “last supper” in Luke 22:20 where it is recorded, that Christ stated: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.” See also Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, when discussing the importance of remembering Christ, quoted the words of Jesus from Luke 22:20. Paul also understood his ministry as a servant of the new covenant, 2 Corinthians 3:6. The central Old Testament text regarding the new covenant is Jeremiah 31:31-34. The core of the new covenant is the provision of salvation through the shed blood of the Servant who is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, which is appropriated by those who have faith in Christ. The Old Testament description of the new covenant, given to Israel and Judah, Jeremiah 31:31-34 is that God will put His law within them which will be written on their hearts and He will be their God and they will be His people. There will be no need for any teaching regarding knowing God for all will know Him and He will forgive and not remember their sins. See also Ezekiel 36:24-27 for a further description of new covenant promises. It was most likely this passage from Ezekiel that the Messiah was referencing in His discussion with Nicodemus as recorded in John 3:1-21. The author of Hebrews also understood that the Messiah (Jesus Christ) was the mediator of the new covenant through His shed blood, See Hebrews 8:7-13; 9:15; 10:11-17; 12:24; and 13:20.

The Old Testament specifically states that the new covenant was to be made with the house of Israel and the house of Jacob, Jeremiah 31:31. But the New Testament makes it clear that the new covenant was in the blood of Jesus Christ, that is it was through the shed blood of Christ that the new covenant was made manifest. All who believe in Christ and specifically in His blood which was shed as an atoning sacrifice for their sins, participate in the new covenant. It was through or by means of His shed blood that Jesus Christ is the mediator of the new covenant. Therefore all, whether Jew or Gentile can participate in the new covenant and appropriate its promises. By means of the new covenant, believers in Christ also participate in the unilateral and unconditional Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.
What does that mean for the original promise by God that the new covenant was for the house of Israel and Jacob? It does not mean that God somehow changed His mind and withdrew His promise to His covenant people and gave it to the Gentiles. It also does not mean that because the new covenant was initiated by the shed blood of Jesus Christ that this somehow meant that the promised earthly kingdom of Christ was being inaugurated by the shedding of His blood. The New Testament nowhere makes this claim. The coming millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ is still in the future and will only be established when the Messiah returns to earth to defeat the enemies of His faithful remnant and then He will sit upon the Davidic throne which is the throne of the promised kingdom.

However, those, both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ, specifically believing in His shed blood as an atoning sacrifice for their sins, participate now in the new covenant but its full completion will await the days of the coming messianic kingdom when the full promises of Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-38 and other Old Testament texts will be realized. All the promises of the Old Testament regarding the new covenant have not yet been realized or completed and it would be an injustice to the Scriptures to spiritualize these texts and amend them to make them appear complete before the coming messianic kingdom. Recommended resources for a study of the new covenant include:


Henebury, Paul Martin, Biblical Covenantalism, Online Resource: https://drreluctant.wordpress.com/

The Masters Seminary Journal, Biblical Covenants Issue, TMSJ 10/2 (Fall 1999).

49:9-10 I will say to the prisoners, 'You're free;' to those hidden in the darkness, 'Show yourselves.' They will feed along the road ways, and all bare heights will be their pasture. 10 They will not hunger or thirst, neither will the heat or sun strike them down; for he who has mercy on them will lead them; he will lead them beside springs of water.

The tenth aspect of the second servant song is The Servant will be used by God to be a comfort for His people upon whom He has compassion, Isaiah 49:9-13. This caregiving ministry of the Servant will occur in the far future days when He establishes His messianic kingdom will include releasing the faithful remnant who are described as prisoners who have been hiding in darkness in far away nations, 49:12. The Servant will ensure they have sufficient food to eat and water to drink as they travel to meet Him in Zion. Later, Isaiah will describe the Servant’s ministry in similar terms, in 61:1-2 which is quoted in Luke 4:18-19. See also 40:10-11; 41:17-20; and 43:19-21.

The ministry of the Servant as described in Isaiah 49:8-9 is similar to that of the first Servant Song as recorded in 42:6-7:
6 I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;
   I will take you by the hand
   and protect you.
I will give you as a covenant for the people,
   and a light for the nations,
7 to open the eyes of the blind,
   to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
   and those who sit in darkness out of the prison.
   (Isaiah 42:6-7)

“The “road ways,” 49:9 refer to the “highway” that Isaiah had declared would be in place for the faithful remnant who will be gathered from all nations as the way they will travel in safety and peace to Zion. Isaiah states in 35:8-10:

8 A highway will be there,
   and it will be called "The Way of Holiness;"
   the unclean will not travel on it;
   but it will be reserved for those who walk that way;
   fools will never stray onto it.
9 No lion will be there,
   nor will any ravenous beast go up on it;
   they will not be found there;
   but the redeemed will walk there.
10 Those ransomed by the LORD will return,
   and come with singing to Zion;
   everlasting joy will crown their heads.
   They will find joy and gladness,
   and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

The “springs of water,” 49:10, by which the Servant will lead the faithful remnant reminds the student of the Scriptures of the beautiful 23rd Psalm in which David wrote about His source of safety and peace being in the Lord who is his comforting shepherd. See also Revelation 7:16-17 for a “heavenly” reference to springs of water.

49:11 I will make all my mountains into roads,
   and my highways will be raised up.

The Servant’s preparation of the roadways and highways will include levelling mountains and raising up low lands so that the faithful remnant will easily travel from the far countries to meet Him in Zion. Some scholars interpret these words as figurative with the meaning that the Lord’s intent is for His people not to be restricted by geographic barriers when they are gathered from the nations of the world. It should not be the first choice of students of Scriptures to turn the plain words of God into a non-literal interpretative language. The Lord is quite capable of reconstructing the landscape including lowering mountains and raising valleys. Also, the timing of this regathering of His faithful remnant will be at the end of the great Tribulation. This period, described in many places in the Scriptures, will include the most violent upheaval of the earth ever to be seen by man since the time of the world-wide flood in Noah’s time. This upheaval of the earth could quite easily result in the mountains being pulverized and the valleys filled with debris to make the landscape of the earth to appear level. See also Isaiah 11:15-16; 19:23; 24:1-6, 19; 26:7; 40:3-4; 42:15-16; 51:10-11; and 62:10.
49:12 Look, these will come from far away.

Look, these come from the north
and from the west;
these from the southern land of Syene.

Those whom the Servant will regather to be the faithful inhabitants of His millennial kingdom will come from the far nations of the world, including the nations from the north, the west and from what is called the southern land of “Syene.” Some have suggested that this was a very early reference to China. For example, Victor Buksbazen suggests:

“And these from the land of Sinim. In this context the land of Sinim represents the Far East, probably China, as the remotest land in the East. Some commentators have argued against the interpretation of the land of Sinim as meaning China, on the basis that the term “China” was supposedly derived from the Tsin dynasty dating back to only 255 B.C. long after the times of Isaiah.

However, variations of the name China were known as far back as the 10th century B.C. and some of the provinces of that land were designated by that name. It is possible that merchants from China occasionally reached Babylon, the world center of commerce in those days. “(Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 383).

Other scholars suggest that Syene (Sinim in the KJV), refers to the Aswan - Elephantine area in southern Egypt. However, it is interpreted, the clear intention of the text is that the Servant is the divine source of the regathering of His faithful people from all nations of the earth. This is not a reference to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem from Babylon as some suggest but an event that will happen at the end of the great Tribulation when the Lord will establish His messianic rule on the earth.

49:13 Sing, O heavens,
and be joyful, O earth.

Break out into singing, O mountains;
for the LORD has comforted his people,
and will have compassion upon his afflicted.

Just as Isaiah concluded the first Servant Song, Isaiah 42:10-13, he also concluded the second Servant Song with a hymn or exhortation of praise. Thomas Constable comments on 49:13:

“Isaiah concluded by calling on the whole created universe to rejoice because the Lord had comforted His people (cf. 40:1; 47:6) and had shown compassion on His formerly afflicted nation (cf. 42:10-13; 44:23; 45:8; 52:8-9; 55:12-13). This is rejoicing over deliverance from sin, not just exile. When the Servant completes His work of salvation, the whole creation, not just humankind, will experience liberation from the effects of the Fall (cf. Rom. 8:19-22).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 242).

Isaiah calls for the heavens and the earth, including the mountains to be joyful and sing. He had earlier declared God’s exhortation to His creation, as recorded in 44:23:

Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it;
shout, you lower parts of the earth.
Break forth into singing, O mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it.
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,
and will reveal his glory in Israel.
Psalm 98:8-9 and Isaiah 55:12 also describe the acts of nature in anthropological terms. The rivers and trees are depicted as clapping their hands and the mountains singing and shouting for joy because of the great work of the Lord in redeeming, comforting and rescuing His people. This rejoicing of nature, God’s created things, speaks of their release from the bondage of the corruption which came from the fall of earth’s first couple, Romans 8:19-22. When the Servant establishes His kingdom, nature itself will also be restored. See also Isaiah 30:23-26; 32:15-20; 35:1-7; 41:18-20; 43:19-21; and 44:3.

2. God Promises Blessings to Zion: 49:14-26

Isaiah 49:14-26 are set within a longer section, 49:14-52:12 which describe God’s promises that He will not forget nor forsake His people and He will restore Zion. This longer section has four main parts: (1) 49:14-26: God will re-gather His people to Zion to establish the messianic kingdom. (2) 50:1-11 The Third Servant Song: The Messiah is obedient to His calling and will be Helped by God. (3) 51:1-23: The Lord will bring comfort and Salvation to His people. (4) 52:1-12: God will redeem and restore Zion.

The first main part, 49:14-26 entitled “God Promises Blessings to Zion,” is a description of the re-gathering by God of His people to Zion to establish the messianic kingdom. This part begins with a lament by the people of Zion, in the far future, who have been chastised by the Lord during the Tribulation period. Zion complains that the Lord has forsaken His people. The Lord responds by reassuring His people that He has not forgotten them and has them inscribed (engraved) on the palms of His hands. The Lord reveals that Zion will be built up by its sons who will be gathered from the nations. God will cause these mighty nations to release His people from captivity. The sons, the children of Zion will receive assistance in their journey to Zion by kings and princess of these nations who will bow before them. By this act, God will be known by all people on the earth as the LORD (Yahweh) who is the Redeemer and Savior of Zion and the Mighty One of Jacob.

49:14 But Zion said,
   The LORD has forsaken me,
   the Lord has forgotten me.

Due to the unprecedented troubles and distress of the Tribulation, Jeremiah 30:7, the inhabitants of Zion will cry out that the LORD had forsaken and forgotten them. They had many promises from God regarding the coming of the Servant, the Messiah and what He will accomplish for them. But in the years leading up to the return of the Messiah, their affliction is so great that they will have either forgotten these promises or have refused to believe in them. The Messiah will not return until they cry out to Him and acknowledge their sin of rejecting Him when He first came to His own people to provide salvation. A study of Leviticus 26:40-42 and Jeremiah 3:11-18 reveals the necessity for Israel to confess the iniquity of their past sins when their ancestors rejected God and slid into wickedness and rebellion. Zechariah 12:10 speaks to their need to mourn for the one (an only son) whom they had pierced, for they must first recognize their sin:

“Then I will pour the spirit of grace and supplication on the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so they will look on me, the one whom they have pierced. They will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and will grieve bitterly for him, as one bitterly grieving over a firstborn child.”
   (Zechariah 12:10)

Hosea 5:15-6:3 is a further prophecy of their need to acknowledge their sin and earnestly seek the Lord whom they had rejected when He first came among them. When they confess their sin and seek their Messiah, he will return to them:
5:15 I will return to my place,  
until they acknowledge their guilt,  
and seek my face;  
in their affliction they will earnestly seek me.

6:1 Come, and let us return to the LORD;  
for he has torn us,  
but he will heal us,  
he has injured us,  
but he will bandage us up.

6:2 After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will raise us up,  
and we will live before him.

6:3 Let us acknowledge him;  
let us pursue knowing the LORD;  
he will come forth as sure as the morning dawns;  
he will come to us as sure as the rain,  
as the latter rain that waters the earth.

(Micah 5:15-6:3)

It is only then, that the faithful remnant of Zion, when they are surrounded by their enemies and have no hope of escape, during the campaign of Armageddon, will acknowledge and repent of their past sins of rejecting their Messiah and call out to Him. The Messiah will respond by returning to earth as a mighty warrior and rescue them and then lead them victoriously back to Zion to establish His messianic kingdom.

For a comprehensive discussion of the events that will occur during this time, see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Revised Edition, Ariel Ministries, 2004, chapter 14: *The Campaign of Armageddon and The Second Coming of Jesus the Messiah*, pages 309-357. A study of these far future days through the lens of many Scriptural passages will enhance the student’s understanding of the events that must take place before and after the return of the Messiah.

Isaiah 49:14 can also be identified as a key text for understanding what is to follow from this point to the end of Isaiah chapter 66. Isaiah, in all that is to follow in his writings, responds to the complaint of the people of Zion that the LORD has forsaken and forgotten them. By direct response in the verses that immediately follow 49:14 and by explanation of what is to unfold in the future, Isaiah beautifully expounds on God’s care, concern and comfort for His covenant people whom He most certainly has not forsaken. The Apostle Paul emphatically stated in Romans 11:1, “I ask then, has God rejected his people? Certainly not!” and in 11:2 Paul continues, “God did not reject his people whom he foreknew.” The teaching of Paul is that God has prepared a remnant, Romans 9:27, quoting from Isaiah 10:22-23, and even in Paul’s days this remnant remained, Romans 11:5. Paul in 11:11-12 (NKJV) explains the future role of the Israelites, “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. 12. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” Paul follows up these statements by quoting from the Psalms and Isaiah; and prefacing these quotes with the emphatic, “and so all Israel will be saved,” Romans 11:26. The following commentaries for studying Paul’s Epistle to the Romans and specifically chapters 9-11 of Romans are recommended as they are all dispensational and premillennial. These commentaries were available at the time of the publication of this Study of Isaiah. Thomas Constable, *Notes on Romans*: Soniclight.com – Online; David L. Cooper, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*: Biblical Research Studies Group – Online; Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace*, BMH Books; Woodrow Kroll, *The Book of Romans: Righteousness in Christ*, AMG Publishers; William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, Kregel Publications.
49:15 Can a woman forget her nursing child?
   Will she have no compassion on the son of her womb?
   Even if these might forget,
   I could never forget you.

As a first response to the lament of the people of Zion, in 49:14, God asks rhetorical questions of a mother forgetting or having no compassion on her nursing child serve to remind the people of Zion of their special relationship with their Lord. He pictures one of the most precious and personal relationships of humanity, that of a mother and her nursing child. It is the closest of all relationships between humans, yet God responds that even if a mother might forget her own child, He will never forget His covenant people. A closely related passage is Jeremiah 31: 20:

Is Ephraim my dear son?
   Is he a delightful child?
   For as often as I rebuke him,
   yet I still remember him.
   Therefore my heart yearns for him;
   I will surely have mercy on him," says the LORD.

Psalm 27:10 is another reminder of the Lord’s care for His children:

When my father and my mother abandon me,
   then the LORD will take me in.

Isaiah will later declare the words of the Lord, in 66:13:

As a mother comforts her child,
   so I will comfort you;
   and you will be comforted in Jerusalem.

49:16 Look, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are continually before me.

The Lord uses an anthropomorphism to describe His unique relationship with the people of Zion, whom He will never forget. God is Spirit John 4:24 and does not have physical features such as hands. But He describes His relationship with His people in terms they can easily understand. Isaiah had previously discussed the writing on the hands by God’s people as a reminder of their special relationship to Him, Isaiah 44:5. The Lord’s anthropological depiction is that every time He looks as His hands, He is reminded of His covenant people because they, their names perhaps, are inscribed or engraved on His palms.

He also states that the walls of His people are continually before Him which may have the meaning that the walls of Zion are always present in His “mind.” God can never forget His people if their place of habitation is constantly before Him to remind Him of His covenant and promises to them. He will keep these promises to His people for the sake of His great name. See notes on Isaiah 48:9, 11. Isaiah spoke of the walls of Zion, in 26:1; and would again in 56:5 and 60:10 and in 60:18b the prophet records the words of God saying:

but you will call your walls "Salvation,"
   and your gates "Praise."
49:17 *Your children hurry to return; those who destroyed and laid you waste will leave you.*

As a further indication that He will not forget His covenant people, God declares two distinct promises in Isaiah 49:17. The word translated as “children” in the DASV is *bonayik* in the Hebrew, literally meaning “builders” which is very similar to the Hebrew word *banayik* which has the meaning of “sons,” which the DSAV and the KJV translate as “children.” Because of the possibility that either *bonayik* as “builders” (NASB) or *banayik* as “sons” (NIV) were in the original text, it must be left to the context to determine what Isaiah intended as the meaning of the word. Thomas Constable comments:

“Isaiah saw the builders of Jerusalem's breached walls hurrying to rebuild them after their destroyers had departed. In other words, Jerusalem would not be in a vulnerable condition for very long, relatively speaking. The builders were the sons that Zion thought had been denied her. The Hebrew word translated “builders,” *bonayik*, is almost identical to the word translated “sons,” *banayik*, and may have been deliberately ambiguous to communicate both ideas. Originally only the consonants, which are identical, appeared in the text.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 243).

Within the context of the larger passage in chapter 49 of Isaiah, sons or children are mentioned. See 49:15 (son); 18 (these); 20 (children); 22 (sons); and 25 (children). It may have been Isaiah’s intention to use the word “sons” in 49:17 as those who return to Zion in the future. But the possibility of Zion’s sons being those who will return as builders also may have been intended by Isaiah purposefully to contrast with the remainder of the sentence where those who destroyed and laid waste Zion is mentioned.

Isaiah in 49:17b, states a second promise from God revealing that in the far future, those who had destroyed, and laid waste Zion will have left them. This certainly could not fit the Babylonians who did not leave them. In reality, in the near future, it was the people of God who left Babylon. Also, in the context of chapter 49, those who return to Zion come from the far reaches of the earth as 49:12 and 22 clearly state, so it was not the return of the exiled Jews from Babylon that is the topic of Isaiah’s prophecy. In keeping with the context of chapters 49 and following, Isaiah is describing the far future, when the Messiah will regather the faithful remnant of His covenant people from the nations of the world to come to Zion. The city of Zion, which will be laid waste during the days of the great Tribulation, Zechariah 14:1-2, will be rebuilt by these returning “sons” at the establishment of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah.

49:18 *Lift up your eyes and look around; all these gather themselves together and come home to you.*

"As I live," says the LORD, "you will surely wear all of them like jewelry, and adorn yourself with them, like a bride.

Isaiah, in 49:18, is describing the wonderful promises from the LORD who continues to speak, 49:15 and following, to His covenant people in Zion in response to their lament in 49:14. When the distressful days of the great Tribulation are over, the Messiah will return and regather the faithful remnant of His people from the nations of the world. The people living in Zion are exhorted to lift their eyes to witness an incredible event. Those who have remained faithful to the Lord will be coming home. They will be like precious gems
or jewelry to the inhabitants of Zion who have just been rescued by their Messiah from the assault upon them by the wicked coalition of nations who were bent on annihilating them. They will be seen as so precious, that Zion’s inhabitants will embrace them as jewelry which a bride would wear.

The Lord in 49:18, makes these promises with a sacred oath to Himself, “As I live.” The Lord could not make an oath based upon anything greater except for Himself. This oath is a solemn and holy promise that what the Lord says will happen. There is no conditional aspect to the oath. It is a sure and certain promise to His covenant people. See also Isaiah 5:9; 14:24; 54:9 and 62:8. An example of an oath sworn to Himself is declared by the Lord as recorded in Isaiah 45:23a:

\[I\text{ have solemnly sworn by myself,}\
\text{the word gone forth from my mouth is righteous,}\
\text{and cannot be revoked.}\]

49:19–21 For though your waste and your desolate places, and your land has been destroyed, but now you will be too crowded for your inhabitants, and they who swallowed you up will be far away.

20 The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears, 'This place is too cramped for me; give me more room where I can live.'

21 Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has given birth to all these for me? For I have been bereaved of my children and barren, exiled and divorced, so who has reared these children? Look, I was left all alone, so where did these come from?'

Isaiah 49:19–21 continue the content of the oath the Lord as sworn to Himself, “As I live” 49:18. The Lord describes the desolate condition of Zion following the destruction caused by its enemies during the campaign of Armageddon near the end of the great Tribulation, Joel 3:9-11; Zechariah 12:1-3; 14:1-2; and Revelation 16:12-16. Zion which is the city of Jerusalem, and the area surrounding it will be laid waste, made desolate and destroyed. But this will be a temporary condition. The Lord, the Messiah will return and destroy the enemies of His covenant people, who will take refuge in Bozrah, surrounded by these enemies. The Messiah will lead them in a victorious and joyous march along a highway of holiness to Zion where He will establish His messianic kingdom and regather His people from the nations of the world to populate Zion. See for example, Psalm 79:1-13; 80:1-19; Isaiah 35:1-10; 63:1-6; 64:1-12; Jeremiah 49:13-14; 49:7-22; Ezekiel chapters 38-39; Hosea 6:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; 3:1-21; Micah 2:12-13; Habakkuk 3:1-19; Zechariah 12:10-13:1; 13:7-9; 14:1-21; Revelation 14:19-20; and 19:11-21. These are Selected passages only, not an exhaustive list.

Zion will be freed from its enemies who are described in 49:18 as “they who swallowed you up will be far away.” Their enemies will have been defeated by the returning Messiah and many of them will lie in death upon the mountains of Israel, Ezekiel 39:1-24. After these momentous events, the Lord will regather those who had remained faithful to Him from the nations of the earth. They will come in such numbers that Zion will be over-crowed. The inhabitants of Zion, who will witness this great in-gathering of God’s covenant peoples, will be so amazed that they will ask, “where did all these come from?” The re-gathering of the faithful remnant of Israel is a marvelous theme that is often spoken of by Isaiah, 14:1-2; 43:1-6; 54:1-17;

7 Before her labor pains began,
she gave birth;
before her pain came,
she delivered a boy.
8 Who has heard of such a thing?
  Who has seen such things?
  Can a country be born in a single day?
  Will a nation be born in a second?
Yet as soon as Zion went into labor,
she gave birth to her children.

49:22-23 This is what the sovereign LORD says,
  "Look, I will raise up my hand to signal the nations,
   and set up my signal flag to the peoples.
They will bring your sons in their arms,
   and your daughters will be carried on their shoulders.
23 Kings will be your foster fathers,
   and their queens your nursing mothers.
They will bow their faces to the ground before you,
   and lick the dust of your feet.
You will know that I am the LORD,
   and they who expectantly wait for me
   will not be put to shame."

The Lord will cause the nations to not only release the faithful remnant of His covenant people, but these nations will also provide the means for His people to travel to Zion. The leaders, kings and queens, of these nations will assume the chief responsibility in ensuring that God’s people are brought safely to Zion. In their service to God’s faithful remnant, these leaders will bow in humility before them even to the very ground where their lips will taste the dust of the earth. Thomas Constable comments:

  “Sovereign Yahweh further promised that the Gentiles would be responsible for ushering many of the Israelites back into their land. Even Gentile kings and princesses would carry Hebrew children back to their ancestors’ homeland.

  God would raise His hand and an ensign (banner, signal), Messiah, to summon the nations to do this (cf. 5:26; 11:10, 12; 13:2; 30:17; 62:10). They would show an uncharacteristic concern for the welfare of the Israelites and would even bow down before them in submission.

  Previously the Israelites had to bow before the Gentiles. The "times of the Gentiles," the times of Gentile supremacy over Israel in the world, will have ended (cf. Zech. 12:2; 14:2-3; Luke 21:24; Rev. 11:2; 19:17-19). The times of Gentile supremacy in the world began when Nebuchadnezzar removed Israel's sovereignty, in 586 B.C., and will conclude when Jesus Christ returns at His second advent and restores Israel's sovereignty, in the Millennium. This will prove that Yahweh is the true God since He predicted this reversal of Israel's fortunes and will bring it to pass. Those who believe His promises will not be embarrassed or disappointed, because He will fulfill them.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 244-245- selected paragraphs).
The last half of Isaiah 49:23 states “You will know that I am the LORD, and they who expectantly wait for me will not be put to shame.” This prophecy from the sovereign LORD (Yahweh), was made over 2,700 years ago and is still applicable today. The faithful remnant of God still wait expectantly for the return of their Messiah to rescue them from their shame and from the brutal treatment they have received from the nations of the world who are led by Satan and his demons to destroy them. These nations will go through the Tribulation period during which they will face the wrath of God’s judgment upon them. All who survive of these nations will no longer be influenced by evil but will know the Lord and seek to serve Him. These Gentile survivors will carry those who are the faithful remnant of God’s covenant people as they journey to Zion to meet and worship the Messiah. These Gentiles will willingly do all they can to ensure the safety and comfort of God’s people and will also bring their wealth to Zion. See Isaiah 60: 5, 11 and 61:6.

49:24-26 Can plunder be taken away from a warrior, or captives be rescued from a tyrant?
25 But this is what the LORD says, "Even the captives will be taken away from the mighty, and the plunder of the tyrant will be rescued. I will attack those who attack you, and I will save your children.
26 I will force those who oppress you to eat their own flesh; they will get drunk with their own blood, as with wine.
Then everyone will know that I am the LORD, your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

Isaiah in 49:24 declares the words of the Lord, who asks two difficult questions: “Can plunder be taken away from a warrior, or (can) captives be rescued from a tyrant?” For humans, these questions would likely result in a negative response. But those who wait expectantly for the Lord, 49:23, they will have the assurance that both of these questions will be easily answered in the affirmative by the Lord. They will have witnessed all that the Lord has done during the Tribulation period and their confidence in Him will be strengthened because He has kept them safe during this tumultuous time. The Lord promises, 49:25 that He will come to the rescue of His faithful remnant and attack those who had attacked them. The Lord promises to save their children. In rescuing them from their captives, the mighty and the tyrant, the Lord will release them. The words “plunder” and “captives” are likely synonyms referring to those who have been taken captive by “mighty” nations. Those who knew Israel’s past history would remember that the Lord had rescued His people, including their children, from captivity in Egypt and punished Egypt with severe plagues that devastated the nation. King David, many years before this prophecy of Isaiah prayed to God, Psalm 35:1-3:

1 Oppose, O LORD, those who oppose me; fight against those who fight against me.
2 Take hold of shield and buckler; rise up to help me.
3 Draw out the spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

Another psalmist also prayed as recorded in Psalm 43:1:
Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation; deliver me from the one who is deceitful and unjust.
The Lord states in Isaiah 49:26, that those who oppress or contend with “you,” the faithful remnant, will be dealt with very harshly. The implication is that the oppressors will fight against themselves and will “eat their own flesh” and “they will get drunk with their own blood.” Ezekiel 38:17-23 is a description of what some understand as referring to this time when those who oppose the people of God will fight among themselves: 17 “This is what the sovereign LORD says: ‘Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in that time for years that I would bring you against them? 18 On that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel, says the sovereign LORD, my rage will be roused. 19 For in my jealousy and in the fury of my wrath have I spoken: Surely on that day there will be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. 20 The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the animals of the field, and all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all people that are on the face of the earth, will quake at my presence. The mountains will be thrown down, and the steep places collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground. 21 I will call for a sword against Gog on all my mountains, says the sovereign LORD: every one’s sword will be against his brother. 22 With pestilence and with bloodshed I will judge him; and I will rain on him, and on his troops, and on many peoples that are with him. It will be an torrential downpour, with great hailstones, fire and brimstone. 23 This is how I will magnify myself and sanctify myself. I will make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.’”

The ultimate purpose for God’s actions, as stated in Isaiah 49:15-26 in response to the lament of His people (49:14), is that “everyone will know that I am the LORD, your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob,” 49:26. God acts so that His salvific purposes will be realized and that He will be known and worshiped, not only by His covenant people but by peoples from all nations. One of God’s major roles for His Servant is recorded in Isaiah 49:6b “I will also make you a light to the nations, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” In performing this task, God’s Servant, the Messiah would bring salvation by making salvation available to the peoples of the earth through their faith in Him. The Servant would also bring them the knowledge of glorious Lord of creation who is a savior, a redeemer and the Mighty One. See also Isaiah 11:9; 45:6; and Habakkuk 2:14. The plan of God included the Gentiles, who along with His own people, will enjoy the benefits of the millennial rule of the Messiah. Thomas Constable aptly addresses the correctness of the premillennial interpretation of the prophecies of Isaiah:

“Are these descriptions just impressionistic pictures of Gentiles coming to Christ for salvation, or should we look for a more literal fulfillment of these promises? Amillennialists say they are figurative descriptions of Gentiles coming to salvation through Christ. Premillennialists say they describe a literal return of Israelites to their land with an accompanying exaltation of the physical descendants of Jacob in the earth.

One of the cardinal rules of hermeneutics is that, if the interpreter can understand something literally, it should be taken that way—unless other indications in the text or context point to a non-literal interpretation. Amillennialists concede that it is possible to take these prophecies literally, and that if one does, he or she will come out a premillennialist. But they say that a literal fulfillment was not intended, and that these predictions are being fulfilled spiritually through the church. Premillennialists view this chapter, and most of chapters 50—57, as revealing Messiah's restoration of Israel to her land at the beginning of the Millennium.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 245-246).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 49:

49:1-13 God’s Calling of the Servant
   The Commissioning of the Servant: Verses 1-7
   The Caregiving of the Servant: Verses 8-13
49:14-26 God Promises Blessings to Zion
   The Complaint of God’s People: Verse 8
   The Compassion of God for His People: Verses 8-26

The third Servant Song in Isaiah is declared in 50:4-11. The other Servant Songs are found in 42:1-9; 49:1-13; and 52:13-53:12. The first three verses of chapter 50 are either a continuation of the response of God to Israel’s complaint in 49:14 or an introduction to the Servant Song. The LORD, Yahweh has not put away His people by divorce nor sold them to any creditor, vs.1. He has sought them and called them, but no one responded to Him, 2a. The LORD reminded them that He has the power to redeem and deliver them for He can dry up the sea and the rivers by a mere rebuke, 2b. He also is so powerful that He can cast the vast heavens into darkness, vs. 3.

50:1 This is what the LORD says,
"Where is your mother's divorce certificate,
by which I have put her away?
Or to which of my creditors have I sold you?
Look, you were sold because of your sins,
and for your transgressions your mother was put away.

Within the context of chapters 49 and 50, it is best to understand 50:1-3 as a continuation of the Lord’s response to the complaint of His people that He had forsaken and forgotten them, 49:14. The context of chapter 49 is set in the far future days of the Tribulation when the covenant people of God, in distress while being held captive by tyrannical nations, complain that they have been abandoned by their Lord. The Lord reassures them that He can never forget them for they are inscribed (engraved) on the palms of His hands and their walls are continually before Him, 49:16. In this continued response to His people, 50:1-3, the Lord reminds them that He has not put them away but is always present among them, although they did not respond to Him. He also reminds them of His great power, so they have no need to have any doubts that He has forsaken them.

In 50:1, the LORD asks two rhetorical questions. The first question concerns the existence of a divorce certificate by which He has “put away” their mother. As this is a rhetorical question, it does not mean that there was a literal mother, but it may refer to the people themselves as the “wife” of the Lord for they are His covenant people, Isaiah 54:6, and 62:4-5. He has not issued a certificate of divorce. See Deuteronomy 24:1-4 for the laws regarding divorce. The Lord however, had symbolically written a “writ of divorce” to the adulterous people of the northern kingdom of Israel, Jeremiah 3:8 but not to the people of Judah whom He still, in Isaiah’s time, had not cast out because of their many sins. See Isaiah chapter 1 for a catalog of these sins.

The second question concerns the selling of His covenant people to a creditor. There is no one to whom the Lord is in debt. He has no debts that would require selling any of His beloved possessions to cover any amounts owed. Selling family members into slavery for debts owed was an unfortunate circumstance for some in Israel’s history. See 2 Kings 4:1 and Nehemiah 5:1-5. The Lord has not done that to His people whom He had just stated how much He cares for them, Isaiah 49:15-26. In the last sentence of 50:1, the Lord states that in the past His people had been “sold” and “put away.” This could refer to situations described in Judges 2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7 and 1 Samuel 12:9. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah Vol. 2, page 376. The past “selling” and “putting away” of His people however was not permanent but was intended by God for them to repent of their sins and return to Him in faith and obedience.
50:2 Why was no one there when I came?  
Why did no one answer when I called?
Is my hand so weak that it cannot redeem?  
Do I have no power to deliver?
Look, at my rebuke I can dry up the sea, 
I can make the rivers into a desert;  
their dead fish stink because there is no water,  
and they die of thirst.

The Lord directs two sets of questions to His covenant people. The first two questions, 50:2a are similar and directly address the complaint of His people recorded in 49:14. The people had complained that the Lord had forsaken and forgotten them. The response of the Lord here is that He had come to them and called them, but no one was present, and no one answered Him. In reality it was the people who had forsaken and forgotten their sovereign LORD. The history of the people of Israel is unique because they are the only people to have experienced God’s personal and visible presence when He accomplished many miraculous acts on their behalf. For example, Isaiah had previously spoke of Egypt and God’s power, 43:16-17. They had forgotten the plagues God had brought upon Egypt. They had forgotten the events of the first Passover, when the firstborn of the Israelites were spared, but not those of the Egyptians. They had forgotten the parting of the Red Sea saving their ancestors from recapture by the Egyptian army. They had forgotten giving of the law at Sinai and the presence of the Lord, day and night during their sojourn in the desert wilderness and the Lord’s provision of water and manna for them. They had forgotten the parting of the Jordan river upon their entrance into the land of promise. So many other appearances of the Lord were also forgotten including the most recent events, in Isaiah’s time, when the Lord’s angel destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, thus saving the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, Isaiah 37:36. In a later day, their own descendants would also not heed the presence of the Servant, their Messiah during His first advent. Not only would they not listen to Him, but they would reject Him and demand His death.

David L. Cooper comments on vs. 2a:

From verse 2 we learn that Jehovah, the Messiah, who sends this message has already visited Israel, has left her to her fate, and has returned to heaven. It is clear from this passage and others that this Jehovah has sustained a very close relationship with the nation, which is represented by the marriage vow. His ceasing to acknowledge this relationship and His withdrawing fellowship from her for the time being might, by some, be understood as being equivalent to a legal divorcement, but the speaker immediately assures the Hebrew people, the children of Zion, that, though He has separated from His wife temporarily, He has not instituted legal proceedings for a divorcement. He therefore challenges the Jewish people to produce such a document showing that He has divorced Jerusalem, His wife. (In this connection let us remember that this one who is speaking is Jehovah, who came to the earth and Israel refused to hear Him upon His visit. This Jehovah, as we have already seen, is Jehovah the Messiah. He it is who is the husband of Israel. There is no conflict between this representation and that which is found in the New Testament, where the church is said to be the "bride" of Christ. The New Testament union between Christ and the church is of a higher and more spiritual order than that between Him and Israel. There is therefore no conflict between the teachings of the two Testaments.)

The Messiah would not put Israel away by divorcing her. This thought is set forth very beautifully by Hosea and his wife, Gomer. After the marriage, she proved unfaithful to the prophet. He therefore put her away but did not divorce her and awaited the time when she would cease from her sinful ways. After that he took her back to himself in holy wedlock. Thus the spirit of the prophet with his unfaithful wife is set forth to picture to us Israel's unfaithfulness to Jehovah, her Messiah.
In verse 2 the Messiah asks Israel why there was no man who responded when He called her at the time of which the message speaks, namely, His first coming. The language is very specific—"Wherefore, when I came, was there no man?" When we view this rhetorical question in the light of its fulfillment, we see that there were some in Israel who did accept Messiah and became His most ardent followers. But the number who received Him was so very small in comparison with the nation that, relatively speaking, Messiah could say that there was no one who gave heed. That the Bible does use relative language is clear from such a passage as Matthew, chapter 3. Here we read that all Jerusalem and Judaea went to John and were baptized by him. Matthew's statement is that all the people did it. Nevertheless, we are told in Luke 7:29 that the Pharisees and the lawyers "rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized of him." Relatively speaking, the bulk of the nation did accept John's message and submitted to his baptism, but there was a small minority that did not. One must look at all the facts of a given statement in order to determine whether or not the passage is to be interpreted absolutely or relatively. We are, however, to understand every statement absolutely unless there are facts which indicate that the writer used relative language. In view of this usage and in view of the light of the historical fulfillment, we know that Isaiah saw that comparatively few of the nation would accept Messiah when He would appear. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – October 1945).

In the second half of Isaiah 50:2, the Lord asks the second set of two questions. He first, asks His covenant people if His hand is so weak that it cannot redeem and second, does He have no power to deliver? God often uses an anthropological example as a teaching lesson. He discusses His “hand” in Isaiah 1:25; 5:12, 25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4, 10, 13, 14; 11:11, 15; 14:26, 27; 19:16, 25; 23:11; 25:10; 26:11; 28:2; 29:23; 31:3; 34:17; 40:2, 12; 41:10, 20; 43:13; 45:11, 12; 48:13; 49:2, 16, 22; 50:2, 11; 51:16, 17; 53:10; 59:1; 60:21; 62:3, 8; 64:8; 65:2; 66:2 and 14. Of these occurrences, a few stand out as examples of His mighty power, such as that of 41:10:

Do not be afraid,  
for I am with you;  
do not be troubled, 
for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you;  
yes, I will help you;  
yes, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Also, similar to the words of Isaiah 50:2 is Isaiah’s declaration in 59:1:

Look, the LORD’s hand is not too short, that it cannot save,  
nor is his ear so deaf, that it cannot hear.

The Lord speaks of His mighty arm in Isaiah 30:30; 40:10, 11; 48:14; 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16; 62:8; 63:5 and 12. Of these 40:10; 59:16 and 63:5 are powerful examples of what His arm has wrought. The Lord speaks of His eyes in Isaiah 1:15; 11:3; 22:4 and 37:17; and of seeing in 37:17; 38:5; and 63:15. He speaks of His ears in 37:17, 29; and 59:1; and of hearing in 30:19; 37:17; 38:5; 59:2 and 65:24. He speaks of His face in Isaiah 8:17; 54:8; 57:17; 59:2; 64:7; and 65:3. Mention of the Lord’s heart is found in Isaiah 63:15. The above verses are examples (not exhaustive) of the use of anthropological terminology in Isaiah to describe the relationship between the Lord and humans. Without this terminology, it would be difficult to for humans to understand the intentions of God as He deals with people.

In Isaiah 50:2, the intention of the Lord is very clear. The Lord is all-powerful and will accomplish all that His “hand” has determined. He states in 50:2 that He has the power to “redeem”. The Hebrew word for “redeem” is pedut which has the meaning of to redeem or to ransom. The Hebrew word pedut only occurs in the Old Testament in Exodus 8:23; Psalm 111:9; 130:7; and Isaiah 50:2. It has a close meaning with padah \ 
which is also closely associated with *ga’al*, which occurs often in Isaiah as referencing the redemption by the Lord as Israel’s family or kinsmen Redeemer. The word “deliver” is the Hebrew word *nasal* which occurs often in Isaiah, 5:29; 19:20; 20:6; 31:5; 36:18; 19, 20; 36:14, 15 (twice), 18, 20; 37:11; 38:6; 42:22; 43:13; 44:17, 20; 47:14; 50:2; and 57:13. It has the meaning of deliver and rescue. In Isaiah 50:2, it has the meaning of God’s power to deliver His people from danger or from their enemies. God asks a negative rhetorical question which has a positive answer: “*Do I have no power to deliver?*” The obvious positive response is, yes God does have the power to deliver them. They could realize this deliverance if only they would acknowledge Him and respond to Him in faith.

The Lord adds to these rhetorical questions, 50:2 with a statement of fact. He commands them to “look,” (DASV) which is rightfully translated as “behold” in the KJV, NASB and ESV. The word “behold is also a better translation for “look” in 50:1 in the DASV. What God’s covenant people are to “behold” is His ability to make the sea and the rivers dry as He has done in the past by drying up the Red Sea as their ancestors were leaving Egypt and the Jordan River as they were entering the land of promise. If God has the power to control nature, He certainly can deliver His people from harm and redeem them. God had just stated, 49:25-26, that He can release His people who have been held captives by the mighty and from tyrants. The Servant of God, the Messiah also demonstrated this divine power over nature. See Matthew 8:23-27 and 14:22-33.

50:3 *I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.*

The Lord continues His response to their complaint that He had forsaken and forgotten them, 49:14, by another statement of His power over His creation. Not only does the Lord have ultimate power over the earth and all it contains, He can also command the heavens, which are infinite, to be covered (clothed) with blackness as if they had been covered with sackcloth. He had done than in the past, Exodus 10:21-28 (plague of darkness). He will do this again in the future, in the day of the Lord, just preceding the return of the Messiah, Isaiah 13:9-10; Joel 2:30-31; 3:15; Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28; Acts 2:17-21; and Revelation 6:12-17. With such displays of God’s awesome power over His creation, God had convincingly shown that He can deliver His people from any harm and bring redemption to them. They did not acknowledge Him or respond to Him when He came to them, 50:2. This statement can be understood as a prophetical future occurrence of the Messiah’s first advent. Would they acknowledge Him following the events of the great Tribulation? The Scriptures attest that, at the time of the coming of the terrifying “Day of the Lord,” and when their situation is hopeless because they are completely surrounded by their enemies, they will repent of their sins, acknowledge that they had rejected their Messiah and mourn for Him, and will call upon Him to return and rescue them. Only then will their Messiah come and rescue them. David L. Cooper comments on the impact of the words of the Lord in vss. 2a-3:

As proof that He can deliver, not having lost any of His power, He calls attention to the fact that "... at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stink, because there is no water, and die for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering." He not only is the God of creation, but He is the God who is controlling all nature and directing the course of human history. It is in Him that we live, move, and have our continual existence. Thus this omnipotent Creator and Preserver of the universe reminds the nation of Israel, after she has rejected Him, that He has put away Jerusalem, the mother of the nation, temporarily--because of the sins of the people, but this separation is not permanent. It is only temporary. The Messiah is awaiting the time when Israel, being taught the enormity of her sin of rejecting Him, will confess this national transgression, will turn from it, and will return to Him wholeheartedly, accepting Him enthusiastically. When she does this, He will return and enter into covenant relationship with His beloved people again and make Jerusalem the joy and praise of all the earth. (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – October 1945).
The Third Servant Song: 50:4-11

The Servant Songs in Isaiah, 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12, provide much detail about: the task given to the Servant, by His heavenly Father; the enablement the Heavenly Father has given to the Servant to complete the task; the mind-set of the Servant regarding the task including the suffering the Servant would endure in completing the task; and the result of this task being completed. The first two Servant Songs, 42:1-9 and 49:1-13 have been discussed in some detail in this Study of Isaiah. The following is a brief summary.

In the first Servant Song, the Father biographically, describes the Servant’s meekness by His not crying out nor raising His voice 42:2; not breaking a bruised reed, nor extinguishing a faintly burning wick 42:3; and not growing faint (being disheartened) nor discouraged 42:4. The first Servant Song also describes the task of the Servant as bringing forth justice to the nations 42:3-4; bringing teaching to the coastlands (nations of the earth) 42:4; being a covenant for the people 42:6; being a light for the nations 42:6; opening the eyes of the blind 42:7; releasing the prisoners from dungeons 42:7; and releasing prisoners from darkness 42:7. The Servant will be able to accomplish these tasks because the Father will put His spirit upon the Servant 42:1; the Father will lead the Servant “by the hand” and protect the Servant 42:6, for He will call the Servant in righteousness 42:6.

In the second Servant Song, the Servant speaks autobiographically, of His mind set, regarding the task, His heavenly Father has given to Him. He laments that He has labored in vain, 49:4; and spent His strength for nothing, resulting in futility, 49:4. The task given to the Servant is described by the Father biographically as raising up the tribes of Judah 49:6; restoring the survivors of Israel, 49:6; and this is called “insignificant” by the Father and He describes a more wide-ranging task of making the Servant a light to the nations, 49:6; and bringing salvation to the ends of the earth, 49:6. The Servant was also to be a covenant for the people, 49:8; to restore their land, 49:8; and to re-establish the people’s desolate places which is their inheritance, 49:8. The Servant would also free captive prisoners, 49:9 and release those who are hidden in dark places (prisons), 49:9. The Father of the Servant has enabled the Servant to accomplish these tasks by making His mouth like a sharp sword, 49:2; hiding the Servant in the shadow of His hand, 49:2; making the Servant like a polished arrow, 49:2; and has put Him into His quiver, 49:2. The Father has formed the Servant in the womb (of his earthly mother) to be His Servant, 49:1 and 5; and Has given the Servant His strength, 49:5. The Father has also responded to the Servant and has helped and protected Him, 49:8.

The result of the task being completed by the Servant is described by the Father, biographically as although the Servant will be despised and abhorred by the nations, 49:7 and although the Servant will serve rulers, 49:7. Kings will see Him and rise up in respect to Him, 49:7; and Princes will bow down before the Servant 49:7. By completing these tasks, including the re-gathering of the faithful remnant from all nations, 49:9-12, the LORD (Yahweh), will bring comfort and show compassion to His afflicted people 49:13. As a result, the heavens will sing and the peoples of the earth will be joyful, 49:13. This will happen because the Father explains that the faithful LORD, who is the Holy One of Israel has chosen the Servant, 49:7, (to accomplish His purposes).

Between the second and third Servant Song, 49:14–50:3, there is a connecting passage in which the Lord responds to a complaint by His people stated in 49:14. God’s people claim that the Lord and forgotten and forsaken them. The response to this complaint by the Lord, includes: first, a word of comfort that He has not nor ever will forget or forsake His people, 49:15-18; second, a word of promise that He will repopulate their land, 49:19-21; third, a word of hope that He will re-gather the faithful from powerful and tyrannical captors, 49:22-24; fourth, a word of salvation that He will redeem His people, 49:25-26; and fifth, a word of permanence that He will not divorce or sell out His people for He is all powerful, 50:1-3.
The third Servant Song, Isaiah 50:4-11, describes the Servant’s autobiographical declaration of His obedience to the sovereign LORD (His Father), 50:4-5; the sufferings He will endure in carrying out His responsibilities, 50:6; and the help He will receive from the sovereign LORD, so He will not be disgraced or condemned but vindicated, 50:7-9. The third Servant Song also includes an exhortation, (the words of the Servant declared by Isaiah), to the covenant people to fear the LORD and obey the voice of the Servant, 50:10-11.

50:4 The sovereign LORD has given me the tongue of a teacher, 
so that I may know how to sustain those who are weary with words. 
Morning by morning he wakes me up, 
he wakens my ear to hear like those who are taught.

The sovereign LORD has given me the tongue of a teacher, (first phrase of Isaiah 50:4)

The sovereign LORD (Adonai Yahweh) also translated as “Lord GOD”, is the One from whom the Servant (me) receives an instructed tongue. “Sovereign LORD” occurs also in 50:5, 7 and 9 as an emphatic notice that it is no other than Yahweh, the great “I AM” who is the self-sufficient, omnipresent God, who is also Adonai, the sovereign and mighty Lord. There should be no doubt as to the authority from whom the Servant receives His abilities, help and enacting right to perform His assigned tasks. Isaiah 50:4 states that the sovereign LORD gives these things to “me.” The word “me” has the capital ‘M” in the NKJV and NASB, to indicate the translator’s identification of “me” as being someone who is considered to be God. In 50:10, the voice to be obeyed is that of the Servant, whom is the speaker of the words, “me,” “I,” and ‘my” recorded throughout 50:4-11. Although there have been many who have attempted to identify this person as some other historical person or even as the nation Israel, there can be no other person who best fits this Servant as the Messiah, the One who is revealed in the New Testament as the Lord Jesus Christ. Taken cumulatively, the four Servant Songs in Isaiah, 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12, pinpoint the identity of this person as the Messiah with exact and convincing detail. The words of the Servant in this first phrase of 50:4, as in most of the content of the four Servant Songs, describes the period of the Messiah’s first advent when He was on the earth as the “God man.” David L. Cooper explains in this extended quotation:

“In verse 4 the Messiah declares that "The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught." When we read this passage and remember that this is Jehovah who is doing the talking, we wonder how it is that the Lord Jehovah gives Him the tongue of one who is taught, and why it is necessary for the Lord Jehovah to waken Him morning by morning. If this passage were the only one which we have, we could not understand such language. But when we study other predictions concerning Jehovah the Messiah's coming to earth, we learn that He, in entering our sphere, is begotten by the Holy Spirit and is born of a virgin. Thus Jehovah the Messiah assumes human form and becomes the God-man--Immanuel, God is with us (Isa. 7:14; 9:6). The historical fulfillment of this prediction became a reality in the miraculous conception and virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his making the announcement to the virgin, Gabriel, in-answer to Mary's question, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" declared, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34,35). Notice, kind reader, the angel's statement: "Wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God." "The holy thing" begotten by the Holy Spirit came to consciousness in the union of the eternal Logos--the Word (John 1:1)--with this holy thing that was begotten by the Holy Spirit. Thus the holy thing begotten, after its union with the eternal Logos, was to be called and was thus addressed, "the Son of God." He was in truth the God-man. He was not God and man, a monstrosity. Instead, He was indeed the God-man. Being the God-man and being born in the form of a little baby, He grew, in stature and in wisdom, to manhood. Concerning Him Luke tells us that he "... advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (See Luke 2:52.)
There was therefore an unfolding and a development of His human nature in its connection with the divine Logos. Concerning this proposition there can be no doubt. An examination of the life of our Lord as recorded by the four Evangelists shows that He had imposed upon Himself limitations—even though He was God in human form. From the standpoint of His divine nature He could look into the heavens and could comprehend God. This fact is seen in the following quotation: "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).

Yet from the standpoint of His human nature, He had the limitations of the flesh. For instance, He declared that, concerning the day when He will return for His saints, no one "knoweth, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only" (Matt. 24:35,36). On various occasions we are told that Jesus, perceived such and such a thing, acted or responded in a given manner. When all the facts regarding His human nature are gathered and are studied, one arrives at the inevitable conclusion that the Son of God, while here upon earth, imposed certain limitations upon Himself. This being true, it is natural that God the Father, who was interested in Him beyond all conception of mortal man, would give Him "the tongue of them that are taught," that He might sustain with words him that was weary. Thus the Lord Jehovah gave to Jehovah Messiah the very words which He should use in His preaching ministry to the meek and lowly of the earth. In the divine arrangement concerning the incarnation the Lord Jehovah was pleased to do this for and through the Son.

Moreover, He tells us that God the Father wakened Him morning by morning to hear as those that are taught. Messiah, according to this prediction, will rest well—perfectly, but will be awakened by the Father at the proper time in order that He might have sweet communion with Him through prayer. By this fellowship, the Messiah is prepared to speak to the people—as never man so spake. When we read this prediction in the light of the fulfillment as we see it especially recorded in Luke, we can understand this more perfectly. Luke presented the Lord Jesus as the ideal man, the perfect man. He, though God, took on the likeness of sinful flesh. He was sin apart. There was no sin in His flesh. Neither did He commit any wrong in His life. Nevertheless, it was essential for Him, in order that He might perform His redemptive work, to be in communion with His Father and daily be taught of Him before He undertook the work that lay before Him. Thus we read that often our Lord arose very early and went out to some secret place to pray. On the night before He chose the Twelve, He continued in prayer all night. After having thus been awakened by the Lord and having been supercharged by the divine power, our Lord was prepared daily to go out and battle against Satan and to preach to sinners.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – October 1945).

The words of the DASV in 50:4, “the tongue of a teacher” is translated as “the tongue of the learned” in the KJV and NKJV, as “an instructed tongue” in the NIV and “the tongue of disciples” in the NASB. The word translated as “teacher” in the DASV is the Hebrew word “limmud” which has the meaning of “disciple” or “taught.” It also occurs later in vs. 4 translated in the DASV as “taught.” This word also occurs in Isaiah 8:16, 54:13; Jeremiah 2:24 and 13:23. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The word for ‘disciple’ here is ‘limmud,’ instead of the later ‘talmud.’ The servant affirms that he was instructed by the LORD God Himself. (cf. John 7:16 and 14:24). (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 389.)

To enable the Servant to complete the task assigned to Him, the sovereign LORD equipped His Son, the Messiah with instruction, as a master would teach a disciple. The Father sent the Spirit to “rest upon” His Son, as prophesied in Isaiah 11:2 and as fulfilled in the New Testament in Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; and John 1:29-34. Also, this instruction likely came during long periods of intimate fellowship between the Father and His Son, when Jesus withdrew Himself from others for prayer, Matthew 14:23; 26:36-46; Mark 6:45-46; Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; and 22:39-46.

so that I may know how to sustain those who are weary with words, (second phrase of Isaiah 50:4)
The Servant was given an instructed tongue to be able to proclaim the very words God intended. A brief perusal of the Gospel of John reveals this relationship, John 5:36; 8:28, 38; 10:18, 37-38; 12:49-50; and 14:31. An example of this relationship is seen in John 12:49-50: 49 For I did not speak from myself; but the Father who sent me, he has given me a commandment about what I should say and what I should speak. 50 I know that his commandment is life eternal. The things therefore which I speak, are just what the Father has told to me to say."

In the second Servant Song, the Servant proclaims that “He made my mouth like a sharp sword,” 49:2. The sovereign LORD equipped the Servant, the Messiah to use the words of His mouth to accomplish the task the LORD had ordained for His Son. In 50:4 a segment of this task is revealed. It is to use the Servant’s words “to sustain those who are weary.” At times, the words of the Messiah at His first advent, were sharp with the declaration of judgment, Matthew 18:7 and at other times, these words were gentle and sustaining as seen for example in Matthew 11:28-30, 28 “Come to me, all you who labor (are weary) and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” This ministry of the Messiah, in using His words to sustain the weary and the weak, was witnessed during His first advent and is present now as He leads His church and this ministry will continue into His millennial kingdom as prophesized by Isaiah in 40:29-31:

29 He gives strength to the weary;  
to the weak he increases strength.
30 Even youths will faint and grow weary,  
and vigorous young men fall exhausted,  
31 but those who wait for the LORD will renew their strength;  
they will mount up with wings like eagles;  
they will run, and not grow weary;  
they will walk, and not faint.

All who are discouraged, who are weak in heart and body, and who are in weariness due to their life circumstances can seek the Lord directly and find help, strength and encouragement to overcome any obstacle and difficulty. He lives eternally to intercede for those who draw near to Him (Hebrews 7:25).

Morning by morning he wakes me up,  
he wakens my ear to hear like those who are taught. (third and fourth phrases of Isaiah 50:4)

The intimate relationship between the sovereign LORD and the Servant, the Messiah is described in terms of a family relationship. The Father awakens His Son each morning so that the Son can receive fresh words of instruction for the coming day. The word “taught” is the same Hebrew word limmud as “teacher” in the first sentence of 50:4. The Son is a faithful recipient of the words of His Father. He not only listens but obeys His Father’s instruction as He testifies, as recorded in the New Testament. Thomas Constable comments:

“The Servant's words had come to Him through daily, direct interaction with the Lord as an obedient disciple (cf. Gen. 3:8; Mark 1:35; Heb. 5:8).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 248).

50:5 The sovereign LORD has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious,  
nor did I turn back.
As in Isaiah 50:4, the Servant states that it was the sovereign LORD who was the divine authority who spoke to Him. His Father opened His ear, 50:5, to give Him instruction regarding His earthly task to which He was obedient and was not rebellious. King David had written many hundreds of years earlier, as recorded in Psalm 40:6-8:

6 You have no delight in sacrifice and offering;  
you have opened my ears,  
you have not required burnt offerings and sin offerings.

7 Then I said, "Look, I have come;  
in the scroll of the book it is written about me,

8 ‘I delight to do your will, O my God;  
your law is in my heart.’"

The author of Hebrews, in 10:5-7 applied these verses to the Messiah who was obedient by doing the will of the Father. This obedience meant that salvation was accomplished on behalf of all people by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the Apostle Paul stated, as recorded in Philippians 2:8, “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” The Apostle John records the words of the Messiah, in John 8:28-29, regarding His obedience that led to His death on the cross: 28 Then Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak only the things that the Father has taught me. 29 The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." John also recorded the words of the Messiah, in John 14:31: "I am doing what the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” John later recorded the words of the Messiah in 15:10, “If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love.” The author of Hebrews, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, revealed why the Messiah did not turn back from completing His assigned task, even though it brought Him much suffering, “Looking to Jesus the leader and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you do not grow weary and give up.” Hebrews 12:2-3.  

As a result of His obedience “unto death, even death on a cross,” Philippians 2:8, the Servant was exalted by God as Philippians 2:9-11 state: “Consequently God highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” The obedience of the Servant led to a cruel death upon a Roman cross from which the Servant did not rebel against nor turn away from. His obedience, however, was rewarded with the “joy that was set before Him,” Hebrews 12:2; and to exaltation in heaven which ultimately was for the glory of His Father. Philippians 2:9-11. Another purpose of the Servant’s obedience was that it served as an example to those who have faith in Him, so they would have strength to endure and also to not turn back from their tasks that have been given to them by the Messiah, “the race that is set before us,” Hebrews 12:1.

50:6 I gave my back to those who beat me,  
and my cheeks to those who ripped out my beard;  
I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.

The Servant explains some details of what He was to endure as a result of not turning back or rebelling against the will of the sovereign LORD. He willingly (“I gave” and “I did not hide”) presented Himself to physical abuse which is described as being beaten on His back; having His beard ripped from His cheeks and
facing insults and spitting on His face. There can be no doubt that the cumulative evidence, revealed in the Servant Songs, point to only one person who would fulfill at the prophecies about His calling, the tasks assigned to Him, the enabling of the Servant by the sovereign LORD, His obedience in completing these tasks and the suffering He endured in completing these tasks. This person, described in Isaiah as the Servant, could only have been the One, who is revealed in the New Testament, as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The abuse of the Servant in the manner spoken of in Isaiah 50:6 was fulfilled literally during the time of the suffering of the Messiah just prior to His death on the cross. See: Matthew 26:67-68; 27:24-31; Mark 14:65; 15:16-20; Luke 22:63; John 18:22-23; and 19:1-3. These verses describe in graphic detail the beatings, the mocking and the insults He patiently and willingly endured without complaint. Psalm 22 is another prophetic passage describing the suffering and death of the Messiah which was accurately fulfilled as recorded in the New Testament.

The Servant in the second Servant Song, 49:1-13, had introduced the suffering He would endure. In 49:4 the Servant laments, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing, only futility.” In 49:7, the LORD addresses the Servant: “to one who is despised, to one whom the nations abhor, to one who is a servant of rulers.” There was only a hint of suffering or harm that may come to the Servant in the first Servant Song in the promise the sovereign LORD gives to the Servant in 42:6, “I will take you by the hand and protect you.” However, the suffering of the Servant and its purpose is extensively revealed in the fourth Servant Song, 52:13-52:12. The progression of the revelation of the suffering of the Servant is seen as each Servant Song is declared by Isaiah. The final Servant Song will not only describe this suffering in greater detail but will also describe the salvific purposes that God has ordained that will result from the suffering of the Servant. Isaiah 50:5-6 reveals the willingness of the Servant to suffer but the fourth Servant Song will reveal the purpose and the pleasure of God in this suffering.

50:7 For the sovereign LORD will help me;
I will not be disgraced.
Therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I will not be put to shame.

For the sovereign LORD will help me; (first phrase of 50:7)

The Servant next reveals that the task giver, the sovereign LORD will help Him. This declaration of help is repeated in 50:9. The LORD declares his support for the Servant in 42:1. In 42:6, the LORD states that He will help the Servant by taking Him by the hand and protecting Him. In 49:5 the Servant states that God is His strength. In 49:8, the LORD states, “In the time of my favor, I answered you; and in a day of salvation, I helped you. I will protect you.” One aspect of this “help” is described in 50:4 as: “Morning by morning he wakes me up, he wakens my ear to hear like those who are taught.” The intimacy between the sovereign LORD and the Servant is prophesized by Isaiah and fulfilled in the New Testament. An example of this intimacy is recorded in John 1:18 (NKJV), “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

I will not be disgraced, (second phrase of 50:7)

The suffering of the Servant, described in 50:6, would have been understood by Isaiah’s audience as a sign of deserved punishment, disgrace and disrespect. See for example Deuteronomy 25:2 describing beatings for punishment as declared by a judge; spitting in the face, indicating shame, Numbers 12:14; and cursing and
the pulling out of hair for acts of evilness, Nehemiah 13:25. These examples are suggested by Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, page 382. In spite of the afflictions, the Servant will receive, He declares that with the help of the sovereign LORD, He will not be disgraced. Disgraced is the Hebrew word, *kalam*, which has the meaning of being humiliated, being ashamed, or being confounded, because of one’s actions. The word *kalam* occurs a few times in Isaiah, 41:11; 45:16, 17; 50:7; and 54:4. The beatings, ripping out of the beard, spitting in the face and the insults afflicted upon the Servant, however would not lead to disgrace or humiliation as the sovereign LORD would be the Servant’s help and strength. These sufferings have a divine salvific purpose which is revealed in the fourth Servant Song, Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The Servant can endure them with confidence and with the certainty that He will be vindicated, 50:8. See notes on 50:6 above.

*Therefore I have set my face like a flint*, (third phrase of 50:7)

With the help and strength that the Servant will receive from the sovereign LORD, the suffering He will receive will not deter Him from completing the assigned tasks given to Him, 42:1, 6-7; 49:5-6, 8-13; 50:4. He will willingly and resolutely face these sufferings for He describes that He has set His face like flint. The word flint is the Hebrew word *challamish*, which refers to a very hard silica rock which is harder than steel and was used as an abrasive. Reference: The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 2, page 548. The word flint, *challamish* occurs a few times in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 8:15; 32:13; Job 28:9 (marginal note); Psalm 114:8 and Isaiah 50:7. The likely fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Luke 9:51 (KJV): “when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” The Servant would not be rebellious and would not turn back, 50:5 from facing the affliction He knew was awaiting Him in Jerusalem.

*And I know that I will not be put to shame.* (fourth phrase of 50:7)

The Servant can face the suffering awaiting Him because He knew that the sovereign LORD was with Him, and would take His hand and would help and protect Him so that He could complete the tasks assigned to Him. By steadfastly setting His face to the sufferings that awaited Him, Luke 9:51 the Servant knew that He would not be put to shame and that these sufferings would accomplish the great plan of God, established before the foundation of the world. This divine plan of God, although it meant suffering and death for the Servant (and His resurrection to life), would accomplish the means of eternal salvation for all who will put their faith in the Servant, John 3:14-16, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

50:8 *The one who vindicates me is near.*
  
  *Who will make accusations against me?*
  
  *Let us confront each other.*
  
  *Who is my adversary?*
  
  *Let him come near to challenge me.*

*The one who vindicates me is near*, (first phrase of 50:8)

The Servant could face the sufferings to come because of the nearness of the sovereign LORD who will help Him, and He will not be put to shame nor be disgraced, 50:7. See notes on 50:4- 7 for a brief discussion on the relationship between the Servant and the sovereign LORD and how it relates to the willingness of the Servant to face the coming sufferings. In 50:8 the confidence of the Servant is evident in His statement that the one who vindicates Him is near. Bracketing 50:8 is the statement in 50:7 and 9 that the sovereign LORD will help Him. This helps to identify the “one” who is near who vindicates the Servant. The word vindicates is the Hebrew word *sadaq* which has the meaning of, to be just or righteous and to be acquitted. The word
sadaq occurs in Isaiah (DASV) in 5:23 (acquit); 43:9 (proven right); 43:26 (innocence); 45:25 (vindicating); 50:8 (vindicates); and 53:11 (justify). In all occurrences of sadaq in the KJV it is translated as justify or justified. The word sadaq occurs in the fourth Servant Song in a highly significant verse 53:11:

As a result of the anguish of his soul,
    he will see and be satisfied.
    By his knowledge my righteous servant will **justify** many,
    and he will bear their sins.  (bold intentional)

The sovereign Lord will vindicate (sadaq) the Servant for the Servant will justify (sadaq) many. The suffering of the Servant described as the anguish of His soul, is explained in detail in the fourth Servant Song 52:13-53:12. The Servant’s suffering will result in salvation being accomplished for the people of the world, for all who believe in the Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ. By this suffering, the Servant will have satisfied the sovereign Lord’s righteous demand for a propitiation which is an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. The sovereign LORD will accept the atoning sacrifice of the One who is called the Servant in Isaiah and is revealed as the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament. His sacrifice, once for all, is sufficient for all the sins of the world’s people and directly applicable for those who believe in Him. It is described in Isaiah 53:11 as the Servant will “**justify many and he will bear their sins**.” Throughout all the days of the Servant’s anguish and suffering, He will be comforted and strengthened by the sovereign LORD, the One who is near.

**Who will make accusations against me?** (second phrase of 50:8)

Because the sovereign LORD vindicates Him, the Servant can boldly ask, who is qualified enough, or righteous enough, or exalted enough to make any accusations against Him? The Servant calls upon anyone in the world, living in the past, present or future, to state any case of accusation against Him. The words appear to be in a courtroom setting. See also 41:1; 43:8-13. The word “accusations” is the Hebrew word rib which has the meaning of to strive or contend against. In the DASV, rib is translated in Isaiah as 1:17 (plead); 3:13 (accusation); 27:8 (contend); 45:9 (argues); 49:25 (attack); 50:8 (accusations); 51:22 (pleads) and 57:16 (accusations). The Servant is asking who is supremely qualified enough to bring any charge or contention or accusations against Him. This rhetorical question is coupled to a similar question later in 50:8: “who is my adversary?” The answer to both of these questions is a resounding silence!

*Let us confront each other. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to challenge me.* (final phrases of 50:8)

No one has the authority to stand up to confront the Servant to bring any accusation or charge against Him. He has been vindicated by being declared just and righteous by the sovereign LORD of the universe. He will face suffering and affliction as one who has been punished, Isaiah 53:4-5. But this punishment, even to death, will be in accordance with the good pleasure of the LORD, Isaiah 53:10 for it is the LORD who has smitten and afflicted Him, Isaiah 53:4. Therefore, since the Servant’s “punishment” has been at the hand of the sovereign LORD and the Lord has vindicated the Servant, who in all the universe can or could lay any charge against the Servant. The Servant asks, if there is such a person, (and there is none), let this person come forward to be confronted by One who is called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” Isaiah 9:6. There will be no confrontation. Thomas Constable comments:

“The Servant could, if He chose to do so, stand up in court and declare His righteousness. No one, such as a prosecuting attorney, could condemn Him by showing Him to be wicked (cf. John 18:38). God would stand near Him as His defense attorney and would vindicate Him (cf. 1 John 2:1-2). The beginning of Jesus’ vindication was His resurrection (cf. Acts 2:23-24; 3:15; 13:29-30).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 249).
50:9 The sovereign LORD helps me.  
Who is he who will condemn me?  
Look, they all will wear out like a garment,  
the moth will eat them up.

The Servant again, as in 50:7 declares that He receives help from the sovereign LORD. With this help, who in all the universe has the ability, authority or the acumen to condemn the Servant. Like the rhetorical questions in 50:8, this question in 50:9, “who is he who will condemn me?” also is answered with deafening silence, for there is no one, not even one, who has any cause to lay any charge of condemnation against Him. Those who are so full of hubris and evilness who think they can lay any charge against the Servant will not last but face certain death, for they are but a created being and cannot stand against the One who is the Almighty. Those who presume to condemn the Servant will “wear out like a garment” for as a garment, “the moth will eat them up.” In Isaiah 51:7-8, the Servant proclaims:

7 Listen to me, you who know righteousness,  
the people who have my law in their heart.  
Do not be afraid of the insults of men,  
nor fear their mocking.  
8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment,  
and the worm will devour them like wool.  
But my righteousness will last forever,  
and my salvation to all generations.

The Servant, the Messiah is truly eternal. He has no beginning nor end. He has everlasting righteousness, and against Him no one can bring any charge or accusation. In Isaiah 50:4-9, the Servant proclaims that He is vindicated by the sovereign LORD who helps Him and will not allow Him to be put to shame or disgraced. His sufferings and afflictions will, as explained in the fourth Servant Song, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, result in the completion of His task, that of being the One who will take upon Himself the sins of the world so that salvation will be accomplished and sufficient all and applicable for those who will believe in Him. In this task, He will be punished for sins He did not commit and bring salvation to those who did not deserve it, nor could accomplish the work of salvation for themselves. His act of grace freely bestowed on the entire human race, brought Him the vindication of His Father, the sovereign LORD who has declared Him to be righteous. Therefore no one can bring any charge against Him. With the words of 50:9, the autobiographical testimony of the work of the Servant is completed in the third Servant Song. In 50:10-11, the Servant turns His attention to those who will hear or read the writings of the prophet. They are called to trust in and rely upon the LORD.

50:10 Who among you fears the LORD?  
Who obeys the voice of his servant?  
Anyone who walks in darkness,  
and has no light,  
let them trust in the name of the LORD,  
and rely upon his God.

The focus of this third Servant Song changes in 50:10-11 as the Servant addresses those who will either hear or read the message of Isaiah. The prophet records the words of One who will suffer humiliation, affliction and death to bring salvation to those who cannot save themselves and who will be condemned if they attempt such folly. The Servant first asks two questions of those “among you” which is likely addressed to
Isaiah’s audience in Judah who are God’s covenant people. The first question is, “Who among you fears the LORD?” The word “fear” is the Hebrew word yare which has the meaning of fear or being terrified yet being in awe of God and acting in holy reverence to Him. Those who are God’s covenant people who knew the books of Scripture would have known from an early age the command of the Lord to fear Him, Leviticus, 19:14; 25:17; Deuteronomy 6:2, 13, 24; and 31:12. See also Psalm 33:8. In Isaiah 8:13, the prophet had declared the words of God:

The LORD of hosts is the one you must recognize as holy,  
and let him be your fear,  
and let him be your dread.

Isaiah also declared in Isaiah 59:19:

So they will fear the name of the LORD from the west,  
and revere his glory from the rising of the sun.

There is also another dimension to “fear” which may prevent the worshipper of God from coming to Him or cause the worshipper to be afraid in His presence. Isaiah addresses this situation in several places in his prophecy. These “fear not” admonitions are intended to give those seeking God a sense of comfort and trust in their God. See Isaiah 35:4; 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5 and 44:2. See also Jeremiah 30:10.

The second question of Isaiah 50:10 is, “Who obeys the voice of his servant?” These two questions are related as the result of fearing the Lord is surely obeying Him. The word “obeys” is the Hebrew word shama which has the meaning of “to hear” (most often occurrence in the OT), “agrees with,” “discerns,” and “obedience.” Of the many occurrences in Isaiah of shama, it is translated as obedience, or similar word in, 1:19; 30:9; 42:24; and 50:10.

In Isaiah 1:18-19, obedience and willingness are equated with trusting in the LORD:

18 "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD.  
"Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red like crimson,  
they shall be like wool.

19 If you are willing and obedient,  
you will eat the good of the land.

A clear statement of not being obedient to the LORD is stated in Isaiah 42:24:

23 Who is there among you who will listen to this?  
Who will pay attention and hear in the time to come?  
24 Who gave Jacob up for spoil,  
and Israel to the robbers?  
Was it not the LORD  
against whom we have sinned?  
In whose ways they refused to walk,  
and whose law they would not obey.
The latter half of Isaiah 50:10 provides hope for those who walk in darkness:

Anyone who walks in darkness,
and has no light,
let them trust in the name of the LORD,
and rely upon his God.

This is not the darkness of sinfulness or of those who have been blinded by Satan, 2 Corinthians 4:4, but that which Isaiah spoke about as recorded in 9:2; and which king David experienced and wrote about in Psalm 23: 4. Followers of the Lord who experience times of little or no light to guide them and face uncertainty in the direction they should walk are to simply trust in and rely upon the Lord. The people of Judah will lament in a future day that the Lord has forgotten and forsaken them, Isaiah 49:14. They will have Isaiah 50:10 and many other Scripture passages to lead them in their darkness. For example, one such passage they should know by heart is Psalm 119:105, Your word is a lamp to my feet, and light to my path. The ultimate reason why the people of God should trust and rely upon Him is that their Messiah is the light of the world, John 1:9; 8:12, 9:5, 12:46; 2 Corinthians 4:4. Those who trust in their Messiah, their Redeemer and Savior, will no longer walk in darkness but will have the abiding divine light to guide them. Their obedience to the word of the Lord will ensure they will not stumble or fall but walk with confidence and assurance that they will complete their journey to the praise and glory of the Lord.

50:11 Look, all you who light a fire,
that equip yourselves with burning torches;
walk in the light of your fire,
and among the torches that you have ignited.
This is what you will have from my hand;
you will lie down in torment.

The result of not trusting in nor relying upon the Lord is explained by the Servant in 50:11. Instead of looking to their Messiah who is the “light of the world” (see notes on vs. 10), those who choose to walk their own way in their own strength and by their own “light” a burning torch, will end up being burned or torched by this light source. In other words, they will reap what they sow. If they light their own fires they will be consumed by them. They will “lie down in torment.” The word torment is the Hebrew word maatsebah, which occurs only in this verse and has the meaning of “a place of pain” The last verse of the prophecy of Isaiah, 66:24, describes this place, “They will go out, and look on the corpses of those who have rebelled against me; for their worms will not die, neither will their fire be extinguished. They will be abhorred by all humanity.” See also Jeremiah 19:6; Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:47-48; and Revelation 20:14-15. David L. Cooper provides this extended comment on Isaiah 50:10-11:

“A Call to all Truth Seekers to Accept the Messiah

After the prophet, as the representative of the Messiah, delivers his message, he makes a special personal appeal to the people in the following words:

"10 Who is among you that feareth Jehovah, that obeyeth the voice of his servant? he that walketh in darkness, and hath no light, let him trust in the name of Jehovah, and rely upon his God. 11 Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that gird yourselves about with firebrands; walk ye in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Isa. 50:10,11).
"Who is among you [the Jewish people] that feareth Jehovah [the Lord Jehovah, the Father] that obeyeth the voice of his servant [Messiah]?" Thus in this verse the prophet was speaking for the Lord Jehovah, sending forth a call to the honest-hearted truth seekers to accept and to obey the Messiah, the servant of Jehovah. Neither Jehovah God nor Jehovah Messiah ever forced any man's will. God made each one a free moral agent. He does all within His power to persuade men to accept the truth and to yield their lives to Him. Nevertheless He always stops short of coercion of the will. The prophet therefore, speaking for God, asks the people who will come out and obey His servant. This is a call to Israel which was issued officially on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ (Acts, chap. 2). That invitation has been echoing down the corridors of time to the present moment. The gospel is to the Jew first and also to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16). Now is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time. When death comes, it is too late, for it is appointed unto men once to die; after that, judgment. (See Hebrews 9:27.) The call is coming to every Hebrew to accept Messiah. An invitation is given to every sinner throughout the world.

"He that walketh in darkness, and hath no light, let him trust in the name of Jehovah, and rely upon his God" (vs. 10b). One does not have to be a brilliant and highly educated man in order to receive the truth. One does not have to be born into an environment of culture, refinement, and education in order to understand the knowledge of God. One may be born in heathen darkness and may be walking in the same; but, if he is only honest and conscientious, prizing truth above everything else, the Lord will bring truth to such a one. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:5): Cornelius was living up to all the light that he had. Moreover, it is evident that he was praying for more light; for the angel, dispatched from heaven to him, declared that his prayers had been heard and that he should send to Joppa for one Simon, whose name was Peter, and who was lodging by the seaside. This messenger of God was to tell him words whereby he and his household might be saved. Thus we see that an honest, conscientious truth seeker received the light. God gave it to him. What He did for Cornelius, He will do for anyone else who is thus seeking truth and righteousness.

But to those who do not want truth but who wish to continue in their own spiritual darkness, the prophet said, "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that gird yourselves about with firebrands; walk ye in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that ye have kindled" (vs. 11). It is quite evident in this connection that these people whom he thus addresses are those who are satisfied with their own spiritual condition and standing before God. He therefore is willing for them to walk in the light of their own firebrands—in the light of human knowledge and effort. So long as they do that, however, they can never come to the true light. Those who thus persist in their own darkness "shall lie down in sorrow." In other words, these shall pass out of this life without God and without hope in the world. They shall go off into everlasting darkness and shame." (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – October 1945).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 50:

50:1-3 The LORD Redeems
50:4-5 The Obedience of the Servant
50:6 The Suffering of the Servant
50:7-9 The Vindication of the Servant
50:10-11 The Servant Redeems

4. God’s Comfort for His People: 51:1-23

Following the third Servant Song, Isaiah brings messages of hope, comfort and redemption for the people of God which leads directly to the fourth Servant Song. The section 51:1 to 52:12 can be understood as a single prophetic unit which prepares the audience for the climax of great plan of God in willing His Servant to suffer and die sacrificially for the sins of the world. This study of Isaiah will look at this section in two larger units, first, God’s Comfort for His People, 51:1-23 and second, God Promises Good News to His People, 52:1-12 including smaller sections within these two larger units. The section 51:1-52:12, contains several
imperative commands such as listen: 51:1, 4, 7, and 21 (hear this); look: 51:1-2, 6 and 22; wake up: 51:9; 17 and 52:1; and depart: 52:11. These commands are connectors to the previous section, 50:1-11 and to the following section 52:13-53:12 which makes Isaiah 51:1-52:12 an important bridge linking two units which describe the suffering of the Servant and God’s plan for salvation for the people of the world.

A: The Redeeming Lord: 51:1-8

The first paragraph, 51:1-8 of the larger section 51:1-52:12 contain three imperative commands from the LORD to listen to Him: vss. 1, 4 and 7; and three commands to look: vss. 1, 2 and 6. These six imperative commands define this paragraph as God’s directive to His people to pay attention to what He is saying and to consider the examples He is providing. The intent of God as recorded in these verses is to bring to their attention the example of Abraham and Sarah to whom God blessed vss. 1-2, and thereby assuring His people that He will comfort Zion, His people vs. 3; and make Zion like Eden and bring joy and gladness to Zion, vs. 3. This along with the other indicators in these verses point to a time just prior to the second advent of the Messiah and His establishment of His kingdom. God will also ensure that His law will go forth from Zion as well as His justice which will be a light for the world, vs. 4. God also assures them that His righteous is near them and His salvation has been sent out, so the nations of the world will have hope in Him, vs. 5. God contrasts the present heavens and the earth which will not last with His righteous and salvation which will last forever, vs. 6. Finally, God implores His covenant people to not be afraid of the insults or mocking of men for they will perish and again God states that His righteousness and salvation will last forever, vss. 7-8.

In this short paragraph, 51:1-8, the Lord reminds His audience of things that belong to Him:

My people (vs. 4)
My nation (vs. 4)
My justice (vs. 4)
My righteousness (vss. 5, 6, 8)
My salvation (vss. 5, 6, 8)
My arm (vs.5)
My law (vs. 7)

51:1 Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,
you who seek the LORD.
Look to the rock you were chiseled out of,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.

The setting of this prophetic section, 51:1-52:12 is most likely just prior to the second advent of the Messiah, near the end of the Tribulation period, when the comfort the Lord will give to Zion is near. The Lord states that He will make Zion and its surrounding wilderness like Eden vs. 3, which has not yet happened and was certainly not a promise about the post-exile days of Jerusalem when the exiles returned from Babylon. The Lord also stated that the heavens and earth vs. 6, will not last, and He will judge the peoples of the earth, vs. 5. The Lord continues to respond to the question and lament of His people Zion, 49:14 who complain that the Lord has forsaken and forgotten them. His response is recorded in the larger section 49:15 to 53:13 and arguably continues to the end of the prophetic writings of Isaiah. In the paragraph, 51:1-8, the Lord beckons those who pursue righteousness and seek Him and to listen to Him. These words must certainly apply to the faithful remnant who have endured the distress of the days of Tribulation by being obedient to the Lord’s call to hide themselves as recorded in Isaiah 26:20-21.
Go, my people, enter into your rooms.
Shut your doors behind you.
Hide yourself for a little while,
until his anger is passed.

For look, the LORD comes out of his dwelling place
to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their sin.
The earth also will reveal the bloodshed on her,
and will no longer cover her slain.

(Isaiah 26:20-21)

The word “righteousness” in vs. 51:1 is a common theme of Isaiah. It is the Hebrew word sedeq, a noun which is closely related to the noun sedaqah. It is also related to the adjective saddiq and the verb sadaq. Sedeq occurs 25 times in Isaiah including three times in this paragraph, 51:1, 5 and 7. The related word sedaqah occurs 36 times in Isaiah and twice in this paragraph, 51:6 and 8. Each occurrence of sedeq and sedaqah in these verses is translated as “righteousness” in the DASV. To pursue “righteousness” is to act like God who is altogether righteous, Isaiah 41:10; 42:21; and who speaks righteousness, 45:19. It is a holy characteristic of the Messiah (the Branch), Isaiah 11:4-5; who will reign in righteousness, Isaiah 32:1. To pursue righteousness is to pursue holiness as they are identical in aspect. Just as the Lord calls His people to be holy for He is holy, Leviticus 11:44). The LORD describes His faithful followers as those who pursue righteousness.

The faithful remnant of Israel is also described as, “you who seek the LORD.” In the last days the people of God will seek Him. Hosea 3:5 states, “Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and will tremble before the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.” Even those who will leave their exile in Babylon will seek Him as recorded in Jeremiah 50:4. Isaiah had previously spoken about seeking the Lord, Isaiah 14:32 and would later state as recorded in 55:6-7, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous his thoughts. Let them return to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Those who seek the Lord will find Him. In a prophecy of the latter days, the Lord spoke through Moses, Deuteronomy 4:25-31 and revealed what would happen to His covenant people. This lengthy passage is worthy of our study and consideration:

25 When you have had children and grandchildren, and you have been in the land a long time, if you corrupt yourselves and make a carved idol in the form of anything, and do what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, to provoke him to anger; 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will quickly be removed from the land you are crossing the Jordan River to possess. You will not live there long but will be utterly destroyed. 27 The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations, where the LORD will exile you. 28 There you will serve gods of wood and stone made by human hands that neither see, hear, eat or smell. 29 But if from there you will seek the LORD your God, you will find him, when you search for him with all your heart and all your soul. 30 When you are in distress and all these things happen to you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God, and listen to his voice. 31 For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you, or forget the covenant which he promised your fathers. (The bold words in Deuteronomy 4:29 are intentional).

The Lord promises that those who seek Him with all their heart and soul will find Him. The Old Testament has much to say about seeking the Lord. For a study on seeking the Lord, see (selected verses only), Deuteronomy 4:25-31 (as stated above); 1 Chronicles 16:10, 11; 22:19; 28:9; 2 Chronicles 15:2; Psalm 14:2;
In the second half of Isaiah 51:1 the LORD states that the faithful remnant are to look back: “Look to the rock you were chiseled out of, and to the quarry from which you were dug.” This is a reference to their lineage from Abraham and Sarah, upon whom the Lord will discuss more as recorded in 51:2. The description of the first parents of the Hebrew peoples as a rock and a quarry from which they were birthed is likely a depiction of the inability of these first Hebrew parents to have children of their own and of their advanced ages which would have normally made it impossible for them to bear children. It is as if God was saying, from an impossible situation, life came from it as it were from a rock. God, however can bring miracles from any impossible situation and this included the birth of Isaac. The line of the Hebrews was birthed from such a situation. It took an act of God to do the impossible and He assures His covenant people that He has not forsaken nor forgotten them, Isaiah 49:14. He will comfort His people and make Zion like Eden, Isaiah 51:3 and establish His justice as a light to the nations, 51:4; and sent forth His salvation, 51:5; which will last forever as will His righteousness, 51:6, 8.

51:2 Look to Abraham your father,
and to Sarah who bore you;
for he was only one person when I called him,
but I blessed him, and made him many.

The Lord reminds His covenant people to look to their Hebrew first parents, Abraham and Sarah, who like a rock or a quarry 51:1, when it seemed impossible for life to come from their inability to bear children, enabled them to be the parents of the promised child Isaac. They also were promised that they would be the parents of a multitude of descendants, Genesis 17:4-5. Abraham had no children when He was first called by God, Genesis 12:1-3, but God blessed Him by making him the father of many, the Hebrew race. See also Genesis 13:16; 15:1-6; and 22:17-18.

51:3 For the LORD will comfort Zion,
he will comfort all her ruins.
He will make her wilderness like Eden,
and her desert like the garden of the LORD.
Joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the sound of music.

Just as God had blessed Abraham, He would in a far future day, bring comfort to and bless Zion by making her ruins and her wilderness and desert “like the garden of the LORD.” This statement is a major indicator that this comfort and blessing upon Zion would come in the latter days, for this has not yet happened. David L. Cooper comments:

“In the first call the prophet exhorted these truth seekers to "... look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged." The imagery here is a rock quarry from which stones have been blasted. The Jewish nation is thought of as these stones that have been quarried from this rock. That this interpretation is correct, is seen by a glance at the second verse: "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him, and made him many." In this
verse the prophet was referring to the fact that Abraham and Sarah had passed the age of parenthood when Isaac was born.

In order that they might become parents, God performed a biological miracle upon their bodies. Thus the birth of Isaac was the result of the creative activity of the Almighty (Isa. 43:1). Although Abraham was but one, by that biological miracle his descendants had become many. When the Lord called him from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Palestine, He promised that He would make his descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens and as the sands beside the sea. The Lord has never fulfilled this promise in the proportions here contemplated, but He will do it in His own good time. That Isaiah had this future vision of Israel and of her becoming many in view in this prophecy is clear from verse 3, which foretells the time when Palestine shall become as the Garden of Eden, that Jehovah planted. At that time joy and gladness will be the order of the day. Many scriptures foretell the conditions which will prevail in Israel during the Millennium.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly, November 1945).

Isaiah 51:3 is one of many descriptive verses within the prophecy of Isaiah that foretells of the conditions that will exist during the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. In Isaiah 51:3, the prophet describes that Zion will experience both physical and spiritual blessings. The physical land will be transformed from a desert wilderness to a garden that will be like Eden. The people living in this kingdom who reside in Zion, will express joy, gladness and thanksgiving and they will by musical sounds, give joyous praise to the Messiah. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“For the LORD has comforted Zion
The promise is expressed in the prophetic past. What Jehovah is planning to do for His people in the future, is to the prophet an already accomplished fact. Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and the desolate land shall become like Eden, a garden of the LORD.

Joy and gladness…the voice of melody
The prophet’s vision reached out beyond any historical limits and becomes eschatology, a vision of the last days as he sees Israel returning, not only to their native land, but to God.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, pages 391-392).


51:4 Listen to me, my people; give ear to me, my nation; for a law will be issued from me, and I will establish my justice as a light of the peoples.

The Lord as in 51:1 calls upon His people and His nation to listen to Him. He promises two things to His covenant people in the future. First, He will issue His law, Hebrew *torah*, which are His instructions and directions. The place from where He will issue His *torah* is Zion, 51:3, when it is established as the capital of the messianic kingdom. Second, He will establish His justice, “as a light of the peoples,” which is a reference to the Gentile nations. The word justice in the DASV is the Hebrew word *misphat* which occurs often in Isaiah translated mostly as justice and sometimes as judgment. Occurrences in Isaiah where *misphat* refers to the justice of God in the days of the messianic kingdom include but not an exhaustive list, 1:27; 9:7; 16:5;
28:17; 32:16; 33:5; 42:1-4; 51:4; 54:17; 56:1; and 61:8. The Lord’s covenant people and the Gentile nations of the earth, during the messianic reign of the Messiah, will benefit with righteousness and salvation from both the Lord’s law and justice being issued from Zion. Thomas Constable comments:

“Again the Lord urged His nation to listen attentively to Him (cf. v. 1). What God would do for His people, in preserving them and returning them to the land, would be a lesson (Heb. torah, instruction, ”law”) to the whole world. His justice in fulfilling His promises to the Israelites would lead many of the Gentiles out of their darkness and into His light. This is what Isaiah revealed earlier that Messiah the Servant would do (9:7; 11:4; 16:4-5; 42:1-4; 49:6).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 251).

51:5 My righteousness is near,
my salvation is gone out,
and my arms will judge the peoples.
The coastlands will expectantly wait for me,
and they will hope on my arm.

In the latter days, God’s righteousness will be near or close to all peoples of the earth. His salvation will also go out to the world just as His law and His justice 51:4), will go out as a light of the peoples. The justice and righteousness of God have a salvific purpose which is that the world’s peoples will respond in faith to God and experience redemption and enter into a right relationship with Him. Along with His issuance of the message of salvation, God will also judge the peoples of the world with His “arms” which indicates His power and authority to judge them. The peoples of the world, the coastlands of 51:5, will wait expectantly for God to accomplish His salvation purposes as they have hope in His power and authority described as His arm to accomplish all of His plans. The days of the Tribulation will result in both judgment upon the world’s peoples and the accomplishment of salvation which will be fulfilled when the Messiah returns to establish His kingdom. In the present age, in which the Messiah is the head of His church, His people are also looking forward to the complete fulfillment of these promises when the Messiah will rule the world from the Davidic throne on Mount Zion. The Church age is not the fulfillment of the promises of Isaiah 51:1-11 but the people of this present age look in eager expectation to God’s powerful and authoritative work when all nations will witness His judgment and salvific works. God will comfort Zion and make her desolate places like the Garden of Eden, 51:3. He will cause the present earth to be destroyed, 51:6 and bring the faithful remnant to Zion, 51:11 with joyful shouting and they will experience everlasting joy. David L. Cooper comments that the agent God will use to bring salvation to the nations will be the saved people of Israel:

“According to verse 5 the prophet was looking forward to the time when God's righteousness of which he spoke is, of course, imputed; it will be near in that He who is Israel's righteousness will be close at hand, that is, His coming will be near. In view of these facts, I know that the prophet looked forward and saw the time shortly before Messiah makes His personal appearance to save Israel. At that time the Lord will judge His people. They will expectantly await His coming and will put their trust in Him. Thus we see in verse 5 a prediction of the conversion of the world, which will be brought about by saved Israel.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly, November 1945).

51:6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
the heavens will vanish away like smoke,
and the earth wear out like an old garment.
They who live there will die like gnats;
but my salvation will last forever;
and my righteousness will never end.
God calls upon His covenant people to consider the present heavens and the earth as temporal. The heavens will “vanish away” and the earth will “wear out” and the inhabitants of the earth will perish. In comparison, God’s salvation and righteousness will be eternal. The timing of this devastation upon the created order is not given, instead it is stated as an event that is certain to occur. During the period of the Tribulation, the heavens and earth will witness great upheaval. This will occur during the days of the sixth seal judgment, Revelation 6:12-17, also during the days of the trumpet judgments, Revelation 8:7-9:21, and the bowl judgments, Revelation 16:1-21. See also: Isaiah 13:13-16; 24:1-6, 19-23; 26:20-21; and 34:1-4. Following the days of the millennial kingdom the heavens and the earth will be completely destroyed in preparation for the eternal state which will have no corruption from the old created order, 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11 and 21:1.

The words spoken by the Messiah, Jesus Christ, during the days of His first advent were similar to the words of Isaiah 51:6. These words are recorded in Luke 21:33: “Heaven and earth will pass away; but my words will never pass away.” Refer to: Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:28 and Psalm 102:25-27. Also, the writer of Hebrews quotes Isaiah 51:6 and Psalm 102:25-7 in Hebrews 1:10-12. The intent of these passages of Scripture are the same. God, His word, righteousness and works, including salvation will endure forever. To trust or depend upon the present world order or situation in a local geographical setting, like Jerusalem in Isaiah’s days or in any current situation is folly. Times of peace and prosperity will not endure. Political stability is fleeting, and chaos is certain to come. Personal wealth, stability and security will erode and disappear but those who trust Him have the assured confidence in who God is and what He says and does. The truth of God’s message in Isaiah 51:6 is just as relevant today as it was for those who heard or read the writings of Isaiah.

51:7-8 Listen to me, you who know righteousness,
the people who have my law in their heart.
Do not be afraid of the insults of men,
nor fear their mocking.
8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
and the worm will devour them like wool.
But my righteousness will last forever,
and my salvation to all generations.

As in 51:1 and 4, God calls His people to listen to Him. This repeated command to listen to what He has to say is highly significant. God had previously declared that His servants were blind and deaf, Isaiah 42:18-19, and had told Isaiah the results of his prophetic ministry as recorded in Isaiah 6:9-10:

9 He said, "Go, and tell this people:
Keep on listening, but do not understand;
keep on looking, but do not perceive.
10 Make the heart of this people insensitive,
and make their ears deaf,
and shut their eyes;
so that they may not see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their heart,
and repent and be healed."
Knowing that His covenant people were so hard of hearing, God repeats the command to listen to Him, 51:1, 4, and 7, so that they will be obedient to him. The word to listen is the Hebrew word shama which often is translated as listen, hear and obey. The meaning of “listen” in Isaiah 51: 1, 4 and 7 is the command by God to obey Him. They are called to obey Him because they are those, “who know righteousness,” 51:7 and those who “pursue righteousness,” 51:1). They know and pursue righteousness because they have God’s law, torah, in their hearts. The setting of Isaiah 51:1-11 is certainly during the days of the Tribulation when God’s covenant people, the faithful remnant will need His assurance that their troubles will soon be over and they will emerge from their distress with everlasting joy as they proceed with singing to Zion, 51:11. They will have obeyed God’s command to enter their rooms and hide until God’s indignation against the wicked of the world is completed during the Tribulation, Isaiah 26:20-21. During these stressful days, many of the faithful remnant will face persecution from wicked men who will mock and insult them. God tells them not to be afraid of or fear these wicked individuals for they will perish “for the moth will eat them up like a garment and the worm will devour them like wool,” 51:8. The Messiah, the great Servant of the Lord also was reassured with similar words as recorded in 50:8-9:

8 The one who vindicates me is near.
   Who will make accusations against me?
      Let us confront each other.
   Who is my adversary?
      Let him come near to challenge me.
9 The sovereign LORD helps me.
   Who is he who will condemn me?
   Look, they all will wear out like a garment,
      the moth will eat them up.

The Messiah received assurance from the sovereign LORD that He would be vindicated and that those who oppose and condemn Him would perish. The faithful remnant would also have God’s protection and assurance that their enemies would perish is a like manner. Those who will oppose His faithful remnant during the days just preceding Messiah’s second advent will face, not an immediate death, but a more prolonged period of “dying” as they experience the full wrath of God upon them.

As with the previous declaration from God regarding His righteousness and salvation lasting forever, 51:6, God repeats this claim in 51:8. Those who oppose His Servant, and the faithful remnant will perish, but God’s righteousness and salvation will last forever and will impact all generations of the world’s peoples. The repeated declaration of His everlasting righteousness and salvation summarizes this most remarkable paragraph, 51:1-8. God three times invokes His call for His people who know and pursue righteousness to listen to Him, 51: 1, 4 and 7). He calls upon His covenant people to “look,” 51:1, 2 and to “lift up their eyes,” 51:6, to perceive the lessons He has for them to learn.

B. The Rescuing Lord: 51:9-16

The paragraph 51:9-16 is linked grammatically with 51:17-23 and 52:1-12 with the repeated calls to “wake up, wake up” 51:10; 51:17 and 52:1. These paragraphs continue the emphasis of 51:1-8 which contains God’s command to listen to Him. As recorded in 51:9-16, God speaks to His people to trust Him instead of “mere mortals” 51:12, which emphasizes the message of 51:7. God promises to soon release the captives, 51:14 and they will, in their liberty, come to Zion with singing and everlasting joy, 51:11. The people are reminded of God’s past works of redemption 51:9-10, and a promise of future works of redemption, 51:11, 14. The paragraph ends with a reminder of God’s power over His created works and His protection for His created people, 51:15-16.
51:9-10  Wake up, wake up, put on strength, O arm of the LORD.  
Awake, as in the days of old,  
the generations of ancient times.  
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,  
who pierced the sea monster?  
10 Was it not you who dried up the sea,  
the waters of the great deep,  
who made the depths of the sea  
a way for the redeemed to cross over?

As with the previous paragraph, 51:9-16 has as its setting the days of the Tribulation in the far future. Many scholars understand that these paragraphs apply to the return of the exiles from Babylon. But there is no evidence from history that the Hebrew people were afraid or faced an oppressor in Babylon who was determined to destroy them, 51:13. Neither did they face death or the fear of being put into a pit, or of lacking food, 51:14. Instead, many of those who were exiled in Babylon, elected to stay there and not return to Jerusalem. Those who did elect to return were relatively few in number and when they did return they did not have “everlasting joy” 51:11. They faced many hard years of frustration and opposition as they toiled to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its temple. Therefore, the context of chapter 51 of Isaiah best fits a time, which has yet come when they will be comforted by the Lord and have everlasting joy as they return to Zion from worldwide captivity.

The speaker of the words recorded in 51:9-10 may be the prophet Isaiah as he refers to the past works of the Lord, “ancient times,” 51:9 and a prophecy of future times in 51:11. The prophet calls for God’s covenant people to “wake up” three times in 51:9. The people are to awaken to the fact of what God had done for them “in the days of old, the generations of ancient times.” The people had complained to God that He had forsaken and forgotten them, 49:14. The writings of Isaiah from 49:15 to the end of his book can be understood as God’s response to this complaint. If it is correct, that the words of chapter 51 are set within the future days of the Tribulation period, then the words of the prophet, recorded in 51:9 are intended for the faithful remnant of God’s people to awaken spiritually and remember what God had done for His people in the past. They will be facing great persecution and death from cruel oppressors who are determined to destroy them, and God’s intention is for them not to lose heart but remember His past deeds. God will rescue them as He had redeemed their ancestors.

The statement of God’s cutting Rahab in pieces may be a reference to His destruction of Egypt during the exodus as 51:9 seems to imply. Isaiah had previously referred to Rahab as Egypt in 30:7. See also Job 26:12 and Psalm 89:10. The act of God in piercing the sea monster may refer to Rahab, as the NIV seems to indicate, or to the “dragon” as translated by the NASB, ESV, and the KJV; or the “serpent” as translated by the NKJV. The words “sea monster” in the DASV is the Hebrew word tannin which refers to a Pharaoh of Egypt, in the days of the prophet Ezekiel. See Ezekiel 29:3 and 32:2. A creation emphasis of the “sea monster” may be intended in Psalm 74:13-14. See also notes on Isaiah 27:1 in which tannin is a reference to Satan as the dragon. However, in the context of Isaiah 51:9-10, the statement to Rahab as the sea monster is clearly a reference to the ancient days when God destroyed Egypt and brought His redeemed people through the parted waters of the Red Sea. For the Scriptural record of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea by the ancient Israelites as they were fleeing from the army of Pharaoh of Egypt see Exodus Chapter 14. Thomas Constable posits an interesting understanding of Isaiah 51:10:
“Isaiah frequently used the image of God making a way, pathway, or highway for His people so they could enter into the blessings that He had planned for them (cf. 9:1; 11:16; 19:23; 30:11, 21; 35:8; 40:3; 42:16; 43:16, 19; 48:17; 49:11; 57:14; 62:10). I wonder if this is the origin of the early Christian use of "the way" as a title for Christianity.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 253).

51:11 *The ransomed of the LORD will return,*
*and come with singing to Zion.*
*Everlasting joy will be upon their heads.*
*They will obtain gladness and joy,*
*and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*

The prophet, after reflecting upon the past rescue of God’s redeemed people as they fled from Egypt, now turns to the future to God’s rescue of the faithful remnant who have been in continual fear of death from an oppressor will seek to destroy them, 51:13-14. Isaiah had previously described the joy that these who have been rescued (ransomed) will express as the come with singing to Zion in 35:10. Isaiah 51:11 repeats the words of 35:10 as the events described in chapter 35 are central to the prophetic message of the prophet.

*Those ransomed by the LORD will return,*
*and come with singing to Zion;*
*everlasting joy will crown their heads.*
*They will find joy and gladness,*
*and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*

Victor Buksbazen comments:

“As always, the prophet looks beyond the immediate situation toward the ultimate redemption, which is so beautifully described here. In the prophet’s vision, history is the background canvas for the “ultimate days” when the Messianic King, or the suffering and exalted Servant of God, shall reign over all the kingdom of the earth.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 394).

David L. Cooper adds:

“The prophet, seeing what the "arm of Jehovah" has done in carrying out the plan of God which runs through the ages, looked out, in verse 11, and saw the time when the ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come with singing unto Zion: "And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." The ransomed in this instance are none other than the faithful remnant of Israel who heed the triple call of which we have been studying. The "arm of Jehovah" paid the ransom price on Calvary nineteen hundred years ago. The remnant accept Him as their Lord, Saviour, and Messiah--as the one who paid the ransom for their redemption. The prophet therefore sees the Messiah working in behalf of this faithful remnant. Because of what He has done and will do for them yet in the future, they will come from the four corners of the earth and will return to Zion with singing and with everlasting joy upon their heads. After that time they will never sorrow anymore.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – November 1945).

51:12 *I, even I, am he who comforts you.*
*So why are you afraid of mere mortals,*
*and of the son of man who is as fleeting as grass?*

In response to the reflection of the prophet on what God has done for His covenant people in the past, 51:9-10 and what He will do in the future, 51:11, God responds with an emphatic, *“I, even I, am he who comforts*
you.” The word “comforts” is the Hebrew word nacham, which has the meaning of to console and to comfort, but also to relent and repent. Nacham occurs in Isaiah in the DASV in: 1:24 (vengeance), but as “relieved” in the NASB; 12:1 (comfort); 22:4 (comfort); 40:1 (comfort) twice; 49:13 (comforted); 51:3 (comfort) twice; 51:12 (comforts); 51:19 (comfort); 52:9 (comforted); 54:11 (comforted); 57:6 (appeased), but as “shall I relent” in the NASB; 61:2 (comfort); and three times in 66:3 (comforts, comfort and comforted). A very significant occurrence of nacham occurs in Isaiah 61:2. The New Testament records in Luke 4:18-19; that the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2, but only partially, ending His quotation of Isaiah 61:2 after the words “to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor.” The Messiah did not quote the remainder of 61:2, “and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort (nacham) all who mourn,” for this second part of 61:2 referred to His second coming following the Tribulation period when He will return to take vengeance on all who oppose Him and comfort those, the faithful remnant of His covenant people who will mourn for Him, Zechariah 12:10-14. The Lord in 51:12 tells His covenant people that He is the sovereign Lord, “I am he,” and He will comfort them in their distress during the dark days of the Tribulation, the period of Jacob’s trouble as stated in Jeremiah 30:7: “Alas, that day is so great that there has never been one like it. It is the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he will be saved out of it.”

The LORD asks His covenant people, as He is the One who comforts them, why are they afraid of mortals who live on earth like grass that so quickly dies? He had reminded them, Isaiah 51:6, that His salvation and righteousness would last forever but those on the earth, “will die like gnats.” The prophet had foretold of the future days of the Servant, the Messiah, in 50:1-9. The Servant asks in 50:8, “who is my adversary?” and in 50:9, “who is he who will condemn me?” The response in 50:9 is that those who are against the Messiah will perish, the will “wear out like a garment,” for “the moth will eat them up.” The prophet also used similar words to describe those who oppose God’s covenant people, in 51:7-8. They too, 51:8 will perish, “for the moth will eat them like a garment and the worm will devour them like wool.” God’s people, 51:7 were told, “do not be afraid of the insults of men, nor fear their mocking.” The Lord repeats this admonition to His people in 51:12 to not be afraid of mortal men for they will also perish. The intent of these passages is that the people of God are to trust only in God. To fear mortal men is meaningless. Only God. His word and His works will last forever. Only God is powerful and mighty to defeat any schemes of men. Safety, peace, righteousness and salvation which lasts forever are found only in God.

51:13 You have forgotten the LORD your Maker,
who stretched out the heavens,
and laid the foundations of the earth.
Why are you continually afraid
because of the fury of the oppressor,
who is determined to destroy?
Where is the fury of the oppressor?

The LORD confronts His covenant people with a stinging accusation, “You have forgotten the LORD your Maker.” This is an ironic response to their complaint, recorded in in 49:14: “But Zion said, the LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.” The truth of the matter is that the Lord could never forget or forsake His people. It was His people who had forsaken and forgotten Him. The setting for the Lord’s accusation against His people is during the distressful days of the Tribulation. The Lord had promised to protect them during these days, Jeremiah 30:7. He will also comfort them, Isaiah 51:3 and 12. He next reminds them of His creative acts, “who stretched out the heavens,” as He had previously stated, Isaiah 40:22; 42:5; 44:24, and 45:12. The writer of the book of Job also states this claim: Job 9:8; 26:7; and 38:5. The prophets who lived after the days of Isaiah would also state this great truth, Jeremiah 10:12; 51:15 and Zechariah 12:1.
The Lord also reminded His people that it was He who “laid the foundations of the earth.” God had previously reminded them of this creative act in Job 38:4; Psalm 102:25; 104:5; Proverbs 8:29. It was alluded to earlier in Isaiah 40:21 and later in Zechariah 12:1. The writer of Hebrews reminded another audience of this truth, as recorded in Hebrews 1:10, quoting Psalm 102:25. They needed to look no further than the opening verses of the Torah, Genesis 1:1 and following to remind them that God was their Maker and is the One who comforts them, Isaiah 51:3, 12. So why are they “continually afraid” of their present circumstances? The answer lies in the moral fabric of mortals, even those who are called His chosen people. They can surmise only what is directly facing them without regard to the past works of God nor to His promises of future safety, comfort and peace. Even God’s covenant people, whom He has given the title of His servants, are declared by God to be blind and deaf, Isaiah 42:18-19 and 43:8-13.

Those who are the faithful remnant of God, who will face the distressing days of the coming tribulation, will have continual fear of cruel tyrants who, with the fury of human wrath, will oppress them, and will seek to destroy them. During this short period of time in the far future, it will be Satan who will empower the fierce tyrants of the earth to seek to destroy the faithful remnant of God, Revelation 12:13-17. It is human nature to fear those who seek physical death, but God is reminding those who are declared to be His covenant people that they are to trust Him for safety and comfort for He has promised to save them from this torment, Jeremiah 30:7. The promise to save them must be understood as preserving them as an ethnic nation who are faithful to Him. Individual members of the faithful remnant will indeed face death, as revealed in Daniel 7:23-25; 9:27; Matthew 24:15-28 and Revelation 6:9-11; 11:7; 12:17; 13:7; and 17:6.

51:14 The captive exiles will soon be released;
he will not die and go down into the pit,
neither will he lack bread.

Many scholars understand this verse as referring to the release of the exiles from Babylonian captivity. To do so completely ignores the context of chapter 51 which has the setting of the great tribulation and its distressing days. There is no record of the exiled Hebrews who lived in Babylon of fearing death while in captivity nor any who were facing being put into pits or any who were lacking food. These ancient exiles did not live in Babylon in continual fear of oppression by fierce tyrants who sought to destroy them, 51:13. It was just the opposite. Many Hebrews enjoyed their lives in Babylon, and they decided not to return to Jerusalem. The words of 51:14, therefore must refer not to those who left ancient Babylon but to those who will be kept as the captives of cruel tyrants during the future days of the Tribulation. When these future captives are released they will travel to Zion, singing and with everlasting joy upon them, Isaiah 35:10; 51:11, to meet their great Redeemer, the returning Messiah, for whom they had mourned, Zechariah 12:10-14. Further details of this release and the journey to Zion and the glories of the kingdom of the Messiah are declared by Isaiah in, 1:26-27; 2:1-4; 4:1-6; 9:1-7; 10:20-27; 11:1-16; 12:1-6; 14:1-3; 19:18-25; 25:6-9; 26:1-4; 27:12-13; 35:1-10; 40:9-11; 41:8-16; 43:1-21; 44:1-8, 21-23; 45:14-25; 46:12-13; 49:8-13, 15-26; 51:11; 52:1-12; 54:1-17; 55:1-13; 56:6-8; 60:1-22; 61:3-11; 62:1-12; 65:8-10, 17-25; and 66:7-24. These references are not an exhaustive listing.

51:15 For I am the LORD your God,
who stirs up the sea,
so that its waves roar.

The LORD of hosts is his name.

There appears to be two speakers in 51:15. The first is the LORD who reminds His people, that He is the LORD, Yahweh, who is eternal, transcendent, ever present and self determinate. He is also your God, Elohim
who is supremely powerful and mighty, able to accomplish all He desires. The second speaker is most likely Isaiah who adds to the narrative that the name of God is the LORD of hosts, Yahweh of armies. The first words of 51:15, “For I am” are literally, “As for me, I am.” See J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 325. The Lord repeatedly, throughout the writings of Isaiah, reminds His people and anyone else that He is the great I AM (Exodus 3:14). They should not fear anyone who is trying to harm them, for God will comfort them, protect them from persecutors, and release them from all who have imprisoned or have held them captive, 51:3, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16, 21-23.

The works of God are described in 51:15 as stirring up the seas so that it waves roar. God reminds His people that He has control over His created world even over the mighty oceans as also declared in Psalm 107:25. The prophet Jeremiah, in a parallel verse, confirms this so eloquently in Jeremiah 31:35:

This is what the LORD says,  
who gives the sun for a light by day,  
and orders the moon and the stars for lights by night,  
who stirs up the sea, so that its waves roar.  
the LORD of hosts is his name.

Some also understand that the words in Isaiah 51:15, of God, “who stirs up the sea so that it waves roar,” refers metaphorically to His actions of arousing foreign armies and controlling them for His purposes, specifically to bring about judgment upon His people, for it is stated at the end of 51:15 that He is Yahweh of armies. The Lord, as recorded in Isaiah 7:17-20, declared that He would bring the King of Assyria (and his armies) against the King of Judah, Ahaz (and his people). In chapter 10 the Lord promises to punish Assyria for its intention to destroy rather than just punish Judah. The Assyrians are described in Isaiah 10:5-6 as:

5 Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger,  
the club in their hands is my rage!  
6 I am sending him against a godless nation,  
and against the people of my wrath.  
I will give him an order,  
to take the spoil,  
to seize the plunder,  
and to stomp them down  
like the mud in the streets.

Although, the metaphorical understanding of God stirring up the sea, in Isaiah 51:15 as referring to His use of foreign armies to punish His people is possible, it is best to take these words in 51:15 in their natural grammatical setting as referring to God who controls the elements of His creation including the vastness of the oceans and its roaring waves. If God can control the raging of the waves in the vastness of the seas, He certainly can protect His people from any harm or danger. This understanding of 51:15 also best fits the words of vs. 16 which has a similar meaning.

51:16 I have put my words in your mouth,  
and have covered you in the shadow of my hand.  
I am the one who established the heavens,  
who laid the foundations of the earth,  
and who says to Zion, "You are my people."
The Lord continues His promise of protection to His covenant people who are the faithful remnant who will endure the distress of the Tribulation just prior to the second return of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. This verse is punctuated with the words of the Lord’s ownership of His creation. First, in clause one, He promises to put my words into the mouths of His people. Second, in clause two, He states He has covered them in the shadow of my hand. Third, in the last clause of vs. 16, He says to Zion, you are my people. Each clause of this magnificent verse will be discussed separately to discover the beauty of its meaning. (Bolding is intentional).

I have put my words in your mouth, (first clause of Isaiah 51:16)

In Isaiah, 59:20-21, the prophet records,

20 "A Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those in Jacob who turn from their sin,” says the LORD.

21 "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD, "my Spirit that is on you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, will not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouths of your children, nor out of the mouth of your children's children," says the LORD, “from now to forever.”

The setting for Isaiah 59:20-21 is just prior to the second advent of the Messiah when He will come to establish His messianic kingdom. It is the same setting for the words of Isaiah 51:16. The duration of the words to be put in the mouths of His covenant people will be “forever,” Isaiah 59:21. The purpose of the words of God being put into the mouths of His covenant people, is for them to be a witness to the people of the world during the devastation of the Tribulation, Matthew 24:14. See notes on Isaiah 59:20-21 and also refer to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, The Footsteps of the Messiah, Ariel Ministries, 2004, pages 219-222.

As recorded in Deuteronomy 18:18, and specifically, in the context of 18:15-19, the Lord will also put words into the mouth of a future prophet to come, which must refer to the Messiah as no other prophet has arisen that would be applicable to this promise. See also Deuteronomy 34:10. The words of Luke in Acts 3:19-26, and 7:37 confirm that the words of Deuteronomy 18:18 which refer to the Messiah. God will put His words into the mouth of His Servant, the Messiah Jesus Christ, to accomplish His divine purposes for the salvation of all who will believe in Jesus Christ. He will also put His words into the mouths of the faithful remnant for the purposes of bringing the good news of salvation to the peoples of the earth during the days of the Tribulation just prior to the return of the Messiah to establish His kingdom.

The prophet Jeremiah testified that God’s words were put into his mouth to accomplish the plans of God, Jeremiah 1:9. King David proclaimed that the words of God will cause the kings of earth to give thanks to God and they will sing of the ways of the Lord, as recorded in Psalms 38:4-5:

4 All the kings of the earth will give thanks to you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

5 They will sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.
and have covered you in the shadow of my hand. (second clause of Isaiah 51:16)

As a protection to the faithful remnant who will proclaim the words of God as a witness to His salvation during the days of the Tribulation, God promises them that he will cover them in the shadow of His hand. God had protected Moses from death when Moses wanted to see His glory by covering Moses with His hand, Exodus 33:22. The covering of God’s hand is an anthropomorphism for His divine protection. The Servant of the Lord, the Messiah also stated that He has been hid in the shadow of God’s hand (as a means of protection so that He could accomplish the will of God), Isaiah 49:2. Psalm 121 is another reminder of the protection of the Lord:

1 I will lift up my eyes to the hills,  
   from where does my help come?  
2 My help comes from the LORD,  
   who made heaven and earth.  
3 He will not allow your foot to stumble;  
   he who watches over you will not slumber.  
4 Look, he who watches over Israel  
   will neither slumber nor sleep.  
5 The LORD is the one watching over you;  
   the LORD is your shade on your right hand.  
6 The sun will not harm you by day;  
   nor the moon by night.  
7 The LORD will protect you from all evil,  
   he will watch over you.  
8 The LORD will watch over your going out  
   and your coming in  
   from now and forevermore.

Throughout the Scriptures, the promises of God’s protection to those who trust and have faith in Him are recorded. A few examples: First, The Lord promises His protection to those who help the poor, Psalm 41:1-2. Second, the Lord calls upon a future generation to make peace with Him and rely on His protection, Isaiah 27:5. Third, the Lord promises protection to Zion against its enemies in a future day, Isaiah 31:5. Fourth, the Apostle Paul states that the Lord will protect His children from evil, 2 Thessalonians 3:3. Fifth, the Apostle Peter writes about the protection of the Lord, even amid distressful times, as recorded in 1 Peter 1:3-9.

It is not that every believer will be kept safe from the attack of the enemy or will be saved from death. For historians have recorded periods of martyrdom, where God’s saints have been killed and these have increased in modern days and will increase until the day the Messiah returns. But God will preserve the nation of Israel and protect the faithful remnant just as He will preserve His church, for the gates of Hell will not prevail against or overcome it, Matthew 16:18. Those who have been slain due to their testimony for the Lord are considered precious in the sight of the Lord, Psalm 72:14 and 116:15. Even those who are faithful to the Lord and who will be slain as martyrs during the Tribulation will not be forgotten and will be eventually avenged by the Lord, Revelation 6:9-11.

I am the one who established the heavens, (third clause of Isaiah 51:16)

The third clause of Isaiah 51:16 is translated differently in the various Bible versions. The NASB differs significantly from the DASV in the third clause. The DASV states, “I am the one who established the heavens.” The NASB has, “to establish the heavens.” The NASB thus put the emphasis on the actions of the
Lord in putting His words in the peoples mouth and covering them with His hand as the means of establishing the heavens. Thomas Constable, using the NASB as the main text of his Notes on Isaiah for 2017, states:

“He would use the Israelites to create new heavens and a new earth, in the *spiritual* sense of their being His instruments of transformation in the Millennium. However, He would use His Servant Messiah to create new heavens and a new earth *literally*, at the end of the Millennium (cf. v. 6: Rev. 21:1—22:5). And He would use the Servant Messiah to reaffirm His commitment to Israel in the future. How God would use the Servant to do all this becomes clearer in 52:13—53:12, the fourth Servant Song. This was a fitting culminating assurance to the Israelites.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 254).

The NIV is somewhat similar to the DASV. The third clause in the NIV states, “*I who set the heavens in place.*” Gary V. Smith, using the NIV as a background text, discusses the issue of who God is speaking to in 51:16 for the words of God are similar to those made to the Servant of God in Isaiah 49:2 and 50:4. Smith comments:

> “The solution may lie in viewing this verse as another means of assuring the audience (similar to the purpose of 51:15) that God will accomplish what he has promised his people and will answer their prayer in 51:9–11. Initially the prophet quotes God’s past commissioning of the Servant (this is not a direct address to the Servant at this time) and his past promise to protect the Servant by hiding him in his hand (51:16a), thus assuring the audience that God’s arm was already active in the past. What he called the Servant to do (49:2) will be accomplished; therefore the audience should trust God. If this is correct, then the final three infinitive constructs probably function in a similar way. NIV translates these verbs as participles (“who set,” “who laid,” “who say”) and implies the first person “I” from 16a, but the infinitive construct normally depends on an earlier verb by modifying its action in some way. If God wanted to bring greater assurance to increase the faith of the audience, these infinitive constructs probably function to introduce a purpose or result clause that refers to a future creation of the new earth and the consummation of God’s plans to restore his people to their covenant status of being “my people.” With this approach, these words would demonstrate to the audience that God’s arm was, is, and will be active. God’s plan for the Servant of the Lord would lead to a new creation of the world for God will some day reestablish his relationship to his people, exactly what they were praying for in 51:11 and what God already promised in 51:3–6.” (Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 409-410).

The KJV translates the third clause as, “*That I may plant the heavens.*” Victor Buksbazen, using the KJV as his text, combines the third and fourth clauses in his comments.

> KJV: *That I may plant the heavens and the earth and lay the foundation of the earth.*

> “Some interpreters have considered this passage hopelessly confused and out of harmony with the preceding thoughts (e.g. Skinner). This might be so, if the prophet had been referring to the original creation previously mentioned in verse 13. However, if we regard this as a promise of a new creation, of a new heaven and a new earth, filled with the righteousness of God, and where restored and redeemed Israel is again the people of God, then the passage makes beautiful sense. This apparently was what the prophet had in mind (cf. Isa. 65:17).” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 395).

**who laid the foundations of the earth.** *(fourth clause of Isaiah 51:16)*

In the context of Isaiah 51:16, and specifically the third clause, *I am the one who established the heavens*, the laying of the foundations of the earth, the fourth clause is closely linked to God’s works through His covenant people at the end of the Tribulation and during the establishment of the messianic kingdom. God will include the faithful remnant of Israel who survive the Tribulation in His works to create a renewed earth.
In Isaiah’s writings, this reshaping of the foundations of the earth is mostly depicted as the movement of the mountains as stated in 2:2; 41:15; 42:15; 49:11 and 54:10. The involvement of the people of God in this process is graphically portrayed in 41:15-16:

15 Look, I will make you to be a new sharp threshing instrument having many teeth.
You will thresh the mountains, crush them and make the hills like chaff.
16 You will winnow them and the wind will carry them away, and the whirlwind will scatter them.
Then you will rejoice in the LORD; you will glory in the Holy One of Israel.

The creation of a new heavens and earth, Isaiah, 65:17-25 is best understood as a restored earth that will be made ready for the millennial kingdom of the Messiah and not the final heavens and earth. The final state when an eternal re-created heaven and earth will be made by God will come after the culmination of the millennial kingdom and directly following the judgment at the great white throne, Revelation 20:11-21:1. It is not stated in Isaiah how the faithful remnant will “thresh the mountains and crush them,” Isaiah 41:15 in preparation of the messianic kingdom. The Lord will use His people in the manner in which He alone deems most appropriate to accomplish His purposes in the construction of the renovated heavens and earth. That He would consider and employ His people in this process is a matter of great praise to Him, for He has not forgotten or forsaken His people and they will be mightily used by God to accomplish His purposes to make the earth suitable for the reign of His glorious Servant, the Messiah.

and who says to Zion, “You are my people.” (fifth clause of Isaiah 51:16)

Not only will the faithful remnant of the Lord be used to make ready the physical aspects of the messianic kingdom, they will be the Lord’s own people as they live in the kingdom. Zion is a most precious name and a cherished home for the covenant people of God. God has promised that He will defend Zion and make His beloved city like Eden. Zion will be the capital of the messianic kingdom. The Messiah will be present and will reign over the earth from Zion for a thousand years. The faithful remnant of the Jews who have been held captive by cruel tyrants during the Tribulation will be released by the Messiah and they will come to Zion with singing with everlasting joy. Zion is spoken of as the people of God in Isaiah 1:8, 27; 3:16-17; 4:3-4; 10:24, 32; 12:6; 16:1; 30:19; 33:14; 37:22, 32; 51:16; 52:2; 60:14; 61:3 and 62:11. Zion will also be the blessed dwelling place of the Lord, Isaiah 2:3; 8:18; 12:6; 18:7; 24:23 and 59:20. (This is not an exhaustive list).

The Lord has said to the faithful remnant that, “you are my people.” They belong to Him as His possession. He had chosen them when they were the fewest of peoples, Deuteronomy 7:6-8. See also Deuteronomy 10:15, 14:2; 1 Kings 3:8; Psalm 33:12; 105:43; Isaiah 43:20; 65:22; Acts 13:17; and 1 Peter 2:9. Moses declared long ago to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 14:2, “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his own special possession, above all peoples on the face of the earth.” Isaiah often declared the words of the Lord regarding this people as being “my people” in 1:3; 3:12, 15; 5:13; 10:2, 24; 19:25 (my inheritance); 22:4; 26:20; 32:13, 18; 40:1; 47:6; 51:4, 16; 52:4, 5, 6, 14; 53:8; 57:14; 58:1; 63:8; 65:10, 19 and 22.

The Old Testament is a narrative about the great covenants and promises of God to His people and the relationship between His chosen people and Himself. He knew that His chosen people would sin against Him, Deuteronomy 31:14-30 and Isaiah 1:2-15. But God provided, through His incomparable grace, a way
for His people, prone to sin, to be redeemed, Isaiah 1:18-19; 52:13-53:12. The Lord in His mercy, became a “kinsmen” (or family) Redeemer to His people whom He had chosen. He alone provided salvation to them and made a new covenant with them, Jeremiah 31:31-34, and stated he would forgive them and no longer remember their sins, Jeremiah 31:34. They would forever be a nation before Him, Jeremiah 31:35-37.

C. The Revenging Lord: 51:17-23

As with the previous paragraph, 51:9-16 and the following paragraph, 52:1-2, the prophet introduces the paragraph, 51:17-23 with the double call to “wake up.” All of chapter 51 is call to God’s people in their distress to wake up and listen to the Lord for He has not forsaken nor forgotten them, as the people of Zion had complained, 49:14, but the truth was that they have forgotten Him, 51:13. God calls upon His blind and deaf servants, 42:18-19, to listen to Him and look to what He had done on their behalf, 51:1-2. In the paragraph, 51:17-23, God states that they need to awaken to the fact that their punishment has been from the Lord who has exercised His wrath upon them, 51:17, 20. The people have no one to guide them, 51:18, (for they have spurned the Lord as their leader and guide). As a result, they have suffered desolation, destruction, famine and death by the sword with none of their own to grieve or comfort them, 51:19. Only God Himself pleads for the cause of His people and He will remove His judgment and wrath from them, 51:21-22. God will also pour out His wrath upon those who have tormented them. 51:23. The setting of this paragraph as with all of chapter 51 is during the devastating days of the Tribulation, just prior to the return of the Messiah to rescue His people and set-up His messianic kingdom. The faithful remnant will be under oppression from those who sought to destroy them, 51:13. But God will bring judgment upon these tormentors and they will drink the cup of God’s wrath, 51:23.

51:17 Wake up, wake up, stand up, O Jerusalem,
you who drunk at the hand of the LORD
the cup of his wrath;
you have drunk dry the bowl that causes staggering.

The Lord calls upon His covenant people to “wake up” and “stand up” for the days of their distress will soon be over. The Lord will, in the far future, bring days of judgment, distress and trouble upon His people, Jeremiah 30:7, Daniel 12:1, Matthew 24:4-28; and Revelation chapters 6-19. The purpose of these days of Tribulation will be to purge His people of their sinfulness and to bring them to repent of their national sin of rejecting the Messiah who had lived among them during His first advent. The Messiah will only return when His chosen people repent and request that He return to them, Hosea 5:15-6:3 and Zechariah 12:10-13:1. During these future days of Tribulation, the covenant people of God will drink the cup of wrath from the hand of the Lord and it will cause them to stagger. Thomas Constable comments:

“Jerusalem had drunk a powerful liquid at the hand of her God. He had given her punishment to drink for her sins (cf. Mark 10:38). Drinking a cup of wine is a figure of judgment (cf. 29:9; 63:6; Ps. 75:8; Jer. 25:15-16; Rev. 14:10). Jerusalem now lay in a state of stupor but needed to arise because the Lord had a future for her.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 254).

51:18 There is no one to guide her among all the children she has borne;
neither is there any who takes her by the hand
among all the children she has brought up.

The covenant people of God had forgotten Him, 51:13. They had scoffed at the Lord’s rule over them and “made a covenant with death,” Isaiah 28:14-15. They participated in religious rituals, but their hearts were
far from the Lord, Isaiah 29:13. They spurned and mocked God who made them, like clay thinking it was equal with the potter and saying it (the clay) was not formed by the potter and saying the potter has no understanding, Isaiah 29:16. God had promised to fight against His own people due to their rejection of Him, Isaiah 29:1-4. God will perform His “unusual work”, His “extraordinary deed,” Isaiah 28:21-22 and bring destruction on His own people.

Since they had walked away from the guidance and the fear of the Lord, they had no one to guide them. They were without godly leadership and were left drifting in moral decay and help captive by those who were seeking to destroy them, Isaiah 51:13. They will remain in this state of moral decline, estranged from the Lord until they repent of their national sin of rejecting their Messiah.

51:19 These two things have happened to you:
   desolation and destruction,
   famine and the sword.
Who will grieve with you?
Who will comfort you?

Because of their sins, for example, Isaiah 1:2-31, and their rebellion against God and their rejection of the His rightful leadership and guidance over them and due to their spurning and mocking of God who is their sovereign LORD, 51:22, they will face “desolation, destruction, famine and the sword.” Although many scholars point to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians as the fulfilment of this prophecy, there is nothing that directly ties this statement in 51:19 to that event. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 413 for a discussion on this point. In the context of chapter 51, the setting is the far future Tribulation, where God will bring this type of judgment upon His people and upon the world. God states that these two things “have happened” to them. The words “have happened” is a future perfect sense stating what will happen as an accomplished event. The “two things” mentioned by God are given in pairs, “desolation and destruction,” and “famine and the sword.” Each pair of these words, have similar spellings in the original Hebrew and that may be the reason the pairs are linked together.

As recorded in the DASV, God asks two rhetorical questions, “who will grieve with you?” and “who will comfort you?” the KJV has only one question, “By whom shall I comfort thee? which is similar to the NKJV. The NIV has, “who can console you?” The NASB has “How shall I comfort you?” The ESV has “who will comfort you?” John Oswalt, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 350, note 81 has a detailed discussion on the most likely literal understanding of this question. It seems most appropriate to read this question as translated by the ESV and the DASV, “who will comfort you?” as it best fits the context of 51:19-23. It is the action of the Lord to bring judgment upon His people for their rebellion against and rejection of Him. Since the people have no godly leadership to guide them, 51:18, they are left without anyone who is able to comfort them (in righteousness). Therefore, in God’s great grace and tender mercy, He will remove the cup of His wrath from His people, 51:22, and they will never drink it again.

51:20 Your children have fainted;
   they lie at the head of every street,
   like an antelope caught in a net;
   they are full of the wrath of the LORD,
   the rebuke of your God.
As recorded in 51:20, God continues His rebuke of His people for their scorning of His leadership and their rebellion against Him. See notes on 51:18. Those who will live through the Tribulation will face the judgment of God described in 51:19. This will also include the children. There are at least three ways to understand this reference to children. First, the words “your” and “children” both refer to the covenant people of God who will endure God’s wrath upon them for all, both old and young have rebelled against Him. Second, the sins of the parents are visited upon their children, Numbers 14:18. Third, their descendants also could not offer any guidance or comfort. In Isaiah 5:25, the prophet had spoken of those who will lie in the streets as a result of the judgment of the Lord:

_Therefore the anger of the LORD burns against his people; he has stretched out his hand against them, and has struck them._

_The mountains tremble, and their corpses are strewn like garbage in the streets._

_After all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is still stretched out._

(Isaiah 5:25)

The prophet Jeremiah also described a similar outcome, when he declared the words of the Lord, regarding false prophets who were saying that the people would not have famine or see the sword (cf. Isaiah 51:19). This situation is recorded in Jeremiah 14:13-16: 13 Then I said, "Ah, sovereign LORD! The prophets tell them, 'You will not see the sword, or experience a famine; but I will give you a guarantee of peace in this place.'" 14 Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in my name. I did not send them, nor have I commanded them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a phony vision, worthless revelations, and the deceptions of their own hearts. 15 Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name, who I have not sent, yet they say, 'Sword and famine will not come on this land.' Those prophets themselves will be consumed by sword and famine. 16 The people to whom they prophesy will be cast out into the streets of Jerusalem because of famine and the sword. They will have no one to bury them -- including their wives, their sons, and their daughters. I will pour their wickedness upon them._

The final phrases of 51:20, “they are full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God,” give a sense of just how far the Lord intends to punish His covenant people for their sins against Him. They will drink the full measure of the bowl (cup) of the Lord’ wrath. The NASB in 51:17 states that they will drain this bowl (chalice) to the dregs. They have fully consumed the judgment and wrath of the Lord. There will not be any further punishment afflicted upon them, for they “will never drink in again,” 51:22. It is not that God’s judgment was minor nor short in duration. The Lord has not spared His people from calamities and devastations since the time of the beginning of their founding as a nation under Jacob. They still face His judgment and will do so until they repent of their sin of rejecting and rebelling against Him. They continued this rebellion and made it worse by rejecting His Servant, the Son of God, the Messiah who came to them in His first advent. They will continue to bear the brunt of His wrath until the end of the Tribulation period when they will call upon Him, whom they had pierced and mourn for Him, and plea for Him to return, Hosea 5:15-6:3 and Zechariah 12:10-13:1.

51:21-22 _Therefore hear this, you afflicted, you who are drunk, but not from wine._
22 This is what your sovereign LORD says, and your God who pleads the cause of his people, "Look, I have taken out of your hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of my wrath; you will never drink it again.

The Lord in 51:21, again calls upon His people to hear Him, (51:1,4, 7). He calls them afflicted which is the Hebrew word ani which often has the meaning of “poor” or “humble” but in a few occasions in the Old Testament has the direct meaning of being “afflicted” as it is translated in Isaiah 51:21. The Hebrew word ani also occurs as afflicted in relation to the suffering of the Messiah in Psalm 22:24. King David used this word, in Psalm 25:16 to describe his plight as being “alone and afflicted.” It also occurs as afflicted as a result of God’s judgment upon His people, in Isaiah 54:11. The sinful and rebellious people of God had been drunk, not from wine, but from drinking the full measure of the cup of God’s wrath, 51:17.

In 51:22, the Lord describes Himself to His covenant people as “your Sovereign LORD,” and “your God,” who pleads the cause for “his people.” (words in bold intentional). He reminds His people that He has chosen them as His possession, as they should have remembered from their reading of the Torah, as Deuteronomy 26:18 states, “The LORD has declared today that you are his own treasured people, just as he has promised you, so that you should keep all his commandments.” He is their LORD, Yahweh who is their personal God who is eternally self-existing. He condescends to belong to a stubborn, willful and sinful people who continually spurn His advances to govern them in justice and righteousness. He is also their covenant God Elohim who alone, because no one else can, pleads the cause for His people. The KJV has, “Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God.” The first name for God, in 51:22, in the KJV is “Lord” a translation of Adonai who is their master and owner who has absolute authority over them and over all creation.

Bible students should note that God uses language suggestive of a court room, in which He pleads for the cause of His people. To whom does God plead? He must defend His people against His own divine righteousness and justice. God’s perfect righteousness cannot allow sin to go unpunished. It would stand against all that He is, for He is holy and demands that His people be holy, Leviticus 11:44. Therefore since, no one else is qualified or acceptable to Himself to stand in defense of His people, He pleads for their cause as their kinsmen Redeemer to rescue them from His righteous wrath and save them from the judgment He must apply. To do this however, will require a much greater work than merely standing to defend them. It requires the greatest work of grace ever imagined. He will necessarily take upon Himself this act of grace by sending His Son, the Suffering Servant, the Messiah to stand in the place of these underserving and wicked people and also to stand in place for all mankind. The description of this act of grace is graphically declared by Isaiah, beginning in just a few verses following 51:22. The great climax to the work of the Suffering Servant is revealed in Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12 and the section immediately following 51:23 leads to this climax.

The final sentence of 51:22 clearly and definitely provides the setting for the words of chapter 51 of Isaiah. The Lord will during the last days of the great Tribulation to come, Jeremiah 30:7, Daniel 12:1, Matthew 24:4-28; and Revelation chapters 6-19, complete His judgment upon His covenant people, who will be the faithful remnant who survive the devastation of the Tribulation. See also Isaiah 26:20-21 and Jeremiah 30:7. The Lord promises that he will remove from His people the judgment upon them described as the bowl (cup) of His wrath and they will “never drink it again.” It is a promise for a far future day that has not yet happened but as with all of God’s promises, His people can depend on the veracity of His word for His word is as authoritative and true as He is Himself. There is no one more exalted or higher to whom His people could appeal. There judgment will end exactly as He has stated.
51:23 *Instead I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have told you, 'Bow down, that we may walk over you.' You have laid your back like the ground, and like the street for them to walk over.*

As recorded in Isaiah 51:23, the Lord promises to take the cup of His wrath and give it to those who have been tormenting His covenant people. The oppressors, (cf. 51:13) have sought to destroy God’s covenant people and use them as slaves to imprison them and leave them without food. They are seen in 51:23 as demoralizing God’s faithful remnant by walking over them as if they were nothing but dirt on the street to be trodden down. But God will bring their days of tormenting His people to a decisive end. They will be punished and will perish at God’s hand. See Isaiah 49:25-26; Jeremiah 25:15-38; Habakkuk 3:12-14; and Zechariah 12:1-10. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 51:21-23

“In verses 21-23 the prophet resumed the figure of comparing Jerusalem to a drunken woman lying helplessly in the dust. He declared to her that the Lord Jehovah her God will have at that time taken the cup of staggering and the bowl of His wrath out of her hand. She will at that time have drunk all the wrath of God which is commensurate with her sins. She will therefore never have to drink of it again. When the Lord thus takes this cup of drunkenness from His Chosen People, He will place it in the hands of her enemies who will have to drink it to the very depths of despair. The Lord thus takes care of the remnant from that time on. There will then be a reversal of the conditions of Israel with that of her enemies.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – November 1945).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 51:

51:1-8 The Redeeming Lord  
51:9-16 The Rescuing Lord  
51:17-23 The Revenging Lord

5. God Promises Good News to His People: 52:1-12

This section of the writings of Isaiah, 52:1-12, is a glorious prelude to the revelation of the Messiah as the great Suffering Servant of God who will be sent to be a sin offering for His covenant people and for all peoples of the earth, past and present, Isaiah 52:13-53:12. In the section, 52:1-12, God’s covenant people, the people of Zion, are to wake up and adorn themselves with beautiful garments, vs. 1; remove the dust from themselves, remove their chains of captivity and sit on their throne in Jerusalem, vs. 2, for they are to prepare themselves to meet the LORD who is returning to Zion, vs. 8. They had lived under bondage in Egypt and were recently oppressed by the Assyrians, vs. 4-5. But now they will be redeemed, vs. 3; and they will know the Lord, vs. 6. Good tidings, of peace, salvation and the reign of God will be announced to them, vs. 7. They will see the return of the LORD to Zion, vs. 8; and they will joyfully sing, for the LORD has comforted and redeemed them, vs. 9; and all peoples of the earth will see the salvation of God, vs. 10. Therefore, God calls them to depart from the nations that have held them captive, vs. 11; and He promises to be with them, when they leave these nations, vs. 12. Isaiah states that this declaration from the Lord came to Him in the days following the days of Assyria’s oppression, “*recently Assyria has oppressed them,*” vs. 4. The prophecy given to Isaiah in 52:1-12, as in chapter 51, regards the far future days when the messianic kingdom will begin to be established.

52:1 *Wake up, wake up, clothe yourself with strength, O Zion. Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city;*
no longer will the uncircumcised and the unclean enter you.

The message from the Lord in 52:1-12 is a continuation of the declaration of the Lord, which began in 51:1 which concerns the removal of the Lord’s judgment upon His covenant people, during the terrifying days of the Tribulation, and the purification of the people as they prepare to meet their Redeemer as He returns to set up His messianic kingdom. The double call in 52:1 to wake up is connected to the command of the Lord in 51:1 to listen to Him and other double calls to wake up in 51:9 and 17. The Lord in 52:1 is calling upon His people, Zion, to awaken to the fact that He has rescued them from their oppressors, redeemed them from their sins, and restored them to their rightful place in Jerusalem. The days of Tribulation are now over, and they are to prepare themselves to meet their Lord, the Messiah when He returns to Zion, 52:8.

The clothes they are to wear are symbolically called “strength,” for those who have oppressed them, 51:13, have been cast aside by the Lord, and they will return to Zion with joyful singing, 35:10, 51:11 and as they return they will be strengthened by the Lord. Isaiah had previously described these days and the new strength that will be given them from the Lord as recorded in Isaiah 41:8-16. The newly establish messianic kingdom, that the redeemed of the Lord will journey to from their captivity among the nations, will be cleansed from any unclean or those who are uncircumcised. This refers to those evil nations who had been their oppressors, 51:13, for only those who the Lord calls and enables with His strength will make the journey to Zion to meet their Messiah. Those who had oppressed them will no longer exist, 41:11-12. Along the way, they will be aided by many including kings of nations, 49:22-23; 60:4. When they arrive the wealth of the nations will be brought to them and others (foreigners) will rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and kings will serve them, 60:10-11. See also the wider context of the details of this return to Zion and the involvement of the nations in 60:1-22. Those of these nations who have turned to the Lord in faith will also be among the faithful remnant of God’s people as they come to Zion at the inauguration of the Messiah’s millennial kingdom on the earth. This kingdom has not yet come, nor has it been inaugurated as some claim (already-not yet). For a thorough discussion on the kingdom to come, see Andrew M. Woods, The Coming Kingdom, Grace Gospel Press, 2016. See also the excellent exposition of the Kingdom of God in the Scriptures by Michael J. Vlach, He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God, Lampion Press, 2017. For an older but valuable book length treatment on the Kingdom, see Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, BMH Books, 1959.

The clothing called “beautiful garments” in 52:1, are called “beautiful garments of salvation,” by Thomas Constable in his notes on Isaiah 52:1:

“God called on Israel to awake and to be strong (in the strength that God provides). The Israelites did not need to call on Him to awake and to be strong, as they had done (51:9). He was ready to save them. But were they ready to trust Him for their salvation (cf. 40:27-31; 42:23-25; 43:22-24; 45:9-13, 15, 18-19; 46:8-13; 48:1-22; 49:14—50:3)? The Lord instructed the people of Zion to put on the "beautiful garments" of salvation that God would provide for them.

How He would provide salvation for them is the subject of the next Servant Song (52:13—53:12). God saw His people as comprising a holy city, and they needed to view themselves that way too, as holy people (cf. 4:2-6; 1 Cor. 1:2). References to Jerusalem as "the holy city" appear in Neh. 11:1, 18; Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 4:5; 27:53; and Rev. 11:2. The Lord would forbid any uncommitted and unclean people from having a part in His future for them.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 256).

Jerusalem is called in Isaiah 52:1, “the holy city.” It is also called by this title in Nehemiah 11:1; Revelation 21:2 and 10. The mountain of Jerusalem is called “holy” in Daniel 9:16 and Zechariah 8:13. The references
to the holy mountain refer directly to Zion in Psalm 2:6; Joel 2:1; 3:17 and Zechariah 8:3. The holy mountain as Zion is directly implied in Psalm 48:1 and 87:1. It is not insignificant that Zion is mentioned in Isaiah 52:1 in connection with Jerusalem the holy city. Jerusalem and Zion can be understood as interchangeable references to the holy residence of the Messiah who will return in the future to establish His kingdom and sit on throne of His father David, Luke 1:32.

Isaiah reveals much about this holy place called Zion. There is more detail about Zion in the writings of Isaiah than in any other Scriptural book. The following is a summary of what Isaiah declares about this holy mountain, also called Jerusalem.

It will be in the latter days the most exalted mountain on earth and from it (including Jerusalem) the law of the LORD will be issued for He will teach the nations and judge between them, Isaiah 2:2-4. Also in these days, all who reside in Zion and in Jerusalem will be called holy and the Lord will reside there and upon the entirety of Mount Zion, the LORD will create a glorious canopy (the shekinah glory), Isaiah 4:2-6. The dwelling place of the LORD of hosts is on Mount Zion, Isaiah 8:18. Zion is called the hill of Jerusalem in Isaiah 10:32. The LORD is the founder of Zion, and his afflicted people will seek refuge in Zion, Isaiah 14:32. It is called the place of the name of LORD of hosts, Isaiah 18:7. The LORD of hosts will reign in Mount Zion, Isaiah 24:23. In Zion a tested foundation stone will be laid which is called a precious cornerstone, Isaiah 28:16. The LORD will deliver Zion from its enemies, Isaiah 29:8, 30:19 and 31:4,9; 34:8. The LORD has filled Zion with justice and righteousness, Isaiah 33:5. In the future, Zion will be established forever, Isaiah 33:20. To the future Zion, the ransomed of the LORD will return with singing, joy and gladness and everlasting joy will crown their heads, Isaiah 35:10 and 51:11. In the future survivors, the remnant will come out from Jerusalem, called Mount Zion, Isaiah 37:32. Good news, the gospel of salvation will be proclaimed in Zion, Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 46:13; 52:7; 62:1 and 11; The LORD will comfort Zion, Isaiah 51:13; 52:9 and 61:13. God calls the people of Zion, His people, Isaiah 51:16. In the future no unclean or uncircumcised will come into Zion, Isaiah 52:1. The LORD will return and restore Zion, Isaiah 52:8. The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those who turn from their sin, Isaiah 59:20. Zion will be called the city of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel, Isaiah 60:14. Zion will experience rapid growth in population in the days of the messianic kingdom, Isaiah 66:7-11.

52:2 Shake off the dust from yourself;
get up, sit on your throne, O Jerusalem.
Lose yourself from the chains on your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion.

There are four calls for action in 52:2: “shake off the dust”; “get up”; “sit on your throne”; and “lose the chains on your neck.” These commands from God to the faithful remnant of His covenant people, whom God calls, “captive daughter of Zion,” conveys the thought that they are still affected by the “staggering” they have endured by consuming the contents of God’s cup of wrath, which He has just removed from them, 51:22. It was not enough for them to have this cup of judgment removed. Now they would have to demonstrate that they had actually repented of their national sin of rejecting the Messiah at His first advent, and plead for Him to return, and have been truly in mourning for Him who they had pierced, Hosea 5:15-6:3 and Zechariah 12:10-14. Their actions speak of their faith in Him, not as a requirement of faith, but as outward demonstration that their lives had been changed as a result of their faith.

God calls them to first, “shake off the dust” from themselves as they had been trodden down by their oppressors, who had humiliated them by walking over them, 51:23. Second, God calls them to then “get up” which can be understood in at least two ways. One: they are literally commanded to “arise” from the dirt and
dust where they have lain and two: they are to “go up” to Zion to the mountain of the Lord’s house, Isaiah 2:3 and Micah 4:2, where they will adorn their royal robes, their beautiful garments (vs. 1), of strength and salvation in readiness for the next command from the Lord. Third, the people of God, called Jerusalem, are commanded to sit on their throne. In the messianic kingdom, they will reign with Christ, their Messiah for a thousand years, Revelation 20:4. Fourth, they are to lose (to remove) from their necks, the chains that had kept them literally captive and spiritually oppressed during the days of the Tribulation. The days of torment were now over, and they must go up to Zion to meet their Messiah, 52:8. They will go from being captives of those who oppress them by being “ground” into dust, to sitting and ruling on thrones, wearing beautiful garments, and reigning along side the King of kings and Lord of lords. David L. Cooper comments on 52:1-2:

“The third and last exhortation to "Awake, awake," is also directed to Zion (52:1). In this verse and the following the prophet still thought of Israel as a drunken, helpless woman lying in the dust. Since she will nevermore drink of the cup of His wrath, and since she will at that time be recovering from the terrific strokes of His judgment, the prophet told her to arise and put on strength. Moreover, she is to put on her beautiful garments and to sit upon her throne.

These verses picture Jerusalem with the Jewish people as being delivered from her perpetual tormentors and of her having sufficient strength to arise, to shake the dust off herself, and to clothe herself with her beautiful, royal garments, and to mount the throne for the purpose of reigning upon the earth. God brings deliverance to those who turn to Him. He never coerces the will. He never forces anyone. He calls upon one to exercise one's faith by turning to Him. When one thus in faith turns to the Lord, the Almighty enables such a one to do so. The saying, "The Lord's commandings are His enablings," is certainly true--both of the individual and of the group that turns to Him.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly - November 1945).

52:3 For this is what the LORD says,  
"You were sold for nothing;  
you will be redeemed without money."

In an earlier message, Isaiah had declared the word of the LORD of hosts, that the exiles from Babylon would be released without any price or reward, Isaiah 45:13. In a passage closer to chapter 52, Isaiah declares in 50:1, that:

This is what the LORD says,  
"Where is your mother's divorce certificate,  
by which I have put her away?  
Or to which of my creditors have I sold you?  
Look, you were sold because of your sins,  
and for your transgressions your mother was put away.

The Lord had “sold” or allowed His covenant people to be held captive by Gentile nations due to their sinfulness and rebellion against Him and rejection of Him, without the exchange of any money. This leads naturally to the consideration of the Lord’s ownership of all things. For example, someone may ask, to whom does the Lord “owe” anything? Or they may ask, to whom is the Lord in debt for any amount or for any reason? The answer is a resounding “no.” The Lord does not need anything, Acts 17:25. The Apostle Paul expressed well the ownership of the Lord of all things in the great doxology which concluded the theological teaching of his letter to the Romans as recorded in Romans 11:33-36:
O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
 therapies are his judgments,
 and how unfathomable are his ways!

For who has known the mind of the Lord?
 Or who has been his counselor?

Or who has first given to God,
 so that he is obligated to repay him?

For from him, and through him, and to him, are all things.
 To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Therefore, since God neither needs to pay for anything or to receive payment from anyone, since all things belong to Him, He can with infinite authority claim that He had “sold” His sinful covenant people for nothing and He also redeemed them without money. The Lord with unmeasurable grace and love will redeem His people and all mankind without money for no money transaction is required. But there is a great “cost” to the Lord. He deemed that His people be “sold” and He deemed that they be redeemed. No one could during the days of Isaiah, or before or after, have any claim to these people except the Lord Himself. The word redeemed is the familiar Hebrew word ga’al which occurs often in the writings of Isaiah. It refers to the Lord as His people’s family or kinsmen redeemer who rescues them from their helpless situation. For occurrences of ga’al in Isaiah, see, 35:9; 41:14; 43:1, 14; 44:6, 22, 23, 24; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 62:12; 63:4, 9 and 16. A similar term theologically is “ransom” which is the Hebrew word padah which occurs in 35:10 and 51:11. See notes on 35:10. If the word “redeemed” in 52:3 is understood as merely freeing His covenant people, the faithful remnant from those who oppress them and hold them captive, then it could be argued that to the Lord there was no “cost.’ However, if the intention of the Lord was to just free His people, the prophet would most likely have used another Hebrew word to convey this meaning. But, as the word ga’al was used, it does have a salvific meaning and redemption, according to the Scriptures does require a payment. See J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 328. Although the Lord has said His people will be “redeemed” without money, it does not mean that there is no “cost” personally to the Lord. To those who seek the Lord in faith, there is no “cost” for the Lord’s gracious provision of salvation, Isaiah 55:1, Revelation 21:6 and 22:17. But this salvation came at a great “cost” to God, Isaiah, 28:16. This “cost” is explained in detail in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12.

52:4 For this is what the sovereign LORD says,
 "At first my people went down into Egypt to live there,
 recently Assyria has oppressed them for no reason."

Isaiah often uses the name “sovereign LORD” (Yahweh who is sovereign) to emphasize the importance of a specific discussion. In 52:3, the prophet had introduced the discussion with “For this is what the LORD says.” Isaiah’s audience therefore, are compelled to pay attention to what the Lord has to tell them. In 52:3 the Lord makes the point that as His people had been “sold for nothing,” they would be “redeemed without money.” In 52:4 the Lord makes the point that Egypt and Assyria had oppressed them “for no reason” or literally “for nothing” which connects 52: 3,4 and 5 in the discussion. Egypt and Assyria had oppressed the Lord’s people “for nothing” in the sense that the Lord did not allow His people to be permanently kept in the state of oppression but would rescue them. Another possible understanding of the words “for no reason” DASV, or “without cause” (for nothing), is explained by Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 398, as “without any moral or legal right.” The discussion the Lord wants His people to grasp and understand is that He promises to bring His people out from their cruel oppressors in the future just as He had done in the ancient past from captivity in Egypt and more recently from the assault by the Assyrians.
The words, “recently Assyria has oppressed them” sets the timing when Isaiah declared this message. It was relatively close to the time following the defeat of the Assyrian army by an angel of the Lord, Isaiah 37:36. Such historical references are helpful to understand when Isaiah was ministering the word of the Lord to the people of Judah. This comment eliminates any possibility that Isaiah’s message was given by another messenger in a later historical period, as some critical scholars claim. It also suggests that the context of Isaiah’s message was not about the Babylonian captivity. Isaiah is declaring a message about the far future, during the days at the end of the Tribulation and during the time of the Lord’s second advent when He will free His covenant people, the faithful remnant from the oppression of those who oppress them and “taunt them,” 52:5. See also connected passages: Isaiah 49:22-26; 50:1-2; 51:7, 12-14, and 23.

52:5 Now therefore, what do I have here, says the LORD, seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Those who rule over them shout a taunt at them," says the LORD, and my name is continually blasphemed.

The phrase in the DASV “what do I have here,” is in agreement with most English versions. The meaning of these words however, is debated by Biblical scholars. For an extended discussion, see Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, vol. 2, pages 420-422. In the context of the preceding chapters including 52:1-12, the prophetic setting is the end of the tribulation period when God is completing His judgment upon His covenant people and the pagan nations of the world. Many scholars however, without apparent textual support, suggest that the prophetic setting is during the last days of the Babylonian captivity for the exiles from Judah. The timeframe when Isaiah delivered this prophetic message is set in 52:4. The planned assault by the Assyrians on Jerusalem, which was ended by God’s intervention, Isaiah 37:36, was still in recent memory and Jerusalem was safe from attack by its enemies. The Lord is assessing the situation during the days in the far future when the faithful remnant will be held captive by many nations and have been “taken away for nothing.” The pagan nations who are oppressing God’s people had no legal right to hold God’s people captive, nor had they paid anything to God for His people, nor had they any moral reason for their actions.

The cruel rulers of the nations who are holding God’s people captive, in the far future, will be taunting them, 52:5, and oppressing them and seeking to destroy them, 51:13-14. These rulers are also continually blaspheming the great name of Yahweh. A recent example in Isaiah’s day of the taunting of God’s people and the blaspheming of God’s name is recorded in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria had led his army to attack Judah and had captured many of the fortified cities of Judah. He then turned his attention to Jerusalem with the intent of destroying the capital of Judah. Sennacherib had sent his representative, Rabshakeh to taunt the people of Jerusalem by claiming their God had no power to save them and even claiming that it was the Jewish Lord who told the pagan Assyrian to destroy Judah. This taunting and blasphemy was answered decisively by God with the destruction of the Assyrian army as recorded in 37:36. The timing of the declaration of the far future prophecy was therefore within an appropriate setting and Isaiah’s audience could well relate to what God was telling them. The Lord will again respond to the taunting of His people and the blaspheming of His great name in the far future. See Isaiah 49:25-26; 51:7-8, and 21-23.

The Apostle Paul quoted Isaiah 52:5 in Romans 2:24: “Just as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” Paul’s application of this prophecy from Isaiah was to enhance his point that the Jews were as guilty as the Gentiles in sinfulness and dishonoring God. The Jews could not boast in their knowledge of God’s law as they, as self-proclaimed, guides and teachers of the law, were guilty of not keeping the law, which led to God’s name being blasphemed among the Gentiles. Paul’s citing of Isaiah 52:5 does not mean that his application of this verse was its fulfillment. Many Old Testament passages are quoted
in the New Testament as a means of application and not a final fulfillment of the O.T. reference. For example, the quoting of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21, was an analogical application of the day of the Lord prophecy by the prophet Joel, not a fulfillment of the prophecy. For an extended discussion of the use of Joel 2 in Act 2 see Andrew M. Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, Grace Gospel Press, 2016, Chapter, 18, under heading Joel 2 in Acts 2. See also Michael J. Vlach, *How Does the New Testament Use the Old Testament: A Survey of Major Views*, Theological Studies Press, 2017, for a detailed discussion of how the New Testament applies Old Testament texts. This publication reviews scholarly viewpoints but will be of interest to the Bible student who desires a deeper theological understanding of this issue.

52:6 *Therefore my people will know my name; in that day then they will know that I am the one who speaks; look, it is I.*

The Lord had earlier promised to vindicate His people and protect them and gather them from the nations, so they could with singing and joy journey to Zion with the aid of the nations who had previously held them captive and oppressed them, Isaiah chapters 35, 40-48, and 50-52. The Lord promises in 52:6 that will be a day in the future, “*in that day,*” when God, who is the Messiah will reign in Zion, 52:7. “*In that day,*” His people will not only know His name but will know Him for who He is, the great “*I am.*” They are called to look upon Him and acknowledge Him. It will be the “day” of the beginning of the messianic rule of the Messiah when all people alive on the earth, following the Tribulation, will know for certain that the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, has returned to vindicate His great name Thomas Constable comments:

“The Lord's conclusion to the situation was twofold. First, He would so deliver His people that there would be no question in their minds that He was the only true God (cf. Ezek. 36:21-32). Second, Yahweh would prove that He is who He claimed to be, by fulfilling what He had predicted He would do. "In that day" anticipates a time, yet future, in which God would act decisively for His people to vindicate His name.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 257).

Victor Buksbazen adds:

“*Therefore will my people know my name: ‘To know the name’ is to know intimately the character of the person who bears the name. In this case Israel will know that Jehovah is mighty to deliver, her faithful and promise-keeping God.”* (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 398).

52:7-12 Introduction

Following the declaration of Isaiah regarding the Lord’s promises that He will not forsake or forget His people (even though they will forsake and forget Him) and His promises to redeem His people from cruel oppressors and bring them to Zion where He will be known by them, the prophet orates a great hymn of praise regarding the works of restoration and salvation wrought by the Lord. Similar “hymns of praise” are recorded in Isaiah 42:10-12; 44:23; and 49:13. The hymn of praise in 52:7-10 completes the long section 49:14 to 52:6. The words of Isaiah 52:11-12 are a prophetic call to God’s people to act upon His promises by coming out of the nations that have held them in cruel captivity. It should be noted that some have suggested that the fourth Servant Song actually begins with Isaiah 52:7, however this study of Isaiah will be in agreement with the majority of scholars who state that the fourth Servant Song with Isaiah 52:13.

The hymn of praise by Isaiah, 52:7-10, announces the bringing of good news of peace, happiness, salvation and the announcement that God reigns, to the people of Zion, vs. 7. Watchmen in Zion will witness the restoration of their city by LORD and shout joyfully of what they have witnessed, vs. 8. Also, the ruined
places of Jerusalem will shout joyfully because the LORD has comforted and redeemed His covenant people, vs 9. Finally, the hymn of praise, declares that the LORD has shown to all nations His great strength (has barred His holy arm), so that His salvation will be seen by all the earth, vs. 10. Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer comment on verses 7

“The prophet next proclaims God’s kingship over Israel. The beautiful feet of the messenger and the good news He proclaims to the people of Israel result in praise. The Septuagint and the NT translate the Hebrew phrase rendered good news as “gospel.” Therefore, the term “gospel” carries with it a royal nuance that is frequently overlooked. In the context of Isaiah, the royal nuance of the good news is certainly in mind as God is identified as the One who reigns.” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, Moody Bible Commentary, page 1086).

52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings,
who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

Isaiah 52:7 is one of the most beloved verses in all of Scripture and its words have been woven into Christian songs of praise for the gracious and merciful acts of God in redeeming His covenant people and all peoples who will put their faith in His Son. Notwithstanding the words of Christian hymns that make this verse applicable to a universal message of salvation, it is specifically in the context of Isaiah 52:1-12 and the chapters that precede it, a proclamation of praise for those who will bring the good news of God’s salvation to the covenant people of God, who are His faithful remnant who have been held captive by oppressive tyrants in many nations of the earth. The people of God will soon be released and freed from those who have held them and have sought to destroy them, Isaiah 51:12-14. The historical setting will be in the far future, at the end of the tribulation period, when God will gather His elect people from the nations and bring them in victory and great joy to Zion, Isaiah 35:10, 51:11.

Who will be those who bring proclamations of good tidings and publishes (announces) salvation and who will say to Zion, “Your God reigns?” There has been much speculation on the identity of these individuals. Will it be those who have been saved during the Tribulation who will go to these nations as Christian missionaries to bring the gospel message to all peoples including the covenant people of God? Will it be the 144,000 Jews who will receive the seal of God upon their foreheads, Revelation 7:3-8; 14:1? Will it be an as yet unidentified sole messenger who has been assigned by God to be this bringer of good tidings? Or will it be the returning faithful remnant who announces these good tidings to Zion. Isaiah had earlier announced a prophecy of announcing comfort and coming salvation to the people of Zion, Isaiah 40:1-11. He would prophesy of the mission of the Messiah to bring good news and comfort those who mourn in Zion, 61:1-3. The prophet Nahum may have quoted Isaiah as recorded in Nahum 1:15a or received the same message from God who is the author of Scripture. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 10:15, made an application of Isaiah 52:7 in his discussion on the preaching of the gospel message and those who are sent to preach this message. It must be remembered that a New Testament application of an Old Testament prophecy is not a final fulfillment of that prophecy unless it is clearly evident that this is the case. From the context of Isaiah chapter 52:1-12 and the preceding chapters, the context of this proclamation of good tidings occurs during the days just prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom when God is gathering His elect people from the nations of the world to come to Zion to meet and live under the gracious rule of their King, who is their Messiah. The identity of the messenger(s) of good tidings is not made certain in the Scriptures.
Victor Buksbazen suggests:

“The prophet visualizes in spirit a fleet-footed messenger on the mountains of Judah, bringing the good tidings that the exiles, under Jehovah Himself, are returning to Zion in triumph. The apostle Paul sees in this messenger the figure of an evangelist who brings the good tidings (“the evangel”) of salvation to Israel (Rom. 10:13).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 399).

Other passages in Isaiah state that the message of God’s comfort and salvation are proclaimed on the mountains, Isaiah 40:9; 42:10-11; 44:23; 49:13; and 55:12. See also Psalm 72:3. A close parallel to Isaiah 52:7 is Isaiah 40:9:

Get up on a high mountain, O Zion,
message of good tidings.
You who announce good tidings to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with strength;
do not be afraid.
Announce to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

The “good tidings “in the DASV and the KJV but “good news” in other English versions, are described by four declarations described as “peace,” “good news of happiness” (ESV), “salvation” and the emphatic “Your God reigns!”

“peace” (the first declaration)
The first of the four declarations is “peace” which shall be a major characteristic of the messianic rule of King Messiah. Peace, shalom in the Hebrew, has several meanings in the Old Testament. In the context of the messianic rule of the Messiah, shalom refers to an absence of hostility, harm, fear and worry about any stressful condition. The One who will rule His kingdom is described in Isaiah 9:6 as the “Prince of Peace,” and there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, Isaiah 9:7. Isaiah describes this kingdom in 26:1-3 as,

1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
We have a strong city;
God has set up salvation like walls and ramparts.
2 Open the gates,
so that the righteous nation
that keeps faith may enter.
3 You will keep in perfect peace,
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.

Isaiah, in the same context as 26:1-3, describes the actions of the Lord in 26:12 as: “O LORD, you will establish peace for us.” Isaiah describes the days of the messianic kingdom, in 32:16-18 as,

16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness;
righteousness will reside in the fruitful field.
17 The produce of righteousness will be peace;
the result of righteousness,
quietness and confidence forever.
My people will live in peaceable dwellings,  
in safe homes,  
and in secure resting places.  
(Isaiah 32:16-18)

Isaiah records the promise of God in 54:10 that “my loyal love will never leave you, nor will my covenant of peace ever be broken, says the LORD who has compassion on you.”

In Isaiah 55:12, the prophet records, regarding the messianic kingdom, that,

For you will go out with joy,  
and be led forth with peace;  
the mountains and the hills will break out in singing before you,  
and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands.

The prophet records in 57:18-19, the promise of God for those entering His kingdom, that,

I have seen their ways,  
but I will heal.  
I will lead him,  
and restore comfort to those who mourn,  
creating praise on their lips.  
Peace, peace, to those who are far off  
and to those who are near,  
says the LORD,  
and I will heal them.

In the kingdom of the Messiah, God will, as recorded in Isaiah 60:17b-18,

I will also make peace your overseer,  
and righteousness your ruler.  
Violence will no more be heard in your land,  
devastation or destruction within your borders,  
but you will call your walls 'Salvation,'  
and your gates 'Praise.'

Finally, as recorded in Isaiah 66:12, God promises, “Look, I will extend prosperity (peace) to her like a river.” The overwhelming evidence, from the prophetic writings of Isaiah, is that the kingdom of the Messiah will be a time of unparalleled peace upon the earth during which time, the inhabitants of the kingdom will be free to live their lives in contentment and have the freedom to openly worship their King who is their Messiah.

“good news of happiness” (the second declaration)  
The second of the four declarations is “good news of happiness.” Happiness,” is the Hebrew word tob, which can also be translated as “well being” (marginal note in the NASB), or simply “good” or “goodness.” In the context of Isaiah 52:7, the marginal note of the NASB, as translating tob as “well being” aptly describes the physical and spiritual condition of the inhabitants of the messianic kingdom. The sense of the well being of these inhabitants could be understood as being content, satisfied, and “at peace” with their circumstances. They will have nothing lacking in their living conditions nor in their relationship with each other or with their
Messianic King or with those who will act as administrators of the kingdom. Each day will bring contented happiness during which they can joyfully praise their Savior, the Messiah. Part of this happiness will stem from extremely good physical health and a vibrant long lifespan without fear of diseases, or fear of violent weather, or fear of enemies or fear of harm from wild animals who will also be at peace with their environment and with others who inhabit the kingdom. (see Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:25).

“salvation” (the third declaration)
The third of the four declarations is “salvation,” which is the Hebrew: yeshu’ā. Salvation is one of the great themes of the prophecy of Isaiah. The prophet’s name has the meaning of “The Lord is salvation,” (“salvation of Yah”). Salvation in the writings of Isaiah has the meaning of rescue, deliverance, ransom, and redemption both physically and spiritually. The One who brings salvation is Israel’s kinsmen Redeemer (ga’al) who is their Messiah and King. The Hebrew word yeshu’ā is the most common word for salvation in Isaiah. Synonym’s for this word in Isaiah are yesha and teshu’ah. The Hebrew word for salvation, yeshu’ā occurs in Isaiah 12:2, 3 (twice), 25:9; 26:1, 18; 33:2, 6; 49:6, 8; 51:6, 8; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:11, 17; 60:18 and 62:1. See notes on these verses for an explanation of the meaning of salvation in the context of these verses. The short chapter 12 of Isaiah is an excellent example of the praise for God’s salvation by those who will inhabit Zion “in that day” (12:1,4), which is the day of Messiah’s kingdom, Isaiah 12:1-6 states,

1 In that day you will say,
   "I will give thanks to you, O LORD;
    for though you were angry with me,
     but now your anger is turned away
      and you comfort me.

2 God is my salvation;
   I will trust and not be afraid;
   for the LORD, yes the LORD,
    is my strength and song;
     he has become my salvation."

3 Joyfully you will draw water
   from the wells of salvation.

4 In that day you will say,
   "Give thanks to the LORD,
    call on his name;
     declare his deeds among the peoples,
      proclaim that his name is exalted.

5 Sing to the LORD,
   for he has done wonderful things;
    let this be known in all the earth.

6 Shout out and cheer, O inhabitant of Zion,
   for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

“Your God reigns!” (the fourth declaration)
The fourth of four declarations is “Your God reigns!” Although listed fourth, this declaration is of the utmost in rank and importance. All of the other works and actions of God on behalf of His creation are secondary and lead to this greatest and most exalted fact. Salvation, as important and as costly as it is to God to accomplish, is in itself, a means to the most ultimate reality. This utmost reality is that God reigns over His creation. One scholar suggests that the kingdom of God is the central theme of Scripture. See Michael J. Vlach, He will Reign Forever, pages 21-26.
His creation and all its benefits and glories pale in comparison to the existence of God who delights to live (tabernacle) among His created people as their King. The history of God’s creative purposes finds its climax in the personal rule of God among those who have put their faith in Him. The setting for this personal rule of God will be in the messianic kingdom when the Lord, the Messiah will return to earth to rescue His people and personally establish and rule over His kingdom. The throne room for this rule will be in Zion. From Zion, the Messiah will rule over all the earth. Those who are in Zion will joyfully hear the message that is brought to them by the messenger, Isaiah 52:7, that “Your God reigns!” It will be the greatest message ever delivered or heard by the ears of mankind.

When the Messiah, Jesus Christ will return to earth as a victorious warrior King, the words of a great multitude will proclaim, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns,” Revelation 19:6. The Messiah will reign in the far future, which many texts of Scripture speak of “in that day.” It is a day yet to come. Someone may ask, “Does not the Messiah reign today?” Or they may ask, “Isn’t the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ present on the earth now?” Many who hold to an “already-not yet” hermeneutic of the kingdom of Christ would advocate that when Christ came to earth at His first advent, He inaugurated His kingdom which He rules on David’s throne from heaven. However, this understanding of the kingdom of Christ has many flaws. Scripture clearly states that Christ is sitting at the right hand of His Father in heaven, advocating on behalf of the saints who are called His body, the Church. Christ is not now sitting on the throne of David ruling His kingdom. He will sit on this throne, one future day when He returns to earth to establish His messianic kingdom. Even though the disciples of Christ where often dull in their understanding of the kingdom of God, they at least knew that Christ’s kingdom was not yet present. When Christ was soon to ascend into heaven, they asked, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The Lord did not correct them by stating that the kingdom was already present, but He said, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has set by His own authority” Acts 1:7. There will be a time when the Messiah will rule, while sitting on the throne of David. This time will come at the decree of the Father who alone sets the time-frame of history. As mentioned above, see the publications by Alva J. McClain, Michael J. Vlach and Andrew M. Woods, for a detailed defense of the coming rule of the Messiah on the earth.

Another question that someone may ask is, “Isn’t God always ruling His kingdom?” Those who ask this question should be aware that there certainly is a universal kingdom of God over which God the Father sovereignly rules. This universal rule is different from the coming messianic kingdom which will have a set time frame, as stated in Revelation 20:1-6. The events leading to the establishment of this kingdom, its Kingship, living conditions, those who will inhabit this kingdom and benefits to those who will inhabit this kingdom are prophetically stated in the writings of Isaiah and by other writers of the Old and New Testaments.

The words “Your God reigns!” can also be translated as “Your God is King.” See marginal note in the NASB. The message of the Kingship and reign of God is similar to the previous declaration by Isaiah as recorded in Isaiah 40:9-11. Other exclamations that God reigns are recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:31; Psalm 47:8; 93:1; 97:1; and 99:1. Also, many Psalms declare that God is King, 5:2; 10:16; 22:28; 24:8; 10; 29:10; 44:4; 45:6, 11; 47:2; 6; 7; 68:24; 74:12; 84:3, 93:1; 95:3; 98:6; and 145:1. See also Jeremiah 8:19; 10:10; 46:18; 48:15; 51:57; Ezekiel 20:33; Obadiah vs. 21; Zephaniah 3:15; Zechariah 14:9, 16, 17 and Malachi 1:14. The ancient Israelites had once recognized God as King over them but had sought a human king to rule them, thus rejecting God as their sovereign ruler: 1 Samuel 8:7 and 12:12. The sad history of the Israelites from that point on, with a fallible human ruler, is witness to the folly of rejecting God’s righteous and holy rule over His covenant people. This sad history will turn to a joyful proclamation of praise to God, and a peaceful prosperous life, when God’s people repent of their national sin of rejecting God and His Son. When this happens, they will openly plea for their Messiah to return and rule them. Important passages proclaiming God as King in Isaiah occur in: 6:1, 5; 9:7; 24:23; 33:22; 37:16; 41:21; 43:15; and 44:6.
52:8 Your watchmen lift their voices, 
together they shout for joy; 
they will see with their own eyes, 
when LORD returns to Zion.

Isaiah 52:8 continues the narrative of the glorious proclamation of 52:7. A messenger (or messengers) have come to Zion to proclaim good news of peace, happiness, salvation and the most exalted declaration that their God has come to them to reign. This will happen at the end of the Tribulation period when the Messiah will return as a mighty warrior King to defeat the enemies of His covenant people and come to Zion to establish His messianic kingdom. The messenger(s) coming to Zion to proclaim the good tidings are first seen and heard by the watchmen who keep watch over the beloved City of God. They hear the message and together with the messenger(s) shout for joy for they gladly acknowledge that they will personally witness the return of the Lord to Zion. The words “see with their own eyes” are literally “to see eye to eye.” It indicates that when they witness the return of the Lord to Zion, they will be so close to Him that they can look into His eyes. Their years of travail and suffering are coming to an end. Their city will be liberated and purged from sin and wickedness. A glorious new day of righteousness is about to dawn upon them. The watchmen’s shouts of joy will arouse the people of God to awaken and clothe themselves with beautiful garments (52:1), as they await the entrance of their King, the Messiah.

52:9-10 Break out into joyful singing, 
you ruins of Jerusalem; 
for the LORD has comforted his people, 
he has redeemed Jerusalem. 
10 The LORD has bared his holy arm 
in the eyes of all the nations. 
All the ends of the earth 
will see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:9-10 may be understood as a hymn of praise by Isaiah upon contemplating the good tidings that will be brought to Zion when the Lord comes to reign among His covenant people. The joyful shouts of the watchmen over Zion will be joined by the inhabitants of the city who will fill all of the ruins of Jerusalem with praise for their returning King who has redeemed and comforted them. This is certainly not a reference to the return of the exiles from Babylon. It is the Lord who is returning to be King over His covenant people and bring comfort, peace, happiness and salvation to them, following the distressful days of the Tribulation. The exiles in Babylon lived for the most part in comfort and peace and they may have been very happy in their circumstances for most of them refused to return to Jerusalem to face the arduous task of rebuilding the temple and the city. The Lord will return to earth to rescue His covenant people from the despair of being held captive and the fear of being destroyed by those who have held them in many nations of the world. The kings of the nations of the world will assist them as they leave these nations and travel to Zion, Isaiah 49:22-23. Upon their arrival, the ruins of Jerusalem will be rebuilt, Isaiah 58:12, by foreigners, Isaiah 60:10, who will also pasture their flocks and be their farmers and vinedressers, Isaiah 61:4-5.

The people of Jerusalem will be comforted by the returning Lord. See also, Isaiah 40: 1-11. The Lord, who is their kinsmen Redeemer, will physically rescue His covenant people from their enemies and redeem them. This redemption should be understood in a spiritual sense as salvation from sin and wickedness. If they had not received the Lord’s salvation, by faith in their Messiah, they would not have been eligible to live with the Messiah in His messianic kingdom. The reference in 52:10 to the Lord bearing His holy arm has a very significant meaning. Bearing the arm is a symbol of strength and power. All nations of the earth will witness
the power and holiness of the Lord when He rescues and redeems His covenant people. The word “arm” in 52:10 is the Hebrew word zeroah, which for example is described in Deuteronomy 26:8, “Then the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with terrifying deeds and with signs and wonders.” The word zeroah also occurs in Deuteronomy 33:27, “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are his everlasting arms.” (bold intentional).

The word zeroah also occurs in Isaiah in 33:2, “be our strong arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble;” in 40:10, “Look, the sovereign LORD will come with might, he will rule with his strong arm;” in 59:16, “Therefore his own arm brought salvation to him;” in 62:8, “The LORD has sworn by his right hand, and by his mighty arm;” and in 63:5, “Therefore my own arm brought me salvation.” (bold intentional). It is readily seen that the Lord’s arm, zeorah, is closely connected with salvation. Mitch Glaser in Messiah in the Passover, Chosen People Ministries, licensed to Kregel Publications, 2017, page 242, emphatically links zeroah in Isaiah 52:10 to the saving arm of God which is fulfilled by the Lamb of God, the Messiah. In the passover celebration, for certain Jewish participants, a part of the feast includes a shank bone of a lamb, the arm, of which messianic Jews depict as representing the Messiah as the lamb who was slain.

The peoples of the earth who are alive at this time, “all the ends of the earth,” will also have salvation offered to them. See Isaiah 45:22; and 49:6. All who respond in faith will reside in the kingdom with the Messiah as their holy and righteous King. Later Isaiah would state in 59:20-21:

20 "A Redeemer will come to Zion,  
    and to those in Jacob who turn from their sin,"  
    says the LORD.

21 "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD,  
    "my Spirit that is on you,  
        and my words which I have put in your mouth,  
        will not depart out of your mouth,  
        nor out of the mouths of your children,  
        nor out of the mouth of your children's children,"  
    says the LORD, "from now to forever."

David L. Cooper comments:

“Isaiah, being thrilled with the vision of Jerusalem's deliverance, which will occur when Messiah returns to Zion, spoke to the waste places of Jerusalem and called upon them to break forth into joy and singing. He realized that that will be the time when the Lord comforts His people and redeems Jerusalem. At that time the Lord will make bare "his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth" shall see the salvation of God.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – November 1945).

52:11-12 Depart, depart, get out of here,  
touch nothing unclean.  
Get out of the midst of her;  
purify yourselves,  
you who bear the sacred vessels of the LORD.

12 For you will not leave quickly,  
nor will you go fleeing for your lives;  
for the LORD will go before you;  
the God of Israel will watch your back.
Many Bible scholars suggest that these two verses have been added or inserted into chapter 52 at this point because of the assumption that they apply to the return of the Judean exiles from Babylon. This assumption may stem from the words in 52:11, “you who bear the sacred vessels of the LORD.” While it is understandable why this viewpoint is expressed, it does not however, fit the context of the first section of chapter 52 nor of the chapters preceding this chapter. The context, as has been described in the study notes on chapter 52 and the passages that precede it, is the timeframe at the end of the Tribulation period when the returning Messiah descends upon the earth as a warrior King to rescue His covenant people and establish His messianic kingdom.

The Lord’s words in 52:11-12 are spoken to those who have been held in despair and were in fear of the leaders of the nations who humiliated them and have sought to destroy them. See Isaiah 49:25; 51:14-16; 52:3-6. At the beginning of the seven-year period, the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24-27, also known as the Tribulation, the Antichrist will make a seven-year “covenant” with the Jews, of whom many will have returned to a portion of the land, that was promised to them in ancient times. There is a temple in place, according to Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:4-16; and Revelation 11:1-2. In the middle of this seven-year “covenant,” the Antichrist will break his own covenant and cause the Jews and their sacred vessels and implements to be removed from the temple and he will set up an abomination in the temple, Daniel 9:27 as clarified by Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:15.

Those Jews who are in Jerusalem during those terrifying days will need to flee for their lives, Matthew 24:16-22. The priests who had been ministering Jewish worship rituals such as sacrifices, and offerings will be among those who will immediately leave the temple, taking the vessels of the Lord with them. Their flight into the nations to avoid the wrath of the Antichrist and his forces will last for a short time, Matthew 24:22, which can be understood as three and one-half years which completes the second part of the seven years period, Daniel 9:27. See also the corresponding time periods stated in Revelation 11:2, forty-two months; 12:6, one thousand two hundred and sixty days; 12:14, a time, and times and half a time; 13:5, forty-two months. For a detailed description of the end times including the Tribulation period, see J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology, Zondervan, 1964. See also, John F. Walvoord, End Times: Understanding Today’s World Events in Biblical Prophecy, Word Publishing, 1998.

At the end of the days of their distress, called Jacob’s trouble in Jeremiah 30:7, the faithful Jews who will plead for the return of their Messiah and have put their trust and faith in Him, will be called out of the nations where they have been so cruelly mistreated. The Lord calls them to get out of these nations and touch nothing unclean in them and purify themselves. The apostle Paul quoted from Isaiah 52:11 in 2 Corinthians 6:17. As with many other Old Testament quotations that appear in Paul’s letters, ie: Romans 10:15, this quotation from Isaiah 52:11 is an application, not a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. There is abundant Scriptural support for this prophecy of Isaiah to be fulfilled during the end days of the Tribulation and just prior to the establishment of the messianic kingdom by the returning Messiah. This divine call to the covenant people of God to depart from the nations and to not touch anything unclean, will be generally applicable to all of the faithful remnant and specifically for those priests who have held on to the sacred vessels of the Lord. Isaiah 52:1 states that no one unclean will come into Zion.

Though they will flee in imminent fear for their lives from Jerusalem, Matthew 24:16-22, they will return three and one-half years later without fear for their lives nor will they need to travel back to Zion in haste. The Lord promises to go before them and He will also watch over them from behind them, Isaiah 52:12. This is similar to the Lord’s protection of the ancient Israelites as they walked for many years in the wilderness after the Lord has rescued them from Egypt. Isaiah had earlier declared that during this journey in the far future, the kings of princes of the nations of the earth will assist them as guardians and nurses and carry them to their destination, Isaiah 49:22-23. See also Isaiah 14:2; 43:6; 60:4 and 66:20-21.
Teaching Outline for Isaiah chapter 52:1-12

52:1-2 Call for God’s people to awake and purify themselves
52:3-6 God’s people will know Him and His name
52:7-10 God’s people will know the King who reigns
52:11-12 Call for God’s people to leave the nations and purify themselves


If the prophecy of Isaiah can be understood as the highest and loftiest writing of the Old Testament, then Isaiah chapter 52:13 to chapter 53:12 must be the very pinnacle, the highest point of the Old Testament and arguably the entire Scriptures. There has been more scholarly literature written on this section of Isaiah than on all of the rest of Isaiah and on any comparable length of verses for the entire Scriptures. It stands more exalted and revered as no other part of Scripture can claim. It explains how salvation was wrought by God as sufficient for all of the human race. It explains how the Servant, the Messiah, God’s Son, went from being exalted in heaven to being slaughtered on earth, and rising from the dead to be again exalted in heaven. With all that is said in this section of Isaiah about the Servant’s role in God’s gracious offer of salvation, one would think everyone would be in agreement as to its interpretation and application. This however, is not what has unfolded.


David L. Cooper provides a brief introduction:

“IN ISAIAH 52:13-53:12 we reach the climax so far as the "servant passages" of Isaiah are concerned. The first mention of the servant is found in Isaiah 41:8. An examination of that context shows that the one to whom reference is made is none other than the remnant of Israel that will be gathered from among all the nations in the end time and restored to the land of the fathers and to fellowship with God. But also in Isaiah 42:18-22 we read of the servant of Jehovah. From the facts of this context it is quite evident that not the remnant of the nation is referred to, but the entire Hebrew race. In other portions of Isaiah the servant indicates an individual, the ideal Israelite, the Messiah of the nation. The reason for reaching such a conclusion is that the facts of the various contexts indicate this meaning.

Who is the servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12? An examination of the facts of this context shows very clearly that an individual is meant, namely, the Messiah of Israel. In this passage this servant is differentiated from the remnant and from the entire nation. Moreover, He suffers in behalf of His people and in behalf of the entire world. These facts justify our interpreting this as a prediction of the personal Messiah.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly - December 1945).

Gary V. Smith adds:
“Although this Servant poem is most closely related to the earlier Servant poems in 42:1–13; 49:1–13; and 50:4–11, it also has connections with its immediate contextual setting of chap. 52. Isaiah 52:1–10 refers to a future time in which Zion will be a holy city (52:1). This will happen because God will forgive their sins by washing away their filth and cleansing the blood stains from Jerusalem (4:3–4). In 53:4–6, 8, 11–12 the good news is that forgiveness is attained through the death of the Servant, thus explaining how the sins of the nations will be washed away. Isaiah 52:7 predicts a time to proclaim the good news of peace, salvation, and the reign of God as King in Jerusalem, and 53:1–10 refers to an almost unbelievable “message, report” of good news about a Servant who would bear the sins of many. Isaiah 52:10 refers to the Lord baring his arm in the sight of all the nations so that they can see the salvation of God. These ideas are consistent with and elaborated in 53:1 when the arm of the Lord reveals the Servant. Many nations and their kings will see, hear, and understand this message (52:15) just as 49:7; 51:4–5; 52:10 predict. These interlinking connections suggest that this Servant poem in 52:13–53:12 is the climactic message that fills out the unanswered questions raised in these earlier oracles. It explains the personal action of God through the Servant that makes salvation possible to many, and it plays a fundamental role in convincing the nations to understand and accept the salvation that God offers.”


The passages, 42:1-13; 49:1-13; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12, are often called “songs” or “poems” and have many related themes. The first Servant Song, 42:1-13 describes the Servant as God’s chosen One of whom God upholds, delights in and upon whom God has put His Spirit. The work of the Servant will be to bring justice and His law to the nations. In this role, the Servant will not cry out or raise His voice but will be gentle towards others. The Servant will not be discouraged or defeated and will be victorious in His mission. God will watch over and protect His Servant, whom God has called in righteousness. God will appoint Him to be a covenant to the people and a light to the nations to open blind eyes and free captives from imprisonment (of sin).

The second Servant Song, 49:1-13 describes an autobiographical account of the work of the Servant. The Servant describes His calling and protection from God who will display His glory in His Servant. The Servant describes His frustration and apparent lack of success in His appointed task but acknowledges that God will reward for His work and will give to Him the justice that He deserves. The work of the Servant is explained as gathering and restoring Jacob and Israel to God and being a light to the nations so that God’s salvation will reach to the ends of the earth. Although the Servant will be despised and abhorred by the nations and be a servant to the earth’s rulers, the kings and princes of the nations will worship Him. The Servant will be given as a covenant to the people and will restore the land of His covenant people and will free captives and bring those in darkness into the light and comfort them. The Servant will have compassion on His covenant people and will lead them from the nations where they have been held captive and restore them to their inheritance in their promised land.

The third Servant Song, 50:4-11, is an autobiographical description of the work and suffering of the Servant. The Servant describes the enabling of God upon Him to sustain those who are weary, and He will be obedient to His calling. The Servant will suffer physical abuse including strikes upon His back, the pulling out of His beard, humiliation and spitting into His face. Through all this He will be helped from God and He will not be disgraced nor ashamed for God will vindicate and help Him. Those who oppose and condemn Him will themselves face the wrath and judgment of God.

The fourth Servant Song, 52:13-53:12 describes in detail the suffering, death, resurrection and exaltation of the Servant who accomplishes the work of salvation for sinful humanity that God had planned before the foundation of the world. This Song has three component sections. Many scholars divide the fourth Servant Song into five sections of three verses each, 52:13-15; 53:1-3; 53:4-6, 53:7-9 and 53:10-12 which has much to be commended, but for the purposes of this study it will be simpler to adopt a three-partition examination of the text.
The first section of the fourth Servant Song is an introductory declaration, 52:13-15, consisting of God’s statement that His Servant will prosper (act wisely) and will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Many will be appalled at the Servant who will be disfigured beyond that of anyone (while being punished and being put to death). By this punishment and death, the Servant will bring salvation to the nations. Kings (leaders) of the nations will be amazed at Him and they will understand His work of salvation although they had not heard about or had not been told about it.

The second section, 53:1-9, describes a confession by repentant Israelites who will have faith in the Servant (their Messiah). They confess that the Servant was a man of sorrows, who knew suffering, and whose appearance did not attract them to Him. He was despised and forsaken by His own people, who did not esteem Him. They further confess that the Servant bore their griefs and carried their sorrows although they had before considered Him to be afflicted and smitten by God. They confess that the Servant was pierced, crushed and punished for their sins and by doing so, the Servant brought peace and healing to them. They also confess that they had gone astray like sheep and had turned to their own way, yet God had caused their iniquities to fall on the Servant. They confess that although the Servant was oppressed and afflicted, He did not complain but silent as He was led like a lamb to be slaughtered. They also confess that the Servant met His death in oppression and judgment and was stricken for their transgression. Although the Servant had neither done any violence nor had spoken any deceit, He was assigned a grave with the wicked yet was buried in the grave of rich man. Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer comment on 53:1-9:

“The speaker changes from God to Israel in 53:1, and the nation continues speaking through the three stanzas of the body of the poem (53:1-9). Israel speaks from the perspective of finally understanding the identity of the Servant after many years of rejection. This is penitential Israel, finally recognizing the long-rejected Messiah. In a parallel passage, Zechariah predicts that when Israel finally recognizes the Messiah, the nation will repent with great mourning (Zch 12:10). The words in this section aptly express that mourning and repentance. In the body of the song, penitent Israel gives three reasons for failing to recognize the Messiah in the past.” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, *Isaiah*, Moody Bible Commentary, page 1088).

The third section, 53:10-12, describes God’s pleasure in the death of the Servant and the result of this death and God’s exaltation of the Servant upon His resurrection. The prophet Isaiah speaks in vss. 10-11 and records God’s words in vs. 12. The prophet explains that the Servant was actually put to death by God’s pleasure which was His will and purpose. The Servant’s death was considered a guilt offering which accomplished the bearing of the people’s iniquities and brought about the justification of many, which can be understood as those who trust in Him. After His death, the Servant will live, by being resurrected to life. God declares in vs. 12 that He will reward the Servant who bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

David L. Cooper comments (an extended comment):

“After the prophet told us what the nation of Israel will confess in the future when its eyes are opened to the facts concerning the messiahship of the Lord Jesus and His being the Redeemer of the world, he in verses 10-12 of this chapter gave us the divine interpretation of Messiah's execution. Although there was no violence nor deceit in His mouth, Jehovah was pleased to bruise Him. He, the Lord Jehovah, had Him put to grief. In the plan and purpose of God, Messiah was to suffer and to taste death for every man. He was to become a curse for us and bear the brunt of the wrath of God against sin in our behalf. Those who engage in the rejection and execution of King Messiah of course acted upon their own initiative. Nevertheless, in what they did, they were carrying out the plans of God. The Apostle Peter explained on the day of Pentecost that those Jews to whom he was speaking on that occasion, by the hands of lawless men (Romans) put the Lord Jesus to death, and in their doing this they were simply carrying out "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." (See Acts 2:23). Although by His overruling providence they were carrying out the divine plans and purposes, yet those
who put Him to death were responsible in that they sinned against light and committed one of the most horrible crimes, or the most heinous deed of the centuries. In the Almighty's having Messiah put to death, He was having Him to make His soul "an offering for sin." John the Baptist had this thought in mind when he, in pointing to the Lord Jesus, said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

According to Isaiah 53:10 after the Messiah makes Himself an offering for sin, He comes to life; for, "... he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand." This refers to His post-resurrection life and activity. He conquered the foes of the human family, came forth from the grave, bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel, and at the same time He brought to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Some people have thought that Christianity is a failure. Not so! Messiah, by His omniscience, looked down through the corridors of time and saw an innumerable company of people who desire truth and who want to be in fellowship with God. Thus, according to the prophecy, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." According to the same verse it is "by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities." No one can believe on Him of whom they have never heard. It is therefore necessary that the gospel of the grace of God and of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ be preached to men. The Lord told Cornelius that he should send to Joppa for one man whose name was Simon and who would tell him words whereby he and his household might be saved. Thus it is by the knowledge of the Saviour that men are brought into right relationship with the Deity. When they accept Jesus Christ as their personal sacrifice, He bears their iniquities and they go free.

Because of the supreme sacrifice that the Messiah makes in behalf of the salvation of all believers, God apportions His part among the great—as we see in 53:12. He is given the place of preeminence, "... because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors." In His dying, He bore the sin of many, and, as He did so, He "made intercession for the transgressors." This specific prophecy was fulfilled in the cry of our Lord Jesus Christ when He said to the Father, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Everyone who is unprejudiced and unbiased can see in this marvelous passage in Isaiah a clear, definite picture of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friend, if you have never accepted His atonement, do so today. You have no promise of tomorrow. In Christ there is salvation and in Him alone." (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly—December 1945).

52:13 *Look, my servant will deal wisely; he will be exalted and lifted up, and will be greatly exalted.*

*Look, my servant will deal wisely* (first phrase of 52:13)

Although the DASV has the word "look" as the first word in 52:13, the KJV, NKJV, NASB, and ESV have "Behold" which corresponds with Isaiah 42:1. The NIV has "see" which is textually acceptable but "behold" has a much stronger sense of paying attention to the Servant, than to merely look at or see. Thomas Constable comments:

"Behold, My Servant marks a new section in the development of Isaiah's argument, but it also directs the reader to fix his or her attention carefully on the Servant (cf. 42:1; Zech. 3:8; 6:12; 9:9). The Servant would succeed in the sense of fulfilling the purpose to which God had called Him (cf. 42:1; 49:2-3; 50:7-9)." (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 260).
The words, “will deal wisely”, describing the action of the Servant can also be translated as “will prosper.” The Hebrew word is yaskil, which occurs in two other locations in Isaiah, 41:20 and 44:18. Victor Buksbazen explains the meaning of yaskil in the context of Isaiah 52:13:

“The KJV translates this “shall prosper.” The Hebrew verb “yaskil” means “to act wisely or prudently.” “To prosper” is the result of wise or prudent action.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 411).

**He will be exalted and lifted up and will be greatly exalted** (latter part of 52:13)

These three verbs can also be translated as “high, lifted up and greatly exalted.” They are used by Isaiah in other passages: 6:1, high and lifted up; 33:10, “Now I will rise, says the LORD, now I will lift up myself, now I will be exalted.”; and 57:15, “high and lofty One, high and holy place.” Victor Buksbazen advises that:

“The three verbs are used to convey the absolute height to which the Servant of God shall attain. It will be absolute and beyond any comparison.

The first two verbs, “lifted up and exalted,” are the same which Isaiah used about the LORD whom he saw sitting upon the throne “high and exalted” (Hebrew: ram ve-nissa Isa. 6:1).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 411).

Thomas Constable adds:

“The terms high, lifted up, and greatly exalted describe God elsewhere (cf. v. 17 (sic); 6:1; 33:10; 57:15). One writer noted several similarities between these two sections of the book and used them to argue for a single writer of the entire prophecy.633 Thus the Servant would take a place of equality with God (cf. Acts. 2:33; 3:13, 26; Phil. 2:9; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22). This could in no way refer to Israel, the remnant in Israel, or any merely human person.634 [Note 633: Herbert M. Wolf, "The Relationship Between Isaiah's Final Servant Song (52:13—53:12) and Chapters1—6," in A Tribute to Gleason Archer, pp. 251-59. Note 634: See F. A. Aston, The Challenge of the Ages, for defense of the view that this Servant song can apply only to Jesus Christ.]” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 260-261).

David L. Cooper comments on 52:13:

“In verse 13 the prophet looked out toward the future and called the nation's attention to this servant of Jehovah who "shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." The word in the original translated shall deal wisely also means prosper. The former rendition is the preferable one in the light of the facts of the context. This one's entire life and all of His acts shall be characterized by prudent, wise decisions.

We are next told that He shall be exalted, lifted up, and shall be very high. An examination of these words in the original shows that the term translated "shall be exalted" literally means to rise or raise oneself. An examination of the various occurrences of this word throughout the Hebrew Bible shows that such is the primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning of this term. One should therefore adhere to the literal meaning on all occasions, unless there are facts in the context which show that the literal sense is not intended. The word rendered "lifted up" literally means to lift oneself up or be lifted up. The verb rendered "shall be very high" literally means what these words imply. Taking the literal meaning of these words, we see that the verse is a prediction that Messiah will deal wisely, that He will rise from the place where He is (which is not stated in this verse), that He will lift himself up, or be lifted up, and that as a result of His being lifted up He shall be exceedingly or very high. When one studies the first nine verses of Isaiah, chapter 53, one comes to the conclusion that Messiah is slain and dies and is buried-- "And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death"--and that after His death He prolongs His days (vs. 10). It is clear from these facts that Messiah is slain, that He is buried, and that He rises from the grave. In view of these facts, then, the verb
rendered in 52:13 "shall be exalted" which literally means rise should thus be understood in its literal meaning of rising from the dead. This passage is then a prediction that, notwithstanding Messiah's dealing wisely, He is slain and buried; but the powers of the unseen world cannot keep Him, for He rises from the dead. After He has returned to life and has come forth from the tomb, leaving it empty, He lifts Himself up or is lifted up; that is, He lifts Himself up from His position upon the earth. When this part of the prediction is viewed in the light of related passages, it is seen that the lifting up here refers to the ascension of the Messiah to the right hand of the throne of God after His resurrection. Being at the right hand of the Majesty on high, He is very high as the last verb of the prediction indicates. Such is the meaning of this verse when it is translated literally and when it is viewed in the light of the facts following in chapter 53. We may conclude therefore that Isaiah saw, in vision, the Messiah as He moved among men, teaching and performing His deeds of mercy. Notwithstanding that fact, He is slain, is buried, but rises from the dead, bringing life and immortality to light in the gospel. After His return to life, He then ascends to the throne of God by accepting the invitation of the Lord, set forth in Psalm 110:1: "Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, Until I make thine enemies thy footstool"

Having ascended to the Father in the heavens, the Messiah remains in that position of honor and glory during the present dispensation—until God the Father makes His enemies the footstool of His feet. Thus in our verse we see the personal ministry of our Lord, His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of the throne of God.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly, December 1945).

52:14 Just as many were astonished at him, his disfigured face was marred more than any other, and his form beyond other human beings.

These words describe the scene when the Servant, Jesus Christ was brutally assaulted and then cruelly hung on a Roman cross to die a most painful death. Those who witnessed this event were astonished by being appalled or devastated at His appearance. Victor Buksbazen adds:

“Even as many were appalled at thee
Jehovah addresses Himself directly to His servant in the pronoun of the second person as “thee.” the word “appalled,” (Hebrew shamem), means “devastated.” It expresses deep, bewildered amazement caused by the transformation of the once marred and distorted (beyond human resemblance) visage of the servant, to the now exalted personage.

So marred was his figure beyond any man’s
This is a parenthetical sentence in which the prophet explains the reasons why so many were appalled at this appearance. We have here a glimpse in the depth of the intense suffering of the Messiah, which transfigured His whole image beyond human semblance.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 411).

As this event happened about 2000 years ago, we have no photograph to show the extent of the distortion and disfiguration of the person and face of the Messiah as He bore the full brunt of the cruelty of the Roman soldiers upon Him. He had done no wrong to anyone including the soldiers who seem to have taken sadistic delight in inflicting pain and punishment to the Savior of the world. We can only surmise how much the Messiah’s face and person was marred beyond recognition as a human form. Psalm 22:1-18 is another Old Testament prophecy of this event and adds a narrative of the words and thoughts of the Messiah as He faced this horrendous death. See also Matthew 26:67; 27:27-31; John 19:1-3.

Isaiah 53:7 describes the event of the assault upon the Messiah as “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.” It isn’t enough to say that Jesus was put to death for the sins of the world. He was slaughtered like an innocent lamb who did not voice any objection to his human tormentors, but instead made intercession for them while He hung upon the cross in unimaginable pain, Isaiah 53:12, Luke 23:34.
52:15 So he will sprinkle many nations; kings will shut their mouths before him. For that which they had not been told, they will see; and that which they had not heard, they will understand.

This words in this verse, “he will sprinkle many nations” have been debated by Bible scholars for generations. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Here the prophet compares the previous physical appearance of the servant, which was marred and distorted, to his exalted, high priestly position of the one who cleanses many from the defilement of their sins. To sprinkle, in Hebrew “yazzeh” (from the verb nizeh – to sprinkle or be sprinkled) is often used in the Old Testament to describe the ritual cleansing of a leper by means of sprinkling of the blood of a sacrifice (Lev. 14:7), or the veil in the Tabernacle (Lev. 4:6).

In this connection it is interesting to note that in the Talmud, one of the names of the Messiah is “Nagua” – “the leprous one” (Sanhedrin 98b). This is based on Isaiah 53: 4 and 8. The servant of Jehovah, once shunned like a leper now brings cleansing to the nations, not through the blood of animals, but by his own.

Some Jewish interpreters translate “yazzeh,” not as “sprinkle,” but “startle” (Slotki). This translation is possible, but “sprinkle” is more suitable, because of the content and the other passages where this verb is also so translated (Lev. 4:6, 14:7).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 411).

It appears that there is a difference of opinion even among messianic Bible Scholars who do not often differ on important and vital doctrines of the role of the Messiah in accomplishing salvation on behalf of sinful humanity. Thomas Constable suggests a harmonizing of these viewpoints:

“The interpretation of the Hebrew word yazzeh, translated "sprinkle" or "startle," has led students of this verse to two different understandings of the prophet's line of thought. If "sprinkle" is correct, Isaiah meant that even though the Servant was such an unlikely candidate as Yahweh's representative, He would still perform the priestly function of cleansing the world of its sins (cf. Lev. 4:6; 8:11; 14:7; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Heb. 10:22).

If "startle" is correct, the prophet meant that since the Servant was such an unlikely candidate as Yahweh's representative, He would shock the world (when He made His claims and when God would exalt Him). Both meanings are possible, and both harmonize with other revelation about the Servant. Most English translations have "sprinkle," and this is probably the primary meaning. There are other priestly allusions in the following verses (53:6, 7, 10, 11). I think Isaiah may have used a double entendre at this point so his readers would see both truths. Isaiah was a master of multiple allusions, as we have seen.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 261-262).

Kings will shut their mouths before him. For that which they had not been told, they will see; and that which they had not heard, they will understand. (latter part of 52:15)

The words of Isaiah 52:15, must be understood in the context of chapters 52 and 53. There is therefore a direct relationship between the sprinkling of the nations by the Messiah and the reaction of the kings that they will be silent before Him and they will see what they have not been told and they will understand what they have not heard.
Victor Buksbazen suggests:

“The convincing and convicting force of the Messiah's message shall be so great that the great among men will stand before Him in mute awe and reverence, because that which they will hear from His lips, was never heard before and the matchless life which they will see was never seen before. This is elsewhere described in Isaiah:

Kings shall see and arise,  
Princes shall worship,  
Because of Jehovah, who is faithful,  
And the Holy One of Israel who has chosen thee (49.7).  

Isaiah 52:13-15 forms a prologue to the great Messianic vision of chapter 53 ands sums up its entire message.”  
(Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 412).

Thomas Constable adds:

“Another problem is why the kings would be speechless. Would it be because of His lowly appearance (v. 14) or because of His exaltation (v. 13)? According to the first view, even kings would be shocked at the lowly state of the Servant (cf. John 19:19). What they had not known was that Israel's redeemer would be a humble Servant. According to the second view, even kings would be speechless at the Servant's exaltation (cf. v. 13). They had never heard that one who took such a lowly place could ever sit on the throne of God.

Again, since people and kings were shocked at both the Servant's humiliation and His exaltation, it is very hard to tell what was in Isaiah's mind. Perhaps the first view is better because the thought of verse 15 flows directly out of verse 14. However, the Apostle Paul applied this verse to the preaching of the gospel in virgin and largely Gentile territory, and the gospel includes both the sufferings and glory of Messiah (cf. Rom. 15:21). Suffering in God's service leads to exaltation and glorification.”  
(Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 262).

The Apostle Paul quoted from Isaiah 52:15 as an application of his task to preach the gospel where it had not already been proclaimed, “20 I have made it my aim to preach the gospel where Christ has not already been named, so that I might not build on someone else's foundation. 21 but, as it is written, "Those who were never told about him will see him, and those who have never heard will understand." Romans 15:20-21.

The second section of the fourth Servant Song, consists of the passage, Isaiah 53:1-9. The first section, 52:13-15 provided an overview of the entire Servant Song proclaiming the death, resurrection and exaltation of the Servant, the Messiah. The second or middle section of the Servant Song is an extended confession by the covenant people of God who will in the far future be the faithful remnant whom God has preserved during the days of the Tribulation. These people will finally recognize their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during His first coming. The will in repentance, realize that the extreme suffering and brutal slaughter of the Servant was on their behalf, and upon the behalf all of sinful humanity. They will confess that the Servant was put to death to bear their sins and was a guilt offering for them, although He had not committed any wrong nor was their any deceit in Him. This confession is in the past tense. Isaiah is prophetically writing of a far future day, just prior to the second advent of Jesus Christ, when the faithful remnant will repent and make this confession.

53:1 Who has believed our message?  
To whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

The question that must first be addressed in properly understanding verses 1-9 of Isaiah chapter 53 is, who is speaking these words? This study of Isaiah states that they were the faithful remnant of God’s covenant
people who are confessing the national sin of rejecting the Messiah during His first advent. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The majority of modern Jewish and some non-Jewish interpreters put the question in the mouth of the Gentile nations who in the last days will see the exaltation of the once despised Jews.

Although most flattering to the national ego, this interpretation is inconsistent with the prophet’s known views about his people and with the language of his prophecy.

Repeatedly the prophet denounced his people for being deaf and blind to the will of God (42:19-20, 43:24).

According to the prophet, they do not deserve the name Israel, and their allegiance to Jehovah is insincere (48:1). He characterizes his nation as “an obstinate people with a neck like an iron sinew and their forehead is like brass” (48:4).

The whole history and national character of Israel is completely out of harmony with the prophet’s portrait of God’s obedient servant who takes upon himself the sins of his people to redeem all men. In view of all this, the only reasonable answer to the question, “who has believed in the message we have heard?” is that it is asked by repentant Israel or by their godly remnant when they will finally recognize their past rebellion against God and against His servant, the Messiah. In reality the sense of the question is a self-accusation by the people that so few of them have believed.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 412-413).

There are two questions to be discussed in Isaiah 53:1. The first is “Who has believed our message?” Isaiah, prophesizing the words to be spoken in the far future by the faithful remnant of the Lord’s covenant people, is stating that the message is so amazing that who would believe it. It is a message, stated in verses 1-9 of the salvific work of the Servant, the Messiah on behalf of His people and all of sinful humanity. It is declared to be “our message.” The message of Isaiah’s own people, spoken not in Isaiah’s time, but in a time when the descendants of the Jews of Isaiah’s time will finally repent of their sin of rejecting the very Servant whom will come to redeem them.

The second question to be discussed in Isaiah 53:1 is, “To whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” The anthropomorphism of the Lord having an “arm” occurs in Isaiah in 30:30; 40:10, 11; 48:14; 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16; 62:8; 63:5, 12. The statements regarding the “arm” of the Lord can refer to His care for His people like a shepherd, 40:11, but most often refers to His great strength as in 51:9 and his ability to save, 52:10. The great message of salvation is depicted in Isaiah 53:1 as a work of the arm of the Lord. See J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 333. The answer to the second question is same as the first. F. Duane Lindsey believes the answer is that only a few people have either heard the message or witnessed the revealing of the strength of the arm of the Lord. See F. Duane Lindsey, Isaiah’s Songs of the Servant, Part 4, Bibliotheca Sacra, October - December 1982, pages 322-323. The message of salvation, Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is so amazing to be almost beyond belief and the rhetorical questions seem to point to an answer of just a few people have or would believe this message. As for the Jews, this was certainly the case as only a relatively few trusted in the Lord for salvation during the days of Isaiah, continuing to the days of the first advent of the Messiah and even to today. As far as the Gentiles are concerned, a most revealing question was asked by the Lord as recorded in Luke 18:8: “I tell you, that he will quickly give them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

The Apostle John appropriately applies this verse in John 12:38 within the wider context of John 12:20-50. In this passage John is recording the dialogue between Jesus Christ and those who were following Him. John 12:37-39a states, “Even though he had done so many signs in front of them, still they did not believe in
For he grew up before him like a tender plant, 
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no impressive form or beauty 
to attract us to him; 
there was nothing about his appearance 
that we should desire him.

The section, Isaiah 53: 2-9 contains many occurrences of the personal pronouns “he,” “him,” and “his” and a reference to “a man” in 53:3. The evidence for a singular male person is so overwhelming in these verses that it is almost beyond imagination that many Jewish and liberal scholars would identify the one described as Israel or some other group. Also, some scholars point to this person as being Isaiah, a king of Persia, or another individual almost to spite the obvious identification that the Servant is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ for no other individual in all of history could fulfill the words of these verses. For a discussion of this issue see Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, pages 400-410.

For he grew up before him like a tender plant, and like a root out of dry ground.

If it is the Messiah who is identified as the “he” in the first phrase of 53:2, then who is the “him” mentioned in this same phrase. In 53:1, the one having the (strong) arm is the LORD, Yahweh. So, in the context of these verses, two individuals are mentioned, the LORD, Yahweh and the Servant, the Messiah. The words of king David in Psalm 110:1 are helpful in the identification of the first “him” of Isaiah 52:2. David stated, in Psalm 110:1: “The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” The New Testament writers confirm the fulfillment of this O.T. statement, citing the words of Christ Himself in Matthew 22:43-45. See also, Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-45; Acts 2:32-35 and Hebrews 1:5-13. Also, Isaiah had earlier declared in 42:1-13; 49:1-13 and 50:4-9 that it was the LORD, Yahweh who called the Servant and taught Him and cared for and protected Him and ultimately would exalt and reward Him. So, it is with confidence and with solid Biblical support that the student of Scripture could rightly identify the “him” in the first phrase of Isaiah 52:2 as the LORD, whom is further identified in the New Testament as the Father of the Servant.

The first sentence of Isaiah 53:2 states that the He, the Servant grew up before Him, the LORD as a tender plant, and like a root out of dry ground. Thomas Constable comments:

“This verse elaborates on the humble nature of the Servant's person and ministry (cf. 52:14). Instead of appearing as a mighty oak or a flourishing fruit tree, the Servant would grow up before the Lord as a sucker, a normally unwanted shoot that sprouts up from a root (cf. 11:1; 1 Sam. 16:5-13). The Hebrew word, *yoneq*, literally means a "suckling," but Isaiah used it figuratively here in a horticultural sense to describe a tender sucker. 642

Gardeners usually snip off such "shoots" as soon as they appear, because they rob nourishment from the main plant. A parallel figure is a sprig that sprouts up in a barren landscape. Usually these little sprigs die very quickly from lack of moisture. The synonymous descriptions point to the apparently earthly, natural origin of
the Servant, with a family tree, and to the arid spiritual environment in which He grew up.” [Note 642: Baron, p. 70.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 263).

Victor Buksbazen provides an extended discussion:

“For he grew up like a tender plant before him

The prophet points to the unostentatious and humble beginnings of the servant, who was like a tender plant bursting forth from the dry ground. The Hebrew word for the “root” is “yonek,” a suckling; or horticulturally speaking, “a twig” or “a stalk.”

In 11:1 the prophet proclaimed:
There shall come forth a shoot
From the root stock of Jesse,
And a twig out of his roots shall bear fruit.

The connection between the Messiah proclaimed in the first part of Isaiah and the suffering servant of God in the second part is here strongly suggested.

And as a root out of dry ground

In the prophetic writings the Messiah is often called a root or branch. This is a reference to his Davidic descent (Isa. 11:1).

Out of dry ground – Hebrew, “me-eretz tziah.” Under Herod the Davidic dynasty became all but extinct. The attrition of time, and finally the murderous jealousy of Herod, so called “the Great,” have done their worst, almost wiping out all known or potential claimants to the throne of David. In this sense “the root of Jesse” vegetated and finally sprung up in “dry ground.”

Spiritually speaking, Israel, in the first century before Christ and long after became “a dry land.” No longer were there the prophets to proclaim to Israel the will and the Word of Jehovah. It was the age of the great Pharisaic scholars, legislators and interpreters of the Law of Moses according to their own human understanding. It was the age of Jewish scholasticism, acute, occasionally even brilliant, but spiritually not very creative. It was an age somewhat reminiscent of the later medieval scholasticism of the Church.

“Eretz tziah” – a dry land – may have originally suggested the name Zion, which means “a dry hill or place.” This would point to the fact that the grandeur of Zion and all that it represents was not inherent in the land itself, which was dry and barren, but came from God who has chosen Zion as His habitation.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 413-414).

He had no impressive form or beauty to attract us to him; there was nothing about his appearance that we should desire him.

The second part of Isaiah 53:2 discusses another important aspect of the life of the Messiah during His first advent. As the context of 53:2 describes the Messiah’s earthly life, it seems best to understand the prophetic comments regarding His appearance as applicable to the years of His public ministry. Therefore, this description of His appearance is not referring to the agony He suffered at the hands of the Roman soldiers leading to His death on the cross which is described in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52:14. Victor Buksbazen again, provides an extended discussion:
“There was nothing in the outward circumstances of the servant’s advent to make him attractive to his people or to the world. There was no pomp or circumstance, no earthly splendor, usually attendant upon the arrival of earthly princelings, nothing to excite the imagination of his countrymen or of the world. Israel’s vision of the Messiah was focused on his majestic appearance as king and conqueror, who will subdue the enemies of Israel, impose his peace upon the nations and establish his and Israel’s glorious kingdom. Foremost in the minds of the Jewish people were those passages of the Scripture which predicted divine judgment and the downfall of the Gentiles and the establishment of the kingdom where:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
And the calf and the young lion shall lie down together,  
They shall no longer hurt nor destroy in my holy mountain.  
For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God  
As the waters cover the sea.  
And the root of Jesse shall stand for a standard for the nations…. (Isa. 11:5, 10; 65:22-25)

These ideas have always exercised an enormous fascination for the Jewish people, even to the present time. It was Israel’s “vision splendid,” which she transmitted to all mankind. However there was scant recognition of the fact that before this Messianic kingdom could become a reality, the Messiah must first suffer, die and rise again from the dead. This aspect of the Messianic mission hardly registered on the national conscience of Israel. Nor did they ever become deeply aware of the fact that the mission of the Messiah was to bring His people and the nations to repentance and to faith in Him as the divinely appointed Redeemer.

It was with this in mind that the risen Christ on the way to Emmaus chided the two disciples:
O foolish ones, and slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and the prophets, he expounded the scriptures, the things concerning himself. (Lk. 24:25-27)

A Messiah without earthly splendor, humble and humiliated, who is tormented and dies upon a shameful cross as a vicarious and voluntary sacrifice for the redemption of Israel and mankind, has always been and still remains offensive to the Jewish thinking.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, pages 414-415).

53:3 He was despised and rejected;  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
Like one from whom people hide their face  
he was despised,  
and we thought nothing of him.

Isaiah 53:3 continues the description of the Messiah from vs. 2. The confession of the covenant people of God, the faithful remnant, who will be gathered from the nations at the end of the Tribulation, adds more detail about the Servant and the Jewish people’s rejection of Him. Another extended quotation from Victor Buksbazen is cited to explain the meaning of Isaiah 53:3.

“The He was despised and shunned by men

In earlier rabbinic literature the Messiah was recognized, as least in part, as a sufferer, In the Jewish prayer book there are frequent allusions to Isaiah 53 and to the suffering of the Messiah, but later contemporary Judaism has sought to eliminate, or at least to play down, all such allusions to a suffering Saviour.

The legend of the two Messiahs was invented in an effort to reconcile the two Biblical strands of thought: one which speaks of a suffering Messiah and the other which foresees his victorious reign. One is Messiah ben Ephraim (also sometimes called Messiah ben Joseph). He is the suffering Messiah who dies in battle against Armilius (Rome). Then comes the second, Messiah ben David, who is victorious over Rome (all pagan
powers), and restores the kingdom of Israel and establishes peace among the nations of the world. This was the feeble effort to reconcile the two distinct phases of the coming of the Saviour, first as “the Lamb of God” who sacrifices Himself for the redemption of all men and His second coming as King of kings, to establish His glorious Kingdom.

The prophet by inspiration and also from his own knowledge of his people foresaw all this, and so spoke of the servant as already despised and rejected by men. The Hebrew word for “men” is “ishim,” the poetic form for the regular “anashim,” a reference not to the ordinary rank and file men (hoi polloi), but to men of stature. Such men shunned him. The very fact of His humble origin and of His dwelling in Nazraeth, an obscure town in Galilee, not even mentioned in rabbinical literature, outside the New Testament, was in the eyes of His contemporaries and almost insurmountable obstacle (John 1:46, 7:41).

A man of afflictions and acquainted with suffering

We translated the Hebrew word “machoboth” as “afflictions,” which is nearer to the original than the KJV’s “grief.” “The afflictions” could be either physical or spiritual.

Jewish controversialists have maintained that since Jesus never suffered personal affliction during his life time, nor was ever sick himself, therefore the above words could not apply to him. However, this is not a reasonable argument. Like all the prophets, Jesus identified Himself with His people. He was afflicted in their afflictions, and felt all the maladies of His people with a keen personal sensitivity, even as Isaiah did centuries before:

From the sole of the foot even to the head,
There is no a sound spot,
Only wounds and bruises and running sores,
Which have not been pressed out nor bound up,
Nor softened with oil (Isa. 1:6).

The servant came to suffer with and for His people and to lay down His life for them.

He was one form whom men hide their face,
He was despised and we esteemed him not.

People are loathe to look as a man who they hate immensely; in all the history of Israel no other was more intensely hated and despised than the person of the servant of God. The prophet rightly called him “a man of affliction and acquainted with suffering.” For hundreds of years, He name was not even mentioned among Jews except by such circumlocutions as “that man” or “the hanged one.” The words “he was despised” are repeated twice in this sentence to emphasize its intensity. The Hebrew name of Jesus, “Yeshua” (Saviour), has been deliberately distorted into “Yeshu,” the initial letters of which were supposed to spell out a Hebrew sentence which means, “Let His name and his memory be blotted out.” This aversion to him has even increased with the passage of time.2 However with the growing social, moral and religious ferment among the Jewish people, this attitude is gradually changing to a more positive stance.” [Note 1: Sukkah 246, Soncino Edition. Note 2: Modern Hebrew dictionaries and official documents still spell the name Jesus as “Yeshu” instead of the correct “Yeshua”.] (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 415-416. Notes: page 423).

Isaiah 53:4-6 describe the vicarious death of the Servant on behalf of His covenant people and all humanity. The verb tenses are in the past tense and indicate a “prophetic perfect” proclamation of something that will happen in the future as already accomplished. The confession of the covenant people of God, the Jewish faithful remnant of the Tribulation focuses on the Servant bearing their griefs and sorrows 53:4, even though they had (erroneously) thought that He was being punished, smitten and afflicted by God for His own deeds. 53:5-6 clearly present the truth that the Jewish people had for so long failed to acknowledge. The Servant was wounded (pierced) and crushed (put to death) for their sins and because of this crushing the Servant accomplished the work of spiritually healing them and making them whole. The LORD, 53:6 brought this
healing and wholeness to His people and all mankind because their sins, for which they deserved death, was laid on the Servant, who was innocent 53:7-9, of any wrongdoing.

53:4 Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we thought he was being punished, smitten by God and afflicted.

Isaiah 53:4, begins with “surely” which is the Hebrew word aken and has the meaning of an unexpected or new thought or event. The whole thinking process of those confessing their sins turns on this unexpected statement. It was not enough for the faithful remnant to confess that they had wrongly thought that the Servant’s grief and sorrows was due to His own (sinful) deeds and that He was being punished by being smitten and afflicted by God for these deeds. There was something much deeper and intense in the working of God that they had to confess that they had entirely missed. Now was the time for their confession that the Servant had actually bore their griefs and carried their sorrows, the rightful punishment for their sins. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Repentant Israel continues its great confession as they look upon God’s servant, their once despised Messiah. Now they acknowledge that He did not suffer for His own sins, but that He carried upon His shoulders the burden of their sins and the pain of their transgressions. His suffering was expiatory and vicarious in nature. The word, “nasa” to “bear,” in this sentence is used in connection with the sacrifices of expiation (Lev. 5:1, 17; 16:22, 20:19, 20).

The three expressions: “stricken” (Hebrew “nagua”) refers to a loathsome disease such as leprosy; “smitten of God” a divine retribution for a heinous sin, and “afflicted” as one might be afflicted by the punishment for one’s crime; all these describe the terrible consequences of sin. The Talmud calls Jesus a transgressor, and the renowned 12th century scholar, Maimonides, states that Jesus deserved the violent death which he suffered.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 417).

The apostle Matthew, cited Isaiah 53:4 in his gospel account in Matthew 8:16-17. Although Matthew applied analogically, the healing effects of the work of atonement to the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, the complete fulfillment of the healing (physical and spiritual) would not be realized until believers are ushered into the eternal state. Physical healing is one of many results of the atonement but is not an intrinsic component of the atonement. The final physical healing from death, which is called an enemy in 1 Corinthians 15:26, will occur after the completion of the earthly kingdom of the Messiah when death will be abolished. The apostle Peter references the wounds (stripes) the Messiah bore, in 1 Peter 2:24 as spiritually healing from sin. See more on this in the notes for Isaiah 53:5.

53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that made us whole was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.

The confession of the faithful remnant who survive the Tribulation now takes direct aim at the vicarious and penal accomplishment of the death of the Servant, the Messiah on behalf of the covenant people of God and also for all humanity. The Messiah was “wounded,” Hebrew “mecholah” which is literally that He was pierced. It has the meaning of someone being put to death. The Messiah was thus, put to death (pierced) for the transgressions of His covenant people who confessing this truth and for all sinful humanity. The Messiah was also “crushed,” Hebrew “daka” which has the meaning of being crushed painfully to death. The second
A phrase of 53:5 states the same truth as the first phrase, the Messiah was painfully and without mercy crushed to death as a substitutionary and vicarious atonement (penal offering) for the iniquities of others. The third and fourth phrases of 53:5 gives the result. The Messiah bore in his body the punishment that was due to all humanity for their sin against God. God not only accepted the vicarious offering of His Servant as being the once for all atonement for the sins of the world’s people, but God was the One who put this Servant to death, 53:10. The Messiah bore in His body the sins of all mankind, 2 Corinthians 5:21. As a result of this punishment upon the Servant, the covenant people of God and all sinful humanity are made whole by believing in the Servant, John 3:16. It should be understood that the brutal slaughter of the Servant as a atoning sacrifice for the sins of the covenant people of God and for all mankind is not a universal statement that humanity will be saved from eternal condemnation. It is only by belief in the atoning cross work of Jesus Christ that anyone is saved and declared by God to be justified which is to be considered righteous in His sight.

Another result of this atoning sacrifice of the Servant in 53:5 is that “by his stripes we are healed.” The word “stripes” in the DASV is the Hebrew word hubbura which has the meaning of wounds or scourging and by these wounds or scourging, God’s covenant people and sinful humanity who by faith alone in the atoning cross work of Jesus Christ are healed. The sense of “healing” in the context of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is spiritual healing or wholeness. The apostle Peter as recorded in 1 Peter 2:21-25 makes this abundantly clear. The Messiah bore the sins of all humanity as a vicarious, penal and atoning sacrifice. He did not become sick or unhealthy to make sinful humanity well or whole physically. Sinners will be “healed” completely when they are given their resurrected bodies in the eternal state. Physical healing is not a guarantee for everyone who becomes a child of God by believing in the Savior. The New Testament gives evidence of this in 1 Timothy 5:23 and 2 Timothy 4:20. All those who were raised from death beds or like Lazarus raised from the dead would die later. The testimony of many saints is overwhelming in numbers that they were sick or had some physical disability that was not healed and that rather than being accused of having lack of faith their condition actually brought them closer to their Savior and increased their faith. They know that because of the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their sin, they will be perfectly healed when they meet their Savior in heaven. For an excellent discussion on the question of whether healing is in the atonement, see Richard L. Mayhue, “For what Did Christ Atone in Isa 53:4-5,” The Masters Seminary Journal, TMSJ 6 (1995): pages 121-141.

Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 53:5:

“But he was wounded for our transgressions

“But he” is the emphatic assertion that the real cause of his suffering was not, as Israel falsely assumed, for his own sins, but for the transgressions of his people. The word “wounded,” “mecholal” literally means “he was pierced.” Only an inspired prophet could use a word which so literally corresponds to that which actually happened to the righteous servant of God, the Messiah Jesus. “Wounded (or pierced) for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities” expresses fully the vicarious character of the suffering of the servant of God – the innocent for the guilty.

In spite of the assertions of the rabbis and of some non-Jewish theologians that vicarious suffering is morally objectionable and unacceptable, this is exactly what the Scriptures teach. This is also what history and life itself teaches us.

The whole sacrificial system symbolizes substitution, of the innocent for the guilty. No sacrificial animal, however perfect, could by itself make atonement for sin. In the last analysis the sacrifice was merely symbolic and pointed to the fact that the sinner deserved to die, and that it was the servant of God, who voluntarily took
upon himself the sins of all men. This is why John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as “the lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

Sin brings in its wake suffering and death, not only upon the sinner, but frequently also upon the innocent, just as the voluntary sacrifice of an “innocent” person may bring healing and salvation to the guilty.

The chastisement which secured our peace was upon him

“Musar shlomenu,” the “chastisement which secured peace.” Forgiveness, to be real, must be obtained at a price. A righteous God, in order to forgive sinners, must base it on moral ground. Otherwise forgiveness would be morally objectionable and spiritually meaningless, as there would be no difference between righteousness and wickedness. But God is not only merciful but also righteous. And so the righteous servant of God took upon Himself the chastisement or the punishment which secures our peace.

And by his stripes healing has come to us

This line complements the preceding. “By his stripes,” that is, by the vicarious suffering of the servant, we may secure peace – shalom – that is, complete reconciliation with God, harmony within our souls, and peace with men. Healing in this context is primarily the healing of the soul from the sickness of sin. Yet in addition to the spiritual healing, physical and emotional healing may also be included. In our age it is recognized that physical ailments frequently have an emotional and psychic background. Our hospitals are often filled with such patients. The servant who brings to sinful man peace with God and healing to his soul also brings healing from a multitude of diseases.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 417-418).

A note on Victor Buksbazen’s comments about healing: “Yet in addition to the spiritual healing, physical and emotional healing may also be included.” This line must be tempered with the fact that all physical healing is just temporary for those who have been healed from any illness, disease, or physical or mental disability will eventually die. The cause of their death will not receive any healing. Also, physical or mental healing is not the same as that of remission of sins in the atonement of the Messiah. Those who believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ will have “eternal life” that is not temporal but truly everlasting which cannot be taken away. Only in the eternal state will healing be complete and understood as an effect of the atonement of Christ.

Thomas Constable provides these comments on Isaiah 53:5:

“But continues the contrast between the Servant and the rest of humankind. He would not only experience affliction for us but injury as well. "Pierced through" and "crushed" describe extreme distress resulting in death (cf. 51:9; Job 26:13; Ps. 109:22; Lam. 3:34). The Hebrew words behind these terms are the strongest ones in that language for violent and excruciating death. 652 Transgressions are willful and rebellious sins, and iniquities are sins that result from the perverted quality of human nature due to the continuing effects of the Fall.

Looking back from the Cross, we can see how appropriate these terms were in view of the death Jesus died, death by crucifixion. It was God who was behind the piercing and crushing of the Servant (vv. 6, 10). It was as though the Servant took the whipping that we deserved for being rebellious children (cf. Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 5:8; 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24-25).

What the Servant would do in bearing the consequences of humankind's sins would bring about positive results for many people. This shows again that the Servant's sufferings were not just with His people but for them. He would bear away sins so people could experience healing and well-being (Heb. shalom, the fullness of God's blessing). This is far more than just physical healing; the whole passage is dealing with redemption from sin.
But does it include physical healing? Is there healing in the atonement? Does what the Servant did guarantee physical healing for every believer? Ultimately it does. Eventually we will experience good health since poor health is one effect of sin. But immediately it does not in every case. We have yet to enter into all the benefits of Christ's death for us, and must continue to struggle with some of the consequences of the Fall until we see the Lord. 657” [Note 652: Delitzsch, 2:318. Note 656: See Bruce R. Reichenback, “By His Stripes We Are Healed,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:4 (December 1998): 551-60, for a helpful study of how the Old Testament views the linkage between sin, sickness, suffering, and death, contrasted with modern views. Note 657: See Baron, p. 86.] (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 266-267).

53:6 *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all.*

The confession of the penitent covenant people of God, the faithful remnant, now focuses on the recognition of their personal failings. They acknowledge that each one of them have wandered astray like sheep and each one has ventured or turned away from God to do what they have sinfully willed to do. As a result of this sin of rebellion against God, the LORD, Yahweh, has placed on “him,” the Messiah, the sin of each one (all). There is no clearer statement in the Old Testament than this of the cause and the need for a vicarious atoning sacrifice by which the sins of the wicked have been laid or placed upon the innocent Messiah. The *cause* is the willful wickedness of sinful humanity, “all we,” Hebrew *kullanu*, including in this context, the covenant people of God. The *remedy* is the moral righteousness and mercy of a holy God which demanded just punishment for sins, but in His gracious and unexpected provision, God placed this punishment upon His Son so that in the death of His Son, the Servant, the Messiah, only one would need to die as the just punishment for the sins of humanity. For further comment on Isaiah 53:6 refer to Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 451-452. See also J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, pages 335-336 for an exegetical discussion on Isaiah 53:6 which includes an explanation of the word “laid” and other significant words. Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 418, provides a brief discussion on this verse. Edward E. Hindson, Isaiah, in the *King James Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, page 839, as well provides a detailed discussion. Thomas Constable also comments:

“A simile now reinforces the point just made. Sheep are notoriously shortsighted; they go after the next clump of grass without regard to where their feet may lead them. They are also self-centered; their only thought is how they can satisfy themselves with no concern for the welfare of other sheep. Consequently sheep often get lost. Humans are the same.

But Yahweh would cause the consequences of our natural sheep-like tendencies to fall on the Servant. Rather than every person having to bear the consequences of sin himself or herself, as Job's friends argued he or she must, God would make His Servant suffer for the iniquity of all sinners (cf. Lev. 16; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22-25).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 267).

John A. Martin adds:

“The redeemed remnant (and others) will acknowledge that they were guilty and that the Lord made the Servant the object of His wrath in order to take away their guilt. Sheep tend to travel together, so if the leading sheep turns aside from the path for grass or some other purpose, usually all the sheep do so. They tend to follow the lead sheep which is often dangerous. Similarly all Israel had turned aside (cf. 1 Peter 2:25) from following the Lord, from keeping His commandments. The essence of sin is going one’s own way, rather than God’s way. That iniquity has to be punished, so the Lord….laid the punishment for that iniquity (cf. Isa. 53:11) not on the “sheep” (Israel and other sinners) that deserved it, but on the Servant who died in their place.” (John A. Martin, *Isaiah*, page 1108, © 1985 John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament is published by David C Cook. All rights reserved).
David L. Cooper however, applies Isaiah 53:6 only to Israel:

Then the nation of Israel will confess that "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." In what sense do all go astray? Let us remember that this is the confession of the remnant of Israel. These people will confess that the nation as a whole, from the time of Messiah's first coming until the time that they receive the truth have gone astray, in that they have misunderstood the Messiah and did not recognize Him when He came the first time. Furthermore, they will admit that the nation turned from Him to its own way. Notwithstanding that fact the Lord Jehovah laid upon Him the iniquity of the whole race. In other words, He tasted death for every man and made possible the way of salvation for all who will come to God by Him. In the light of the facts of the context, we must hold to this interpretation of this most important verse. It is therefore incorrect for us to take this passage out of its connection and apply it to men in general. It is true that men refused to retain God in their knowledge and drifted away from Him. Hence they went astray. This teaching is found in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. But what Isaiah in 53:6 says has specific reference to Israel's not recognizing her Messiah and of her being led astray in regard to Him and of her having rejected Him through the centuries. (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly, December 1945).

Isaiah chapter 53:7-9 provides details on the humility and innocence of the Servant. Although He was oppressed and afflicted 53:7, He did not raise any complaint and like a lamb that is led to be sheared and slaughtered, He remained silent before His tormentors. He was put to death by oppression and judgment 53:8, which few of His generation thought it important to consider. His death was on behalf of the sins of the covenant people of God, whom Isaiah calls "my people." But the Servant’s atoning death was not exclusively for them. Contrary to D. L. Cooper’s narrow interpretation of Isaiah 53:6, stated above, the vast majority of Biblical scholars and more importantly the New Testament confirm that Messiah’s sacrificial death was sufficient for all people as is clear from passages such as John 3:16 and Hebrews 7:27 and 9:12, “once for all.” Those who put Him to death assigned his grave among the wicked but, upon God’s intervention, He was laid in a rich man’s grave, to prove His innocence.

53:7 He was oppressed, 
yet when he was treated harshly he did not open his mouth; 
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, 
and like a sheep before its shearers is silent, 
so he did not open his mouth.

Isaiah 53:7 describes the humility of the Servant in not protesting or voicing opposition to the way in which He was treated during His trials, punishment and then being put to death. Even though He knew beforehand that He would be so violently abused and killed without cause, John 18:4; He willingly submitted Himself to be slaughtered as a vicarious atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Isaiah 53:7 picks up the portrait of a sheep from 53:6. But instead of the penitent sinners being the sheep, 53:6, the Messiah, who is the Lamb of God faces death as innocent lamb on behalf of these confessing sinners. The confirmation that the Servant, the Messiah who is the Lord Jesus Christ is the lamb is stated in the New Testament: John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 7, 9, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 8:1; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 23; 22:1, 3. The apostle Paul made this very clear as recorded in 1 Corinthians 5:7, *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

The word “oppressed” is the Hebrew verb nagas, which has the meaning to cruelly mistreat in Isaiah 53:7. The word nagas occurs often in Isaiah. In the DASV it is translated as, oppressed in 3:5; oppress in 3:12; oppressor in 9:4; oppressors in 14:2; oppressor in 14:4; oppressed in 53:7; oppress (“drive hard” in the NASB) in 58:3; and overseer in a positive sense in 60:17. The words “treated harshly” in the DASV is
translated as “afflicted” in most English versions. It is the Hebrew word anah which has the meaning of bringing about or having intense pain or sorrow. Anah occurs in 53:4: “smitten by God and afflicted.” It is translated in the DASV as “oppressed” in 58:10 as does the NIV but the KJV, NKJV, NASB and the ESV translate anah as “afflicted.” Other occurrences of anah in Isaiah include, 27:2; 31:4; 58:3, 5; 60:14 and 64:12. The comments by Thomas Constable on Isaiah 53:7 are useful for the student’s understanding of this verse:

“In spite of God's punishment for sin, the Servant would bear it without defending Himself (cf. 42:2-3; 49:4-9; 50:5-7; Jer. 11:18-20; 12:1-3; Matt. 26:63; 27:12-14; Mark 14:61; 15:5; Luke 23:9; John 19:9). He would allow others to "fleece" Him and even kill him without even protesting (cf. Acts 8:32-33; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Israel protested God's shearing of her (40:27; 49:14; 63:15). He would not be a helpless victim, but one who knowingly and willingly submitted to death (cf. Luke 9:51). Jeremiah used the same figure to describe himself—but as a naive person who did not know what would happen to him (Jer. 11:19). The sheep metaphor is apt because the Israelites used lambs as sacrificial animals to cover their sins (cf. Gen. 22:7-8; Exod. 12:3, 5; Lev. 5:7; John 1:29).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 268).

Victor Buksbazen’s comments are also very useful for understanding Isaiah 53:7:

“He was tormented and he submitted himself

Our translation differs from the KJV which reads: “He was oppressed and he was afflicted.” We believe that our translation comes closer to the original text and is in agreement with many of the more recent translations. The whole sense of this sentence is the voluntary, humble and quiet submission of the ill-treated servant of God to his tormentors.

And opened not his mouth

This prediction is in harmony with the story of the trial of Jesus and His silence before His accusers (Mt. 26:62-62, 27:12).

As a lamb which is led to the slaughter

The references in the New Testament to Jesus as the Lamb of God have their roots in the story of the passover lamb, and the sprinkling of its blood on the door posts of the Israelite households in Egypt (Ex. 12:3, 4, 7). It is also a reference to the lamb-like submission of the Messiah to His tormentors and to His sacrifice.

This kind of submissive behavior can in no way be attributed to Israel as a nation. Whatever the virtues of Israel are, suffering in silence and submission to her tormentors is not one of them. Whenever the Jews were able, they resisted with all their might and when they were unable to do this because of unfavorable circumstances, they protested vigorously and vociferously against their oppressors. In fact, they never considered suffering in silence as a virtue. Even in the infamous extermination camps and in the ghettos of the Nazis, they resisted whenever they were able, or sent messages of protest and alarm to the rest of the world. This was an understandable and natural reaction on the part of the Jews, but is completely at odds with the description in Isaiah 53 of the behavior of the servant of God.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 420).

The writer Luke as recorded in Acts 8:26-40 tells the story of the evangelist Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch who was a court official (perhaps a treasurer) of Candiace, who was the Ethiopian Queen. The eunuch must have had some interest in the religion of the Jews but would not have been allowed access to the Temple according to Jewish law, Deuteronomy 23:1. While reading the account of the sacrifice of the servant in Isaiah chapter 53:7-8, he was visited by the evangelist Philip, who was sent to the eunuch by God’s direction. Philip explained to the eunuch the meaning of the text of Isaiah as applying to Jesus Christ. Upon hearing this, the eunuch believed in Christ as the Son of God and was immediately baptized by Philip as a believer.
This New Testament account is a strong confirmation that the prophetic words of Isaiah 53:7-8, apply to the Servant of God who is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**53:8** By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
But from his generation who even cared?
He was cut off out of the land of the living;
for the rebellion of my people he was struck down.

The word “oppression” in Isaiah 53:8 is the Hebrew noun *oser* which only occurs three times in the Old Testament. In Psalm 107:39 it is translated as “oppression” and in Proverbs 30:16 it is translated as “barren” in most English versions. The word *oser* has the literal meaning of restraint and coercion and implies that the servant was restrained or arrested. The word “judgment,” Hebrew *mispat*, when coupled with *oser*, suggests that following the restraint and arrest of the Servant, He was led to face a sentence of judgment. *Mispat* occurs often in Isaiah, usually translated as justice or judgment. See word studies for *mispat* in notes for Isaiah 40:14; 42:1 and 51:4. For a discussion on *oser* and *mispat*, see Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 453 and 454. The words “taken away” in the DASV, NIV, NASB and ESV is translated as “taken from prison” in the KJV and NKJV. The implication of “taken away” is that the Servant was taken away to be put to death, as the third phrase of 53:8 clearly states, “He was cut off out of the land of the living.” The second phrase, “But from his generation who even cared,” suggests that the people in Jerusalem alive at the time of the Servant’s crucifixion, were too busy with their own lives to even consider the importance and impact on their lives, and the lives of all people, of the death of Jesus Christ. The final phrase of Isaiah 53:8, may be from the voice of the prophet who clearly lays the blame for the death of the Servant, *he was struck down*, upon the rebellion of the covenant people of God, “my people.” The speaker could also be the singular voice of the faithful remnant of the Jews who are confessing their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during His first advent. Another possibility is that the speaker is God Himself as the words “my people” are often a reference recorded in Isaiah that He has made about His covenant people. The most likely source of the speaker regarding “my people” is the singular voice of the faithful remnant who are also the voice for their confession of the sins of their people committed against the Messiah, both past and present as recorded in Isaiah chapter 53. Thomas Constable provides an excellent commentary on Isaiah 53:8:

“The Servant's treatment at the hands of others would be unjust from start to finish. Oppressive legal treatment and twisted justice would result in His being taken away to suffer and die (cf. Matt. 26:59-61; Luke 23:2-4, 13-16). This was not the case in Israel's suffering in captivity. That suffering was in harmony with what justice prescribed. However, it was for the transgressions of the prophet's people that the Servant would suffer a fatal blow (cf. Gen. 9:11; Exod. 12:15; Dan. 9:26; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1:13-14, 19-20). This does not rule out His dying for Gentiles as well. Perhaps Isaiah identified Israel ("my people") as the beneficiary of the Servant's death, here, because Israel's sins had been so great, and Isaiah's ministry was to Israel. Miscarried justice would be only the means to that end.

It is quite clear that the Servant did not just die for the Israelites. Some of what Isaiah wrote about "my people" might lead the reader to this conclusion. However, the testimony of Scripture, which statements in Isaiah support, is that the Servant paid for the sins of all humanity (e.g., 1 John 2:2). Note that the Servant referred to here cannot be the Israelites since He would die for the transgression of "my people," namely, the Israelites.

Those of the Servant's generation who observed Him dying would not appreciate that He was dying as a substitute (cf. vv. 1-3). The Hebrew of this verse may point to a meaning beyond this. The Hebrew word *dor*, translated "generation," also means "line." If that is the meaning (or one of the meanings) of this word here, Isaiah may also have meant that no one would consider that the Servant died childless. Childlessness in His culture suggested a futile existence and a curse from God. People would conclude that He died cursed by God rather than as a substitute sacrifice.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 268-269).
53:9 They made his grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death;
although he had done no violence,
nor was there any deceit in his mouth.

The words of Isaiah 53:7-8 are a prophecy of the vicarious sacrificial death of the Servant on behalf of His rebellious covenant people and all sinful humanity. There was, and is and will be no one who was not directly responsible for the need of the Servant to suffer death as an atoning sacrifice to satisfy the holy and righteous wrath of God which demanded death as a result of sin, for all have sinned, Romans 3:23 and 5:12. The death of the Servant was as a passover lamb in which the penalty for sin, death, was laid on the Lamb who was innocent of any sinfulness instead of upon all humanity whom was guilty of sinfulness.

When the Servant died (prophetic present tense for a future event), it was the intent of those who put Him to death to assign Him a grave with the wicked, likely referring to the two criminals who were also crucified at the same time as the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Luke 23:33. Yet God was not going to let that happen. The Servant who is the Messiah, God’s Son, Jesus Christ had not done any violence nor was their any deceit in His mouth directly implying that He was innocent of any sinfulness. His innocence would not be treated as wickedness by sinful men. God provided a way that His Son would be buried in the grave of a rich man, which was confirmed in the New Testament as Joseph of Arimathea, Matthew 27:57-60. It was not that the rich man was in himself also guiltless, but that in being buried in this rich man’s grave, the Messiah would not have the stigma of wickedness assigned to him. The innocence of the Messiah is also confirmed by the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:22 which quotes from Isaiah 53:9. See also Luke 23:4, 14, 22, 47; John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 1:19; 3:18 and Revelation 5:2-10.

Victor Buksbazen comments:

“And his grave was appointed with the wicked
And with a rich man in his death
Again we are astounded at the accuracy of the prophetic prediction which found its fulfillment in the events of the crucifixion. Jesus’ body, considered by Jewish and Roman officialdom as that of a rebel, would normally have been assigned together with the two other (sic) criminals who died on two other crosses, and would have been buried, where criminals usually were buried, in an unmarked grave, except for divine intervention. “The rich man,” Joseph of Arimathea (Mt. 27:57), intervened with the Roman authorities and had Jesus buried in a private grave in his garden, “wherein never man before was laid” (Lk. 23:53).

Although he had committed no violence
The complete innocence of the servant, who has committed no crime in deed or in word is here emphasized. There was nothing in the life of Jesus to justify such a cruel and extreme sentence.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 421).

The notes of Thomas Constable on Isaiah 53:9 are also worthy of consideration:

“The final insult to the Servant would be that people would plan to bury Him among the wicked, implying His own wickedness. Likewise, burial among the rich—instead of among the humble—would cast doubt on His righteousness, since the rich were often oppressors of the poor (cf. Ps. 49:5-6; 52:7; Prov. 18:23; 28:6, 20; Jer. 17:11; Mic. 6:12). Yet, in another sense, since Jesus' corpse received honorable treatment after His death, this suggested that He was unworthy of such an ignominious martyrdom. Isaiah seems to have meant that somehow wicked people and a rich man would be involved in the Servant's burial (cf. Matt. 27:57-60). This is somewhat paradoxical. The Servant would not defend Himself (v. 7), but neither would He be guilty of anything worthy of death (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). Lack of "violence" and "deceit" represents total guiltlessness. The Servant would
always speak the truth. Truly, the Servant would have to be more than a sinful human or the sinful nation of Israel (cf. John 8:29; 2 Cor. 5:21).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 269).

The words of Isaiah chapter 53:10-12 provide a conclusion to the passion prophecy of the Servant in the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah. 53:10 explains that it was God who was behind the punishment and death of the Servant. This death satisfied the will “good pleasure” of God in providing sinful humanity with salvation they did not deserve through His Son who was put to death as a guilt offering although He was innocent of any sin. The Servant, although suffering death would see “offspring” which can be understood as those who believed in Him who would be adopted into God’s family. The Servant would “prolong His days” meaning He would live eternally after He arose from the dead. God’s pleasure will prove to be successful for the Servant demonstrated in the raising the Servant from the dead and extending his “line” with those who would believe in the Servant, the Messiah. Isaiah 53:11 explains that as a result of the anguish of His soul, the Servant would live to see what He had accomplished by His death and resurrection, which would be the righteous justification of many, being those who would believe in Him, for He had their sins laid on Him to provide this justification. 53:12 explains that the Servant’s reward from God will be His exaltation and His receipt of what is rightfully due to Him. He will be exalted in this way because of what He had accomplished in His death by bearing the sins of many, those who believe in Him, and through His ministry of intercession.

53:10 Yet it was the LORD's good pleasure to bruise him and to cause him grief.
When his life is made an offering for sin, he will see his offspring.
He will prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD will be successful in his hand.

Isaiah 53:10 confirms the startling declaration made by the prophet in 53:6 that it was the LORD, Yahweh, who was the divine cause of the Servant bearing the sins of humanity. In this action, the LORD’s good pleasure, His divine will, was accomplished which meant that the bearing of humanity’s sins was the cause of the Servant being crushed and put to death. The Servant could not bear these sins without being personally punished to the point of death which God’s holiness and justice demanded. The human agents who brought about the Servants punishment and death cannot claim they were excused of any wrongdoing because they were accomplishing God’s purposes in the death of His Son. They will receive the just reward for their own actions as did the nations of Assyria and Babylon when they attacked and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel (by Assyria) and the southern kingdom of Judah including Jerusalem (by Babylon). Even though these nations were being led by God to punish His covenant people, their sinful and cruel actions in carrying out God’s plans caused them to receive the just and righteous punishment from God.

God’s pleasure, His divine will, to crush the Servant was not an afterthought or sudden impulsive action. The work of God to bring the offer of salvation to God’s covenant people and all sinful humanity was planned before the creation of the world, Revelation 13:8. This means that before God created the heavens and the earth, He had planned to redeem humanity, those He created in His image, because God knew that they would rebel against Him. Their sinful and wicked behavior could not be tolerated by a holy God. God’s righteousness and justice demanded that sin be punished by eternal death. If no action was taken by God, who loved His created people, John 3:16, then all people on the earth whoever lived would die eternally without any hope of reconciliation with God. The trinitarian God, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, planned the method and exactly how salvation for all mankind would be enacted. The Servant therefore knew before He came to earth just what would happen to Him to become the kinsmen Redeemer for His covenant people and for all humanity. Thus, God’s will to crush the Servant by having Him put to death for the sins of
humanity can be called His “good pleasure.” The death of the Servant was for the greater good of all humanity, yet it caused the Servant to endure an unimaginable separation from His Father, prophesized in Psalm 22:1, and fulfilled in Matthew 27:46. The innocent Servant, who had committed no sin, suffered intense and excruciating pain and a most horrible death to die the death that all of humanity should have died for their sins. This was all necessary so all who believed in the Servant, who is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ would not face the just punishment they deserved but would experience everlasting life in perfect fellowship with their Creator.

Following the punishment and death of the Servant as a sin offering for all humanity, He would experience the prospering by God (be successful in his hand). J. Alec Motyer so succinctly describes this as:

“The Lord was the architect of His suffering; he lives to apply its achievements.” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 338).

One of the “achievements” that was applied to the Servant was that of being made an eternal ruler of His kingdom, 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 9:6-7; and Daniel 2:44-45. The words in 53:10, “he will see his offspring” literally: “seed,” does not mean the Servant had personal descendants, but that those who believe in Him would become His spiritual children including the covenant people of God whom God had called “Israel is My Son, My Firstborn,” in Exodus 4:22, and “sons,” in Isaiah 1:2; 4; 30:9; and 63:8. The words “He will prolong his days,” is a direct prophecy of the resurrection of the Servant who will live after being put to death. This is also implied in the phrases, “he will see his offspring” and “the pleasure of the LORD will be successful (prosper), in his hand.” For further discussion see, Edward E. Hindson, Isaiah, in the King James Bible Commentary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, pages 840-841. As is usual for Gary V. Smith in his excellent commentary on Isaiah, an extended discussion is provided. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 457-460. Victor Buksbazen provides these comments on Isaiah 53:10:

“Yet it pleased the LORD to crush him
All the things which happened to the servant of Jehovah were, in the final analysis, the result of Jehovah’s will. It was Jehovah’s will to crush him, it was His will to afflict him with grief, in Hebrew, “hecheli,” the same word which is used in verses 3 and 4.

If his soul shall make a trespass offering
“Asham” is a trespass offering distinct from ever other sacrifice. It was made by the individual person in compensation for any wrong committed by him. It discharged the person from guilt and set him free (Lev. 5:15). The central idea of the trespass offering was satisfaction demanded by a just God.

Thus the servant of God made himself a sacrifice in restitution for the sins of every man, individually.

He shall see seed, prolong his days
“He shall see seed” refers to those who are redeemed by His sacrifice. “He shall prolong his days” refers to His resurrection and the life which only began after His crucifixion. Jewish commentators have maintained that “seed” refers exclusively to physical offspring, that is children, but in reality it refers to spiritual seed, a following (Psa. 22:30, Isa. 65:25, Mal. 2:15).

And the purpose of the LORD shall prosper in his hand
It was the whole counsel of God, which the servant accomplished, because of His willingness to offer Himself as a trespass offering. This purpose of God continues to prosper through the ages. The servant of Jehovah was appointed to restore Israel so that they might in the end become a light to the nations and carry the salvation of God to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6).” Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 421-422).
As a result of the anguish of his soul,  
he will see and be satisfied.  
By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their sins.

Another implied reference to the resurrection of the Servant is contained in the first sentence of Isaiah 53:11. As a result of the brutal punishment and horrendous death of the Servant described as “the anguish of his soul,” the Servant will be alive to see the results of His vicarious sacrifice as a guilt offering on behalf of sinful humanity. He will see these results and be satisfied. See 1 John 2:1-2. The satisfaction of the Servant of His accomplished work on the cross and His resurrection to life meant that all those who believed in Him would be reconciled to God. The awful effects of the fall on sinful humanity would be reversed as His once for all sacrifice would be sufficient for all men and effective for those who believed in Him, which is described in 53:11 as “will justify many.” The way in which many are justified, described as “by his knowledge” is the personal experience that the Servant endured by His punishment and death as a sacrificial sin offering on behalf of sinful humanity. This “knowledge,” being His personal experiencing the requirements of death, meant that He, the innocent and sinless Son of God will bear the sins of those who deserved to face the holy and just punishment for their sins. Thomas Constable aptly comments:

“After His sacrificial work had ended, the Servant would look back on it with satisfaction, as would Yahweh (cf. 1 John 2:2). The "many" would obtain justification through the knowledge of Him and His work. The "many" is a distinct group, numerous but not all-inclusive, namely: believers.

The "one" Righteous Servant ("the Righteous One, My Servant") would make "many" people righteous by bearing their iniquities, not His own ("justify the many"); cf. vv. 4-6; John 10:14-18; Rom. 5:18-19). As Cyrus was God's anointed servant to restore the Israelites to their land, so the Servant would be God's anointed Servant to restore humanity to Himself. He would accomplish what the Old Covenant sacrificial system prefigured and anticipated.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 271).

Therefore I will assign him a portion with the great,  
and he will divide the spoil with the strong,  
because he poured out himself to death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
Yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:12 completes the fourth Servant Song, 52:12-53:12. The verse begins with the word “Therefore” which could be a summary of the previous few verses or of the entire Servant Song. As a result of the successful work of justifying the many through the Servant’s vicarious sacrifice as a sin offering and having sinful humanity’s iniquities laid on him, 53:6, the LORD, identified as “I,” will assign the Servant. “him,” “a portion with the great and he will divide the spoil with the strong.” There is much debate on the meaning of the reward assigned to the Servant by the LORD, Yahweh. Many English Versions agree on the interpretation of the words along with the DASV, but Bible scholars and students do not agree as to the meaning of this interpretation. The meaning that Isaiah had in his prophetic writing remains somewhat obscure and all Biblical scholars and students can do is suggest options that seem to best fit these words in Isaiah 53:12. The testimony of the New Testament is that the Servant, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, had been exalted by God the Father. See Acts 5:31; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:3; and Revelation 5:11-14. Isaiah alludes to this exaltation, the Servant’s reward in many passages that are prophetic insights into the glorious reign of the Messiah.
The LORD Yahweh provides a summary of why the Servant will be exalted and rewarded. He states that it was because He voluntarily offered Himself, poured out himself to death. Ultimately it was not the combined evil intentions of the rebellious Jews and complicit Romans who put the Servant to death. He, as a humble and innocent lamb, willingly gave Himself up to the human powers so that His death, the reason He came to earth, could be made manifest. Also, The LORD Yahweh, continues, that His exaltation and reward came as a result of the Servant being “numbered with the transgressors.” The Lord Jesus Christ quotes this phrase, Luke 22:37, directly confirming its fulfillment in Himself. To bear the sins of sinful humanity, the Servant identified with sinners (prophetic perfect tense), although He had committed no sin, which should be understood that He was never a sinner. The LORD Yahweh further states that the Servant, “bore the sin of many” which has been commented upon above, but it needs to be re-stated that the death of the Servant was sufficient in its scope for all sinful humanity and directly applicable, effective for salvation to all those who put their faith in Him, John 3:16. Finally, the LORD Yahweh states that the Servant “made” (literally He will – a future action) “make” intercession for the transgressors. The intercessory ministry of the Servant continues to this day. See Acts 5:31; Hebrews 7:25, and 9:24. Thomas Constable comments:

“Because of His work and its results, God would exalt the Servant (cf. Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:12). He would give Him a reward with the many great ones whom He justified, and would divide this booty with the many who would become strong by virtue of His work for them (cf. Eph. 4:8; 6:10-17). Another interpretation sees Yahweh giving the Servant the many great ones (believers) as booty, specifically as a token of redemption completed. He would also give the Servant the strong ones (unbelievers) as spoil, which the Servant would dispose of at the proper time. 670

The reason for the Servant's exaltation is that He would surrender Himself to death (cf. Matt. 26:38-39, 42) and consent to being numbered among the rebels against God; He would take His place among sinful humans (cf. Matt. 26:50-54; Mark 15:27; Luke 22:37). Yet He would do more than simply identify with the rebels. He would bear their sin (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21) and intercede for them (cf. Heb. 7:25). This intercession is more than prayer; it would also involve intervention (cf. 59:16; Heb. 9:12-14). This final promise of exaltation returns to the thought with which this passage began (52:13). The Servant's exaltation is for accomplishing redemption. 672 [Note 670: See Motyer, pp. 442-43. Quote and Note 671 not cited. Note: 672: See F. Duane Lindsey, “The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Bibliotheca Sacra 139:556 (October-December 1982): 312-29 and 140:557 (January-March 1983): 21-39., for another exposition of this passage.]” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 271-272).

Victor Buksbazen also comments on Isaiah 53:12, which completes his more extensive comments on the fourth Servant Song:

“12 Therefore will I give him a portion among the great

“Barabim” means “among the great ones” and also “among many.” Here the prophet further elaborates the thought in Isaiah 52:15:

So also shall he sprinkle many nations,
Kings shall shut their mouths before him.

The completed work of the servant of Jehovah will affect not only Israel but also the nations of the world (see 49:7). The prophet foresees the time when the great men of history shall pay homage to the servant of God, the Messiah.

Because he poured out his life unto death

His impact upon the nations and the homage which the mighty and the great will pay Him will be the consequence of His pouring out His life, although at the time of His crucifixion, He was considered a transgressor by those who sat in judgment over Him.
Yet he bore the sin of many
Far from being a transgressor, the servant of God was the Saviour of transgressors and interceded for them at the very moment when He was being put to death by them (Lk. 23:34).

With chapter 53, which is the heart and center of the Book of Consolation, Messianic prophecy reaches its majestic pinnacle.

Delitzsch, to whom all who ever commented on Isaiah in the course of the last century owe a great debt, writes in his commentary: “The Servant of Jehovah goes through shame to glory and though death to life. He conquers when He yields; He rules after being enslaved; He lives after He has died; He completes His work after He Himself has been apparently cut off. His glory streams upon the dark ground of the deepest humiliation…” 3

We can only add that apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, it would be impossible to understand this majestic chapter in Isaiah, and it would forever be a dark mystery without solution. However, in the light of His life it has become the brightest star of Hebrew prophecy, the star of hope and salvation for all men.” [Note 3: Franz Delitzsch, The Prophecies of Isaiah, Vol. 2, p. 341, Eerdmans Publ. Co.] (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 422-423).

Gary V. Smith also provides an extended discussion:

“There are four reasons for this exalted position of the Servant. (a) He was exalted “because” he poured out his life (lit “his soul”) and died (53:8). His willingness to pay the ultimate penalty of suffering and death exemplifies a humiliation and sacrifice far above all others. (b) Although the Servant was not a sinful person (53:9), “he was numbered, listed, grouped; let himself be numbered” (nimnâ) 426 with the rebellious. Rather than remaining a high exalted one who was totally separated from sinners, the Servant allowed himself to be identified with the sorrows and sufferings of the rebellious people of his day. The people of that time despised and rejected him, wrongly assuming that God smote him because of his own sins (53:4). (c) He not only identified with the plight of sinful people, “he bore the sins of many” as 53:4, 11 confirm. He accepted the load of their guilt so that he could make reparations for that guilt (53:11). The “many” refers back to the many he justified in 53:11, the many who were his portion in 53:12, the many Israelites who were appalled at his disfigured looks in 52:14, and the many kings who shut their mouths in 52:15. (d) He also “interceded for the transgressors.” C. Westermann suggests that one should not conclude that this means that “he made prayers of intercession for them, but that with his life, his suffering and his death, he took their place.” 427 The Servant’s “intervention” would certainly refer to what he did in 53:1–11, but since it is placed at the end of the message when the Servant is exalted, one might suggest that it refers to something done after his exaltation. This is especially implied by the change from perfect verbs (past completed action) to a final imperfect verb yapgî’ā “he will intervene, intercede.” There is no expanded description of his future intervention on behalf of the many, but the future orientation of this activity implies that the Servant’s work on behalf of the many will continue on into the future. This continued intervention/intercession might involve prayers for the many whose guilt he bore, or it might involve his intervention in the lives of many so that they will understand what he has done and accept the justification that he achieved when he bore their sins (53:11).” [Note 426: Motyer, Isaiah, 443, argues that this is a tolerative use of the niphal verb “he let himself be numbered.” Note 427: Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, 269, suggests that this word means “to intervene.”] (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 463-464).

The over-arching reason for the Servant’s sacrificial death.
In summary, the fourth Servant Song is a majestic and exalted portion of Scripture that provides the direct reason for the slaughter of the Servant as an atoning sacrifice on behalf of the covenant people of God and for all mankind. Without this sacrificial death by the innocent “lamb of God,” no one would have any opportunity to be saved eternally so as to enter into the presence of God who desires to “tabernacle” with the redeemed and fulfill the covenant formula of they, being His people and He, being their God, Revelation
The provision and execution of the means of salvation by God is a beautiful expression of God’s divine love, grace, comfort and compassion for those whom He created. But the provision of salvation is not the over-arching reason why God sent His Son to accomplish this salvation.

This over-arching reason is explained not in one passage of Scripture but in many passages that must be woven together like a fine tapestry which depicts the most exalted reason why the heavens and the earth exists. The first piece begins in Genesis chapter 1. Following the description of the events of the six days of creation, God finished His creative acts by creating mankind in His image, Genesis 1:26-31, to bear His likeness and to rule over the earth. As God’s image bearers, humans were to superintend the “life” of all living things God had created. They also were to have perfect fellowship with God and enjoy His presence. Some have also understood the first chapter of Genesis as explaining the beginning of the kingdom of God in which God as King relates to His subjects who are assigned kingly tasks. See Michael J. Vlach, *He will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God*, Chapter 4, The Kingdom and Creation. For a theological understanding of mankind as image bearers see *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, Crossway, 2017 by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, under heading, Created in God’s Image, in Chapter 6.

God, within the pages of the Old Testament, provided revelation as to why He created the heavens and the earth and mankind in particular. One of the clearest passages is Isaiah 43:7, “everyone who is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed, yes, whom I have made.” God, although He could have done so, because of the sin of His covenant people did not abandon them because of His great name, 1 Samuel 12:22. God intention for His covenant people was that “they would have been a special people to me, for my fame, honor, and glory,” Jeremiah 13:11. God’s purpose for the Pharaoh of Egypt who refused to listen to the plea of Moses to let the Hebrews leave Egypt, was kept in power for the express purpose of proclaiming God’s name in all the earth, Exodus 9:16. God’s purpose in dividing the waters of the Red Sea when the Israelites were fleeing the army of Pharaoh is revealed in Isaiah 63:12, “to make himself an everlasting name,” and 63:14 Isaiah states “This is the way you led your people to make your name glorious.” King David in Psalm 8, declared, “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth; you have set your glory upon the heavens!”

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul ended the great theological section of Romans with a doxology of praise with the declaration that to God be glory forever, Romans 11:36. Paul also stated in another letter, “whatever you do, do all for the glory of God,” 1 Corinthians 10:31. In another letter, Paul states within in a most magnificent passage, “For it is God who said, “Let there be light shining out of darkness,” who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6. Paul, in yet another letter declared, “Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, in order to deliver us from this evil world, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever, Amen.” Galatians 1:3-5. In the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians the phrase, “to the praise of his glory”, or similar is stated three times. In Philippians 4:20, Paul declared, “to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever.” In the future state, giving glory to God is the praise of heaven, Revelation 4:11 and 5:12. There are a great many other examples in the New Testament of the glory of God being righteously displayed and declared including the earthly ministry of the Messiah during His first advent. The evidence for righteously displaying and declaring God’s glory, both in the Old and the New Testaments is incontrovertible. The human authors of Scripture declared God’s glory in their writings as they were “inspired” (God breathed) to do so by the Holy Spirit. They also wrote about those who righteously displayed God’s glory and brought glory to God during their life on the earth.
There is also a great volume of evidence from the Scriptures that God supremely values His glory above all else. Perhaps the most passionate proclaimer of the incomparable glory of God revealed in the Scriptures is John Piper. Piper’s books are magnificently filled with the truth of the supreme pleasure that God has in His glory and mankind’s role in declaring God’s glory. A suggested book written by John Piper that explains this is *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s delight in Being God*, Multnomah Books, a division of Random House, Inc. 2000.

If we can piece together the intent of the glory of God throughout Scriptures, we can conclude that those who are the image bearers of God, are to righteously display and declare the incomparable glory of God to all creation. In order for God to accomplish this several things were necessary. *First*, God created His kingdom so that He would be in absolute and sovereign control over all aspects and over all created things of His creation so that His purposes for creating the heavens and the earth would be completed exactly as He purposed. The kingdom of God according to Michael J. Vlach is so important and central to the Scriptures that it envelops all other themes, *He will reign Forever*, page 21. This is certainly true as to the great volume of content in the Scriptures relating to the kingdom of God. However, as important as the kingdom of God is within the Scriptures, the kingdom itself is the first and arguably the most important means or framework God has chosen to accomplish His over-arching reason for creating the heavens and the earth. This over-arching reason is the answer to the question, why did God create His kingdom? It is also the answer to the “why” question for all other aspects of God’s creation.

*Second*, mankind had to be formed and made in His image to be suitable image bearers to display and declare His glory. God had purposed that no others in the created order could possibly perform this task. The reason for this is likely that God’s image bearers were given the opportunity to trust Him and put their faith in Him. They willingly choose to obey and have faith in God in such a way that God accepts their faith and obedience as a demonstration of His glory and by their faith they are declared “righteous.” There is no evidence that angels, even though they give glory to God, were formed to be God’s image bearers in the same way as humans nor were they given the tasks or roles that God reserved for humans to righteously display and declare His glory. *Third*, mankind had to be preserved from worldwide disaster, so this task could be completed, hence the Noahic covenant. *Fourth*, a family had to be formed from one race from which God’s Son would come to be the perfect human, who could fulfill God’s righteous and just purposes to be mankind’s sacrificial atoning sacrifice, hence the Abrahamic covenant. *Fifth*, the need for an earthly kingdom and a throne and a righteous King to rule the kingdom on this throne was necessary to display and declare God’s glory though the keeping of God’s promises to His chosen race, and all who believe in His Son, hence the Davidic covenant. *Sixth*, the need for God to supernaturally create a receptive heart in mankind and a renewed mind in order for humans who respond in faith and receive eternal salvation and to “righteously” relate to Him in such a way so that these people could adequately, in the way He has solely decreed, display and declare His glory, hence the new covenant. *Seventh*, this display and declaration of God’s glory will not end with the great white throne judgment but will, as God had planned from eternity past, continue forever so that those who inhabit the heavenly realm and fellowship with God will continually righteously display and declare His glory. Therefore, along with having creation itself declare His glory, Psalm 19:1, God also purposed, that those who are the image bearers of God, are to righteously display and declare the incomparable glory of God to all creation, for all eternity.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 52:13-53:12
52:13-15 Starting Statements: The Servant’s exaltation following suffering
  53:1-3 The Rejection of the Servant
  53:4-6 The Redemption by the Servant
  53:7-9 The Resurrection of the Servant
53:10-12 Summation Statements: The Servant’s exaltation following suffering
7. God’s Everlasting Compassion for His People 54:1-17

Following the majestic revelation of the fourth Servant Song, Isaiah continues to discuss the conditions of the covenant people of God, the faithful remnant who will be gathered from the nations and will be established in Zion, where they will greatly increase in number and be comforted by their Redeemer. Although they will be counted as barren during the distressful days of the Tribulation, their population will increase dramatically in the kingdom of the Messiah. There will be so many of them that their descendants will need to possess nations and desolate cities that have been left empty as a result of God’s judgment upon them during the Tribulation, 54:1-3. They will not be ashamed nor disgraced, for their great Creator, the LORD of hosts, their Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth will be as a husband to them and have compassion on them, for His covenant of peace with them will not be shaken, 54:4-10. The Lord will establish them in fortifications adorned with precious jewels and their children will be taught by the Lord and be at peace. He will establish them in righteousness and they will be free of oppression for no enemy will hurt them and He will vindicate them, 54:11-17. David L. Cooper provides this introduction to Isaiah Chapter 54:

“ISAIAH, chapter 54, constitutes a literary unit or a single discourse. It must therefore be studied as a whole. At the same time one must see its connection with that which has gone before in order to appreciate it properly. The oracle begins with these words: "Sing, 0 barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith Jehovah" (54:1).

In a most dramatic manner the prophet burst forth with the oracle of chapter 54 after he had given us the marvelous message regarding the "servant of Jehovah"--Messiah--in Isaiah 52:15--53:12. At first sight there seems to be no close connection between the oracle which we are studying…. and that concerning the servant of Jehovah and His sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection. But upon further study the connection is seen to be very close. The prophet--seeing what the crucifixion of the Messiah accomplishes, recognizing that in 53:1-9 is the penitential confession of the remnant of Israel and knowing that the Messiah will return when Israel thus confesses and pleads for Him to come back-- naturally bursts forth in this paean of glory, which describes the blessedness of the Jewish people and the great increase of the nation. In other words, if there were no Isaiah 52:13-53:12, there could be no Isaiah, chapter 54. The first is the cause, the latter the effect--so far as Israel is concerned.

When we turn back to 51:17 and read through 52:6, we see that our prophet compared Jerusalem, the capital and mother city of the Jewish people, to a woman lying prostrate in the dust. This representation of Israel in these chapters is likewise borrowed from chapter 49:14-21. Thus the figure introduced in chapter 49 is carried forward and reappears in chapters 51, 52, and 54. Naturally it has the same connotation in this last appearance as it does in the former passages. Thus we are justified in reaching the conclusion that in our present chapter the prophet was speaking to Jerusalem under his favorite symbolism of a woman. This interpretation is confirmed by the contents of the rest of the chapter.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – January 1946).

54:1 *Sing, O barren one who has never given birth.*
*Break out into singing and shouts of joy,*
*you who have never been in labor.*
*For there are more children from the desolate*
*than there are children from the married woman,*
*says the LORD.*

Isaiah 54:1-2 contain seven imperatives, 54:1: sing, break out; 54:2: enlarge, stretch out, spare nothing, lengthen, and strengthen. These imperative verbs are directed from God to a “barren one” who has God as a
husband, 54:5. While some Biblical scholars suggest the term “barren one” is a description of Gentile believers, there is nothing in the text that would imply or indicate this description is accurate. In the context of the preceding chapters of Isaiah, it is clear that Isaiah is prophesizing about the covenant people of God, the faithful remnant who will, in a far future day, survive the distressful days of the Tribulation and then be gathered by God to come to Zion to populate the earthly kingdom of the returning Messiah. The reference to Zion, the people of God as a woman in Isaiah is not uncommon, 49:14-50:3; 51:17-52:12. Also God is depicted as the husband of His people in Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 31:32; Ezekiel 16:32; and His people as His wife: Isaiah 54:6; and Ezekiel 16:32.

The intent of Isaiah 54:1 is that although God’s covenant people have been “barren,” like a woman without children, during the tumultuous times of the Tribulation, these desolate ones will bear more children in a coming time and place, than the married women do at the present time. Isaiah had earlier discussed the rapid growth of Zion in 49:18-23. Because of the promise that the mothers of Zion will bear children to populate the earthly kingdom of the Messiah, they are called upon to “Break out into singing and shouts of joy.” It may be that Isaiah is calling upon the women of his audience in Jerusalem, who will be the ancestors of the women in the far future day of the beginning of the messianic kingdom, to praise their Messiah with songs and joyful shouting. Even though the time of Isaiah were days of uncertainty for fear of their enemies, Isaiah promises that in a coming day, they will have great cause to rejoice at what God will accomplish among them. The audience of Isaiah, if they had been faithful in reading their Scriptures, specifically the five books of Moses, they would have remembered that God had, in the past, given to a barren woman, Sarah, a great innumerable number of descendants far greater than given to Hagar. That which God had accomplished in Israel’s past, He will do again in super-abundance in their future. Isaiah proclaims that God’s covenant people has a glorious future. See also Zephaniah 3:12-20.

The apostle Paul cited Isaiah 54:1 in Galatians, 4:27 within the greater context of Galatians 4:21-31. John A. Martin, understands that Isaiah 54 applies to the people of Jerusalem in the millennial kingdom, who have been regathered from the nations. See John A. Martin, Isaiah, pages 1109-1110. Victor Buksbazen also understands that chapter 54 is referring to triumphant Zion: See Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 425.

54:2 Enlarge the place of your tent,
and stretch out the tent curtains of your dwellings.
Spare nothing,
lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.

According to Biblical Scholars, it was the responsibility of the wife in ancient Near Eastern cultures to erect and to look after the family tent(s). If the tent needed repair or enlarging the wife would be responsible for this task. Although in Isaiah’s days, the Jewish people no longer lived in tents, the prophet’s audience would well understand the picture described to them by the inspiration of God. The barren woman would need to expand the home because she soon will give birth to enlarge the family size. This would be happening to all families who have left their captivity within all the nations of the earth and have travelled to Zion under the guidance of their “husband” who is described by many majestic titles in 54:5. The reason the “wife” of Yahweh was barren during the future days of the tribulation was because “she” was far from God in “her” heart. Upon confessing the national sin of Israel, Isaiah 53:1-9, barren Israel would be restored to a right relationship with her “husband” and become fertile to bear many children to repopulate the chosen land. Although some understand this repopulation as spiritual, there is nothing in the text to suggest this. The prophet Jeremiah prophetically described this same event in the far future as recorded in Jeremiah 30:18-22.
18 This is what the LORD says:
   "I will bring back Jacob's tents from captivity,
   and have compassion on his dwellings;
   the city will be rebuilt on its own hill,
   and the palace will be set in its rightful place.
19 Out of them will proceed thanksgiving
   and the voice of those having fun.
   I will multiply them,
   and they will not be few.
   I will also honor them,
   and they will not be despised.
20 Their children also will be just like it was long ago,
   and their congregation will be established before me;
   I will punish all who oppress them.
21 They will have their own prince,
   and their ruler will come from the midst of them;
   I will bring him near,
   and he will approach me.
   For who would dare to approach me otherwise?"
   says the LORD.
22 "You will be my people,
   and I will be your God."

(Jeremiah 30:18-22)

Victor Buksbazen comments:

“During her captivity Israel was like a rejected wife: childless, desolate and grieved in spirit. But now that the LORD is about to look with favor upon her she is to break forth in joyful song. The returning exiles from all corners of the earth will be more in number than the children of Zion before her dispersion.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 425).

54:3 For you will spread out to the right and to the left;
your descendants will possess the nations
and resettle the deserted cities.

In the far future, after the distressful days of the Tribulation, the covenant people of God who will be the faithful remnant, will start to repopulate Zion under the righteous and just rule of the Messiah. The population of the Jewish peoples will expand so rapidly that there will be no room for them within land of restored Israel. They will soon spread out in numbers so great that they will settle in cities left deserted after God’s judgment upon the world during the Tribulation. In this way, they will possess the nations, not by warfare but by childbirth. They will finally fulfill the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, Genesis 17:1-8. When God re-affirmed this covenant with Jacob as recorded in Genesis 18:13-14, God said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The ground on which you lie, I will give to you and to your descendants. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west, east, north and south. Through you and your offspring will all the families of the earth be blessed.”

One of the reasons God will cause the earth, during the Messianic Kingdom, to be populated with growing numbers of Jewish people is that they will bring to the nations of the earth, the knowledge of their Creator, who is the LORD of hosts, the Holy One of Israel, their Redeemer who is also called in the DASV “the God
of the entire earth,” Isaiah 54:5. All the nations of the earth will learn, by those who are the chosen people of God, that all peoples of the earth have but One God who is also the Redeemer to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. As a result of this knowledge, the nations of the earth will rejoice in their God and praise Him. Then the prophetic words of King David, as recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:31 will be fulfilled:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice.
Let them proclaim among the nations, “The LORD reigns.”

Isaiah would later declare in Isaiah 61:9-11:

9 Their descendants will be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them will realize,
that they are the people the LORD has blessed."
10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my soul will be joyful in my God.
For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has clothed me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom wears a turban like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as the garden causes things planted to sprout,
so the sovereign LORD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up
before all the nations.

54:4 Do not be afraid,
for you will not be put to shame.
Do not be embarrassed,
for you will not be humiliated.
You will forget the shame of your youth
and will no longer remember the disgrace of your widowhood.

Isaiah 54:4 contains two imperatives: “do not be afraid” and “do not be embarrassed”. Each of these imperatives are followed by a result: “for you will not be put to shame” and “for you will not be humiliated.” The last sentence of 54:4 is a statement of God’s promise for not being afraid or being embarrassed. The once barren one, the wives of Zion who have been gathered from the nations will no longer remember the shame of their youth when they were barren and desolate, and they will also no longer remember their feelings of disgrace of being widows. Isaiah is most likely referring to the fact that upon their arrival in Zion to populate the messianic kingdom, they who had been estranged from God and were as a spiritual widow were now in a righteous relationship with God who describes Himself, in 54:5 as their Husband. With God as their husband, they have no need to be afraid, or embarrassed for they will not be put to shame or be humiliated. They are in the place God wants them to be and He will bless them with many children to quickly populate not only Zion but also, they will populate the desolate cities which had been under God’s judgment in the Tribulation. See study notes on 54:3 above.

The Hebrew words for “shame, humiliated and disgraced” in 54:4 express a similar idea. The English word “shame” occurs twice: “you will not be put to shame, Hebrew bosh) and you will forget the shame, boshet of your youth. The English word “humiliated” is the Hebrew kalam and the English word “disgraced” is the
Hebrew *hapher*. Examining these Hebrew words help the student to understand the intent of God’s message to His covenant people. They had been put to shame, humiliation and disgrace as a chastisement from God because of their rejection of their LORD. But God is merciful and will deliver His people and restore them to a right relationship with Him. See Isaiah 45:17; 49:23; Ezekiel 16:63; Joel 2:26 and Zephaniah 3:11. The prophet Jeremiah also expresses this well as recorded in Jeremiah 31:16-19:

16 This is what the LORD says:
   "Restrain your voice from weeping,
   and your eyes from shedding tears,
   for your work will be rewarded,"
   says the LORD;
   "and they will return from the land of the enemy."
17 "There is hope for your future," says the LORD;
   "your children will come back to their own territory.
18 I have surely heard Ephraim grieving,
   'You have disciplined me,
   and I was disciplined,
   like a calf untrained with a yoke.
Bring me back,
   and I will return;
   for you are the LORD my God.
19 For after I had turned away, I repented;
   after I was instructed, I slapped my thigh;
I was ashamed and humiliated,
when I realized the disgrace of my youth.'
(Jeremiah 31:16-19)

Many Biblical Scholars suggest that the words in Isaiah 54:4, “the shame of your youth” refers to the captivity of the ancient Israelites in Egypt and “the disgrace of your widowhood,” refers to the future, in Isaiah’s day, of their descendants who will be exiled in Babylon. For an example of this understanding, see Allen P. Ross, *The Book of Isaiah*, Chapter 20, Future Blessings for the People of God (Isaiah 54:1-17). Bible.org, published, February 2, 2009. All such suggestions, however, even by the most qualified scholars, are personal opinions and may or may not be what the prophet intended. This Study of Isaiah has consistently held to the opinion that most of the prophetic writings of Isaiah from chapters 40-66 refer to the far future times of the Tribulation and the Messianic kingdom unless the context clearly states otherwise. The references to Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 and the near verses that are in context to these verses clearly refer to that historical figure who lived long after the prophet Isaiah. But when the covenant people are called from God from the nations of the earth, this is not a reference to the end of the Babylonian exile as many commentators claim. The Jewish captives in Babylon were freed from just one nation Babylon, and not from the nations of the earth. Also, only a relatively few of the exiles in Babylon returned to Jerusalem. As the descriptions of the calling of the covenant people of God from the nations of the earth have not matched any historical period, this event must still be future. The period best fitting this calling from the nations is that at the end of the Tribulation when King Messiah will establish His earthly millennial kingdom. This is true of Isaiah chapter 54 particularly in verses 9-17 which prophetically can fit only the days of the messianic kingdom which follow the Tribulation.
For your Maker is your husband; 
The LORD of hosts is his name. 
The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. 
He will be called ‘the God of the entire earth.’

The word “for” which begins Isaiah 54:5, Hebrew ki, can also be translated “because,” as it introduces the core reason why God’s covenant people, especially the women, are to break out into singing, 54:1; and are also to enlarge the place of their tents, 54:2. They will have their descendants possess the nations, 54:3; and are not to be afraid or embarrassed, 54:4. This core reason is the identity of the One who called them back to Himself as a wife. The One who has called them back to Himself is identified as “your husband” who is “your Maker,” “the LORD of hosts,” “the Holy One of Israel,” “your Redeemer,” and “He will be called the God of the entire earth.” This is the only verse in Isaiah which has these names for God listed together and only this verse combines five names with the descriptive “your husband.” See also Hosea 2:16-20. It is as if God is providing His covenant people with no doubt as to His identity, power, sovereignty, as He is their Creator and the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the commander of the armies of heaven and controller of all earthly armies, the One who is Holy One of Israel, the One who is their kinsmen redeemer, and the One to be called the God of all the earth. God also condescends to call Himself their husband. God’s covenant people will realize all of the promises of 54:1-4 because they have been restored to a righteous relationship with their “husband” God. The days of chastisement and discipline, during the Tribulation, which will lead them to their national confession, Isaiah 53:1-9, are over (prophetically) and God is restoring them to Himself as they begin to populate the Messianic kingdom.

The title Maker, referring to God as Creator is the Hebrew word asah. It occurs also in Isaiah 17:7; 27:11; 44:24; and 51:13; The Hebrew word bara is similar in meaning and is translated as Creator in Isaiah 40:28; 43:1 and 15; as is the Hebrew word yasar, translated as Creator in Isaiah 27:11, and Maker in Isaiah 45:9 and 11. The title husband, Hebrew ba’al, refers to God’s family relationship with His covenant people and can be translated as Lord (noun), or to marry (verb). It only occurs in the Old Testament here in the prophecy of Isaiah, but the concept of God’s people being married to Him is clearly stated in Isaiah 62:4-5 which is very similar in content to Isaiah 45:1-5. See also Jeremiah 31:32; Hosea 2:19-20 and Revelation 21:2. The name for God, LORD of hosts, refers to God as Yahweh of armies of heaven and earth is a common name for God in Isaiah, occurring over sixty times. including the expanded Lord God of hosts in the DASV. See notes on Isaiah 1:9 for a full listing of these occurrences in Isaiah. God as the Lord of hosts cannot and will not be defeated in anything He wants to accomplish and also no enemy, no matter how powerful can overpower Him. The title, Holy One of Israel, is another common name for God in Isaiah, occurring 28 times. This title expresses God’s ultimate character, as holy, expressed in triplicate in Isaiah 6:3 and how He relates in His holiness with His covenant people whom He has chosen for His own. See notes on Isaiah 1:9 for a full listing of these occurrences in Isaiah. The title, Redeemer, which is ga’al in the Hebrew, occurs also in Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6; 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 26; 54:8; 59:20; 60:16; and 63:16. It is a beautiful depiction of God’s family relationship with His covenant people whom He redeems as their Savior from spiritual and eternal death which they have deserved because of their sinfulness and rebellion. See Isaiah chapter 1 for one such listing of their sinful acts. God will be known by the title God of the entire earth, in the messianic kingdom when all alive will glorify His great name. Although it is true that God is now King of all the earth, Psalm 47:7, not all acknowledge Him, but in the future His glory will be known, and everyone will see His glory, Isaiah 40:5.

For the LORD has called you back 
as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, 
like a wife who married young and was rejected, says your God.
The LORD, Yahweh, will call His covenant people back to Himself, in the days in which the messianic kingdom will begin to be populated with those who are believers in the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah, uses the simile “as a wife” to describe the family relationship between Israel’s Redeemer (family or kinsmen Savior) and His covenant people. See notes on 54:5 above for the title of God as Israel’s “husband.” The covenant people of God will feel forsaken and will grieve in spirit because they had been briefly abandoned by God, 54:7, during the days of the Tribulation. God will use this period to chastise and discipline His covenant people. They will learn the lesson of God’s discipline and repent of their national sin of having rejected the Messiah during His first advent. The words of their confession of their national sin is recorded in Isaiah 53:1-9. During the distressful days of the Tribulation, the covenant people of God, who are also known as the faithful remnant, will be like a wife who had married young and yet was rejected. However, God will bring circumstances upon them which will cause them to repent of their national sin and plead for their Messiah to return to the earth and rescue them from their enemies. For a detailed description of the Biblical record of these events, see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Revised Edition, Ariel Ministries, 2004, pages 293-307. For an alternate translation of the words, “and was rejected,” and how it relates to the context of this passage, see Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, pages 482-483. God will call His people back to Himself, like a husband who was estranged from his wife but seeks to restore the relationship, which is portrayed for example, in the prophecy of Hosea.

54:7-8 "For a brief moment I abandoned you,
   but with great compassion I will regather you.
8 In overflowing wrath I hid my face from you for a moment,
   but with everlasting love I will have mercy on you,"
   says the LORD your Redeemer.

The “brief moment” of God’s abandonment of His covenant people, described in Isaiah 54:7, is not the seventy years duration of the Babylonian captivity as many commentators suggest, for seventy years is more than a brief moment. In the context of chapters 40-66 of Isaiah, this brief moment, must refer to the days of the Tribulation just prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. This “brief moment” in which the Lord hid his face from them 54:8, would be days of the Tribulation which will be short in duration as recorded in Mark 13:20. Compare also: Revelation 12:12. The Lord declares that He have great compassion upon them and with everlasting love, He will have mercy upon them, as their Redeemer and will regather His covenant people. The place to which He will regather His faithful remnant is to His beloved city Zion, as Isaiah has often prophesized. See Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 11:11-16; 12:1-6; 27:12-13; 30:18-26; 31:6; 32:15-20; 33:20-24; 34:16-17; 35:1-10; 40:1-11; 41:8-20; 43:1-13; 44:1-5, 21-28; 45:14-25; 46:13; 49:14-26; 51:1-23; 52:1-12; 54:1-17; 56:1-12; 57:14-19; 59:15b-21; 60:1-22; 61:1-11; 62:1-12; 65:17-25; and 66:10-24.

The word “compassion” in 54:7 is “raham” in the Hebrew, which can be translated as “mercy” and is related to the word “womb.” In Isaiah, raham is translated in the DASV as “conception” in 46:3, and in other versions it is translated as “womb” or “birth.” Raham is translated as “mercy” in 47:6; as “compassion” in 54:7; as “mercies” in 63:7; and as “compassion” in 63:15. The words “everlasting love” in 54:8 is “hesed” in the Hebrew and is related to God’s loyalty and devotion to His covenant with Israel. It can be translated as “loyal love” or “royal love.” In Isaiah, hesed is translated in the DASV as “loyal love” in 16:5; as “beauty” in 40:6; as “everlasting love” in 54:8; as “loyal love” in 54:10; as “loyal covenant” in 55:3; as “devout” in 57:1; as “loyal love” twice in 63:7.
A verse that is close in meaning and content to Isaiah 54:7 is Isaiah 63:7:

*I will recall the loyal love of the LORD,*
  *and the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,*
*because of all the LORD has done for us,*
  *and the great goodness toward the house of Israel,*
*that he did for them according to his mercies,*
  *and according to his great loyal love.*

Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 54:8:

“God did not lose control of Himself when His people sinned, but He became very angry because sin destroys people and breaks the fellowship that He desires to have with them. He had to turn away from sinners (hide His face from them) because He is holy. But that separation was short-lived compared with the everlasting compassion that His loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) requires. The Lord would buy His bride back to Himself.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 274).

Victor Buksbazen adds:

“Jehovah’s essential relationship to Israel is that of “everlasting kindness” which may occasionally be disturbed or frustrated by the rebelliousness and waywardness of His people. Yet in the end Jehovah’s mercy always prevails.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 426).

**54:9** For this is like in the days of Noah to me;
  *for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would never flood the earth,*
  *so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you or rebuke you.*

Because of God’s “everlasting love” (loyal love), 54:8 to His covenant people He will show mercy to them, 54:8. This event or time is like in the time or days of Noah to God. In the days of Noah God made a covenant (I have sworn) that the waters (as great as in the days of Noah) would never again flood the earth. God promised in Genesis 8:21, “And the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of human beings, for the imagination of the human heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again destroy every living thing as I have done.” This is repeated as a covenant in Genesis 9:8-17, particularly Genesis 9:15, “then I will remember my covenant, that is between me and you and every living creature of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all flesh.” The promise in Isaiah 54:9 begins with “for as” which describes the historical reminder in Genesis 8 and 9 and concludes with God’s present promise which is similar to a covenant (I have sworn), “so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you or rebuke you,” Isaiah 54:9.

This is a very significant promise, much like a covenant (*so I have sworn*), that God makes with His covenant people to whom He has described Himself in terms of a “husband,” 54:5. This major promise has no past historical evidence as God certainly has been angry with His covenant people and rebuked them during the first advent of the Messiah and it is evident that He has rebuked them by chastisement and judgment since those days. The only time that would fit this solemn promise by God to His covenant people would be during the Messianic Kingdom following the Tribulation. The days of the Tribulation will be a time of trial, chastisement and discipline for God’s covenant people and these days will end when His people have confessed their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during His first advent, Isaiah 53:1-9. They also will

54:10 For the mountains may be moved, and the hills shaken, 

but my loyal covenant love will never leave you, 
nor will my covenant of peace ever be broken, 
says the LORD who has compassion on you.

Continuing with the promise of Isaiah 54:9, “so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you or rebuke you,” the LORD adds that His loyal love will never leave His covenant people although the mountains and the hills may be moved or shaken. Although the earth and heavens itself may perish God will remain the same, Psalm 102:25-28. God’s salvation will be forever, and His righteousness will never end, Isaiah 51:6. God promises to be with His covenant people, Isaiah 41:1, and He will never forsake them, Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Psalm 37:28; 94:14; Isaiah 41:17 and 62:11-12. The Lord has kept and will keep His promises to His covenant people, Joshua 21:45; 1 Kings 8:56; 2 Chronicles 21:7; Psalm 77:8; Romans 4:21; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Hebrews 10:23 and 2 Peter 1:4. His word and His inheritance will never fade, Isaiah 40:8 and 1 Peter 1:4. God’s loyal love, Isaiah 54:10 is everlasting, 54:8 and unchanging, Micah 7:18, 20. See notes on Isaiah 54:8 above for God’s “everlasting love” Hebrew: hesed.

Just as God’s everlasting (loyal) love will never leave His covenant people, His “covenant of peace” with them will never be broken for God continually has compassion upon them. There are many suggestions as to the meaning of “covenant of peace.” Many commentators agree with Thomas Constable who suggests:

“Even the most substantial and immovable of things do not compare with the firmness of God's promise. The Lord will again reshape the surface of the earth, as He did with the Flood, only the next time it will be with a great earthquake (cf. Rev. 16:17-21). Even global changes would not alter this promise to preserve His people in intimate relationship with Himself. This promise is so firm and formal that it constitutes a covenant, a covenant guaranteeing peace with them and for them (Heb. shalom, wholeness of divine blessing).


The writings of Isaiah contain a few references to God’s new covenant with His people. In 42:6 and 49:8 the Servant is appointed or given as covenant from God to His people which is a direct reference to the new covenant. See notes above on those verses. In 24:5 Isaiah mentions an “everlasting covenant” as he does again in 55:3 and 61:8. The words “the covenant” occur in 33:8 and “my covenant” in 56:4, 6; and 59:21. See notes on these verses for further comment. In Isaiah 54:10, Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26 God’s covenant of peace is mentioned, compare also Malachi 2:5. In the context of the passages where the “covenant of peace” is mentioned, it is apparent that this is the new covenant the Messiah will mediate. The new covenant, in which all who believe in the shed blood of Jesus Christ for salvation participate, will be fully fulfilled for Israel during the Messianic Kingdom where the Prince of Peace will reign on the throne of David. During the duration of this Kingdom, 1,000 years, Revelation 20:1-6, God will enact this covenant of peace, which is the new covenant, over all creation. It will be a time when humans are at peace with each other and even the animals will live in peaceful co-existence with each other and with humans. Warfare will be eliminated and
instruments (armaments) of war will be transformed for use in far more peaceful and pastoral pursuits. Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer rightly comment:

“Given the other uses of the phrase in Numbers and Ezekiel, the covenant of peace as used here refers to the new covenant (cf. Jr 31:31-34), when Israel will be at peace with God and experience the security having been re-established in the land.” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, Moody Bible Commentary, page 1092).

Isaiah 54:11-17: A Brief Introduction

God has made promises regarding the future to His covenant people who are without comfort and afflicted, vs. 11. These promises begin with God’s assurance that He will rebuild their habitation (NIV: City) that will have precious jewels for stones and for its foundation, vs. 11. God will make the pinnacles (NIV: windows) of their inhabitation, and its gates and walls of precious gems, vs. 12. In this bejeweled habitation, the children will be prosperous and be taught by the LORD, vs. 13. God’s covenant people will be established in righteousness and they will have no cause to fear due oppression or terror for God will defeat any enemy that may assemble against them, vss. 14-15. God, who has created the blacksmith to forge tools of war will ensure no such weapon will be successful against His covenant people and even verbal accusations against them will be refuted for God will vindicate His servants, vss. 16-17.

54:11-12 O afflicted one, tossed by storm and not comforted, 
look, I will rebuild your stones with jewels, 
and lay your foundations with lapis lazuli. 

12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies, 
and your gates of sparkling gems, 
and all your walls of precious stones.

The recipient of this message, “O afflicted one,” 54:11, is the same as that of 54:1 stated as “O barren one.” In 54:1-10, the message from God to Zion is that God’s covenant people are pictured as a wife who is without children and who has been without a close relationship with God who is described as her “husband,” 54:5. In 54:11-17, this depiction of Zion changes to that of a city who now is afflicted but will be adorned with Jewels as a beautiful city and by implication, as a restored wife who will be lovingly cared for, protected and kept secure by her “husband.” The reason Zion has been afflicted, tossed by storm and not comforted, is due to the chastisement and judgment upon Her by God during the days of the Tribulation. God proclaims that this condition is only “for a brief moment,” 54:7-8. In the days of the earthly messianic kingdom her days of affliction will be over, and God will gather His elect, the faithful remnant from all the nations where they have been held captive and bringing them to Zion. The messianic kingdom is being established with regenerated people and a renewed environment.

God is taking personal oversight of the renewing of His people. The words “look, I” in the DASV is literally “look (behold) I myself.” God is not delegating His work to another but is assuring His covenant people that He Himself will do this work. The beginning of this work is described as “I will rebuild your stones with jewels.” It is better translated in the NASB as “I will set your stones in antimony.” Antimony was described in 1 Chronicles 29:2 as a black powder that was added to the mortar for inlaying the stones of the temple built under the leadership of Solomon. The wicked wife of King Ahaz, Jezebel used antimony for painting her eyes (like mascara), 2 Kings 9:30. God also promised in Isaiah 54:11 to lay the foundations of Zion with “lapis lazuli.” The meaning of “lapis lazuli” seems to be sapphires which would be very reflective and when the sun shone upon this edifice it would be brilliant in reflection.
God promises, in Isaiah 54:12, to “make your pinnacles of rubies.” The word “pinnacles” is *semes* in the Hebrew which is mostly translated as “sun” in the Old Testament. The KJV translates *semes* as “windows” which likely was meant as reflecting the sun. The word for “rubies” is “bright red” (NASB margin note) and would also beautifully reflect the sun when it shone upon it. The gates of restored Zion will be set with “sparkling gems” (or jewels) and its walls (or borders) will be set with “precious stones.” The picture that God is describing of restored Zion at the beginning of the messianic kingdom describes a city similar to the eternal New Jerusalem that is described in Revelation 21:9-22:5. Both the city of Zion in the messianic kingdom and the New Jerusalem in the eternal state will be places of brilliant beauty as the sun, during the years of the messianic kingdom and the brilliance of God in the eternal state, will illuminate the precious gem stones to a dazzling appearance which will reflect (display) the glory of God.

54:13 All your children will be taught by the LORD, and your children will enjoy prosperity.

In the days of the messianic kingdom, the LORD, with the meaning here of the Messiah, will not delegate the instruction of the children of Zion to human instructors. The Messiah will personally teach those in Zion, including those of other nations, “His ways”, Isaiah 2:3. See also, Isaiah 28:26; 30:19-20; and 48:17. The word “prosperity” is the Hebrew word “shalom” which is most often translated as peace but also mean well-being, and completeness. The teaching of the Messiah will lead to a generation that will be at peace with their Creator, creation, and with each other. They will have a complete education unhindered from the evil influence of sinful humanity.

The Lord Jesus Christ cited Isaiah 54:13 as recorded in John 6:45: “It is written in the prophets, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father, and learns, comes to me.” The application made by the Lord in John 6:45 is that those who have been taught by God will come to know and have faith in the Son, who is the Messiah. In the messianic kingdom, it will be God the Son, the Messiah who will both teach and bring people to Himself. In those days, the people of Zion will have the most exalted Teacher who will teach the greatest lesson to achieve the optimum result. The teaching by the Messiah will be irresistible in its effect. The word from God (the Messiah) will accomplish that for which it was intended, Isaiah 55:11:

So will my word be that goes forth out of my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I desire it to, and it will succeed in the matter for which I sent it.

54:14-15 In righteousness you will be established; you will be far from oppression, for you will not fear, for terror will not come near you.

15 If anyone attacks you, it will not be from me; whoever will assemble against you will be defeated because of you.

Those who will inhabit the messianic kingdom, both the covenant people of God and redeemed Gentiles will be established in righteousness. Righteousness is a major topic of Isaiah’s prophecy. The first chapter introduces the theme of a “city of righteousness,” 1:24-28 which will be the characteristic of Zion in during
the years of the messianic kingdom. Isaiah 9:6-7 reveals that The Messiah will rule on throne of David over His kingdom and will uphold His kingdom with justice and righteousness:

6 For unto us a child is born,  
unto us a son is given,  
and the government will be upon his shoulders:  
and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government  
and of peace there will be no end.  
He will rule on the throne of David,  
and over his kingdom,  
to establish it,  
and to uphold it with justice  
and with righteousness from this time forth forever.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

The concepts of justice, righteousness and salvation are closely related as they are embodied in the Ruler of the millennial kingdom, the Messiah who will have the Spirit of the Lord upon Him, Isaiah 11:2; and 42:1. He will be called in righteousness, 42:6 and receive help and vindication from the Lord God, 50:7-9. The ministry of the Spirit is vital to the establishment of righteousness in the kingdom of the Messiah. See Isaiah 32:15-18. Those who will be the administrators and overseers of the kingdom will be endowed with peace and righteousness, 60:17. The One who rules the kingdom will speak in righteousness as He is mighty to save, 63:1 and He will restore the survivors, the preserved ones of Israel and bring salvation to the end of the earth, 49:6. Because the kingdom will be founded or established in righteousness, those who live in it will have no fear of being terrorized or oppressed by enemies. The threat of attack, however is not without possibility and is not merely a theoretical event. Any attack will not come from God and those who attack will be defeated by Him. Isaiah 54:14 states that the citizens of the kingdom will “be far from oppression” and “terror will not come near to them. This does not mean that an attack is impossible but if it happens, God will defeat it.

It should be noted that even though the messianic kingdom will be peopled by those who have faith in their Messiah and will be a community of believers, they will still be human and capable of sin. They will be taught directly by the Lord, 54:13, and they will be administered by righteousness and justice but as the years of the kingdom precede, a growing dissention to the rule of the Messiah will be evident. When Satan is released from his captivity, at the end of the given years for this kingdom (1,000 years), he will lead those who oppose the rule of the Messiah in open rebellion against their righteous Ruler. This rebellion will be short-lived, and God will devour the rebellious people with fire from heaven, and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:7-9.

54:16-17 Look, I have created the blacksmith  
who blows the fire of coals  
and produces a weapon perfect for its work.  
I have created the destroyer to bring destruction.  
17 No weapon that is formed against you will be successful.  
You will refute every tongue  
that makes accusations against you.  
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
and their vindication is from me,"

says the LORD.

God states in 54:16 that He has created those who forge weapons for a purpose and that is produce weapons that are designed for the purposes God intends. God also has created a destroyer, kingdoms and their armies, to bring destruction, which is His judgment, often upon His chosen people who had openly rebelled against Him. See Isaiah 5:24-30; 7:17-25; 29:1-4; 39:5-7 and Habakkuk 1:5-11. God also uses nations and their armies to bring judgment upon nations, for example, Assyria and Babylon, which He had called to bring judgment on His people, but Assyria and Babylon had been too aggressive and destructive in their attack on His people, Isaiah 10:5-19. The king of Babylon was also punished for being overly aggressive on his own people, Isaiah 14:20.

God promises that no weapon that is formed against His people in Zion during the duration of the messianic kingdom will be successful. As noted above, and as recorded in Revelation 20:7-9, at the end of the years allotted to this earthly messianic kingdom, there will be a rebellion led by Satan which will attempt to overthrow the rule of the Messiah. This rebellion will be met with fire from heaven which will consume the human participants and its leader, Satan, will be cast into the lake of fire. Along with weapons that are formed against the people of the messianic kingdom, words that are hurled against them will be refuted. God will refute every tongue that makes any accusation against His people. God will protect them on every side and will vindicate His servants.

God mentions His “servants” in 54:17. From this point on in the writings of Isaiah, God refers to servants, plural and not the singular Servant. See 56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13, 14, 15 and 66:14. The divine Servant, the Messiah (prophetic future sense), had completed His substitutionary work of salvation as prophesized in the magnificent songs of the Servant, Isaiah 42:1-0; 49:1-13; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12. The divine Servant had accomplished salvation and blessings for those who are the servants of God. Isaiah will refer to these blessings in the latter chapters of His prophecy. Isaiah had also mentioned many benefits and blessings to these servants in earlier chapters.

Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 54:17:

“Even though opponents might arise, they would be ineffective against God's invincible people. Hard steel or a hot tongue, two forms of antagonism that represent all forms of it, would not prosper. Yahweh's vindication of His people would be the heritage of His servants in that peaceful era. That heritage would include restoration to intimacy with God (cf. vv. 1-10), and, for Israel, fulfillment of the promises in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3, 7).

The historical setting for the fulfillment of this prophecy is the time following the Servant's full redemption of His people. This full redemption will take place at His second advent. Even though Jesus Christ died for our sins and defeated Satan during His first advent, He has not yet destroyed the effects of sin in the creation, including humanity, or punished Satan. He will do this at His second advent. Thus, the joy Isaiah described in this chapter will come to fruition during the Millennium, and thereafter, throughout eternity.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 277-278).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 54:
54:1-10 The Lord as Zion’s Husband
   54::1  Zion’s Praise
   54:2-3  Zion’s People
   54:4-10 Zion’s Prospect
8. God calls His People to Seek Him: 55:1-13

Many Biblical scholars understand chapter 55 as a completion of the longer unit from chapters 40 to 55 and the shorter unit of 53:13 to 55:13. Gary V. Smith comments:

“This chapter completes the long section of chaps. 40–55, as well as the shorter section of 53:12–55:13. Following a pattern somewhat similar to the promises and the imperative invitations to a feminine singular audience Zion in chap. 54, this chapter has additional divine promises and imperative exhortations to a masculine plural audience (to “everyone” in 55:1, which goes beyond “the servants of the Lord” in 54:17) to encourage them to respond to God’s invitation to enjoy his abundant blessings. The connections between chaps. 54 and 55 are evident in the common reference to (a) joy and singing at the beginning (54:1) and at the end of these two chapters (55:12–13), (b) the coming of peace in 54:10, 13; 55:12, (c) God’s compassion on his people (54:7–8, 10; 55:7), (d) God’s love (54:10; 55:3), (e) God’s covenant (54:10; 55:3), and (f) a new relationship with the nations (54:3; 55:4–5). The theological issues no longer focus on any of the present problems the nation was enduring; instead, attention is concentrated on the free food and water that are available, an everlasting covenant through a Davidic leader, forgiveness of sins, joy, and the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. These seem to be eschatological promises that God will provide for the people living in the New Jerusalem where he will reign as king. The structure of this chapter is divided into two paragraphs:

Invitation to participate in God’s provisions and covenant 55:1–5
Invitation to repent and see God’s words fulfilled 55:6–13”


Other scholars however, such as John A. Martin, Isaiah in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, include chapter 55 within the section chapters 49-57 which ends, 57:21 with the words: “There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.” A similar ending in Isaiah 48:22, concludes chapters 40-48. These statements bring a conclusion to two sections of nine chapters each which leaves chapters 58-66, also at nine chapters, equally dividing chapters 40-66 into three components of nine chapters each. While this may seem to be an arbitrary division of the writings of Isaiah, it needs to be noted that Isaiah carefully composed his prophecy in a manner that placed theological and thematic material in easily discernable sections. Isaiah also, often inserted salvation passages at the end of judgment oracles to underscore God’s majestic plan of providing salvation to His covenant people as well as to the nations of the earth. There is no definitive outline of Isaiah that all would agree upon. Students of Scripture should not worry themselves overly much with scholarly suggestions as to an outline. There are seemingly as many outlines suggested for Isaiah as there are Biblical scholars who have written commentaries and studies on Isaiah. The great scroll of Isaiah, for example found in the caves of the ancient Qumran community, among other writings commonly called the “Dead Sea Scrolls, did not contain an outline. Outlines were suggested by scholars as aiding in the understanding of the Biblical writings but are not inspired and many conflict with other suggested outlines for the same Biblical book.

Brief Overview of Isaiah Chapter 55

Chapter 55 of Isaiah speaks of the invitation of salvation, primarily to God’s covenant people, the faithful remnant who have endured the Tribulation, but also to all who hear or read the message of Isaiah. Salvation is not exclusive to the Jews, for God has given His Servant the task of bring salvation to ends of the earth,
Isaiah 49:6. God extends the invitation of salvation as a depiction of waters and wine and milk for the thirsty which can be obtained free of charge without any money, vs. 1. The portrait of salvation continues in vs. 2 to include the finest of foods which is better than spending money on bread that does not satisfy the hungry. God calls His audience to listen to Him, so they will live. He will make an everlasting covenant with them like His loyal covenant with David, vs. 3. This David leader, the Messiah, has been given to them as a witness, a leader and a commander to the world’s peoples, vs. 4. Because the Lord has glorified His covenant people, nations whom they do not know will be summoned to come to them, vs. 5. God’s calls upon all people to seek Him and to call upon Him while He may be found and while He is close by, vs. 6. To come to the Lord, the wicked must forsake their (evil) ways, and their unrighteous thoughts and return to Him for He will have mercy on them, vs. 7. God’s thoughts and ways are beyond comparison to those of humans, vss. 8-9. God’s word will accomplish what He has intended, just as the moisture of rain and snow accomplish their purposes of making the earth sprout so that their will be bread, vss. 10-11. God’s blessings include the peace and joy of all who respond to Him and His creation will praise Him for He will restore it with beneficial flora as an everlasting memorial to Him, vss. 12-13.

55:1 Everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters.
You who have no money, come buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and free of charge.

Chapter 55 of Isaiah begins with a three-fold invitation, not four as in the NIV, for everyone, both Jew and Gentile, to come to that which will satisfy the thirsty which is available from God, who is implied as the speaker, free of any charge, without costing any money. Money in Isaiah’s day did not involve coins for monetary use as they were not in use until much later during the days of the Persian era. In the eighth century B.C., Silver would be weighed on a scale to determine value. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, page 496.

The invitation to come to “the waters” is similar to the writings of King David in Psalm 36:7-9:

7 How precious is your loyal love, O God!
The human race takes refuge under the shadow of your wings.
8 They are abundantly satisfied with the food from your house;
you let them drink from the river of your delights.
9 For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

Isaiah had earlier declared, in 12:2-3:

2 God is my salvation;
I will trust and not be afraid;
for the LORD, yes the LORD,
is my strength and song;
he has become my salvation."
3 Joyfully you will draw water
from the wells of salvation.

In Jeremiah 2:13, the prophet states the lament of God, “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Zechariah prophesized that living waters will flow from out of Jerusalem, Zechariah 14:8. See also Psalm
46:4; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; and Zechariah 13:1. The pouring out of waters that brings life is a picture of the pouring out of the Spirit as Isaiah states in Isaiah 44:3-5. See also Ezekiel 36:22-28.

This truth is very evident in the New Testament as the story of the Messiah with the women at the well in Samaria indicated, John 4:3-42. Jesus the Messiah states in John 4:13-14: “Everyone who drinks from this water will become thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst; but the water that I will give will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” The “living water” that the Messiah spoke about is described as the Spirit in John 7:37-39: “Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘from within him will flow out rivers of living water.’” But he said this about the Spirit, which they who believed in him were about to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.”

The invitation to everyone who is thirsty to come to the waters, Isaiah 55:1, implies that they are seeking spiritual sustenance from the Lord. Although, the greater context of chapter 55 and chapter 54 indicates a far future time, when the covenant people of God are being gathered from all nations to populate the messianic kingdom which has its capital in Zion, the invitation from God (implied), is extended to all nations, Isaiah 49:6. Some Biblical scholars are quick to insert the Church in Isaiah chapter 55 as being the prophet’s intended meaning but there is no mention of the Church or its existence in these verses. It is an improper exegesis to insert a meaning into the Old Testament based upon the writings of the New Testament. Many New Testament authors applied passages of the Old Testament in their writings, but this does not give anyone the Scriptural authority to re-interpret Old Testament passages based upon the use of application of these passages in the New Testament. The Old Testament can stand on its own as an inspired text. One scholar who is exploring how the New Testament writers use the Old Testament is Michael J. Vlach, both in his published works and in his online “blog.” Vlach convincingly demonstrates that the New Testament authors used the Old Testament, contextually, as Vlach explains:

“the majority of NT uses of the OT reveal a common sense literal and contextual understanding of the OT texts by the NT writers.” (Michael J. Vlach, “NT use of OT, Part 4: Contextual use of the OT by the NT Writers,” http://mikevlach.blogspot.ca/2011/02/nt-use-of-ot-part-4-contextual-use-of.html. Accessed February 23, 2018.).

In the second part of Isaiah 55:1, the Lord adds to that which the thirsty will derive from Him: wine and milk. This is part of the “finest cuisine” (55:2), God intends the seeker (the thirsty) to enjoy when the invitation to come to the Lord is accepted by the seeker. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Ho, everyone who is thirsty come to the waters
Here is one of the most glorious and beautiful chapters in the book of Isaiah. It is a chapter in which an invitation is extended to all who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, to come to a feast which God has prepared for them. All they have to do is to accept His gracious invitation.

The water wine, milk and bread of which the prophet speaks are the various aspects of the Word of God. Water is essential to life, without it life is impossible. Wine is exhilarating, and in the lands of the Bible was frequently use to nourish and to strengthen the sick. Milk is basic to growth and health. Bread is “the staff of life.” All these are offered by a gracious God, freely and without any cost.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 429).

55:2-3a Why do you spend money for that which is not bread,
and your wages for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me,  
and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in the finest cuisine.

3 Incline your ear and come to me;  
listen, so you may live.

Continuing with the same theme as 55:1, Isaiah cites the words of God in 55:2 which adds bread to water, milk and wine, signifying the need for the thirsty (55:1) and hungry seeker to obtain the bread that satisfies rather than spending money “for that which does not satisfy.” Again, the implied speaker is the Lord who states, “listen carefully to me.” The Lord implores His audience, to eat good food which involves delighting themselves in the finest of foods. Of course, the student of Scripture understands the word picture the Lord is “painting” for His audience. It is not real food, that the seeker is invited to partake, but spiritual nourishment that comes from trusting in the Lord and receiving upon them, the Spirit of God. In a later day, the Messiah would state that He was the “bread of life,” John 6:35, 48 and 51. The purpose of listening carefully to God, 55:2 and inclining the ear and coming to God, 55:3a, is so that the seeker, those who are thirsty, 55:1 and hungry, 55:2, will receive spiritual sustenance (the finest cuisine, 55:2) from the Lord by trusting in Him and therefore receive life, 55:3a. David L. Cooper comments on 55:1-3a

“In 55:1-3a we hear Isaiah preaching the gospel of the grace of God in vision to the Jews during the closing scenes of this age and the Tribulation. He sees the people running hither and thither expending their efforts and using their money for material things rather than the spiritual realities. He questions them and asks why they do this. That this is an offer of free grace is clear from the statement found in 55:3a: "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live ..." The people are urged to incline their ear, open their hearts, give heed to the message in order that their souls might live. God has but one plan of redemption regardless of the age during which He is dealing with men. This scheme is salvation by grace through faith. It is not of works in order that no one should glory. Everyone who has ever been saved--in pre-Christian times--has been saved by the grace of God through faith. No law could be given whereby men might be made alive and justified. During the Millennial Age men will be saved in the same manner. Thus all of the redeemed, when all earthly affairs are wound up, will be able to sing of the matchless, wonderful grace of God.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – February 1946).

55:3b I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
just like my loyal covenant made to David.

The Lord spoke of a “covenant of peace” in Isaiah 54:10. Many Biblical scholars suggest that this covenant of peace is a reference to the new covenant which is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-34. This aspect of the covenant of peace, if it is referring to the new covenant, best fits the time of the messianic kingdom. See notes on Isaiah 54:10. Thomas Constable suggests that the “everlasting covenant” mentioned in Isaiah 55:3b could be a reference to the new covenant or to the Davidic Covenant:

“Again the Lord urged the hearers (everyone) to come to Him. He pressed them to listen to what He was saying, twice. God Himself is the feast. The result for them would be life, real life as opposed to the vain life described above (v. 2). Real life would involve living under an everlasting covenant that God would make with His people. This is probably a reference to the New Covenant, since the implication is that God would make it in the future (cf. 54:10).

While Jeremiah 31:31 says that Yahweh would make a new covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," that covenant is the one under which all the people of God have lived since Jesus ratified it (2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-12). Its benefits are not all exclusively for Israel, though some of its benefits are exclusively for Israel and these benefits will only come into Israel's possession in the Millennium. Jesus terminated the
Mosaic Covenant (Mark 7:19; Rom. 10:4; 14:14; Heb. 8:6—9:22; et al.) and ratified the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25) with His blood when He died on the Cross.

However, this could be a reference to the Davidic Covenant, which is also eternal (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16). This new covenant would be in full harmony with God's promises to David, in the Davidic Covenant, regarding David's descendant who would rule over his house forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 1 Chron. 17:23-26; Ps. 89:35-38; cf. Isa. 9:6; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 13:34). [Note 695: J. Martin, p. 1110; Dyer, The Old..., p. 576]” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 280).

David L. Cooper suggests:

“In Isaiah 55:3b-5 God promises to make with Israel an everlasting covenant. Following this promise He specifies what it is, namely, the mercies guaranteed to David (vs. 3). In order to understand this passage, one must study carefully II Samuel 7:1-17 and I Chronicles 17:1-15. One should also study II Samuel 23:1-7. These passages tell what was involved in the mercies guaranteed, or assured, to David. Upon a careful study of these passages we see that all promises connected with these passages center in the personal Messiah of Israel, who appeared historically as the Lord Jesus Christ.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – February 1946).

Victor Buksbazen adds:

“And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, - The trustworthy mercies of David

The trustworthy mercies of David, - in Hebrew, “Hasdei David haneemanim.” The prophet harkens back to the everlasting covenant with God made with David when He promised him:

Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee, thy throne shall be established for ever (2 Sam. 7:16). This was “the everlasting covenant” with David.

Since David died many centuries before, the reference must be understood in a Messianic sense. Messiah, who is the scion of David, is the agent through whom God carries out His redemptive will. He is the Word of God Incarnate who lives eternally. The same view is also expressed by the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:29-31.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 430).

The Apostle Paul, speaking in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, in Acts 13:34 cited Isaiah 55:3 from the Greek Old Testament, also known as the Septuagint, applying it in his sermon regarding the life and death and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Paul applied Isaiah 55:3 (the reference to David) as a statement about Jesus not undergoing delay (the blessings of David) but being resurrected from the dead. See context of Paul’s statements in Acts 13:13-41.

The word “make” in Isaiah 55:3b which refers to the everlasting covenant is the Hebrew word “karat’ which is literally “cut”. God “cuts” a covenant with His people. This refers to the cutting up of animals as part of the ceremony of establishing a covenant between God and His covenant people. See Genesis 15:1-21; and Jeremiah 34:18-19. See also 1 Chronicles 16:16; Nehemiah 9:7-8; Psalm 105:9 where the word “made” in these verses is karat meaning cut. The theological significance of “cutting” a covenant is that it requires the shedding of blood, which in the Old Testament, was the blood of animals. However, as the shedding of the blood of animals could not take away sin, Hebrews 10:4; God prepared a better sacrifice, that of His Son, the unique Servant who was slaughtered as an atoning substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of humanity, Isaiah 53:1-12. In this way, God cut an everlasting covenant with His covenant people who trust in Him and with all who trust in Him. This covenant, which is certainly the new covenant will be fully realized for Israel during...
the messianic kingdom ruled by the very same Messiah who was the cut sacrifice that God demanded in order to enact the covenant. In the context of Isaiah 55:3-4, this everlasting new covenant would be the means by which God ensures the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, of which the Messiah fulfills the Davidic covenant promised in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16. By the new covenant God also ensures the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, specifically in His shed blood for salvation participate in the new covenant and thereby through the new covenant participate in the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants, although the full completion of all aspects of these two covenants for Israel will be during the messianic and eternal kingdoms.

Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer comment:

“Though physical sustenance will surely be provided, Israel will be sustained through their obedience to the Lord and His provision of the everlasting covenant, a reference to the new covenant (see Jr 31:31-34).”

(Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, Moody Bible Commentary, page 1092).

55:4 Look, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples.

The word “look” in 55:4 and 5, is the Hebrew word “hen” which has the meaning of “behold.” Behold has a stronger connotation than simply to look. God desires His audience to pay close attention to what He is saying. The One who is identified as David in 55:3 must also be identified as the “him” in 55:4 who God has given as a witness, a leader and a commander to the peoples. Since David has long since died and since the everlasting covenant promised in 55:3 refers to the enactment of the Davidic covenant through the new covenant, the One who fulfills this covenant is the Messiah. Therefore, this One must be the Messiah who God gives as a witness to the peoples of the earth, and as a leader and commander to them. The Messiah is a witness to God in that God made Him a light to the nations so that God’s salvation would reach to the ends of the earth, Isaiah 49:6. He would also be a leader to (of) the peoples of the earth. This will occur when the Messiah will rule His people when He returns at His second advent to establish His earthly kingdom. The word “commander” is the Hebrew word sawah which has the meaning of giving a charge and to command. The Messiah will both lead and command, give a charge, to those living on the earth during the days of the messianic kingdom. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The purpose of the eternally living David is to be a witness, a prince and a commander to the nations, a task which is identical with the mission of the servant of God (Isa. 42:1, 49:6, 52:15). Now the prophet Isaiah merges the two images of the Messiah into one, that of Servant and King (Isa. 11:10).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 430).

55:5 Look, you will summon nations you did not know; nations that did not know you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

There is some uncertainty among Biblical scholars as to the exact identification of the word “you” in Isaiah 55:5. The word “you” is a singular which could refer to a person, such as the Messiah or to peoples identified as a singular group, such as the covenant people of God who will be alive to populate the messianic kingdom under the rule of the Messiah. Because the words “know” and “run” are plural, some postulate that it is the people of God who should be identified as the “you” throughout Isaiah 55:5. However, a careful reading of
this verse strongly indicates that the word “you” in each occurrence, refers most likely to the Servant of God, the Messiah. Thomas Constable suggests:

“The problem in this verse is the identity of "you" (sing.). It does not refer to the "anyone" addressed in verse 3 since this is too broad a field of reference for what the verse describes. It could be the people of God generally, since what the verse describes could apply—to some extent—to all the redeemed. It could be the Servant, in which case the verse means that the whole world would be flocking to David's Great Son. It could also refer to Israel.

In the Millennium, glorified Israel will appeal to Gentile nations (a collective singular goi) that would run to her because of her God. It is clear that more than one nation is in view, because the verbs translated "knows" and "run" are plural in the Hebrew text. The last interpretation harmonizes with what Isaiah wrote elsewhere that Israel would do (cf. 2:3; 35:2; 42:4; 46:13; 49:3; 60:9, 21; 61:3; 62:3; 66:18, 21). Perhaps the Servant as the leader of Israel, which also would call the nations, is the solution.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 281).

As with many individual verses in Isaiah, the compound names for God are stated as giving divine authority as the reason something is to be done or accomplished. Two of these compound names occur in Isaiah 55:5. The LORD your God is “Yahweh Elohim” who is the great “I Am,” Exodus 3:14. God is also Elohim, the plural name for God, who is the mighty and supreme One, who also is the Creator, Genesis 1:1. The nations are being summoned to “run” to the Messiah by the authority and power of “the LORD your God.” The second compound name in Isaiah 55:5 is the very familiar “Holy One of Israel,” which occurs 25 times in the writings of Isaiah. The nations will run to the Messiah because the Holy One of Israel has glorified His Servant, the Messiah as He is a desire to the nations. Also, God has glorified His Servant, the Messiah to accomplish the purposes that the Holy One of Israel has for Him. In Isaiah 52:13, the prophet states the Servant will be “lifted up and will be greatly exalted.” It is the exalted and lifted up Messiah who will be glorified, to whom the nations will run, Isaiah 55:5 See Isaiah 2:3; 49:22-23; 60:1-22; 61:1-11; 62:1-12; and 66:18-21.

55:6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.

It may be tempting to suggest that this verse teaches that there are sometimes when the LORD, Yahweh is not near or cannot be found. This may be suggested for example, by comparing Isaiah 55:6 with 54:7-8. But, the context of 54:7-8 indicates that these verses are speaking about the judgment of God upon His people. To be sure, there were times when God’s covenant people were sinful and unrepentant and participated in religious festivals, when God would not respond to their prayers, Isaiah 1:15; 8:17; 45:15; and 59:2. However God never forsakes His own, Deuteronomy 31:6, Isaiah 41:10, 17; 49:16; and Hebrews 13:5. God is always present to provide help, Psalm 46:1. Even during times of national sin and rebellion, repentant sinners can always come to God. See also Acts 17:27.

God’s desire is that all would come to repentance (for salvation), as recorded in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some think about slowness; but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Yet there will be a time when God’s judgment will come upon the earth, when His patience with humanity will be at an end as the wider context of 2 Peter 3:1-13 indicates. So, the seeking of the LORD while He may be found and calling upon Him while He is near must be seen in the greater context of God’s purposes and plans. God will one day bring judgement upon the earth when it will be too late for sinners to call upon Him. Sinners are to call upon God during the day of salvation, Isaiah 49:8; 2 Corinthians 6:2, which are the days before God in His wisdom and perfect timing will bring an end to the sinfulness of humanity. Therefore, “today” is always the day of salvation.
To seek the Lord and call upon Him is to recognize that He is a God who exists and who will respond to the repentant heart cry of those who cry out to Him. This must be done in faith. Hebrews 11:6 states, “Now without faith it is impossible to please him; for one who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he rewards those who seek him.” For all who will call upon Him (in faith) will be saved, Acts 2:21. So also 1 Peter 1:8-9, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; you do not see him, yet you believe in him, rejoicing greatly with joy unspeakable and filled with glory. 9 You are receiving the result of your faith—the salvation of your souls.” Earlier Isaiah had declared the message of God, as recorded in Isaiah 45:22, in the DASV, “Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.” It is significant that the NIV, NASB and the ESV have the word “turn” instead of the word “look” to begin this verse.

55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous his thoughts.
Let them return to the LORD,
and he will have mercy on him,
and to our God,
for he will abundantly pardon.

Isaiah calls upon those who are wicked and unrighteous to forsake their (evil) ways and thoughts and return to the LORD, Yahweh. The intent of Isaiah 55:7 is that those who are far from God because of their sinfulness, those who are called wicked and unrighteous, will receive pardon which is forgiveness from their sins. God who alone can forgive sins because of His great mercy upon them. This verse complements 55:6 and taken together these verses speak of God’s merciful offer of salvation by the pardoning of their sin. Isaiah began his book with a description of the covenant people of God, as recorded in Isaiah 1:4,

O sinful nation,
a people loaded down with iniquity,an offspring of evildoers,children who act corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have despised the Holy One of Israel;
they have turned their backs on him.

Isaiah spent much time during his ministry as a prophet from God warning his own people, the people of Judah, to repent of their sinful ways and turn to the Lord. This call for repentance, the forsaking of their evil ways and thoughts and turning to the Lord is essential for they cannot be truly saved unless they have repented of their sin. Their salvation, described in the Old and New Testaments is the same. It is by faith alone. However, inherit in this faith is that a true heart of repentance is evident. Faith without repentance is not saving faith. For an understanding of the Biblical meaning of repentance, see Except Ye Repent, CrossReach Publications, 2015 Edition, by Harry A. Ironside. An online edition of this book (earlier edition) is also available.

Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 55:6-7:

“6 Seek the LORD while he may be found
Repeatedly the Scriptures appeal to Israel and through her to all men to return to God, while there is yet time. “Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Psa. 95:7-8, also Isa. 61:2 and Lk. 4:19). We still live in “God’s acceptable year” which may one day come to an end.
7 Let the wicked man forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts

The wickedness of men is manifested in his thoughts and in his actions. These he must abandon as a precondition for repentance.

Let him return to the LORD

The idea of repentance, in Hebrew, “teshuvah,” is based on the word, “return” – shuv. It is the dominant note and heart cry of the prophets: forsake your evil ways and return to God.

For he will have mercy on him...He will abundantly pardon

The vision of a compassionate God, who is anxious for the prodigal to repent and return to Him, is at the very heart of the Scriptures. Nowhere is it more beautifully expressed than in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32). (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 430-431).

The words “abundantly pardon” in Isaiah 55:7 are very important theologically as they indicate the willingness and mercy of God to forgive the sins of His covenant people and all humanity in the sense of greatly forgiving or multiplying forgiveness. This multiplying of forgiveness is clearly stated in Matthew 18:21-22, “Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him, seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, seven times; but, seventy times seven.” The word “abundantly” in Isaiah 55:7 is the Hebrew word rabah, which has the meaning of “much,” “many” and especially “multiply.” For example, Isaiah had used the word “rabah” in 1:15: 9:3 and 23:16 to indicate many or multiplied. The word “pardon” in Isaiah 55:7 is the Hebrew word salah, which has the meaning of forgiveness. The prophet Jeremiah often used salah to describe forgiveness. See Jeremiah 5:1; 31:34; 33:8; 36:3 and 50:20. It occurs also in the Psalm 25:11 and 103:3, but perhaps the most emphatic use of salah, as forgive, occurs in Daniel 9:19 during that prophet’s impassioned prayer: “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act. Do not delay, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.” (bold added).

Without the willingness of the Lord in His great mercy to abundantly pardon the sins of humanity, none would be able to stand before Him or have a relationship with Him or indeed live with Him forever in heaven. To be abundantly pardoned by God is to stand before Him, justified by being declared righteous. It is receiving the imputed righteousness of the Savior so that God looks upon those He pardons as being righteous although they have no righteousness of their own. The righteousness of the Messiah imputed to those whom God declares as justified, is the spiritual reality of being “saved.” It is this wondrous and merciful act of God that makes God’s “thoughts and ways,” Isaiah 55:8, so immensely different than the those of humans and even of those who are God’s chosen covenant people.

55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," says the LORD.

9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

The LORD (Yahweh) gives His response to the mercy He has showered upon sinful humanity in the forgiveness of their sins. He demonstrates His merciful love to humans He has created “for” or because His thoughts and ways are not the same as those of humans who are not divine nor have an incorruptible nature. God is completely “other” in His being and actions in comparison to humanity. The revelation of the Servant, the Messiah, who is an atoning sacrifice for the sins of many, Isaiah 52-13-53:12, is the background for God’s forgiveness of sinful humanity based upon their faith and turning to Him. Humanity does not
understand forgiveness as God does. Humanity is not longsuffering, patient, loving and compassionate in the way that God demonstrates these attributes. Although humans are created in God’s image, Genesis 1:27, they are corruptible and incapable of divine logic, and actions. Isaiah 55:9 records just how much distance lies between God’s ways and thoughts and those of humans. This distance is incalculable and unfathomable: “as the heavens are higher than the earth.” This infinite and unimaginable distance describes the pitiful condition of the ways and thoughts of humans compared to the high and exalted attributes of God.

Victor Buksbazen comments:

“8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts
Man can never fathom the depths and the greatness of God, except to the extent to which He has revealed Himself to him, through His Word, especially through the incarnate Word, Christ. God is not only omnipotent and all wise, but also full of compassion and forgiveness, when man turns to Him in repentance.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than yours
In this striking figure the infinte transcendence of God over man is expressed. There just is no comparison between man’s thoughts and ways and God’s.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 431).

55:10-11 For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven,
and does not return there without watering the earth,
making it produce and sprout,
giving seed to the sower,
and bread to the eater;
11 so will my word be that goes forth out of my mouth;
it will not return to me empty,
but it will accomplish what I desire it to,
and it will succeed in the matter for which I sent it.

The prophet in Isaiah 55:10-11 records God’s second response and reason for His merciful act of abundantly pardoning the sins of His covenant people and humanity. God sends precipitation in the form of rain and snow to water the earth which makes the earth produce seed and then crops which are used by humans to make bread to assuage their hunger. God, who created humans to live on the earth, provides the means for them to drink and eat to sustain life. God compares this provision of the necessities of life to His word which proceeds from His mouth. God’s word will accomplish exactly what God desires it to accomplish and will not fail: “return to me empty.” Thomas Constable comments:

“There is a second reason sinners need to change their ways and thoughts, with the Lord's help, and that is because the Word of the Lord is absolutely dependable. All that God has said is reliable, including His promise of pardon and compassion (v. 7; cf. 53:10). God's Word is like the rain and snow, the gifts of God from heaven to earth (cf. v. 9).

"Rain" and "snow" are water in its two forms, as it normally comes from heaven to Palestine. Isaiah's use of both rain and snow may indicate the totality of God's blessing; every time He sends water from heaven, in whatever form, it brings blessing because it nourishes the earth. Both rain and snow achieve their purpose of bringing life, nourishment, and blessing to humanity (cf. Jer. 29:11; Mark 4:1-20; Heb. 6:7-8). Therefore, since God has promised compassion and forgiveness for those who seek Him, people can count on the fact that if they seek Him, this will be His response.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 282).
Included in the “matter” 55:11, that God sends forth His Word, are His covenants with His people including the everlasting covenant, 55:3; (referring to the new covenant) and all of the major covenants: Noahic: Genesis 6:18 and 9:9-17; Abrahamic: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-21; 26:2-5 and 28:10-17; Mosaic: Exodus Chapters 19-24; Priestly: Numbers 25:10-13; Davidic: 2 Samuel 7:8-16 and Psalms 72 to 89; and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27. Also, to this listing should be added all of God’s promises throughout the Scriptures. God has given His covenant people and all who believe in Him, including the body of Christ, the Church, so many wonderful and blessed promises which comprise a major part of God’s Word. His promises will not fail or cease to be active. They will be fulfilled as certainly as God exists for it is impossible for God to lie or fail in any “matter.” (bold intentional).

55:12 For you will go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break out in singing before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands.

Following the exalted words of God’s extraordinary promise of Isaiah 55:10-11, and the greater context of God’s words of comfort, Isaiah 40-41, the Servant Songs and God’s proclamations, Isaiah 42 to 53 and their follow-up, chapters 54-55, Isaiah records the inspired words given to Him from God that His covenant people will go out, from their captivity among the nations, and will be led forth, to Zion with peace. When they are travelling to Zion, the non-human objects of God’s created world will in a figurative and anthropomorphic way, perform human like actions of singing and clapping their hands. See also Isaiah 35:1-10; 40:9-11; 41:17-20; 42:10-11; 43:10-11; 44:1-5, 23; 49:13; 51:11; 52:7-10; and 54:10-13.

55:13 Instead of thorns, cypress trees will grow, and instead of briers, myrtle trees will sprout up. It will be a memorial for the LORD, for an everlasting sign that will never be cut off.

When the faithful remnant of God, are gathered from the nations of the world to travel to Zion they will witness the transformation of the natural world by its Creator. Thorns will be replaced by cypress trees and briers will be replaced with myrtle trees. This transformation of nature, the reversal of the curse on it due to the sin of Adam and Eve, will be both a memorial to God and His everlasting sign that will not be removed.

The content of Isaiah 55:12-13 is clearly descriptive of the last days, following the Tribulation and the beginning of the messianic kingdom and does not fit in any way with the return of the Jews who had been exiled in Babylon. Those who suggest that these words relate to the return of the Babylonian exiles are forced to make God’s promises in 55:13 as a misrepresentation and grossly exaggerated. The condition of the natural flora in Jerusalem during and following the return of the exiles from Babylon was not any different than when the exiles first went into captivity.

The beautiful and vibrant cypress trees and fragrant and refreshing myrtle trees are examples of the beauty that will be seen during the days of the messianic kingdom. Of particular interest to the student of the Scriptures is the mention of the myrtle tree. The myrtle tree was one of the trees specified for the making of booths used for the days of the feast of booths or Tabernacles, Nehemiah 8:13-18. This feast was noted for the presence of the Lord. The word tabernacle has the meaning of God’s dwelling (living) with or among His people. The word tabernacle is used in Revelation 21:3 describing the dwelling of God permanently with the redeemed. The myrtle tree is associated with the feast of tabernacles and is not insignificant that Zechariah saw the Angel of the Lord standing among the myrtle tress conversing with the LORD, Zechariah 1:7-21.
Thus, the myrtle tree is associated with God’s presence and it also is not insignificant that this specific tree is mentioned in Isaiah 55:13 as being one of the beautiful natural flora that God states will be for an everlasting sign that will never be cut off, which may indicate that this tree, among others will be planted and remain forever in the eternal state as a memorial to the presence of God. In the messianic kingdom this tree, among others will represent the beginning days of God’s kingdom to be ruled by His Son, who is the Servant, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ who is blessed forever. Thomas Constable comments on the everlasting sign of Isaiah 55:13:

“The replanting of productive, desirable trees and shrubs (representing all creation), in place of plants bearing the marks of the Fall and its curse, symbolizes the rejuvenation of creation. This transformation, and behind it the redemption accomplished by the Servant, would be a memorial that would honor Yahweh. It would be an everlasting sign of God’s salvation that would remain forever.

Isaiah mentioned three things that would be everlasting in chapters 54 and 55: His lovingkindness (Heb. hesed, 54:8), His covenant with His people (55:3), and this sign. This sign recalls the sign of the child to come (7:14). As that sign would be an immediate and physical proof that Messiah would come, so this sign would be the same kind of proof that the Servant had come.

The transformation of the world following the lifting of the curse will be observable. While this description is obviously figurative—hills do not shout for joy, and trees do not clap their hands literally—it represents a real change in nature, not just the joy that will pervade all creation.

This is a description of millennial conditions on the earth after Jesus Christ returns to the earth to rule and reign (cf. 35:1-2; 41:18-19; 44:3). If it were not so, there would be no everlasting sign. As the Passover was a sign to the Israelites of God's first redemption of them from Egyptian bondage, the transformed earth and people will be a sign to all God's people of His second redemption of them from Satan's bondage.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 283).

David L. Cooper adds his comments regarding Isaiah 55:10-13

“The Word of God is sure. It is pure—as silver refined seven times (Ps. 12). The Word of God is backed up by all the power of Omnipotence. The prophet, therefore, in 55:10-13 assured his auditors that the Word shall accomplish that whereunto God has sent it. He therefore sees the fulfillment of the various predictions concerning Israel's final deliverance, the lifting of the curse, and the establishment of a reign of righteousness upon the earth. These thoughts are especially apparent in verses 12-13. In connection with these promises see Isaiah 65:17-25.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – February 1946).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 55:
55:1-5 The Call of God to Redemption
   55:1-2 Redemption offered at no cost
   55:3 Davidic Covenant Confirmed
   55:4 Davidic Commander Commissioned
   55:5 Redeemed People Glorified

55:6-13 The Call of God for Repentance
   55:6-7 God’s Abundant Pardon
   55:8-9 God’s Amazing Perspective
   55:10-11 God’s Awesome Purpose
   55:12-13 God’s Abounding Preservation
9. God’s Promises of Salvation and Blessings to His People and Others: 56:1-8

Although many scholarly works on Isaiah place Isaiah chapter 56 as the beginning chapter of the final major literary unit of the writings of Isaiah comprising chapters 56-66, this study of Isaiah places chapter 56 as the second last chapter of the larger unit of chapters 49 to 57. See introduction to this larger unit, chapters 49-57 at the beginning of the study for chapter 49 for the reasons why this outline has been adopted. As mentioned previously, there is no absolute or authorized “outline” for any Biblical book so students of Scripture can with careful study and reasoning establish an outline that best suits the content of a particular passage or entire book of Scripture.

In chapter 55 Isaiah records a prophecy about the Davidic leader and commander, the Messiah who will be appointed by God as a witness to the nations, 55:4. The inhabitants of the nations will be summoned to come to join the covenant people of God in the messianic kingdom, 55:5. The Lord, as recorded in the first eight verses of chapter 56, describes the identity of these inhabitants and the basis upon which they will become redeemed members of the kingdom.

Isaiah 56:1-8 generally consists of a description of the obedient who are accepted into God’s kingdom because they obey Him and keep His covenant, including Sabbath observances. Isaiah begins this section with a declaration by the LORD of required right and just actions for His accompany salvation will soon come and His righteousness is ready to be revealed. The LORD states that blessed are those who act justly and do what is right and keeps the Sabbath and keep their hands from doing any evil vss. 1-2. The prophet next, vs. 3 describes the objection of the foreigner and the eunuch who have asked, will they be accepted as God’s people? The LORD states that eunuchs will be accepted by keeping God’s covenant and His Sabbath, and they will receive a name better than that have bearing children, they will have an everlasting name, and they will not be cut off, vss. 4-5. Foreigners, (Gentiles) also, like the eunuchs, will be accepted by keeping God’s covenant and His Sabbath, vs. 6. They will be brought to God’s holy mountain where they will be full of joy in God’s house of prayer. God will gather them from the nations to His holy mountain along side of the dispersed of Israel, vss. 7-8.

56:1-2 This is what the LORD says,

"Be just, and do what is right,
for my salvation will come soon,
and my righteousness is ready to be revealed.

Blessed is the one who does this,
the one who holds it tight,
who keeps the Sabbath and does not defile it,
and keeps his hand from doing any evil."

As there are no “chapter” divisions or section breaks in the oldest or any ancient manuscripts of the writings of Isaiah, the contents of chapter 56 follows naturally from that of chapter 55. Chapter 56 expands upon the revelation of chapter 55, specifically of verse 55:4 which declares that God will make the Davidic leader and commander as a witness to the peoples (Gentiles). It is not as some may assume, only a message for the faithful remnant of God, His covenant people who have survived the troubles of the Tribulation and are being gathered from the nations to populate the emerging messianic kingdom. The message of Isaiah 56:1-8 certainly applies to God’s covenant people but it has particular importance to the Gentiles and a unique group called eunuchs.
The declaration, “This is what the LORD says” occurs repeatedly in the writing of Isaiah, beginning from, 1:2, “for the LORD has spoken.” Following 56:1, this statement is repeated in 56:4; 65:8, 13; 66:1 and 12. Isaiah uses this statement to emphasize the authority of the LORD, Yahweh in declaring a truth He wants to ensure that the audience of Isaiah will hear and obey. In this instance, it is a critically important message about His salvation and righteousness. To all who has read or would have heard the voice of the prophet, the LORD is commanding them to be obedient to Him through actions of justice and righteousness, stated in 56:1 as “be just and do what is right.” The paring of justice and righteousness often occurs in Isaiah. See Isaiah 1:17, 21, 27; 5:7; 9:7; 10:2; 16:5; 28:17; 32:1, 16; 33:5; 53:11; 56:1; 58:2, 59:9 and 14. The Messiah will establish His coming kingdom and uphold it with justice and righteousness, Isaiah 9:7. God expects that His covenant people and all who will be obedient to His covenant, will follow the example of their Messiah by just and right behavior. They are to do this because His salvation will soon come upon them and His righteousness is ready to be revealed. It is critical theologically to understand that God is not demanding righteous and just acts as a prerequisite of salvation, but He is saying that those who act this way are demonstrating the communal affects, that is proper behavior to each other and themselves, that the coming salvation and righteousness that the LORD alone can provide.

The timing of the coming righteousness and salvation is not revealed but it is consistent with a “telescoped viewpoint” of many prophetic passages in the Old Testament. It can therefore be applied to the first and second advents of the Messiah. In His first advent, the Messiah accomplished the work of righteousness and salvation and in His second advent, He will establish a kingdom completely permeated with these divine truths.

Those described in 56:2, as practicing just and right behavior are called blessed. They are those who receive God’s blessings and are joyful and happy in their relationship with God. They firmly take hold of justice and righteousness by practicing this behavior, and make proof of it by keeping, without defiling, the requirements of the Sabbath and demonstrate that their outward behavior is righteous as an indication of inward purity. The effects upon them of the Lord’s righteousness and salvation is evidenced by their obedience to all of God’s requirements stated in the “law.” The reference to keeping the Sabbath and behaving righteously represent the keeping of all requirements of the law of God. See Exodus 31:12-17.

The problem, that all who study Scripture know for certain, is that without the inward work of God in their lives including the imputation of righteousness and the appropriation of salvation, no one could faithfully and perfectly keep all the requirement of the law. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between the salvific and righteous work of God “in” the lives of all who seek Him and their acceptable obedience to Him. The same is true whether a person lived in Isaiah’s day or in the present day. No one can exhibit righteous and just behavior that is acceptable to God, without their first being an acceptance by faith of God’s free offer of salvation that was wrought by the atoning sacrifice of His Son, the Servant, the Messiah which was described by Isaiah in 52:13-53:12.

56:3 Do not let a foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD, say,
   "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people,"
   nor let the eunuch say,
   "Look, I am just a withered tree."

The “law” stated in the Pentateuch forbade the inclusion of specified foreigners and eunuchs from the inclusive worship of the Lord by the covenant people of God, expressed by Biblical scholars as Israel’s cultic worship. See for example, Exodus 12:43 and Deuteronomy 23:1-8. However, the worship from many non-Israelites was accepted by God, Exodus 12:48-49 and Numbers 15:14-16. Rahab and Ruth who were non-
Israelites were also accepted, as were others, 1 Kings 8:41-43. Ultimately, the inclusion of foreigners and eunuchs in participating in worshiping the Lord was based on their observance of the law and keeping the covenant as Isaiah 56:4 plainly states. Biblical commentators have expressed differing viewpoints on the reasons God excluded some foreigners and eunuchs while accepting others. Thomas Constable offers this explanation:

“In view of the priority of heartfelt obedience over mere ritual observance of the Law, the foreigner and eunuch, for example, should not feel hopeless, i.e., considering themselves lifeless or fruitless. All who genuinely seek the Lord (55:6) would find acceptance by Him, even though they might not qualify for participation in the cultic worship of Israel (cf. Exod. 12:48-49).

God's exclusion of foreigners and eunuchs from Israel's public worship (Deut. 23:1-8) was not because these types of people were intrinsically evil and therefore unacceptable to Him. God excluded foreigners because He wanted to teach His people that opposition to His will and His people has abiding consequences. He excluded eunuchs because He wanted His people to learn that the destruction of sexual organs that He created has consequences. These consequences affected their worship of the Holy One of Israel, as well as their public life and their private life.

Ruth and the Ethiopian eunuch are the proof that God accepts people on the basis of their faith in Him—in spite of their ancestry or personal history. Non-Israelites and disabled Israelites could enjoy the blessings of God's salvation (personal salvation and millennial blessings) along with normal believing Israelites.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 286).

Victor Buksbazen, suggests:

“According to Deuteronomy 23:1 a person who has been physically emasculated could not be a member of the congregation of Israel.

The same prohibition also applies to the Ammonites and Moabites because of their hostile treatment of the Israelites when they were wandering through their territories on their way back from Egypt to the Promised Land (Dt. 23:4). A noticeable exception was Ruth the Moabitess, the ancestor of King David. However, it is possible that the prohibition applied only to men and not to women.

In any case the two groups developed a natural sense of inferiority. In the case of the Jewish eunuchs, the prophet refers to involuntary emasculation inflicted on them by their pagan captors when they selected them for service in their harems.

“The foreigners” in this verse apparently refers to those Gentiles who were attracted to the worship of Jehovah and became proselytes adhering strictly to the ritual and ethical ordinances of Israel, following justice and righteousness, also observing the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was singled out by the prophet, because it is a visible profession of Jehovah as Creator and Lord of their lives.” [Note 1: For the relationship of the Sabbath to the Lord’s Day, we recommend our book, The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel published by Spearhead Press, Collingwood, N. J.] (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, comment: page 434 and note: page 437).

In the millennial kingdom, those who are foreigners will certainly have a place in the society and in the worship of the Messiah, Isaiah 60:3-14 and 61:1-11. David L. Cooper comments:

“In 56:3-8 God holds out special promises to both eunuchs and foreigners who join themselves unto the Lord. A man who is a eunuch, viewed from the natural standpoint, has an occasion to be discouraged and to lose all hope. On the contrary, the Lord urges them to take heart and to look forward to the great blessings, which He
has for them in the future. In conveying to them some idea of the blessedness in store for them, He declared that he would give them a name that is far better than sons and daughters, "an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off." Moreover, He made special promises to the foreigners that join themselves unto Jehovah. These were known in New Testament days as proselytes. Solomon, at the dedication of the Temple, being led by the Spirit, showed that any Gentile who had a longing for Jehovah and who desired to do His will might become a proselyte to the Jewish faith and thus receive the blessings that come to true worshipers of God. Thus all foreigners who have joined themselves to the Jewish people with an idea of worshiping the true God are urged in these verses to observe the word, which they have, to live up to the light which they have received, and are assured that they will be acceptable to the Almighty.

In this connection the Lord promised that the Gentiles who thus join themselves to Israel shall worship in the great millennial Temple, which shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. In verse 8 the prophet makes the prediction that God will gather to Israel people other than the Jews, who will worship and serve God acceptably.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – February 1946).

Isaiah’s statement in 56:3, of those eunuchs who lament their possible non-acceptance by the Lord in the participation of worship, because they state, “I am just a withered tree,” is most likely a comment about their inability to father children. It is an expression of their shame in not having a family legacy and its accompanying sense of worthlessness. God will respond to their feelings in 56:4. See discussion on this point by Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 533.

56:4-5 For this is what the LORD says:
   To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
   and choose the things that please me,
   and hold on tight to my covenant,
   to them I will give in my house and within my walls
   a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters.
   I will give them an everlasting name
   that will not be cut off.

In Isaiah 56:4-5, God responds to the feelings of exclusion from His people and the worthlessness felt by the eunuchs stated in 56:3. Isaiah begins the response of God with the authoritative “For this is what the LORD says.” Isaiah also began his short discussion, 56:1-8, with the same authoritative declaration, 56:1. To repeat this declaration in such a short space is an indication of the importance of the message to the eunuchs who needed to have this message from God as an indication of His assurance, that their obedience to the law, represented by keeping God’s Sabbaths, and their choice of doing things that pleased God and their rightful obedience, stated as holding on tight to God’s covenant was meaningful to God. As a result, God would bless them with a confirmed place within His walls (the temple on Mount Zion). God would also give them a memorial and a name that would be seen as better than having children. God would ensure that the name He would give them would be everlasting and this name would never be “cut off.” God’s mention that the name He would give them which would not be “cut off” may have been intended as a response to the shame they felt for being emasculated by their pagan masters who often placed them in servitude among the master’s harem. The timing of this promise of blessings would certainly apply to the years of the messianic kingdom as David L. Cooper suggests. However, eunuchs, such as the one from Ethiopia, as recorded in Acts 8:26-40, can today, as during the times of the early church become members of the body of Christ, the church by having faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The exclusion of eunuchs, as stated in Deuteronomy 23:1 may have been only applicable during the days of the mosaic covenant and this exclusion, like so many others, came to an end when Christ, as the believer’s great High Priest, mediated a better covenant, Hebrews 8:1-13 and 9:1-
28. God specifically mentioned three aspects of faithful activity by the eunuchs that pleased Him and led to His declaration of the prominence and permanence He would assign to them.

The first aspect was “who keep my Sabbaths.” The keeping of God’s Sabbaths was more than mere ritualistic observance of a set of rules. The Sabbath was of particular sacredness to God. The putting aside of daily routines and work to worship God and contemplate on His word was a demonstration of a deep heartfelt devotion to Him. It was more than a duty, it was genuine devotion of the kind that God desired from His covenant people that was above all other adherences to His law. It indicated that the worshiper had faith in Him and trusted in Him for daily guidance, which was something that the spiritual and royal leadership of the people most often failed to demonstrate.

God placed such a high regard on keeping His Sabbath, that He placed it prominently, fourth, on the list of the ten commandments, Exodus 20:8-11. God’s high regard for not keeping the Sabbath was demonstrated in the issuance of the death penalty, as recorded in Exodus 31:15 and Numbers 15:32-36. The Sabbath was called “holy,” Exodus 16:23; 20:11. No work was to be undertaken for it was a day that the Lord set aside as a reminder that He rested on the seventh day after six days of creative work, and the Lord blessed it and made it a holy day, Exodus 20:11. It was set aside as a holy day Deuteronomy 5:12, and also a day of remembrance of the Lord’s deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt, Deuteronomy 5:15. Isaiah later recorded this declaration from the Lord for those who keep His Sabbath as a holy day, Isaiah 58:13-14:

13 If you keep your foot from violating the Sabbath,
    from doing your pleasure on my holy day;
    but call the Sabbath a delight,
    and the holy day of the LORD honorable,
    and if you honor it,
        not going your own ways,
        or pursuing your own pleasure,
        or speaking your own idle words,
14 then you will delight yourself in the LORD,
    and I will make you ride on the high places of the earth,
    and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father."
        for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.

The prophet Ezekiel also declared God’s intentions for the Sabbath, Ezekiel 20:12, “I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, so that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.” The keeping and observance of the Sabbath day represented the keeping of the entire “law” as an outward demonstration of the inward reality that those who keep His Sabbaths are those who have faith in God and follow Him with a heart devoted to Him. It is significant that God’s mentions the keeping of the Sabbath first in the listing of the things the eunuchs were doing that pleased Him and brought about God’s rewarding them with blessing and an everlasting name.

The second aspect of the obedience of the eunuchs, mentioned in Isaiah 56:4 is “and choose the things that please me,” which is better stated as “choosing things which I desire.” This represents a continual decision to seek what pleases the Lord and then observing it. Proverbs 21:3 states, “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.” The prophet Hosea recorded a similar message in Hosea 6:6-7, as did Isaiah in chapter 1:10-20. See also 1 Samuel 15:22; Proverbs 15:8; and Micah 6:6-8. The things that God desires and what pleases Him is obedience to Him and His word. The apostle John stated the words of Jesus, as recorded in John 14:23, “If someone loves me, he will obey my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our residence with him.”
The third aspect of the obedience of the eunuchs, mentioned in Isaiah 56:4 is to “hold on tight to my covenant.” Other English Bible versions have “hold fast” to His covenant. This is an act of obedience to the requirements of the mosaic covenant which demonstrates that the eunuchs kept a strong hold onto their relationship with God. This third aspect can be understood as a summary of the first two described in Isaiah 56:4 but also conveys a much more intimate desire to only do the things that the Lord commands to the exclusion of any self-will or self-direction. Moses stated these words of God in Exodus 19:5-6, “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant then you will be my special possession among all peoples. For although all the earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you will speak to the Israelites.” King David proclaimed, as recorded in Psalm 103:17-18:

“17 But the loyal love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to their children's children; 18 to those who keep his covenant, and who remember to do his precepts.”

The eunuchs, who steadfastly keep the Lord’s covenant, will have an everlasting name within the house and walls of the Lord, Isaiah 56:5, and will have a memorial which shall be better to them than having the legacy of children. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“They were not to consider themselves “as dried up trees.” Because of their devoted service to the LORD, they shall have a more lasting memorial (yad veshem, literally, “a hand and a name”) than sons and daughters. 2” [Note 2: It is interesting to note that the Mt. Zion memorial to the six million Jewish victims of Hitler is known as “Yad va-shem,” literally “a hand and a name” (Isa. 56:7), a common expression for a lasting memorial. (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, comment: page 434 and note: page 437).

56:6-7 Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not defile it, and holds on tight to my covenant; 7 I will bring them to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

The language of the prophet regarding the obedience and reward of the foreigners to the LORD in Isaiah 56:6-7, is similar to that of 56:4-5 regarding the eunuch’s obedience and reward. There are however more aspects stated regarding the obedience of foreigners to the Lord in 56:6-7 than of the eunuch’s obedience to the Lord as recorded in 56:4-5. The notes for Isaiah 56:3 give the relevant Scriptural passages regarding the exclusion of selected foreigners from the inclusive (cultic) worship of God’s covenant people and the verses that allow many foreigners, those who are obedient to God access into this worship. God gave the following directive to His Servant, the Messiah, "It is too insignificant that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the survivors of Israel. I will also make you a light to the nations, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." 49:6. Isaiah often spoke of these foreigners (the nations) who would have salvation brought to them and they would be brought to Zion: 2:2-4; 11:10; 14:1-2; 25:6; 42:6;
45:20-25; 49:6, 22-23; 52:10; 52:15; 57:13; 60:1-14; 61:11; 62:2; and 66:12-23. The ultimate fulfillment of time when the nations will know the salvation of the LORD will be during the years of the messianic kingdom. But prior to that time, the Messiah will be gathering many “foreigners” from the nations to Himself.

Although the people of Israel were and still are the chosen people of God, they do not hold an inclusive right to fellowship with God. God “wants all people to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth,” 1 Timothy 2:4. Those who are “foreign” to the covenant people of God can be included in those who have a right to live in God’s holy mountain and have full participation in the worship of God, in His house which He calls His house of prayer, Isaiah 56:7.

Victor Buksbazen comments:

“King Solomon in his dedicatory prayer of the Temple (1 Ki. 8:41-43) looked forward to the day when foreigners from distant lands would come to worship the LORD on Mt. Zion. Now the prophet explicitly states the God’s Holy Temple will be a universal house of prayer for all peoples. Jesus quoted those words when He drove out the merchants from the Temple (see also Mt. 21:13 and Lk. 19:46).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 435).

There are four aspects to the obedience of the foreigners as stated in Isaiah 56:6. First, they will those who “join themselves to the LORD to serve him.” Those who join themselves to the LORD acknowledge His sovereignty in their lives and willingly turn from pursuing their own way, so they can serve Him in purity and righteousness. Second, they so love the Lord’s name that they willingly become his servants. This is an outward demonstration of their inward devotion to Him as depicted by Isaiah as loving the name of the LORD. To be willing to serve The LORD implies that these foreigners have renounced their allegiance to serving any other master and will henceforth only serve God. Scripture makes it plain that it is impossible to serve two masters, Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13. The love of the foreigner for the name of the LORD therefore is an undivided and total love unencumbered with doubts as to whom they should obey. Third, as did the eunuchs, these foreigners keep the Sabbath and do not defile it. It is an act of pure devotion for these foreigners to keep the requirements of the Sabbath for they were not born into an Israelite family and did not grow up with the Torah taught to them from their earliest days. Foreigners would have to adapt to the uniqueness of Sabbath obedience which would require a stark change in their behaviour. To do so willingly speaks of their complete and total love to the LORD. Fourth, and as did the eunuchs, these foreigners held on tight, held fast, to the mosaic covenant and obeyed it to their utmost ability. They would need to have first learned the many religious requirements (cultic worship) that was part of holding fast to the mosaic covenant and then faithfully, as they were able, fulfill these requirements. It was not an easy task, and as observed above in the notes for Isaiah 56:2, no one could faithfully and perfectly keep all the requirement of the law. It was only the forgiveness of God, for the sins of both God’s covenant people and foreigners, wrought by the atoning sacrifice of His Son, the Servant, as recorded in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, that anyone could enjoy righteous fellowship with God and have a standing in His presence.

Isaiah 56:7 records the three-fold response by the LORD to the obedience of these foreigners. The first response is the promise that these foreigners would be brought to God’s holy mountain. Isaiah often spoke of Mount Zion as God’s holy mountain, 11:9, 27:13; 56:7, 13; 65:11, 25; and 66:20. See also Psalm 2:6, 15:1; 48:1; Joel 2:1, 3:17; Obadiah 1:17; and Zechariah 8:3. This ancient mountain, Moriah, with its meaning of “the place where Yahweh provides”, was first called Zion which has the meaning “a stronghold” and “a fortress” and also “a dry place.” It is very significant to God’s purposes, that David captured this mountain stronghold, 2 Samuel 5:7. It was the place where Abraham was instructed to take his “promised son” Isaac to
be tested by God and where Abraham passed the test. It is a very sacred place to God. The remnant of the Lord are mentioned in specific relationship to Jerusalem and Zion, 2 Kings 19:31.

The second response from God stated in Isaiah 56:7 is that He would “make them joyful in my house of prayer.” The temple, also called house, as a place of prayer, is mentioned many times in the Scriptures. See 1 Kings 8:29, 38; 9:3; 19:14; 2 Chronicles 6:20, 29 7:12; 20:5-13; Isaiah 37:14; 56:7; Luke 2:37 and Acts 3:1. Jesus, when He drove out the money changers and the merchants from the temple, quoted this phrase from Isaiah 56:7 as a Scriptural warrant for His actions. See Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17 and Luke 19:46. God’s blessings on the obedient and faithful foreigners is to make them joyful in His house of prayer. There are no prescribed or ritualistic prayers that are mentioned in the Scriptures that must be made within the temple, perhaps with the notable exception of the customary citing of the Psalms of accent, Psalms 120-136 during the three prescribed annual feasts, of unleavened bread, weeks (Pentecost), and booths (tabernacles), that all males of Israel were commanded by God to attend, Exodus 23:14-17; 34:22-24 and Deuteronomy 16:16-17. See notes in the NASB John MacArthur Study Bible, page 844.

God’s intention was that those who enter His house, the temple would do so in the attitude of prayer in joyful and prayerful contemplation of the creator of the sovereign of the heavens and the earth. The house of God, specifically the tabernacle and the first temple were designated as the place of God’s presence and those devoted to Him went to the house of God to meet Him with hearts full of joy. Those who were foreigners were thus granted the same awesome privilege as the covenant people of God to enter into His presence in His house. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 535-536 for a more detailed commentary on this issue.

The third response from God stated in Isaiah 56:7 regarding His blessings upon obedient and faithful foreigners is that He would accept their burnt offerings and their sacrifices on His altar. In this third response, God was fully incorporating foreigners into the cultic worship of His covenant people. They were not just allowed to pray along side of the Israelites in the temple but were to take an inclusive participation in the ritualistic practice of offering burnt offerings and sacrifices to God. The complete fulfillment of this promise to foreigners will come in the future messianic kingdom when “my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples,” Isaiah 56:7.

56:8 The sovereign LORD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, says, "I will gather others to them, besides those who are already gathered."

Isaiah completes this short section, 56:1-8 by declaring the words of God regarding the future days when His covenant people, the faithful remnant will be dispersed to all nations during the distressful days of the Tribulation period. God is described by the prophet as the LORD, “who gathers the dispersed of Israel.” This is a common theme of Isaiah regarding these far future days. For example, as recorded in Isaiah 11:12, the prophet states the promise of the Lord:

“Then he will set up a signal flag for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”

See also Isaiah 27:12; 40:11; 43:5; 49:5, 18; 54:7; and 60:4. In God’s final gathering, all nations and tongues will be gathered to Him, Isaiah 66:18. The Lord promises that along with the dispersed of Israel, foreigners who are obedient and faithful to Him, Isaiah 56:3,6-7 will also be gathered from the nations of the earth. As
mentioned above this will be completely fulfilled during the days of the messianic kingdom. However, in the nearer future, during the church age, this gathering will be seen as a mystery, as Thomas Constable explains:

“With an unusually strong declaration (cf. 1:24), sovereign Yahweh affirmed that He would gather many other Gentiles to Himself along with the Israelites (cf. 19:25; 49:6-7; 51:5; 55:5; John 10:16). He would not save only Israelites, but Gentiles as well. The new revelation, or mystery, concerning the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the church (Eph. 2—3), was not that God would save Gentiles as well as Jews. It was that in the church He would deal with Jews and Gentiles on the same basis. Jews would have no advantage over Gentiles as they did previously.

Now both types of people could come into relationship with God directly through faith in Christ. Formerly Gentiles came into relationship with God indirectly—through Israel—through faith in Yahweh. The Lord was not referring to the Babylonian exile or to geographical dispersal, but to those scattered from Himself.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 287).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 56:1-8:
56:1-2 The Promise of Salvation
56:3 The Remarks of Outsiders
56:4-5 The Rewards to Obedient Eunuchs
56:6-7 The Rewards to Obedient Foreigners
56:8 The Promise of Salvation

10. God judgment and ultimate forgiveness for iniquity: 56:9-57:21

The section, Isaiah 56:9 to 57:12 completes the larger unit of Isaiah chapters 40-57. This section consists of three paragraphs: 56:9-57:2: Wicked Leaders; 57:3-13: Wicked Worship; and 57:14-21: The Contrite Restored and the Wicked Removed. This section is notable for its recurring words such as “way,” and “peace.” See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 539 and 540 for a discussion on the several structural factors that are suggestive of Isaiah’s intentional unity of this section.

Isaiah 56:9-57:2: Wicked Leaders and the Righteous Removed

These verses describe the leaders and protectors of God’s covenant people who are not obedient to God’s covenant nor keep His observances and they by inference will not be invited to participate in worship on God’s holy mountain. Isaiah had previously spoken of others, Gentiles from all nations, who would be participants in the messianic kingdom: Isaiah 2:2-3; 11:9-10; 14:1-2; 18:7; 19:18-25; 25:3-7; 26:9; 29:19; 42:6; 45:22-24; 49:6; 22-23; 52:10, 13-15; 53:1-12; 55:4-5. The prophet would again speak of them in Chapters 60-62 and 66.

This passage generally consists of a judgment upon the disobedient (the blind watchmen, silent watchdogs and greedy shepherds (kings) of Judah for their actions. The prophet in 56:9, records a message about devouring animals (enemy nations who attack Judah) and in 56:10, the message is about the blind watchmen and silent watchdogs of Judah who cannot keep watch over their own people. The prophet declares in 56:11 that these watchdogs have voracious appetites and the shepherds are greedy and have no understanding and have turned (away from God) to their own way. In 56:12 the prophet declares that these shepherds and watchmen who are described in 56:10-11, get drunk and have no wisdom about the future. In contrast to the wicked, 57:1-2, describes the death of the righteous who are taken away to spare them from the certainty of evil which will come upon the nation.
David L. Cooper keeps to his consistent commentary on the end-times meaning of these and preceding sections in his comments on 56-9-57:2:

“Israel's Pitiful Plight
In the paragraph consisting of 56:9-12 Israel is represented as a flock of sheep. The leaders are thought of as the watchmen, who are declared to be blind and to be without knowledge. Then, in the same breath, the prophet compares them to dumb dogs, that cannot bark and that lie around, dreaming and loving to slumber. There is therefore no one to take care of and to protect the flock. The prophet, seeing this situation, spoke to the beasts of the field and called them to come and to devour the nation. Beasts when used symbolically always signify civil governments. This position is seen in Daniel 7:1-14. The nations are therefore invited by the prophet to come and to destroy the flock of Israel. According to parallel passages the nations will, in the time of the end, come to devour Israel. At the conclusion of the Tribulation, all of the armies of the nations will be gathered together against Jerusalem to battle. But in the final crisis Jehovah, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, will come and bring the necessary deliverance.

In verses 11 and 12 of this passage the prophet further described the leaders of Israel, declaring that they are greedy dogs and can never get enough. He compared them to shepherds that could not understand and that turn aside always to their own interests. They constantly are seeking to engage in the gratification of their fleshly lusts. These are terrible indictments brought against the leaders of Israel. While this description does represent the leaders as a whole, we have reason to believe from other passages that there are or will be some notable exceptions to this rule.

If Isaiah were present today and were speaking to the professing church and the ministers of the Word, there is no doubt concerning his bringing even graver charges against them than he does against the Jewish leaders. Unfortunately, many ministers do not seem to realize the grave responsibilities which are resting upon them because of their position. Men who are called into the ministry should give themselves to their ministry, acting honestly and conscientiously before God all the time and working in the interest and behalf of the people to whom they minister.

The Disappearance of the Righteous from the Earth
As noted before, the disappearance of the righteous from the earth by natural as well as by foul methods, together with the removal of the church by the rapture, is set forth in 57:1,2. God has not ordained that His people who believe in Him should remain here and pass through the horrors of the great tribulation Period. In fact, He has appointed us not unto wrath but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. This vision therefore of the removal of the godly from the earth is set forth in this marvelous passage.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly, February 1946).

56:9 All you animals of the field, come to devour,
yes, all you beasts in the forest.

In the context of 56:9-57:21, the Lord is bringing judgment upon the wickedness of the Jewish leaders. This judgment is described in 56:9 prior to the description of the wickedness of the Jewish leaders. The Lord declares that animals of the field and beasts in the forest will come to devour. This depiction of animals who will devour is plainly understood as the nations that will come against the Jewish people. This is evident from a parallel passage recorded in Jeremiah 15:3-4. See also Jeremiah 12:9; Ezekiel 5:17; 34:1-10 and Hosea 13:1-16. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The beasts of the field and the forest are the foreign oppressors of Israel, abandoned by her own leaders and about to become the prey of her rapacious neighbours, “the beasts of the fields.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 436).
The timing of when foreign nations will “come to devour” the nation is not stated by Isaiah. The history of the Jewish people from the time of Isaiah to the present day is sadly sprinkled with its conquest by foreign nations and death to the Jews by tyrants. The horrific slaughter of six million Jews at the hands of the Nazi regime during the second world war is a nefarious example of the nations that have devoured the Jews. See comment by Victor Buksbazen under notes for 56:5. The last of these horrific times will be during the Tribulation when the covenant people of God will face the wrath of Satan who will use everything in his power to destroy them. However, as with many times in the past, all will not be lost, and God will preserve to Himself a faithful remnant, whom God will gather from the nations to worship Him in Zion, when the Messiah returns to defeat His enemies, those who have devoured the Jews and establish His earthly kingdom.

56:10 Their watchmen are blind,  
they are all without knowledge;  
they are all silent watchdogs, who cannot bark;  
dreaming and lying down,  
how they love to sleep.

The reasons for the judgment of God upon His covenant people, 56:9, are described beginning in 56:10. Their watchmen, Hebrew saphah, instead of fulfilling their task of watching out for danger, are described as blind, without knowledge, like silent watchdogs, spending their days dreaming and lying down and like those who love to sleep. See also Jeremiah 6:16-19. The watchmen were the priests, prophets and kings that have been called by God to protect His people from false teaching, and dangerous invasive philosophies as well as physical danger. They were to hold fast to God’s Word and His covenant and ensure that the worship of God’s people was in strict accordance with God’s law. Most failed miserably in their assigned calling as Jeremiah also declared in Jeremiah chapter 23. There were for sure, a few faithful “watchmen” such as the prophet Ezekiel, see Ezekiel 3:16-27; and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and others. But the majority were not true to their calling and led the people of God into gross immorality and other sinful practices. For example, the sins of king Manasseh, see 2 Kings 21:1-18; 23:26 and Jeremiah 15:3-4, were particularly objectionable to God. Isaiah had previously warned against the blindness of those who were “seers,” 29:9-16. Jeremiah also declared God’s judgment upon the false prophets and priests, Jeremiah 14:13-18. Again, Victor Buksbazen aptly comments:

“His watchmen are all blind and ignorant  
They are dumb dogs, which cannot bark  
Just as Jeremiah did (later ch. 23), so our prophet denounces in scathing terms Israel’s watchmen of his own day. They were blind and ignorant of what ailed their people and what was happening around them. Instead of being seers and prophets, they were dumb dogs, which cannot bark to warn people.

They rave, they lie down and love to slumber  
There is a play on words in the Hebrew text: the prophet declares that the leaders of Israel, instead of being “chozim” – “seers,” are “hozim” – “ravers and babblers”; lazy dogs which love to slumber when they should be alert and watchful.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 436).

56:11 Yes, the dogs have big appetites;  
they can never get enough.  
These are shepherds who have no understanding;  
they have all turned to their own way,  
every last one of them is out for his own personal gain.
The watchmen 56:10, are described in 56:11 as dogs with such voracious appetites that they are never satisfied. The words “big appetites” are similar to the words in Isaiah 5:14 which speaks of Sheol, “Therefore Sheol has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without limit.” See comments by Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 543. In the KJV, NKJV and NASB, the words “big appetites” are translated as “greedy” and is literally, “strong of soul/appetite.” The leaders, the kings and prophets, of the Jewish people are interested only in their own gain which can never be satisfied. They have totally neglected the needs of those who are in their care and under their protection. The shepherds described in 56:11 are most likely referring to first, kings who have been assigned the royal oversight of the people. See 2 Samuel 5:2; and 1 Chronicles 11:2; to judges before there were kings, 1 Chronicles 17:6; and even to King Cyrus, Isaiah 44:28. Second, they refer to others such as prophets, Jeremiah 17:16. See related passages regarding God’s condemnation of these shepherds who fail to look after their flock, Jeremiah 10:21; 12:10 (re: God’s vineyard); 22:22; 23:1-40; 25:34-38; 50:6; Ezekiel 34:1-10; Zechariah 10:1-3; and 11:1-17.

These shepherds are also described in Isaiah 56:11 as having no understanding of the calling of God upon them to tend His people, as they have turned to their own “way.” They are only interested in their own personal gain without regard for the plight of God’s covenant people. The word “way,” is the Hebrew “derek” and it also occurs in 57:10, 14, 17 and 18 thus making it a major theme of this section. The Hebrew word “derek” (way) is a common word used by Isaiah in his prophetic writings and is used most significantly in Isaiah 53:6:

All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned everyone to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all.

To turn to one’s own “way” is to turn away from God and walk in rebellion against Him. Those who were shepherds and were entrusted to the care of God’s people (flock), had made a willful decision to care only for themselves and walk in the “way” they so desired for their own personal gain. In Isaiah 53:6, it is the sheep who have turned to their own way and in 56:11 it is the shepherds who have done this. Thus, no one is exempt from this charge, for all have rebelled against God, Romans 3:23, and have turned away from following His “way,” which is the way of righteousness and obedience. Because of everyone’s walking in their own way, the LORD, Yahweh has laid the sins of “us all” on “Him,” the Messiah who would come to earth to be an atoning sacrifice for these sins. See notes on Isaiah 53:6.

56:12 “Come,” they say,
“I will get some wine.
Let's get drunk with strong drink;
Tomorrow will be just like today,
only better.”

Chapter 56 of Isaiah closes with a sad portrait of those who are called by God to shepherd His covenant people. It was not enough for the unfaithful shepherds to turn to their own way in rebellion against God, and greedily seek their own gain from which they can never be satisfied and have no understanding of their calling from and responsibility to God for shepherding His flock, vs. 11. They also had sunken so low in morality to desire wine and strong drink for the purpose of getting drunk. They do this because they have the pagan mindset that their future, (tomorrow) will always be better so they can continually profit from their wickedness. Isaiah had earlier warned against those who seek unjust gain and pursue strong drink and lavish banquets, Isaiah 5:8-25. See also Psalm 10:1-15. The Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, spoke in a parable about a similar mindset as recorded in Luke 12: 13-21 which had an eternal lesson applied to it, “But God
said to him, 'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you. Then who will get all the things you have prepared for yourself?' So it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12: 20-21.

57:1-2 The righteous perishes, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, with no one giving it a thought; the righteous are taken away sparing them from the evil to come.

2 Such a one enters into peace; those who walk in uprightness rest on their death beds.

In comparison to the judgment upon the wickedness of the leaders of God’s covenant people, Isaiah 56:9-12, the righteous who have been oppressed by these wicked leaders, will not face this judgment, but in their passing from earthly existence to a heavenly one, will be spared from the judgment of God, which is called “the evil to come,” Isaiah 57:1. A sad commentary on these wicked leaders is that they have been so consumed in their rebellion against God in turning to their own way and the gaining of personal wealth and the pursuit of strong drink and in their pagan mindset that they will always prosper from their selfish desires, is that they do not even notice when the righteous ones among them perish.

The implication of their not noticing the passing away of the righteous is that they could care less about the righteous and their holy lives. Such is the blindness of the wicked who seek only to please themselves and have no care or concern about God’s requirements and will for His creation. God promises in 57:1, that judgment will indeed come upon them stated as “the evil to come.” Isaiah had continually warned the wicked from the covenant people of God of the consequences of their self-will, their sinfulness and turning from God to go their own way. God had also forewarned many pagan nations of the consequences of their wickedness. Yet the reward of the righteous is that they will “enter into peace,” Isaiah 57:2; but their will be no peace for the wicked, Isaiah 57:21. The words “rest on their death beds,” should not be understood as soul sleep or the waiting of the righteous in their graves for the resurrection in the far eschatological future. The Old Testament has a few references to the destiny of the righteous who die. Job understood that he would see God after his earthly death, Job 19:25-27. King David seemed to understand that he would again, in the afterlife, see his son who had died, 2 Samuel 12:23. Daniel was also assured of life after death, Daniel 12:2. See also Psalm 16:8-11 and 17:15. The New Testament gave further revelation that made it clear that when a righteous person dies, their soul goes to be with the Lord, Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23.

Isaiah 57:3-13: Wicked Worship

Isaiah, as recorded in the section 57:3-13, comments on the wickedness of the worship practices of his audience. The speaker in this section is God as evident from vss. 6, 11, 12 and 13. The section begins with an emphatic “but” in vs. 3, which draws a comparison between the righteous in vss. 1-2 and the wicked in vss. 3-13. The audience, “you” are called “sons of a sorceress” and “offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute,” in vs. 3 and “children of sin” and “offspring of liars” in vs. 4 because of their evil behavior before God. God asks them in vs. 4, of whom are they scorning by shameful actions and facial expressions. In vss. 5-13, God describes the vileness of their false religious practices. They are inflamed with lust and practice immorality and cult prostitution among nature: trees, valleys, rocky cliffs, mountains. Worse, they have sacrificed their children, vs. 5 which is particularly offensive to God. They have set up pagan symbols, “your memorial” in their houses as they have increased their immorality and prostitution, vs. 8. They have made offerings to false gods, such as Molech, vs. 9 and by sending ambassadors to far destinations to seek out evil worship practices, they have made their graves with the wicked, “down into Sheol,” vs. 9. There were no limits to the
journeys to sinfulness, vs. 10. In all this they did not give God any thought, vs. 11. Therefore, God will expose their works. Their works of false righteousness will not help them, vs. 12. He will not answer them when they cry out for help. God says to them, “let your collection of idols deliver you,” for a wind will carry all of their idols away, vs. 13. Finally, to conclude this section, God says, only those who take refuge in Him will possess the land (promised by His covenant with them), and they will inherit God’s holy mountain (Zion), vs. 13.

57:3 But come here, you sons of a sorceress, the offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute.

The setting in Isaiah 57:3 turns dramatically from the righteous who are perishing to be saved from the evil to come, but will find rest, 57:1-2, to the description of “you” (plural) who are the wicked and who are described as children of “a sorceress,” “an adulterer,” and “a prostitute.” All of these names describe those who act in violation of God’s Word. The first name, is “sorceress” (female) which describes the evil practices of their mothers, which by implication was passed down to them. Sorcery, the practice of divination, is expressly forbidden, Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26, Deuteronomy 18:9-14; cf. Micah 5:12. However this practice occurred often. See 1 Samuel 28:7-14; 2 Kings 17:7-18; 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:1-9; Isaiah 8:19; Jeremiah 27:9-10; Ezekiel 13:6-7, and 23. It was in practice during the days of the early church, Acts 16:16-18, and will also be prevalent in the far future in the days of the Tribulation, Revelation 9:21, and 18:23. Isaiah, in 47:9 and 12, had spoken against the sorceries of Babylon.

Secondly, they were called the offspring or seed, Hebrew zera, of an adulterer. They had forsaken their lineage from Abraham as the seed of the promise thus removing themselves from the promises of God’s covenant with Abraham. Adultery was expressly forbidden in the ten commandments, Exodus 20:14. The punishment for committing adultery was death, Leviticus 20:10. It was called a great sin in Genesis 20:9 and a great evil and a sin against God in Genesis 39:9. Thirdly, and related to the sin of adultery, was the name “prostitute.” To be children of a prostitute or harlot was to have shame upon them, Judges 11:1-2. To be a prostitute and be the daughter of a priest brought upon her the judgment of death by burning, Leviticus 21:9. In the context of Isaiah 57:3-13, the prostitution was cultic in the sense that visiting prostitutes, both male and female, was part of the religious practices of the cult worship of false gods. See for example: Genesis 38:21-22; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 2 Kings 23:7; and Deuteronomy 23:17-18. Ezekiel often, throughout his prophecy, spoke of Israel in terms of prostituting themselves against God, see specifically Ezekiel chapters 16 and 23. Prostitution is a great offense to God for it robs God of the devotion humans should be expressing to Him. Instead of giving righteous love to their Creator, humans scorn Him by expending their sinful, self-seeking love and sexual lust to another. To love someone other than God with this type of love, is a rejection of His righteous glory and holiness. See 1 Corinthians 6:15-20. The book of Hosea is a description of God’s dealings with His unfaithful covenant people who are described in Hosea as harlots.

57:4 At whom are you making fun? At whom are you making faces, and sticking out your tongue? Are you not children of sin, an offspring of liars,

Isaiah had previously declared God’s judgment against those who display or parade their sins before Him. Isaiah 3:9 states:
The look on their face witnesses against them;
they flaunt their sin like Sodom;
they do not hide it.

Woe to their soul!
They have brought disaster on themselves.

In Isaiah 3:9, the NIV has “parade” for *flaunt* while the NASB has “display.” See notes on Isaiah 3:9 for an expanded discussion. In 57:4, Isaiah again describes God’s reaction to this scornful and rebellious display of their sins before Him. It is not enough for these sinners to just practice their iniquities in the open. They bring upon themselves certain and coming destruction by flaunting their sins in an open distain and scorn for God. Isaiah had previously described them and His reaction to them in 1:10-15. They are described as “rulers of Sodom,” and “people of Gomorrah,” in Isaiah 1:10. Their sexual sins, 57:3, 5-10 made them as detestable to God as the rulers and people of Sodom and Gomorrah whom God dealt with in a mighty and lethal display of His wrath, Genesis chapter 19. See also Isaiah 1:9, Deuteronomy 29:22-28; 32:32; and Jeremiah 23:14.

Isaiah added to their description as children of the sorceress, an adulterer and a prostitute, 57:3 by including that they are children of sin and an offspring of liars, 57:4. In all this the implication is that they also practice the behaviour of their parents by committing the same sins. They not only commit these sins but display them openly in public defiance against God. Those who scorn God will face His judgment. Isaiah had earlier declared, “the scoffer will be gone, and all those who are keen on doing wrong will be cut off.” Isaiah 29:20. The prophet would also later state:

"Look, it is written before me:
I will not keep silent, but will repay,
yes, I will repay dropping it right into their laps
7 both your own sins and the sins of your fathers,” says the LORD,
"Because they have burned incense on the mountains,
and blasphemed me on the hills;
therefore I will pay them back in full
dropping it right into their laps." (Isaiah 65:6-7)

Note: The NASB translates *blasphemed* in Isaiah 65:7 as “scorned”

57:5 you who are inflamed with lust among the oaks,
under every green tree;
who slay children in the valleys
under the rocky cliffs?

In Isaiah 57:5, the Lord continues His indictment against the covenant people of God for the rebellious and vile practices associated with their worship of false gods. Their attachment to these false gods, Molech, 57:9 and also likely Baal whom Ahaz at times served, 2 Kings 10:18. The worshipping of false gods were *inflamed with lust*, literally “burning hot” in their sexual encounters with cult prostitutes. This evil practice was to “ensure” fertility for themselves and their crops. The Israelites did not break away completely from the false worship of the Canaanites which included fertility rites involving cult prostitution. It is likely that Jacob’s son Judah was seeking fertility blessings from the false gods of the Canaanites when he had sexual relations with Tamar, his daughter in law, whom he did not recognize but thought she was a cult harlot (temple prostitute), Genesis 38:12-26. It was customary for these sexual encounters to take place under so called sacred trees, including oaks, Isaiah 1:29. See also Deuteronomy 12:2; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 16:4;
Jeremiah 2:20; 3:6: (green trees); 2 Kings 16:4; Ezekiel 6:13: (green tree and leafy oak); Ezekiel 20:28: (shade tree); and Hosea 4:13 (oak, popular, terebinth, which are shade trees).

The worship of false gods included a most vile and iniquitous practice of sacrificing children in valleys and under rocky cliffs. The word “slay” in 57:5, is literally “slaughter.” This was most often related to the worship of Molech but was involved with Baal worship as well, Jeremiah 19:5. This practice of slaughtering children was deeply offensive to God as, Jeremiah 32:35 attests. (Note: Jeremiah 19:5 and 32:35 are very difficult verses to interpret). It was a very early practice in the history of the Israelite people, Leviticus 18:21 and persisted for several generations, 2 Kings 16:3-4; 21:1-7; 23:10; and Ezekiel 16:20. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Sexual promiscuity and the sacrifice of children on pagan altars were all part of Semitic idolatry. Some of the temples employed “sacred prostitutes,” who acted as priestesses and priests of the gods, especially of Ashtereth or Astarte, the Semitic Venus. The cult of Moloch demanded the sacrifice of children. This murderous cult was practiced by King Manasseh in the Valley of Hinnom, below Mt. Zion (2 Chr. 33:6).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 439).

57:6 Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion;
they, they are the gods you have chosen.
To them you have poured out a drink offering,
you have offered a grain offering.
Should I be appeased with these things going on?

The translation of 57:6 in the DASV is slightly different than other English versions. For example, the NKJV has: “Among the smooth stones of the stream is your portion; they, they are your lot! Even to them you have poured a drink offering, you have offered a grain offering. Should I receive comfort in these?” It does not matter where the covenant people of God have rebelled against God in worshipping false gods. The Lord, the “I” in the last phrase of 57:6, sees all that is happening and there is nothing that escapes His penetrating view. See 1 Samuel 16:7; Job 28:24; Psalm 11:4; 33:13; 66:7; Proverbs 5:21; 15:3; and Jeremiah 32:18-19. God not only “sees” what His covenant people are doing when they are rebelling against Him, He also fully perceives and understands the thoughts and intents of their heart.

The first sentence of Isaiah 57:6 is an example of God’s vision. God sees that His covenant people are committing idolatry among the smooth (slippery) stones of the valley which is the Hebrew word nahal, which is better translated as “wadi.” Those who practiced their corrupt worship of false gods among the high places and under shady trees, also brought offerings to these gods during the rainy season into the streams (wadi) that were dry for some parts of the year but were smooth and slippery when the rains came. They offered drink and grain offerings to these gods as worship for the “portion and lot” of the land these false gods supposedly gave them. Instead of giving thanks to the only true God, for giving them their portion of the land by the casting of lots, see Numbers 26:53-56 and Joshua 13:1-7; and Joshua chapters 14:1 to 19:51; they ascribed to the false gods their “lot” for their portion of the land. Thus, they have wickedly denied God’s provision for them and threw His care for them in His face by ascribing to false gods that which only the LORD, Yahweh had promised and given to them.

God’s prescribed way for His covenant people to worship and thank Him was by their giving to Him drink offerings, Exodus 29:40-41 and Leviticus 6:20; 23:9-21, and offerings of grain Leviticus 2:1-16. Isaiah had earlier denounced their worthless offerings, Isaiah 1:13 and would again in 66:3. These offerings were detestable to the Lord because of the sinfulness and rebelliousness of God’s covenant people. Those who offered drink and grain offerings to false gods were specifically turning this into a vile and evil practice
which was intended to be holy before God. The Lord rhetorically asked them, Should I be appeased (have compassion) with/on you with these things going on? There should have not been any in Isaiah’s audience who would have thought that the Lord would be pleased with their wicked behaviour. Thomas Constable suggests another aspect of this false worship in the streams of Israel:

“A wadi (Heb. nahal) is a streambed that is dry most of the year but in the rainy season becomes a rushing torrent. As mountaintops became places of worship because they were close to heaven and the gods, so wadis in valleys became places of worship because they were close to Sheol and the dead.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 290).

57:7 Upon a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed; that's where you went up to offer sacrifices.

Isaiah now lifts the viewpoint of his audience from the evilness of making offerings to false gods in the valley streams, to the wickedness of cult prostitution in the mountains. The statement of setting or making their bed in the mountains in the context of chapter 57:3-13 certainly refers to the practice of sexual relations with cult prostitutes. See comment and Scriptural references in the notes for Isaiah 57:5. The practice of offering sacrifices on the mountains may not involve the slaughter of children, 57:5 as this seemed to be reserved for the valleys. It may have involved the burning of incense as practiced by King Ahaz, 2 Kings 16:4; and the worship of astronomical objects, the host of heaven, as practiced by King Manasseh, 2 Kings 21:5. The critical issue is the rejection of God and His desire for His covenant people to meet with Him and praise and worship Him on Mount Zion, Psalm 48:1; Isaiah 2:3; 24:23; Joel 3:17; Micah 4:2, 7 and Zechariah 8:3. The greatest wickedness was that God covenant people rejected His Son whom He has installed on Mount Zion, Psalm 2, and replaced the worship of God’s Son with the worship of false gods on other mountains that were not considered holy by God.

57:8 Behind the doors and the posts you have set up your memorial; deserting me you have exposed yourself and jumped into bed with them.

You have expanded your bed, and made a covenant with them; you loved their bed and to gaze on their nakedness.

Isaiah 57:8 begins with a reference to what happens “behind the doors and the posts.” The covenant people of God had set up a memorial to their false gods in these places and wickedly practiced their worship to these false gods. They had completely rebelled against one of the most important confessions of their faith to Yahweh, often called the Shema (to hear), Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

4 Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These words that I am commanding you this day, are to be on your heart. 7 Teach them repeatedly to your children, and talk about them when you sit in your house, when you walk along the way, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as a sign on your hand and bind them on your forehead. 9 Write them on the door-posts of your house and on your gates.

Forsaking this confession of faith, they had replaced the command to write the words God had given them on their door-posts of their houses and on their gates, with a memorial to false gods which involved immoral sexual practices. They had aligned themselves with cult prostitutes, 57:3-7, in setting up this evil
“memorial” which in Hebrew is zikkaron, which has the meaning of a remembrance or memorial as in the DASV. It occurs only in this verse in Isaiah but occurs often in the Old Testament. See Exodus 12:14; 13:9; 17:14; 28:12 (twice); 28:29; 30:16; 39:7; Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 5:15, 18; 10:10; 16:40; 31:54; Nehemiah 2:20; Esther 6:1; Job 13:12; Ecclesiastes 1:11; 2:16; Zechariah 6:14; and Malachi 3:16. Its use in Exodus 12:14 is especially significant as the memorial-day of passover which is connected with the feast of unleavened bread. It is a memorial that was to be celebrated as a feast as a permanent regulation or ordinance to remember the Lord’s deliverance of the Hebrew’s first born from the avenging angel of death when He rescued the Hebrew people from long years of slavery in Egypt. The breastpiece of judgment worn by the high priest was to carry the names of the twelve tribes of Israel as a continual memorial before the LORD, Exodus 28:29. Later memorial stones were to be set up on the west bank of the Jordan River, Joshua 4:7 as a permanent memorial to the Hebrew people reminding them that the ark of the covenant and the Hebrew people crossed the Jordon river on dry land at that place and entered into the promised land.

The wicked and blasphemous practice of setting up of a memorial symbol, which is not described by Isaiah as to its content, was a particularly evil taunt to God who had established His “memorials” so that His people would always remember Him, and He would continually remember them. This pagan memorial was set up behind doors and posts, perhaps in pagan temples, where God’s covenant people had exposed themselves in beds where their nakedness was revealed. They had also expanded their beds, perhaps to have more sexual union with cult prostitutes or to worship additional false gods, and they had made a pact or covenant with these cult prostitutes or the false gods they represented. The entire practice was an affront to God. God’s covenant people had made a covenant or pact with evil. Compare this with Isaiah 28:15 and see notes for Isaiah 57:9. God’s covenant people had rejected the sacred and solemn covenants that God made with them and they replaced their obedience to His covenants with immorality and with covenants made with false gods. Their observance of festivals and feasts, that were required by God’s law, was a weariness and a burden to God, Isaiah 1:14 and therefore, His righteous judgment was to come upon them as God had so long ago predicted as recorded in Deuteronomy 31:14-18.

57:9 You went to Molech with olive oil,
    and increased your perfumes.
You sent your ambassadors far off,
    and sent them even down into Sheol.

In Isaiah 57:9-10, the prophet discussed the evilness of God’s covenant people who were seeking political pacts and agreements with pagan kings in opposition to seeking God’s guidance and help. The word “Molech” in the DASV in 57:9 should be understood as “king.” The Hebrew word is melek, which literally means “king.” Isaiah had earlier described the wickedness of God’s covenant people who were seeking the aid of foreign pagan kings. King Ahaz had done this Isaiah a recorded in Isaiah 7:1-9. See also 2 Kings 16:1-20 and 2 Chronicles 28:1-27. King Hezekiah had sent his ambassadors to Egypt 28:14-15; 30:1-7 and later tried to seek the help of the Chaldeans, especially Merodach-baladan, Isaiah 39:1-8 See also Ezekiel 23:16.

The sending of ambassadors “far off” is most likely a reference to those from the court of Hezekiah who were sent to Egypt for help from the threat of the invasion of the Assyrians. Their anticipated pact with Egypt was, as recorded in Isaiah 28:15, called a “covenant with death” and “an agreement with Sheol.” Isaiah’s reference in 57:9 to sending the ambassadors far off and sending them even down to Sheol is most likely the historical reference the prophet would have had in mind in 57:9. There will be a far future fulfillment of this prophecy during the evil days of the Tribulation when Israel will make a pact with the antichrist, the prince who is to come, Daniel 9:26-27, which will be broken by the antichrist himself which will result in much distress and destruction upon God’s covenant people. See also Matthew 24:4-22.
57:10 You were wearied by the length of your journey; yet you never said, “It is worthless.” Instead you are energized; therefore you do not faint.

In the long journey of Hezekiah’s ambassadors to Egypt, they likely met with many distressing and dangerous situations. See notes on Isaiah 28:15. They did not seek the Lord’s help because they were running away from Him and had rebelled openly against Him. They could only seek the aid of their idols and false gods from which they could receive no help, so they depended on their own strength and wisdom. The folly of trusting in their own strength is stated vividly by the prophet Habakkuk, “they are guilty, whose might is their god.” Habakkuk 1:11. Those who refuse the Lord’s gracious offer of guidance and help, Isaiah 40: 28-31 and depend upon their own finite abilities, draw upon themselves God’s judgment. They have acted as if God does not witness their actions as Isaiah had stated in Isaiah 40:27, Why do you say, O Jacob, and claim, O Israel, "My way is hid from the LORD, and the justice due me is ignored by my God?"

David L. Cooper provides a “far-future” application to the words of Isaiah 57:9-10:

“But in the, middle of the Tribulation the Antichrist, becoming jealous of the divine honors offered to the Deity, will demand that men and women shall no longer worship any god or goddess—not even the God of heaven. Moreover, he will issue an edict that all men must worship him. Thus idolatry--that, of worshiping the Antichrist, a man, will be brought into existence. This type of pagan worship will be the last and final attempt of man to worship others than the true God.

Idolatry is represented throughout the Old Testament under the imagery of adultery on the part of the unfaithful wife. Israel is represented likewise in the Old Testament as the wife of Jehovah. She has at various times played the harlot, going off after other gods. It is true that she was cured of gross idolatry at the time of the Babylonian captivity. Since then she has never engaged in idolatry, but she will, in the time of the Tribulation, along with other nations worship various gods, of their own manufacture. In the middle of the Tribulation, however, when the Antichrist demands that men worship him, Israel likewise will do so. This is set forth in Isaiah 57:9-10. The prophet thinks of Israel as a woman who prepares herself with all varieties of perfumes and oils and goes in to the king to commit adultery. When she engages in this worship of the king, the Antichrist, she feels a thrill of the quickening of her strength. This of course will come from satanic powers. But it will only be temporary. Sin always leaves a sting. Those of Israel who thus worship this false messiah will do it to their own hurt.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly -February 1946).

57:11 Whom were you afraid of and in fear of so that you lied, and have not remembered me, or give me a thought? Was it because I held my peace for a long time that you do not fear me?

The speaker of the words recorded in Isaiah 57:3-13 is clearly identified in 57:11-13. It could not be the prophet Isaiah as he does not have the authority to make the statements contained in these verses. The only viable speaker is the LORD, Yahweh who is revealing the idolatrous worship of His covenant people. In 57:11 the LORD directly confronts them with questions which reveal their complicity with evil for they have no fear of Him. They are liars and have not remembered Him as their covenant God, nor have they given any thought to Him. God asks them, do they have no fear of Him because He had been silent, “held my peace”
for a long period of time. This holding of God’s peace may not be just His silence but His inactivity in the lives of His covenant people. See J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 356 for a discussion on this issue. The identification of this long period for the holding of God’s peace is not stated. Gary V. Smith comments:

“In the second half of 57:11, God questions why these people ignored their relationship to him. Could it possibly be that these people ignored God because he “was being silent and hiding?” In the future eschatological period when God establishes his kingdom at Zion, he will no longer be silent (62:1), and when he punishes the wicked, he will not be silent (65:6). Thus God’s silence refers to a time when he did not speak or act in a favorable way (42:14; 62:1; 65:6). One might think that this could hardly refer to the times of the prophets, when God repeatedly spoke messages through numerous prophets and repeatedly delivered and brought judgment on nations. God’s hiding or silence could apply to any short period of time when God did not immediately answer the prayers of his people (8:17; 59:2; 64:7; Deut 31:17; Mic 3:4; Ezek 39:23–24). For example, the lament of the people who were suffering under the attacks of Sennacherib complained that they were waiting for God to act (26:8), and they did not see his hand of judgment on their enemies (26:11) because God was hiding his face for a moment (40:27; 54:7–8). Since God did not immediately answer the people’s prayers but allowed them to suffer defeat for many days, it appeared to them that he was silent and not interested in them. This perverse pragmatic response that requires instant gratification concerning what they want done, without first considering why God might be putting them through this kind of experience, demonstrates the shallowness of their relationship with God. If he does not quickly satisfy all their needs and grant their every request, they quickly turn away and ignore him. Maybe this is not that different from the consumer mentality that has infiltrated some modern churches. Is the biblical worldview all about how God can make me feel good? This verse suggests that part of what gives people a sense of the real presence of God in their lives (the opposite of God being silent) are their own acts of fearing, remembering, and thinking about him.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 557-558).

It was not enough that the covenant people of God forget about God nor gave Him any thought, but the height of their sinfulness is that they had no fear of Him. God asks them rhetorically, who were they so afraid of and in fear of that they did not remember Him? Was there any other being so important or wonderful in aspect that deserved the “fear” of the people of Judah, more than the only true God who created them and chose them for Himself as his chosen people? Could they be so blind, and deaf, Isaiah 6:9-12; 42:19, as to “look” to and “hear” from another “god” that would cause them to transfer their fear of the LORD, Yahweh to a worthless idol? The fear the LORD is extremely important in the relationship between Him and His covenant people, and all who call upon His name. The word for “fear” occurring twice in 57:11 is the Hebrew, yare (closely related to yirah), which has the general meaning of “afraid,” “fearful,” “terrifying,” “dread,” “awesome,” and “revere.”

In the summary of the commandments of the LORD, Moses reminded the people of Israel, as recorded in Deuteronomy 6:24-25, “The LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as he has to this day. 25 It will be our righteousness, if we carefully do this entire commandment before the LORD our God, just as he has commanded us.” Moses later stated, as recorded in Deuteronomy 10:12-13, “Now, then, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and soul, 13 to keep the command of the LORD, and his statutes, that I am commanding you this day for your good?” Moses added, as recorded in Deuteronomy 10:20, “Fear the LORD your God, serve him and hold on to him, and take oaths only in his name.” (Bold added for emphasis). Isaiah prophesized that the Messiah (the Branch) would delight in the fear of the LORD, Isaiah 11:3. He also declared that the fear of the LORD produces the treasure of stability, abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge, Isaiah 33:6. Also in the far future the people of the earth will fear Him and revere His glory, Isaiah 59:19. But Isaiah had earlier reminded God’s covenant people as recorded in Isaiah 29:13 that,
The Lord says,  
These people draw near to me with their mouth and with their lips they honor me, but their heart is removed far from me, and their fear of me is merely human commands which they have been taught.  
(Isaiah 29:13) (Bold added for emphasis)

The writer of Proverbs began his writings with the admonition: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline, Proverbs 1:7, and later would add, The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding, Proverbs 9:10. Often the fear of the Lord and obedience to Him is linked together, as the above examples from Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 10 clearly demonstrate. For an excellent devotional study on the fear of God, see Jerry Bridges, The Joy of Fearing God, Waterbrook Press, division of Random House Inc. 1997.

57:12 I will expose your "righteousness;" as for your works, they will not help you.

God sees and understands every action and thought. See for example, Genesis 6:5; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 10:4; 94:11; Isaiah 66:18; Ezekiel 11:5; Daniel 2:29-30; Amos 4:13; Matthew 9:4; 12:25; Romans 2:15; and Hebrews 4:12. The Lord would expose (declare) their actions of so-called righteousness both in thought and action and as their works, to achieve righteousness, would not be of any help to them. As in the Old Testament, so in the New, only the Lord can declare someone to be righteous. See Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 3:21-4:25; and Galatian 3:1-14. The self-righteousness of the covenant people of God in worshiping false idols and gods and committing adultery and fornication with cult prostitutes to seek fertility for themselves and their crops would not help them in any way to be righteous before God. Isaiah would later state in Isaiah 64:6:

For we are all like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all wither like a leaf, and our sins carry us away like the wind.

In Isaiah chapter 58, the prophet states the words of the Lord in declaring the transgressions and sins of His covenant people. They have sought the Lord and have fasted, but it has been to no avail. The Lord explains what type of actions are acceptable to Him. When chapter 57 is studied along with chapter 58, it is obvious that the people have combined their devotion to God by following the prescribed worship of the law with the worship of false gods. Righteous deeds required by the law have been replaced with their wicked deeds which are described in chapter 57, and throughout the writings of Isaiah. Like an house divided, a mind divided will not stand. The Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, states this plainly in Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13. The apostle Paul also spoke of the generation of Isaiah’s contemporaries and for all generations of those who have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped created things rather than the Creator. Those who do these things are worthy of death. Romans 1:18-32.

57:13 When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you; but the wind will blow them away, a breath will carry them all away. But the one who takes refuge in me will possess the land, and will inherit my holy mountain.
Isaiah summarizes 57:1-13 with God’s declaration of what will happen to those who cry out (literally “wail”) to their idols for help and compares this with those who will take refuge in Him. The words “collection of idols” is literally just “collection,” with the meaning of things that they have gathered to themselves. It is by implication and context that “idols” are inserted as the objects that have been gathered. When the covenant people of God cry out (wail), Hebrew za’aq, to their collection (of idols) there will be no response for idols cannot help them. See Judges 10:14 and Jeremiah 11:12. Their idols will be blown away by the wind and a breath which is likely the breath of God, Isaiah 17:13; 29:5; 40:24. They had forgotten the refuge of God and had worshiped false gods and sought the refuge of pagan kings, See Isaiah 17:10; 28:15; 30:2.

In contrast to those who seek help from worthless idols which will be blown away in the wind, God offers a gracious provision of salvation. Those who take refuge in Him, will posses the land (of promise) and will inherit His holy mountain (Zion). See Isaiah 4:6, 14:32; 32:1-2; 33:16. This promise of God is a further confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant, Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-21; 26:2-5; and 28:10-17. For a study of the Abrahamic covenant see, Keith H. Essex, The Abrahamic Covenant, published in The Masters Seminary Journal, TMSJ 10/2 (Fall 1999) 191-212. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 57:13:

“In that day of judgment, the idols that the Israelites had trusted in, even in captivity, would be of no help. They would be as useless and lightweight as what the winds blow away. In contrast, those who made Yahweh their refuge from the storms of life would inherit the land and possess the Zion of the future Millennium (cf. 11:9; 24:23; 25:6-8; 65:25; 66:20; Matt. 5:5).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 291, 292).

In his consistent application of Isaiah chapters 40-66 referring mostly to the far future days just prior to and including the millennial kingdom of the Messiah, David L. Cooper adds the following comment on Isaiah 57:11-13:

“The prophet is carried forward by the Spirit to the very end of the Tribulation and sees, in verses 11-13, the destruction of all of the apostates in Israel. These of course will be cut off out of the land of the living. On the contrary, all those that take refuge in the Messiah shall be saved, preserved, and enter into possession of the land which God gave Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and to his seed forever. They are the ones who shall inherit God's holy mountain.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly, February 1946.

Isaiah 57:14-21: The Contrite Restored and the Wicked Removed

The initial promise of Isaiah 57:13b is given more detail by God who explains that His grace is extended to those of His covenant people who are contrite and humble in spirit. However, those who refuse to repent and remain in their wicked condition will not find the peace that God offers. The passage begins, 57:14 with a call to build up and prepare the “way” and remove any stumbling blocks from the “way” of God’s people. God explains that He is high and lofty and lives in a high and holy place with those whom are “contrite and humble” for He will revive their spirit and heart, vs. 15. God explains in vs. 16 that He will not always be angry with nor accuse His people for to do so would cause them to expire of the breath that He gave them. He also explains in vs. 17 that He was angry with His people and struck them because of sins such as their greed and they kept turning back to the “way” of their hearts. He has seen their “ways,” vs. 18 but He will heal them, lead them and restore comfort to those who mourn. This action of God, vs. 19, will create praise on their lips. He will also grant peace and healing to those (who are contrite and humble) who are both far away and near. The wicked however, will not find nor will there be any peace for them, vss. 20-21.

57:14 He will say, "Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove the stumbling blocks out of the way of my people."
Isaiah 57:14 is similar in some respects to Isaiah 40:3-4 in which the people of God are called upon to clear the way in the wilderness for the coming Lord and to make level or smooth a highway in the desert for God. In Isaiah 57:14, however, the “way,” derek in the Hebrew, which occurs twice in this verse, is to be prepared for God’s covenant people. The word “way,” derek occurs often in Isaiah chapters 56-57. See 56:11, 57:10, 14, 17, and 18. The clear intention of preparing the “way” for God’s people is so they can become contrite and humble themselves and avail themselves of His gracious provision of reviving their spirit and heart, 57:15, providing healing and comfort to them, 57:18, and peace to those both far away and near, 57:19. Isaiah would later proclaim a similar message in 62:10-12:

10 Go through, go through the gates; prepare the way for the people.
Build it, build the highway; remove the stones; lift up the signal flag for the peoples.

11 Look, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth,
"Tell the daughter of Zion,
'Look, your salvation comes;
look, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him."

12 They will call them, "The holy people,"
"The Redeemed of the LORD,"
and you will be called "Sought After, A City Not Forsaken."

Some may be tempted to apply Isaiah 57:14 to the return of the exiles from Babylon but there is no indication that this is the intention of the prophet. The context of Isaiah 57:14-22 is a spiritual restoration not a physical movement from one location to another. How is the way to be prepared so that the covenant people of God can be restored to their God and become humble and contrite? The answer must be similar to that of the ministry of John the Baptist who understood his role as preparing the way for the Messiah, John 1:6-8, 19-23, as prophesized in Isaiah 40:3. The preparing of the way for the covenant people of God to be restored by Him is by the teaching and proclamation ministry of the truth of God’s Word by the prophets of God, like Isaiah and others. In order for the people of God to understand the word of God, they must be confronted with God’s word by faithful servants who will not water-down its contents nor shy away from difficult teachings and judgments by God. The word of God will accomplish its purposes, Isaiah 46:10; 55:11; 2 Timothy 3:16; and Hebrews 4:12. When the word of God is faithfully proclaimed faith can result, as the apostle Paul so clearly taught as recorded in Romans 10:1-21.

57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says,
who inhabits eternity,
whose name is Holy:
"I live in the high and holy place,
with the contrite and humble of spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble,
and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Isaiah states the authority of the LORD who is the “high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.” The Lord also speaks, “I live in a high and holy place.” Four descriptive terms are used in Isaiah 57:15 to describe the majesty and holiness of the Lord. First, Isaiah describes the Lord as the “high and lofty One.” Isaiah had previously declared in 33:5, “The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high. He fills Zion
with justice and righteousness.” See also Psalm 47:9; and 97:9 and Isaiah 6:1. In another passage, 52:13, Isaiah records that the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, will, “deal wisely; he will be exalted and lifted up, and will be greatly exalted.” See also Philippians 2:9 and Hebrews 7:26. Second, Isaiah declares that this One who is high and lofty also “inhabits eternity.” This is literally, “dwells in eternity.” The Lord lives or dwells forever without beginning or end. Isaiah had previously declared in 43:13, the words of God who declared, “from eternity I am he.” The Scriptures often describe the Lord as the One who lives forever, Psalm 90:2; Daniel 4:34; 12:7; Revelation 4:9-10; 10:6 and 15:7. The eternity of God is difficult for humans with finite minds to fully comprehend. Humans are born, live for a time on the earth and then die. God, however, was never born nor had a beginning and will never die or have an end so Isaiah can state that God truly “inhabits eternity.”

The third majestic truth about God in Isaiah 57:15 is that God’s name is Holy. The vision of God and the seraphim would have been indelibly etched in Isaiah’s memory when He saw the Lord, high and lifted up in the temple, Isaiah chapter 6. The voices of the seraphim would still resonate with Isaiah as he heard them proclaim, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” Isaiah 6:3. Many centuries before the days of Isaiah, the Lord had warned about the vile practice of sacrificing children to the false god Molech which defiled His sanctuary and profaned His holy name, Leviticus 20:3. This warning is significant in the context of Isaiah chapter 57:3-13 where this wicked activity was still being practiced. Other important references to God’s holy name in Scripture occur, for example in the Old Testament in, Psalm 30:4; 103:1; 111:9; Ezekiel 36:20-23; 39:7 and in the New Testament: Luke 1:49 and Revelation 15:4. The declaration that God’s name is holy speaks of His intrinsic attribute that He Himself is holy, Leviticus and calls upon His covenant people to be holy, Leviticus 11:44-45.

It is significant that throughout the writings of Isaiah, the holiness of God is often declared, and He is known by the title as the Holy One of Israel. This continual reminder to God’s covenant people underscores their sinful and pitiful condition as introduced immediately in the prophecy of Isaiah. The contrast between the wickedness of the people of God and the holiness of God is a major theme of Isaiah. It is only the graceful provision of redemption by the Holy One of Israel that enables His people to have fellowship with Him, so they can possess His land and inherit His holy mountain, Isaiah 57:13.

The fourth majestic truth about God in Isaiah 57:15 is that God Himself declares that He lives in a high and holy place. It is not that He will one day live in this place, but He dwells eternally in a place He calls high and holy. He has always existed in “a place” that is holy. In the far future, the Messiah will dwell in a high place, called His holy mountain, Mount Zion, during the millennial kingdom. This also is a major theme of the writing of the prophet Isaiah. For example, Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; chapter 35; 52:1-10; and chapters 60-62 speak of this aspect of the messianic kingdom. The passages stated are not a complete listing of all such occurrences in Isaiah.

God, also, as recorded in Isaiah 57:15, shares this high and holy place with those who are contrite and humble of spirit. This is a prophetic perfect sense for this describes the habitation of the Messiah with the redeemed of the earth during the days of the messianic kingdom in the future. These days are not yet evident for the Messiah has not yet returned to establish this kingdom. This kingdom is not already inaugurated as many suggest. This kingdom will only be evident when the Messiah returns to earth to sit on the Davidic throne. For an excellent discussion on the coming of the messianic kingdom refer to the previously mentioned books by Michael J. Vlach and Andrew M. Woods. Although the ultimate fulfillment of the declaration that God lives in a high and holy place with those who are the contrite and humble of spirit will be during the days of the messianic kingdom, and then forever in the eternal state, the work of God in reviving the spirit of the humble and the heart of the contrite is ever present. God is always drawing people to Himself for the purposes of salvation. In this sense God now lives with those who He has revived. In the
New Testament, this truth is revealed as a mystery, involving the Gentiles but also the truth that Christ (the Spirit) lives within those who believe in Him, Colossians 1:26-27. This is the reason believers in Christ are also called the temple of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:17-20. Isaiah 57:15 should also be compared to Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The “poor in spirit” of Matthew 5:3 are those who God declares in Isaiah 57:15 are “contrite and humble in spirit” and “humble.” These are those who will inherit the kingdom of heaven and live with God in “the high and holy place.” Since the Scriptures for the Messiah during His first advent was the Old Testament, He could have used Isaiah 57:15 as one of the texts for the first part of “His Sermon on the Mount” on what is known as the beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-12.

This work of God in reviving the spirit of humble and the heart of the contrite is a descriptive picture of salvation that the Old Testament occasionally references. For example, Ezekiel 36:22-27 was likely the Old Testament passage that Jesus was referencing during His discussion with Nicodemus when He told Him, that no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again, John 3:3-9. The Lord states in Ezekiel 36:26 that He will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them and put His Spirit within them. This is similar to the promise of a new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-34, of which the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ declared that in His blood which was poured out was the new covenant, Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25. Jesus Christ, who is the Servant of God, the Messiah, was the “new covenant” was prophesied about in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8. The reception of God’s work of salvation on behalf of the contrite and humble Isaiah 57:15, which is also described as righteousness, is by faith, Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4. That the Messiah is the mediator of the new covenant through His blood allows all, both Jew and Gentile, to participate in the salvation and other blessings of the new covenant though faith in Him. God’s promises regarding the new covenant in the Old Testament, became a reality to those who believed in Christ for salvation. This is not to say that the messianic kingdom had begun with Christ’s statement regarding the new covenant. It is important for students of the Bible not to merge the new covenant in the church age with an inaugurated messianic kingdom. The faithful remnant of the covenant people of God will fully participate in the new covenant following the return of the Messiah to rescue them after they have confessed their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during His first advent, and upon the Messiah establishing his earthly kingdom.

57:16 For I will not make accusations forever,  
nor will I always be angry;  
for then they would expire before me,  
even the breath of life that I have made.

God is the speaker in Isaiah 57:16 and He declares that He will not forever accuse His covenant people (of their rebellion against Him) and He will not always be angry with them. To do so would cause them their death. The KJV for this verse states: “For I will not contend for ever, neither will I always be wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.” The word “accusations” in the DASV is “accuse” in the NIV and “contend in the KJV, NKJV, NASB and ESV. It is the Hebrew word, rib, which has the meaning of to strive, content or dispute. It occurs in Isaiah in this way in Isaiah 3:13, “The LORD rises to make the accusation; he stands to judge the peoples.” See also: Jeremiah 2:9. The word “they” in the DASV is better translated as “spirit” which is ruach in the Hebrew and has the meaning of “spirit” or “breath.” The word “breath” is the Hebrew word neshamah which literally means “breath of life,” as in the DASV in Isaiah 57:16, and this word also has the meaning of “soul.” Isaiah 57:16 indicates the frailty of humans in comparison to their Creator who has compassion on them and will not allow them to die out as He had done previously through the great flood, Genesis chapters 6-9. See Genesis 6:3 for a comparison to Isaiah 57:16. The gracious Creator will revive the “spirit” of the humble and revive the heart of the contrite, 57:15 and will heal His covenant people and restore them, 57:18-19.
57:17 I was angry because of their unjust greed, 
and struck them; 
I hid my face in anger, 
yet they kept turning back to the way of their own hearts.

As a brief parenthesis to the description of His healing, reviving and restoring work, the LORD reminds the audience of the prophet why He was angry with His covenant people. They were displaying the evil intentions of their heart by their “unjust greed” (unjust gain). This may be a reference to the leaders, both religious and royal taking advantage of the vulnerable. See also Isaiah 10:1-3; 56:11-2; and Jeremiah 8:10. The apostle Paul declared in Colossians 3:5, “So put to death your earthly actions: sexual immorality, impurity, ungodly passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.” Paul would later state in 1 Corinthians 6:10: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some craving it have wandered away from the faith, and have pierced themselves with many sorrows.” (References suggested by Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 293). As in the days of Paul, and in much earlier times, as it is now, greed is associated with and is the same as idolatry. This will still be a major problem during the days of the Tribulation, Revelation 9:20.

The LORD struck them and hid His face from them in His righteous indignation (anger) against them, yet His covenant people “kept turning back to the way of their own hearts.” (bold intended). The “way,” Hebrew word derek, of man is a major theme of chapters 56 and 57. See notes on 56:11, 57:10, 14, and 18. God often disciplined His covenant people with the desire to have them repent of their sinfulness and return to Him. See for example, Amos 4:6-12. See also: Isaiah 6:10; 31:6; 44:22; 55:7; Jeremiah 3:6-14; 8:4-22; Ezekiel 18:32; Hosea 5:15; 7:10; 14:1; and Joel 2:12. God is longsuffering to those whom He had called to be His own people and desires that they seek Him for forgiveness and restoration when they have sinned and rebelled against Him. This truth is still relevant today for those who have trusted in the Son of God for salvation and have sinned against Him. The apostle John stated in 1 John 1:8-9, “If we claim that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

57:18-19 I have seen their ways, 
but I will heal. 
I will lead him, 
and restore comfort to those who mourn, 
creating praise on their lips. 
Peace, peace, to those who are far off 
and to those who are near," 
says the LORD, 
"and I will heal them."

Isaiah 57:18-21 is a summary of chapters 49-57 and perhaps of all preceding chapters. Isaiah declares God’s verdict in 57:18-19 on the contrite and humble who are described in 57:15. God then describes His verdict upon the wicked in 57:20-21. In 57:18, God makes three outstanding promises to those whom He has known which in the DASV is translated as “seen their ways.” These are those of His covenant people who are not described as wicked, 57:20-21 so they must be the contrite and humble described earlier, 57:15. It may be implied from the words, “I have seen their ways,” (other translations have: “I have seen his ways”), that these are promises that are similar in detail to the new covenant. See Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:22-27. It is God’s act of grace to undeserving people for they can do nothing to earn or work towards or achieve in any way God’s forgiveness or to be restored to a right relationship with Him. It is God who is doing the restorative work.
The first promise of God stated in 57:18 is that He will heal them. This healing work must involve more than physical healing for the context of Isaiah chapter 57 speaks of a revival of the heart, 57:15. The “heart work” of God, is also described Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33; 32:39-40; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26 and Malachi 4:6. Compare God’s work of healing the heart with what is required of His people as recorded in Ezekiel 18:31 and Joel 2:12-13. The healing of the heart is new covenant language and is what Jesus was most likely referencing from the Old Testament, especially, Ezekiel 36:22-27 when He told Nicodemus, recorded in John 3:3, that he must be born again. God’s promise to heal them is thus, a promise of salvation involving the healing of the heart. Following the announcement of peace to those far and near, Isaiah 57:19, the Lord repeats His promise to heal them to emphasize the priority of this gracious work from God.

The second promise of God stated in vs. 18 is that He will lead them (him). The word “lead” is the Hebrew nahah, which also has the meaning to guide. Isaiah had discussed the rebellion of God’s covenant people against following the leading and guidance of God and their refusal to trust in Him, for He had made many promises to lead them, for example, Isaiah 40:11; 48:17; and 49:10. See also in the Old Testament, Psalm 23:2; 25:9; 68:6; 80:1; 139:10; Ezekiel 34:15 and in the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 2:14. The folly of seeking one’s own way is well attested in the writings of Isaiah, 8:11; 35:8; 42:24; 47:15; 53:6; 55:7-9; 56:11; 57:17; 58:13; 59:9; 65:2; and 66:3. Sinful humanity demonstrate their evil most profoundly when they rebel against the leading of the One who has created them and rules sovereignly over His creation. The apostle Paul has revealed their rebellion against God in following Him as recorded in Romans 1:18-32 and 3:9-18. See also Psalm 14:1-3 and 53:1-3 which are referenced in Romans 3:10-12.

The third promise of God stated in 57:18 is that He will, “restore comfort to those who mourn.” The word “comfort” is the Hebrew nihumim, which also has the meaning of compassion. Isaiah would again declare this promise of God in 61:2-3. See also Jeremiah 31:13 and Matthew 5:4. Isaiah often spoke of the comfort of the Lord, Isaiah 12:1; 40:1; 49:13; 51:3, 12; 52:9; and 66:11-13. The Psalms are also a book of God’s comfort. See Psalms 23:4; 71:21; 86:17; 119:50, and 76. The means by which God will fulfill these promises to His covenant people, is undoubtedly through the mediatorial and salvific work of the Servant, the Messiah.

It is the through faith in the substitutionary atonement of the Messiah that humans are brought into a righteous relationship with God and intrinsic to this relationship is a rich array of blessings that the New Testament reveals, for example Ephesians 1:3, “Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” All of Ephesians chapter 1 is a discourse on these blessings. See also Romans 8:28-39 and Colossians 2:9-14 as other examples of these blessings.

The result of the three blessings of God in 57:18 is that they will bring praise to the lips of those who receive them. Isaiah had also declared words of praise for the gracious mercies of God in 12:1-6; 25:1-9; 26:1-15; 35:10; 42:10-13; 44:23; 49:13; 51:3, 11; 54:1; 60:5; 61:7, 10-11; 63:7; 65:18; and 66:10. Part of this praise that God will create on the lips of His covenant people whom He will bless, is the repetition of the word “peace” which is the Hebrew shalom, which has the meaning of prosperity, tranquility, completeness, wholeness, and freedom from anxiety. Peace is a gift from God, Psalm 29:11; 72:2-3; 85:8; Isaiah 52:7; 60:17; Jeremiah 33:6; Nahum 1:15 and Haggai 2:9; and John 14:27. It is also a product of righteous as the prophet declares in Isaiah 32:17.

The produce of righteousness will be peace;
the result of righteousness,
quietness and confidence forever.
The ultimate source of peace is through faith in the Messiah, Romans 5:1-2, “Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” See also Ephesians 2:17.

57:20-21 But the wicked are like the raging sea;
    for it cannot rest,
    and its waters churn up muck and mire.
21 "There is no peace," says my God,
    "for the wicked."

In contrast to the blessings from God, 57:18-19 on the contrite and humble, who have faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Servant, there is no such blessings on the wicked. The wicked are described as being like the raging sea which cannot rest. The result of all their restlessness is only the stirring up of ‘muck and mire.’ The fruit of the righteous is peace, Isaiah 32:17. But the fruit of the wicked is that they have no peace. Victor Buksbazen comments on the plight of the wicked:

“This is God’s judgment concerning the ungodly (reshaim). By the inherent sinfulness of their nature, the wicked are condemned to constant turmoil and to self-destruction.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 443).

As with Isaiah 48:22, “There is no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked,” which concluded the nine-chapter section, Isaiah chapters 40-48, Isaiah 57:21, which repeats the words of the judgment of God upon the wicked, also concludes a nine-chapter section, Isaiah chapters 49-57. Although many Biblical scholars do not agree, the conclusion of two nine-chapter sections of the final twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah with the same words of judgment from God upon the wicked cannot be merely coincidental but intentional on the part of Isaiah. The fact that the final nine-chapter section, Isaiah 58-66 also concludes with God’s judgment upon the wicked, Isaiah 66:24 is very suggestive that this was the intention of the prophet to conclude three sections with God’s statement of judgment. As students of the Scriptures know, there are no chapters or verses in the earliest copies of Isaiah’s prophecy. So, these statements by Isaiah must have been intentional concluding words to indicate the end of an identifiable literary unit or structure.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 56:9-57:21
56:9-57:2: Wicked Leaders and the Righteous Removed
   56:9-12 Judgment on Wicked Watchmen and Shepherds
   57:1-2 Removal of the Righteous to Obtain Peace
57:3-13: Wicked Worship Condemned
   57:3-4 Sinners and Scornful Condemned
   57:5-13 Idolatry and Child Sacrifice Condemned
57:14-21: The Contrite Restored and the Wicked Removed
   57:14-17 God’s Desire to Bless His People
   57:18-19 God’s Blessing on the Righteous
   57:20-21 God’s Judgment on the Wicked
Chapters 58-66 form the third and final section of nine chapters of the third division, chapters 40-66, of Isaiah’s prophetic writings. In the first division, chapters 1-35, Isaiah discussed the judgment of God upon Israel, Judah and the nations of the earth. In the second division, chapters 36-39 the prophet wrote about an historical account of the times of Hezekiah and the invasion of Judah by Assyria. In the third division, chapters 40-66, Isaiah described God’s comfort and salvation which will be made available to His covenant people. In the third and final section, of chapters 40-66, Isaiah discusses the salvation ministry of the Messiah and the glories of the messianic kingdom and the eternal state.

One of the great themes of chapters 58-66 is the revelation of the Redeemer. In 59:15b-21, Isaiah discusses the Lord’s reaction that there was no justice in Judah with no one to intercede for His covenant people. God, therefore, brought salvation through a Redeemer who will come to Zion, 59:20. The Lord’s glory will be with His people in the messianic kingdom, and in the eternal state, chapter 60. The ministry of the Redeemer in His first and second advents is discussed in chapter 61. In Chapter 62, Isaiah discusses the glory and righteousness of the future people of Zion who will be called “The holy people, the Redeemed of the LORD”, and also Sought After, A City Not Forsaken,” Isaiah 62:12. One of the greatest revelations of the return of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ is given by the prophet in Isaiah 63:1-6 which is similar to Revelation 19:15-16. The prophet records a prayer for the return of the Lord in 63:15-64:12. In chapter 65, Isaiah records the revelation of the Lord’s mercy for His faithful servants and judgment upon those who forsake Him and a prophecy about the messianic kingdom. In the last chapter of his prophecy, Isaiah discusses the joy, gladness and holiness of future Jerusalem contrasted with the final destiny of the wicked.

Among other significant themes of this final section of Isaiah is that of God’s new covenant, 59:21 and 61:8. The Messiah was appointed by His Father to be a covenant to the people, Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8. The method by which all of God’s promises to His covenant people and to all who have faith in Him will be fulfilled, including redemption, holiness, possession of the land, the glories of the presence of the Messiah in the messianic kingdom and every other blessing, is through the new covenant. The Messiah revealed in the New Testament that the new covenant was in (by) his atoning blood sacrifice, Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25. Therefore, by the new covenant, all the promises of God in the unilateral Abrahamic and Davidic covenants will be realized and completed. Those who have faith in the atoning blood sacrifice of the Messiah for their salvation, participate now in the new covenant’s promises and blessings of a replaced heart and a renewed mind. However, the final literal completion of these promises and blessings for both the members of the body of Christ and the covenant people of God, upon their belief in the Messiah, will be during the messianic kingdom. Isaiah, in chapters 58-66 reveals much prophetic content about the future earthly messianic kingdom.

It must be understood that there are not two distinct ways to salvation. Only those, both Jews and Gentiles, who believe in the atoning blood sacrifice of the Messiah will truly be saved. There are however two distinct “peoples” that have significant roles within God’s future plans. The first are God’s covenant people which can be understood in this age and in the future as the faithful remnant. To them God has made many promises and to them God has made covenants including the Abrahamic, Davidic and the New. The promises and covenant statements will be perfectly and completely fulfilled to them in the far future days of the earthly messianic kingdom after they have confessed their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during his first advent and have pled for Him to return and to rescue them from their enemies. They will see their Messiah when they say, “blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!” Matthew 23:39. The second “people” are those, both Jews and Gentiles, who, by their belief in the atoning blood sacrifice of the Messiah, Jesus
Christ, are baptized into the body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:13. These “people” comprise what is known as the Church, the body of Christ. Believing Jews and Gentiles are members of the body of Christ and participate fully in all the blessings and responsibilities of being a faith member in the Church. God has not cast off or forever rejected His covenant people. A remnant of their number will repent and will turn to their Messiah in believing faith during the final days of the Tribulation and their Messiah will return and rescue them from their enemies who will have surrounded them. It is apparent that the distinctiveness of the Jewish people will not be forgotten or ignored both in the future days of the Messianic kingdom and the forever days of the eternal state.

Outline of Chapters 58-66
C. The Promises of the Future Messianic Kingdom: Chapters 58-66

1. God’s Blessings for Observing Righteous Fasts and Sabbaths: 58:1-14
2. God to Bring Salvation through His Own Arm: 59:1-21
4. The Messiah to Heal and Comfort the Afflicted: 61:1-11
5. The Beautiful Land of the Messiah: 62:1-12
6. The Return of the Messiah Who is Mighty to Save: 63:1-6
8. Isaiah’s Prayer for Mercy from God: 63:15-64:12
10. Future Blessings on the Remnant: 65:8-12
15. Destinies of the Faithful and the Wicked: 66:15-24

1. God’s Blessings for Observing Righteous Fasts and Sabbaths: 58:1-14

Chapters 58 and 59 are considered by many Biblical scholars as being one literary unit. However, David L. Cooper considers chapters 58-60 to be a single unit or sermon by Isaiah:

“Chapters 58, 59, and 60 constitute a single literary unit, a sermon. In chapter 58 the prophet calls upon Israel to lay aside all of her formalism and to turn to God. If she will only do this, the Messiah will come and deliver her. In 59:1-15a Isaiah portrays very vividly and graphically the prevalence of sin in Israel of the end time. Following this prediction, in 59:15b-60:3, appears a forecast of the Messiah's coming in glory and power. In 60:4-9 is a prophecy of Israel's final and complete regathering to the land of the fathers. The discourse closes with a most wonderful description of the millennial Jerusalem (60:10-22).” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – March 1946).

In chapter 58, Isaiah discusses what may be called, a return to righteousness which replaces ritual. In the first five verses, the prophet records the Lord’s rebuke for ritualistic worship which is only formal motions without heartfelt devotion to Him. The people, vs. 2, seek God daily and seem to delight in knowing His ways, “as if they were a nation that did righteousness.” They ask God for righteous judgments and (seem) to draw near to Him. But, vs 3a, they complain that although they have fasted and humbled themselves, God has not seen it nor acknowledged it. God, vs. 3b, states that their day of fasting was really a day to seek their
own pleasure and oppress their workers. It was also a day of quarreling, argument and fighting, vs. 4. God asks, vs. 5, “Is this really the fast I have chosen?” Is it “an acceptable day to the LORD?”

In verses 6-14, God describes what He has chosen as an acceptable fast. This includes righteous acts of breaking every yoke and setting free the oppressed, vs. 6. It is to share bread with the hungry and give shelter to the homeless, to clothe the naked and provide for one’s relatives, vs. 7. This righteous activity will result in God’s pleasure and healing, vs. 8. God will answer them when they call upon Him and help them, vs. 9a. If they replace wicked acts with righteous ones, the Lord will guide them, make them healthy and satisfy their desires, vss. 9b-11. They will also become builders and restore ancient ruins, vs. 12. If they do not violate the Sabbath but delight in it and honor it by not seeking their own ways and pleasure, then they will delight themselves in the LORD, then He will bless them, vss. 13-14.

58:1-5 Ritualistic Fasting Rejected

58:1 Shout out loud, do not hold back;  
lift up your voice like a trumpet,  
declare to my people their transgression,  
and to the house of Jacob their sins.

The first words of Isaiah 58:1 in the DASV are “Shout out loud” (some versions have “Cry loudly”), which is literally “with a full throat, spare not” according to Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 445. Although it is not stated who is to shout or cry out, it is reasonable to consider that Isaiah has received this call from God as the message is from Him as the second half of 58:1 indicates. Combined with the call to shout with a full throat is the command to, “lift up your voice like a trumpet.” Victor Buksbazen again comments:

“The Hebrew word for “trumpet or horn” is “shofar” – a ram’s horn used by the priests to call the people to a solemn assembly, or by a military commander to sound the signal for alarm or for action.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 445).

The prophet is to shout or cry out with a full throat loudly, as with a trumpet or horn of summons, to give God’s words to His covenant people (my people, the house of Jacob). God’s words are stated as, declare to my people their transgressions and sins. This message from God is all to common in the writings of Isaiah. From the very first chapter to the last, Isaiah is called upon to make known the sins of the people, those who have rebelled against God, Isaiah 1:2 and those who have chosen their own ways, and who delight in their abominations, Isaiah 66:3. The declaration by God of the sins of His people is a major theme in Isaiah, for God has constantly reminded them of their wickedness and rebellion against Him. Thankfully, a corresponding theme in Isaiah is God’s gracious and merciful provision of salvation for them through the atoning sacrifice of the Servant, who is the Messiah who was “crushed for our iniquities” 53:5, and upon Him the LORD laid “the sin of us all,” 53:6 and who’s life was made “an offering for sin,” 53:10 and He “bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors,” 53:12. The specific set of iniquities in this declaration from God, chapter 58, has to do with the ritualistic and heartless practice of fasting, 58:3-4.

58:2 Yet they seek me daily,  
and delight to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that did righteousness,  
and has not rejected the ordinance of their God.  
They ask me for righteous judgments;  
they delight to draw near to God.
The connection between 58:1 and 58:2 is that, although the covenant people of God (my people, the house of Jacob), have sinned and transgressed against God, they seek Him and (seemingly) delight to know (understand) God’s ways, “as if they were a nation that did righteousness.” They were blind to the consequences of their sinfulness. They had “rejected the ordinance of their God,” but with ignorance of the consequences of their sin, had sought God out every day as if they had some righteous reason to know Him. They were blind to their iniquities which kept them from God and without any remorse or repentance of their sins, were ones who, although unrighteous, looked to God for His righteous judgments. They had ritualistic ambition but were people who’s “righteous acts are like filthy rags,” Isaiah 64:6. In spite of their wickedness, they delighted to “draw near to God,” 58:2. This attempt to draw near to God was an abomination to Him because they were wicked and sinful.

The “ordinance of their God” is the Hebrew word mishpat, which usually has the meaning of “justice” or “judgment” in the Old Testament and in the context of Isaiah 58:2 can be understood as “law” or “commands” which would refer to the law as stipulated in the Pentateuch. The repeated refusal of God’s covenant people to obey His commands was an offence that kept them distant from fellowship with Him and from receiving the benefits of His guidance and blessings. When they came to God clothed in the filthy rags of their own self derived righteousness, God was repulsed and would not receive them nor respond to their “delight to draw near” to Him. God, who is intrinsically holy, did not then, and does not today, embrace wickedness. The only way God could have fellowship with them is through their faith, Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; see also Romans 4:13-25; and Galatians 3:6-9. True fellowship with God is only possible by faith in the ‘cross-work’ of the Messiah which results in the “righteousness” of Jesus Christ being imputed (reckoned) to them. See Romans 1:17, “righteousness from God.” See also Romans 3:21-24; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; and Philippians 3:8-9. For a discussion of the imputed righteous of Christ see Henry Clarence Thiessen, Lectures in inSystematic Theology, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Revised Edition, 1979, pages 276-277.

Regarding their delight to know the ways of God, they should have been familiar with the words of King David, as recorded in Psalm 37:4:

Delight yourself in the LORD,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

The desire to delight in the Lord and draw near to Him is a common theme in the Scriptures: Psalm 1:2; 37:23; 40:8; 111:2; 112:1; 119:(many vss.); Proverbs 23:26; Isaiah 58: 13-14; Jeremiah 15:16; Hebrews 4:16; 7:19, 25; 10:22; and James 4:8. However, drawing near to God and delighting in Him is an act of a pure heart, from those who are devoted to Him and have faith in Him. Seeking God in true repentance and humbleness of heart is pleasing to Him as are the external actions stemming from this, such as the acts that God accepts as a “fast,” as described in Isaiah 58:6-14.

58:3-5 'Why have we fasted,' they complain,  
'but you did not see it?  
Why have we humbled ourselves,  
but you take no knowledge of it?  
In the day of your fast you pursue your own pleasure,  
and oppress all your workers.

4 Your fasting leads to quarreling and arguments,  
and to wicked fistfights.  
The fasting you do this day
Is this really the fast that I have chosen? Is it a day just for a person to humble themselves? Is it merely to bow down one's head like a reed, or to lie on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

Those who have fasted and humbled themselves complain that God has not seen them nor acknowledge their actions. Prior to the exile in Babylon, there was only one day of the year that fasting (a sabbath of solemn rest) was required by all Israelites on the day of atonement, Leviticus 16:29-34. However, individuals could fast for various reasons such as an during times of great need or when enemies attacked, 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 12:16; Daniel 6:18; and 9:3. In later years other fasts were added during the exile in Babylon, Zechariah 7:5; and 8:19. See also Ezra 8:21-23.

The response of God Isaiah 58:3b; revealed the sinfulness of those who fasted which was the reason God did not respond to them. The purpose of fasting was first to seek God for forgiveness of sins and second to seek Him in complete humbleness and contriteness in spirit for His help when the only rescue possible is from God alone. Isaiah, however, revealed that the covenant people of God spent their day of fasting pursuing their own pleasures and oppressing their workers. The fasting rules on the day of atonement required that everyone cease from working and spend the day humbling their souls, Leviticus 16:29-30. Not only were they pursuing their own pleasure and oppressing their workers, but they their fasting led to quarreling, arguments and wicked fistfights. The attitude and actions of those who fasted, Isaiah 58:3-4, reveal that their hearts were far from God and they were merely practicing ritual without any righteousness or even desire to be righteous.

In Isaiah58:5, the Lord asks several rhetorical questions that demand negative answers because they are really statements about what God does not accept when His covenant people participate in a day of fasting. The first question is the way the people choose to fast really the fast God has chosen? The obvious response is no for God has not chosen a fast filled with wickedness and oppressive behaviour, 58:3-4. The second question is much deeper theologically. Is the day of fasting only for someone to humble themselves? God is asking, is that all there is to your fasting, just a day to humble yourselves? Fasting certainly includes an attitude of humbleness but it is far more than that. God required a contrite spirit and a sacrificial attitude which involves separation from all normal daily activities such as work and business interests and the releasing of employees from their work obligations, so they also can fast in an appropriate manner. It is a day to confess sins and seek forgiveness from God so that righteous fellowship with Him can be restored. It is a day of peace from conflict and for righteous thoughts and deeds and for seeking God to have fellowship with Him alone. It is a day of prayerful communing with the Lord and a day of devout worship of Him filled with praises for who He is and what He has accomplished.

The third question pertains to the outward actions. God asks is the day of fasting only for bowing one’s head like a reed or to lie on sackcloth and ashes? The bowing of the head like a reed would be ritualistic formality without any true spiritual impact within the heart of the person. The same would apply for those who put on sackcloth and laid on a bed of ashes. It is going through the motions to appear as if the person participating in the fast was pious for the sake of those who would be observing these actions. At times, the Lord’s people were requested to put on sackcloth and to lay in ashes as an outward display of mourning for coming disaster. See Jeremiah 6:26. At other times this was an observed behaviour by the people because of the Lord’s
The fourth question is a summary of the Lord’s statements, is all this what you call a fast and an acceptable day to the LORD? The Lord asks, does their wickedness of thought and deed and their ritualistic formal motions which are for appearances only and have no devotion or consideration of the Lord, are these things what they would consider as acceptable to God? This fourth question, as for all of the other three, demand a negative response for there is absolutely nothing the covenant people of God have done in their day of fasting that is either pleasing to God or acceptable to Him. Just the opposite was true for their wickedness was an abhorrence to the Holy One of Israel.

58:6-14 Righteous Fasting Rewarded

Isaiah 58:6-14 is notable for a series of “is not this” (if) and “then” actions and results. Vss. 6-7 contain eight righteous actions, which “if” completed are rewarded with five results in vss. 8-9a that the Lord will give (the “then”). Vss. 9b-10a contain four additional righteous actions, which “if” completed are rewarded with seven results in vss. 10b-12. Vss. 13-14 are another series of “if” and “then” actions and results concerning the Sabbath day. Vs. 13 contains (perhaps) seven righteous actions beginning with “if” and vs. 14 contains three results beginning with “then.” Biblical scholars differ as to the exactness of the numbers of these actions and results for some could be combined as one action or result. The clear intention of God is however, that righteous actions, that He commands will result in His divine pleasure and response.

58:6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen:

*to loose the bonds of wickedness,*

*to tear off the ropes of the yoke,*

*and to let the oppressed go free,*

*and to break every yoke?*

In stunning contrast to the fast chosen and observed by His covenant people, the Lord describes, in 58:6-14, the observances of fasting that He has chosen. In 58:6 God describes four actions that are not usually applied to a day or time of fasting. God is stating that if (for example) the purpose of their fasting is for the opening up, freeing or loosening the grip of wickedness upon them or for freedom from oppression from their enemies, they need to treat others as they would want to be treated. The Messiah would much later declare this is a sermon, recorded in Matthew 7:12, “Whatever therefore you would that others should do to you, so you should do to them, for this fulfills the law and the prophets.” The Messiah also proclaimed this truth, as recorded in Matthew 6:6-18 (NKJV), as He explained one aspect of His model prayer, “*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” In the same sermon, the Messiah commented on fasting, “*Moreover, when you fast, do not be as the hypocrites, who make their faces sad, for they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by men to fast. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward.* 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face, 18 that you may not be seen by men to fast, but only by your Father who is hidden in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.” Matthew 6:6-18.

The LORD in Isaiah 58:6 describes four actions that He has chosen as an acceptable fast. The first action is to “loose the bonds of wickedness.” The righteous acts of those devoted to God and seek Him in faith include working to free others from the grasp of wicked people and the removing of obstacles that wickedness has placed in the way of others. See Proverbs 21:12; 29:7 and Hebrews 11:33 (acts of righteousness). The second
action is “to tear off the ropes of the yoke.” This action may involve working towards freeing someone from bondage or confinement as it is difficult without force to do this immediately. This, as with all righteous acts, requires God’s involvement. Those who participate in God’s choice of a righteous fast would need to seek God in prayer to achieve what He desires to accomplish these acts of righteousness. The third action is “to let the oppressed go free.” This may refer to freeing those who have been oppressed by the covenant people of God themselves and it may also involve seeking the freedom of those who are oppressed by others. The topic of being oppressed is very wide and involves many aspects of social, political, business and religious oppression as well as oppression by family members as the end of 58:7 indicates. The fourth action is “break every yoke.” This is a summary of all of the requirements of righteous “fasting” that God desires. God requires His covenant people and all who have faith in Him to be continually at work at setting captives free, removing wickedness and its obstacles and seeking just and fair decisions for everyone regardless if they are or are not in the “household of faith”, Galatians 6:10.

58:7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and provide shelter for the homeless? Is it not when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own relatives?

Isaiah, in 58:7 begins God’s questions with “Is it not,” which is similar to “Is not this,” which begins God’s questions in 58:6. These expressions translate the Hebrew halo which has the meaning of “it certainly is so.” The words of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, “Truly I say to you,” have much the same meaning. In 58:7, the prophet continues God’s declaration of what He considers a righteous fast. As with 58:6 there are four actions that those who are righteously seeking God are required to perform. They are not to be done in ritualistic formality, such was the practice in the past for God’s covenant people, but with a humble and contrite heart. The first action is “to share your bread with the hungry.” Some may suggest that this and the other righteous actions apply specifically to the “day” of fasting, as a day of fasting is mentioned in 58:3-5, but the Scriptures require these and others as everyday actions of righteousness. See Proverbs 25:21; Ezekiel 18:7, 16; Matthew 25:34-40; and Romans 12:9-21. However, the righteous actions the Lord requires to be done on the Sabbath do apply directly to that specific “day”

The second righteous action of Isaiah 58:7 is to “provide shelter for the homeless.” This is also more than an activity to be done only on the day one fasts. It implies a much deeper and costlier commitment in comparison to feeding those who are hungry. To provide shelter for the homeless involves a long-time commitment of one’s availability and money. The KJV translation of this phrase is to “bring the poor that are cast out to thy house.” The NKJV is similar: “And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out.” It obviously is not possible to bring all who are homeless into one’s house but the spirit of this righteous requirement from God would be to be working continually to ensure the homeless have proper shelter. As with the other righteous actions stated in Isaiah 58:7, this also requires a deep and sacrificial commitment of time and money.

The third righteous action of Isaiah 58:7 is to provide clothing for the naked. Along with helping individuals as a need is recognized, many churches have food and clothing “cupboards” which are used on a daily basis to help relieve the critical needs of the poor and homeless in their communities. Individuals can also donate food and clothing items to Christian charities which distribute these items free of charge to those who are needy. In Isaiah’s day, it is not known if such charitable organizations were operating but individual acts of kindness in providing food and clothing was always a righteous activity that God required.
The fourth righteous action of Isaiah 58:7, not to hide oneself from the needs of family, may have been the most difficult for God’s covenant people to practice. Helping strangers in need is sometimes much easier than swallowing pride and forgiving past hurts to help estranged family members who are in need. This may be why God added this requirement. To help loved and cherished family members may not need a special command from God. But to help those family members who have become “outcasts” for any reason who are in need, is a commitment that would be a righteous activity that would not only be pleasing to God but be most God-like. The righteous actions, stated in 58:6-7, selected by God to be requirements of a fast that He accepts are also reminders of the righteous works of the Servant, Isaiah 11:1-10; 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12; and 61:1-3. See also Psalm 146:7.

58:8-9a Then will your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly spring up; your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will guard your back.  

9a Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say, "Here I am.

The results of performing the righteous acts stated in 58:6-7 are five rewards from the LORD, stated in 58:8-9a beginning in 58:8 with “then.” These rewards are obviously not contained to just one day but are consequences of actions that indicate a heart that is humble, contrite and continually devoted to doing what pleases God. They apply not only to Isaiah’s time, nor only to a far future time but to every day including today. Christians can confidently expect the “if” actions and “then” results to apply to them each day they walk with the Lord. The words of the Lord to Joshua as recorded in Joshua 1:6-9 are another example where God’s reward “then” follow His requirements of righteous actions. They are “timeless” principles for all who have faith in God to apply to their lives.

The first result or reward from God for doing the required righteous actions stated in 58:6-7, the “then” stated in vs. 8 is your “light” will “break forth like the dawn.” The source of “light,” Hebrew or, is the Lord, Isaiah 2:5. Isaiah prophesized in 9:2 that,

The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined.

God had promised in Isaiah 42:16, to turn the darkness into light before His people. In 49:6, speaking to His Servant, the Messiah, God promises that “I will also make you a light to the nations, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” Also, God promised in Isaiah 60:1-3, to the people of Zion in the far future that,

1 “Arise, shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

2 For, look, darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness the peoples, but the LORD arises on you and his glory is seen over you.

3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your radiance.
In the New Testament, the apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:6, wrote a most beautiful description of the meaning of God’s light: “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” The “light” that will “break forth like the dawn,” Isaiah 58:8 is many splendored. It is that the light of God, seen in the Messiah, is the light of men, John 1:4-5, that shines so bright to dispel darkness so that God’s truth can be revealed. It is the light that will be upon His covenant people, in the person of their Messiah, so that the nations of the earth in a far future day will be attracted to it and desire to come to Zion, Isaiah 60:1-3. It is also the light that will shine in the hearts of those who have faith in the Messiah, 2 Corinthians 4:6, so that the knowledge of the glory of God will be seen in the face of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The second reward stated in Isaiah 58:8 is that “your healing will quickly spring up.” Isaiah had previously discussed light and healing in 30:26:

Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD binds up the injuries of his people and heals the wound he has inflicted.

Healing was also discussed by Isaiah in 57:16-19. The most important theological writing of Isaiah regarding healing which ties together all references to spiritual healing occurs in 53:5:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that made us whole was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.

The healing that will quickly spring up or sprout, Hebrew samah, is a spiritual renewal of the heart that the Lord will bring upon those who are penitent and contrite. It is encapsulated in the new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-29 through the substitutionary cross-work of the Messiah. It is a most wondrous act of grace to a most underserving people but through faith, these who are undeserving, will be marvellously declared “healed,” “justified,” and “righteous.” They will have a position before God that, although they are yet sinners, they will be seen by Him as righteous, and have the God given “right” to stand before Him. See above comment on the imputed righteousness of Christ under notes for Isaiah 58:2.

The third reward stated in Isaiah 58:8 is that “your righteousness will go before you.” The words “your righteousness” going before them surely is a reference to the Lord, who is their righteousness, who will go before them, Isaiah 52:12. It is the Lord who is their righteousness, Jeremiah 23:6, 33:16. The prophet Micah declared as recorded in Micah 7:9, “He will bring me out into the light, and I will see his righteousness.” In a far future day, the Messiah will physically return and go before them, Micah 2:13. For Isaiah’s time and even today, the Lord’s righteousness spiritually leads those who are obedient to Him. Those who are dependant upon Him will have His guidance for He leads them beside still waters and guides them “in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” Psalm 23:2-3.

The fourth reward stated in Isaiah 58:8 is “the glory of the LORD will guard your back.” Isaiah had previously stated “the LORD will go before you; the God of Israel will watch your back,” Isaiah 52:12. Not only will the LORD go before them as their righteous guide, but He will also protect them on all sides. They should have complete confidence in Him as He surrounds them with His loving care and protection. See also Exodus 14:13-20; Isaiah 42:16, and 49:8-13 (the ministry of the Messiah).
The fifth reward is stated in Isaiah 58:9a. The LORD will respond to them when they call out to Him and be present to help them. In a similar passage to that of Isaiah 58: 6-14, The psalmist Asaph declared, in Psalm 50:14-15 that, “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and keep your vows to the Most High. 15 Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify me. Isaiah had also stated that God’s covenant people were to call upon the Lord while He was near to them, Isaiah 55:6. Isaiah also stated 65:24, referring to a far future time, “Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” As it was in Isaiah’s time and remains so today and will be during the messianic kingdom, those who draw near to the Messiah in faith and are obedient to Him will enjoy the benefits of His nearness to them for He will quickly respond to calls for help from His people.

58:9b-10a If you remove from the midst of you the yoke of oppression, 
the pointing fingers, and speaking wickedly, 
and if you give yourself to help the hungry, 
and to satisfy the needs of the oppressed,

In Isaiah 58:9b-10a, Isaiah records another set of righteous actions required by the Lord as a fast that He will acknowledge and accept. These four righteous actions, performed by His covenant people, beginning with the word “if”, are followed with seven rewards that again begin with the word “then” in 58:10b. The first righteous action of Isaiah 58:9b-10-a is the removing, from the midst of God’s covenant people, the yoke of oppression. This refers back to what God had declared as recorded in 58:6. The usage of yokes were very common in the agricultural economy of ancient Judah during the time of Isaiah for controlling the movements of large animals for the work of plowing hard soil and other tasks. A yoke was typically a heavy restraining device made of wood that encompassed an animal’s neck and had reins attached to it which a farmer would use for turning the animal in a desired direction. In the context of Isaiah chapter 58, the yoke is a metaphor for the restraints put upon people held captive. Thus, to use the metaphor for an illustration, captive people would be under the yoke of slavery, oppression, forced labor, and cruel, brutal and unfair treatment of any kind. The LORD expected His people to work towards the removal from their midst of any kind of oppressive treatment. Some understand this requirement from God as a direct command to His covenant people who oppress those who work for them during the day of their fasting.

The second righteous action has two components, the putting to an end of pointing fingers and wicked speech. The pointing of, or stretching out, fingers was likely an action of judging others by a critical and negative gesture that was socially demeaning. Associated with this action is wicked speaking. See Proverbs 6:12-14 as an example. Isaiah recorded a strong condemnation against God’s covenant people, Isaiah 59:2-3:

2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God, 
    and your sins have hidden his face from you, 
    so that he will not hear. 
3 For your hands are defiled with blood, 
    and your fingers with iniquity; 
    your lips have spoken lies; 
    your tongue mutters wickedness.

The third righteous action of Isaiah 58:9b-10a is that His covenant people are to give themselves to help the hungry. This is a sharp rebuke, for during a day of fasting they would openly demonstrate their piousness by not eating but others who have little or no food are painfully hungry, and God’s people do nothing to relieve their hunger. This ungodly piety was no different during the days of the Messiah’s first advent, as His parable of the good Samaritan demonstrates, Luke 10:30-37. The fourth righteous action of Isaiah 58:9b-10a is to
satisfy the needs of the oppressed. This may be a summary statement of all of the righteous acts described in chapter 58 that God requires as a fast that He desires and accepts.

58:10b-12 then your light will rise in darkness,
    and your darkness will become like the noonday.
11 The LORD will guide you continually,
    and satisfy your desire even in parched places
    and make your bones strong.
You will be like a watered garden,
    and like a spring of water whose waters never fail.
12 They who will be from you will rebuild the old ruins;
    you will raise up the foundations of many generations;
you will be called "The Reparer of the Broken Walls,"
"The Restorer of Streets to Live in."

As with the previous set of “if” and “then” cause and effect actions in 58:6-7, righteous actions followed by 58:8-9a, positive rewards, the positive rewards stated in 58:10b-12 follow the righteous actions described in 58:9b-10a. Seven positive results or rewards from God are stated in 58:10b-12. Not everyone agrees that the listing of these rewards can be identified as seven distinct actions from God, for some may be combined as one general action, but the intent is the same. God promises to reward the righteous acts of His covenant people with His presence and guidance and with benefits He alone can provide.

The first result stated in Isaiah 58:10b-12 is that, “your light will rise in darkness, and your darkness will become like noonday.” This may be a re-statement of the result stated in 58:8, “then will your light break forth like the dawn.” For a discussion on the importance of this result, see notes on 58:8. The second result stated in Isaiah 58:10b-12 is that the LORD promises to continually guide His covenant people and all who have faith in Him. This is a wonderful promise from God as often stated in the Old Testament: Psalm 23:3; 48:14; 67:4; 73:24; 78:52, 72; 107:30; Isaiah 42:16; 49:10, and 57:18 and in the New Testament: Luke 1:79; John 16:13; and Revelation 7:17.

The third result stated in Isaiah 58:10b-12 is that the LORD will “satisfy your desire even in parched places.” The word “desire” in 58:11 is the Hebrew word nephesh which is often translated as “soul” or “body” but can have the meaning of “desire” as translated in the DASV, ESV and the NASB, but as “soul” in the KJV and the NKJV, and as “needs” in the NIV. This Hebrew word also occurs in 58:10 and is translated as “needs” in the DASV and NIV. This result from God is perhaps in juxtaposition to the requirement of God for His people to “help the hungry,” 58:10. See note below on God’s Blessings. The fourth result is that the LORD will “make your bones strong.” This result or reward is similar in intent to what the apostle James recorded in James 5:13-16. It should be remembered that not everyone will be healed because they have obeyed God with a whole heart. God’s ultimate intent is to eternally bless all who have faith in Him. Many who served God faithfully while living on the earth but were privileged to suffer for Him in poor health and with disabilities that were not healed, will receive healthy “heavenly” bodies. For an excellent discussion on this reality, refer to Suffering and the Sovereignty of God, John Piper and Justin Taylor, General Editors, Crossway Books, 2006.

The fifth result stated in Isaiah 58:10b-12 is that “you will be made like a watered garden.” This is a metaphor for God’s provision and care resulting in the growth and fulfilled potential that God alone desires. It is fitting that those who have faith in God are described as a garden. The results of the growth and success of the garden resides solely in God’s hands. The “things” of the garden, the plants, flowers and crops depend
entirely on God and have no strength or ability to grow and prosper themselves. It is God’s intended result that will determine the success of what is planted in His garden. Mature students of Scripture should be able to discern the “intent” of God’s meaning in Isaiah 58:11 in comparison to God’s intentions in the description of His vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7. See notes on Isaiah chapter 5.

The sixth result stated in Isaiah 58:10b-12 is that God’s faithful people will be “like a spring of water whose waters never fail.” This is close in meaning to the previous result of a “watered garden.” God promises to continually be with His faithful and obedient people, so their lives will resemble a spring that constantly flows with water for their benefit and the benefit of others. In the New Testament, the Messiah promised that He can give water from which, those who receive it, will never again thirst, John 4:14, “but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst; but the water that I will give will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

The seventh result stated in Isaiah 58:10b-12 is that those who are obedient to Him by observing a fast that He desires and accepts will “rebuild the old ruins,” and “raise up the foundations of many generations,” and they will be called “The Repairer of the Broken Walls, The Restorer of Streets to Live in.” Many Biblical scholars understand that this promise applies specifically to the return to Jerusalem by the exiles in Babylon to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that were destroyed by the Babylonians. However, other scholars suggest alternate interpretations. David L. Cooper for example suggests that this rebuilding will happen during the return to Jerusalem at the end of the Tribulation period by the faithful remnant of God’s covenant people at the beginning of the Messianic kingdom. See D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – March 1946. Gary V. Smith also suggests that this restoration will happen in an eschatological era. See Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 582-583.

God’s Blessings:
It is critical for those who have faith in God to not have the attitude of obeying and serving God only to get blessings from God as some may imply is the case from Isaiah chapter 58. God is to be obeyed, served and worshiped because of who He is not because of what blessings He may bestow. Some may be also tempted to love and look for God’s blessings more than loving God Himself. The greatest gift God gives to this world is Himself. There is nothing greater, better, higher or more exalted or holier than God Himself. His gifts, blessings, grace and mercy flow out from who He is and are not to be desired above Him for this leads to idolatry. The teaching of some present day Christian associations and denominations seems to put more emphasis on the blessings from God rather than on the divine Bestower of the blessings. Also, their teaching may lead many to the conclusion that believers in God need to give to Him their time and particularly their money in order to receive blessings from Him. It is taught that this is a guarantee from God that blessings are derived in direct response to the amount of money and gifts one gives to God which is often directed solely to the leader(s) of the Christian organization. This is not what the Scriptures teach.

God, as recorded in Isaiah chapter 58, is specifically promising His love, care and guidance and blessings to those who are participating in a fast God desires and accepts. By comparing Scripture with Scripture, the student understands that the direction in which God often leads His servants, may not at first be perceived as a blessing as God’s servant Job came to understand and as the apostle Paul and most of the other apostles experienced. This understanding of God’s direction in the lives of His people requires a mature outlook and perception of what God is doing to accomplish His plans and purposes in the world He alone has created. Not all, who wholeheartedly obey and worship God, will receive the type of blessings that many think are “due” to them from God. The author of Hebrews makes this clear, as in Hebrews chapter 11:36-40. The ultimate blessings from God will not be received in this earthly life but will be realized in the eternal state, when all who live with God there, will fully comprehend His divine intentions for them.
58:13 If you keep your foot from violating the Sabbath, 
    from doing your pleasure on my holy day;
but call the Sabbath a delight,
    and the holy day of the LORD honorable,
and if you honor it, 
    not going your own ways, 
    or pursuing your own pleasure, 
    or speaking your own idle words,

The requirements of “if” and the results of “then” as seen in the preceding verses of Isaiah chapter 58, continue in 58:13-14. But in these verses, the emphasis is upon keeping the Sabbath. The Sabbath was instituted by God as a day of rest, a holy convocation and was declared by God to be an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel. The Sabbath is first mentioned in Exodus 16:22-30 when God brought manna to His people for food. They were not to gather the manna on the Sabbath day for it was to be a holy day to God. The observance of the Sabbath was instituted by God as the fourth commandment, Exodus 20:8-11 and the penalty for not observing the Sabbath, during the wilderness wonderings by the Israelites, was death, Exodus 31:14-15 and Numbers 15:32-36. Once the Israelites were in their promised land, there is no record that the death penalty was practiced for not keeping the Sabbath. The observance of the Sabbath was to be a sign between God and His people, Exodus 31:12-17 and it was to be an everlasting covenant between them, Leviticus 24:8. Even the land was to have ‘sabbath’ rests every seven years, Leviticus 25:2-7; 26:34-39; and at the end of forty-nine years a year of jubilee, the fiftieth, was to be observed, Leviticus 25:8-22. The Sabbath was to be kept as a holy day, Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Isaiah had previously discussed the keeping of the Sabbath day, Isaiah 56:2, 4 and 6 and would again mention it, Isaiah 66:23. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel also declared the wickedness of the people of God for not observing the Sabbath day as God required. See Jeremiah 17:19-27; Ezekiel 20:12-26; 22:8, 26 and 38.

However, by the time of Jesus there was much legalism attached to keeping the Sabbath by the Jewish religious leaders who often accused the Lord of breaking the Sabbath by healing people on this day, Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 6:1-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-30; 7:14-24; and 9:1-17. Jesus responded to their legalistic interpretation by stating that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath, Matthew 12:12. The Sabbath was kept by the followers of Jesus up until the resurrection, Luke 23:56. But following the resurrection the observance of the Sabbath day was not kept and was replaced by religious observances during the first day of the week, which was Sunday, Acts 20:7. The apostle Paul also made reference to not judging people for their observance (or not) of the Sabbath day and festival days for they were just a shadow of what was to come, Colossians 2:16-17. See also Romans 14:5-6.

In Isaiah 58:13, the prophet lists several righteous observances, the that LORD required, with the conditional “if” regarding the Sabbath. These are divided into negative and positive actions. The negative actions are, first, to keep one’s foot from violating the Sabbath, which is likely a reference to not conducting business, buying and selling on the Sabbath, Nehemiah 10:31-33 and 13:15-22. The second negative action was to keep from doing one’s own pleasure on God’s holy day, which is stated twice in 58:13. It was a holy day, a day of rest and a holy convocation to God’s people, Leviticus 23:3. The third negative action was to not “going your own ways.” The fourth negative action was not to speak idle words. These actions help clarify that God desires that His Sabbath was to be set-apart wholly for Him.

The positive actions in keeping the Sabbath, listed in 58:13 are first, to call the Sabbath a delight. Isaiah spoke of delighting in the LORD in 58:14 as a result or reward of righteous actions in 58:13. The righteous action of acknowledging or calling the Sabbath a delight is to observe it as God intended for the Sabbath was
a day set aside for holiness during which God’s people were to contemplate who God is and what He has and continues to do for them. They were to have the attitude that there is no greater delight than to delight in God alone. The second positive action was to acknowledge (to call) God’s holy day as honorable. The word “honorable” is the Hebrew word kabeled, which has the meaning of “heaviness” or “weighty” and can also mean to “glorify”. To keep the Sabbath as honorable is to observe it as having much weight or worth therefore, in observing it this way, one glorifies God. God also describes what He means by honoring the Sabbath in 58:13, as stated in negative actions (see above): not “violating the sabbath;” “not going your own ways;” not “pursuing your own pleasure;” and not “speaking your own idle words.” All of the positive and negative descriptions of actions God requires for keeping the Sabbath center on delighting only in Him as 58:14 will reveal.

58:14 then you will delight yourself in the LORD,  
and I will make you ride on the high places of the earth,  
and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.

The “if” actions of Isaiah 58:13 are followed by the “then” results or rewards declared in 58:14. Before considering any conclusions about the automatic results of cause and affect between 58:13 and 14, it is best to study what God’s intentions are for those of His covenant people who obey Him. See notes on Isaiah 58:12 above for a discussion on these intentions. God’s promises stated in 58:14 most likely have a far future time for their fulfillment when God will restore the people to their land and bless them among the nations of the earth. Victor Buksbazen observes:

“The honoring of the Sabbath and of the LORD who sanctified the Sabbath will bring exaltation and honor to Israel from the nations of the earth, also restoration and enjoyment of their ancestral heritage.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 448).

David L. Cooper also suggests:

“The third conditional sentence is found in verses 13, 14. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day ... then shalt thou delight thyself in Jehovah; and I will make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth; and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it." According to this proposition as with the two former ones, all Israel will have to do is to live up to the light that she has, walking forward as God leads her. Then He will give her the full light of day, and her "light," who is none other than her righteous Messiah, will come and bring the long desired rest and victory.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – March 1946).

Isaiah had previously recorded the promises of God in similar language in 40:31:

but those who wait for the LORD will renew their strength;  
they will mount up with wings like eagles;  
they will run, and not grow weary;  
they will walk, and not faint.

The words “and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,” refer to the promises God had made to them about the land. See (not an exhaustive list), Isaiah 30:23-26; 30:1-22; 30:2; 61:1-62:12; 65:17-25; also Psalm 53:6; Jeremiah 30:3, 18-24 Ezekiel 34:11-31; and Amos 9:11-15. Finally, the LORD authenticates His promise by stating, “the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.” These are promises that the covenant people of God can absolutely depend upon for the LORD will certainly fulfill them. The final phrase of Isaiah
chapter 58 bears the sovereign stamp of Yahweh who has also in many places in Isaiah stated, “thus says the LORD.”

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 58:
58:1-5 Fasts Ritualistically Observed
58:6-12 Fasts Righteously Observed and their Rewards
58:6-7 Righteous Actions of Acceptable Fasts
58:8-9a Results of Righteous Actions
58:9b-10a Righteous Actions of Acceptable Fasts
58:10b-12 Results of Righteous Actions
58:13-14 Sabbaths Righteously Observed and their Rewards

2. God to Bring Salvation through His Own Arm: 59:1-21

God’s warning about the iniquities of His covenant people are continued in Isaiah chapter 59 but are directed to their daily lives rather than to their day of fasting or Sabbath day observances. A catalog of sins is presented, similar to many other passages in Isaiah starting with chapter 1, as the ever-present sinfulness of the people is a major theme of Isaiah. God does not just lament over these sins but provides a salvific solution for them as vs. 1 of Chapter 59 clearly demonstrates. God’s intention throughout the writings of the prophet Isaiah is to not minimize the sinfulness of His people as these sins were and are an abhorrence to Him, but He highlights these sins as they pinpoint the primary condition of His people. They had repeatedly and continually rebelled against Him because they had rejected Him as their sovereign ruler. They had persistently exhibited the fruit of this rejection in a multitude of sinful behaviours stemming from their inward desires (the heart) which is wholly deceitful. Thus, the people were only motivated to act in their own ways with absolutely no concern for righteously walking in God’s ways.

Isaiah chapter 59 opens with a blessed reminder that God both hears and provides salvation to His people. The metaphors of God’s hand and ear in vs. 1 are an apt introduction to this chapter as it is highlighted with anthropomorphisms describing God’s actions: works of His hand, vs. 1, hearing of His ear, vss. 1-2, His seeing vs. 15, works of His arm, vs. 16, and wearing garments including a helmet and a breastplate, vs. 17. Corresponding to these anthropological descriptions of God’s actions are many depictions of human actions which however, describe sinful behaviour. His people sin by the use of their hands (palms), fingers, lips, tongues, feet, thoughts, voice (growling and moaning), and speaking (talking).

Although salvation is the major theme of Isaiah chapter 59, the subject of justice and its parallel righteousness also have a prominent place. Justice, Hebrew misphat, occurs in vss. 8, 9, 11, 14 and 15. In vs. 4, the DASV, KJV, NKJV and NIV have the word “justice” and the ESV has “justly.” The Hebrew word is sedeq, and is translated as righteously in the NASB, thus highlighting the parallel between justice and righteousness. The similar word righteousness, Hebrew sedaqah, occurs in the DASV in vss. 9, 14, 16, and 17. Theologically, salvation embraces justice/righteousness. Justice and righteousness which are acceptable and delighted in by God could not be truly evidenced in people’s lives unless they have first believed in God for salvation. God’s new covenant with His people, which is referenced, but not fully explained, in vs. 21 is the means by which God will ensure that justice/righteousness is evident in the lives of those who believe in Him by faith and thereby participate in the blessings of the new covenant. The new covenant and its resulting blessings is referenced again in the Old Testament in such passages as Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-29. The new covenant is given by God, Yahweh. The mediator of the new covenant is the Messiah who has been appointed as a covenant to His people as previously declared in Isaiah, 42:6 and 49:8. The Holy Spirit’s role, in the new covenant is introduced in Isaiah 59:21, is that of being “upon” His redeemed people forever, for God will always be present with them.
Isaiah chapter 59 has three main sections. Vss. 1-8 are declarations by God of the sinfulness of His covenant people. Vss. 9-15a describe a confession of these people regarding their sinfulness and its consequences. Vss. 15b-21 describe God’s gracious response to His people’s confession with His provision of salvation, including a reference to a Redeemer to come, vs. 20 and specific promises pertaining to the new covenant, vs. 21. Vss. 15b-21 of Isaiah chapter 59 comprise some of the most wonderful descriptions of salvation contained not only in the writings of Isaiah but in the entire Old Testament and are worthy of careful study by all students of the Scriptures. It should be noted that this chapter can be studied as a stand-alone Scriptural essay on salvation for it contains a description of sins, a confession of sins and a salvation response by God including a wonderful reference to His new covenant. Chapter 59 can also be viewed as a gateway to the final chapters of Isaiah which describe God’s works of salvation and the promises of a peaceful and righteous reign to come ruled by “a Redeemer (who) will come to Zion,” Isaiah 59:20.

A: 59:1-8 God declares the sinfulness of His covenant people

David L. Cooper comments on verses 1-8:

“In Isaiah 59:1-15a we have one of the dark pictures which shows to us the spiritual condition of Israel in the end of this age. To the people of that time it will appear as if the heavens are brass and as if the Lord is no longer interested in His Chosen people. But the prophet in 59:1-8 shows that the trouble is not with the Lord, but with Israel herself. He has just as much power now as ever and will always have. Moreover He can hear their petitions just as much as he heard the prayers of Moses, Samuel, and other great warriors of faith in the past.

The trouble, according to verses 2 and 3, is that her sins and her iniquities have separated between her and her God and He has hidden His face from her. From verse 3 we see that Israel's hands will be defiled with blood and her fingers with iniquity. Moreover their lips speak lies and their tongues mutter wickedness. None at that time will be suing in righteousness and pleading in truth. They will love vanity and speak lies, will conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity. According to verse 5 they hatch adders' eggs and weave spiders' webs. He who eats of those eggs dies, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. In other words, the prophet says that everything which they do is with design, that wickedness and impure motives prompt all actions. The webs which they weave will not be for garments, neither will their works cover them. Their works are those of iniquity and violence. They are swift to do evil and they haste to shed blood. Their thoughts are of iniquity, and desolation and destruction are in their paths, but the way of peace they do not know and there is no justice in their goings.

Are we to take this language in the absolute or the relative sense? From what we learn in other passages relating to the same time, we know that there will be those who will be exceptions to this general rule. This language therefore is that of a relative character and not of the absolute sense.

It is hard to see how such people, who have enjoyed so much light as the Hebrew people have, can yet sink to such depths as are here foretold. But these characteristics are not simply those of the nation of Israel. When we look in the New Testament, we see that even in the so-called Christian world there will be those who sink to the same depths or even lower than these do. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. There is no telling what one will do.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – March 1946).

59:1 Look, the LORD's hand is not too short, that it cannot save, nor is his ear so deaf, that it cannot hear.
Isaiah introduces, what modern readers know as chapter 59, with a call to “Look” or more emphatically “Behold,” which the Hebrew word $hen$ certainly implies. This call to “behold” follows God’s lament of His people’s sinfulness when they were participating in a day of fasting and on the Sabbath day and His response to them if they righteously observe these “days” in a manner that He both chooses and accepts. As if to provide a summation of the discourse of Isaiah chapter 58 and introduce chapter 59, God abruptly states that He can indeed hear the penitent cries of His people and provide salvation. God most likely was directly responding to the complaint of His covenant people recorded in Isaiah 58:2-3 and in a general sense to the people’s complaint recorded in 49:14, “The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.”

The LORD’s response is gracious and salvific. He states emphatically that He indeed can save His covenant people and by implication all who have faith in Him. This salvation is not a rescue from enemies or from calamity but a spiritual salvation as Isaiah had previously made plain (selected verses only): 1:18, 27; 45:8, 17, 21; 49:6; 51:6; and 52:13-53:12; and would again describe:59:16-17; 61:10; 63:1, 4-5 and 8. The intent of the LORD to save them spiritually is plain from the context of Isaiah chapters 58-59. The sins of His covenant people have been described in great detail as had the consequences of these sins. The LORD speaks of salvation within the context of this description of the sinfulness of His people. He was amazed (astonished) that there was no one to vindicate or to intercede on behalf of His people, 59:16 so He Himself brought salvation to Him (the Servant) and His (Yahweh) righteousness supported (upheld) Him (the Servant). The work of the Servant, who is the Messiah, to provide salvation is described in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The salvific ministry of the Servant during His first advent is described in Isaiah 61:1-2a. The prophecy of the Servant returning to the earth to bring this salvation in His second advent to the faithful remnant following the Tribulation is explained in 63:1-6. The prophecy of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the Servant (the Branch) to bring salvation and righteousness when the Servant returns to establish His kingdom of peace is described in Isaiah 11:1-10. Therefore, the message of Isaiah 59:1 affirms the major theme of the writings of Isaiah, that the Lord will redeem His covenant people and all peoples of the earth who have faith in Him.

Another aspect of the Lord’s ministry to His covenant people and to all peoples is that He listens to them and hears them when they call out to Him. Isaiah had previously discussed that God does listen and respond to those who call upon Him: Isaiah 30:19; 41:17, and 58:9 and would again declare this, 65:24. It is a constant theme in the Psalms: 3:4; 4:3; 17:6; 18:6; 20:6; 34:4; 65:5; 91:15; 118:5; 119:26; 120:1 and 138:3. The prophet Daniel prayed for the Lord to hear his call, Daniel 9:19; and a repentant Jonah knew the Lord would hear him even in the depth of the ocean, Jonah 2:2. But the Lord does not hear (respond) to those whose iniquities have separated them from Him according to Isaiah 59:2. God however, will respond to the sinful who acknowledge their sin and confess their sins and seek the Lord as the second and third sections, 59:9-21 clearly affirm.

59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you,
so that he will not hear.

Although God promises to hear His people when they call upon them and save them, vss. 1, He will not respond to them while the persist in their iniquities and sins which demonstrate that they are yet in a state of open rebellion against Him as their sovereign Ruler and LORD. Isaiah, in 1:15 stated:

When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you.
Yes, when you make many prayers,
I will not listen, 
for your hands are full of blood.

Isaiah had, as recorded in chapter 58, declared the words of God’s rejection of the faithless and sinful formality of His covenant people in their participation of days of fasting and the Sabbath day. He would not accept wickedness of any kind from His people in the keeping of these “days” and He will not listen to them in any other day when they continue in their sins. The words of Isaiah in 59:2, “hidden his face,” are an anthropomorphism representing God Himself for God is Spirit, John 4:24, and does not have facial features nor other human-like features such as hands or ears, 59:1. Because of their sinfulness which has separated them from God, He will not hear them. The common word “hear” is the Hebrew shama, is the last word in the English versions of both 59:1 and 2. It is a reference to what God hears. It is translated either as “hear” or “heard,” referring to an action of God, in Isaiah 37:4, 17; 38:5; and 65:24. In sharp contrast to what God hears is the reaction of His covenant people who are in open rebellion against Him. In Isaiah 30:11, they said about God, “let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel.” The word for “hear” in 30:11 is the Hebrew shabat which has the meaning “to cease” or “to stop.” In 59:2, God refuses to “hear” from His covenant people because they are so wicked. In 30:11, God’s people refuse to “hear” from God because He is so holy.

59:3-4 For your hands are defiled with blood, 
and your fingers with iniquity; 
your lips have spoken lies; 
your tongue mutters wickedness.
4 No one cares about justice, 
or pleads their case with honesty. 
They trust in empty words, and speak lies; 
they conceive trouble, 
and give birth to sin.

As recorded in Isaiah 59:3-4, the prophet begins a list of God’s indictments against His people beginning with the word “for” which indicates a “because” reason why God will not hear from His people. God will not hear them because of their sinfulness which was introduced in 59:2 and is now explained in 59:3-8. The listing of the sins of God’s covenant people is all to common in Isaiah beginning in chapter 1. The acts of these wicked people are vividly portrayed in opposition to their God who is described often in Isaiah as the Holy One of Israel. One of the major themes of Isaiah is a Holy God versus a wicked people. In spite of this truth, which has existed from the creation of humanity and will continue until God finally terminates wickedness, God’s formula for His covenant relationship with His people is “I will be their God and they shall be my people.” This formula describes the relationship God desires in His “new covenant” with them: Jeremiah 31:33 (cf. 24:7); 32:38; Ezekiel 37:23, 27 (cf. 11:20; 14:11); Zechariah 8:8; 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Hebrews 8:10. Isaiah concludes chapter 59 with a description of the new covenant.

The reason why God will not “hear” from His people, is stated, beginning in Isaiah 59:3 with the sinfulness that their hands and fingers have caused, and this verse concludes with the sinfulness of their lips and tongues. The first depiction of sin is that their “hands (palms) are defiled with blood.” This indictment is not new for it was announced by God as recorded in Isaiah 1:15. It was a persistently vile and wicked sin that God abhors. Proverbs 6:16-19 reveal God’s hatred of it among other acts of wickedness:

16 There are six things the LORD hates, 
seven that are detestable to him: 
17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that plots wicked plans,
feet that run to do evil,
a false witness who propagates lies,
and he who sows discord among brothers.
(Proverbs 6:16-19)

The relationship of shedding of blood and hands is also spoken of in the same context as those who commit adultery with idols, as recorded in Ezekiel 23:37 and 45. These acts of sinfulness are pointed out as being especially odious to God. Indeed, the very first child born into this world, Cain, grew up to be a murderer (and a liar) by shedding the innocent blood of the second child born into this world, his brother Abel, Genesis 4:1-10. The acts of murder and lying are a characteristic of Satan, whom many desire to follow, such as Cain and all murderers and liars, including the religious leaders at the time of the Messiah’s first advent, as Jesus explained in John 8:44.

The second depiction of sin in Isaiah 59:3 is that their fingers (are defiled) by iniquity. Iniquity, also occurring in 59:2 is the Hebrew word awon, which is also often translated as “guilt” and “punishment.” Of great significance is the occurrence of awon in the fourth “Servant Song,” Isaiah 52:13-53:12. As recorded in Isaiah 53:5 the Servant was “crushed for our iniquities.” In 53:6, it is recorded, that “the LORD has lain on Him the sin (iniquity) of us all.” Also, in 53:11, it is recorded about the Servant that “he will bear their sins,” (iniquities). The iniquities of God’s covenant people and all peoples of all times including Cain the murderer, were held to Christ’s account. For He bore of all iniquities and was crushed by His Father so that the penalty for the commitment of these iniquities (and all sins) by all peoples could be paid by the innocent and righteous Son of God, the Messiah. The just and righteous Messiah bore the sins of the unjust and unrighteous so that they could be declared justified by God, when they put their faith in His Son, and they, therefore would not have to bear the eternal consequence (penalty) of these iniquities. (bold intentional).

The third depiction of sin in Isaiah 59:3 is that their “lips have spoken lies.” The word “lies” is the Hebrew word seqer which is also translated in the Old Testament as “deceit” and in the NASB for Isaiah 53:9 as “falsehood.” The first recorded act of lying in the Scriptures is by Satan, Genesis 3:4. Jesus called Satan “a liar, and the father of lies,” John 8:44. Some may want to place “lying” as a sin that is somehow lesser in importance than murder but as stated in Proverbs 6:16-19 (stated above), it is among the sins that are detestable to God. The common expression “little white lies,” is therefore a misnomer for there is nothing “little” or “white” about lies. Some may want to point out that God appeared to, on the surface at least, overlook some “lies” such as by the harlot Rahab, as recorded in Joshua chapter 2. However, God commended her faith, Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25, but not her lies.

The fourth depiction of sin in Isaiah 59:3 is that their “tongue mutters wickedness.” The word “mutters” is the Hebrew word hagah, which also has the meaning to “meditate” and “moan” or “growl.” It occurs 25 times in the OT and is translated as “meditate” in: Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; 63:6; 77:12; 143:5; and Isaiah 33:18. In contrast to the righteous who “meditates” on God’s law, day and night, Psalm 1:2 are the wicked who “mutters” wickedness with their tongues. The DASV for the first phrase of Isaiah 33:18 has “Your heart will obsess about former terrors.” The KJV, NKJV and NASB translate hagah as “meditate” while the ESV translates it as “muse” and the NIV as “ponder.” The use of different English words to translate the Hebrew hagah is an indication of the translator’s preference within the context of any specific English version. However, in Isaiah 59:3 the Hebrew word hagah is translated as “mutters/muttered” in most English versions signifying a more consistent approach to translation. The fact that they are either meditating or muttering is not as important as is the object of what their tongues do. Their tongues mutter “wickedness” which is the Hebrew word avlah, and which is also translated in the Old Testament as iniquity, injustice, unrighteousness
and wrong. The word *avlah* for wickedness only occurs in Isaiah 59:3. In the NASB, for example, the English word wickedness occurs six times in Isaiah, 9:18; 32:6; 47:10; 58:6; 58:9 and 59:3 translating five different Hebrew words. This points to the emphasis that God, through the writing of Isaiah, puts on wickedness and how is separates His covenant people from Him. The speaking of wickedness was something that God wanted His people to forsake (repent) during their day of fasting, and by implication all other days, Isaiah 58:9. The repenting of and forsaking of speaking wickedness is a condition for God’s responding to them when they call upon Him.

In Isaiah 59:4, the prophet continues God’s indictment upon His covenant people by highlighting their wicked behavior. The *first* behavior indicated is that “no one cares about justice.” When combined with the *second* behavior stated in 59:4, “or pleads their case with honesty,” (NKJV: truth), these both seem to refer to the corruptness of the legal system. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The judicial process is perverted by the litigants and by the judges.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 450).

The lack of justice (righteousness) in the legal system indicates just how pervasive wickedness had overtaken the people of God. Justice and righteousness are major themes in Isaiah chapter 59, with the English word “justice” in the DASV occurring in vss. 4, 8, 9, 11, 14 and 15 and the related word “righteousness” occurring in vss. 9, 14, 16 and 17. In 59:4, the word translated as “justice” in the first phrase, is the Hebrew word *sedaqah*. In 59:8, “justice” is the common Hebrew word *misphat*, which also occurs translated as “justice” in 59:9, 11, 14 and 15. The word translated as “righteousness” is the common Hebrew word *sedeq*, occurring in 59:9, 14, 16 and 17.

The second phrase in 59:4, “or pleads their case with honesty,” is translated in the NKJV as, “nor does any plead for truth.” The word “honesty” in the DASV is the Hebrew word *emunah*, which occurs about fifty times in the Old Testament and has the meaning of faithfulness, truthfulness and steadfastness. *Emunah* also occurs in Isaiah in 11:5 (faithfulness); 25:1 (faithfulness); and 33:6 (stability). This second phrase helps to clarify the meaning of the first phrase which implies a courtroom and legal process as noted above.

The third phrase in 59:4 is “they trust in empty words and speak lies.” The word “empty” is the Hebrew *tohu*, which has the meaning of formless and confusion and is the word describing the early condition of the creation process of the earth, “formless” in Genesis 1:2 and Jeremiah 4:23. *Tohu* occurs frequently in Isaiah in the DASV: 24:10 (broken down); 29:21 (false); 34:11 (emptiness); 40:17 (worthless); 40:23 (worthless); 41:29 (nothing); 44:9 (nothing); 45:18 (chaotic); 45:19 (vain); 49:4 (vain); as well as 59:4 (empty). If the third phrase is connected with the first two phrases which seems most likely, those who seek legal process through the courts and those in judicial authority have no integrity therefore the entire process is corrupt and not trustworthy.

The fourth phrase in 59:4, “they conceive trouble and give birth to sin” appears to be an introduction to 59:5-6. Isaiah is describing those who have authority over and those who participate in the legal system as putting their sinful thoughts into practice. The prophet Jeremiah described their condition as recorded in Jeremiah 17:9-10:

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and incurably sick.  
Who can understand it?  
10 I, the LORD, search the mind, and test the heart,  
to give everyone according to their ways,
According to the fruit of their actions.

During the days of Jesus’ first advent, He rebuked the religious leaders for their rejection of Him by attributing His works to Satan and for the evilness of their hearts: “You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Matthew 12:34. The Scriptures often speak about the evilness within humanity: (selected verses only): Genesis 6:5; Psalm 73:7; 140:2; Proverbs 6:14, 18; 2:20; 15:28; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Isaiah 32:6; Jeremiah 4:14; 7:24; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; Ezekiel 14:3-4; Matthew 9:4; 12:34; 15:19; Mark 7:21; Luke 2:35; and 6:45. In Isaiah’s day the entire society was so corrupt that their evil thoughts most always led to evil actions. It was no different in the days of the first advent of the Messiah and is no different today and will be the same just prior to the return of the Messiah to earth.

59:5-6 They hatch the eggs of deadly snakes, and weave the spider’s web. Whoever eats their eggs dies; and if one is crushed, it hatches into a viper. Their webs cannot be used as clothes, nor will they cover themselves with their works. Their works are works of iniquity, and the acts of violence are in their hands.

The evilness that is conceived in the hearts of God’s covenant people give “birth,” 59:4 to wicked actions which are described in Isaiah 59:5-6 and following. In 59:5 these actions are depicted as hatching eggs of deadly snakes (serpents/adders/vipers) and the weaving of a spider’s web. Both of these actions lead to folly and one leads to death. The hatching of eggs from deadly snakes bring death if the egg is eaten due to the poison within it. If the egg hatches, a deadly viper is released. The weaving of the spider’s web, 59:6, is folly if the web is to be used for clothing for spider’s webs cannot provide coverage or protection like clothing. Also, spider’s webs cannot cover the wickedness of their works, which are works of iniquity and violence, for all is exposed before God who sees everything. The Scriptures declare that, “The LORD does not look at things the way a man does; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7. Also: “Now there is no creature that is hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and exposed before the eyes of him before whom we must give an account.” Hebrews 4:13. Jesus called those who had rejected Him, a “brood of vipers,” Matthew 12:34.

59:7 Their feet run to do evil, and they are quick to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; devastation and destruction follow in their tracks.

The evil (trouble) that the hearts of God’s covenant people have conceived, 59:4, is further described in Isaiah 59:7 as having feet that “run to do evil” and “they are quick to shed innocent blood.” See comments on vs. 3 above. God’s people were corrupted by their evil thoughts and actions. Devastation and destruction followed them along the way they walked. Instead of walking the way God intended, walking on their own paths or highways resulted in chaos and violence. The word “devastation” is the Hebrew word shod which also has the meaning of violence, havoc and ruin. It occurs in Isaiah in the DASV in: 13:6 (destruction); 16:4 (destruction); 22:4 (destruction); 51:19 (desolation); 59:7 (devastation); and 60:18 (devastation). The word “destruction” is the Hebrew word sheber which also has the meaning of to break, fracture or crush. It occurs
in Isaiah in the DASV in: 1:28 (crushed); 15:5 (destruction); 30:13 (topples); 30:14 (smash); 30:26 (injuries); 51:19 (destruction); 59:7 (destruction); 60:18 (destruction); and 65:14 (broken). Both of these Hebrew words, *shod* and *sheber*, have similar meanings and are almost interchangeable with each other in the English versions of Isaiah. A similar verse to Isaiah 59:7, occurs in 51:19 where both *shod* and *sheber* are found. See notes on this verse. God, however, will eventually bring salvation to His covenant people and *shod* and *sheber* will no longer be heard within their borders, Isaiah 60:18. Paul quotes from this verse in Romans 3:15-17.

**59:8** The way of peace they do not know;
there is no justice in their paths.
They have made their paths crooked;
whoever walks in them does not know peace.

In Isaiah 59:8, which is the final verse in the first section of Isaiah chapter 59, God summarizes the spiritual condition of His covenant people. They do not know the way of peace for they have walked in their own “tracks”, 59:7 and there is no justice (righteousness) in their paths which has only resulted in devastation (*shod*) and destruction (*sheber*). Their rebellion against God has resulted in their paths being made crooked. They can blame no one else. It is entirely the result of their evil inward thoughts that have manifested into wicked actions. The result of this, is that whoever, including themselves, who walk in these crooked paths will not know peace. Isaiah had stated a similar result in 48:22 and 57:21: “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.” They had forgotten the first song in their Hebrew song book, Psalm 1, of which vss.4-6 state:

4 The wicked are not so,
but are like the chaff that the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment;
or sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 59:7-8:

“Instead of running from evil, God's people were running to it, even hastily shedding innocent blood to secure their ends (cf. Rom. 3:15-17). Again Isaiah used "way" to describe the moral life. Their hands and feet only manifested what was in their hearts, however. Their imaginations and thought processes were corrupt. All human ways are utterly futile apart from the Lord's intervention. Note the repetition of "iniquity" four times in verses 3, 4, 6, and 7.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, pages 299-300).

B: 59:9-15a The People’s Confession Regarding Their Sinfulness and its Consequences

Verses 9-15a of Isaiah chapter 59 are a confession of the sinfulness and its consequences by the people of Judah. Isaiah incudes himself in this confession as evidenced by the many occurrences of personal pronouns: “us,” “we,” and “our.” Other prophets and leaders of the Jewish people had included themselves in the confession of the sins of God’s covenant people, such as Daniel, in Daniel 9:1-19, Ezra, in Ezra 9:5-15 and Nehemiah, in Nehemiah 1:4-11. Isaiah confessed that justice, vss. 9, 11, and 14, and righteousness, vss. 9, and 14, were far from the people as they had multiplied their sins and transgressions in their rebellion against the LORD. The people were “well aware,” vs. 12 of their iniquities as they had turned away from following God. They had conceived and uttered lies from their hearts, vs. 13. Therefore, they stumbled about as the blind in midday and walk like the dead, vs. 10. They growl like bears and moan sadly like doves and
salvation was far from them, vs. 11. Also, truth was lacking in Judah, vs. 15. It was a true confession from the heart of the prophet as he had included himself among the others in Judah recognizing their sinfulness as he had done earlier as recorded in Isaiah 6:5. Isaiah in 24:16, had also voiced a deep personal concern about the treacherous times to come in the far future, as the Lord revealed to him the devastation that the earth and its inhabitants would face. Isaiah stated, “The earth is defiled by its inhabitants; because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant,” Isaiah 24:5. This defiling of the earth by its inhabitants is also stated in Revelation 11:18 as one of the reasons for the Lord to bring judgment upon the earth.

59:9-10 Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us. We look for light, but see only darkness, for brightness, but we walk in utter darkness.  
10 We grope along the wall like the blind; we grope as those who have no eyes. We stumble at noonday just like it was twilight; among the living we are like dead men.

Following God’s indictment against His covenant people of their iniquities that have separated them from Him, 59:1-8, Isaiah speaks for his people, 59:9-15a, beginning with “therefore,” acknowledging and confessing their great sinfulness and rebellion against God. Isaiah does not hide or neglect the truth of the wickedness of the people of Judah. He first confesses that justice, the Hebrew word mishpat, is far from them and righteousness, Hebrew sedaqah, did not overtake them. This lack of justice and righteousness is a major theme of Isaiah chapter 59. Justice, mishpat, is mentioned in 59:8, 9, 11, 14 and 15. Righteousness, sedaqah, is mentioned in 59:9, 14, 16 and 17. In Isaiah chapter 58, the prophet stated that God commented that His people asked for righteous judgments, 58:2 but they had not righteously kept a day of fasting or a Sabbath day. The Lord had declared to them what He required for a day of fasting that He could accept and what was required to righteously observe His Sabbath day. Although God’s covenant people sought righteous judgments, justice and righteousness was not near to them because, as Isaiah would confess in 59:12-13, they had committed transgressions and sins which testified against them.

The people had sought for “light” but had seen only darkness. They had sought brightness, but they continued to walk without His presence in “utter darkness.” The depiction of seeking “light” is also a major theme of Isaiah. God had promised as recorded in Isaiah 58:8:

Then will your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly spring up; your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will guard your back.

Also, as a result of their righteous actions, the Lord promised them in Isaiah 58:10b -11a:

“then your light will rise in darkness, and your darkness will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually.”
From the beginning of Isaiah’s writings, the theme of light has a prominent position. God’s covenant people are called to walk in the light of the LORD, 2:5. Light is removed from them due to their wickedness, 5:20, 30. But God promised them that the light (of salvation) would shine upon them, 9:2, which is a prophecy of Messiah’s coming to them. On the day the Lord heals His people, 30:26, the light of the sun would be seven times brighter. The Servant of the Lord, the Messiah is promised to be a light to the nations providing salvation, 42:6 and 49:6. The darkness of God’s covenant people will be turned into light, 42:16. Those who walk in darkness without light are called upon to trust in the name of the Lord, 50:10. God promises that He will set His justice for a light to the peoples (providing salvation), 51:4. This light of salvation would break upon them like the dawn, 58:8, and their light would become like the light of noon, 58:10. The people are called to rise and shine for their light has come, who is the Messiah who brings the light of salvation, 60:1. God promises that nations would come to their light, their Messiah, 60:3. Finally, God promised that He would be an everlasting light to them for He will be their glory, 60:19-20. The light that is promised to them was not discernable, 59:9 for their sin had blinded them as 59:10 reveals. In the New Testament the apostle Paul attributed blindness to the light of salvation to the acts of Satan, 2 Corinthians 4:4. This is not as easy to discern in the Old Testament. However, the deceitfulness of Satan is evidenced from the very beginning, Genesis chapter 3, in turning humans away from God. The people of Judah in Isaiah’s time were like so many generations before and after them. It will not suffice to blame wicked and rebellious behavior on Satan as if that would give anyone an excuse for escaping God’s rightful and just wrath for punishing sin. God holds all who sin accountable and the wages (results) of sin is death, Romans 6:23. But as this verse continues, “the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The wicked acts of God’s covenant people, Isaiah 59:9-10, result in their walking in darkness, without the light of the salvation promised by the LORD. They “grope along a wall like the blind,” and “stumble at noonday,” and among the living, they are “like dead men.” Isaiah often spoke about the blindness of his people, 6:10; 29:9-10; 42:16, 19; 43:8; 44:18 and 56:10. He also declared that these eyes would be opened, 29:18; 32:3; 35:5; and 42:18 for it will be the Servant, the Messiah who will open them, 42:7. The prophet confesses that they are like the dead, (without the light of the salvation of the Lord). Their only hope is for the Lord to bring them salvation which He promises to do following their confession of their sins and rebellion against Him, 59:15b-21. Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 59:10:

“The prophet further enlarges on what he said in verse 9. Without the guidance of the God-revealed righteousness, the people are like the blind who grope along the walls. This is a striking picture familiar to the inhabitants of Jerusalem where blindness was such a frequent and pathetic occurrence.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 451).

**59:11** We all growl like bears, and moan sadly like doves. We look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.

Isaiah continues the acknowledgement of the sinfulness of the people of Judah including his own which has resulted in their sad condition of growling like bears and moaning sadly like doves. The word “growl” is the Hebrew hamah, with the meaning to roar, howl or be disturbed. It also occurs in Isaiah in the DASV in 16:11 (groans); 17:12 (roar) twice; 22:2 (revelry but “tumultuous in the KJV); and 51:5 (roar). The sense of the word “growl” in 59:11 is that the sins of the people have made their lives so miserable because there is no justice or salvation, society is left in an uproar and its citizens growl or roar in their agony. It is similar to the reason why the people “moan sadly like doves.” King Hezekiah complained of his sickness and said he
moaned like a dove, Isaiah 38:14. The prophet Ezekiel described the people’s reaction to God’s wrath upon them, “But if any survivors do escape, they will be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all moaning each one for his own sin.” Ezekiel 7:16. The growling and moaning of the people of Judah can both be for the complaint of their situation, where there is no justice or salvation, and also as a confession of their sinfulness that brought about God’s punishment upon them. Because of the wickedness of the people of Judah, the justice they had looked for, Isaiah 58:2; was not present and salvation they had wanted was far from them. Justice is a major theme of Isaiah chapter 59, verses 4, 8, 9, 11, 14 and 15, as is righteousness, verses 9, 14, 16 and 17. In 59:11, Isaiah combines the lack of justice, Hebrew mishpat, and salvation, Hebrew yeshu’ah, resulting from the people’s sinfulness.

The addition of the word salvation, Hebrew yeshu’ah, is of considerable importance. Moses had warned God’s covenant people that there would be no one to rescue them, with words similar but not the same to that of Isaiah 59:11. Moses declared in Deuteronomy 28:28-29, “The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness and with confusion of heart, 29 and you will grope around at noonday as the blind grope in darkness. You will not prosper in your endeavors and you will be oppressed and robbed continually, but there will be no one to rescue you.” The “salvation” sought by the people in Isaiah 59:11 could be understood as a rescue from their enemies. However, it is likely this salvation is of far greater significance because of the emphasis in chapter 59 of justice and righteousness and the fact that Isaiah speaks of spiritual salvation in the immediate context, 59:15b-21. The Lord will bring salvation, 59:15b-19 and He will send a Redeemer to His covenant people in Zion (a future reference), 59: 20. The Lord also punctuates the spiritual sense of this salvation with a clear reference to the new covenant in 59:21 including the role of the Holy Spirit who will be upon His people as an integral aspect of the new covenant.

59:12 For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us.
Our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we are well aware of them:

Isaiah begins a listing of the sins of God’s covenant people, including his own, in 59:12 and extending to 59:15a. It is these sins that have brought so much misery to them and have resulted in God’s judgment upon them so that there is no justice, righteousness or salvation among them. Their miserable condition is a direct result of these sins which the prophet now confesses. In 59:12, three descriptive words and phrases of these sins are stated. Two of four English words in 59:12 describing sin come from the same Hebrew word, pesha. Although some may want to group all of these words as just a general description of the sinfulness of the people, Isaiah purposely listed them, and it is useful for the student of the Scriptures to pause and take careful note of the meanings of each word. First, their transgressions have been multiplied before God and are with us. Transgressions is the Hebrew word pesha, which is derived from pasha, also meaning to transgress. To transgress is to rebel against God with actions that are offensive to Him. The first occurrence of pasha in Isaiah is in 24:20:

The earth will stagger like a drunkard, it will sway like a hut in a storm; its transgression will be heavy on it, it will fall and not get up again.
Isaiah 24:20, gives a sense of the “weight” of the rebelliousness of the inhabitants of the earth against their Creator which will result in the wrath of God against them and judgment upon the earth. See also 50:1; 57:4; 58:1 and 59:12. God, however, is loving and gracious and will remove (blot out) the guilt of these transgressions, 43:25; 44:22, through the expiatory (atonning) cross work of the Servant, the Messiah; 53:5 and 53:8. Isaiah in 59:12, describes transgressions as being multiplied before God. The word “multiplied” is the Hebrew word rabab, which also has the meaning of numerous, many and much. See also (selected verses only): Genesis 6:1; Psalm 3:1; Isaiah 22:9; and Jeremiah 5:6.

The second descriptive word for the sinfulness of God’s covenant people in Isaiah 59:12 is “sins.” The Hebrew word chattah which is derived from chata has the meaning of “to miss the mark” or fail to live up to the righteous standard of God. It is a very common word in the Old Testament, often translated as sins, punishment and a sin offering. Isaiah states that the sins of the people testify against them. These sinful actions are well known to God and are the root cause of why God will not bring justice, righteousness and salvation to them.

The third descriptive word for sinfulness is iniquities. Isaiah confesses that the people of Judah are well aware that they are committing iniquities against God. Iniquities is the Hebrew word awon, meaning twisted or bent and is also translated in the Old Testament as guilt and punishment. The most significant occurrence of awon in Isaiah, is recorded in Isaiah 53:5, 6, and 11 where the iniquities of the inhabitants of the world and specifically of the covenant people of God are put upon the suffering Servant, the Messiah who bears them as He becomes, in the future for Isaiah’s time, an atoning sacrifice on their behalf. The Messiah would take upon Him these iniquities and assume the punishment for these iniquities that the guilty rightly deserve to bear. The righteous One, thus becomes a sin offering who appeases the wrath of God so that those who believe in Him will have the punishment for their sins removed and they will be called “justified” by God. See notes for Isaiah 53:5, 6 and 11 for an expanded discussion.

59:13 rebelling and denying the LORD, turning away from following our God, talking about oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering lies from the heart.

As recorded in Isaiah 59:13, the prophet continues to confess the sins that he and the people of Judah had committed. There are several verbs Isaiah uses to explain the wicked behavior of God’s covenant people. First, the people have been rebelling against the LORD. “Rebelling” is the Hebrew word pasha which is translated as “transgressing” in many English versions. See comment on pasha in the notes for 59:12 above. Rebelling is a very apt description of the heart condition of these people for it reveals the root of their wickedness. The Scriptures attest that the heart of man is wicked, (selected verses only): Genesis 6:5; Psalm 28:3; 73:7; Proverbs 6:18; Isaiah 32:6; Jeremiah 4:14; 7:24; 16:12; 17:9; Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21; and Luke 6:45. From this root of a deceitfully wicked heart spring all kinds of evil which results in open rebellion against God. Isaiah could well be confessing this on behalf of all God’s covenant people and all of humanity.

Second, the people of God have been denying the LORD. Denying is the Hebrew word kahash which occurs only in this verse in Isaiah. It also has the meaning of deceiving, lying and being hypocritical. Examples of the meaning of kahash can be found in Joshua 24:27; Psalm 81:1; Proverbs 30:9; Jeremiah 5:12 and Hosea 4:2. Third, the people of God have been “turning away” from following their God. The words “turning away” is translated from the Hebrew word sug, which also has the meaning of backsliding, moving away and turning back. Scriptural examples of sug occur in, Psalm 78:57; Proverbs 14:14; Isaiah 42:17; 50:5 and Zephaniah 1:6. An excellent example of this word also occurs in Psalm 53:3:
They all have turned away;
they all have become corrupt;
there is no one who does good, not even one.
(Psalm 53:3)

Fourth, Isaiah confesses that he and his people sin against God by “talking about oppression and revolt.” They speak openly about oppressing and revolting in their relationship with each other and with God. There is no righteousness in their midst and it is implied from this statement that what they speak about actually happens. The people had been oppressed from their enemies in the past, Isaiah 52:4, when various enemies assaulted them, and the people will be oppressed again in the far future, 51:13, 23. But they have not learned from their past history of the evils of being oppressed, for they do so to each other and also revolt against civil and religious authority. But, most significantly, they have revolted against their God. Revolt is the Hebrew word sarah which also has meaning to rebel and to turn one’s back on God, similar to the preceding phrase in 59:13. The word sarah also occurs (selected verses only), in Deuteronomy 13:5; 29:32; Isaiah 1:5; 31:6 and Jeremiah 28:16;

Fifth, Isaiah confesses the he and his people sin against God by conceiving and uttering lies from their hearts. God had indicted them of telling lies, 59:3 and Isaiah here acknowledges this sinful behavior by his confession. The beginning of lying to each other and to God is in the heart where sins of all kinds are conceived, as God also reminded them in 59:4. That which is conceived also gives birth, 59:4 to uttering, which is the Hebrew word hagah which also has the meaning of moaning, growling and even meditating. Isaiah also used the word hagah as translated in the DASV in, 8:19 (mutter); 16:7 (mourn); 31:4 (growls); 33:18 (obsess); 38:14 (moan); 59:3 (mutters); and 59:11 twice (moan and sadly).

59:14-15a Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands far off;
truth has stumbled in the street,
and uprightness cannot even enter.
15 Truth is lacking;
anyone who rejects evil makes themselves a target.

Isaiah summarizes the results of the sinfulness of God’s covenant people in 59:14-15a by stating that justice and righteousness are turned back and stand far off which is exactly the situation of this evil society that Isaiah stated when he began his confession in 59:9. The wicked thoughts from their hearts which gave birth (conceived) to all kinds of evil has resulted in a complete lack of justice, righteousness, uprightness and truth among the people. The society from the regal, civil and religious leadership to all citizens were so corrupt that anyone who dared to speak out against or reject evilness was made a target by others who were immersed in this wicked behavior. The people had sunk so low in wickedness that there was no peace among them, Isaiah 48:22; and 57:21; and no hope of salvation for them, 59:11. Thomas Constable comments on Isaiah 59:14-15a:

59:14: “These are the reasons justice and righteousness stood far removed from the people. Truth had collapsed, so uprightness could not enter the company of the redeemed (cf. 1:21-23).”

59:15a: “Where truth is lacking, as it was in Isaiah's society, the person who turns aside from evil to do good makes himself a prey to others who take advantage of him. This is the final irony of many ironies in this pericope. It corresponds to the earlier expressions of bad conditions resulting from iniquity (cf. vv. 4, 7-8). Isaiah was not advocating this type of behavior. He was saying that unless God intervenes for His people, this type of behavior is all that they can expect.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 301).
Also, there was no one to vindicate them or intervene for them, 59:16. Their plight was hopeless with no escape from their wickedness. What could be done for them? Fortunately, they had a faithful God who kept His covenant with His people, and who would by Himself, in His own power, bring salvation to them by providing a Savior who is called a Redeemer in 59:20. Also God would institute a new covenant with them with the promise that the Holy Spirit would be upon them and that God’s very words would be with them forever, 59:21. Hope, help and healing were to come from their loving and gracious Creator who promises that He will never leave them for all eternity.

C: 59:15b-21 The Salvation That Only God Can Provide

Following God’s indictment of the wickedness of His covenant people, 59:1-8; and their acknowledgment of their wicked behavior and the confession of their sins against God, 59:9-15a; Isaiah reveals God’s response which is to provide salvation through a Redeemer who will come to Zion and God also promises a new covenant which involves the ministry of the Holy Spirit upon those who participate in the new covenant.

Verses 15b-21 of Isaiah chapter 59, contain some of the most exalted salvation language found anywhere in the Old Testament. This section begins with what the LORD saw, vs. 15b which refers to the immediate context of the great confession of rebellion and sinfulness by His covenant people. What the LORD also saw was that His people were in need of someone to vindicate them and intervene for them, vs. 16. Since there was no one eligible or righteousness to accomplish this task, He brought salvation to them by His own power and strength, vss. 16-17. These verses should not be understood as God only perceiving, as if by surprise, this lack of someone to intervene for His people. This need of an intercessor was something God had foreseen in eternity past. See notes on vss.15b-16. God not only brought salvation but brought due punishment for His enemies, vss. 17-18; so that God’s glory and the fear of His great name would be known in all nations of the earth, vs. 19. The bringing of salvation was through a Redeemer, the Messiah who, in the far future will come to Zion, to those who turn from their sin, vs. 20. Also, God promises to establish a new covenant with His people which will involve the ministry of the Holy Spirit upon those who participate in the new covenant.

The setting of these verses is clearly in the far future, in the days just prior to and during the millennial kingdom. See comments by John A. Martin, Isaiah, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, page 1114, and by Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary, Isaiah, pages 1095-96. David L. Cooper also comments (an extended excerpt):

“The Coming Messiah

In verses 59:15b-60:3 we have a vivid, graphic description of the return of the Messiah in glory at the conclusion of the Tribulation Period. God must punish wickedness wherever He finds it and in whomever it is discovered, whether it be the individual or the nation, whether it be in Israel or among the Gentiles.

We are told in verse 15b that Jehovah sees this condition of the nation and is highly displeased that there is no justice. Moreover He looks to see if there is a man and is amazed that there is no intercessor. Of course this language is what we speak of as anthropomorphic, that is, we speak of God as if He were a person possessing a human body and the faculties of the same. According to II Chronicles 16:9 "... the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." When Israel at Sinai made the golden calf, the Lord said to Moses for him to move away to allow Him to destroy the entire nation. But Moses fell down in the breach and pleaded for the Lord to slay him, but to spare His Chosen People whom He had just delivered from Egyptian bondage. See, for instance, Exodus 32:30-35; Psalm 106:23. Thus Moses had power with God and his intercession preserved the nation from extermination on that occasion. Moreover, Noah, Daniel, and Job had great power in prayer with the Lord, as we see in
Ezekiel 14:12-20. In Psalm 99:6 we learn that Moses, Aaron, and Samuel likewise had power with God in prayer. Jeremiah mentions these, too, as being able to pray the effectual, fervent petition (Jer. 15:1).

But in the end time there will not be any man in Israel whose spiritual stature and standing with God will be such that he can step into the breach and can spare the nation from judgment. A like situation existed in the days of Ezekiel, as we see in chapter 22:30: "And I sought for a man among them, that should build up the wall, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none." That Isaiah 59:16 is thus to be interpreted is evident from the fact that, in verse 20, we see that there will be those who turn from transgression in Zion unto God. This fact demands that we understand verses 15 and 16 as language used in the relative sense. In other words there will be no outstanding spiritual giant who will be able to take the situation in hand as did Moses.

Under these conditions there is but one thing which a righteous and a holy God can do and which is set forth in verses 16b-18: "Therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it upheld him. And he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a mantle. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, wrath to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense." In this passage the Lord Jehovah is represented as a warrior who prepares himself to go into action. Of course He spoke of Himself in terms of the equipment of soldiers of that day and time. Another picture of this same battle action of the Messiah is set forth in 63:1--7--a passage which we shall soon study.

According to 59:18 the Lord, when He comes and thus deals with His adversaries, will mete out justice to them according to their deeds and their actions. Not only will He deal with Israel, but also with the nations of the earth, as is shown in the last statement of verse 18.

When He thus appears upon the earthly scene and recompenses all His enemies, He will introduce a new era. At that time all people will fear the name of Jehovah from the rising of the sun to the setting thereof. At the time of His coming, however, He will come as a mighty, rushing stream, which is driven by the Spirit of God. This figure indicates the rapidity and the irresistible force and speed with which He will return to earth. This same thought is set forth in the smiting stone which strikes the image of Daniel, chapter 2, on the feet and which destroys the metallic image, the symbol of the four world governments from Nebuchadnezzar's day unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Messiah returns, He will come to those in Jacob who turn away from transgression and sin. There has always been a faithful remnant in Israel. There always will be, no matter to what depths mankind or any portion of the race plunges, found faithful, honest, conscientious souls who want to do the will of God and who, to the best of their ability and strength and power, are doing it.

When Messiah thus returns, He will enter into a covenant with the faithful remnant of His ancient people and will put His words in their mouths and His spirit in their souls. He will never reject them anymore and they will be faithful and true to His covenant." (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – March 1946).

59:15b-16 The LORD saw it,
and the fact that there was no justice displeased him.
16 He saw that there was no vindicator,
and was amazed that there was no one to intervene.
Therefore his own arm brought salvation to him;
his righteousness supported him.
The beginning of this grand statement of salvation, Isaiah 59:15b-21, is a declaration from the prophet that “the LORD saw it.” What did the LORD, Yahweh see and when did He see it? The LORD saw the repentant hearts of His covenant people and He also saw the catastrophic conditions that their sinfulness had brought upon their society, as the next phrase reveals: “that there was no justice displeased him.” The LORD sees everything as Proverbs 15:3 indicates: “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good.” See also 2 Chronicles 16:9; Jeremiah 16:17 and Zechariah 4:10. It is not that the LORD just happened to take the time to look upon the condition of His covenant people and it “surprised” Him to see their deplorable condition. The context of 59:15b-21 is that, God as a divine warrior, had a plan for providing salvation which He executed to perfection. God knew from eternity past that He would need to have His only unique Son, to come to earth to be slain as an atoning sacrifice on behalf of His created people, Revelation 13:8 and Matthew 25:34. It was His divine plan which He had purposed from before the creation of the world to bring this salvation. Although the words, “the LORD saw” may be perceived as a result of the wickedness of His covenant people, His “seeing” was eternal for He always has seen and continues to see all things that have happened and will happen throughout all eternity.

The LORD saw what “displeased” Him. The wickedness of the hearts of His covenant people had resulted in an unjust and unrighteous society in which evilness “reigned” and any who sought to do turn away from wickedness were preyed upon by those besotted in their evilness. God hates evil in any context. He hated evil in the garden of Eden; in the entire world in Noah’s days; in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; in the society of the heathen nations populating Canaan; in the conduct of King Saul; in the society of the Jewish people from their first days and continuing up to the end of the tribulation period; and in the conduct of all the world’s people today. The wicked conduct of humanity has always displeased Him, and He had a most gracious and loving plan to deal with this evil.

As recorded in Isaiah 59:16, God also “saw” that there was no “vindicator” (DASV), who could intervene on behalf of His covenant people. The setting for this specific time will be during the far future days of the tribulation when some of His people will be living in rebellion against Him in Israel and many of them will be scattered throughout the nations. This people will not have anyone to defend their cause. The phrase in the DASV, “there was no vindicator” is better translated “He saw that there was no man” as in the KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB and similar in the NIV. God was looking for a man to “intervene” on behalf of His people. The word “intervene” is the Hebrew word paga, which is also translated as “to meet”, “to encounter”, “to plead,” and “to entreat.” The word paga also occurs in Isaiah in 47:3 (to spare); 53:6 (has laid); 53:12 (intercession) and 64:5 (meet). This word has its most profound usage in Isaiah 53:6 and 12 but is extremely significant in 59:16 as an indication of what the Lord was seeking. He was (will be) looking for someone during the chaotic days of the tribulation to stand up and plead for His covenant people, to defend their cause and fight their enemies. There were a few such men in the past, such as Abraham, Moses, David and Daniel, but they were the exception. The Lord told the prophet Ezekiel that, “The people of the land have committed extortion and robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have deprived the foreigner of justice.30 I sought for a person among them, who would build up the wall, and stand in the gap before me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found none.” Ezekiel 22:29-30.

As in Ezekiel’s days, so it will be in the future, there will be no one who will stand to intercede for the covenant people of God, and all peoples of the earth. They would, because of their wickedness have no hope of salvation unless God took the initiative and provide salvation for them. Isaiah states in 59:16b that “therefore his own arm brought salvation to him.” The ESV translates this phrase as “Then his own arm brought him salvation.” The NKJV has “Therefore His own arm brought salvation for him.” Salvation was both a plan and a work of God. It was an act that He alone accomplished through the atoning sacrifice of His Son during His first advent and will be applicable for all who believe in the Son, including the faithful remnant of God during the tribulation period. God’s provision of salvation will also, during this same period
be accompanied by His judgment as 59:17-19 reveals. Isaiah stated in 59:16 that God’s “righteousness supported (upheld, sustained) him.” God was absolutely in the “right” to provide salvation when there was no one else to intercede on behalf of His people and all other peoples. God’s righteousness is totally apart from the righteousness of humanity. Within God’s righteousness there is room for divine grace that reaches down into the pit of human depravity to eternally rescue those who, by their own actions, are walking on a wide path to hell.

God’s provision of salvation is said to be provided by “his own arm.” God does not have a physical arm or hand. See for example notes on Isaiah 30:30; 32; 40:10; 41:10; 50:2; 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:1; 62:8; and 63:5. Isaiah uses anthropological language to describe the mighty power of God who neither needs arms nor military armor but is described with these terms so that His people can easily understand that God possesses great and mighty strength that is unsurpassed within all of His creation. A similar expression occurs in Isaiah 63:5 but on this occasion, it is the returning Messiah Who, as a divine warrior, accomplishes salvation.

I looked, but there was no one to help;
   I was shocked that there was no one to lend support.
   Therefore my own arm brought me salvation,
   and my wrath sustained me. (Isaiah 63:5)

59:17 He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
   and a helmet of salvation on his head.
He put on garments of vengeance,
   and was clothed with zeal as a robe.

With words that are similar to that of the apostle Paul as recorded in Ephesians 6:13-17, as indeed Paul quoted from Isaiah 59:17 in Ephesians 6:14, Isaiah describes the armor God wore along with garments of vengeance and a robe of zeal in His fight as a divine warrior to bring salvation and defeat His enemies. Similar “warrior language” was used earlier by Isaiah, 40;10; 42:13; 51:9; and 52:10 and would be used again in 63:1-6. As mentioned above in the notes for 59:16; God does not need external armor to defend Himself when He comes as a warrior to bring His righteous judgment upon the wicked. He also does not need weapons, and Isaiah did not describe any weapons that God used in His warfare of vengeance against those who have rebelled against Him. Vengeance is the Hebrew word naqam, which also occurs in Isaiah 34:8; 35:4; 47:3; 61:2 and 63:4. Vengeance is the righteous reaction of God against those, including His covenant people, who have had the privilege of knowing Him or receiving blessing from Him, but have rebelled against Him by disobeying Him and walking contrary to His way. The prophet Micah stated, “I will execute vengeance in anger and wrath upon the nations that have disobeyed.” Micah 5:15.

Also, in Isaiah 59:17, the prophet describes God’s warrior clothing as being “clothed with zeal as a robe.” Zeal is the Hebrew word qi’nah which is often translated as jealously. The word qi’nah also occurs in Isaiah 9:7; 11:13; 26:11; 37:32; 42:13; and 63:15. The sense of God’s burning zeal (jealousy) is found in Psalm 79:5-7 as a request from God’s covenant people for God to avenge them from the nations that have devastated Judah.

How long, O LORD?
   Will you be angry forever?
   Will your jealousy burn like fire?

6 Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not know you,
   and on the kingdoms that call not on your name.
For they have devoured Jacob,
and laid waste his dwelling. (Psalm 79:5-7)

59:18-19 According to their deeds, so he will repay;
wrath to his adversaries,
and punishment to his enemies;
even to the distant coastslands he will repay them.

19 So they will fear the name of the LORD from the west,
and revere his glory from the rising of the sun.
For he will come like a rushing stream,
that the wind of the LORD drives on.

When the LORD provides salvation in the far future, 59:15-16, He will also exact His vengeance, 59:17 upon His adversaries and enemies. This will be a worldwide event as 59:18 clearly states. Those who are His enemies and adversaries deserve this righteous punishment because they have rebelled against Him. The apostle Paul stated, “For even though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, or give thanks to him; but became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Romans 1: 21-23. The wicked deserve the wrath of God and will have no peace, Isaiah 48:22; and 57:21. God will “repay” them for their evilness and they will reap what they have sown, which will be God’s righteous and just punishment. God will be preparing the earth for the millennial kingdom of His Son, the Messiah who is depicted as the suffering Servant in the writings of Isaiah. God will in His great wrath, punish those who refuse to give Him glory and obey Him through trusting in His Son, Psalm 2:10-12. Isaiah had earlier in chapters 13-27, declared God’s judgment upon the nations, including the people of Israel and Judah.

One result of God’s judgment upon the earth, is that the peoples of the world will fear the name of the LORD, Yahweh and revere His glory from east to west, 59:19. See also Psalm 72:19. God’s judgment and punishment will come to the earth like a rushing stream, unstoppable and inevitable for He drives it along. A prophetic picture of this judgment is seen in Isaiah 63:1-6, where the prophet reveals that it is the returning Messiah who will exact this punishment. It is the Messiah who will be “marching in the greatness of his strength,” 63:1 and who has enacted His judgment upon the wicked, “I stomped them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath,” 63:3 Also the Messiah states, “I trampled down the peoples in my anger, and made them drunk with my wrath, and I spilled their lifeblood on the ground,” 63:6. The Messiah will, as Yahweh’s Servant, enact this righteous punishment upon all the wicked who are alive at the end of the Tribulation. See also Revelation 19:11-21. The earth will be purged of the wicked who have opposed God and have killed His saints, Revelation 19:2. Only those who have trusted in the Messiah and have repented of their sins will populate the messianic kingdom when it is established.

59:20 "A Redeemer will come to Zion,
and to those in Jacob who turn from their sin,"
says the LORD.

The Redeemer who will come to Zion is identified in Isaiah 63:1, “It is I, who announces vindication, mighty to save.” He is the One whom Isaiah had earlier discussed as the Servant, 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. He is the One who is given as a covenant to the people, 42:6 and 49:8. He will be a light to the nations, 42:6 and He will bring God’s salvation to the ends of the earth, 49:6. The One to come is called a “Redeemer,” Hebrew go’el, who will be the savior of His kinsmen, their family redeemer. He will come to
the place the Lord loves, to Zion, Psalm 87:2. He will come “to those in Jacob who turn from their sin.” The long sad story of the Jewish people will have a glad ending. They had continually rejected God’s prophets whom He had sent to rebuke them for their sinfulness and to exhort them to turn to God and walk in His ways. They had rejected God’s Son when he came to be their Savior and incited the Roman authorities to put Him to death. God had warned them that they would need to repent, Leviticus 26:40-42, and Jeremiah 3:11-18. God told them He would not return to them unless they acknowledged their sin and earnestly seek Him, Hosea 5:15-6:3. They would mourn for the one they had pierced, Zechariah 12:10 and He would not be seen among them unless they confess, “blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” Matthew 23:37-39.

The setting for the Redeemer coming to Zion is during the events of what one Biblical Scholar has called the “Campaign of Armageddon,” when the armies of Antichrist will surround the faithful remnant of the People of God and they will be without hope and face annihilation. When they are faced with death, they will acknowledge their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during His first advent and confess their sins and ask the Messiah to return to save them. Then the Messiah as the Redeemer will come to Zion, Isaiah 59:20. See Arnold Fruchtenbaum, The Footsteps of the Messiah, Ariel Ministries Publisher, 2004; Chapter 14: The Campaign of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Jesus the Messiah.

59:21 "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD, "my Spirit that is on you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, will not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouths of your children, nor out of the mouth of your children's children," says the LORD, "from now to forever."

Isaiah 59:21 is one of the major statements regarding the new covenant in the Old Testament. It is not accidental that this statement is placed in the context of the second coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ when he comes to bring His righteous judgment upon the wicked of the world, to save His covenant people from the armies of Antichrist and to establish His millennial kingdom. In this context, the prophet, under God’s divine inspiration, as for all of Isaiah’s writings, reveals that God will establish His covenant with them. The description of this covenant is consistent with the other descriptions of the new covenant recorded in the Old Testament. The primary passages, along with Isaiah 59:21 are Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 37:26-28. Other references to the new covenant in the Old Testament include, Isaiah 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 61:8; Jeremiah 32:40; 50:5; Ezekiel 16:60; 43:25; and Hosea 2:18. A careful study of these passages reveals that God makes promises to His covenant people that are as yet unfulfilled as clearly stated in Isaiah 59:21, “my words which I have put in your mouth, will not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouths of your children, nor out of the mouths of your children’s children, says the LORD, from now to forever.” Other similar promises occur in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 37:26-28. The triune God is involved in all aspects of the new covenant. The Father, Yahweh, is the holder of the covenant. The Son of God, the Messiah is given as the covenant to His people, Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 and the Holy Spirit will be upon them, Isaiah 59:21. In the Old Testament, the new covenant which is eternal, Isaiah 59:21; 61:8; Ezekiel 37:26, is made between God and His covenant people, the house of Israel, Jeremiah 31:33. The new covenant embraces the Abrahamic covenant, a blessing to all nations and the Davidic Covenant, with the promise that David, God’s servant will be their prince forever, Ezekiel 37:25. The participation in the new covenant will be on the basis of the law of God which will be written on the hearts of His covenant people, Jeremiah 31:33. God will thus give them a “new heart.” The overarching promise of the new covenant is that Yahweh will dwell with His people, and He will be their God and they will be His people for His sanctuary will be in their midst forever, Ezekiel 37:27-28 and Jeremiah 31:33. See also Revelation 21:3 which confirms the new covenant formula,
“I will be their God and they will be my people.” This verse also confirms that He will dwell (tabernacle) among them forever.

The New Testament states that the promise of Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 that the Messiah, the Servant will be given as a covenant to the people, is revealed as being in the blood sacrifice of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Luke 22:20; and 1 Corinthians 11:25. The apostle Paul revealed that he and others were servants of the new covenant, 2 Corinthians 3:6. Although the new covenant was a covenant between God and the people of Israel, Jeremiah 31:33, there is a relationship to the new covenant with all believers in the Messiah, for Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New covenant, Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24.

The connection between the promises of the new covenant made to the people of Israel and the revelation in the New Testament that the new covenant has a relationship to all who believe in the shed blood of Jesus Christ for salvation. This has caused much confusion in the minds of Biblical scholars and students and all who seriously study the Scriptures. If the new covenant was between God and the people of Israel, what role does the church today have in participating in the new covenant? An excellent resource that discusses in detail the new covenant in the Old and New Testaments is Dispensationalism, the Church and the New Covenant, by R. Bruce Compton, The Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal, 8 (Fall 2003), pages 3-48. Compton concludes: “the view that the church presently participates in the new covenant while national Israel fulfills the new covenant in the future is the most satisfactory interpretation of the biblical evidence.” Page 48.

Also, Thomas Constable comments:

“In closing, God promised with a covenant promise that He would not withdraw His Spirit or His Word from His people on whom He would place them (cf. Jer. 31:31-44). This is a reference to the New Covenant. The Spirit would abide on His people forever, and His Word would remain in their mouths so they could be the witnesses to Him that He created them to be. Since this has not yet happened, it appears that it will happen at the Lord Jesus’ second advent (v. 18).

There is debate about whether the Lord has already given His Spirit permanently to all His people, but there is no question that He has not yet made His people the witnesses that they should be. He has given the Spirit to Christians, but not to all Israelites (cf. Joel 2:29). Christians are relatively ineffective witnesses now, but Israel will be a faithful witness in the Millennium (Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:27b). Israel will witness to the greatness of Yahweh and will draw the nations to Him (cf. 2:2-3; 60:1-3). This is the purpose for which He will redeem them.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 303).

Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer comment on 59:20-21:

God declares that He will be the Redeemer who will come to Zion. Therefore, those who turn from transgression in Jacob will experience God’s salvation (v. 20). Paul the apostle quotes this verse in Rm 11:26, depicting the day when Israel turns to the Lord Jesus for deliverance prior to the second coming of Christ. When the entire nation repents, then all Israel will be saved. At that time, God will enact the new covenant (cf. Jr 31:31-34) with Israel that will guarantee God’s presence with the nation throughout her generations (Is 59:21). The permanence of the Spirit and the Word among the people speaks to the promise of ongoing faithfulness and of the removal of sin. (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, Moody Bible Commentary, page 1096). (bolded words in the original text).
Michael Vlach presents an excellent discourse on Paul's Use of Isaiah 59:20-21 in Romans 11:26-27

“Isaiah 59:20-21 in Context

The last two major sections of Isaiah are chapters 49-57 and 58-66. Isaiah 49-57 focuses on the coming Suffering Servant who will vicariously atone for the sins of His people. We now know that Jesus is this Suffering Servant. Isaiah 58-66 then focuses on the glorious kingdom blessings that will come to Israel and the world. Israel will be restored and the nations of the earth will then bless Israel.

Together, these two sections focus on salvation and kingdom. So when Isaiah 59:20-21 will speak of the Lord’s salvation of Israel, the backdrop of this truth is the work of the Suffering Servant.

Isaiah 59 is a strategic chapter since it addresses: (1) Israel’s sin (vv. 1-8); (2) Israel’s national confession of guilt (vv. 9-15a); (3) the Lord’s rescue of Israel (vv. 15b-19); and (4) the salvation of Israel and Israel’s inclusion into the New Covenant (vv. 20-21). Starting with Isaiah 59:15b, the Lord, who is presented as Israel’s interceder, is said to be displeased that there was “no justice” and “that there was no one to intercede” for Israel. So He decides to act alone on Israel’s behalf against the nations. This interceding on Israel’s behalf will include both national deliverance from Israel’s enemies and spiritual salvation for Israel from her sins.

Isaiah 59:16-19 emphasizes the coming wrath of God against the nations, even distant nations—“Wrath to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the coastlands He will make recompense” (59:18). This is clearly a physical deliverance from oppression. This also is the message of Zechariah 14 and Isaiah 63:3-6 which speak of the Lord’s physical deliverance of Israel from her enemies. Also, in the New Testament Zacharias declared that the coming Messiah (Jesus) would bring “Salvation from our enemies” (Luke 1:71). He also said that in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant God would “grant us that we being rescued from the hand of our enemies” (Luke 1:74).

Yet in addition to national deliverance from enemies, the “Redeemer” of Isaiah 59:20 is also a Savior from sin. Much of Isaiah 58-66 concerns Israel’s sinfulness and Israel’s national confession of sin. Isaiah 59 began with, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save” (v. 1). That this includes salvation from sin is supported by the fact that Isaiah 59:1-15a is all about Israel’s sin and confession of sin. So the “Redeemer” of verse 20 is more than a deliverer from oppressing nations He is also a Savior from sin. This Redeemer is also the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52-53 who “bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors” (53:12). Also, this “Redeemer” comes “to those who turn from transgression in Jacob” (59: 20). So the Redeemer’s coming to Zion is linked with forgiveness of sins in Israel.

This salvation that the Redeemer brings is linked with Israel’s inclusion and participation in the New Covenant—“‘As for Me, this is My covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit which is upon you. . . .’” (21a). The “My covenant” here most probably is the New Covenant. Jeremiah 31:31, 34 explicitly links the New Covenant with Israel’s forgiveness of sins. Ezekiel 36 also links the Holy Spirit with the New Covenant—“I will put My Spirit within you” (Ezek. 36:27a). This inclusion of Israel into the New Covenant is also linked with Abrahamic Covenant blessings since the New Covenant is an extension of the Abrahamic Covenant.

In sum, Isaiah 59 reveals that Israel’s sin will one day be recognized by the people of Israel. When this occurs, the Lord will act alone on Israel’s behalf to rescue Israel from her enemies. He also comes to Israel with salvation, a salvation based on the work of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52-53. This salvation means inclusion into the New Covenant.”

Following a discussion on Paul’s use of Isaiah 59:20-21 in Romans 11:26-27, Vlach summarizes:

“Here Paul relies upon Isaiah 59:20-21a in a contextual way. The Isaiah passage predicted a coming salvation of Israel as a corporate entity that reverses the nation’s unbelief and that is Paul’s point too. The coming of the
Redeemer, who is Jesus the Messiah, will be linked with the salvation of national Israel and Israel’s inclusion in the New Covenant. That is the message of both Isaiah and Paul. To compare:

Isaiah 59:20-21: Predicts a coming salvation of national Israel and inclusion of Israel into the New Covenant.


Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 59:
59:1-2 The Condemnation of Sin
59:3-8 The Conduct of Sin
59:9-11 The Consequence of Sin
59:12-15a The Confession of Sin
59:16b-21 The Conversion from Sin


The last major section of the prophecy of Isaiah, chapters 58-66 is mainly centered on the return of the Messiah: to save His people who have repented of their national sin of rejecting Him; to exact vengeance on His enemies and to establish the millennial kingdom. In chapter 58 Isaiah dealt with the sins of God’s covenant people during days of fasting on the Sabbath day and the rewards for these people if they righteously observed these days. In chapter 59, the prophet declared God’s indictment on the sins of the people on all occasions, the acknowledgment of their sinfulness and a confession of these sins, and God’s response which was: to provide salvation by His own power and initiative, to bring righteous retribution on the wicked and to reveal more details about the new covenant, especially the role of the Holy Spirit in this covenant. In chapter 60, the current chapter to be studied, Isaiah reveals details about the establishment of the millennial kingdom including the glory of the Messiah and the kingdom, the gathering of the Faithful remnant to Zion, the role of the nations in this gathering of God’s covenant people and the transition of the millennial kingdom into the eternal state. These themes will also continue to the end of Isaiah’s writings.

Chapter 60 of Isaiah has three major sections. Vss. 1-9 describe the glory of the millennial kingdom and the gathering of God’s covenant people to Zion. Vss. 10-16 describe the role of the nations in the establishment of God’s covenant people to Zion. Vss. 17-22 describe the prosperity, peace and perpetuity of the millennial kingdom. In the first nine verses, the prophet calls upon God’s covenant people to stand (arise) and shine, for the glory of the LORD, the returning Messiah has come to them and the nations of the earth will be attracted to the Messiah and will come to Him, vss. 1-3. The people living in the land will observe that the faithful remnant of God’s people will be coming to the newly established kingdom, bringing with them the wealth of the nations, including many animals, vss. 4-7. Ships will come upon the sea from far nations carrying the faithful remnant and great wealth. These coming people will honor the LORD because He has glorified His people in His land, vss. 8-9.

The prophet describes, in the second section of chapter 60, that foreigners will rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and foreign kings will serve God’s covenant people. The gates of the rebuilt city will be open continually so that the wealth of the nations will be brought to Zion. Any nation that does not serve God’s covenant people will be totally destroyed, vss. 10-12. The glory of Lebanon, its natural resources, will be brought to Zion to make beautiful, the sanctuary of the Messiah. The descendants of those who previously oppressed God’s people will bow before God’s people and proclaim that Zion is the City of the LORD who is the Holy One of Israel, vss. 13-14. No longer will the people of God be forsaken but will be made majestic by the LORD and
will be a source of joy for many generations. The kings of the nations will bring their best resources to Zion so that all will know that the LORD is their Savior, Redeemer and the Mighty One of Jacob, vss. 15-16.

Isaiah, in the third section of chapter 60, describes the prosperity and peace that will come upon Messiah’s kingdom. Valuable minerals will abound in the kingdom which will also be governed by a ruler (overseer) of peace, vs. 17. Violence and devastation will no longer be present in Zion. God’s people will call its Salvation and its gates Praise, vs. 18. When the transition between the millennial kingdom to the eternal state occurs, the presence of the LORD will be so glorious that the sun and the moon will no longer be required for light and the days of mourning will be over, vss.19-20. God’s covenant people will finally be righteous, and they will possess the land forever empowered by the LORD so that He will be glorified, vss. 21-22.

1: 60:1-9 The glory of the millennial kingdom and the gathering of God’s covenant people to Zion.

Isaiah 60:1-9, as does the entire 60th chapter of Isaiah, follow immediately in chronological order following chapters 58 and 59. God’s covenant people will have finally recognized their sinfulness and will have confessed their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during His first advent. See notes on 59:20. The Messiah, will return to the earth, at the end of the period known in the Old Testament as Jacob’s trouble (distress), Jeremiah 30:7, and in the New Testament as the Great Tribulation. He will come to rescue His people, destroy His enemies and to establish the millennial kingdom. Verses 1-9 of Isaiah 60 describe details about this kingdom and the gathering to Zion, of the faithful remnant of God, from the nations of the world. This is one of the most wondrous and exalted passage of God’s inspired Scriptures.

60:1 Arise, shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

The prophet calls upon God’s covenant people who are in Zion, per 60:14 to “arise, shine,” for their light has come upon them. The glorious and majestic Messiah has now come to them to establish His earthly kingdom. They are to arise or stand up, Hebrew: qum, and not hide themselves but show themselves to the world. They have nothing to fear, for the sons of their former oppressors and all who had despised them will bow down at their feet, 60:14. They will stand free from oppression for no one can stand against them when they have their Messiah with them. They are also to “shine,” Hebrew: or, which is also translated as bright or to give light or to illumine. Examples of the light of the Lord occur in Psalm 31:16; 67:1; Proverbs 4:18-19; and Ezekiel 43:2. They are to shine because their light, the Messiah is come to them and His glory is risen upon them. The word “glory” is the Hebrew word kabod, which Isaiah earlier had described as a display of God’s Shechinah glory in Zion in “the day,” in the millennial kingdom, when the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, Isaiah 4:2-5. This glory was also manifest when a cloud divided the Israelites from the approaching army of Egypt, Exodus 14:19-20. It was manifest in the cloud of glory, the Shechinah, which appeared on Mount Sinai, Exodus 19:18, 24:17; and Deuteronomy 5:24. It was manifest in the tabernacle, Exodus 40:34-38; Numbers 9:15-23; and 20:6; and in the pillar of cloud while the Israelites journey through the wilderness, Numbers 14:14; Nehemiah 9:12,and 19. It was manifest during the dedication of the temple, 1 Kings 8:11; and 2 Chronicles 7:1, and when God resided in it, Psalm 26:8. It will also be manifest when the faithful remnant will be gathered to Zion, Isaiah 58:8. This glory of the LORD also fills the earth, Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19; Isaiah 6:3; and Habakkuk 2:14; and the heavens Psalm 8:1; 19:1. Everyone will see the Messiah’s glory when He comes, Isaiah 40:5. The covenant people of God will “shine” for they will reflect the glory of the Messiah just as the face of Moses shone when He met with the Lord, Exodus 34:29-35.

Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 60:1:
“Zion, the personification of Israel, is commanded to arise from the former gloom of depression and to radiate
the light and the glory of God. The Hebrew verb, “zarah,” is used to describe the rising of the sun. The light of
the glory of God, is used in later literature called “The Shechinah.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 456).

Thomas Constable adds:

“God had called Israel to be a light to the nations (43:10), but presently she was darkness (56:9—57:13; 59:1-15a). The Lord had promised that He would enable His people to fulfill their calling (57:14-21; 59:15b-21).
Now Isaiah summoned the nation to rise up and shine because her light had arrived (cf. 51:17; 52:1). God's
glory, rather than His discipline, will rise as the sun upon her. Like a city gleaming in the light of the risen sun,
Israel will shine with a glory that is not her own. God will not share His glory with false gods (42:8; 48:11),
but He will share it with His people through His Servant (11:10; 35:2; 43:7; John 1:14; 17:4, 22; Rom. 8:17; 2
Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:13-14).

The first coming of Christ anticipated the dawning of a new day for Israel, but His second coming will see the
fulfillment of these prophecies of Israel's glorification (cf. Rev. 2:28; 22:16).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page
304).

60:2 For, look, darkness covers the earth,
and deep darkness the peoples,
but the LORD arises on you
and his glory is seen over you.

The glory of the Messiah in itself and as reflected by His covenant people in Zion will shine all the brighter
because of the darkness that will be upon the earth during the distressing days of the Tribulation and as the
Messiah is establishing His millennial kingdom. When the Messiah returns during this dark period, His
glorious appearance will be so bright that everyone will see it, Isaiah 40:5. Earlier Isaiah had described the
gloom of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali which would see the glory of the Messiah, 9:1 and in 9:2 Isaiah
declares:

The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light;
those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death,
on them the light has shined.

This describes the glory of the light of the Messiah of whom Isaiah declares in 9:6-7:

6 For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given,
and the government will be upon his shoulders:
and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government
and of peace there will be no end.
He will rule on the throne of David,
and over his kingdom,
to establish it,
and to uphold it with justice
and with righteousness from this time forth forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.
Just as the darkness of sin had covered the land before the coming of the Messiah to Israel during His first advent, so will the darkness and gloom be deeper as it covers the earth and its people prior to the Messiah’s second coming. The Messiah however, will dispel the covering of darkness and gloom as He arises to rule over His kingdom and His glory will be seen not only among but over His people who reside in Zion, which will be called “The city of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel,” 60:14. The glorious appearing of the Messiah will bring in an age of magnificent light upon the covenant people of God who reside in Zion and upon all the peoples of the earth.

60:3 **Nations will come to your light,**  
and kings to the brightness of your radiance.

As the Messiah is beginning to set up His millennial kingdom, where He will reign on the throne of David, Isaiah 9:7; the nations, Hebrew: goy, which are the Gentiles, will come to the light of Zion who is the Messiah. The kings, and leaders of these nations will come to Him who is “the brightness of your radiance.” The people of Israel had looked for light, 59:9 and upon their acknowledgment and their confession of their sin against their Messiah, He has come to be their light to which all nations are attracted. Isaiah, in a millennial kingdom reference, had earlier exhorted his people to walk in the light of the LORD, 2:5. They, who walk in darkness would see the great light of their Messiah, 9:2. The Servant who is the Messiah is declared (appointed) by Yahweh, to be a light for the nations, 42:6 and a light to the nations 49:6. God’s justice will be established as a light of the peoples, 51:4. The LORD, promised that when His people respond to Him with righteous actions, their light will break out like the dawn and their righteousness would go before them, 58:8. In the eternal state, the light of Yahweh will be everlasting and they will no longer have need for the light of the sun or the moon, 60:19-20. It is not to any inherent light the people of Zion possesses to which the nations and its leaders are attracted but to the light of the Messiah who is “the brightness of your radiance.”

60:4 Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together and come to you;  
your sons will come from far away,  
and your daughters will be carried on the hip.

Attracted by the brightness of the radiance of the Messiah which is the light of the people of Zion, the nations will come to them and bring with them the faithful remnant of God’s people who will be scattered throughout the nations of the earth. Isaiah often stated God’s promises that His faithful remnant will come to Zion, 2:2-5; 11:10-16; 14:1-2; 43:1-7; 49:8-26; 56:8 and 66:20. God is the One who will bring His people to His city. The people who once oppressed them will carry the children of God’s covenant people as they travel to Zion, 14:1-2; 43:6; and 49:22-23. This is not, as many Biblical commentators suggest, a return from exile in Babylon, but a most glorious gathering from the nations following the distressing days of the great Tribulation as the reference to the wealth of the nations being brought to Zion, 60:5 most clearly reveals.

60:5 Then you will see and be radiant,  
and your heart will thrill and rejoice;  
because the abundance of the sea will be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations will come to you.

Those living in Zion at the time of the great gathering of the faithful remnant of God’s people, will witness the most astonishing sight they have yet seen. The Gentile peoples who had previously oppressed the people of God, will not only accompany God’s covenant people, but will actually be assisting them and even
carrying their young children. Another amazing sight will be seen. These Gentile peoples will also be bringing the wealth of the nations and the abundance of the sea to Zion. The inhabitants of Zion witnessing this most wondrous spectacle, will shine with radiance and their hearts will be thrilled as they rejoice of what God is doing among them. The words regarding their heart, “thrill and rejoice” is literally “tremble and be enlarged.” See NASB margin note. Compare with Psalm 34:5. Isaiah in 61:6 recorded, “You will eat the wealth of nations, and in their glory you will boast.”

Gary V. Smith comments on Isaiah 60:5b-9:

“60:5b–9 A slightly different topic is introduced with “surely, it is true” (kî, omitted in NIV) in the middle of v. 5. This introductory term assures the audience that all that the prophet says will happen. The nations (mentioned already in 60:3) will not only transport people back to Jerusalem; they will also bring gifts to Zion so that they can be presented to God. The amazing gifts they will bring to God include things from all over the world. 60:5b refers to the “wealth” (NIV) from the sea and the “riches” (NIV) of the nations, but the terms that describe these gifts are unusual. The first term usually refers to the “roaring sound, noise, tumult” of large waves in the sea, of people talking, or of God’s roaring (13:4; 17:12; 31:4; 33:3; 51:15), but in some contexts the semantic range of this term is extended to include the idea of the “multitude of people” who are making this roaring sound as they arrive (5:13; 16:14; 29:5, 7, 8). Thus this verse must refer to the multitude of people that will come from far distant nations to Zion on ships of the sea. The second term can refer to the (a) great physical strength of a person or God (2 Chr 26:13; Hab 3:19), (b) the strength or valor of a warrior, (c) an army (1 Sam 16:18), (d) the moral strength or worth of a person (Ruth 3:11), or (e) the wealth of a person (Gen 34:29). Verse 5b is thus an introductory summary statement that broadly categorizes the things (“riches, wealth”) and many people (“the multitudes”) that will come to Zion.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 616).

60:6 The multitude of camels will cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba will come;  
they will bring gold and frankincense,  
and will proclaim the praises of the LORD.

Isaiah continues to describe the wealth of the nations that will flow to Zion. This wealth will consist of beasts of burden, camels and precious metal, gold and costly spice, frankincense. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“One of the results of Israel’s restoration to divine favor will be a great increase in commerce with all her neighbors.

The young camels” translated by the KJV’s as “dromedaries,” are actually young camels and not the one-humped camels. In this verse a number of descendants from Ishmael are mentioned: Ephah is a Midianite tribe (Gen. 25:4), the son of Keturah and Abraham. Most commentators believe that Sheba is modern Yemen.

They come bringing their most precious gifts, gold and frankincense, proclaiming the praise of Jehovah. The most significant aspect of this prophecy is the reconciliation of the Arab tribes with Israel and their worship of Jehovah. This prophecy, together with Isaiah 19:23-25, indicates that in Isaiah’s time there was a live hope and desire that Israel and her Arab neighbors might be reconciled and worship together one God. The reference to gold and frankincense brings to mind the story of the wise men from the East who brought gifts to the newborn child, Jesus, of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Mt. 1:11).”  (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 457).

Thomas Constable also suggests:
“Gentiles will also come from other parts of the world bringing treasure to honor Israel. The visit of the wise men at Jesus' birth suggests a fulfillment (cf. Matt. 2:11). The visit of the Magi should have alerted Israel to the identity of Jesus. But again, the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem was only a foretaste of what Isaiah predicted would come to all Israel. Isaiah saw camels as thick as flies on meat covering the land around Jerusalem. These Gentiles will express thanks that Israel has brought the Word of God to them, in its written, spoken, and incarnate forms.

When the wise men came to visit baby Jesus, they brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:11). These gifts have suggested to some interpreters the purity and value of His birth, the fragrance of His life, and the suffering of his death. But Isaiah predicted that in the future Gentiles would bring only gold and incense, since death will not be in view.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 305-306).

60:7 All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together to you,  
the rams of Nebaioth will be brought to you for sacrifices.  
They will go up as acceptable on my altar,  
and I will beautify my glorious temple.

As well as camels, flocks including rams will be brought to Zion. They will come from Kedar, descendants of the son of Ishmael, Genesis 25:13, who lived in the desert lands north of Syria and from Nebaioth, who are the Nebateans, descendants of Nebaioth, also a son of Ishmael, Genesis 25:13. They lived in Arabia, Modern Jordan in and near the modern city of Petra. The reason these flocks will be brought to Zion during the millennial kingdom period will be for sacrifices on the altar of God which will be acceptable to God for with them He will beautify (glorify) His glorious temple. There has been a continual debate among conservative evangelical scholars, who hold to a consistent dispensational hermeneutic, as to why there will be sacrifices during the millennial kingdom. Those who hold to an amillennial viewpoint typically allegorize any references to sacrifices during the millennial reign of Christ for they posit that the “so called” millennial reign of Christ is the current Church age and any references to blessings upon Israel are fulfilled in the church, so they claim there is no need for sacrifices. Dispensational scholars who keep to a consistent literal hermeneutic do not attempt to “explain away” the meaning of the Scriptures that refer to these sacrifices, (see also Ezekiel chapters 40-48); nor do they employ allegory to explain them away. Therefore, as the Scriptures attest to the presence of animal sacrifices during the millennial reign of the Messiah, it is best to accept this as God’s desire without speculation as to an exhaustive definitive reason why God desires them. Thomas Constable, who holds to a consistent dispensational hermeneutic, comments:

“Isaiah saw other nations, ancient enemies of Israel, bring offerings typical of their way of life. Evidently there will be a literal temple and altar in Zion then (cf. Ezek. 40—43). The sacrifices offered there will be for thanksgiving to God. God will glorify the millennial temple as the focal point of worship at this time. Isaiah's vision of the future Jerusalem included a temple and altar (cf. v. 13), but John's vision of the future Jerusalem excluded both (Rev. 21:22). The solution is probably that Isaiah described the millennial city, and John the eternal city.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 306).

Who are these that fly like a cloud, 
and like doves to their windows? 

For the coastlands will expectantly wait for me, 
and the ships of Tarshish will arrive first, 
to bring your children from afar, 
along with their silver and their gold.

They will honor the LORD your God, 
the Holy One of Israel, 
because he has glorified you.

Isaiah asks a rhetorical question in 60:8 as he sees in a vision those who are flying towards him as if they are in a cloud and like doves to their windows. Some Biblical scholars such as Thomas Constable understand that those coming to Zion are “as thick as clouds” and remind Isaiah “of doves flying to their dovecotes.” Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 306. See also Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 457. One scholar has a more futuristic understanding who considers the reference to flying on a cloud to air travel; D.L. Cooper Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly-March 1946. Geoffrey W. Grogan views this imagery as the people of Israel travelling on Gentile ships and perhaps including Gentiles also travelling to Zion, Geoffrey W. Grogan, Isaiah, page 330. Edward E. Hindson, also sees this imagery as referring to ships that are rapidly approaching Israel, Edward E. Hindson, Isaiah, The King James Bible Commentary, page 852.

In Isaiah 60:9, the prophet records that, “the coastlands will expectantly wait for me.” Isaiah had earlier expressed this phrase in 51:5:

My righteousness is near, 
my salvation is gone out, 
and my arms will judge the peoples. 
The coastlands will expectantly wait for me, 
and they will hope on my arm.

The hope of those who have trusted in their Messiah is that He would return for them. In the context of Isaiah chapter 60 as in the preceding chapters, the setting is the end of the great Tribulation and the establishment of the millennial kingdom by the Messiah. Those who live in far away places, described as the coastlands, have waited in expectation for their Messiah and now He has come in His glorious light, 60:1-2. Those who are from the far reaches of the Mediterranean Sea, Tarshish, will be the first to arrive on the shores of Israel, to be followed later from those who live in more distant places, the coastlands. These ships will carry the covenant people of God, the faithful remnant from the nations. The ships will also be carrying the wealth of these nations, silver and gold, see also 60:5. As they are travelling and when they arrive in Zion, they will be honoring the LORD who is their God and the Holy One of Israel. They will honor the LORD because He has glorified His covenant people by His marvellous light, which is described in 60:3 as “the brightness of your radiance.” It is not because the people of God have any glory in themselves that will be attracting the nations to come to them. It is only because the glorious radiance of the Messiah has come upon them and it will be the Messiah to whom the peoples of the world, both Jews and Gentiles are coming with their children and their wealth. Those who had been their oppressors and captors will be bringing the faithful remnant of God to worship their Messiah and these former tyrants will be coming with wealth as tribute to Messiah. See Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 457-458. Thomas Constable comments:
“Gentiles and Israelites are waiting for God because they have come to worship Him for what He has done in Israel's experience and character. Israel will finally fulfill her calling as a kingdom of priests, bringing all other kingdoms to the Holy One of Israel—her God (Exod. 19:5-6).” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 306).

2: 60:10-16 The role of the nations in the establishment of God’s covenant people to Zion

Verses 10-16 of Isaiah chapter 60 describe the amazing role the Gentile nations will have in the establishment of the people of God to Zion as the millennial kingdom of the Messiah is being established. The horrific days of the great Tribulation will have just ended. The leaders and others from many nations that had oppressed and tormented the faithful remnant of the LORD will turn to the Lord and assist the Lord’s people in the establishment of the kingdom. Those nations that will not serve God’s people will perish, vs. 12. Thus, at the beginning of the messianic kingdom, only those who trust in the Messiah will populate the kingdom. Those from the Gentile nations that assist the covenant people of God will bow before them, vs. 14. The people of Zion will be a source of everlasting pride and a source of joy, vs. 15. The very best resources these Gentile nations will be brought to Zion, vs. 16.

60:10 Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. For though in my wrath I struck you, yet in my favor I have had mercy on you.

Upon arriving in Israel, and after assisting the faithful remnant of God and bringing their wealth and resources to Zion, the leaders and others of the Gentile nations, foreigners will begin the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. These walls and the temple will have likely been built by the Jews during the first half of the tribulation period when the agreement, (covenant) with the Antichrist was in force. However, after the Antichrist breaks his own agreement with the Jews, his armies, consisting of warriors from all nations will converge upon helpless Israel and they will overrun the city, Zechariah 14:1-3; and Revelation 16:12-16. This assault on Israel has been called the “Campaign of Armageddon,” by Arnold Fruchtenbaum. See chapter 14 in his book, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Ariel Ministries Publisher, 2004. This event will take place immediately prior to the return of the Messiah to rescue His faithful remnant and destroy His enemies. During the assault of Jerusalem, the walls and many other structures, including the newly built temple will be destroyed. It should be noted that this assault on Jerusalem will be instigated by God, Zechariah 14:2, as a judgment on His people who, even during the days of the Tribulation, will continue to rebel against Him. The leaders and others from the nations that will come against Jerusalem, will later be those who give of their wealth and resources to Zion and will rebuild the city’s walls, and other structures. These Gentile leaders and their people will also serve the people of Zion in other capacities.

Isaiah declares the word of the LORD, Yahweh in the second half of 60:10: “For though in my wrath I struck you, yet in my favor I have had mercy on you.” The wrath of God in striking His covenant people is revealed in Zechariah 14:2. His favor by having mercy upon them is revealed in Isaiah 60:3-17. The word “mercy” is the Hebrew word raham, which is also frequently translated as “compassion.” This word also occurs in Isaiah in 9:17; 13:18; 14:1; 27:11; 30:18; 49:10, 13, 15; 54:8, 10; and 55:7. Refer to the notes on these verses. Isaiah had earlier declared in 54:7-8:

7"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will regather you.
8 In overflowing wrath I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting love I will have mercy on you,” says the LORD your Redeemer.
The prophet Habakkuk prayed that the LORD would have mercy when He enacted His wrath as recorded in Habakkuk 3:2:

_O LORD, I have heard the report about what you have done, and stand in awe, O LORD._

_Revive your work in our time; in the midst of these years make it known; in wrath remember mercy._

The psalmist expressed a similar sentiment, as recorded in Psalm 78:38:

_Yet he, being merciful, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; many times he held back his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath._

David L. Cooper comments:

“According to Isaiah 60:10 foreigners will be employed to build up the city walls, and kings will minister unto the Jews. The reason for this is stated in the following words: "For in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favor have I had mercy on thee." Israel has had advantages that no other nation has ever enjoyed. With increased opportunities, there come added responsibilities. She will be punished double for all her sins; yet, when this glorious era dawns, the people will have double instead of persecution and dishonor—as we shall see in the study of Isaiah, chapter 61.” (D. L. Cooper, _Commentary on Isaiah_, Biblical Research Monthly – March 1946).

60:11 _Your gates also will be open continually; they will never be shut day or night, so that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings leading the procession._

The prophet had earlier stated that nations will be bringing their wealth to Zion as the millennial kingdom is established, 60: 5-9. The majestic ruler of the kingdom will be the Messiah, who will have for just one of His magnificent titles, “the Prince of Peace,” Isaiah 9:6. There will be peace, safety and prosperity in all His kingdom. These themes abound in the writings of Isaiah, 2:1-4; 4:6; 9:7; 11:6-10; 32:1-2, 17-18; 33:2-24; 35:1-10; 40:1-11; 41:12, 18-20; 45:17; 46:13; 52:7-12; 57:19; 60:1-62:12; 65:17-25 and 66:10-14. The Prince of Peace will be resident in Zion and the gates of His capital city will always be open. However, He will also rule the nations with a scepter of iron, Psalm 2:9 and Revelation 19:15. The inhabitants of the kingdom will freely enter into Zion. Many who come will be kings, leading a grand procession of people from their nations and will bring to the Messiah wealth from their nations. Isaiah had earlier declared this in 10:13-14; 45:14; 49:7, 23; 60: 3, 5, 10 and would again declare it, 61:6; 62:2 and 66:12.

60:12 _For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you will perish; those nations will be totally destroyed._

One aspect of the millennial kingdom that may be difficult for some to understand is that not only is the Messiah the Prince of Peace, but He is also a just ruler who will not abide rebellion in any form and this will result in the total destruction of any nation that does not submit to Him by serving His covenant people. As mentioned above the Messiah, Jesus Christ will rule the nations of the earth during this kingdom period with a scepter (rod) of Iron, Psalm 2:9 and Revelation 19:15. It may be that this destruction of these nations will
happen at the beginning of the kingdom age. The Messiah will destroy these nations to protect those who inhabit the kingdom from any oppression or vindictive action by those who may oppose Him and His people. Also, the nations will be required to go to Zion annually “to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles,” Zechariah 14:16. Those who do not do this will receive a just punishment, Zechariah 14:17-19. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The words sound harsh or even vindictive, but the thought expressed in them is that every nation or government which opposes God, will have no future and will eventually perish. It complements the thought, “the meek shall inherit the earth.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 458).

60:13 The glory of Lebanon will come to you,
the cypress, fir, and pine trees,
to beautify the place of my sanctuary;
and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

As recorded in Isaiah 60:13, the prophet continues the description of the role that the nations will have in the establishment of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. From the bordering nation of Lebanon will come majestic trees, “the cypress, fir and pine trees.” The wood from these trees will be to make the sanctuary of the Messiah, “my sanctuary,” a beautiful place that will be suitable for the divine Ruler and will reflect His glory as He is the Majesty over all of His creation including nature. The identity of this sanctuary is not stated by Isaiah in this verse. However, the next phrase, “and I will make the place of my feet glorious,” does provide a Scriptural reference to identify the sanctuary as the millennial temple. In 1 Chronicles 28:2, king David stated, “Hear me, my brothers and my people. I wanted to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God; and I began preparations for building it.” David therefore identified “the footstool of our God” as the house of God which is the temple. The glory of the millennial temple is stated in much detail in Ezekiel chapters 40-48.

60:14 The descendants of your oppressors will come bowing before you;
all those who despised you will bow down
at your feet,
and they will call you The City of the LORD,
Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah in 60:14, reveals that those (their sons) who had previously oppressed the faithful remnant of God will now come and bow before those they had oppressed. They will bow at the feet of the covenant people of God not to worship them but to acknowledge God’s favor upon them and to give a visual demonstration that these formerly oppressed ones are the people of God, who have a unique covenant relationship with Him. These former oppressors will call God’s people, “The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” The irony of this is that, when the faithful remnant were held captive in the nations of the earth during the days of the great Tribulation and even prior to these days, they were made to bow before their captors. Now their captors will come to bow before them and honor them. They will be called by the name of their LORD, Yahweh and will be rightly identified as “Zion” the city that is beloved by the LORD. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 60:13-14:

“The glory of Lebanon--the cedars of Lebanon, the most glorious of ancient days--will be given unto Zion. All of the very best materials upon the face of the globe will be used in the reconstruction of the Temple, as we learn from verse 13 of this chapter. The prophet, in speaking of the sanctuary, declares, “I [Jehovah] will make the place of my feet glorious.” Jehovah, then, according to this prediction, will be there in person. This prediction is in perfect harmony with Ezekiel 43:7: “And he said unto me, Son of man, this is the place of my
throne, and the place of the soles of my feet where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom and by the dead bodies of their kings in their high places." This passage is to be taken literally, at its face value. In keeping with all the Scriptures is this one which foretells that Jehovah himself will be in Zion personally and will reign there as her King. (See Zeph. 3:14-17.) At that time men will call Zion "The city of Jehovah, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel." It will be thus named because Jehovah in person, the Messiah--the Lord Jesus Christ--will reign there. Jerusalem therefore will be called the throne of Jehovah. (See Jer. 3:16, 17.)” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – March 1946).

See also Isaiah 52:1. The prophet also stated in 48:2 that:

*For they call themselves after the holy city, and depend on the God of Israel. The LORD of hosts is his name.*

60:15 Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through you, I will make you majestic forever, a joy for many generations.

The nations had previously hated Zion and the covenant people of God and forsaken and oppressed them in all the nations of the earth. People from these nations scorned Zion and refused to acknowledge its existence by visiting it. This will be evident during the days of the great Tribulation where Israel’s people will suffer extreme persecution, and many will be killed by those loyal to Antichrist. These days are called “the time of Jacob's trouble.” Jeremiah 30:7. If it had not been the intervention by the LORD, it is likely that the faithful remnant themselves will not endure these days, as the last half of Jeremiah 30:7 states: “but he will be saved out of it.” Revelation chapter 12 also reveals God’s provision of safety for His covenant people. Isaiah earlier in 26: 20-21 had declared:

20 Go, my people, enter into your rooms. Shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself for a little while, until his anger is passed.  
21 For look, the LORD comes out of his dwelling place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their sin. The earth also will reveal the bloodshed on her, and will no longer cover her slain.

But in the days of the messianic kingdom, God will make His covenant people “majestic forever, a joy for many generations.” In this, God is fulfilling His promise to Abram, as recorded in Genesis 12:3, that “Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” See also Genesis 18;18; 22:18; Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:8. In this promise, God is also fulfilling one of the great provisions of the covenant that He made with Abraham. The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants extend to the millennial kingdom and into eternity. Those who will be blessed in the fulfillment of these covenants do so by first participating in the new covenant by believing, for their salvation, in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the Messiah who said, as recorded in Luke 22:20, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.” See also 1 Corinthians 11:25.
60:16 You will also suck the milk of the nations,
and will suck at regal breasts.
You will know that I, the LORD,
am your Savior, your Redeemer,
the Mighty One of Jacob.

With a common portrait of sustenance, Isaiah depicts the nation of Israel receiving the best of resources from the nations and its kings. The nations are to give their very best as a tribute to the Messiah who will rule the world from His throne (Davidic throne) in Zion. In a previous dispensation, sacrifices and offerings that were acceptable to God had to be without blemish, Leviticus 22:21; Numbers 19:2 and Malachi 1:14. In the messianic kingdom the offerings from the nations and their leaders will be of the highest value and quality for they will be given in devotion and worship to the Messiah, who describes Himself as their Savior, Redeemer and the Mighty One of Jacob. The latter half of Isaiah 49:26 contains the exact statement as does the latter half of 60:16 affirming that the LORD is the Savior, Redeemer and the Mighty One of Jacob.

The LORD, Yahweh is their Savior for He will eternally save His covenant people and all who believe in the atoning work of the Servant, who is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is certainly a spiritual salvation. The One who is the Redeemer is the kinsmen (family) Redeemer who also spiritually redeems His covenant people, and all who will trust in Him, from the penalty of sin. The family of the Redeemer had been unable to escape from certain eternal doom because of their sinfulness and rebellion against God. God alone had to provide salvation for them, Isaiah 59:15b-17; and 63:5. The LORD also describes Himself as the Mighty One of Jacob, Genesis 49:24; Psalm 132: 2, 5; and Isaiah 49:26; which is a similar title to that of the Mighty One of Israel, Isaiah 1:24. This Mighty One, who is their redeeming sovereign, will bring the wealth of the nations to Zion for it is a fitting tribute to Himself and gives glory and honor to Him. This tribute of wealth will be of great benefit to the inhabitants of the messianic kingdom but all who reside there should acknowledge that this wealth is not given because of any worth of significance they have, but it is all due to their Messiah who has chosen to live among them and be their God. The Scriptures declare The Messiah has also been appointed heir of all things, Hebrews 1:2; and that all things were made by Him, Acts 17:24; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11; and 5:13. Therefore, all things belong to Him, so the wealth of the nations are a tribute to Him for this wealth rightfully belongs to Him. See also Romans 11:36.

3: 60:17-22 The Prosperity, Peace and Perpetuity of the Messianic Kingdom

The third and final section of Isaiah chapter 60 describe some of the ways in which the Messiah will bring prosperity, peace and perpetuity to His kingdom. David L. Cooper provides a summary of these verses:

“When Zion is thus rebuilt, gold will be used where silver now is; and brass where silver now is used and the like. Thus Zion is to be built upon a much more magnificent scale than at the present time.

There will be no need of a police force, for violence will be never more heard in the land. There will never more be any desolation, nor destructive powers that will enter the land or the city of Jerusalem. People will call her walls salvation and her gates praise.

As we see in Isaiah 4:5, 6, there will be a great canopy created over Jerusalem, which will protect it from the showers and from the sunshine. This promise is in perfect accord with 60:19. The sun shall not strike it by day, neither shall the moonlight fall upon its streets, the reason being that Jehovah will be an everlasting light and Israel's God will be her glory. From His person will radiate the light that will illuminate this great, marvelous, millennial Jerusalem. The sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. Then darkness rests upon that
portion upon which the sun is not shining. There will be no day and night in Jerusalem, because the light emanating from Messiah's person will illuminate the city twenty-four hours out of every day.

There will be no wicked, unprincipled Jews, for they will all be righteous, as we see from verse 21. They, the rightful owners of the land of Palestine, will inherit the land. When they are thus established there, they will be "the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." Israel then will multiply and become a strong nation. She will become as the stars of heaven and as the sand beside the sea. Great and wonderful things are in store for the Chosen People. God will hasten the fulfillment of this prediction in His own time.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – March 1946).

60:17 *Instead of bronze I will bring gold,*
  *and instead of iron I will bring silver,*
  *and instead wood, bronze;*
  *and instead stones, iron.*
  *I will also make peace your overseer,*
  *and righteousness your ruler.*

For the building of His magnificent city, including His sanctuary, 60:13, the Messiah will bring to Zion precious metals along with other costly metals to replace more ordinary and cheaper building materials. This will result in a beautiful and glimmering city that will dazzle the eye to better reflect the glory of the resident King. There will be no cutting corners to cut costs or no shoddy workmanship in this re-building project. The Messiah will ensure the right materials will be used for He will bring them. He will also have righteous and peaceful administrators to ensure the building process will be faithful to His plans. The temple in Zion will be a most magnificent place as the prophecy of Ezekiel chapters 40-48 attest. The buildings will have the best materials and will be of the best construction to ensure that they will last for at least one-thousand years. The temple that will be built at the beginning of the messianic kingdom will be situated on Mount Zion, which will be the highest and exalted of the world’s mountains and all people from all the nations will come to it, Isaiah 2:2-3. Within the temple will be inscribed the names of those who are specifically designated by the Lord, Isaiah 56:5 and it will be a glorious edifice, Isaiah 60:5, where offerings will be made to the Lord, Isaiah 66:20.

Another aspect of the messianic kingdom in 60:17 is that the Messiah will make overseers and rulers peaceful and righteous. The word “overseer” in the DASV is the Hebrew word *pequddah*, which is also translated as officers in the NKJV and KJV; as governor in the NIV; as administrators in the NASB and as overseers in the ESV. The word “ruler” in the DASV is the Hebrew word *nagas*, which has the literal meaning of “extractors” (those who collect tax) This word is translated as extractors in the KJV, as magistrates in the NKJV, as ruler in the NIV, as overseers in the NASB; and as taskmasters in the ESV. All of these English versions, except the NIV, have similar translations as the DASV in that, the Messiah will make peace their overseer (or similar word) and also, He will make righteousness their ruler (or similar word). It is possible to understand these phrases as the transformation by the Messiah of human governors from those who were once sinful, corrupt and warlike to those who are now righteous and peaceful. The NIV translates these phrases as, “I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler.” The NIV translations suggests that there may not be any need for human rulers for the Messiah will ensure righteous and peaceful rule. Revelation 20:4 reveals that resurrected saints will reign with Christ for the duration of the thousand-year messianic kingdom. See also 1 Corinthians 6:2 and 2 Timothy 2:12. One major aspect that Isaiah is indicating in this statement by the Lord, is that the rulership of God’s covenant people and others will dramatically change from corrupt leadership, Isaiah chapter 57 and 59:1-15, to a righteous and peaceful governance, Isaiah chapter 60 and following.
60:18 Violence will no more be heard in your land, 
devastation or destruction within your borders, 
but you will call your walls 'Salvation,' 
and your gates 'Praise.'

Because of the righteous and peaceful rulership of the messianic kingdom, 6017, violence and devastation will no longer plague the covenant people of God and others who live in Zion. Some may point to the uprising fueled by Satan, when he is released at the end of his thousand-year captivity, Revelation 20:7-9 as contrary to this statement in Isaiah 60:18. However, this revolt will not invade into Zion but only surround “the camp of the saints, and the beloved city.” Revelation 20:9. Thus the walls of Zion the beloved City of God will be called “Salvation” and its gates will be called, “Praise.” This peaceful existence will then extend forever into the eternal state. The most important and over-arching theme of the prophecy of Isaiah is the Salvation of the Lord. This is the prophet’s main message as it will extend far beyond the rulership of humans upon the earth and into eternity. The salvation brought by God alone, Isaiah 59:16; 63:5 is the only way humans can co-exist with God. God’s desire is to live with those who trust in Him and in His Son forHe created humans for this purpose so that they can righteously bring Him eternal glory. An indication of this is that the very gates of Zion will be called “Praise.” The combination of salvation and praise is also seen in Exodus 15:2; Psalm 9:14 and 96:2 and is contained in a song of praise (implied), Isaiah 26:1. See also Jonah 2:9.

60:19-20 The sun will no longer be your light by day; 
nor for brightness will the moon give light to you; 
for the LORD will be an everlasting light for you, 
and your God will be your glory.

20 Your sun will no more go down, 
or your moon withdraw; 
for the LORD will be your everlasting light, 
and the days of your mourning will be over.

The prophet in Isaiah 60:19-20 picks up the theme of God’s light and glory from 60:1-3. The light from the LORD is everlasting and signifies both salvation (the light to come is their Messiah who is the Savior) and glory, Isaiah 60:1, 16b. In the beginning of God’s creation, He formed the sun and the moon to govern the day and the night, Genesis 1:14-16. No life would exist on the earth without the sun and the earth would be in total darkness without the light that shines from the sun to give light during the day and the sun’s brightness is reflected off the moon to give light during the night. This has been an enduring creative act of God, Psalm 74:16; 104:19; and Jeremiah 31:35. However when the LORD, Yahweh extends the perpetuity of the kingdom of the Messiah into the eternal state, He (Yahweh) and the Messiah (the Lamb) will be all the light that is needed as also stated in Revelation 21:23, “The city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminates it and the Lamb is its lamp.” During the days of the messianic kingdom, the sun and the moon will continue their purpose as God has intended, but when this kingdom is transitioned into the eternal state, once all rebellion against God has been obliterated, then the works of the sun and the moon will no longer be required. The light of God will also be the everlasting glory for His saints, 60:19 and His light will completely remove all mourning, 60:20. Revelation 21:4 states, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, nor will there be any more mourning, crying, or pain. The former things have passed away.” With the dawning of the eternal state, the glorious LORD and the Lamb will be all the saints will ever need. The saints will no longer grieve or be heartbroken nor will they mourn for any loss for all the things and happenings that had brought them sadness will have “passed away” and will no longer be remembered as Isaiah will later state as recorded in Isaiah 65:17.
Your people also will all be righteous;
they will possess the land forever.
I will plant them like a shoot,
the work of my hands,
that I may be glorified.

The people of the messianic kingdom, who will be transitioned into the eternal state, will not only will enjoy the eternal benefits of having the LORD and the Lamb as their light, 60:19-20, but will also be righteous. This righteousness is not derived from their own acts, for humans are incapable of acting in a righteous manner that is acceptable to God. Those who are called “saints” have this title because they have received through faith in the shed blood of the Savior, Jesus Christ, His imputed righteousness. This is implied in Isaiah 45:24-25 but is explained in detail in Romans 3:21-26 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. See notes on these N.T. verses in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition, Editors: John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, Cook Communication Ministries, 2004. See also the notes on these N.T. verses in The Moody Bible Commentary, Editors: Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, Moody Publishers, 2014. See also the notes on Isaiah 60:21 by Edward E. Hindson, in the King James Bible Commentary, Thomas Nelson Publishers Inc. 1999, page 854.

Not only will “all” the inhabitants of the messianic kingdom that transition into the eternal state be declared righteous, but they will possess “the land” forever. This is the land of promise which God told to Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 15:18; and 17:3-8; to Isaac, 26:2-5; to Jacob, 28:13-15; and 35:9-12; to Moses, Exodus 13:11; and 33:1; and of which Moses reminded God of His promise, Exodus 32:13. The future possession of the land including Jerusalem and Zion is a major theme in Isaiah for it is an integral aspect of the messianic kingdom, 4:3-6; 14:1-2; 26:1-4; 27:12-13; 35:10; 49:8, 14-26; 51:11; 54:1-17; 55:12-13; 57:13; 60:1-22; 61:1-7; 65:9; 66:8-9, and 19-23. This possession of the land will also include the transition into the eternal state when God makes a new heaven and a new earth in which those of His covenant people and all others who trust in Him for salvation, will live in the heavenly “land” forever.

Those who trust in Him for salvation including His covenant people and others will be planted in the land “like a shoot.” This metaphor of planting will be the work of God’s hands which will be accomplished for His glory. The ultimate reason for creation was for God to display His glory. Creation itself displays (declares) His glory, Psalm 19:1. Also, God’s image bearers were created to righteously display and declare His God to all creation. This righteous display and declaration of God’s glory through those who trust in Him for salvation is evident in the covenants that He has enacted. This is also evident within the covenant formula of “they shall be my people and I will be there God.” Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 37:23, 27; 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Hebrews 8:10. See also, Exodus 6:17; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32:28; Ezekiel 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; Zechariah 8:8 and 13:9. In the eternal state God will live or dwell (literally tabernacle) among His people so they can eternally fulfill the purpose for which He created the heavens and the earth and people, Revelation 21:3: “Look, the dwelling place of God is among humankind. He will live with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them.”

The little one will become a thousand,
and the small one a strong nation.
I, the LORD, will, in its time, accomplish this quickly.

In the messianic kingdom, God will completely fulfill the promise He made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2 that from him, God will make a great nation. In the kingdom of the Messiah, those who are humble and meek, (the little and the small) will increase abundantly and populate the kingdom. This is certainly the fulfillment
of the prophecy of Jesus the Messiah, as recorded in Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” The great increase in the population of the messianic kingdom is mentioned by Isaiah in 66:8:

Who has heard of such a thing?
Who has seen such things?
Can a country be born in a single day?
Will a nation be born in a second?
Yet as soon as Zion went into labor,
she gave birth to her children.

Victor Buksbazen suggests that this increase is more than just physical numbers of people:

“It is not just the thought of numerical increase which is expressed here, but the vision of regenerated Israel who will reproduce herself spiritually by her wonderful power to attract the nations to the worship of her God.”
(Victory Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 460.)

The final promise of Isaiah chapter 60 is that “the LORD will, in its time, accomplish this quickly.” This time will certainly come for it will be the time God has set for the dynamic increase in the population during the reign of the Messiah. He will accomplish this quickly which will be to the amazement of all who witness this event. Isaiah had previously declared other things the Lord will accomplish in His zeal, 9:7 and 37:32. The accomplishments of the Lord are declared before they occur and will be certain of their completion. Thomas Constable comments on this last verse of Isaiah chapter 60:

“The Lord would also bless His people with fertility so they would become the ancestors of numerous descendants. He would make of them what He had made of Abraham (cf. 51:2). With posterity come glory, influence, and power (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31). The guarantor of these promises was Yahweh, who brought Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land (cf. Exod. 20:2). He will bring these promises into fulfillment quickly in their proper time (cf. Gal. 4:4).”
(Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 308-309).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 60:
60:1-9: God’s Glorious Kingdom and His Gathered People
60:10-16: The Role of the Nations in Gathering the People and Building the Kingdom
60:17-22: The Prosperous, Peaceful and Perpetual Kingdom

4. The Messiah to Heal and Comfort the Afflicted: 61:1-11

As with chapter 60 and continuing to the end of chapter 62, Isaiah chapter 61 is a description of the messianic blessings that will accrue to the land and to those who inhabit the millennial kingdom of the Anointed One who is the Messiah. In the first three verses of chapter 61, the ministry of the Messiah is prophesied comprising of His work that He accomplished during His first advent and continuing with the work he will accomplish when He returns at His second advent to establish and rule His kingdom. David L. Cooper provides a short introduction to this chapter:

“In THIS EXPOSITION of the Book of Isaiah we have come to chapter 61, which is indeed one of the most important passages of the entire book, even though it is short. It is a literary whole. In the first three verses we see the outline of Messiah's redemptive career. This sets forth in pictorial manner the first coming of the Messiah, His public ministry, His announcement regarding the Christian Dispensation to be followed by the Tribulation, the conversion of Israel, and her being appointed to the positions of honor and trust in the great Kingdom Age. In the second section, verses 4-9, we see Israel in the Kingdom Age occupying the central position among the nations of earth. Finally, in the last two verses, appears a prediction of the conversion of

In the first section of Isaiah chapter 61, vss. 1-3, Isaiah, uses a number of infinitive verbs, to describe the ministry of One who is anointed. As will be discussed in vs. 1, the identity of this Anointed One can be no other than the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ for it is He Himself who claims this identity. In vs. 1 three aspects of this ministry are revealed which relate to the Messiah’s first advent. In vs. 2, aspects four and five of the Messiah’s ministry are revealed. The fourth aspect of this ministry relates to His first advent while the fifth aspect relates to His second advent. In vs. 3, aspects six and seven are revealed which also relate to the second advent of the Messiah.

In the second section of Isaiah chapter 61, vss. 4-9, Isaiah provides a prophecy of the blessings that will accrue to the people and the land during the messianic kingdom. The cities and walls that had previously been destroyed would be rebuilt, vs. 4. Foreigners (Gentiles) will tend to the flocks and crops of God’s covenant people, vs. 5, because God’s people will be busy as God’s priests and will be rewarded with the wealth of the nations, vs. 6. God’s covenant people will receive a double portion of blessing and have everlasting joy, vs. 7. The LORD who loves His people will make an everlasting covenant with His people, vs. 8 and all who live during the duration of the messianic kingdom will realize that The LORD is blessing His people, vs. 9.

In the third section of Isaiah chapter 61, vss. 10-11, the prophet proclaims on behalf of his people that because of the future blessings of the messianic kingdom, that have been revealed to him by the LORD, he will rejoice in the LORD and his soul will be joyful because God has provided salvation and righteousness and Isaiah sees this like the adornment of a bride and bridegroom, vs. 10. The LORD, who is described as a divine gardener, will “plant” His people so that His people will bear the fruit of righteousness and praise before all the nations, vs. 11.

1: The Blessings of Messiah’s Ministry: 61:1-3

1: The Blessings of Messiah’s Ministry: 61:1-3

61:1 *The Spirit of the sovereign LORD is upon me,*

*because the LORD has anointed me.*

*He sent me to preach good news to the poor,*

*to bind up the brokenhearted,*

*to proclaim liberty to the captives,*

*and freedom to prisoners,*

Students of the Scriptures may be puzzled to learn that many Biblical scholars, mostly liberal, suggest any number of individuals as the identity of the one who is described in Isaiah 61:1, as the one whom the LORD has anointed and who is tasked with the ministries revealed in verses 1-3 of this chapter. Even without the evidence of the New Testament, Luke 4:18-19, which absolutely identifies the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ as the speaker of the words of this prophecy, the tasks described in Isaiah 61:1-3, when examined carefully, could only be performed by a divine person. The speaker declares an auto-biographical testimony of these tasks which the sovereign LORD has given to him. The language of the speaker is so similar in content to that of the so-called Servant Songs in Isaiah, 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12, that it is tempting to assign 61:1-3 as another of the Servant Songs. Another possible addition to these Servant Songs is found in Isaiah 63:1-6, where the speaker in that passage is obviously the Servant, the retuning Messiah.
With the clear identity of the speaker as the Messiah, which later revelation in Luke 4:18-19 confirmed, Isaiah 61:1 is thus, one of the most outstanding declarations of the triune nature of God in all of the Scriptures. The first phrase contains all three persons of the Godhead. It is the Holy Spirit that is mentioned as the Spirit. He is identified as the Spirit of the sovereign LORD who is Yahweh. The LORD is the One whom the Messiah reveals in the New Testament as His Father. The Spirit is also declared to be upon me who is the speaker of these words. See also Isaiah 11:2: and 48:16. As the writings of the prophet Isaiah indicate and as confirmed in the New Testament, this one described as “me,” can be no other than the Servant, the Messiah who is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is declared by the Messiah to be upon me. As Isaiah had previously revealed, as recorded in Isaiah 11:2:

*The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him,*

*the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,*

*the Spirit of counsel and might,*

*the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

It is the anointing by the Holy Spirit that enables the Messiah to accomplish the tasks given to Him by His Father, Yahweh. It is the Father who will send the Spirit to anoint His Son, the Messiah to perform certain assigned tasks so that the purposes of God, which will never be thwarted, will be completed. In the New Testament, the portrait of the Spirit anointing the Messiah is seen in the passages that record the baptism of Jesus as He begins His public ministry during His first advent, Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22 and John 1:29-34. The triune nature of God was also evident during the public baptism of the Messiah for the Spirit descended upon the Son and the Father affirms the Son as He spoke from heaven.

The Tasks of the Messiah:
The Father is declared by the Messiah as the One whom sends the Messiah to perform certain tasks which are stated in vss. 1-3 of Isaiah chapter 61. Although it could be acceptably correct to suggest that there are four tasks described by the Messiah in vs. 1, many commentators understand that three distinct tasks are mentioned.

The first task is “to preach good news to the poor.” The words “preach good news” is the Hebrew word basar, which has the meaning of bringing or bearing a message, usually consisting of good news and also occurs, for example, most prominently in Psalm 40:9; 96:2; Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 52:7 and 60:6. The good news that the Messiah is prophesied to proclaim, is the gospel that announces salvation. The Messiah’s first and primary task is to bring or proclaim that, in Himself is salvation for all who will believe in Him, John 3:16, and in the wider context of John chapter 3. In the prophecy of Isaiah, salvation is a major theme which starts with the meaning of Isaiah’s name: “The Lord is salvation.” This salvation, which is the good news that the Messiah proclaimed during His first advent, will also be one aspect of His second coming, Isaiah 63:5. The word “poor” is the Hebrew word anaw, which also has the meaning of afflicted, humble and meek. The care and salvation of those who are “poor, afflicted, humble and meek” is a very precious ministry of the Messiah as the following passages reveal (study the context of each verse for a better understanding): Psalm 10:17; 22:26; 25:9; 34:2; 37:11; 69:32; 76:9; 147:6; 149:4; Isaiah 11:4; and 29:9. The Messiah thus, preaches or proclaims the good news of the gospel of salvation to those who are humble and meek in condition and attitude and are physically and spiritually afflicted and are in need. One Biblical Scholar suggests:

“According to this prediction Messiah, when He appears, will engage in a spiritual work of proclaiming the truth of God to the meek and lowly of earth. It is clear that He does not consume His time with those who are
of themselves sufficient. On the contrary He devotes His entire ministry to those who realize their need.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1946).

Another Biblical Scholar suggests one other possibility:

“The anointed servant of God is to bring good tidings to the humble, a term which usually describes God’s faithful remnant. The good tidings is that their enslavement is about to end.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 462.)

The second task is that The Messiah has been sent, “to bind up the brokenhearted.” The words “bind up” is the Hebrew word habash which has a few different meanings in the Old Testament. It is used to describe the binding or wrapping of turbans of the priests, and as a saddle for riding donkeys. It is also used to describe the binding up of wounds, Isaiah 30:26; Ezekiel 30:21; 34:16 and Hosea 6:1. In Psalm 147:3 both the binding of wounds and healing of the brokenhearted are mentioned. The object of binding up is those who are brokenhearted which is a metaphorical usage of this binding. The word “brokenhearted” is a combination of two Hebrew words, shabar meaning broken and leb meaning heart. This combination occurs also in Psalm 34:18 and 147:3. See also Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; and 66:2. The Messiah had been sent by His Father to heal (bind up) hearts that had been broken by sin and guilt, so they can be restored to spiritual health. The salvific ministry of Jesus Christ during His first advent to bring salvation that heals sinful hearts, will continue when He returns to establish His kingdom. Those who have had their hearts healed (bound up) will be restored to fellowship with their Lord, so they can fulfill God’s purposes for them. The highest and greatest good (purpose) for them is to declare forever His glory while He dwells (tabernacles) with them as their God.

The third task stated in Isaiah 61:1, is that the Messiah has been sent: “to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to prisoners.” During His first advent, the Messiah did not have a ministry of the opening of physical jails or prisons, although the apostles did experience this after the Lord returned to heaven, Acts 5:17-21; 12:6-19 and 16:19-34. In the Old Testament, the proclaiming of liberty to those held captive, was observed at the year of jubilee, Leviticus chapters 25 and 27. See also Jeremiah 34:8-17. The ministry of the Messiah, however, was to release those who were held captive by the bounds of sinfulness and rebellion. The freedom that salvation brings is a releasing of the bondage of sin that enslaves the unsaved. It is also a release from the bondage of spiritual blindness that Satan has brought upon those who are unbelievers in Christ, 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

61:2 to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,

The fourth task assigned to the Messiah by the LORD after being anointed by the Holy Spirit is described in Isaiah 61:2 as “to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor,” (NASV, NIV and ESV). Other versions have: “to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” (KJV and NKJV); The NASB has “favorable year.” In general terms “the year of the LORD’s favor” is a time of salvation. In 49:8, the Servant, the Messiah proclaimed, “In the time of my favor, I answered you; and in a day of salvation, I helped you.” See also 2 Corinthians 6:2. Isaiah, in chapter 63, recorded these prophetic words of the returning Messiah, “the year of my redeemed (redemption) has come,” 63:4. It is not that this is a literal year of 365 days. It is a time for the favor of the Lord to be brought as salvation to those who will respond to the proclamation of the good news, 61:1. It is described as a year in 61:1, and 63:4 and a day of salvation in 49:8. This “time” can be understood as beginning with the first advent of the Messiah and continuing to His second advent. It does not mean that
salvation was not available at any other “time,” for salvation was always available for any who had faith in God, Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4:3); Habakkuk 2:4 (Romans 1:17).

The task of the Messiah is to “proclaim,” which is the Hebrew word qara, which also occurs in 61:1. The Messiah will proclaim that the year (time) of the LORD’s favor had come. This task was a major component of the Messiah’s first advent. As recorded in Luke 4:16-21, Jesus Christ, entered the synagogue in Nazareth and read from the prophet Isaiah, 16 He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As was his custom he entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him and he unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, 19 and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. 20 He rolled up the scroll, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 He began to tell them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears.” (Luke 4:16-21).

This is an exceptional passage of Scripture, for it confirms that the speaker of Isaiah 61:1 is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, thus attesting to the role of the triune God in the tasks assigned to the Messiah. It also is significant for its revelation of where Jesus stopped His reading in Isaiah. He stopped after reading the first phrase of Isaiah 61:2, “to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor,” and did not read the next phrase, “and the day of vengeance of our God.” The reason Jesus did not read this next phrase was to indicate the purpose of His first advent, to proclaim salvation and release captives bound by their sinfulness. One scholar suggests that in not reading the phrase regarding the “day of vengeance,” Jesus was indicating that He would not be establishing His kingdom during the time of His first advent. See Edward E. Hindson, Isaiah, King James Bible Commentary, page 855. Thomas Constable also comments:

“When Jesus Christ read this passage in the Nazareth synagogue and claimed that He fulfilled it, He stopped reading after "the favorable year of Yahweh" and did not read "and the day of vengeance of our God" (Luke 4:18-19). He meant that He was the Anointed One of whom Isaiah spoke, and that He had come to bring salvation. The day of salvation had begun (cf. 49:8; 2 Cor. 6:2). However, the day of vengeance would not begin until much later, specifically at the end of the Tribulation when He will return (cf. 34:8; 35:4; 63:4; Dan. 7:21, 24-27; Mic. 5:15; 1 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 12:13-17; 19:15-20).” 763 [Note 763: See Gary Yates, “The Use of Isaiah 61:1 (and 58:6) in Luke 4:18-19,” Exegesis and Exposition 2:1 (Summer 1987):13-27.] (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 310).

Regarding the phrase “the year of the LORD’s favor,” Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Shnath-ratson la-Jehovah - the year of the LORD’s favor – is that glorious time when God shall turn His face in mercy towards His people (see 60:10).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 462).

The fifth task assigned to the Messiah, is stated in Isaiah 61:2 as to proclaim, “the day of vengeance of our God.” It was not the task of Jesus Christ to enact His righteous vengeance on the people of the earth during His first advent. In the days of His first advent, His primary objective was to be an atoning, sacrificial sin-offering on behalf of all who would believe in Him, thus fulfilling the prophecy (among many others in the OT), of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. It will be when the Messiah returns at His second advent to both proclaim and enact “the day of vengeance.” This is vividly revealed by the prophet as recorded in Isaiah 63:1-6 and which is also revealed in Revelation 19:17-21. The separation of the two advents of the Messiah was not revealed to the prophet Isaiah. It would be revealed as revelation unfolded and God gave His inspired words regarding two separate advents of His Son to the apostles, who wrote of these events in their gospel accounts and in their letters as recorded in the New Testament.
David L. Cooper, however suggests that “the day of vengeance of our God,” is the Tribulation period:

“The day of vengeance of our God is the Tribulation Period, during which God pours out His judgments upon the world. Moses and the prophets unanimously speak of this Day of Wrath. It is usually called "the day of Jehovah." Isaiah speaks of it in 2:12ff. Zephaniah gives us a graphic account of it in chapter 1, verses 14-18, of his prophecy. Joel likewise speaks of it. A detailed statement of it is found in Revelation, chapters 6-19. At that time the Lord will purge out all the wicked from the earth and prepare for the coming Kingdom Age.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1946).

The sixth task assigned to the Messiah, is stated in Isaiah 61:2 as “to comfort all who mourn.” The days of the Tribulation will be days of great grief, destruction, turmoil, death and mourning. After the Messiah has enacted the vengeance of God upon the earth, He will comfort those who mourn from the faithful remnant who are God’s covenant people. He will comfort them by gathering them from the nations of those who have enslaved and oppressed them, and bring them rejoicing to Zion, Isaiah 35:10, 51:11. The ministry of the Messiah in comforting those who mourn is further explained in Isaiah 61:3.

**61:3** to support those who mourn in Zion,

- to give to them a garland instead of ashes,
- the oil of joy instead of mourning,
- the garment of praise instead of the spirit of despondency.

They may be called trees of righteousness,

the planting of the LORD to glorify him.

The terrifying days of the Tribulation will result in mourning throughout the earth and very particularly in Zion. The last days of the Tribulation will witness the assault by the enemies of the Messiah on Jerusalem. The City will be captured, and many atrocities will occur at the hands of the armies of the Antichrist, Zechariah 14:1-2. Zion will be in mourning also for the loss of many Jewish people who will have no hope until they repent of their national sin of rejecting the Messiah during the days of His first advent and then pleading for Him to return and rescue them. Zechariah 14:3-5 reveals the result of their confession and plea, “Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as when he formerly fought on the day of battle. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is to the east of Jerusalem; and the Mount of Olives will be split in two making a great valley from east to west. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and other half toward the south. You will flee through the valley of my mountains; for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel. Yes, you will flee, like when you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.”

Many passages in Isaiah reveal how the Messiah will comfort His covenant people who are in mourning. These include but are not limited to, 4:3-6; 14:1-2; 26:1-4; 27:12-13; 35:10; 49:8, 14-26; 51:11; 54:1-17; 55:12-13; 57:13; 60:1-22; 61:1-7; 65:9; 66:8-9, and 19-23. This comforting ministry of the Messiah is described in 61:3 as first, to give them support. The new covenant formula, “He will be their God and they shall be His people” will be realized. The LORD will be king over all the earth on that day, as revealed in Zechariah 14: 9. Also Zechariah 14:11 states, regarding the newly established messianic kingdom that, “people will live in it, and there will be no more curse; for Jerusalem will be secure.”

Second, the Messiah will give His covenant people, “a garland instead of ashes.” The word “garland” (also NASB), is the Hebrew word pe’ar which can be translated as headdress or turban. This word also occurs in Isaiah 3:20 (headdresses); and 61:10 (adorns). The KJV and NKJV translate pe’ar as beauty, while the ESV translates this word as “a beautiful headdress.” The intent of this phrase is that, instead of the ashes resulting
from the destruction which occurred during the Tribulation, the LORD will adorn His people with beautiful head coverings, like a garland. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“In the Hebrew text there is a play on words: “pe’ar” – “a garland;” “aipher” – “ashes.” Those who wore the ashes of mourning shall obtain a garland of joy. The following two lines are supplementary and express the same thought.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 463).

Third, as stated in Isaiah 61:3, the Messiah will comfort those in Zion with the “oil of joy instead of mourning.” In the Old Testament, those who are honored by the LORD have their head anointed by oil, Psalm 23:5 and 45:7. Psalm 45:7-8 describes both the anointing with oil and the wearing of fragrant garments:

7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions.

8 Your royal robes are scented with myrrh, aloes and cassia; out of ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad.

Fourth, as stated in Isaiah 61:3, to continue the metaphors of wearing garments instead of mourning clothes and ashes, the Messiah will give His covenant people “the garment of praise instead of the spirit of despondency.” As noted above, Victor Buksbazen states that these lines, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of the spirit of despondency, are supplementary to the previous line, a garland instead of ashes. The phrase in the DASV, “the garment of praise instead of the spirit of despondency,” is translated in the KJV and NKJV as “the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Despondency is translated as “despair” in the NIV, as “fainting” in the NASB and as a “faint spirit” in the ESV. The word “despondency” is the Hebrew word keheh, which also has the meaning of dull, faint or dim. This word also occurs in Isaiah 42:3 translated as “faintly,” in the DASV. The intent of the phrase is that for those who are in mourning, the Messiah will replace their dim and faint spirits with praise that they will wear like joyful garments.

Fifth, in Isaiah 61:3, the ministry of the Messiah to those of His covenant people, who will be in mourning following the devastation of the Tribulation, will result in the nations of the earth calling them “trees of righteousness” which the LORD has planted to glorify Him. The word for “trees” is the Hebrew word ‘ayil, which has the literal meaning of “terebinth” or as other versions translate it as “oaks.” Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 463 states that this phrase “conveys a meaning similar to “the pillars of righteousness.” The covenant people of the LORD will be “planted” by Him to be “pillars of righteousness” so that they will glorify Him. This will be the ultimate outcome of the Messiah’s ministry of comfort and support for His people who were in mourning from the great distress of the Tribulation. He will turn mourning into praise so that His great name will be exalted by all peoples and nations of His coming kingdom. This “planting” of His covenant people was promised to David as the LORD unfolded His covenant to him, 2 Samuel 7:10. The LORD promised king David that He would “plant” them in the place (land) that He had appointed to them. In Isaiah 61:3, the testimony of the Messiah confirms this covenant promise and those who are His people can be assured that what the LORD promised in 2 Samuel 7:10 and what the Messiah stated in Isaiah 61:3, will most certainly happen.

2: The Blessings of Messiah’s Kingdom: 61:4-9

Following the declaration of the assigned tasks of the Messiah, the prophet next describes the role the covenant people of God and others will have in the newly established messianic kingdom. The ancient ruins
and cities devastated for many generations and also by the destruction that will occur during the Tribulation will be rebuilt, vs. 4. God’s covenant people will be priests and ministers to Him while others will tend to the raising of crops and animals, vss. 5-6. Those who once faced shame and dishonor among the nations will receive a double portion of blessing in Zion where they will have everlasting joy. God will make an everlasting covenant (new covenant) with His people, vss. 7-8, and they will be known among the nations as those the LORD has blessed, vs. 9.

61:4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins; they will restore what was formerly destroyed; and they will repair the wrecked cities, devastated for many generations.

Upon the gathering of the faithful remnant from the nations to Zion, one of the first works to be accomplished is the rebuilding of the ancient ruins and the cities that have been wrecked (ruined) and the restoration of all that was previously destroyed. Some of these places and buildings have lain in ruins for many generations. David L. Cooper comments:

"And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations" (vs. 4). When we compare this passage of Scripture with others, we know that at the time here foreseen, the curse will be lifted from the earth. As we shall see in Isaiah 65:17, at that time God will create the heavens above anew and the earth anew. The necessity for such new creative activity is seen in the fact that in the Tribulation the heavens above and the earth beneath are all wrecked. In order that there may be a glorious era when the glory of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea, the Lord will have to do all of this repair work. Not only will He accomplish this but Israel, restored, will rebuild her own land. I have been throughout Palestine from Dan to Beersheba. I have seen the ruins of the ancient Canaanite civilization, as well as Israelite ruins. The land has been in a desolate and waste condition through the Christian centuries. What the Zionists are now building up will be thrown down in the Tribulation. Thus the whole land will have to be rebuilt in the Millennium.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1946).

During the days of God’s wrath upon the world, (the Tribulation), the nations that had opposed God and rebelled against Him will be destroyed, Isaiah 34:1-15. These nations will not be rebuilt for the Lord will create a new heavens and a new earth. However, during the days of the messianic kingdom, the Messiah will oversee the rebuilding of the cities and places in Israel that had lain in ruins for many generations and also those that been destroyed during the Tribulation. Both the covenant people of God and foreigners will be involved in this process, Isaiah 58:12 and 60:10. Isaiah had also recorded the role of the Servant (the Messiah), in this process:

This is what the LORD says, "In the time of my favor, I answered you; and in a day of salvation, I helped you. I will protect you, I will give you as a covenant for the people, to restore the land, to reestablish their desolate inheritances. (Isaiah 49:8)
Foreigners will stand and feed your flocks, 
and strangers will be your farmers and your vinedressers.

But you will be called 'the priests of the LORD;' 
people will call you 'the ministers of our God.'
You will eat the wealth of the nations, 
and in their glory you will boast.

Not only will foreigners, Hebrew zur, those from the Gentile nations, help to rebuild the cities and desolate places of Israel, they will also tend to the raising of the crops and caring for the animals of God’s covenant people, 61:5. See also Jeremiah 30:8-9. The reason the people of God will not tend to these chores is that they will be assigned a very privileged role in the messianic kingdom. They will be priests and ministers of the LORD. In this earthly kingdom, God’s covenant people will finally fulfill the promise of God recorded in Exodus 19:5-6. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant then you will be my special possession from among all peoples. For although all the earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you will speak to the Israelites." See also Numbers 25:10-13, which is known as the Priestly Covenant. In the New Testament, the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 stated, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Many commentators understand that Peter was assigning the role of the priesthood to the church. However, at least one Biblical scholar suggests that Peter had written his letter of 1 Peter to the remnant of Israel, so the words recorded in 1 Peter 2:9 refer to them and not to the church. See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Ariel’s Bible Commentary, The Messianic Jewish Epistles, 1 Peter, Ariel Ministries Publisher, 2005, pages 342-343.

In times past, the priests of the Lord received donations (a tithe) from their fellow Hebrews as compensation for their work of their ministry, Numbers 18:8-32. During the messianic kingdom, the covenant people of God, the faithful remnant, will receive the donation of service of those from the Gentile nations who will tend to their flocks and fields and will also bring to Zion, their wealth from these nations. The covenant people of God will minister as priests to the Gentiles and will boast of God’s great goodness to them in providing this wealth to them to enjoy. See Psalm 45:12; Isaiah 60:5, 11; 66:12; Micah 4:13 and Zechariah 14:14. Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 61:6:

“In Exodus 19:6, the children of Israel were called to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” In appreciation of the material help and service of the converted Gentiles, the redeemed Jews will minister to them as “the priests of the LORD.” The expression, “our God,” points significantly to the sharing of the common faith, and the worship of the same God. The term “meshorthei” – “ministers” – means servants who perform higher functions. The prophet sees Israel as the God-appointed minister to the nations of the world.

The word translated “revel” (“boast” in the KJV), literally means “to take in exchange.” The thought here is that Zion – Israel – will share her spiritual wealth with the nations, and in exchange will participate in everything which is great and noble among the nations. We have translated “kavod” – usually “glory” as “splendor.” It comes from a root which means “heavy or weighty.” It refers to all that is truly meaningful and glorious.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 463).

Instead of your shame, you will receive a double portion; 
and instead of dishonor, they will rejoice in their land inheritance.
Therefore in their land they will possess double, 
and have everlasting joy.
Because of their continual sin and rebellion against God, the covenant people of God were to receive a double portion of punishment, Isaiah 40:2 and Jeremiah 16:18. This double portion of punishment likely consisted of not only the (temporary) loss of their land and wealth but also of their royal lineage. They would have to face both banishment to foreign nations which would oppress them and for those remaining in the land, they would have to deal with oppressive foreign rulers over them. But God was merciful and would look after His people whom He called His firstborn son, Exodus 4:22. The firstborn in Israel were to be accorded a double portion of blessing, Deuteronomy 21:17. God will be merciful and would remember His covenant with them and give them a double portion of blessing. Zechariah 9:11-12 states, “As for you also, because of the blood sealing your covenant, I have set free your prisoners from the waterless pit. 12 Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope; even today I promise that I will repay you double.” This double portion would involve first, physical blessings of the reclamation of their land, Leviticus 26:40-45; and Deuteronomy 30:1-20; including the receipt of the wealth of the nations and second, the glorious return of their Messiah who will rule over them on the throne of David. For the receipt of this double portion of blessing they will have everlasting joy.

61:8 For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing. I will faithfully repay them, and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Because of the LORD’s holy and just character, which He describes in Isaiah 61:8 as loving justice and hating robbery and wrongdoing, He will in His faithfulness “repay” His covenant people. This “repayment” is described in 61:7 as giving them a double portion of blessing. The LORD, Yahweh also will make an everlasting covenant with them. The LORD had made previous covenants with His people including those with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and with the priests and yet He was not finished with His covenants for He promised to formulate an everlasting covenant with His people. This everlasting covenant refers to the new covenant. Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer explain:

“God will make an everlasting covenant (v.8) with Israel, a reference to the new covenant (Jr 31:31-34). The reason for this turn of events rests in God’s faithfulness to His covenant, which will bring blessing to God’s people across their generations (vv. 8-9).” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary, page 1097).

Thomas Constable adds:

“Israel could count on these promises because of who Yahweh is: a lover of justice (faithful to His promises to Israel) and a hater of iniquitous robbery (Israel’s enemies taking what did not belong to them). God would give Israel her inheritance and would make a new, everlasting covenant with her (cf. 49:8; 55:5; Jer. 31:31; 32:40; Ezek. 16:60; 37:25-26; Mal. 3:1-2; Matt. 26:27-28; Heb. 9:11-22; 13:20).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 311).

Although the new covenant was initially made with the people of Israel, it is mediated by the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The LORD, Yahweh appointed the Servant, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to be a covenant to the people, Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 Jesus declared that the new covenant is in His shed blood Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25 and thus, all who have faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ for salvation, participate in the new covenant. The covenant people of God, by their faith in their Messiah, participate in the new covenant as do all others (the Gentiles) who have faith in Christ. Those who comprise the body of Christ, the Church participate in the new covenant by believing in Christ for salvation which includes believing in the substitutionary atoning sacrifice that Christ made by the shedding of His blood. Although the Church
participates in the new covenant, they do not completely fulfill it. The new covenant will be completely fulfilled during the messianic kingdom, when God will fulfill all the promises He made to Israel that are stated in the various new covenant statements. See comments by Thomas Constable above for several of the passages where these new covenant promises are stated.

61:9 Their descendants will be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them will realize, that they are the people the LORD has blessed.

When the Messiah returns to rescue His covenant people and establishes His millennial kingdom, His people and their descendants will be known among all the peoples of the earth as those the LORD has blessed. David L. Cooper explains:

“When Israel is thus brought back into fellowship with the Lord, her seed will be known among the nations and all peoples will see and acknowledge that the Jews are the blessed of Jehovah. While they will be established in their own land, many of them will be out all over the earth as the ministers of the Word of God, giving out the truth to the peoples. In this fact will be the fulfillment of the promise which God made to Abraham: "And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1946).

The covenant people of God will also be known at the people He has blessed when they receive the full completion of all the promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic and new covenants. They will be in possession of their promised land. They will be enjoying the benefits of having the wealth of the nations brought to them. They will have others (the Gentiles) serving them by raising their crops and caring for their animals. They will be worshiping in a magnificent temple. They will no longer need to learn about God for He will put knowledge about Him in their hearts. They will be redeemed for they have put their faith in their Messiah. But most significantly, they will have their Messiah with them, who will be sitting on the throne of David, ruling over them and caring for them. For all of these reasons, (and more), all peoples of the earth will realize “that they are the people the LORD has blessed.”

3: The Blessings of Messiah’s Salvation: 61:10-11

In the final two verses of Isaiah chapter 61, the prophet rejoices in the LORD for the blessings of salvation which includes righteousness, vs. 10. Isaiah also rejoices that the LORD will cause righteousness and praise to “sprout up” before all nations, vs. 11.

61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul will be joyful in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom wears a turban like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Isaiah, expresses great rejoicing, following the declaration of the glories that will come to the kingdom of the Messiah, including a double portion of blessing, 61:7 that includes land and wealth, as the first portion, and the presence of the Messiah in their midst, as the second portion. The prophet also rejoices because God’s covenant people will be priests who will minister to the nations, 61:6 and will be recipients of an everlasting
covenant (new covenant), from the LORD, 61:8, and all nations will know that they have been blessed by the LORD, 61:9. The exclamation of rejoicing by the prophet is on behalf of his people, who will be joyful in their souls, for the works of their God. The LORD has clothed them with garments of salvation and righteousness comparable to the beautiful clothing worn by a bridegroom and his bride on their wedding day. Gary V. Smith comments on the source of this rejoicing:

“The speaker emphatically declares his intention to rejoice (“rejoicing, I will rejoice”) and then reemphasizes the point by describing how his soul will exult in “my God,” a term of endearment that indicates a close relationship. The reason for this joyful response is “because” (κι) of what God has done. Since God is the one who “has caused me to be clothed” with salvation, God deserves all the credit for preparing this Anointed One to bring the gift of salvation to others. The garments of salvation and robe of righteousness are metaphors (similar to the “clothes of vengeance” in 59:17) that describe how God has empowered the person wearing the clothes to accomplish the task (61:1–3) of establishing salvation. Having the character and the ability to grant salvation and righteousness will enable the possessor of these qualities to deliver people from their former unrighteous state and will prepare them to enter into God’s glorious kingdom.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 642-643).

David L. Cooper comments on the garments of salvation and the robes of righteousness, Isaiah 61:10:

“The garments of salvation and the robes of righteousness that are mentioned here are none other than imputed righteousness and the salvation which is granted by the Messiah. This same figure is carried out in other passages and is brought over into the New Testament.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly - April 1946).

The blessings of God to His covenant people are proclaimed by the prophet in a very beautiful portrait of being clothed with garments of salvation and with the robe of righteousness. This clothing is also compared to that worn by a bridegroom and a bride. In this depiction, Isaiah is declaring that the people of God have been blessed with salvation through the provision of their God and as a result they “wear” the righteousness of their Messiah, that God has imputed to them. This is the very core of the new covenant. Those who trust in their Messiah for salvation will be declared justified and He will cover them with His own righteousness for they have no righteousness of their own nor can they earn righteousness by any works. The apostle Paul would later expound on this marvellous work of God’s infinite grace of imputing righteousness to those who have faith in His Son, the Messiah, Romans 3:19-22; 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 3:8-9. For a discussion on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer, see Henry Clarence Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Revised Edition, 1983, pages 276-277.

61:11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, 
and as the garden causes things planted to sprout, 
so the sovereign LORD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

Salvation and righteousness go together. In the bringing of salvation to the nations through the Servant, Isaiah 49:6, righteousness will also arise. Righteousness will be planted by the LORD and it will “sprout up before all the nations.” In the previous verse, 61:10, Isaiah, speaking on behalf of the covenant people of God, rejoices that God has wrapped him, and his nation, with a robe of righteousness. Righteousness is a common theme in Isaiah and in the Psalms, for example, in Psalm 85:11-13, the writer exclaimed:

11 Truth springs out of the earth; righteousness looks down from heaven. 
12 Yes, the LORD will give that which is good;
our land will yield its increase.
13 Righteousness will go before him,
and prepare a path for his steps.

(Psalm 85:11-13)

David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah’s description of the sprouting up of righteousness and praise:

“After speaking of his own personal experience, the prophet declared, "For as the earth bringeth forth its bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord Jehovah will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." In this verse the prophet speaks of the nation of Israel and compares it to a garden or a field in which seed has been planted. This seed germinates and springs forth in this garden before all the nations. To what can this figurative language refer? When we read this in the light of such a passage as the parable of the sower (Matt., chap. 13), we can see very readily that the prophet had the same figure in mind. The Word of God is the seed. Here the prophet sees it sowed in all Israel. Moreover, he sees it germinating and springing forth, producing the plants of righteousness in Israel. The nations of earth look on and they see these budding plants of righteousness and praise throughout Israel. This passage assumes that the Word of God is sowed among these people and that it takes root in their hearts. Then it springs forth before all the nations.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – April 1946).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 61:
61:1-3 The Blessings of Messiah’s Ministry
61:4-9 The Blessings of Messiah’s Kingdom
61:10-11 The Blessings of Messiah’s Salvation

5. The Beautiful Land of the Messiah: 62:1-12

Chapter 62 continues the description of the blessings of the Messianic kingdom, that comprise much of chapters 60-66. See notes on the introduction to chapter 60. Much discussion among Biblical scholars has taken place regarding the “speaker” of chapter 62. It is true that the prophet Isaiah has written the words recorded as chapter 62, but who is the one who is speaking the words that Isaiah has recorded? Some suggest it is Isaiah himself, while others state it is Yahweh and others claim it is the anointed one, the Messiah. In chapter 61, the identification of the speaker is easier to discern. In Isaiah 61:1-3, the speaker is clearly the Messiah, and His discourse likely continues to 61:7. In 61:8-9 the speaker is identified as the LORD, Yahweh. In the closing verses, 61:10-11, the speaker is clearly Isaiah. The identification of the speaker is not as easily to discern in chapter 62. Without a detailed technical discussion, it is likely that Isaiah has recorded the words that God has given him to speak and record. So, the “speaker” can be understood as the prophet declaring the words of Yahweh. Isaiah chapter 62 consists of three sections which are the three main paragraphs, vss. 1-5; vss. 6-9 and vss. 10-12. At least one scholar suggests that vss. 1-6 of chapter 63 should be considered as completing a unit, consisting of 62:1-63:6:


For this study of Isaiah, chapter 62 will be considered as a complete unit in itself. Vss. 1-5 of chapter 62 describe the beauty and righteousness of Zion; vss. 6-9 describe the prayer and prosperity of Zion; and vss. 10-12 describe the Gathering to and Redemption of Zion.
In the first section, vss. 1-5, the beauty and righteousness of Zion is described by Isaiah. The prophet in vss. 1-2 declares that the LORD will not remain silent about Jerusalem (Zion), until her righteousness and glory are so bright, the nations and their kings will see it. Zion will also be called by a new name, that is revealed in vs. 4. Zion will be a beautiful crown and diadem in the hand of the LORD, vs. 3. The new compound name for Zion is revealed in vs. 4 as “My delight is in her” and “married.” This compound name is depicted in vs. 5 as Zion’s sons “marrying” the nation and God rejoicing over Zion.

In the second section, vss. 6-9, the prayer for and the future prosperity of Zion is described. In vss. 6-7, Isaiah declares that the LORD has appointed watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem and requests that those who remind the LORD have no rest (compare vs. 1), until He makes Jerusalem “a praise in the earth.” In vss. 8-9 the future prosperity of Zion is described.

In the third section, vss. 10-12, the prophet describes the LORD’s call for the people, the faithful remnant, to go through the gates and to build up a highway for them to use, vs. 10. The coming of salvation to Zion is described in vs. 11 and in as stated in vs. 12, the result is that Zion’s people will be called: holy, the redeemed of the LORD and a city not forsaken but sought after.

1: Isaiah 62:1-5 The Beauty and Righteousness of Zion

62:1 For Zion’s sake I will not stay silent, 
and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep quiet, 
until her vindication brightly shines forth, 
and her salvation like a burning torch.

The topic of this chapter is introduced in the first phrase of Isaiah 62:1, “For Zion’s sake.” The entire chapter is about Zion in the messianic kingdom and what the LORD intends for His beloved city. As recorded in Isaiah 42:14-16, the LORD proclaimed that He had kept silent (held His peace) for a long time but now was going to act on behalf of His covenant people to guide them from darkness into light. Isaiah also records other instances where the LORD, who has previously been silent or away from His people, promises to work for their security and salvation, 45:14-19; 57:11-20; 64:9-12; and 65:1-6. See also Psalm 50:1-3, and 21-23. Although God’s people had not called on Him and had become tired of Him, 43:22; and had said, “The LORD has forsaken me, the LORD has forgotten me.” 49:14; God works tirelessly on behalf of them to bring them to Zion and to bring them salvation. It could be said, the response of God, to the complaint of His covenant people in 49:14, comprises the writings of Isaiah from 49:15 to 66:24.

The LORD will not keep silent until Zion’s “vindication brightly shines forth and her salvation like a burning torch.” The word translated as “vindication” in the DASV is the Hebrew word sedeq, which is translated as “righteousness” in most other English versions. However, one scholar suggests, “Righteousness is here synonymous with the vindication of Israel before the nations of her world.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 466).

Salvation and righteousness is often paired together in Isaiah, 45:8; 46:13; 51:5, 6, 8; 56:1; 59:16, 17; and 61:10. See also Psalm 98:2. Righteousness is the fruit or result of salvation. It is not that the residents of Zion had or have a righteousness that is acceptable to God, but just as God provides salvation through the Messiah, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, He also imputes the righteousness of the Messiah, Jesus Christ to His covenant people and to all who trust in Him for salvation. The righteousness and salvation of Zion’s redeemed people in the kingdom of the Messiah will be a light that brightly shines to illumine all the glories of God’s beloved
city and will be like a burning torch so that all nations and their kings will be drawn to it, for “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your radiance,” Isaiah 60:3.

62:2 The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory,
and you will be called by a new name,
that the mouth of LORD will give you.

As stated above in the notes for Isaiah 62:1; the nations will be so attracted to the brightness of Zion’s righteousness that they and their Kings will come to them, Isaiah 60:3. The glory of Zion will be the presence of the Messiah to whom all nations will come, when He sits on the throne of David in this royal city. The residents of Zion will also reflect the glory of her Messiah. This glory will be seen by the residents of Zion and by the inhabitants of the messianic kingdom. This theme of the glory of the Messiah is a major theme of Isaiah, 4:2, 5; 6:3; 24:15, 16; 26:15; 35:2; 40:5; 41:16; 42:8, 12; 43:7; 44:23; 58:8; 59:19; 60:1, 2, 19; and 66:18-19, and is seen as related to the light of the LORD in 58:8; 60:1, and 19.

The righteousness, vindication in the DASV, of the inhabitants of millennial Zion which will reflect the glory of the presiding King, the Messiah, will result in another blessing for the city. Zion will be called by a new name. In the life of the patriarch Jacob, one of the most intriguing events of his life happened when he returned to Canaan from Paddan-aram and was preparing to meet his brother Esau whom he had deceived and had taken to himself, what had been Esau’s birth right. Jacob was alone at night, before meeting with Esau and the Scriptures state that he was alone and a “man” wrestled with Jacob until dawn, Genesis 32:24. The identity of this “man” has been debated for generations. It may have been an angel whom Jacob had met earlier, Genesis 32:1 or it may have been “the angel of the Lord” which is understood by many to be a pre-incarnate theophany or appearance of the Messiah. Jacob must have been given superior strength for this encounter for the “man” he wrestled with did not prevail against Jacob. The “man” touched the socket of Jacob’s thigh so that it was dislocated. He also gave Jacob a new name, Israel and explained the meaning, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed,” Genesis 32:28.

In Isaiah 62:2, the prophet stated that the city of Zion would be called by a new name. This new name is stated in 62:4. The new name for the people will be Hephzibah and the new name for the land will be Beulah. See notes of 62:4 for a discussion on their meanings. It was not the only occurrence in Isaiah that Zion is called a designated name. In 60:14, Isaiah declares that the descendants of those who had oppressed God’s covenant people, will call the city, “The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” Also, in chapter 60:18, Isaiah states that Zion’s people will call Zion’s walls “Salvation,” and her gates “Praise.” See also Isaiah 61:3, 6; Jeremiah 3:17; 33:16; and Ezekiel 48:35. The new names for Zion and its people signify the glorious works of Yahweh on her behalf and the presence of the Messiah in her midst. These names could only apply to Zion during the messianic reign for it is only at this time that all of her people, the covenant people of God, will be redeemed and bear the righteousness of he Messiah. They will also have a glorious role in this kingdom as Isaiah 61:6 states and 62:3 implies.

62:3 You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

The LORD will so delight in the redeemed and righteous people of Zion that not only will He call His beloved city by a new name, 62:2 but they will be as a “crown of beauty” and a “royal diadem” in His hand. The crown stated in Isaiah 62:3 is the Hebrew word atarah, which has the traditional meaning of a crown to
adorn the head. The word diadem is the Hebrew word *tsaniph*, which has the meaning of a turban which the high priest wore, Zechariah 3:5. The crown is called beautiful and the diadem is called “royal” implying that God has divine purposes for them. The fact that the LORD holds them first in His hand implies power, and holding them in His palm, DASV hand, implies a holding out for view or display. See Edward E. Hindson, *Isaiah, King James Bible Commentary*, page 856. In Isaiah 28:5, Isaiah uses similar terms to describe the LORD of hosts but in 62:3 the covenant people of God are held in His hands as a display of His glory which are in view by all the nations. The depiction by Isaiah in 62:3 of a royal diadem with the meaning of the mitre (KJV) or turban of the High Priest may also refer to the role of the covenant people of God during the millennial kingdom as priests to the nations. See notes on Isaiah 61:6.

62:4 You will no longer be called "Forsaken;"
neither will your land any more be labeled "Desolate."
Instead you will be called Hephzibah [My delight is in her],
and your land Beulah [Married];
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land will be married.

As was stated in 62:2, a new name would be given to Zion and to its people. The covenant people of God will be like a beautiful crown and royal diadem in His hands, 62:3. They were previously forsaken, Hebrew: *Azubah*, and their land was desolate, Hebrew: *Shemamah*, because of their sinfulness and rebellion against God. See Isaiah 1:7-9; 5:9; 6:12; 13:9; 27:10; 49:8, 14, 19; and 60:15. Because the people will return to God and repent of their national sin of rejecting their Messiah at His first advent and will ask Him to come back and save them (the return of the Messiah is depicted in Isaiah 63:1-6), God will respond with salvation, 59:16; and 61:10 and with blessings of the new covenant, 59:21; and 61:8. Along with the new covenant blessings of a new heart and a new Spirit, Ezekiel 36:26-27, God will give their land a new name. The covenant people of God will be called *Hephzibah* which means “My delight is in her.” Also, the land of Zion will be called *Beulah* which means married. Isaiah stated in 54:7-8, that God had previously forsaken His covenant people, but will have mercy upon them. Also, Isaiah stated in 60:15, “Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through you, I will make you majestic forever, a joy for many generations.” Isaiah also declared that The LORD will permanently delight in His people, Isaiah 65:18-19. The land of Israel will also be called “married” for as Isaiah explains in 62:5, the sons of the land will be loyal to the land and rejoice over it as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

62:5 For like a young man marries a virgin,
so your sons will marry you;
and like the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so will your God rejoice over you.

The land of Zion will be a particular source of joy to its inhabitants who will rejoice over it as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride. Not only will the covenant people of God rejoice over Zion, but God Himself will rejoice over His beloved city. David L. Cooper provides a brief summary of this first section of Isaiah chapter 62:

“But when the Hebrew people are converted and all accept the Lord Jesus Christ nationally as their Messiah and Redeemer, saved Israel will lead all nations to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. The blessing therefore of the world is contingent upon the conversion of the Jewish race. Because of this fact God is especially interested in the salvation of Israel.
That she will be converted and be clothed with the righteousness of God is set forth in verse 2 of the quotation above. All nations will see Israel thus clothed in the righteousness of God and called by a new name which He alone will give.

At that time Israel, genuinely saved, will be like a crown of beauty or a royal diadem in the hand of her God. A crown or a diadem is a symbol of authority and power. Thus Israel converted will be the symbol of God's authority over all nations.

Jerusalem has lain in ruins at various times in the past. She has been termed "Forsaken." Moreover, the land of Israel has been spoken of as being "Desolate." But the time which loomed before the prophet's mind in this passage is an era when Jerusalem will be called "Hephzi-bah" and the land of Palestine will be termed "Beulah." The former of these two Hebrew words, which have been transliterated, means my delight is in her. The latter one signifies married. When Israel accepts her Lord and is brought into fellowship with Him, there will be an intense desire for the land of the fathers in the heart of every Hebrew. This thought is expressed in the following words: "For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee; and as a bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." From the message of these first five verses we see that God is especially interested in Jerusalem and her sons.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – May 1946).

2: Isaiah 62:6-9 Prayer for the Future Prosperity of Zion

62:6-7 I have put watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who remind the LORD, take no rest. Give him no rest, until he re-establishes Jerusalem, and makes her a praise in the earth.

In the second section of Isaiah chapter 62, the prophet states God’s intention of finally re-establishing Jerusalem and making the city “a praise in the earth.” However, in God’s purposes and plans, He has set up watchmen on the walls of the city who must never be silent and who must remind the Lord to not rest until His purposes and plans are fulfilled. In 62:1, God stated that He would not be silent nor keep quiet until Jerusalem’s righteousness and salvation are displayed like a blazing light (for all the nations to see). In 62:6-7, God reveals that others will be involved in this process by continually reminding Him to accomplish this task.

There have been many suggestions as to the identity of these “watchmen” whom God will set up on the walls of Jerusalem. Some have suggested sentinels who like traditional watchmen keep a vigilant watch and warn the city when anyone approaches near to the walls. This may be a viable suggestion for in the next chapter of Isaiah, the ones asking questions of the great One approaching them are likely watchmen. See also Isaiah 52:8. Others suggest that the watchmen are angels whom the Lord has given a perpetual watch and the ministry of reminding God of His promises. Also, others suggest that it is the dual role of the prophets to both watch over God’s people and invoke the Lord to fulfill His promises. The prophet Ezekiel was appointed as a watchman, Ezekiel 3:16-21 who also often made pleas to God on behalf of the people.

It is not critical to identify exactly who God has appointed as watchmen. It is however, important to realize that God allows the ministry of others to blend with His in the accomplishment of His great plans for His creation, in this case for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem so that the city will become a praise in the earth. See Isaiah 60:18 and 61:11. It is not that God needs to be reminded in case He would forget His promises. But, it is a characteristic of God to desire the participation of His created people in His works on behalf of the people. The participation here is prayer and pleading to Him to have no rest until Jerusalem
become a praise in the earth. This is also seen in the NT in the model prayer that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, gave to all who believe in Him, Matthew 6:10-13. It is stated in Matthew 6:10, that believers are pray, “Your kingdom come,” which is a plea to God to fulfill His promises to establish the millennial kingdom of the Messiah, and to fulfill the promise that Jerusalem, representing this kingdom would indeed be a praise in the earth. Victor Buksbazen comments on vss. 6-7:

“Ancient and medieval cities and their appointed watchmen, whose primary duty was to warn the citizens against any impending attack by the enemy. So also the LORD has set watchmen on the walls of His holy city Jerusalem, whose duty is to guard the city against her spiritual enemies, against wicked and ungodly men and against spiritual and moral corruption. These watchmen were the prophets of God, who must never be silent or at ease, but keep on pleading with God on behalf of Jerusalem, that is Israel.

The watchmen and the remembrancers of God must never cease their intercessions until Jerusalem becomes what God intended her to be: ‘a praise in the earth,’ the ‘holy city of God.’” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 467).

The fact that God requests that His watchmen are to give Him no rest until Jerusalem is re-established and the city becomes a praise in the earth, leads to many questions regarding the purpose of prayer. If God is absolutely sovereign and will accomplish all His plans and does not require the “help” of anyone, then why for example, does He seek anyone to remind Him (by prayer and pleading to Him) to accomplish His plans? The “why” of this question may never be adequately answered this side of heaven. Some have made excellent comments regarding this connection between God’s all-knowing and all-powerful attributes to accomplish all that He plans and God’s command that we pray to Him so that He will accomplish His plans. Millard J. Erickson, is one who has contemplated this issue and addresses it in his book, Christian Theology, Baker Books, Second Edition, pages 430-431. Another who has written on this issue is Robert Duncan Culver, in his book, Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical, Mentor Imprint, Christian Focus Publications, Ltd. 2013, pages 199-200. Another helpful resource is by an author that is quoted frequently in these study notes on Isaiah, Dr. Thomas Constable. Dr. Constable’s book, Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer, A Biblical Theology of Prayer, is available online (at the time of the publication of this study on Isaiah), Soniclight Website: http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

62:8-9 The LORD has sworn by his right hand, and by his mighty arm,
"I will never give your grain to be food for your enemies,
and foreigners will not drink your new wine
for which you have labored.

But those who harvest it will eat it,
and praise the LORD,
and those who gather it will drink it
in the courts of my sanctuary.

In the coming kingdom of the Messiah, the covenant people of God who will reside in Jerusalem will see a reversal of what they will have to face in the days when they will be held captive in the nations of the earth during the Tribulation. In those terrible days they will work as slaves to cruel tyrants who oppressed them and did not allow them fruits, for their own use, from their labors in the fields of agriculture. Those of God’s people who will live in Israel during these days will also work in the fields and cultivate crops, but they also will not personally benefit from what they will harvest. But, another day will dawn, when the covenant people will witness the destruction of their enemies by the returning Messiah, Isaiah 63:1-6. They will be gathered from all nations where they had been oppressed and come to Zion rejoicing, (Isaiah 35:10; 51:11),
that the days of their captivity have ended. These days are often prophesied by Isaiah, 4:3-6; 14:1-2; 26:1-4; 27:12-13; 35:10; 49:8, 14-26; 51:11; 54:1-17; 55:12-13; 57:13; 60:1-22; 61:1-7; 65:9; 66:8-9, and 19-23. They will be led in this return by their Messiah, Micah 2:13, as He comes triumphantly to His royal residence and establishes His peaceful kingdom. In these glorious days, the covenant people of God will eat of the harvest of the land. Foreigners (those from the Gentile nations) will raise their crops and attend to their animals, Isaiah 61:5 as God’s people minister in the kingdom as Priests of the LORD, and will eat of the wealth of the nations, Isaiah 61:6. All who harvest and gather the harvest (including the Gentiles) will praise the LORD for the harvest and eat of this harvest in “the courts of my sanctuary,” which will be the courtyards of the newly built millennial temple described in Ezekiel chapters 40-48.

God’s covenant people will have the certainty and assurance that these things will happen just as the LORD said it would because He has guaranteed it, “The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm.” Isaiah 62:8. The anthropological descriptions of God having a mighty (strong) arm and a right hand are depictions of His great strength by which He accomplishes His plans and great works. In many places in the Scriptures God is described in these terms. One of these is the magnificent and glorious description of the Lord in Psalm 98:1-3:

1 O sing to the LORD a new song,  
   for he has done marvelous things;  
   his right hand, and his holy arm,  
   have won him the victory.

2 The LORD has made known his salvation;  
   his righteousness he has revealed in the sight of the nations.

3 He has remembered his loyal love  
   and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel;  
   all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

For other descriptions of the mighty acts of God described in terms of His right hand and mighty arm see (examples only, not an exhaustive list), Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 5:15; Psalm 18:35; 20:6; 44:3; 45:4; 48:10; 60:5; 77:15; 89:10; Isaiah 40:10; 41:10; Ezekiel 20:33-34; and Luke 1:51.

3: Isaiah 62:10-12 The Gathering to and Redemption of Zion

62:10 Go through, go through the gates;  
   prepare the way for the people.  
Build it, build the highway;  
   remove the stones;  
   lift up the signal flag for the peoples.

The last three verses of Isaiah 62 are a preparation for the return of the Messiah described in Isaiah 63:1-6. They do however, present an interpretative challenge. Some Biblical scholars, suggest that the words of the prophet refer to the marching out of the Gates of Babylon as the words of 62:10 seem to be similar with Isaiah 48:20-21. However, Isaiah 62:10-12 could also be understood to be similar with 11:16; 19:23-24; 35:8-10; and 49:11-12 which refer to a highway that leads to Zion during the establishment of the messianic kingdom. Biblical scholars do not have a cohesive agreement or understanding of which passages in Isaiah refer best to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem from Babylon and those that refer best to the gathering of the faithful remnant from the nations to travel to Zion to populate the newly established kingdom of Messiah.
In this study of Isaiah, primary emphasis is given to the gathering of the covenant people of God to Zion from the nations following the Tribulation. The reason for this is the context of these passages. If the context reveals that the travelling to Israel occurs during times when God’s glory is seen among all nations and people and leaders of these nations are assisting the travellers to Zion, then it is best to apply these passages to the days when Messiah is establishing His kingdom. In the context of chapter 62 and also 63:1-6, it is evident that a far future time is indicated when the Messiah will return and Jerusalem (Israel) will be glorified and blessed among all the nations of the earth. Therefore, Isaiah 62:10 should be understood as applying to these far future days of the messianic kingdom rather than to the closer future days of the return of the exiles from Babylon to Israel.

As a far future context of Isaiah 62:10-12 is understood when God’s faithful remnant are being gathered to Zion, the words of 62:10, “Go through, go through the gates,” seem best to refer to those living in Zion who are exhorted by God to exit the gates of Jerusalem and prepare a highway for all those who will be streaming to Zion from the nations of the world. They who exit these gates are also to lift up a signal flag or banner to indicate the way those who are travelling to Zion should come. It is possible that several signal flags or banners will be required. The region surrounding Zion will be littered with the remains of the great armed conflict against Israel. Machines and armaments of war and the remains of the dead will be so dense and compacted together that it will be necessary to construct a highway with signals and banners to point the way to Zion. A major battle is described in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 during which a leader described as “Gog” will lead a mighty army, Ezekiel 38:15-16 against God’s people Israel. The battle described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 will result in the defeat of Gog’s army by God, with so many being killed that the people of Israel will take seven months to bury the dead in order to clean the land, Ezekiel 39:12. Also the weapons of war used by Gog’s forces will be used for fuel by the people of Israel for a period of seven years, Ezekiel 39:9.

There is much debate from conservative Biblical scholars as to the timing of this battle. There is no consensus as to when it will occur although many suggest that it will occur sometime during the seven-year tribulation period. Although this war, described in Ezekiel 38-39 may not fit exactly with the details of the conflict of Armageddon, the timing of it may precede the battles that will be fought during the conflict of Armageddon. However, if the conflict described in Ezekiel 38-39 occurs during the Tribulation, as the evidence of Scripture seems to indicate, then the people of Israel will be cleaning up the land littered with the machines and implements of war when Messiah returns to lead His faithful remnant from the nations to be gathered to Zion. When the faithful remnant travel to Zion they will be witnesses of this clean up effort and will be guided by the signal flags the residents of Israel have set up for them and will be walking on roadways (highways) that have been leveled and prepared for them to journey to Zion. For a better understanding of the events described in Ezekiel chapters 38-39, refer to the following suggested resources: Eugene L. Cooper, Ezekiel, The New American Commentary, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. Charles Lee Feinberg, The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord, Moody Publishers, 1969. Charles H. Dyer and Eva Rydelnik, Ezekiel, The Moody Bible Commentary, Moody Publishers, 2014. Elmer A. Jantz, Ezekiel, King James Bible Commentary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

62:11-12 Look, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth,
"Tell the daughter of Zion,
"Look, your salvation comes;
look, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him."

12 They will call them, "The holy people,"
"The Redeemed of the LORD," and you will be called "Sought After, A City Not Forsaken."
Isaiah 62:11-12 is an introduction to the return of the Messiah revealed in Isaiah 63:1-6. The words “has proclaimed,” is a prophetic perfect tense indicating that something in the future is so absolutely certain that the prophet can declare it as already occurred. The LORD has proclaimed His message, “to the ends of the earth.” This proclamation will occur, in the context of Isaiah chapters 60-62, in the days approaching the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom when the Messiah comes with salvation. The proclamation by the LORD will be through various “proclaimers.” The word of God (written and oral) will accomplish all God has intended, Isaiah 55:11. God’s messengers, the prophets are those who proclaim His word. In these last days, God speaks through His Son, Hebrews 1:1-3. During the distressful days of the Tribulation God will declare the gospel through the proclamation of an angel to all who live upon the earth, Revelation 14:6-7. During the Tribulation God will send two witnesses will also prophesy for Him for twelve hundred and sixty days, Revelation chapter 11. Also, many believe that the role of the 144,000 Jewish believers who are sealed by God in Revelation 7:1-8 will be to proclaim the gospel to the nations.

The message the LORD will proclaim to the ends of the earth is that first, the daughter of Zion (God’s beloved people) is to be told, so that she will be ready. The prophet had earlier declared a similar message as recorded in Isaiah 40:1-11. The message to be proclaimed will be intended for the blessing of Zion. In many places, Isaiah 1:8; Jeremiah 6:2; Lamentations 2:1-18, and many other occurrences, the prophets declare the judgment and punishment that will come upon the daughter of Zion. However, God will not always be angry with His covenant people and will bring blessings, accompanied with the presence of their Messiah, to those He calls the daughter of Zion, Psalm 9:14; Isaiah 52:2; Zephaniah 3:14-15; Zechariah 2:10-12; 9:9; Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15. The first phrase of Matthew 21:5, “Tell the daughter of Zion,” is quoted from Isaiah 63:11.

Second, the proclamation of the LORD is declared as “Look, your salvation comes.” This coming of salvation is not just a message about salvation, but it is embodied in the coming Messiah who will come in response to the repentance of Israel for their national sin of rejecting Him during His first advent, Leviticus 26:40-45; Deuteronomy 4:25-31; 2 Chronicles 7:13-14; Jeremiah 3:11-18; 4:1-2; Hosea 3:4-5; 5:15-6:3 and Zechariah 12:10-13:1. This confession is stated in Isaiah 53:1-9 and the plea for their Messiah to come is declared in Psalm 79:1-13; 80:1-19 and Isaiah 64:1-12. A major theme of Isaiah is that the Messiah will come to bring salvation, Isaiah 25:9; 45:8, 17; 46:13; 49:6-8; 51:5-8; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:16-17; 61:10; 62:1 and 63:5. It is also a major theme of the Psalms.

Third, the proclamation of the LORD is declared as, “Look, his reward is with him.” All of the proclamations of the LORD recorded in Isaiah 62:11 regard “Him” who must be the returning Messiah. When He returns, He will bring His reward with Him. This reward is the combined total of all the promises God has made to His covenant people and to the nations regarding the blessings that will come upon the earth when He establishes the messianic kingdom. For a summary of these blessings stated in Isaiah, see the chart, Isaiah’s Description of Israel’s Future Kingdom, John Macarthur, NASB Study Bible, page 1032. The greatest and most exalted reward is that the Messiah will reside among His covenant people and all who have faith in Him. It is a most exalted reward for it is one of the ultimate reasons why God created the world and its peoples. When the apostle John saw the vision of the eternal state, this reason was clearly stated, Revelation 21:3. Another great reward is the salvation the returning Messiah will bring to the earth.

Some may desire to state that, salvation in itself could be understood as the greatest and most exalted reward, but salvation is something the Lord brings and accomplishes. It is the Lord Himself who is above all things and is to be praised above all things. Salvation would have little importance if the Lord of the Universe and all creation were not resident with His people. The ultimate or over-arching reason for God’s creation of the heavens and the Earth have been stated previously in this study. It is that creation itself would display (declare) the glory of God, Psalm 19:1. Also, God’s image bearers were created to righteously display and
declare His glory to all creation. God’s kingdom, His covenants with His people, His provision of salvation through the atoning sacrifice of His Son, the establishment of the Church, the body of Christ, the coming messianic kingdom and the eternal state where all saved people will live with God forever, is for the purpose of having God’s glory righteously displayed and declared by the great company of the redeemed. Some Christians may think that God’s plan for eternity is all about them, their salvation, their rewards, their place in heaven, etc. but that thinking is not ultimately God exalting, for it places all the emphasis on themselves and no emphasis on God’s greatest gift to His creation, which is Himself.

Fourth, the proclamation of the LORD is declared as, “and his recompense before him.” The word “recompense” is the Hebrew word pe’ullah, which is also translated as wages or work. This word also occurs in the DASV in Isaiah in, 40:10 (reward); 49:4 (reward); 61:8 (repay); and 65:7 (pay them back). In Isaiah 62:11 in the DASV. the word “recompense” is well suited to the context as it implies that the Messiah will not only return as a great and glorious Savior but as One who will gain vengeance over His enemies. The return of the Messiah is described as a “day of vengeance” as recorded in Isaiah 34:8; 61:2; 63:4 and Jeremiah 46:10. This day of vengeance also is included in the wider description of the “day of the Lord.” The prophet Joel declares much about that day, Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14 and 18. It is often also referred to simply as “that day.” For a more detailed discussion on the day of the Lord, refer to: David M. Levy, Joel: The Day of the Lord: A Chronology of Israel’s Prophetic History, Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1993. Also, refer to Irvin A. Busenitz, Commentary on Joel and Obadiah, Mentor, Christian Focus Publications, 2003. An additional resource is by Richard L. Mayhue, The Bible’s Watchword: Day of The Lord, The Master’s Seminary Journal, MSJ 22/1 (Spring 2011) 65-88.

In Isaiah 62:12, the prophet declares the result of the proclamation of the LORD, recorded in 62:11. The first result is that God’s beloved people, the daughter of Zion, 62:11, will be called “The Holy People.” This could not be possible until the Messiah had come to bring them salvation and following their participation in the new covenant. They will have new hearts, Ezekiel 36:26 and the Holy Spirit will be within them. They will possess the imputed righteousness of their Messiah, Jesus Christ. They will be redeemed by their faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ who will come back and bring everlasting salvation to them. It is only then they can truly fulfill Exodus 19:6 Leviticus 11:44-45 and Deuteronomy 7:6. See also 1 Peter 1:16. Second, they will also be called “The Redeemed of the LORD.” Upon their faith in the Messiah, whom they had pleaded with to return and rescue them, they will by faith be “redeemed.” They will have finally repented of their national sin of rejecting their Messiah when He came to them during His first advent. When they call upon Him to return He, will come to them with salvation, Isaiah 63:5. Third, they will be called “Sought After, A City Not Forsaken.” This name is also described in Isaiah 62:4 and all the names in 62:12 respond to the promise of 62:2 that God’s covenant people will be called by a new name. See notes on Isaiah 62:2 and 4 for a longer discussion. The prophet has now prepared his audience for the prophetic depiction of the return of the Messiah which is described in 63:1-6.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 62:
62:1-5 The Beauty and Righteousness of Zion
62:6-9 Prayer for the Future Prosperity of Zion
62:10-12 The Gathering to and Redemption of Zion

6. The Return of the Messiah Who is Mighty to Save: 63:1-6

Isaiah chapter 63:1-7 is another majestic highpoint of the writings of the prophet. Verses 10-12 of Isaiah chapter 62 serve as a preparation for and an introduction to the glorious declaration of the return of the Messiah. The Messiah will come to announce vindication for His people Israel and rescue them. He will defeat His enemies and bring salvation to His covenant people and all who will trust in Him. This section
begins with a question of identity of person (Him) who is approaching, and an answer is given, “It is I, who announces vindication, mighty to save,” vs. 1. Another question is asked in vs. 2, regarding the color of the clothes this person is wearing. The answer is given in vs. 3, that the person’s clothing is stained with the blood (likened to grape juice) for He has trampled His enemies in His wrath. This great person, who is mighty to save, announces in vs. 4 that His day of vengeance and year of His redemption has come. This One who is mighty to save declares, in vs. 5, that there was no one to help Him, so His own arm brought salvation. Finally, in vs. 6 this great One who is mighty to save declares that the peoples have been trampled down and their lifeblood was spilled on the ground. Although, the One who is mighty to save is not identified by name in these verses, there can be no doubt as to the identification of this person. Even without the absolute definitive answer revealed in Revelation 19:11-21, this One who is mighty to save could only be the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Messiah who could have the authority to do all that is described in Isaiah 63:1-6. A quotation form Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer provides an introduction to Isaiah 63:1-6:

“The Messiah will deliver Israel, not only by restoration of the nation but by judgment of the enemies of Israel. The backdrop is the future tribulation, when Israel will flee to the wilderness to escape the attack of the future world ruler; also known as the Antichrist (see Ezk 20:34-36; Rv 12:6). Likely, the place in the wilderness is in Edom (modern Jordan) in the city of Bozrah (Petra; see Is 34:5-17 for evidence to support this). The nations will pursue Israel there leading to a bloody war (previously depicted in 34:1-7). God is once again depicted as a conquering hero covered in blood of those He has trampled in the winepress of His wrath (63:1-3). Not only did Isaiah previously draw this picture in Is 34, but the book of Revelation draws it as well (cf. Rv 14:19-20; 19:13-15). These passages identify Jesus the Messiah as the One coming in judgment of the enemies of Israel. From the above passages, it appears that Jesus returns to Bozrah as the end of the tribulation to deliver Israel. Having defeated the nations that attacked Israel in the wilderness, the Messiah will then lead them to Jerusalem (Mc 2:12-13), where His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, and deliver besieged Jerusalem (Zch 14:3-4). God has acted alone because no one was willing to take up the cause of beleaguered Israel (Is 63:4-5). The destruction of the nations will come through the singular activity of the Son of God (vv.5-6; cf. Ps 110:5-7).”
(Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary, page 1098).

Gary V. Smith also provides an introduction to Isaiah 63:1-6:

“This paragraph introduces the final annihilation of the nation of Edom, a picture of God treading out the grapes in a wine press, and God’s wrathful judging all nations. These images are in sharp contrast with the positive images of joy, blessing, worship, and the welcoming of the foreign nations in chaps. 60–62. … This new emphasis is not entirely unexpected or totally unrelated to God’s positive plans for Zion, for hidden within the wonderful news of the establishment of the kingdom of God in chaps. 60–62 are hints about God’s plan to judge those who refuse to serve him (60:12) and his plan to remove all enemies who formerly took the grain and wine that the Israelites worked so hard to produce (62:8–9). This eschatological Day of the Lord was already explained in great detail in 2:6–22, 24:1–23, and 34:1–15, so the message of judgment on the wicked is not new, nor contradictory to what was said elsewhere in Isaiah. In fact, in each of these similar messages there are similar contrasting message of salvation and judgment (2:1–5; 25:1–12; 35:1–10 describe God’s salvation, while 2:6–22; 24:1–23; 34:1–15 explain his judgment). Even within 63:1b, the purpose of God’s righteous action of judgment is connected to his plan to save others. This day of vengeance on the nation will also be a day of redemption for his people (63:4), so God’s powerful arm will not only destroy, but it will also bring salvation (63:5b). The interconnection between these two aspects of God’s plan is also evident by the fact that the Anointed One will proclaim both the “year of favor” and the “day of vengeance” (61:2). J. A. Motyer believes the Anointed Conqueror in 61:1–3 is the one who will finally vindicate God’s justice and destroy the wicked in 63:1–6.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 655-656).

63:1 Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah with stained red garments? Who is this wearing splendid apparel,
marching in the greatness of his strength?
"It is I, who announces vindication, mighty to save."

As evidenced from the above introduction to Isaiah 63:1-6 the setting is most certainly the last days of the Tribulation. The wrath of God against the nations of the world, (Revelation chapters 6-19) has almost been spent but not yet extinguished. There remains a highly significant event that both Revelation chapter 19:11-21 and Isaiah 63:1-6 describe. Following the great confession of Israel’s national sin of rejecting their Messiah during His first advent, which is prophetically declared in Isaiah 53:1-9 and described in Zechariah 12:10-13:1 and also after the faithful remnant of the LORD pleads for the Messiah to return and rescue them, Psalm 79:1-13; 80:1-19; Isaiah 64:1-12 and Hosea 5:15-6:3; the Messiah will return and He will first defeat the armies of the nations that have surrounded the faithful remnant in Bozrah in Edom. After He does this He will lead His covenant people in a triumphant march to Jerusalem, Micah 2:12-13 where the Messiah will free the City from its invaders who are wrecking havoc among the people of Jerusalem, Zechariah 14:1-5 by standing on the Mount of Olives to provide a way of escape for His people.

The defeat of Messiah’s enemies in Bozrah in Edom has an important historical significance. The inhabitants of Edom had their origin from Esau, Genesis 36:1-9. The people of Edom had a long and disgraceful history of antagonism against their “cousins,” the Israelites whom were descendants of Jacob, Esau’s brother. Isaiah had declared God’s judgment upon Edom, Isaiah 34:1-6 as did other prophets, Jeremiah 49:7-22. Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Amos 1:11-12; 9:12; Obadiah vs. 1-14 and Malachi 1:4. Alongside Edom’s many atrocities against Israel, one stands above the rest as recorded in Psalm 137:7 “Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell; they screamed, Tear it down, tear it down, to its foundation.”

Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Edom, although a brother nation, personifies the unrelenting hostility of the pagan world toward Israel (see Isa. 34:5ff., Jer. 25:22ff., 49:17ff., etc.). In later rabbinical literature Edom became symbolic of Rome and all oppressive, pagan power.

Bozrah was once a great city in Edom, on the east shore of the Dead Sea. The name Edom, the other name for Esau (Gen. 36:8) comes from “adom” – “red,” suggesting blood. Bozrah is related to the word, “Bazir” – “a vintage.” It is interesting to note that during the Roman rule the coins of Bozrah had a winepress for their emblem.” Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 470-471).

This great sin against their “brothers” will be finally dealt with by the Messiah when He returns to rescue His people and defeats Edom which may represent all the nations that oppose the divinity and rule of the Messiah, and are in open rebellion against Him, Psalm 2. Edom, in the Hebrew is edom, and closely resembles the Hebrew adam which has the meaning of man or mankind. Edom, in the Hebrew also bears a grammatical closeness to adom meaning “red.” Bozrah, which was once a capital of Edom, has the meaning of “a fortress” and is likely the location of modern Petra in Jordan.

Some debate has arisen among Biblical scholars as to whom is asking the questions in Isaiah 63:1. It may be one of the watchmen on the wall of Jerusalem that the LORD has set up, 62:6 or it may be the prophet Isaiah as David L. Cooper suggests. The questioner asks, who is this coming from Edom (and specifically) Bozrah with garments stained red? It is certain that the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem could not discern that the one marching towards them could have come from Bozrah in Edom, but the LORD would have revealed this to His prophet Isaiah. It is very significant that the One coming from Edom wears garments that are stained “red,” for the nation itself could be grammatically identified as “red.” The questioner also asks, who is this one who wears splendid (majestic) clothing and marching in the greatness of his strength?
The depiction of the One coming is described in the KJV as “This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength” There was a majestic look to the One coming towards the questioner. Both the clothing and the manner of his walking suggested someone with authority. Victor Buksbazen again states:

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“Tscho” is translated in the KJV as “travelling” or “marching.” The Hebrew term means “to sway” and is descriptive of a mighty man as he marches.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 471).

The response to these questions is startling and leaves no doubt as to His identification and the divine importance of His mission. He responds, “It is I, who announces vindication, mighty to save.” In the parallel passage in Revelation, the description of the clothing of the Messiah is similar, “He is dressed in a garment sprinkled with blood, and his name is called, The Word of God,” Revelation 19:13. The One who is the Word of God is also mighty to save. Only the Messiah could be the One who is a victorious warrior and also the Savior and Redeemer who can truly save. No one else qualifies as Isaiah in 59:16 and 63:5 declares. See also Psalm 106:8 and Zephaniah 3:17. David L. Cooper provides these comments:

When the complete and full message regarding Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, is thus presented to the Jewish people in the manner here enjoined and in the spirit of love, God's word will not return unto Him void, but it shall accomplish that whereunto He has sent it; namely, to bring back His people to Himself. When the truth has thus been sown in their hearts, Israel of this future day will acknowledge the national sin--as we see in such passages as Isaiah 53:1-9--and will plead for the Messiah to return. This fact is clearly set forth in Hosea 5:15: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me earnestly." When Messiah came the first time, both Ephraim and Judah committed the heinous crime against Him of rejecting Him. He has gone away and returned to His own place, where He has been ever since. Never will He return to this earth to deliver His ancient people until they acknowledge their offence and seek His face earnestly. According to this passage they will do this very thing in their tribulation, in the time of Jacob's trouble--the Great Tribulation. When they thus make the confession of their national sin and plead with Him to return, He will do so. This coming is set forth graphically by the prophet in 63:1-6. Isaiah who was in Jerusalem was carried forward to the conclusion of the Great Tribulation; and, as he was viewing the events of the end time, he looked from his place to Edom and saw a stranger coming toward the Holy City from Bozrah in Edom. He recognized instantly that this one was glorious in His apparel and that He was marching in the greatness of His strength. He therefore asked the question, "Who is this one?"

The reply coming from the approaching stranger was this: "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." There is but one who speaks in righteousness and who is mighty to save, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. So we can see that this is a vision of His descending from heaven to Edom, where doubtless many Jews will be who flee from the persecution of the anti-Christ. They will be in dire straits at that time and will be praying for their deliverance. He will therefore come to them in their distress. (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – May 1946).

63:2 Why are your clothes red, and your garments like one who treads grapes in the wine press?

John A. Martin gives an introduction to Isaiah 63:2-6:

“The Lord’s garments spattered with blood will appear red as if He had been in a winepress. “Red” (‘adom is a wordplay on “Edom” (edom). A winepress was usually a shallow pit with a hole on the side leading to a container. As individuals trampled on the grapes in the press, the juice flowed through the hole into the container. Obviously some juice would also splatter on the workers’ clothes. As the Lord will fight and defeat the nations (cf. 34:2) in the Battle of Armageddon (cf. Zechariah 14:3; Rev. 16:16; 19:15-19), He will take vengeance on them (cf. Isa. 34:8; 35:4; 61:2) in His anger and wrath. God’s wrath is also pictured as being like
The third question asked of the advancing majestic One who is The Messiah, the returning Jesus Christ, is why are your clothes red? The word “red” is adom is a wordplay on Edom, (see above comments by John A. Martin), and suggests a direct connection to that nation. This question concerning clothing also contains a simile, “like the one who treads grapes in the wine press.” This question depicts someone who is wearing clothes that are completely splattered with the red of the grapes which dyes the clothing. The response of the Messiah in 63:3 confirms this description. The implication of 63: 2 is that Edom has been so trampled that the blood of its inhabitants has stained all the clothing of the Messiah with its redness.

63:3 I have stomped in the winepress alone; and none of the peoples joined with me. I stomped them in my anger, and trampled them in my wrath. Their juice splattered on my garments, and all my clothes are stained.

The response of the Messiah, as recorded in Isaiah 63:3, to the third question in 63:2 reveals much about the purposes of His return to the earth. The Messiah will come to bring righteous judgment upon Edom and as some Biblical scholars have suggested, Edom also represents the evil nations of the earth. Edom and the evil nations have rebelled against the Son of God, Psalm 2, and in His righteous indignation, the Son of God, the returning Messiah will rightly punish them for the judgment they deserve. The Scriptures provide ample evidence that wickedness, if not repented and if faith is not applied to the shed blood of Jesus Christ, will result in God’s judgment and punishment. It is not that the Messiah is simply seeking revenge for the behavior of Edom in the past against His beloved people. Messiah will be returning to accomplish the will of God as Isaiah had earlier revealed in 61:1-3. The purpose of the return of the Messiah will be to exact divine judgment on wicked nations as well as delivering the faithful from bondage and oppression. The words “wine press” in Isaiah 63:3 occur also in Haggai 2:16 (wine vat) and seems to indicate that a separate bowl or container is employed into which the red juice flows after being trodden down. The picture is of a continuing or repeated “stomping” until the container next to the winepress is full to overflowing of the red juice (the blood of the wicked). A similar description is given in Revelation 14:19-20 and 19:13-15.

The Messiah states that His act of judgment upon the wicked will be accomplished by Himself (alone) for no one (none of the peoples) joined Him. This is further explained in 63:5 for just as the LORD, Yahweh had experienced, Isaiah 59:16, no one else stood to intercede or uphold the cause of righteousness in either the provision of salvation or the exacting of righteous judgment. The Messiah will not forstall or hold back His righteous anger and wrath of which the nations will be in great dread as explained in Revelation 6:15-16. See also Micah 7:10. The anger and wrath of the God are often paired together to depict God’s righteous indignation against wickedness and rebellion against Him. See Psalm 2:5; 69:24; 78:49; Isaiah 13:9, 13; 30:27; 63:6; Ezekiel 25:14; Micah 5:15; Nahum 1:2; Habakkuk 3:12; Zephaniah 3:8 and Romans 2:8. Often, God’s anger and wrath are depicted to be against His own people who continually rebelled against Him, as Jeremiah 7:20 and Ezekiel 22:31 are two of many examples in the Scriptures.

The Messiah continues His description of the result of trampling the wicked of Edom (and the nations) by stating that, “their juice (“lifeblood” in the NASB), splattered on my garments, and all my clothes are
ruined.” This description the Messiah’s blood-stained garments is also pictured in Revelation 19:13 as “a garment sprinkled with blood.” Victor Buksbazen further explains:

“Jehovah trampled a winepress, but the grapes were the grapes of His wrath. Their life sap (nitscham) spurted and reddened His clothing. The extreme wrath of God is here described.” Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 471).

63:4 For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redeemed has come.

As recorded in Isaiah 63:4, the Messiah explains the reason for the trampling of His enemies. Isaiah had earlier stated the great mission of the Servant, the Messiah in 61:1-3. There is a dual purpose revealed in the writings of Isaiah for the return of the Messiah, which will be the “day of the Lord” that is often described in the OT with positive and negative aspects. He will come to exact a “day of vengeance” and also bring a “year of my redeemed” (redemption). The word “vengeance” is the Hebrew naqam, describing God’s righteous, just and holy action of exacting judgment upon individuals and nations that are wicked beyond redemption. They have brought the vengeance of God upon themselves because of their continual sinfulness and rebelliousness against Him. Vengeance is also the translation of naqam in Isaiah 34:8; 35:4; 47:3; 59:17 and 61:2. Other occurrences in the OT for naqam include Leviticus 26:25; Deuteronomy 32:35, 41, 43; Psalm 58:10; Proverbs 6:34; Ezekiel 24:8; 25:12, 15; and Micah 5:15. It is usually described as an action that God undertakes for only God can enact vengeance with holiness.

It is not that vengeance will only last a day and redemption only a year. Isaiah is using poetic language to describe two very necessary and critical aspects of the reason for the return of the Messiah. This dual purpose is also recorded in Isaiah chapters 2, 34, 35 and 61. God’s holiness, justice and righteousness could not co-exist with wickedness and rebellion. When the Messiah comes to establish His reign upon the earth following the Tribulation, He will of necessity need to rid the world of those who are in their sinfulness in opposition to Him. This “cleansing” of the world will not be gentle but will be a brutal purging of wickedness with the lifeblood of all who oppose God being spilt. This bringing of judgment upon the wicked should not be seen as a surprise or a blind attack upon them for they have been repeatedly warned of Christ’s coming judgment throughout Scripture and by the missionary and evangelistic efforts of countless servants of God, perhaps beginning with Enoch, Jude vss. 14-15 and continuing right up to the return of Jesus Christ.

The second aspect of this dual purpose of the Messiah’s return is described as “the year of my redeemed has come.” Many versions have “the year of my redemption.” The time for the Messiah to bring salvation and righteousness will have come. As stated previously in these study notes on Isaiah, righteousness is the fruit of salvation. The Messiah will provide physical rescue for His faithful remnant who will be surrounded by their enemies and spiritual salvation to the people of the earth who have faith in the Messiah which will result in an earth that will be populated by those who are redeemed and bearing the righteousness of their Messiah. The words “the year of my redeemed has come” could also be understood as this is the time for His redeemed to receive the blessings He has promised them when He comes to establish His righteous and peaceful kingdom. It will be their time to fully glorify the Messiah in all the earth before all nations. See notes on Isaiah 62:12.

63:5 I looked, but there was no one to help; I was shocked that there was no one to lend support.
Therefore my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath sustained me.
In Isaiah 63:5, the Messiah continues the reasons for His coming both in vengeance and redemption. In the previous verses, both of these aspects of the day of the Lord, redemption (salvation) and vengeance (wrath) are mentioned. In 63:5 the Messiah adds that His own arm brought salvation and wrath because there was no one to help or support Him in these activities. It was not that the Messiah looked around just before He was to return and was surprised that no one “stood up” to assist Him. This knowing that no one else could possibly fulfil these responsibilities came before the world was created. It was with this knowledge that the heavens and the earth were created. It was also with this knowledge that the triune God conceived the plan of redemption for God’s image bearers, with whom He planned to spend eternity. God planned, before the world was made, to live among (tabernacle) redeemed humanity, who could righteously display and declare His glory to all creation forever. Since no was able to assist or lend support to the Messiah, His own arm brought (enacted) salvation and His own wrath (divine and righteous anger or indignation against all wickedness), sustained Him in these tasks. See notes on Isaiah 59:16.

63:6 I trampled down the peoples in my anger, and made them drunk with my wrath, and I spilled their lifeblood on the ground.

With the explanation of His divine actions in 63:4-5, the Messiah concludes that the peoples, not just the single nation of Edom were (prophetic perfect tense) trampled down in His anger. In trampling down the wicked peoples of the earth, they were made drunk in His wrath as he spilled their lifeblood on the ground. The words “made them drunk with my wrath” are similar to the words of God as recorded in Isaiah 51:17. As stated in Revelation 14:8-11, Babylon, during the Tribulation will make all nations drink of the wine of her immorality and those who worship the beast and receives the mark of the beast, will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, Revelation 14:9-11. Babylon itself would be given the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath, Revelation 16:19. The continual sinfulness of the wicked will cause them to plunge even deeper into wickedness, (become drunk), as they relentlessly prove they deserve the wrath of a holy God. In their drunken state of sin, from which they will be unable to recover, they will be plunged without rescue into the wrath of God and they will have no one to blame for their demise and destruction but themselves. Thomas Constable concludes this section with a brief explanation:

“This is a picture of Messiah on earth, following His second advent, having defeated Israel's enemies (cf. 52:7-12; Zech. 14:3; Rev. 14:17-20; 16:16; 19:13, 15-21). The enemies are unbelievers living in the Great Tribulation who refuse to accept the Warrior's previous sacrifice of Himself for their sins—hostile enemies of the Israelites (cf. Rev.12:15-19).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 317).

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 63:1-6
63:1 The Walk of the Messiah: Identification
63:2-4, 6 The Wrath of the Messiah: Vindication
63:5 The Way of the Messiah: Salvation

Isaiah 63:7-64:12

Many Biblical scholars suggest that the section 63:7-64:12 is a cohesive unit describing a lament by Isaiah on behalf of the people of Judah in which the prophet recalls God’s past gracious acts and the people’s rebellion against Him which grieved His Holy Spirit. Because of the sins of God’s covenant people, God turned from helping them to fighting against them. The prophet appeals to God as their Father to return to them for they acknowledge their past unrighteous acts and confess their iniquities against God. Isaiah also pleads to God to restrain His punishment and look upon them for they are His people. In this study of the prophecy of Isaiah, this longer section is divided into two units, 63:7-14 and 63:15-64:12. David L. Cooper provides a brief introduction to Isaiah 63:7-64:12:
THE PRIMARY statement of the confession of the national sin which the Hebrew people will make ..... is found in Isaiah 53:1-9. That the people of Israel will make this confession was foretold by Moses in Leviticus 26:39,40. It was likewise made known by Hosea in 5:14--6:3.

In this second version of her confession, the penitent remnant of Israel will enter into a fuller detailed statement. It is true that the deep theological meaning that is set forth in chapter 53:1-9 is not brought out in this second version of it, which is found in Isaiah 63:7--64:12. But there are many statements made that will throw new light on this future penitential acknowledgment of the age long sin.


Starting in 63:7, a sharp division occurs between what Isaiah had previously declared in his prophecy, 60:1-63:6, regarding the blessings of the return of the Messiah and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom and a lament concerning the recalling of God’s faithfulness and the rebellion of God’s people. Isaiah recalls God’s loyal love and praiseworthy deeds towards the house of Israel, vs. 7. God had become the Savior of His covenant people, vss. 8-9, but they rebelled against God and grieved His Holy Spirit, so He turned against them, vs. 10. Then the people remembered God’s past deeds, including the role of the Holy Spirit, in the days of Moses on their behalf in which He led His people to make His name glorious, vss. 11-14.

63:7 I will recall the loyal love of the LORD,
and the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
because of all the LORD has done for us,
and the great goodness toward the house of Israel,
that he did for them according to his mercies,
and according to his great loyal love.

This section recalling God’s past praiseworthy deeds on behalf of His covenant people, begins in 63:7 with a remembrance of God’s loyal covenant love, which is the Hebrew word, hesed. 63:7 also ends with this reminder of God’s loyal covenant love. The words “loyal love” hesed, are translated as “lovingkindness” in the KJV, NKJV, NASB and “steadfast love” in the ESV. Hesed is also translated in the DASV in Isaiah 16:5 as “loyal love;” in 40:6 as “beauty;” in 54:8 as “everlasting love;” in 54:10 as “loyal love;” in 55:3 as “loyal covenant;” and in 57:1 as “devout.” It is appropriate to understand this “loyal love,” lovingkindnesses, steadfast love, as God’s covenant love (unmerited love or favor), towards His beloved and chosen people. The prophet begins his introduction to the confession of the house of Israel’s national sin with a reminder that God is absolutely loyal to the covenants He has made by oath to His people. God faithfully exhibits “loyal love” to His people by His praiseworthy deeds. It is not just a lot of nice sounding words that God gives His people. He proves His love by His deeds on their behalf and the people are to respond to Him with praise.

The deeds of God that result from His loyal covenant love to His people are also described as His “great goodness” toward the house of Israel which are also described as “according to his mercies.” These deeds are most likely His covenants He has made with their forefathers, Abraham, Moses and David. They also would include memorable acts such as the parting of the Red Sea, as His people were led in safety out of slavery in Egypt, and many other acts including the destruction of the army of Assyria outside of the city of Jerusalem in the days of king Hezekiah. King David, who was often a recipient of God’s covenant loyal love,
proclaimed, Remember, O LORD, your compassion and your loyal love, for they have existed from ancient times. Psalm 25:6. Isaiah concluded this verse by repeating the reason why God performed these praiseworthy deeds, it was according to His great “loyal love,” which is His lovingkindnesses and His steadfast love.

63:8 For he said, "Surely, they are my people, children that will not betray me.”
So he became their Savior.

Isaiah 63:8 can be a difficult verse to understand if viewed outside of God’s covenant relationship with His chosen people. In the context of 63:7-14, God’s words, “children that will not betray me” is certainly an aspect of a covenant. God is expressing the covenant formula, “I will be their God and they shall be my people,” Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 37:23, 27; 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Hebrews 8:10. See also: Exodus 6:17; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32:28; Ezekiel 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; Zechariah 8:8 and 13:9. This expectation of the chosen people to be “His people” is also demonstrated earlier in Isaiah in the “parable” of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7. God’s expectation of a “good” result from His labor in the vineyard was just and righteous. It was not a fault of God that His people did not live in accordance with His expectations. It is also important to place the displeasure of God, expressed in Isaiah 5:2 and 63:10 within His omniscience, that He knows beforehand all that will take place. Within this prior knowledge that God possesses, He still expresses His displeasure when His covenant people do not act in accordance to the requirement of His covenants, even though He knew they would not. This prior knowledge is demonstrated in God’s love for all mankind, in that before the world was created, God had a plan that would provide salvation for them, through the involvement of His beloved Son, whom Isaiah identifies as the “Servant.” The word “betray” in the DASV is the Hebrew word “shaqar,” which has the primary meaning of “to lie,” or to “deal falsely.” It occurs six times in the OT, Genesis 21:23; Leviticus 19:11; 1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 44:17; 89:13 and Isaiah 63:8. In contrast to the fickleness of mankind, 1 Samuel 15:29 states, “The Glory of Israel will not lie or change his mind, for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”

In accordance with His covenants with His people, God became their Savior. This is implied in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants for in order for God to fulfill all of the covenant promises, His people would of necessity need to be spiritually preserved, so that they can benefit from these promises. The provision of salvation in which God Himself became their Savior is an express promise of the new covenant, in that it is God who puts a new heart within His people and a new spirit within them, Ezekiel 36:26; and God will forgive their sins and will no longer remember these sins, Jeremiah 31:34. God became their Savior by His own strength and power, Isaiah 59:16; 63:5. In becoming the Savior of His covenant people, He saves them spiritually and also He continues to save them physically, for example, from slavery in Egypt and from certain death at the hands of the Assyrians. He will continue to save them physically even into the days of the Tribulation, Isaiah 26:20-21 and preserve them, Zechariah 14: 3-5, so they will be able to sing His praises in the messianic kingdom and forever. Messiah’s saving His people physically does not mean they will live in their physical human state forever. It does mean they were saved from danger at a specific time but they would certainly all face death at a later time.

Salvation is one of the great themes of Isaiah, beginning with the prophet’s names which means “The Lord is salvation.” The theme of salvation permeates the entire writing of Isaiah. It is seen in words such as Savior, salvation, save, saved, Redeemer, redeem and redeemed. Salvation has both a physical aspect and a spiritual aspect. The Lord saves His covenant people from physical destruction and death at a specific time and He saves them spiritually, for all eternity, through the sacrificial atoning work of the Servant, who is the Messiah. The spiritual salvation of the Lord is extended by God’s love to all the nations of the earth.
Salvation is provided to God’s covenant people and to the Gentiles through the power and strength of the LORD, Yahweh and the Messiah for there was no one else who was capable or willing to stand up for God’s people. Isaiah states God’s words in 43:11, “I, even I, am the LORD, besides me this is no savior.” The Savior provides salvation which is everlasting, as declared by Isaiah in 45:17, “But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation.” It may surprise some that salvation is not the highest or most exalted gift of God to the inhabitants of the world. The most exalted and praiseworthy gift of God to the world is God Himself. The purpose of salvation is to provide a means that satisfies God’s wrath against sin and to provide a way that rebellious sinners can be declared justified in God’s eyes and have an unrestricted (unhindered by sin) access into His presence. God created the world for His glory. God’s image bearers were created so they would righteously display and declare His glory forever. Also, God’s intention for making covenants with His people is so that He would be their God and they would be His people.

These people are reckoned or considered righteous by their faith in God and specifically their faith in the shed blood of God’s Son, the Messiah. It is this shed blood which is the sign of the new covenant. Those who have faith in the shed blood of the Messiah for salvation, participate in the blessings of the new covenant. Those who are “in Christ,” by their faith in Him, also participate in the blessings of the unilateral covenants, the Abrahamic covenant and the Davidic covenant. There is no faith required to enjoy the benefits of the Noahic covenant, for it was made by God as a benefit to all mankind. Yet the Noahic covenant does have an important role in God’s eternal plans for His creation. God preserves mankind to give opportunity for them to have faith in the Messiah. Those who have faith will live eternally to righteously display and declare His glory to all creation.

63:9 In all their suffering, he also suffered,
    and the angel of his presence saved them.
In his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
    he picked them up,
    and carried them all the days of old.

Isaiah 63:9 contains deep theological truth which needs to be unpacked so that its great meaning can be clearly understood. At first glance, the words “In all their suffering, he also suffered,” may cause some confusion as to its meaning. Biblical scholars also have suggested differing interpretations of the Hebrew words into English which have caused many to misunderstand the actual meaning of these words. The KJV has perhaps the better translation, “In all their affliction he was afflicted.” Following an exegetical explanation of various Hebrew words, Victor Buksbazen concludes,

“We have followed the obvious sense of the text, which states that God does care and shares our afflictions. This is in stark contrast to the ancient Greek concept of god, as being completely indifferent to the affairs of men, a god who is “without passion or compassion.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 473).

David L. Cooper concurs by stating:

“According to verse 9--"In all their affliction he was afflicted"--God the Father is afflicted in the affliction of His people. Here again we have an anthropomorphic expression. Although the language is of this type, it expresses the idea that God is in full sympathy with His people in their sufferings. Any true parent suffers when his child is in distress.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – June 1946).

The LORD cares for His people and has compassion for them. He lovingly considers their sufferings and heals them. As a Father to His people, He also feels their afflictions. He has and shows great emotions. The Holy Spirit grieves when God’s covenant people rebel against Him, Isaiah 63:10. He is slow to anger, and
abounds in lovingkindness, Exodus 34:6; Nehemiah 9:17; and Joel 2:13. The needs of His people are always before Him for He has inscribed them on the palms of His hands, Isaiah 49:16.

The specific reference in Isaiah 63:9 to the suffering of His people may refer to the days when the people of Israel were bound in slavery in Egypt as the comment at the end of the verse implies, that He had “picked them up and carried them all the days of old.” Because of the suffering of His chosen people, Isaiah states that the “angel of his presence saved them.” This is the only occurrence of the phrase “angel of his presence” in the Scriptures. The LORD had previously mentioned His presence in Exodus 33:12-15. This may have been a reference to the angel of His presence whom God had set to guide and guard His people, Exodus 14:19; 23:20-23; 32:34; Judges 2:1, and many other passages. It was the angel of the LORD who spoke to Moses in terms that can only be understood as the voice of God, Exodus 3:2. Many Biblical scholars believe that these occurrences in the OT are pre-incarnate appearances of the Messiah, the Son of God, who would be later born in Bethlehem and be called Jesus, because He was sent to save His people from their sins, Matthew 1:21. Victor Buksbazen again comments,

“The angel of his face” (or Presence) – malach panav. This angel personifies the presence of God with His people to save and protect them. He is the supreme manifestation of God. This angel is mentioned on a number of occasions (Ex. 14:19; 23:20-23; 32:12, 14, 15 etc.). In later rabbinical literature, “The Angel of His Face” became another name for the Messiah.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 473).

The role of the “angel of His presence” was to save His people. In the context of Isaiah 63:9, this saving was a physical rescue of the LORD’s covenant people from their bondage in Egypt. The LORD redeemed (physical rescue) His people by picking them up through the work of His angel and “carried them all the days of old.” It was not that the LORD carried them in His arms but He “carried them” by leading them to safety including the parting of the Red Sea and eventually leading them to the land He had promised them. He also “carried them” by protecting them often in the midst of war with their enemies and in His choice of their leaders. But this leading and protection of God, often through the ministry of His angel, was not for all occasions. When His covenant people rebelled against Him and walked in wickedness, God often withdrew His protection. This withdrawing of His presence was always to chastise them and not to remove them. Isaiah declared the LORD’s intentions as recorded in 54:7-8:

7“*For a brief moment I abandoned you,*
but with great compassion I will regather you.
8 *In overflowing wrath I hid my face from you for a moment,*
but with everlasting love I will have mercy on you,”
says the LORD your Redeemer.

63:10 But they rebelled,
and grieved his Holy Spirit.
Therefore he turned into their enemy,
and he himself fought against them.

The LORD was faithful to His covenants with His chosen people and He rightfully expected His people to be faithful to Him as recipients of the blessings of these covenants. “But they rebelled.” This could be a sub-title for the name of His people. Before the LORD met with Moses upon Mount Sinai to enact what Biblical scholars call the Mosaic covenant, He requested obedience from His people. The people responded by stating, as recorded in Exodus 19:8: “All the people answered together, All that the LORD has commanded, we will do.” The first three words of Isaiah 63:10, “but they rebelled,” could be inserted immediately after the words declared in Exodus 19:8 by the people of Israel. The word rebelled is the Hebrew word marah, which
has the meaning of disobedience and rebellion. It often occurs in the context of God’s people being disobedient to Him as an act of rebellion. The word *marah* also occurs in Isaiah in 1:20; 3:8 and 50:5. See also Nehemiah 9:26; Jeremiah 4:17; 5:23; Ezekiel 5:6; 20:8, 13, 21; and Hosea 13:16. The rebellion of the people of Israel was the sad story of their wilderness journeys. Psalm 78:40-41 states,

40 *How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness,*  
*and grieved him in the desert!*  
41 *They turned again and tested God,*  
*and provoked the Holy One of Israel.*

The rebelliousness of His people was so great that it “grieved his Holy Spirit.” This verse and the next are the only two places in Isaiah where the Holy Spirit is mentioned. In the OT it also occurs in Psalm 51:11 during the confession of his sin and plea that God would not take His Holy Spirit from him. Isaiah 63:10 describes the Holy Spirit as One who was grieved. This is an experience that only persons can have and therefore this verse is a testimony to the personhood of the Holy Spirit. It also speaks of the divinity of the Holy Spirit as does Isaiah 61:1. The role and ministry of the Holy Spirit is revealed more fully in the NT. However, there is evidence in the verses cited and including other verses in the OT that state the singular “Spirit,” that the Holy Spirit was active in the outworking of God’s plans for His creation before the Messiah’s first advent. Stephen, the servant of God was martyred by the Jewish leaders for his testimony concerning their sins and particularly for calling them betrayers and murderers of the Righteous One, the Messiah. Stephen told the Jewish leaders, as recorded in Acts 7:51: “You are stubborn and uncircumcised in heart and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit, just like your forefathers did. “

The latter half of Isaiah 63:10 states that because of their continual rebellion against Him, the LORD became their enemy and He Himself fought against them. Isaiah had often spoken of the LORD being against His people and He would fight against them as they are considered His enemy, 1:25; 5:25; 10:10-12, 25; 28:16-22; and 29:1-4. See also Leviticus 26;25; Jeremiah 30:14; Lamentations 2:5 and 17. The LORD’s purpose in fighting against His own people, in the most part by sending foreign nations against them, is restorative so that they will repent and return with a whole heart to Him. His overall plan was always to bring salvation to those who had faith in Him so that His redeemed people would forever declare His glory to all God’s creation. This plan is also declared by Isaiah in the last phrase of 63:14, “to make your name glorious.”

63:11-14 *Then they remembered the days of old,*  
*Moses and his people,*  
*Where is he who brought them up out of the sea*  
*with the shepherds of his flock?*  
*Where is he who put his Holy Spirit among them,*  
*who caused his glorious arm to be at the right hand of Moses?*  
*Where is he who divided the waters before them,*  
*to make himself an everlasting name?*  
*Where is he who led them through the watery depths?*  
*Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble.*  
*Like cattle that go down into the valley,*  
*the Spirit of the LORD provided them rest.*  
*This is the way you led your people,*  
*to make your name glorious.*
The DASV clarifies in Isaiah 63:11, some textual translation issues that are not clear in the KJV and NKJV specifically in the first phrase. The KJV and NKJV state, “Then he remembered the days of old.” Victor Buksbazen clarifies these translation issues:

“All his people remembered the days of old, of Moses”

This is one of the especially perplexing sentences in Isaiah. In Hebrew, it begins with the word – “vaizkor” – “he remembered.” The question arises to whom does “he” refer: to Jehovah or to Israel? It should be noted that the Hebrew text reads: “Moses his people.” Some manuscripts amended the Hebrew text to read: “Moses, his servant” (“abdo” instead of “ammo”). Our translation gives the most feasible sense. It means that the people having experienced a period of great calamities finally woke up to the fact that all their misfortunes and miseries were the direct result of their disobedience and unfaithfulness.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 473).

It is best to understand Isaiah 63:11-14 as a continued narrative which immediately follows the statement of God’s fighting against His people. Because of God’s actions of opposing His people, they remembered or as Victor Buksbazen states above, they “finally woke up” and they realized that God’s actions against them were due to their own sinfulness and rebellion against God, 63:10, “But they rebelled.” As recorded in Isaiah 63:11, the people first remembered the days of Moses and they asked about God’s presence, “Where is he?” They recalled that it was God who brought their ancestors up out of the sea (the Red Sea) when the ancient Israelites were fleeing from the armies of Pharaoh of Egypt, Exodus chapter 14. God brought His chosen people up out of the sea “with the shepherds of his flock.” These shepherds were most likely Moses, Aaron and Miriam, Psalm 77:20; and Micah 6:4. Psalm 95:4 is a reminder that God’s people are sheep, the people of his pasture. The leaders of the Israelites are thus likened to shepherds who look after the flock of God. In some manuscripts the word “shepherds” is the singular “shepherd” and if this is correct, this would be a reference to just Moses who alone is mentioned in the first part of Isaiah 63:11.

The second question of Isaiah 63:11, “where is he,” relates to two acts of the LORD. The First act was that He” put His Holy Spirit among them.” This is likely a reference to Numbers 11:16-30, which records the incident of the LORD putting the Spirit on the elders of the people of Israel as it was also upon Moses. The purpose of putting the spirit also upon seventy elders was that they would assist Moses with the oversight of the people. The second act of God, following the question, “where is he?” of 63:11, is stated in the first phrase of 63:12. The people also recalled that it was God who “caused his glorious arm to be at the right hand of Moses.” This could be a reference to the plagues of Egypt, Exodus chapters 7-11, where God requested that Moses stretch out his staff, (by implication his arm that held the staff), so that God would bring the plagues upon the land of Egypt. It could also refer to the incident of the crossing of the Red Sea, Exodus chapter 14, where God requested Moses stretch out his hand so that the Red Sea could be parted and then brought together again. It may also refer to the conflict of the people of Israel with the Amalekites, Exodus 17:8-16, where the Israelites prevailed against there enemies as long as the hand of Moses was raised. In the context of Isaiah 63:11-14, it may be that Isaiah was only referencing the Red Sea crossing. The point here is not trying to be so exact as to pinpoint the actual historical reference, but that it was God’s glorious arm that was the power that enabled miraculous events to occur. This is another expression of an anthropological description of God, who is Spirit, and does not have a physical arm. It is used to aid the understanding of the great power of God behind these events. See also Exodus 6:6 and 15:16.

The question in Isaiah 63:12, “where is he,” relates to the dividing of the waters (the Red Sea) before them and may suggest that this is the reference to God’s glorious arm being used, as mentioned in the first part of 63:12. The purpose of mentioning the dividing of the waters before His chosen people is that by this act, God made for Himself “an everlasting name.” Isaiah would again state this at the end of 63:14, “to make your name glorious.” The parting of the Red Sea to allow His people to escape the armies of the Egyptians is a
most revered topic among God and His people. It was the topic of what is called the song of Moses and Israel, recorded in Exodus chapter 15:1-21. It was recalled by Moses as recorded in Deuteronomy 11:4. Those who were in Canaan in Jericho had heard about this great miracle and feared the God of the Israelites, Joshua 2:9-11. God reminded His people of His miraculous works including the incident at the Red Sea, Joshua 24:6-7. See also Nehemiah 9:9-11. Many psalms, the hymnbook of the ancient Israelites, recount this miracle, Psalm 66:5-6; 74:13; 78:13, 53; 106:8-9, 22; 136:12-15. It is also mentioned in the NT in Hebrews 11:29.

However, it was not just the recalling of this miracle at the Red Sea that is critical to the understanding of God’s purposes. He accomplishes all that He does to make for Himself an everlasting glorious name. God told Moses that His name was “I AM WHO I AM.” It was His name forever and His memorial name to all generations, Exodus 3:13-15. God is jealous of His name, Exodus 20:7, 34:14. God is faithful to His covenant people on account of His great name, 1 Samuel 12:22. He redeemed His chosen people to make a name for Himself, 2 Samuel 7:23 so that His name would be magnified forever, 2 Samuel 7:26. The Psalms are replete with praises to God’s name. Isaiah mentioned His exalted name, 12:4; for His name was the desire of the souls of His people, 26:8. Everyone who is called by His name has been created for His glory, 43:7.

God is merciful and even delays His wrath for the sake of His name to preserve a people for Himself, 48:9. God brings His righteous judgment so that His name will be feared throughout the earth, 59:19. He accomplishes great things to make (for) Himself an everlasting name, 63:12. His accomplishes His works to make His name glorious, 63:14.

The Lord Jesus, the Messiah taught His disciples to pray, requesting that the Father’s name will be hallowed (in all the earth), Matthew 6:9. Jesus prayed to His Father that His name would be glorified, and His Father responded, “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” John 12:28. The Scriptures close with the promise that the name of God will be upon the foreheads of the redeemed forever, Revelation 22:4.

Isaiah 63:13-14 contains the last of the four “where is he,” questions in this section, 63:11-14. The statements related to this fourth question have to do with the leading of the LORD of the ancient Israelites through the depths of the Red Sea, “the watery depths.” When the LORD separated the waters of the Red Sea, He also made the ground smooth enough for horses not to stumble and for cattle to traverse the ground just as if they were going to a pasture down in the valley. The Spirit of the LORD (the Holy Spirit), 63:14, was upon the people of Israel as they walked through the towering walls of water. The Spirit provided them rest in that they had the calm assurance that God was protecting them. God led His people in this miraculous way so that His name would be made glorious. See above for a discussion on the name of the LORD. Some Biblical scholars suggest that the mention of the word “rest” in 63:14 refers to the LORD’s leading of His people into the land of promise that is mentioned in Deuteronomy 12:9. However the topic of this entire section, 63:11-14 is best understood as referring to God’s great miracle at the Red Sea for which His name is glorified.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 63:7-14

63:7-9 Recalling of God’s Past Deeds
   63:10a Rebellion of God’s People
   63:10b Response of God
63:11-14 Recalling of God’s Past Deeds

8. Isaiah’s Prayer for Mercy from God: 63:15-64:12

The previous section, Isaiah 63:7-14 was a lament by the prophet, on behalf of God’s people, recalling the past miraculous deeds of God and admitting that God’s covenant people had rebelled against Him. The larger section, 63:15-64:12 records Isaiah’s prayer for God to consider His covenant people, to return to them and
perform awesome deeds as He had in the past. Isaiah prayed that God would look down and consider him for
God’s compassion (seems) to have been withheld from the prophet, 63:15. Isaiah acknowledges that God is
their Father and Redeemer who has a longstanding reputation, 63:16. The prophet laments God’s absence and
blames God for the waywardness of His people, 63:17. Their sanctuary (temple) has been destroyed and God
seems to have deserted them, 63:18-19. Isaiah pleads for God to return and perform His awesome deeds as
He did in the past, 64:1-3. The prophet acknowledges that there is no God like Him who responds to those
who act righteously, 64:4a. Isaiah next confesses the sins of God’s people, 64:4b-7, and pleads for Him to act
beneficially on their behalf and not severely punish them, for their temple has been burned and other places
have become ruins, 64:8-12.

The identification of the historical setting of Isaiah’s prayer has been the cause of much debate among
Biblical scholars. Many consider that the timeframe of the occasion of this prayer was following the return of
the exiles from Babylon. Others think it has a setting during the end of the Tribulation and prior to the return
of the Messiah. For Isaiah’s audience, this prayer would have been very difficult to understand as the temple
was standing and in full operation all the years of Isaiah’s life. So, this prayer was not about local events.
Isaiah certainly would have vividly remembered His encounter with God, recorded in Isaiah chapter 6, and
would not have easily forgotten God’s miraculous actions of destroying the Assyrian army when Jerusalem
was threatened with disaster, Isaiah chapters 36-37. Isaiah may have been given the vision of the destruction
of the temple, 64:11, not long after the events recorded in chapters 36-37. The vision of the destruction of the
temple, 63:18 and 64:11, may have caused Isaiah much concern and deep sadness and thus he was led to pray
the words, recorded in 63:15-64:12.

As has been discussed in the notes on the preceding chapters of Isaiah, the setting for Isaiah’s declarations of
the words that God has given to him, including chapters 63 and 64, best fits a far future eschatological time
frame during which time, God is dealing with the rebellion of His covenant people and the wickedness of the
peoples of the world. The comments in the notes to follow will reflect the implications of this far future
viewpoint.

63:15 Look down from heaven,
   and look down from your holy and glorious home.
Where is your zeal and your mighty acts?
The yearning of your heart and compassion
   are withheld from me.

Isaiah laments the fact that God is not present with him and he pleads to God to look upon him. The prophet
painfully acknowledges that God’s zeal, and mighty acts and also the yearning of God’s heart and
compassion towards him have been withheld from him and by implication the covenant people of God.
Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The pathos of verses 15-19 is unsurpassed in all of Isaiah. Only a prophet who had so completely identified
himself with his people would dare plead with God in such grief-stricken and almost reproachful terms.”
(Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 474).

David L. Cooper adds,

“Beginning with verse 15, we have a record of Israel's prayer and confession of her national sin. Thus the
convicted remnant will pray: "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of
thy glory: where are thy zeal and thy mighty acts? the yearning of thy heart and thy compassions are restrained
toward me" (Isa. 63:15).
The prophet is still thinking of himself as being in the midst of the Tribulation with Israel and praying in her behalf. He prays just as anyone who leads a public gathering in intercession, for he uses the personal pronoun, me, and at other times he uses the plural, us. In his petition he looks up to heaven and calls upon the Lord to look down from His position of glory and of holiness and to act in behalf of the nation. When we compare this petition (vs. 15) with Psalm 80:1f, we see a like situation. In this latter chapter, however, the Shepherd of Israel, the Messiah of the nation, is there addressed. Since both passages are a record of the petitions that will be offered by the penitent remnant of the nation at the end of the Tribulation, it is quite obvious that the one here addressed is the same as the one to whom the psalmist spoke.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – June 1946).

The prophet implores God to “look down from heaven” which is described as God’s “holy and glorious home.” Heaven was understood as the dwelling place of God, where His throne was located, Isaiah 66:1. This place is different from the “heavens” which comprise the atmosphere above as well as the place where stars are seen. The Old Testament introduces the connection between heaven and God’s kingdom: “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all,” Psalm 103:19. See also 1 Chronicles 29:11; and Daniel 4:34. However, the connection between heaven as God’s kingdom is more fully developed in the New Testament where the phrases “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are used interchangeably. The apostle Paul describes this place as God’s “heavenly kingdom” in 2 Timothy 4:18. It is not often that the Scriptures open the “curtains” of heaven and allow a glimpse of what heaven is like, but both the Old and New Testaments reveal aspects of God’s heavenly kingdom, including conversations that occur there. See for example, Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Revelation chapters 4-22. The LORD, Yahweh, the Father of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, spoke from heaven, Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:21; 9:35; and John 12:28.

In 63:15, Isaiah asked God, “where is your zeal and your mighty acts?” Zeal is the Hebrew word qin’ah, which has the meaning of ardor, zeal and jealousy. It is translated often as jealousy, as for example in Ezekiel 36:5-6 where the LORD has spoken in the fire of His jealousy, vs. 5 and in His jealously and wrath, vs. 6. Isaiah had often referred to the zeal of the LORD. The burning zeal of the LORD also drives His fury to devour His enemies, Isaiah 26:11; 42:13; and 59:17. The zeal of the LORD also drives Him to accomplish His great purposes for His Son, the Messiah, Isaiah 9:7, and for the remnant of His people, Isaiah 37:32, which Isaiah may have had in mind when He spoke the words recorded in Isaiah 63:15. Isaiah had declared the mighty acts of God, in his preamble to his prayer, Isaiah 63:11-14. The mighty acts or deeds of God are also mentioned by Isaiah in 64:1-4.

In the last phrase of 63:15, Isaiah relates a personal grievance against God. He states, “The yearning of your heart and compassion are withheld from me.” Most English versions have the object of Isaiah’s grievance as against “me” but the NIV has “from us.” The literal sense of the Hebrew favors the singular, “from me.” See notes on this phrase from Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 680. The DASV, NASB, NIV and ESV state these words as a fact that has happened, while the KJV and NKJV have them as a question as if Isaiah is asking God, have His yearning and compassion (mercies) been restrained from him? Both interpretations convey well the sense of Isaiah’s complaint. The prophet intensely feels the lack of God’s involvement in his life. The words in the DASV, “the yearnings of your heart” is literally a metaphor depicting the noise or stirring of the bowels as an indication of deeply felt emotions. Isaiah is complaining that God no longer has these deeply felt emotions for him nor does God display His compassion or mercy to him. This complaint is from one (the prophet) who feels as if a personal and intimate relationship has ended, such as a relationship between a child and a loving father, for Isaiah describes God as a Father to His people in the next verse.
63:16 For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, are our Father; our Redeemer, your reputation is from ancient times.

The prophet, in Isaiah 63:6, twice addresses the LORD, Yahweh as “our Father.” The depiction of the LORD as a father to His people does not occur often in the OT. Isaiah had earlier declared the prophecy that the Son to be born would have the name of “everlasting Father, Isaiah 9:6. Isaiah would again refer to God as their Father in 64:8. God had declared that Israel was His son and firstborn, Exodus 4:22, whom as a son He called out of Egypt, Hosea 11:1. See also a reference to sons in Isaiah 1:2; and a reference to God as Father in Jeremiah 3:4, 19; and 31:9. The comment by Isaiah “though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us,” may refer to these patriarchs, who are the ancestral fathers of Israel, not being present with those of Isaiah’s day to help them. Only the LORD, who is the spiritual Father of His people, is ever present to be of continual help to His people, even if Isaiah at times did not feel the closeness of God nor recognize His nearness to him and the people of Judah. Isaiah again repeats in 63:16 that the LORD is their Father and adds that He is their Redeemer. Redeemer is the Hebrew word ga’al, which refers to God as His people’s kinsmen or family redeemer. See notes on Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; and 60:16. The concluding phrase of 63:16, “your reputation is from ancient times,” can also be translated as the NKJV does, “from everlasting is your name.”

63:17 Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways, and harden our heart so we do not fear you? Return for your servants’ sake, the tribes of your inheritance.

Isaiah 63:17 appears to present some difficulties for the interpreter and for students of the Scriptures to rightfully apply what Isaiah is saying to God. Isaiah’s words are that of a complaint. On the surface the prophet seems to be blaming God for the difficulties facing His covenant people including making them wander from His ways and hardening their hearts, so they do not fear Him. Biblical scholars have given many suggested explanations that exonerate God and put the blame where it rightfully belongs, on those who have rebelled against Him, Isaiah 63:10. For example, Gary V. Smith comments:

“A second complaint to God relates to the way he rules over the earth. The questions are (a) “Why Yahweh, would you cause us to wander from your ways?” and (b) “Why would you harden our heart from fearing you?” These statements seem to come very close to blaming God for the nation’s present problems. Since God is sovereignly in control of everything that happens on the earth, it is logical to conclude that God has caused or at least allowed Israel to fall into sin and is partially responsible for their present situation. God could have intervened at any time and prevented this situation from happening by removing the temptation to sin or by making them strong enough to stand against evil. Since he did not do this, they appear to suggest that God has some direct or indirect responsibility for their situation. There is some theoretical basis for this complaint, for in 6:9–10 God encouraged Isaiah to preach and “make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull.” But in order to understand the whole picture about hardening, one must recognize that God’s hardening of people like Pharaoh (Exod 7:3, 13; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10) took place only after Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exod 7:22; 8:15, 19, 32). Elsewhere people are warned not to harden their hearts but to be generous (Deut 15:7) and not to harden their hearts like the Israelites did in their wilderness journeys (Ps 95:8), so it appears that there are two sides to hardening. This prayer could either be (a) wrongly blaming God because those praying do not want to accept full responsibility for their own sinful situation, or (b) complaining that
God did not supernaturally act to remove the temptations of life so that they would stop wandering and avoid hardening their own hearts.” (Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 682).

Thomas Constable provides his viewpoint:

“Isaiah, and all Scripture, does not present God as the direct cause of sin, unless this is the only verse in the Bible that does so, and it is not. God allows sin, and He allows people to sin, but He does not make it inevitable that they sin in any given instance of temptation (James 1:13). Isaiah meant that God had caused Israel to sin and had hardened the hearts of the people in a judicial sense (cf. 6:9-13; Rom. 1:18-32). It was because they had chosen to continue in sin, that He judged them by allowing sin to dominate them. Isaiah wanted to place as much responsibility for the Israelites' condition on God as possible.

The Lord had not saved them from their backslidings, so from this standpoint He could be said to have caused them to stray from Him, and to harden their hearts. Really Israel had done these things herself, but because God had allowed it, He could be said to be responsible for it in this sense.

Similarly, Isaiah called on God to return to His people. In actuality, the people needed to return to Him. By asking Him to return to them, Isaiah was asking God to act for them, to step in and deliver them. He strengthened his appeal by referring to Israel as the Lord's "servants" and His "heritage," terms of relationship that God Himself had used to describe His people (cf. 41:9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1; 45:4; Deut. 4:20).” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, pages 320-321).

David L. Cooper adds:

“The prophet, still leading the nation in prayer in his vision (Isa. 63:17), asks the question: "0 Jehovah, why dost thou make us to err from thy ways, and hardenest our heart from thy fear?" Whenever men do not want the truth but prefer unrighteousness and their own ways, the Lord always causes them to miss the way. This is seen in Isaiah 66:3,4 and in many other places in the Scriptures. Pharaoh hardened his heart. When he took that attitude, the Lord hardened his heart. The result of their own willfulness and stubbornness and of the Lord's judicial hardening was that Israel's heart was hardened. The same principles are operative today and always.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – June 1946).

From Isaiah’s perspective, it was easier to blame God for the failings of God’s covenant people than to put the blame where it belonged, on the hearts of the people, who continued without relenting in their wickedness and rebellion against God. Isaiah’s complaint is still heard today. Many immediately put the blame on God for life’s difficulties and tragedies. Sometimes the direct cause is the sinfulness of those who are pleading to God for rescue or relief from some hurt or harm. God is thus allowing their circumstances to be His righteous judgment upon them. They have reaped what they have sown. In other instances of difficulties, God is allowing His people to walk through troubled times in order to produce the fruit of patience and trust in God. See 2 Corinthians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 6:4; Colossians 1:11; James 1:2-4; and Revelation 13:10.

As recorded in the second half of Isaiah 63:17, the prophet pleads for the LORD to return (to be a present help) for the sake of His servant who are “the tribes of His inheritance.” Isaiah pleads that God would return to His people because they are His servant and the people who have been inherited by God. In the context of the preceding chapters, this plea best fits the last days of the Tribulation, when the faithful remnant of God’s people find themselves in great distress. The prophet’s prayer for God to return also fits the timing when the temple and other places of Israel have been destroyed by the enemies of Israel. David L. Cooper adds his comments:
“In the latter part of verse 17 is this special petition: "Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance." The one who is here addressed as Father is urged to return for His servants' sake. One cannot return to a place where he has never been. This petition assumes that this one who is recognized as Father has been here on a former occasion. They therefore know these facts and pray that He might return. Thus we see in this petition reflected the two comings of the one Messiah, separated by the interval during which He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – June 1946).

63:18 Your holy people possessed for a little while, but now our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.

As indicated in the notes of Isaiah 63:17, the timing for Isaiah plea to God was motivated by the destruction of God’s sanctuary (temple). The prophet records that God’s covenant people have only possessed this sanctuary for a “little while.” The words “little while” are translated from the Hebrew word “mits’ar,” and many understand this to be the time between the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians under king Nebuchadnezzar in 586 and the return of some of the Hebrew exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem seventy years later. Yet seventy years in the life of anyone is not “a little while” and for many it is longer than a lifetime. The term “little while” also does not fit the time when the first temple stood for 373 years, from 959-586 B.C.; nor does it fit the time the second temple (Zerubbabel’s temple) stood, from 516 B.C. to 20 B.C. when it was restored by Herod and stood for another 90 years. None of these timeframes could be understood as a little while. The period best fitting the context of Isaiah 63 and preceding chapters is that the temple that will be built in the time of the early years of Daniel’s 70th week, Daniel 9:27. It is in this “week” (seven years), according to Daniel 9:27, that a temple will exist in Jerusalem and it will be defaced by the Antichrist (the one who makes desolate - Matthew 24:15 refers to Daniel 9:27). The seven-year period of Daniel 9:27 is recognized as the time of Jacob’s trouble or distress, Jeremiah 30:7 and corresponds to the seven-year period known as the Tribulation, Revelation chapters 6-19. The first half of the Tribulation appears to be more peaceful and the Jewish people would have time to build another temple. It is this temple that will be destroyed at the end of the Tribulation. This is the only temple that will last for a “little while.” The final temple mentioned in the Scriptures will be the temple of the messianic kingdom, described in Ezekiel chapters 40-48 and it will last for a thousand years.

63:19 We have long been like those over whom you never ruled, like those who were not called by your name.

The Hebrew text for Isaiah 63:19 also contains the first verse of 64:1. Thus, the English versions split the longer verse into two. It may be that the English translators understood vs. 19 of Isaiah 63 as completing the literary unit which began with 63:15 and vs. 1 of Isaiah 64 beginning another literary unit. Isaiah seems to be concluding this first part of his complaint to God by lamenting that God’s covenant people have long been like those whom God never ruled nor were called by His name. This was a very strange statement for Isaiah to make if he was making it within the setting of his prophetic ministry. In the years of Isaiah’s servanthood to God, he certainly would have his meeting with God, Isaiah chapter 6, engraved on his mind and how could he forget God’s more recent deeds on behalf of His people by destroying the Assyrian army, Isaiah chapters 36-37. However, if Isaiah had a vision from God of the far future, and it seems he had, then the days Isaiah is referencing, are the days of the Tribulation just prior to the return of the Messiah. The confession that Isaiah made, 64:5-9 was on behalf of the covenant people of God in the future who will witness the days described in Revelation chapters 6-19. Isaiah’s confession and plea for God to return, 63:17; 64:1, therefore, must be understood as complementing his earlier confession, 53:1-9. Refer also to the plea of others for the LORD to come to them, Psalms 79:1-13; and 80:1-19. This plea by Isaiah for God to return, is the response to God who said that His people must ask for Him to return, Hosea 5:15-6:3; Jeremiah 3:11-4:2; Zechariah 12:10-
13:1. See also Leviticus 26:40-45; Deuteronomy 4:25-32; 30:1-10; and 2 Chronicles 7:13-14; and in the NT, Acts 3:17-21. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 63:18-19:

“In verses 18 and 19 of this chapter the prophet acknowledges that the Jewish people possessed the Promised Land only for a short while and that their adversaries have trodden down the sanctuary of the Lord. They therefore have been as those over whom God never bore rule. In other words, in this part of the petition, the prophet, looking back over the weary waste of the centuries--is describing Israel's scattered condition and the desolate condition of the land while she is dispersed among the nations.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – June 1946).

64:1 O that you would rip open the heavens and come down!
The mountains would quake at your presence.

Isaiah in 64:1-12, declares the second major part of his lament and prayer to God. The first major part occurs in Isaiah 63:15-19. Isaiah in 64:1-3, calls for God to act in a mighty theophany to rip apart the fabric or curtain of heaven and descend to earth to show His unequaled power by causing the mountains to quake and fire to burn so that the nations would tremble, and His adversaries would know His name. This is the prayer of a desperate people, who urgently need God to do something dramatic on their behalf. They wanted God to bring His judgment upon the nations who were oppressing them and also wanted God to vindicate them. Edward E. Hindson, in the notes for Isaiah 64:1, in the King James Commentary, page 861 suggests that the language of 64:1, specifically the rending of the heavens (or clouds) points to the second coming of Christ. Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, page 685 suggests that this plea indicates that it is an event that should already have happened. Isaiah may have been mindful of the events at Mount Sinai, Exodus 19:18. See also Judges chapter 5:4-5; Psalm 18:7-15; 97:1-5; Micah 1:3-4; Nahum 1:1-6; and Habakkuk 3:1-15.

64:2 As when fire burns the brushwood, and fire causes water to boil; may your adversaries know your name, may the nations tremble at your presence!

Continuing his dramatic plea to God to return with mighty power, Isaiah asks that God’s great presence would also cause fire to burn so that, combined with the shaking of the mountains and the burning of fire, God’s adversaries (which are also His people’s enemies) would be forced to recognize His great name and that the nations who had oppressed His covenant people would tremble (with fear) when they actually witness Him perform His mighty deeds. The prophet Habakkuk many years after the days of Isaiah prophesized, as recorded in Habakkuk 3:3-6:

3 God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah.
   His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.
4 His splendor is like the light; rays flashed from his hand; where his power was hidden.
5 Pestilence went before him, and plague followed his feet.
6 He stood and the earth shook;  
    his gaze startled the nations.  
The ancient mountains shattered;  
    the everlasting hills bow,  
    along his ancient paths.

64:3 When you did awesome deeds that we were not expecting,  
    you came down and the mountains quaked at your presence.

Isaiah recounts the events of the past when God performed mighty deeds when He appeared before the people of Israel and the mountains quaked at His presence, Exodus 19:18. The prophet reminds God of His past awesome deeds and exceedingly desires God to come down again and startle the nations and His enemies with His powerful presence. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“The twofold reference to the mountains melting away and to the fire burning the desert brushwood indicates that the prophet thinks of the theophany at Mount Sinai with all of its terrifying phenomena. In her present desperate situation Israel again needs such divine intervention to save her from her enemies and to make known to the nations who hold the name of Jehovah in contempt that He alone is the omnipotent God.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 477).

64:4 For from of old no one has ever heard,  
    or ear perceived,  
    neither has any eye seen a God besides you,  
    who works on behalf of the one who waits for him.

In Isaiah 64:4, the prophet praises God that He alone is God and there is no other God that anyone in all of history (or from all eternity), has seen. No eye has seen, and no ear has perceived of such a God (for there is truly no other God but Yahweh). Isaiah continues by stating that this God (who alone is the only God), works on behalf of those who wait for Him. The apostle Paul paraphrased this verse in his first letter to the church at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 2:9. See also Isaiah 25:9; 30:18; and 40:31. King David also praised God in a similar way, as recorded in Psalm 31:19:

How great is your goodness, which you store up for those who fear you,  
    which you have granted to those who take refuge in you, in the sight of all humanity.

The key issue that Isaiah declares in 64:4, is that God does work on behalf of those who wait for Him. The trust and patience to wait upon God was something king Ahaz could not do, Isaiah 7:12-13, and this evil king called upon Assyria for help, 2 Chronicles 28:16-27, which ended in tragedy for the king and his people. The need to wait upon the Lord is frequently recorded in the Psalms, 5:3; 27:14; 33:20; 37:7; 38:15; 40:1; 119:66; and 130:5-6. Isaiah also had earlier declared that he is waiting upon God, 8:17 and 26:8. Also Isaiah stated that God waits to have compassion on His people, 30:18. See also Lamentations 3:24, 26; Micah 7:7; and Zephaniah 3:8 and in the NT, 1 Corinthians 1:7; 4:5; James 5:7; and Jude vs. 21. God desires that His redeemed people wholeheartedly trust in Him and wait with expectation for Him to act. Those who cannot wait in hopeful trust in God and proceed in their own way and in their own strength, will fail and not only cause hurt to themselves but to many others.
64:5 You meet those who gladly do what is right,  
those who remember you in your ways.  
Look, you were angry because we sinned;  
we have persisted in our sins a long time.  
Can we really be saved?

Continuing the thought of 64:4, Isaiah states that God meets (the needs) of those who act rightfully and remember the way that God works (perhaps another reminder to wait for God). Victor Buksbazen comments:

“This is another difficult passage. The Hebrew word, “pagatha” – “thou hast met,” usually has a hostile connection. But here it is used in a positive sense, that God graciously meets those who rejoice in doing justice and remember Him, as they walk in His ways.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 478).

Isaiah abruptly turns from his praise to God and admits that God was angry (with His covenant people), because they had sinned and had persisted (continued) in their sins for a long time. Isaiah then ponders, “Can we really be saved?” Isaiah 64:5b, is again another difficult passage in which Biblical scholars are divided in their opinion as to how best to translate it. J. Alec Motyer suggests:

“The verbs sing and angry are perfect tenses – it was your fixed mind to be angry and ours to continue in sin. What a collision course! So is salvation possible?” (J. Alec Motyer, Isaiah, page 391).

David L. Cooper comments:

“There is a wonderful promise contained in verse 5: "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways ..." When the Lord tries a person's faith and such a one has not doubted, in the proper time the Lord will meet him and will solve his problems for him. The Lord will not just simply work in behalf of all and meet anyone regardless of conditions. Those who may take hold of this promise are the ones who rejoice, who work righteousness, and who remember God in His ways. Of course Isaiah 64:5 refers to Israel, the penitent remnant in the end time; but we know that, when we compare this scripture with others, this verse contains a general principle of God's dealings with His people.

According to the latter part of this verse, the remnant of Israel will acknowledge that God has been wrathful at it because it has sinned. Moreover, the people will acknowledge that they have been in their sins of a long time and will ask the question: "Shall we be saved?"--under such conditions. God is holy. He cannot tolerate sin and wickedness in His people. It they go into sin and persist therein, He can do but one thing--punish them with the hope of their returning to Him. Israel has sinned throughout her entire career, as we see by reading the Law and the Prophets.

But she has been in her sins of a long time. Let us bear in mind that this is the position of the faithful remnant. In the end of the Tribulation those convicted sinners will look back over the past centuries and will admit that they have been alienated from God and have been in their sins for a long time. In view of the history of the nation, as set forth in the New Testament and in post-biblical times, we are certain that this long time is none other than the Christian Dispensation, during which Israel has been alienated from God.

They will ask the question: "And shall we be saved?" The answer to this query is a most positive affirmation. Anyone and everyone who repents of his sins, returns to God, and accepts the redemption which Messiah purchased for him nineteen hundred years ago can be saved. Whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – June 1946). It should be noted that D. L. Cooper wrote these words before the middle of twentieth century which would have been at that time, approximately 1900 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Students of Scripture should not be harsh with Isaiah for asking if they would be saved because of their persistent sins against God. The sad history of the covenant people of God is one of continual rebellion against Him. It is not surprising that God’s people should wonder if salvation is possible because of their sinfulness. What is surprising is that God, in spite of the wickedness of His people (and all people), has elected to provide the means for their salvation. God did this by sending His Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ to earth to suffer and die as a substitutionary atoning sacrifice, sufficient for all sins of all people. Those who put their trust in God by believing in the Son’s atoning work on their behalf will indeed be saved. No works of self-righteousness by anyone is sufficient to obtain salvation. God in His loving grace and mercy provided the only way for those who would believe in the Son, to be justified before Him and have eternal life to live with Him forever to righteously display and declare His glory to all creation. For this reason, God created humans, His image bearers, to inhabit His earth and eternally to inhabit Heaven with Him.

64:6 For we are all like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all wither like a leaf, and our sins carry us away like the wind.

Isaiah in 64:6, continues his confession of the national sin of his people. See notes on Isaiah 63:19. The prophet rightfully admits that he and his people are all like those who are unclean before God. Isaiah also admits that all (every single one) of their righteous acts are like filthy rags (literally: menstrual cloths). The word “unclean” is the Hebrew word tame which has the meaning of defile as in legal or ceremonial impurity. Isaiah had cried out to God when He saw Him in a vision, “Then said I, Woe is me! For I am doomed; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts,” Isaiah 6:5. See also Isaiah 35:8; 52:1 and 11.

The sins of the people of God had also made them to wither like a leaf and like leaves that are carried away like the wind. The Scriptures confirm that the one who sins will die, Ezekiel 18:4; and Romans 6:23. The prophet rightfully depicts the results of sin of being like a leaf that dies. The result of sin also means that people will have no control over their future, for sinners will be carried away like dead leaves by the wind. It is important not to lift this verse out of its context and assume that all those who sin have no hope of salvation. King David for example, was deeply concerned about dying as a result of his sin with Bathsheba. The prophet Nathan, however, consoled the king with the news that the Lord had removed David’s sins and that he was not going to die, 2 Samuel 12:13. Those who wholeheartedly believe in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, will also have the punishment for their sins removed by God and they will not die spiritually, but have everlasting life, John 3:16.

64:7 Yet there is no one who calls on your name, or endeavors to take hold of you; for you have hid your face from us, and have consumed us by means of our iniquities.

Isaiah, in 64:7, admits that none of God’s covenant people calls upon the name of the LORD (Yahweh), or makes any effort (endeavors) to grasp onto or take hold of Him because the LORD was seemingly hiding His face from them and He was consuming (bringing His righteous judgment) to them because of their sins. God had earlier declared, in Isaiah 1:15, that He had hidden His eyes (because of wickedness), which is described as having their hands full of blood. Isaiah states in 8:17, that he will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob. The LORD declared in Isaiah 54:8, that He had hid His face from His covenant people for a moment, in His overflowing wrath. In Isaiah 57:17, God states that He hid His face from (His
people) and was angry because of (their) iniquity. In 59:2, Isaiah declared that the iniquities of the people had made a separation between them and God. See also many other examples of God hiding His face from His people because of their sinfulness, Deuteronomy 31:17-18; 32:20; Job 13:24; Psalm 13:1; 27:9; 30:7; 44:24; 69:17; 88:14; 102:2; 143:7; Ezekiel 39:23, 24, 29; and Micah 3:4. It was no surprise to Isaiah that the LORD would hide His presence, even for a moment, because of the continual sinfulness of God’s people who had “rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit,” Isaiah 63:10. The word “consumed” is the Hebrew “mug,” which is literally to melt. In Isaiah it occurs only in 64:7 and 14:31 both with the meaning of melting as a form of God’s judgment. Psalm 46:6 states, “The nations rage, kingdoms are shaken; he raises his voice, the earth melts.” See also Exodus 15:15; Joshua 2:9, 24; Psalm 75:2-3; 107:26; Amos 9:5; Nahum 1:5 and 2:6.

64:8 But now, O LORD, you are our Father;
    we are the clay, and you are the potter;
    and we all are the work of your hand.

The prophet in Isaiah 64:8 again confesses that the LORD, Yahweh is their Father. See notes for Isaiah 63:16. The metaphor Isaiah uses to describe the relationship of the LORD as their Father is one of a potter with clay. Isaiah rightly confesses that all of God’s covenant people are the work their Father’s (the Potter’s) hand. Earlier the LORD had lamented as recorded in Isaiah 29:16:

You turn things upside down!
    Should the potter be thought of as no better than the clay.
    Should the thing made say to him who made it,
        "He didn't make me."
    Should the thing formed say of him who formed it,
        "He has no understanding"?

In Isaiah 45:9, the prophet declared the LORD’s words:

Woe to him who argues with his Maker!
He who is a mere potsherd among the potsherds of the earth!
Does the clay say to the one who shapes it,
    'What do you think you are doing?'
or the work of your hands complain,
    'He has no skill in his hands?'

What calamity had to come upon God’s covenant people for them to finally admit that their sovereign LORD was indeed the potter and they were but the clay in the LORD their Father’s hands? In the days of Isaiah, when Ahaz was their earthly king, they had certainly faced adversity and disaster, 2 Chronicles 28:1-27. They had also faced what seemed like certain death during the days of Hezekiah, Isaiah chapters 36-37. However, in Isaiah’s days Jerusalem was unscathed and the temple was in full operation and the people of Jerusalem were very smug about their assumed safety. They went so far as to tell their prophets not to prophesy to them what is right, but only tell them pleasantries and they no longer wanted to hear any more of the Holy One of Israel, Isaiah 30:10-11. God in response told them, as recorded in Isaiah 30:13-14, that:

therefore this iniquity will be to you
    like a cracked and bulging wall ready to fall,
    that topples suddenly, in an instant.
He will smash it like a potter’s clay pot,
shattering it into pieces without mercy;
so that not a shard of it can be found among its pieces
for taking fire from the hearth,
or to dipping up water out of a cistern.

(Isaiah 30:13-14)

This did not happen during the days of Isaiah. Some may suggest that this prophecy from God of the potter’s clay pot being shattered into pieces and their disaster will come upon them “suddenly, in an instant,” refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Babylon or by Rome. But these events could in no way be characterized by a sudden attack as history so clearly revealed. Isaiah’s prayer of 64:8 must be a prophetic pleading regarding the Tribulation period when God’s covenant people think they will have an iron-clad treaty of peace with the world ruler only to discover that their confidence in this person was a lie. The treaty will be broken, and Jerusalem will be overtaken suddenly, leaving God’s people to turn to God in repentance and acknowledging finally, that God truly is their Father who shapes them as a potter does the clay. When these people during the Tribulation pray for God to “rip open the heavens and come down,” 64:1, He will respond to them and their Messiah will come and rescue them and also bring righteous judgment upon the nations who oppose Him.

Isaiah makes His appeal to God that His people are the work of His hands. It was God who formed them for His glory, 43:7. God as the divine Potter, molded His people for His purposes and thus He has a responsibility for that which He alone has created. Isaiah is reminding God also of His covenant responsibilities to the people He has formed and made. In this appeal, the prophet is trusting in the goodness and mercy of the LORD to compassionately consider His people. Isaiah is taking God at His word, as recorded in 44:21:

“Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel,
for you are my servant,
I have formed you;
You are my servant, O Israel,
I will not forget you.”

64:9 Do not be furious, O LORD,
neither remember our iniquity forever.
Please look at us, we are all your people.

Isaiah, in 64:9, pleads with the LORD, Yahweh, to not be furious with His covenant people and not to forever remember their iniquity. It must have been with agonizing passion that Isaiah pleads, “Please look at us, we are all your people.” Isaiah’s plea for mercy is a confession that the iniquities of the people have received righteous judgment from God. The prophet does not try to hide this or fail to admit it, for indeed God’s covenant people have reaped what their sins have sown. Isaiah begs for mercy similar to the plea of the prophet Habakkuk, “in wrath, remember mercy,” Habakkuk 3:2. Isaiah had earlier recalled God’s loyal love and the great goodness He had brought to the house of Israel, according to His mercies, Isaiah 63:5. Isaiah now pleads that God would remember with mercy His people and not forever remember the sins His people had committed. Isaiah implores God to remember His previous promise that He is the one who blots out their transgressions for His own sake and will not remember their sins, Isaiah 43:25. King David had written, in Psalm 103:8-13:
8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loyal love.
9 He will not always accuse, nor will he stay angry forever.
10 He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve, nor repaid us according to our iniquities.
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his loyal love toward those who fear him.
12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
13 Like a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

(Psalms 103:8-13)

The prophet Micah had also stated in Micah 7:18-20 that:

18 Who is a God like you, that pardons iniquity, and passes over the transgression of the remnant of his possession?

He does not remain angry forever, because he delights in loyal love.

19 He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob, and loyal love to Abraham, which you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

Isaiah reminds God, in the final clause of 64:9, that “we are all your people,” which repeats the intent of the words Isaiah had prayed in 64:8, “we are all the work of your hand.” There are no select, elite people within the covenant community of the house of Israel who deserve God’s mercy above any other members of the nation. They are together, the highest leader and the poorest outcast of the people, all God’s people who have been formed by God’s hand for the express purpose of righteously displaying and declaring His glory. Isaiah implores God to remember His purposes for His people for His greater glory and the sake of His great name, Isaiah 48:9.

64:10-11 Your holy cities have become a desert, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.

11 Our holy and beautiful temple, where our fathers praised you, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins.

The prophet in Isaiah 64:10-11, describes the reason for his lament and pleading to God, 63:15-64:12. Isaiah, in his vision of the last days, saw that the holy cities had become a desert, Zion had become a wilderness, Jerusalem was reduced to a desolation, the temple was burned, and all of the pleasant places (things) had become ruins. Some would place the setting of Isaiah’s lament following the destruction of Jerusalem by the
Babylonians in 586 B.C. However, as noted previously, the context of chapter 64 and preceding chapters is a vision of the last days during the Tribulation and just prior to the return of the Messiah. Also, God’s response to Isaiah’s lament, chapters 65 and 66, definitely indicates a time of blessing to come when the messianic kingdom is being established and then transitioning into the eternal state. David L. Cooper explains:

“In verses 10-12 we see a picture of the desolations that will be wrought in Palestine during the Tribulation. Thus penitent Israel will call the Lord’s attention to this wreckage and plead with Him to come and deliver her. This language is similar to that found in Psalm 74.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – June 1946).

Bible students should take note of the words “your” in vs. 10 and “our” in vs. 11 as Isaiah includes God in his lament. Isaiah implores God to act, 64:1 and 12, because “your” holy cities, Jerusalem and Zion were left desolate and had become like a desert and a wilderness. The words “holy cities” likely have the meaning that because all of the land of Israel during the days of Isaiah’s vision (the Tribulation) belong to God, all of the cities of His land are His holy cities. Isaiah had earlier declared the judgment of God upon Jerusalem, 3:1, 8; 10:11; 51:17; and 52:9; and upon Zion, Isaiah 1:8; 3:26; 33:14; 49:14; and 51:3. In 64:11, Isaiah described the temple as “our” holy and beautiful temple, where “our” fathers praised you, is burned with fire. Also, all “our” pleasant places (likely treasured things) have become ruins. The desolation of the temple in the days just prior to the return of the Messiah is also described in Psalm 74; Isaiah 63:18; Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15. This description of the destruction of the cities including Jerusalem and Zion and the temple that Isaiah had seen in his vision moved the prophet to again seek God’s action, 64:12. Psalm 74:1-9 is a very similar lament:

1 O God, why have you rejected us forever?
   Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?
2 Remember your congregation, which you have acquired long ago,
   which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your inheritance,
   and Mount Zion, where you dwell.
3 Turn your steps to the perpetual heap of rubble,
   all the damage that the enemy has done in the sanctuary.
4 Your adversaries have roared in the middle of your assembly place;
   there they have set up their battle streamers.
5 They seemed like those who swing axes
   in a thicket of trees.
6 Now they have torn down all its carved work
   with hatchets and hammers.
7 They have set your sanctuary on fire;
   they have profaned the dwelling place of your name
   by throwing it to the ground.
8 They said to themselves,
   "Let us totally crush them."
   They have burned up all of God's meeting places in the land.
9 We do not see any signs of deliverance;
   there are no more prophets;
   neither is there anyone among us who knows how long it will last.
(Psalm 94:1-9)
64:12 After all this, how can you restrain yourself, O LORD? How can you keep silent and punish us so severely?

To conclude his lament and plea to God, Isaiah in 64:12, boldly implored, “After all this” (the destruction of the cities and the temple), “how can you restrain yourself, O LORD?” The prophet Isaiah, who had met God and had been commissioned by Him, Isaiah chapter 6, and had been given many prophetic messages from God, was keenly aware of God’s desire to bring rescue and blessings to Jerusalem, Zion and to His covenant people. See Isaiah 1:27; 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 12:6; 18:7; 24:23; 27:12-13; 30:19; 31:4-5; 33:5, 20, 24; 35:10; 37:32; 40:1-11; 41:27; 44:1-8, 21-28; 46:13; 51:1-52:12; 54:1-17; 60:1-62:12; 63:7-14; and 65:1-66:24. Isaiah knowing all of these promises of the LORD, spoke for a far future generation who will face the devastation of the days of the Tribulation. He, as it were, looked the LORD in the face, and asked, “How can you keep silent and punish us so severely?” Isaiah identifies himself with this far future generation who will endure the righteous punishment of God. It is not that Isaiah complains about the cause of God’s judgment upon his people, for the prophet certainly knew that the sins of God’s people would result in God’s judgment. It is however, that Isaiah was pleading with God regarding the severity of the judgment that God has revealed in advance to Isaiah. See notes on Isaiah 64:9 above.

The LORD does not leave Isaiah waiting for a response to the lament of the prophet, Isaiah 63:15-64:12. In the final two chapters of the writings of Isaiah, the LORD explained that He will not keep silent but respond in His righteousness. Wickedness will receive a just response and God’s justice will prevail. God’s covenant people will not be forgotten for He will restore His people to their land and bring blessings to the land and to its people. Finally, the LORD will transition the promised peaceful messianic kingdom into the eternal state.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah 63:15-64:12:
63:15-19 The Prophet’s Complaint about Israel’s Condition
64:1-4 The Prophet’s Citation of God’s Power
64:5-7: The Prophet’s Confession of Israel’s Sin
64:8-12: The Prophet’s Call for God’s Action

Introduction to Isaiah Chapters 65 and 66

As mentioned under the notes for Isaiah 64:12, chapters 65 and 66 are a response of the complaint and confession of Isaiah on behalf of himself and God’s covenant people, stated in Isaiah 63:15-64:12. These final two chapters are also a grand conclusion to the prophetic writings of Isaiah bringing God’s judgment on wickedness to its ultimate destiny, the lake of fire, Isaiah 66:24, and bringing God’s blessings to His covenant people and all who have faith in Him to its ultimate destiny, the eternal state with God’s continual presence in the new heavens and the new earth. Chapter 65 is divided for purposes of this study, into divisions corresponding with the four paragraphs in this chapter. Vss. 1-7 discuss the idolatrous people of God. Vss.8-12 discuss the future blessings of God on the faithful remnant. Vss. 13-16 discuss God’s judgment upon the wicked and vss. 17-25 discuss God’s promise of the coming new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah chapter 66 is divided into two main sections, although there are four paragraphs in this chapter. The two main divisions for the purposes of this study are vss. 1-9, the birth of a new nation and vss. 10-24, the eternal joy and endurance of the future Jerusalem.


God response to Isaiah, begins with the statement that He made Himself available to a nation (Gentiles) that did not ask for Him, nor seek Him or call on His name, vs. 1. However, He had spread out His hands to a rebellious people (Israel), vs. 2. His people provoked God constantly by the detestable practices of pagan...
worship, vss. 3-4. These people go so far as to claim they are holier than God, but they are really like a continuous fire that produces smoke in God’s nostrils, vs. 5. God will judge these people (pay them back in full), for their pagan worship, vss. 6-7.

65:1 I made myself available to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me.
I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that did not call on my name.

God’s initial response, 65:1, to Isaiah’s lament, 63:15-64:12 may appear strange for He states that He has made Himself available to those who neither asked for Him, nor sought Him nor called on His name. God even said to them, “Here I am, here I am.” As noted below by Victor Buksbazen, Christian commentators usually apply 65:1 to the Gentile nations. The word “nation” is the Hebrew word “göi” or “goy” which is often a reference to the Gentiles but is also used as a reference to the Israelites. The apostle Paul cited this verse in Romans 10:20: “And Isaiah is very bold, and says, I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” Paul was applying Isaiah 65:1 to his teaching that the Gentiles, who did not seek after righteousness attained a righteousness that is by faith, Romans 9:33 and following. It is significant that God extends His availability to all who seek Him by faith, using language, “I am” that is typically used for His covenant people. Victor Buksbazen comments,

“The question arises who are they who did not seek Jehovah and yet found Him? The majority of Jewish commentators are of the opinion that God addresses Himself to the same people, that is the Jews, in both verses 1 and 2. On the other hand Christian commentators usually apply verse 1 to the Gentiles and verse 2 to the Jews, which seems to be the meaning.

The expression “I was found by them” (in Hebrew, nidrashti) is the reflective passive form of the verb – “darash” – “to seek, to inquire after.”

Jehovah made Himself known to a nation which originally was not called by Him. The expression, nation – goi, is usually applied to a non-Jewish nation, although it should be noticed that on a number of occasions, Israel, too, is called, “göi.” Israel is generally called “am” – “a people.”” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 480-481).

65:2 I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own imaginations.

If the opinion of many is correct, that Isaiah 65:1 refers to the Gentiles who by faith “find God,” then 65:2 most certainly refers to God’s covenant people Israel. Thus, God begins His response to Isaiah with a great rebuke of His covenant people who have done almost everything to provoke Him to bring judgment upon them. In contrast to bringing mercy and salvation to those who did not call upon Him, the Gentiles, God is the One who continually, “all day long” seeks after His people who are rebellious. The word “rebellious” is the Hebrew word, sarar, which also has the meaning of being stubborn and obstinate. It occurs often in the OT as a reference to rebelling against God. See Nehemiah 9:29; Psalm 66:7; 68:6, 18; 78:8; Isaiah 1:23; 30:1; Jeremiah 5:23; Hosea 4:16: 9:15; and Zechariah 7:11.

God also states through the prophet, that His covenant people walk in a way which is not good and follow their own imaginations. One of the most graphic depictions of rebelliousness in the Scriptures is the description of people who walk in their own way in contrast to walking in the way or path of God. See Isaiah
The Book of Proverbs is a commentary on walking in God’s ways versus the dangers of walking in one’s own way. See Proverbs 2:13, 20; 4:14; 8:20; 9:6; 10:9; 14:2; 28:6 and 18. See also, Judges 2:22; Psalm 1:1; 119:1; Jeremiah 6:16; 18:15; Daniel 4:37; Hosea 14:9; Micah 4:2 and in the NT, see Ephesians 5:2 and Colossians 3:7.

Victor Buksbazen provides a much needed and proper understanding of Isaiah 65:2, citing the apostle Paul’s quotation of this verse in Romans 10:21 and the misunderstanding of many who apply Isaiah 65:1-2 and other verses to the erroneous conclusion that the church is the new Israel:

“All day long have I spread out my hands to a rebellious people”

“This is the tragedy of Israel: while God constantly pleaded with His people to follow Him in faith, their response was rebellion and defiance. By contrast, many of the Gentiles to whom God has not specifically made Himself known as He did to Israel, nevertheless have found Him. The conversion of Gentiles to Jehovah happened from time to time in the pre-Christian era but later became a wide-spread reality through the Messiah of Israel and His apostles. Paul refers to these two verses in the above sense in Romans 10:21.

On the basis of the above two verses and also some other passages, many theologians, including some of the Reformers, concluded that God had rejected Israel and that believing Gentiles or the Church are now “The Israel of God” or “The New Israel.” This misinterpretation has continued through the centuries even to the present time, obscuring the true meaning of the Scriptures concerning the relationship between historical Israel and the Church.

In this passage the prophet is merely emphasizing the sharp opinion between rebellious Israel whom Jehovah has pleaded for many generations and those Gentiles who one day will of their own free will come to Him, although they have not been instructed and wooed by the prophets, as Israel has been.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 481).

65:3-4 These people provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens, and burning incense upon pagan brick altars; who sit among the tombs, and spend their night in the secret places; who eat the flesh of pigs, with broth made from abominable things in their pots.

In Isaiah 65:3-4, God continues His lament against His covenant people who continually provoke Him to His face by participating in vile pagan ritual practices. They sacrifice in gardens and burn incense upon pagan brick altars instead of the prescribed worship. Exodus 20:25 for example, describes the building of an altar of stones and forbids the use of cut stones which has had a tool applied to it for the use of a tool profanes the altar. See also Deuteronomy 27:5-6; and Joshua 8:31. Isaiah in 27:9, described what would happen to the altar stones as a result of the pardoning of the sins of the people. Those who should have been completely devoted to God also provoke Him, by sitting among tombs and spend their nights in secret places and also eat the forbidden “flesh of pigs with broth made from abominable things in their pots.” See also Leviticus 11:1-47; Deuteronomy 14:3-21; Isaiah 1:28-31, 66:3, and 17. The sitting among tombs and nighttime rituals may refer to pagan practices such as worshiping the dead, but this is not explicitly stated. By participating in these pagan practices, God declares that they continually provoke Him to His face. Isaiah had earlier stated in 3:9: “They flaunt (display) their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their Soul!”
65:5 They say, 'Keep your distance.
Do not come near me,
for I am holier than you are.'
These are smoke in my nose,
a fire that burns all day long.

Isaiah in 65:5, reveals the attitude of God’s covenant people, who continually rebel against Him. The words of God’s people recorded in this verse, may be the most blasphemous statements made against God in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the religious leaders of Israel committed what many understand as the unforgiveable sin against the Holy Spirit, Matthew 12: 22-37. From this incident recorded in Matthew 12, many also understand that this was the rejection by these leaders of the Messiah’s offer of the kingdom to Israel. In Isaiah 65:5 God’s covenant people clearly had rejected God’s presence. See also Job 21:14-15.

Isaiah had described a similar situation in 30:9-11:

9 For they are a rebellious people,
deceptive children,
children that will not obey the law of the LORD.
10 They tell the seers, "Stop seeing visions,"
and to the prophets, "Stop prophesying to us about what is right,
tell us pleasantries, prophesy illusions.
11 Get out of the way,
turn aside from the path,
let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel."

It is a most grievous statement to say to God, “keep your distance, do not come near me.” In saying this, those who should have responded in faith and trusted in God because of their covenant relationship with Him, are stating that they want nothing of God’s gracious promises contained in the covenants He has made with them. This includes promises of the possession of a defined land for them; promises of being a blessing of God to all the nations of the earth; promises of becoming a nation whose members will be counted as innumerable; promises of a coming peaceful and prosperous kingdom in which the Messiah Himself will reside with them and rule over them; but most importantly, they want nothing of God’s promises of salvation to them as their kinsmen Redeemer.

Their rejection of God is compounded even further by their callous and wicked statement that they consider themselves holier than God. What more could they say than this to completely sever their relationship with God and seal the doom of their souls. It is no wonder that God could state in response, “These are smoke in my nose, a fire that burns all day long.” God also continues His response as recorded in 65:6-7 and 13-16. None of those who have rejected God will survive His punishment. They will face His severest judgment that will result in their inclusion in the lake of fire, Isaiah 66:24. It is not insignificant that just as the response of the wicked of Israel is like a burning fire to God that is like smoke in His nostrils from a fire that burns all day long, so will be God’s response to them for they will be tossed into a lake of fire that will burn forever. Only those who are God’s true and faithful remnant will survive eternal punishment. They will live with God forever to righteously display and declare His glory to His creation. The wicked religious leaders in the days of the Messiah’s first advent who committed an unforgiveable sin faced an eternal punishment. The wicked people of Israel in Isaiah’s day faced a similar fate. See also Isaiah 2:9 and 22:14.
Look, it is written before me:
I will not keep silent, but will repay,
    yes, I will repay dropping it right into their laps
both your own sins and the sins of your fathers," says the LORD,
"Because they have burned incense on the mountains,
    and blasphemed me on the hills;
therefore I will pay them back in full
    dropping it right into their laps."

Isaiah had earlier invoked God to “rip open the heavens and come down,” Isaiah 64:1 and to “return for your servant’s sake,” Isaiah 63:17. If the covenant people of God had rightfully considered their evil ways and blasphemous words to God, they would not have been so hasty to request His return. For His return would mean for most of them, eternal punishment. Only those who were truly repentant and faithful, only a remnant would receive the blessings of God’s covenant promises. See Isaiah 10:21-22; 11:11, 16; 28:5; 37:31-32; Jeremiah 23:3; 31:7; 50:20; Ezekiel 6:8; Amos 5:15; Micah 2:12; 7:18; Zephaniah 2:7, 9; 3:13; Zechariah 8:11-12; Romans 9:27 and 11:5.

God will not let sin go unpunished. Those who by faith trust in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, are declared justified by God because their Messiah bore their sins and took upon Himself the punishment (death) they rightfully deserved. Those who reject God, however have no recourse or help, for they will bear the full brunt of judgment for their own sins. God will not keep silent and will drop His judgment and righteous punishment “right into their laps,” per the DASV and NIV. Other versions, KJV, NKJV, NASB and ESV, state “into their bosom.” Both descriptions have the meaning that the just punishment for their sins will be given to them, so there is no possible means of escaping it. The sins of their “fathers” will also result in God’s righteous punishment for these fathers. Isaiah had earlier proclaimed that the LORD was their Father, Isaiah 63:16; and 64:8. In response, God in 65:7 is stating that just like their biological fathers, they also would receive the just recompense for their sins. If God was their true spiritual Father, they would have acted in righteous ways that would have pleased Him and they would not be facing His wrath.

As stated in Isaiah 65:7, God reveals His great abhorrence for the pagan worship they had practiced, 65:3-5 and their blasphemy, ("for I am holier than you are"), 65:5. He states that He will “pay them back in full,” bringing His righteous judgment and punishment by “dropping it (punishment) right into their laps,” see also 65:6. Isaiah lamented and complained that God was not near to His people nor had lately God performed His mighty deeds, and further the people felt they were like those whom God had never ruled or never called by His name. The LORD’s reply must have stunned the prophet. The people who were called by God’s name acted as if God did not exist. They worshiped false gods in vile pagan ceremonies and worse, they blasphemed His holy name. They had wickedly rebelled against their covenant God. God therefore gave them exactly what their sins deserved. They would receive in themselves the wrath of God’s punishment. There would be no escape or way out. God’s decision as a righteous judge was final. Mercifully, God’s love for His people did not end with this pronouncement of judgment. He would rescue those who had faith in Him, even if it were but a remnant of the people.

10. Future Blessings on the Remnant: 65:8-12

Isaiah transitions from God’s judgment, vss. 1-7, to blessings for God’s servants in vss. 8-12. Another section of judgment follows in vss. 13-16 and then a section on the coming new heavens and earth follow in vss. 17-25. The words of judgment, vss. 1-7 was very severe as in rightfully needed to be as vs 5 indicates. Now, however, Isaiah in vss. 8-12, declares God’s gracious mercy for those who are called His servants and
judgment for those who forsake Him. God promises not to destroy all of Israel for His servants’ sake, vs. 8. Those who are God’s chosen, His servants will inherit His mountains, vs. 9. The plain of Sharon and the Valley of Achor will be places for flocks and herds, vs. 10. Those however, who forsake the LORD and forget His holy mountain (Zion) and worship false gods, “Fortune” and “Destiny” will face death for they also did not respond to God’s call and refused to listen to Him, vss. 11-12.

65:8 This is what the LORD says,
"When juice is found in a grape cluster,
people say, 'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,'
so I will do for my servants' sake;
I will not destroy them all.

The statement, “This is what the LORD says,” is a reminder that God is responding to Isaiah’s lament recorded in Isaiah 63:15-64:12. Following God’s scathing rebuke of His covenant people in 65:1-7, one may wonder if any would be saved. Also, Isaiah may have pondered why He asked the LORD to respond to his lament and come down from heaven, 64:1 if the response from God was only going to be judgment upon the people. The prophet Habakkuk found himself in a similar situation. Habakkuk lamented in Habakkuk 1:2, “How long, O LORD, must I cry, and you not listen? I cry out to you "Violence," but you do not save.” The prophet was complaining about the wickedness and violence occurring among God’s covenant people and their seemed to be no remedy. The answer that Habakkuk received from God must have stunned him. God responded that He was going to do something that Habakkuk would not believe. God was going to bring a foreign nation, the Chaldeans, to punish the people of God. Habakkuk finally acknowledged the LORD’s rightful punishment on His chosen people. The prophet declared in Habakkuk 3:18: “yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”

God was responding in a similar manner to Isaiah, but with coming judgment, God would also have mercy and not destroy all of the people. God describes the situation with His chosen people are like that of a cluster of grapes. All of the grapes (of a dried or pressed cluster) would not be destroyed when juice is found in it, for some would exclaim, there is (yet) a blessing in the cluster, meaning the cluster still will yield useful grapes with their juice in them. God will not destroy all of His people, for within them there are some who are faithful to Him who are His faithful remnant. Isaiah often contrasted those who are faithful from those who are wicked in his writings, 1:26-28; 6:11-13; 10:20-23; 17:4-6; 48:9; 50:10-11; 57:3-21; 65:13-16; 66:3-9. The prophet had earlier exclaimed, in 1:9, “unless the LORD of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.” Also, Isaiah stated in 10:20-23:

20 In that day the remnant of Israel,
and those who survive from the house of Jacob,
will no longer depend on the one who struck them,
but they will rely on the LORD,
the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

21 A remnant will return,
the remnant of Jacob to the mighty God.
22 For though your people, Israel,
be as the sand of the sea,
only a remnant of them will return;
a destruction is decreed,
overflowing with righteousness.
For the sovereign LORD of hosts
will execute complete destruction,
in the midst of the whole land.
(Isaiah 10:20-23)

65:9 But I will bring forth descendants from Jacob,
and from Judah those who will inherit my mountains;
and my chosen will inherit it,
and my servants will live there.

Not only will God preserve some among His covenant people, (a tenth according to Isaiah 6:13), but He will cause those who are the descendants of Jacob and Judah, who are His chosen and His servants to inherit His mountains, (the land of promise). Isaiah had previously declared that God would bring His faithful remnant from the nations of the world to inhabit the land of Zion, 41:8-9; 43:1-7; 49:8-13; 60:1-22; and 61:4-11. They will come to Zion rejoicing, 35:10; and 51:11 and will settle in the land of promise, 54:1-17; 57:13; 60:21; 61:7; and 62:1-12. God will keep His covenant promises to restore His people, make them a blessing in the earth and to settle them in the land He had promised to their forefathers. See for example Deuteronomy 30:1-20. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 65:8-9:

“Though Israel has been rejected by the Lord during the present dispensation, her being cast off is not complete; neither is it permanent. His eye still watches over His people; and, though they have suffered untold persecution, He has prevented their being destroyed. Israel will survive the destruction of all the nations (Jer. 30:11). In Isaiah 65:8,9 God sets forth His protection of the nation as such. In Palestine the grapevines are not trained to grow upon any kind of lattice-work or wires, but lie flat on the ground. Thus the vines themselves, as they lie on the ground after the annual growth has been pruned away, look like rods four or five feet long lying in rows. In the spring these vines are lifted and rocks are placed under them to hold them off the ground. But the new year's growth comes out and spreads in both directions. At the time of the full foliage and of the harvest the vines almost meet in the middle between the rows. The prophet was familiar with such scenes. He pictured two men walking along between the rows of vines. One is represented as about to put his foot upon a cluster, or bunch, of grapes. The other quickly shouts for him not to destroy the entire bunch, though some of the grapes are bad; because a blessing is in it. He thus used this illustration to indicate God's preservation of the nation when she is dispersed among the Gentiles. For the sake of the good ones, the Lord has preserved the nation and has not allowed any hostile power to destroy His people. The reason for His thus protecting them is that "I [Jehovah] will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains ..." (vs. 9). There has always been a remnant of the nation that has thirsted after God and desired to do His will. There is a remnant according to the election of grace at the present time. These of course learn the truth, accept it, and receive Jesus Christ as Lord, Saviour, and Messiah. By so doing they become members of His body and will be translated, if they are still alive, at the time of the rapture. At the same time there is a portion of the nation that will enter the Tribulation and that will constitute the faithful remnant. They will not have at that time seen the full light of the truth. But their hearts will be yearning for God. During the Tribulation the truth will be given them and at the end of that time of sorrowing all constituting this remnant will see the truth, and accept Him. Then He will come, delivering them from all their sorrows. That portion, then, constitutes those who will inherit His mountain.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – July and August 1946).

65:10 The plain of Sharon will be a pasture for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,
for my people who have sought me.
In the land of promise, where God will bring His faithful servants, 65:9, who have sought Him, 65:10, there will be pleasant places where flocks and herds will find peaceful pastures. The plain of Sharon was a pasture land, 1 Chronicles 5:16 and 27:29. The plain or valley of Sharon is located on the western edge of the land, between Mount Carmel and what is present day Tel Aviv. King Solomon recorded his bride’s delight in being praised who stated that she was “a rose of Sharon.” Song of Solomon, 2:1. Isaiah had previously mentioned God’s judgment upon Zion as including Sharon, “The fertile plain of Sharon has become like a desert,” Isaiah 33:9. However, following the judgment of God upon the land, there is a great promise of restoration to the land, where those who have sought Him will live. Isaiah states in 35:1-2:

1 The wilderness and the dry land will be glad;
   the desert will rejoice,
   and blossom like the crocus.
2 It will blossom abundantly,
   and rejoice with joy and singing;
   the glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
   the splendor of Mount Carmel and the Sharon plain.
   They will see the glory of the LORD,
   the splendor of our God.

The Valley of Achor will also be a pleasant place for the herds of the people of Israel. This valley is located west of the city of Jericho. The first mention of this valley in the Scriptures is Joshua 7:24-26. God will transform this place of burial, as the prophet Hosea reveals in Hosea 2:15, “From there I will give her back her vineyards, and turn the Valley of Achor (trouble) into a door of hope.” The timing of this transformation of the land will be following the Tribulation and at the beginning of the messianic kingdom. See quote from David L. Cooper above and Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 710-711.

65:11-12 But you who forsake the LORD,
who forget my holy mountain,
   who prepare a table for Fortune,
   and who fill up mixed wine for Destiny;
12 I will destine you to the sword,
   and you will all kneel down to be slaughtered;
   because when I called, you did not answer,
   when I spoke, you did not listen;
   you did that which was evil in my eyes,
   and chose what I did not delight in.”

Isaiah concludes this section of Chapter, with a very stern reminder from God regarding those who forsake the LORD and forget His holy mountain (Zion), 65:11-12. God states that they also “prepare a table for Fortune and who fill up mixed wine for Destiny.” Victor Buksbazen comments on 65:11 including the relation of these words to pagan worship from the KJV text and its notes:

“But you, forsakers of the LORD, who forget my holy mountains.”

“In verses 11-16, the prophet predicts an unhappy end to the idolatrous majority among the people. To forget “the holy mountains of God” refers to the abandonment of God’s holy Temple for the spurious cults of the various idols mentioned below.”
“Who prepare a table for Gad [the idol of Fortune]”
“Who fill a mixed portion for Meni [the idol of Destiny]”

“Gad and Meni were gods of Fortune and Destiny, worshipped among the Semitic peoples and identified later by the Greeks and Romans with Jupiter and Venus. The prophet declares that Jehovah alone is the sole controller of the destiny of men and nations. To worship “good luck” or “good fortune” idols is a denial of the sovereignty of the LORD. It is hardly necessary to mention that the ancient cults of Gad and Meni have their modern counterparts in astrology, chiromancy, card reading, fortune telling, etc.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 484).


After all that God had accomplished for His people, it is understandable and right that God, the Holy One of Israel, their Creator, Redeemer and Savior would righteously judge them for their continual and relentless pursuit and worship of false gods. They loved their false idols and pagan worship to their fullest capacity by displaying their sins callously and openly before Him, 3:9. They told Isaiah, His prophet to tell them no more about Him, 30:10-11, and most blasphemously, to not come near them for they claimed they were more holier than He was! 65:5. What more could God do for His people than he already has done? All that is left is God’s righteous indignation and judgment to be given to them. In 65:12, God describes that these wicked people will be slaughtered by the sword (and obviously other ways). They would be killed because they failed to respond to God when He called them and refused to listen to Him when He spoke to them (likely through the declarations of His prophets. They “did what was evil” in God’s eyes and they chose what God did not delight in. They have reaped what they have sown and none, who have not repented and turned to God in faith, will escape the judgment described in 66:24, the last verse of Isaiah’s writings.


There is a paragraph break between 65:12-13 likely because of Isaiah’s statement of “Therefore, this is what the LORD says.” The declaration of judgment on the wicked which began in vs. 12 continues into the next paragraph and it is possible that Isaiah decided to add the statement of God’s authority to add emphasis to what God is stating. God describes what will happen to the wicked in contrast to His (faithful) servants, vss. 13-14. The name of the wicked will be left as a curse which will be spoken as a curse by God’s faithful chosen ones. The LORD also declares that He will put the wicked to death. However, the LORD will give His servants another name, in contrast to the curse of the wicked, vs. 15. In a future day, the name of God’s servants will be used as a blessing and anyone swearing any oath will swear it by the God of truth. Also, all former troubles will be forgotten and hidden from God’s eyes, vs. 16.
65:13 Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says,
    My servants will eat,
        but you will be hungry;
    my servants will drink,
        but you will be thirsty;
    my servants will rejoice,
        but you will be put to shame;

Isaiah likely added "Therefore, this is what the sovereign LORD says," to emphasize the divine authority of these words of judgment. Isaiah often had inserted this and similar phrases in his writings to indicate that these words were not just the opinion of the prophet but the divine words of God Himself. They are therefore, critical words to be heeded by those who would call themselves servants of the LORD. In 65:13, God continues His declaration of judgment which He began, stated in 65:12 and earlier in 65:6-7. God describes what will happen to the wicked who are to receive God's judgment in comparison to those who are His (faithful) servants. It is implied that these servants are faithful for they are not receiving the just punishment of God upon the wicked. Isaiah in 65:13 summarizes many of the declarations of judgment he had earlier written, 1:19-20; 5:13; 8:21-22; 42:17; 44:9-11; and would later state in 66:5 and 14. The faithful servants, however, will be cared for by God when they hunger and thirst and will not be put to shame: 49:10; 51:3; and 61:7.

65:14 my servants will sing for joy of heart,
            but you will cry for sorrow of heart,
            and will wail from a broken spirit.

In 65:14, Isaiah continues the words of the LORD, Yahweh regarding the contrast between the blessings of His faithful servants and the judgment upon the wicked. In other English versions, KJV, NKJV, NASB and ESV, this verse begins with "behold" which is the Hebrew word, hinneh. "Behold" is likely used by Isaiah to also draw attention to what God is saying, just as in 65:13 where the prophet declared, "this is what the sovereign LORD says." The message of 65:14 is that those who faithfully obey the LORD and trust in Him will sing for their hearts will be full of joy, 35:10; 51:11. See also Psalm 66:1-4. The faithful servants will have a joyful heart but the wicked will have a sorrowful heart, literally a heart full of pain. The faithful servants will sing (or shout), due to their joyful heart but the wicked will cry out because of their heart of pain and they will wail because of their broken spirit. The "destinies" and "fortunes," 65:11, of the faithful servants will be vastly different than that of the wicked. The faithful servants will enter into the joy and peace of the LORD as they inherit the promises of God. The wicked will enter into everlasting sorrow and pain for there will be no peace for them, Isaiah 48:22; and 57:21.

65:15-16 You will leave your name for a curse for my chosen to use;
        and the sovereign LORD will slay you;
            but he will give his servants another name.

16 Whoever blesses himself in the earth
        will bless himself by the God of truth.
For one who takes an oath in the earth
        will swear by the God of truth;
The former troubles will be forgotten,
        and they will be hidden from my eyes.
Isaiah 65:15 begins with a startling statement that the wicked will have no other legacy except a name that will be “for a curse for my chosen to use.” The name of the wicked will be used as a “curse” because they had rebelled against God and grieved His Holy Spirit, therefore God turned into their enemy and fought against them, 63:10. They had also blasphemed His holy nature by saying to Him, “Keep your distance. Do not come near me, for I am holier than you are,” 65:5. They also had profaned the name of the LORD in all the nations to which they had been scattered, Ezekiel 36:16-23. Because of this wickedness, the sovereign LORD will slay them as He had also stated in 65:12. Also, because of this wickedness and the profaning of God’s name among the nations, the faithful servants will be given a new name by the LORD. It is not stated what this new name will be (See Revelation 2:17 and 3:12), however earlier Isaiah had recorded God’s words in 62:2:

The nations will see your vindication,  
and all kings your glory,  
and you will be called by a new name,  
that the mouth of LORD will give you.

They and the land of Zion will be called by new names, 62:4:

You will no longer be called "Forsaken;"  
neither will your land any more be labeled "Desolate."  
Instead you will be called Hephzibah [My delight is in her],  
and your land Beulah [Married];  
for the LORD delights in you,  
and your land will be married.

The words “whoever blesses himself in the earth will bless himself by the God of truth,” are explained by Victor Buksbazen:

“Just as the name of the ungodly shall be used as an execration, so shall the name of God’s servants be used for a blessing, remember what the God of Truth, literally the God of Amen, has done for His faithful ones (see 2 Cor. 1:20).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 484).

The one who “takes an oath in the earth will swear by the God of truth.” This is certainly a reference to a far future day as described below by David L. Cooper. The previous troubles, conditions and sinfulness of this present earth will be long forgotten and will be hidden from God’s eyes for He will have forgiven His faithful servants whom He has brought into His glorious kingdom and the kingdom of His Son, the Messiah. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 65:15-16:

“At the conclusion of the Tribulation, after the wicked in Israel have been slain, a new order will be introduced. This fact is set forth in verses 15 and 16. The apostates who die under the powerful judgments of the Tribulation will leave their names for a memory to those who survive as the ones upon whom the curse of God fell. The new order mentioned in these verses involve the introduction of a new political set-up, the inauguration of a new spiritual regime, and the institution of a new ethical and moral world. These facts are only hinted at in this chapter, but may be seen from parallel and related passages.

Every vestige of the present order and all things connected with it will be hidden or covered. This is seen in the last clauses of verse 16. During the Tribulation, as we learn from many passages, not only the heavenly bodies will be wrecked; but this earth likewise will become a desolation and a waste, the result of the terrific judgments of the Tribulation. But when the new order is introduced, all the wreckage and everything connected with the present age will be covered up and hidden. There will therefore be nothing to remind anyone of the


In Isaiah 65:17-25, the declaration of God that He will create new heavens and a new earth do have a connection with the preceding verse, 65:16. When God will have voluntarily hidden, from His eyes, all the past troubles of His chosen servants and they will have also forgotten them, will be during a new era as described in the notes above for Isaiah 65:16. This new era is described by God, in vss. 17-19 as His creation of a new heavens and a new earth in which the former things will not be remembered or even come to mind, vs. 17. God call upon His faithful servants to be glad for and rejoice forever because He will create Jerusalem for rejoicing and her people for a delight, for there will no longer be any crying or weeping in the city, vss. 18-19. Vss.20-25 describe selected aspects of the millennial kingdom. People will live very long lives and abide in houses that they have built and eat the food that they have planted for they will live long enough to enjoy the work of their hands, vss. 20-22. The people living in the millennial kingdom and their descendants will be blessed by the LORD, vs. 23. They will receive an instant response to their prayers, vs. 24, and the land will be full of peace, vs. 25.

65:17 For, look, I will create new heavens and a new earth; the former things will not be remembered, or even come to mind.

Isaiah 65:17 has certainly been the topic of a great deal of debate among Biblical scholars of all stripes and backgrounds. Even evangelical, conservative scholars who hold to a dispensational hermeneutic, disagree on some aspects of the meaning of the creation of new heavens and a new earth. Many understand that the word “new” means exactly that including the creation of a brand-new earth. Others see some restoration or renovation of the earth in such a manner that God can call it a new earth. David L. Cooper comments:

“The reason that the wreckage will be covered and hidden, as we have just seen, is given to us in verse 17 in the following words: "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." This sentence, introduced by the conjunction "for," is an explanation of why the wreckage will be hidden. At the beginning of the Millennial Age, our Lord, the creator of all things, will create the heavens anew. A careful study of Isaiah, chapter 34, and II Peter, chapter 3, shows us that at the end of the Tribulation the heavenly bodies are dissolved and pass away with fervent heat. Though the earth is burned by the terrific heat coming from the great heavenly conflagrations and from the explosions that will be occasioned upon earth, yet the earth is not destroyed in the sense of being annihilated; but it is greatly damaged. Life upon earth could not continue very long under the conditions which will result from the Tribulation. In order that there may be a glorious reign of righteousness, the Lord will have to create new heavenly bodies to take the place of those that are dissolved. He likewise will create new materials upon earth which will cover up the wreckage, and which will make possible that wonderful era when the glory of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – July and August 1946).

Thomas Constable adds:

(Introduction to 65:17-25)

“God not only will be faithful to His promises in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness (63:1— 65:16), but He will demonstrate His ability and desire to provide righteousness for sinful humankind by creating new heavens and a new earth. Most of this section describes God's renovation of creation during the Millennium.”
“This verse is an overview of what follows. God announced, in substantiation of everything He had said since 56:1, that He would create a restored and renovated universe (cf. Gen. 1:1). Things will be so much better than they are now that people then will not even think about things as they used to be (cf. Rom. 6:14; Rev. 21:4). This answers the old question of whether or not we will be able to remember our life on earth when we go to heaven.

Isaiah described the future in general terms as "a new heaven and a new earth." In the New Testament, we have further particularization of what this will involve: the making of all things new for those in Christ presently (Gal. 2:20), the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6), and the "Eternal State" (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). Thus Isaiah's use of "new heavens and a new earth" is not identical with the Apostle John's (Rev. 21:1). What Isaiah wrote about this new creation is true of various segments of it at various stages in the future; it is not all a description of what John identified as "new heavens and a new earth," namely: the Eternal State.” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 327).

Victor Buksbazen otherwise suggests:

“Just as in the beginning God created a perfect heaven and earth, so now, after having executed judgment upon the ungodly, the Lord will recreate a new heaven and a new earth, a new cosmos, a completely new order of things.” (Victor Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, page 486).

For other viewpoints, see Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, page 718. Edward E. Hindson, Isaiah, King James Bible Commentary, page 863. Michael Rydelnik, James Spencer, Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary, page 1099-1100. John A. Martin, Isaiah, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, Victor, Imprint of Cook Communication Ministries, page 1120. There are of course many other commentaries and Bible expositions that could be referenced, but for purposes of this study and especially for home study and Bible study groups, these resources and those cited above, should be sufficient for the student to grasp the meaning of Isaiah 65:17. See also the continuing comments below for this verse.

From the many viewpoints stated above of the meaning of the words, “new heavens and a new earth,” it may be somewhat confusing for Bible students to come to a conclusive determination as to exactly Isaiah meant by this phrase. Therefore, some discussion is necessary to help clarify the meaning.

Isaiah did not have the completed text of the Scriptures available for him to understand the further revelation on the sequence of events that are to occur in the last days, including the chronological events of the Tribulation, the millennial kingdom, the last judgment, and the eternal state. Often Old Testament prophecies of the last days merge events into one passage or statement. Therefore, the phrase “new heavens and a new earth” does not appear to be exactly chronological as stated in the New Testament. In other words, this phrase may be a summary statement about the events that will occur in the last days and not a statement that the actual creation of new heavens and a new earth occur before the establishment of the millennial kingdom.

As Old Testament prophecies are so often telescoped into a single passage, the Bible student must take this into consideration and allow Scriptures to interpret other Scriptures. Revelation is progressive in the Scriptures and later statements of the events of the last days help to clarify earlier statements. This is not in any way to suggest that the Old Testament must be viewed through the lens of the New Testament or that Old Testament passages must be re-interpreted because of someone’s understanding of a New Testament text. The Old Testament can well stand on its own without placing a grid of interpretation over it which is not the intention of the original author of Scripture – who is God.
If the statements of Isaiah are carefully examined, the prophet had already discussed the necessity for the creation by God of new heavens and a new earth. A study of Isaiah chapter 24 reveals the reason for the necessity of God to create new heavens and a new earth. The prophet declares in 24:20, that the earth will fall and will not get up again. Isaiah mentions the burning destruction of the inhabitants of the earth, 24:6. Isaiah also stated in 34:4 that “All the host of heaven will be dissolved, and the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll and all their hosts will fall.” These prophecies can rightly be compared with later revelation about these events, such as 2 Peter 3:10-13. At the occurrence of the great white throne judgment, the apostle John stated that, at the presence of the One who sat upon the throne, “from whose presence the earth and heaven fled away and there was no place found for them.” Revelation 20:11. Following this event which included the description of the second death, the lake of fire, Revelation 20:14-15, John declares, in Revelation 21:1: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away; and there was no more sea.” From the chronological events described in the book of Revelation, it therefore is reasonable to state that the creation of the new heavens and the new earth occurs following the thousand-year messianic kingdom and the final judgment.

If the conclusion reached in the above notes are correct, then the statement of Isaiah regarding the creation of new heavens and a new earth, as recorded in Isaiah 65:17 can be clarified to be a summary statement and the events which are stated in Isaiah following 65:17 describe both the messianic kingdom and the eternal state. John F. Walvoord in his discussion on Revelation 22:1 states:

“Only a few other passages in the Bible deal with the subject of the new heaven and the new earth, and these are often in a context dealing with the millennium (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22; II Peter 3:13). The fact that millennial truths are mentioned in the same context in all three of these major references has often confused expositors. However, it is a common principle in prophecy to bring together events that are distantly related chronologically, such as frequent reference to the first and second comings of Christ, actually separated by thousands of years (Isa. 61:1-2; cf. Luke 4:17-19).” (John F. Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Moody Press, 1966, page 311).

The word “create” in 65:17 is the Hebrew word bara, which occurs in the first verse of Genesis and often in the early chapters of Genesis to describe God’s original creation of the heavens, the earth, its creatures and humans. It occurs often in Isaiah, 4:5; 40:26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; 45:7, 8, 12, 18; 48:7; 54:16; 57:19, 65:17, 18 and in reference to creation in Psalm 148:5. The usual meaning of the word bara is to create or make and not to renovate or restore. Isaiah also uses the word bara twice in 65:18 in reference to Jerusalem. See notes on this verse. The phrase “new heavens and new earth” occur also in Isaiah 66:22 in the context of the eternal state for the LORD states they will endure before Him. This phrase also occurs in 2 Peter 3:13 in the context of the old heavens and earth being destroyed by burning and passing away. This phrase occurs in Revelation 21:1 with the clear statement that the first heaven and earth had passed away. The plain sense of the words of these verses should lead to the conclusion that the present heavens and the earth will be destroyed by God, by being burned, and God will create (bara) new heavens and a new earth. The first heavens and earth will have been so corrupted by wickedness and so polluted by the works of humans that God will create a new heavens and earth and the former things of the previous heavens and earth will not be remembered. They will completely pass away from all memory.

65:18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am about to create. For, look, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, and her people as a delight.
The prophet states that God’s desire is that His covenant people are to be glad and rejoice in what He is “about to create.” This is a clear reference to a future creation and in the context of 65:17-18, it is part of the new heavens and earth. God clarifies that it is Jerusalem that He is about to create. The newly created Jerusalem will be made for the purpose of rejoicing forever and the people who inhabit the newly created Jerusalem will also be “created” as an eternal delight to God. There should be no confusion that what Isaiah prophesizes in 65:17-18 is also declared by the apostle John in Revelation 21:1-22:5. John saw a vision of the new (called holy) Jerusalem descending out of heaven and then described its glory, Revelation 21:9-22:5. Only those who have a new heavenly body which is imperishable and spiritual, 1 Corinthians 15:35-49, will inhabit the new Jerusalem and the new heavens and earth. The fact that the inhabitants of the new heavens and earth will have a new imperishable and spiritual body is prophesied by Isaiah in 65:18, as God creating the people of the (new) Jerusalem as a delight to Him.

It is not that God somehow did not get it right the first time He created the heavens and the earth, for He declared that what He had created was “very good,” Genesis 1:31. For His own purposes and by His holy and righteous determination, God deemed that His first creation although declared very good, would involve the necessity for the humans He had created, to be redeemed by His Son. Humanity, in its rebellion and sinfulness, could not enter into an eternal righteous relationship with God and God allowed the affects of this wickedness to play out to its ultimate end, the corruption and pollution of the created heavens and earth. Only those who had by faith trusted in God’s Son, (the Servant described by Isaiah who is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ), would enter into and abide forever within the new heavens and earth God will create. It is only those, whom God has “created” with a new heavenly body, who will be His eternal delight and cause for rejoicing, for they will righteously display and declare God’s glory to all of His newly formed heavens and earth.

65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; there will no longer be heard in her the sound of weeping or the sound of crying.

The prophet in 65:19, records the repetition of God’s statement that He will rejoice in the newly created (holy) Jerusalem and that He will delight in His people who will abide forever in this city which will descend from heaven to the earth, Revelation 21:1-22:5. Along with the previous description that the former things of God’s first created heavens and earth will not be remembered nor come to mind, 65:17 and former troubles will also be forgotten and hidden from God’s eyes, 65:16, God adds in 65:19, that within the new Jerusalem, the sound of weeping and crying will not be heard. This implies that there will not be any cause for anyone to experience sorrow or sadness or disappointment or any other negative emotion or feeling. Those who inhabit the new Jerusalem will be completely of a new creation with incorruptible spiritual bodies whom will forever rejoice with their triune God and sing His praises and righteously display and declare His glory.

Isaiah 65:17-19 is a separate section describing the eternal state within the greater section of chapters 65 and 66. As mentioned above, the declaration of God in these chapters of His creation of new heavens and earth is a summary statement, and some verses of these chapters specifically describe the eternal state and other verses describe conditions which will be evident during the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. Isaiah 65:20-25 describe specific conditions of the millennial kingdom including the long life of the inhabitants of the kingdom. These verses also describe the building of homes and agricultural enjoyment of the kingdom as well as the rapidity of God’s response to their prayers and the peace that will exist among the animals. These are selected aspects of the kingdom that God had deemed important to reveal to the prophet. They are but a
few of the many wonderful aspects of this kingdom that God has revealed to Isaiah about which the prophet has so richly sprinkled throughout his prophetic writings.

**65:20** There will no longer be an infant who lives just a few days, or an old person who does not live out their full days; for the child will die at hundred years old, and anyone failing to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

Isaiah 65:20-25 describe circumstances of the millennial kingdom ruled by the Messiah. Children will be born, and lifespans will be long implying a healthy environment. Those who only live to reach a hundred years will be considered accursed which is the reverse of being blessed by the Lord. Thomas Constable comments on 65:20:

“Specifically, death will not have the power that it has had. Infant mortality will be virtually unknown, and people's life-spans will be much longer. This seems to describe a return to conditions before the Flood, when people lived hundreds of years (Gen. 5). In short, one of the sources of sorrow and weeping, namely, Death, will suffer defeat. Christians need not fear the second death even now. Believers alive in the Millennium will live longer on this earth than they do now, but they will die. And in the Eternal State, even physical death will be gone. [Note 804: See Louis A. Barrié Jr., “The Future for Israel in God’s Plan,” in Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost, p. 175.]” (Thomas Constable, *Isaiah*, page 328).

**65:21-22** They will build houses, and inhabit them; they will plant vineyards, and eat their fruit.

22 They will not build and another inhabit it; they will not plant and another eat it; for as the days of a tree so will be the days of my people, and my chosen will live long enough to enjoy the work of their hands.

Isaiah in 65:21-22 continues to describe certain selected aspects of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. People living on the earth will build houses and live in them (in safety and peace). See Isaiah 60:18. There will be such a tremendous influx of people being gathered to the land of Israel that new houses will need to be built. Also, the houses and other buildings that had been destroyed will be re-built. Isaiah had described the great influx of people to Israel in passages such as, 43:1-7; 49:14-26; 60:1-22; 62:10; and later in 66:7-9. The prophet described the rebuilding of the ruined buildings in 58:12 and 61:4. In contrast to their travails in the nations where they had been scattered, they will build and possess their own homes. They will no longer be slaves held captive to cruel tyrants who had oppressed them, 26:1-6; 52:4; and those who once oppressed them will be judged by God and will serve God’s faithful remnant, 49:26; 60:14-16.

Another blessing of the coming millennial kingdom is that the inhabitants of the kingdom will benefit from their agricultural labors. In times past, they had planted but others had harvested and eaten their crops, Isaiah 1:7; Amos 5:11; Micah 6:15; and Zephaniah 1:13. As mentioned in Isaiah 65:20, the people of God who inhabit the millennial kingdom of the Messiah will live long lives. In 65:22, Isaiah states God’s words, that one of the benefits of this longer life, is that the covenant people of God, “my chosen will live long enough to enjoy the work of their hands.” Added to the peace and safety of the messianic kingdom will be satisfaction. Things that have been built and planted by God’s covenant people will have a lasting legacy and benefit to society and the people who live in the land will enjoy this benefit themselves.
They will not labor in vain, 
or bring forth children destined for disaster.  
For they are the offspring blessed by the LORD,  
and their descendants with them.

The covenant people of God, God’s chosen, 65:22, will see the reward of all their labor and this includes raising children who will fulfill Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” The blessings of Deuteronomy 28:3-12 will also be realized. Also, Isaiah had earlier declared, in 59:21:

“As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD,  
“my Spirit that is on you,  
and my words which I have put in your mouth,  
will not depart out of your mouth,  
nor out of the mouths of your children,  
nor out of the mouth of your children's children,”  
says the LORD, “from now to forever.”

Children who are born in the millennial kingdom of the Messiah will be raised with the benefits of the new covenant. This will include Jeremiah 31:31-34, for they will have God’s law within them which will be written on their hearts and they will all know the Lord. This will also include Ezekiel 36:26-28, for they will have a new heart and a new spirit within them. The children will be blessed by the LORD, Isaiah 65:23 so that they will not grow up to lead lives that are destined for disaster, calamity or without a divine purpose. The parents, grandparents and great grandparents will also live long enough to see their descendants lead godly and successful lives.

Before they call, I will answer;  
while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

One of the greatest benefits of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah is that He will know their needs before they ask Him and those who seek Him by calling upon Him, will receive a response even while they are speaking the words of supplication to Him. The Lord knows the thoughts of everyone, Psalm 94:11 and Isaiah 66:18. Jesus, the Messiah knew the thoughts of everyone, even those who opposed Him, Matthew 9:4; and 12:25. In the days of His coming kingdom, the Messiah will know all the thoughts of His covenant people and all others who inhabit the kingdom. They will be people that are intimately connected to their Lord for He will constantly be in touch with them. Not only will they be able to travel to Zion to meet Him, face to face, they will be meet Him daily as he responds to them.

The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox;  
dust will be the serpent's food.

They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,  
says the LORD.

This final verse of Isaiah chapter 65, concludes the short section, 65:20-25 describing certain specified conditions of the coming millennial kingdom of the Messiah. In a much earlier section of Isaiah, 11:6-9, the prophet had declared:
The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf, the young lion, and the fattened cow will lie down together; and a little child will lead them.

The cow and the bear will graze together; their young ones will lie down together; the lion will eat straw like an ox.

The nursing child will play near the hole of the asp, and the weaned child will put his hand into the viper's hole.

They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 65:25:

“The wolf and the tender lamb shall feed together as one”

“The prophet reverts to his early vision of perfect peace in the animal world, paralleled by peace among the nations, who will be led by a little child (Isa.11:6-9). It is a Messianic vision of the kingdom of God presided over and guided by the King Messiah (Isa. 11:1-5, 10).

The meaning of this passage is not merely of harmony, but of a total transformation of human and animal nature. This will cause the wolf not to feed upon the helpless lamb, just as the transformation of the lion will cause it to eat straw like the ox, and the serpent to feed upon dust. The passage may be understood both in its literal as well as in its figurative sense. In such a transformed world there shall be no war, no destruction among the nations, even as the prophet Isaiah earlier saw in his vision (Isa. 11:9).” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 487).

The final phrase of Isaiah 65:15, “in all my holy mountain, says the LORD,” reminds the audience of the prophet that Zion, the mountain of the Lord, is much beloved by Him. It was one of the mountains in the land of Moriah that God selected for Abraham’s great test with his son Isaac, Genesis 22:2. It was upon Mount Moriah that the temple was built by Solomon and the place where God had met with Solomon’s father David, 2 Chronicles 3:1. It later became designated as Mount Zion where it was called His holy mountain and where God had installed His Son as king, Psalm 2:6-7. It is called the “city of our God, His holy mountain,” Psalm 48:1-2. It is described in Isaiah 2:2 as, “In the latter days, the mountain of the LORD’s house will be established as the highest of mountains.” Also, in Isaiah 2:3, it will be from Mount Zion that God’s law will be issued. In Isaiah 4:5 the prophet declares that, in the last days, the Lord will cover Mount Zion with His shekinah glory. Isaiah states in 24:23 that “the LORD of hosts will reign in Mount Zion.” It is called God’s holy mountain in Isaiah 56:7; 57:13; 66:20; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Obadiah vs. 17; and Zechariah 8:3. It is called the “city of the living God,” Hebrews 12:22 and it is the place where, in a future day the Lamb, the Messiah, will stand, Revelation 14:1.

Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 65:
65:1-7 God’s Judgment upon the Wicked
65:8-12 God’s Blessings on the Faithful
65:13-16 God’s Judgment upon the Wicked
65:17-25 God’s Blessings on the Faithful
Introduction to Isaiah Chapter 66

The final chapter of the prophetic writings of Isaiah conclude the response of God to Isaiah’s lament of 63:15-64:12 and in a wider context, concludes all of Isaiah beginning in chapter 1. As the prophet has so often written, God hates false worship and will punish all who falsely worship Him in the temple. God will also punish those who have rebelled against and have rejected Him and worship pagan gods and practice pagan religious rites. All who oppose God will face God’s wrath for He will execute His judgment upon them resulting in their eternal punishment. However, God will bless and comfort those who are His faithful servants. Zion (Israel) will see great increases in population. God will also bring His faithful remnant from all the nations to see His glory. Some of them will be selected as priests to serve Him. All who are faithful to Him will be eternally blessed but all who have rebelled against God will be eternally doomed. In this study of Isaiah chapter 66, three divisions in the text are selected. Vss. 1-6 discuss the contrast between true and false worship. Vss. 7-14 discuss God’s blessings on millennial Israel. Vss. 15-24 discuss the destinies of the faithful and the wicked.


In the first six verses of Isaiah chapter 66, the prophet declares the words of the LORD regarding true and false worship. God begins by contrasting His omnipresence with the confines of an earthly temple, vs. 1. God reminds His covenant people that He has made all things and He looks favorably upon those who are humble and contrite is spirit and tremble as His word, vs. 2. God declares judgment upon those who falsely worship Him, vss. 3-4. In vss. 5-6 the LORD compares the joy of those who tremble at His word with the shame that will come upon His enemies.

66:1 This is what the LORD says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house could you build for me? Where is the place that I may rest?"

Isaiah begins this last chapter with his often-stated declaration, “This is what the LORD says.” Isaiah ensures that his audience understands that the authority for the statements he is making come from the LORD, Yahweh and therefore, it is critical that God’s covenant people listen and heed His words. God first declares that He is omnipotent and so infinitely vast that all of heaven is His throne and earth is but a footstool for His feet. God reminds all who will listen that He is the divine King over all His creation. Isaiah often spoke of God as King, 6:1-13; 32:1; 33:17, 22; 37:16-20; 43:15; and 44:6. Kings of the earth will serve His covenant people, 60:3; and 10-12. God will punish the kings of the earth, 14:5; 24:21; and 40:23. He sits above the earth, 40:22; and is enthroned as ruler of the earth, 9:7; 24:23; 32:1; 40:10; 52:7 and 63:15 Many of the references to God as King apply to the Messiah who will reign on Mount Zion on the Davidic throne during His millennial kingdom. Other Scriptures attest to the rule of the LORD, Exodus 15:18; 1 Kings chapter 8; 22:19; Jeremiah 10:10-16; Daniel chapter 4; 5:21; 6:26-27 and especially Daniel 7:9-14, which includes a reference to the Messiah who will rule over His everlasting kingdom. The greatest number of references in the Scriptures to God as King occur in the song book of the Israelites, the Psalms. For example, Psalm 103:19 states, “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” In Psalm 2:6-9 the LORD declares:

6 “I have established my king on Zion, my holy hill.”
7 I will announce the decree.  
   The LORD said to me:  
   "You are my son;  
   this day have I become your father.  
8 Ask me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,  
   and the ends of the earth as your possession.  
9 You will break them with a rod of iron;  
   you will dash them in pieces like a potter's clay pot."

(Psalm 2:6-9)

Isaiah in 66:1 states that not only is heaven God’s throne and earth is His footstool but also, what possible house (temple) could contain Him or be large enough for Him to rest (reside). King Solomon acknowledged this fact during the dedication of the temple which had been just constructed under his direction. Solomon stated as recorded in 1 Kings 8:27, “But will God really live on the earth? Even the heaven and highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple that I have built!” God had also discussed a house for His dwelling in 2 Samuel 7:5-7.

In the days just following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, one of the first deacons to be selected to serve the newly founded church, was Stephen who was full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Acts 6:5. Stephen was performing great wonders and signs among the people and was opposed by the religious leaders of Israel who violently arrested him and put him before the High Priest and the ruling religious Council. Stephen, responded to the question of the High Priest about what he had been proclaiming to Israel. In his brilliant and Holy Spirit guided discourse to these evil religious leaders, Stephen quoted from Isaiah 66:1-2 as recorded in Acts 7:49-50. As with the prophets of old and with the Messiah, Stephen was put to death because of his testimony about the rebellion of Israel against the “Righteous One” (the Messiah), including the leaders Stephen was addressing, Acts 7:51-60. For other references to heaven as the throne of God and earth as His footstool, see, Matthew 5:34-35; and 23:22. Also refer to, 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Hebrews 8:1, Revelation 4:2 and 5:13.

66:2 For all these things my hand has made,  
   that is how all these things came to be," says the LORD.  
   "But this is the one to whom I will look,  
   even to the one who is humble and contrite in spirit,  
   and who trembles at my word.

In reference to Isaiah 66:1, heaven and earth, the LORD reminds His covenant people that He had made “all these things,” and explains that it was only by His creative work, by His hands, that “this is how all these things came to be.” The Bible begins with the plain statement that, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1. From time to time, God reminded His people that all things in heaven and earth were created by Him, and they were created for Him. Isaiah also had earlier declared the word of LORD, as recorded in Isaiah 45:18:

For this is what the LORD says  
   who created the heavens,  
   the God who formed the earth and made it,  
   who established it and created it not chaotic,  
   who formed it to be inhabited.  
   I am the LORD; there is no other.
For other examples (selected only), see Psalm 96:5; 102:25; 114:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 146:5-6; John 1:3; Acts 14:15; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:15-16; Hebrews 1:2; and Revelation 14:7. John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-16 and Hebrews 1:2 affirm that the Son of God, the second “person” of the triune God, who is the suffering Servant revealed in the writings of Isaiah, who is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was the actual creator, whom formed the world. It is correct to understand that God created the heavens and the earth as all three “persons” of the triune God were active in the creative process. For a discussion on the “Trinity” and the usage of “persons” or “subsistences” to describe the triune God, the following resources are recommended: Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology, Revised and Expanded, Moody Publishers, 2014, pages 205-210. See also, John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue. Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth, Crossway, 2017, under heading of Trinity. Rolland McCune, A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume 1: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God and Angels, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008, pages 275-305.

Following the reminder of His creative act, which was likely intended to be a sharp rebuke to those within God’s covenant community that He and only He is God and any acknowledgment or worship of any other god is a great affront to Him that will not go unpunished. God, who is sovereign over all His creation explains that, in all of His creation, He will look upon the “one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles as my word.” There is no partiality with God, Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34; and Romans 2:11. He gives no special treatment to religious, or governmental leaders or great heroes, or to anyone even to “good people.” There is no one who “does good,” Psalm 53:3; and Romans 3:12. No one is righteous in themselves as to gain the favor of God. God looks at the thoughts and intents of the heart and He knows who is humble and contrite in spirit and those who tremble at His word. The word “humble” is the Hebrew word ani. This word occurs often in the OT and with great significance in Zechariah 9:9 describing the messianic prophecy of the “King” who is humble and mounted on a donkey. The fulfillment of this prophecy is mentioned in Matthew 21:5; Mark 11:7; Luke 19:35 and John 12:12-15. The Hebrew word ani occurs often in the writings of Isaiah, often translated in the DASV as poor or afflicted, see 3:14, 15; 10:2, 30; 14:32; 26:16; 41:17; 49:13; 51:21; 54:11; 58:7 and 66:2. This word is only translated as “humble” in 66:2.

The word “contrite” is the Hebrew word nakeh, which is found in 2 Samuel 4:4 and 9:3 referring to the crippled and lame son of Jonathan named Mephibosheth. The word nakeh has the primary meaning of crippled and lame. The only other occurrence of this word is in Isaiah 66:2 which is translated in the DASV, NASB, KJV, NKJV, NIV and ESV as “contrite.” The word “contrite” is a very interesting translation of nakeh. The typical English dictionary meaning of “contrite” is to be very sorry and to be very ashamed especially of one’s sins. Contrition, a related word, has the meaning of repentance and shame over past sins. The sense of “contrite” in Isaiah 62:2 is that the person God looks upon, realizes they are “crippled and lame” in themselves and are completely dependant upon God for His righteousness. Victor Buksbazen comments on the second half of Isaiah 66:2:

“Yet… I look to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit”

Nevertheless, this transcendent and infinite God condescends in His mercy to take notice of a man who is humble and of a contrite spirit.

The Hebrew word, “ani” – “poor,” is closely related to the word, “aniv” – “humble,” and both are occasionally used interchangeably, that is, “poor in spirit” or humble. In the Sermon on the Mount there is an echo of Isaiah 66:2:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:3).

Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God (Lk. 6:20).

“Who trembles at my word”
“Who trembles at my word” refers to a man who stands in absolute awe and in obedience to God’s Word. (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 489).

66:3-4 To them the one who kills an ox is just like one who kills a human for sacrifice; one who sacrifices a lamb is like one who breaks a dog’s neck; one who offers a grain offering is like one who offers pig’s blood; one who burns frankincense is like one who blesses an idol. Yes, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations.

I also will choose their punishment, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, no one answered; when I spoke, they did not hear; they did that which was evil in my eyes, and chose what did not please me.

The DASV translation of the first phrase of Isaiah 66:3, “to them the one who....” may cause some to wonder just to whom, is the prophet referring. The latter half of 66:2 refers to those who are humble and contrite. Is it “to them” the words of judgment of the LORD are to be applied? Other English versions clarify this with the placement of the word “But,” at the beginning of verse 3. This helps the reader with the transition God is making between those who are faithful and those who are wicked. The comparison between the faithful and wicked is very clear in 66:5. To them, the wicked, who shamefully display their sinfulness before God, Isaiah 3:9; 30:9-11; 65:5, God compares their worship to abominable pagan practices. For a discussion of these practices, see Gary V. Smith, Isaiah, Vol. 2, pages 730-732. See also Amos 5:21-27; and Micah 6:6-8 and Malachi 1:6-14. The last sentence of 66:3 is God’s indictment upon the wicked of His covenant people, “Yes, they have chosen their ways, and their soul delights in their abominations.” The choice of which way to follow is a constant theme of Isaiah, 2:3; 8:11; 26:8; 28:26; 30:11; 35:8; 42:24; 48:17; 53:6; 55:7-9; 56:4, 11; 57:17-18; 58:1-13; 59:7-8; 63:17; 64:5; 65:2, 12; and 66:4. The most significant result of the choice of “turning to” one’s own way is described in Isaiah 53:6:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the sin of us all.

As a result of following one’s own direction and way, the ultimate destiny of this choice is eternal death. God provided “His own way” of saving people from this destiny by placing the sins of the world upon the Servant, who is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. By believing in the cross-work and resurrection of the Messiah, believers can leave their way and walk in the guidance and care of God’s way. If it was not enough for the wicked to just walk in their own ways, Psalm 1, their soul delights in their abominations of their vile pagan religious practices which are a great affront to God. The first Psalm declares the destiny of the wicked, they will not stand in the judgment, meaning they will be condemned as they appear before God. Psalm 73:19 declares that the wicked will be instantly destroyed. At the beginning of his writings, Isaiah declared those of His covenant people who have descended into sin, have delighted in their pagan worship, Isaiah 1:29. They will be ashamed of this delight of having chosen their own way. By their continual participation in pagan worship, they will face the awful and eternal judgment of God upon them.
In 66:4, God declares that He will choose the punishment of these wicked people and “will bring their fears upon them.” At the end of chapter 66, Isaiah records the punishment God has chosen. The wicked will be cast into a fire that will not be extinguished and they will eternally endure this punishment. Those who continue to rebel against God by worshiping false idols and rejected Him will realize their worst fears. God’s judgment will not evade them. They will not escape. They refused to heed the call of God and refused to hear Him. They did this by refusing to listen to the words of His prophets and not wanting to listen to them. Isaiah 30:9-11 is an example of this:

9 For they are a rebellious people,
deceptive children,
  children that will not obey the law of the LORD.
10 They tell the seers, "Stop seeing visions,"
  and to the prophets, "Stop prophesying to us about what is right,
  tell us pleasantries, prophesy illusions.
11 Get out of the way,
  turn aside from the path,
  let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel.

The sad truth of the people of Israel is that they continually refused to listen to the word of God given to God’s servants, the prophets as recorded so often in the Scriptures. See for example, Jeremiah 2:30; 7:25-26; 25:4; 26:4-6; 35:15; 44:4-6; Daniel 9:6, 9; Zechariah 7:8-14; Matthew 5:12; 23:29-39; Luke 6:23; 11:47-51; 13:28, and 34-35. The words of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as recorded in Matthew 23:37-39, are a stunning example of the Israelites refusal to heed the words of God’s prophets and of the Messiah, 

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kills the prophets, and stone the ones who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not! 
38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I say to you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' This indictment of the Messiah was so significant that it marked the withdrawal of the kingdom offer to Israel during Messiah’s first advent. The Messiah will not return to His covenant people until they repent of their national sin of rejecting Him during His first advent and plead for Him to return. It is only then they will say, “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The last sentence of Isaiah 66:4 is a declaration that the wicked, among the covenant people of God, deliberately did what was evil in the eyes of God and they chose what did not please God. The single and only blame for the just punishment that will be coming on these wicked people lies completely with them. They purposefully chose to walk in their own ways, refusing the rule of their LORD in their lives, and knowingly acted in ways that was evil and did not please God. They openly displayed their wickedness, choosing to parade their evilness in the face of God, Isaiah 3:9. They told God’s chosen prophet, Isaiah not to bring them any more messages from the Holy One of Israel, Isaiah 30:10-11 and what is worse they committed a great blasphemy by declaring that they were holier that God, Isaiah 65:5. They will reap what they have sown and face the eternal punishment they deserve.

66:5 Hear the word of the LORD,
you who tremble at his word:
"Your own countrymen who hate you,
  and throw you out for my name's sake, mock,
'Let the LORD be glorified,
  that we may see your joy,'
but it is they who will be put to shame.
Those whom the LORD spoke about in Isaiah 66:3-4, the wicked of God’s covenant people who will face His righteous judgment, are called in 66:5, “your own countrymen who hate you.” The words of 66:5 are addressed by Isaiah to those who “tremble at his word.” They are the humble and contrite of spirit upon whom God look, 66:2. Again as Isaiah had often declared, this word (message) is to be heeded for it comes from the LORD. Those described above in 66:3-4, are so drunk with their own wickedness that they cannot abide any of their fellow Hebrews who live righteously in humbleness before God and are contrite in spirit. See notes on Isaiah 66:2. The words in 66:5, “and throw you out for my name’s sake,” may refer to being prohibited from worshipping in the temple. It may also point to a far future time, just prior to the return of the Messiah, when the unrighteous prevent the righteous from participating in synagogue worship. If it is correct to understand the context of chapter 66 and preceding chapters as referring to “day of the Lord,” which will occur during the tribulation and extending to when the Messiah will return to establish His millennial kingdom, it is likely these words, of Isaiah 66:5 refer to the righteous being excluded from communal activity that may include being thrown out of either the temple or synagogue. Isaiah 66:6 may also allude to the temple as the place where the righteous have been excluded as it is the place within the city where judgment will be meted out to those who mock God and His faithful people.

The wicked among God’s covenant people will not only exclude the righteous from communal activity for the sake of the LORD’s name but will do so for they hate those who are righteous who obey and follow the LORD. The wicked will mock the righteous with words of a taunt ridiculing both them and the LORD. They will evily mock the righteous with the words, “Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy,” 66:5. The wicked will have no intention of ascribing any glory to the LORD. Neither will they care about or consider the joy of the righteous. This mocking taunt is yet another act of evil rebellion against God that is sealing their fate as the LORD states in the last phrase of 66:5, “but it is they who will be put to shame.” The wicked who openly attempt to put the righteous to shame by their exclusion from communal activities will themselves suffer the ultimate and final shame as they face eternal punishment and torment. They will be excluded from the blessed eternal new heavens and new earth. It was no different in the days of the Messiah’s first advent. The Messiah stated to those who followed Him, as recorded in Luke 6:22-23, “Blessed are you, when people hate you, and when they will exclude you, and mock you, and denounce your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. 23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for your reward is great in heaven; for this is the same thing their forefathers did to the prophets.” Also, the wicked may treat the righteous in this manner for they think they are actually working in God’s service as indicated by John 16:2-3: “They will put you out of the synagogues; yet the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think that he is offering service to God. 3 They will do these things, because they have not known the Father or me.”

66:6 Listen, a sound of uproar from the city, a sound from the temple! It is the voice of the LORD, rendering to his enemies what they deserve.

The recompense for the sins of the wicked will be meted out by the LORD. It may be that the very place, the temple, where the wicked have thrown out the righteous and excluded them from communal activities, is the place where the wicked will receive their punishment from the LORD. The LORD will render to His enemies the just punishment for what they deserve. It is possible that the temple itself is being judged for the wicked who are the enemies of God and His faithful remnant have turned the temple into a place of opposition to God. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 66:5-6

“Israel will be divided into two sections: That portion which hears the Word and receives it, the minority; and the larger part of the nation which rejects the message. Those refusing the message make fun of and ridicule those who, having accepted the Scriptures as the divine revelation, tremble at the Word of Jehovah. The Lord
therefore thus encourages those who do accept it: Pay no attention, exhorted the prophet, to those who reject it; for it is they--the ones refusing it--who will be put to shame when there is "a voice of tumult from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of Jehovah that rendereth recompense to his enemies." This voice of Jehovah mentioned here is nothing other than the voice of Messiah, when He shouts aloud upon His return as He goes forth against His enemies.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – September and October, 1946).


The middle section of Isaiah chapter 66, verses 7-14 concerns the blessings of God upon the newly established messianic kingdom. God will cause the nation, the country (land), which is called Zion and Jerusalem, to expand quickly and increase in numbers. This is depicted in vss. 7-9. Jerusalem will rejoice and those who have mourned for the city will rejoice as well, vs. 10. Jerusalem will be the source of comfort for all who mourn, vs. 11. The LORD will bring peace to Jerusalem and the glory of the nations will be brought to the city. The peoples of these nations will also bring comfort to Jerusalem, vss. 12-13. Because of these blessings the heart of those who mourn will be glad and receive strength from the LORD, vs. 14

**66:7-9 Before her labor pains began,**

* she gave birth;  
* before her pain came,  
* she delivered a boy.  

8 **Who has heard of such a thing?**  
* Who has seen such things?  
* Can a country be born in a single day?  
* Will a nation be born in a second?  
* Yet as soon as Zion went into labor,  
* she gave birth to her children.  

9 **Would I ever bring a baby to the point of birth**  
* and not deliver it?” says the LORD.  
* Would I who deliver  
* ever force the womb shut?” says your God.

If taken by itself, Isaiah 66:7 may seem difficult to understand as the reference to the birth of a boy would cause much discussion on the identification of this individual. However, the immediate context of 66:7-9 indicates that the word “boy” is a depiction of the rapid birth of a new nation whom the LORD will cause to suddenly come into being. The picture is of a mother who gives birth prior to the beginning of her labor pains. The prophet in 66:8, asks a few rhetorical questions, “Who has heard of such a thing and who has seen such things? Also, can a country be born in a single day or in a second? The questions are immediately answered in 66:98. It is Zion who is being depicted as giving birth, not to a boy, 66:7, but to children. The LORD in 66:9 assures the fledgling nation that He will fulfil His promise of the rapid growth of the nation of Zion. Although 66:7-9 contains a metaphor depicting the instant birth of children by a mother, it is explained that this depiction describes the rapid growth of Zion. God will cause the nation to be populated likely from all those who have been gathered to it from the surrounding nations at the conclusion of the Tribulation and as the Messiah is setting up His rule in Zion. However, this understanding may not quite fit the reality of what Isaiah has prophesied. It could be that the rhetorical questions have another response as David L. Cooper explains:
"The prophet compared the troubles and disasters of the Tribulation to the pain connected with childbirth. Frequently the psalmists used this comparison. Isaiah clearly employed it with this signification in our passage. Jeremiah likewise used the illustration with the same connotation; and so did Hosea. Our Lord, in speaking of the sign of the end of the age—a world war, accompanied by famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places—compared it to child birth. "But all these things are the beginning of travail" (Matt. 24:8). In the verses under consideration, the prophet stated that: "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child." Isaiah stood before his intelligent audience and made those bold statements. He put them in this manner in order to attract attention. Then without waiting for any response, he asked the questions found in verses 8 and 9. Thus he called upon his audience to tell whether or not any of them had heard of such a case of childbirth. Had any seen such a thing? Of course these questions demanded a negative answer, for such was never the case. Then he asked this question, "Shall a land be born in one day? shall a nation be born in one day?" These questions also demanded a reply in the negative. No land shall be born in one day, and a nation shall not be born forth at once. In other words, the prophet denied the thought that the new Israel and her land would be born without any trouble or distress. Unfortunately we have been told that the nation of Israel would be born in a day. That is exactly the opposite of what Isaiah proclaimed on this occasion. The nation must go through the period of travail, the Tribulation Period, seven years during which the judgments of God are being poured out. The Lord has chosen His people in the furnace of affliction and will with it purge from them all dross. In so doing, He purifies them and makes them fit for His service.

"For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." The phrase translated "as soon as" also means "when." One is to judge from the facts of the context which of these renderings is preferable. Since the prophet has shown that the nation must go through a period of travail before the new Israel is born, it is better to translate the phrase by the adverb "when"; for the expression, as soon as, contradicts the idea that the nation is to pass through this period of travail and distress. Thus the better translation of the sentence under consideration is: "When Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." According to verse 9 God will bring the period of travail upon Zion. When He does, He will let nature take its course and will bring to the birth. In other words, the new Israel, the faithful remnant, will be brought safely to the birth. This occurs at the end of the period of travail, at the end of the Tribulation, when the nation acknowledges its offense and seeks His face earnestly (Hosea 5:15). At that time--after the period of travail of seven years--the iniquity of that land will be removed in one day (Zech. 3:9).” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – September and October, 1946).

Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer alternatively suggest:

“The metaphor uses in v. 7 in which a birth occurs with no pain symbolizes the coming restoration of Jerusalem that will require no effort by the people (v. 8). Interestingly, the Targum (ancient rabbinic paraphrase) renders the final line of this verse as “her king will be revealed,” which suggests a messianic reading referring to what happens immediately following the second coming of Christ.” (Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, Isaiah, The Moody Bible Commentary, pages 1100-1101).

Thomas Constable, adds:

66:7 “The subject of this prophecy is Zion (v. 8). Isaiah pictured Zion as a pregnant woman giving birth to a baby, without any pain. She would give birth to a boy before she began experiencing labor pains. This is, of course, the opposite of what usually happens. This may be a prophecy of Messiah's appearing (the Rapture) before the Tribulation (the pain), the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7; cf. Gen. 3:16).822 It may also be a prediction of joy and delight coming to Zion in the future. However, in light of the next verse, it seems that the boy is the nation of Israel (cf. Rev. 12:1-2).”

66:8 “Such a reverse order of things seems incredible. Nevertheless, Israel would come (back) into existence quickly and painlessly. This would be a supernatural work of God. It will happen at Messiah's second advent. He will recreate Israel as a nation after Antichrist and the combined Gentile nations of the world have sought to destroy her (cf. Dan. 11:40-45; Rev. 12). However, the whole rebirth of Israel from the Exile to the Millennium
may have been in the prophet's vision. Similarly, he saw the entire recreation of the earth as a completely new planet (65:17-25).”


66:10-11 Rejoice with Jerusalem,
and be glad for her,
all you who love her.
Rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her.
For you will nurse and be satisfied
from her consoling breasts;
you will suck and be delighted
with her bountiful breasts.

Those who mourn over Jerusalem, because of God’s description of coming judgment upon His holy city, are now called upon by God to rejoice with the inhabitants of the city and be glad with them for what God will accomplish as in a single day when He causes Jerusalem (Zion) to rapidly increase in population, 66:7-9.
Isaiah had declared an earlier promise, 49:14-26, regarding the amazing birth of the nation of Zion. In this passage, God promises that the sons of Zion will be brought to the city assisted by the rulers of the nations where they had been held captive and were oppressed. There former oppressors will carry them from these nations to Zion. In Isaiah 49:21 Isaiah makes the astonishing prophecy that the inhabitants of Zion who were bereaved of their children will be amazed at the repopulating of the city and will ask,

“Who has given birth to all these for me?
For I have been bereaved of my children and barren,
exiled and divorced,
so who has reared these children?
Look, I was left all alone,
so where did these come from?”

God answers the inquiry of the ones who had been bereaved of their children in Isaiah 49:22-23:

22 This is what the sovereign LORD says,
"Look, I will raise up my hand to signal the nations,
and set up my signal flag to the peoples.
They will bring your sons in their arms,
and your daughters will be carried on their shoulders.

23 Kings will be your foster fathers,
and their queens your nursing mothers.
They will bow their faces to the ground before you,
and lick the dust of your feet.
You will know that I am the LORD,
and they who expectantly wait for me
will not be put to shame."
Not only will the rulers of the nations who once oppressed the sons of Zion comfort them as they bring them to Jerusalem (Zion), but the city itself will be the source of comfort for these returning sons once they reach it. They will find peace and comfort within the city for it will be the residence of the Messiah who is described in Isaiah 49:26 as “the LORD, your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” Victor Buksbazen comments on Isaiah 66:10-11:

“10 Rejoice with Jerusalem .... all you who love her
The prophet commands those who love Jerusalem and have mourned for her in her degradation to rejoice with her in her glory. The verbs “simhu” and “gilu” are synonymous expressions of rejoicing.

11 That you may suck consolation from her breast and be fully satisfied
Here the mourners and lovers of Jerusalem are compared to an infant long deprived of its mother’s milk and comfort. The infant, which is the faithful remnant, will soon be restored to its mother’s breast, Jerusalem. It will drink in hungrily and with delight the nourishing abundance of its mother, (the word “ziz” literally means an “udder,” a figure of abundance). Jerusalem is here movingly personified as a loving mother who embraces all her returning children and feeds them from her breast.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 491-492).

66:12-14 For this is what the LORD says,
"Look, I will extend prosperity to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream.
You will nurse and be carried on her side,
and will be dandled on her knees.
13 As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
and you will be comforted in Jerusalem."
14 You will see it, and your heart will rejoice,
and your bones will flourish like the fresh grass.
The hand of the LORD will be known to his servants,
and his fury to his enemies.

Isaiah 66:12-14 summarize the preceding verses as the prophet records the words of the LORD emphasizing His many promises for the prosperity and comfort that will come to Jerusalem in the days following the tribulation. The messianic kingdom, with Jerusalem as its capital, where the Messiah will reside, will enjoy ongoing prosperity, like a flowing river as the wealth of the nations are brought to the capital like an overflowing stream. This promise was earlier declared by Isaiah, in 60:5, 11; and 61:6 and was declared also by the prophet’s Micah and Zechariah. See Micah 4:13; and Zechariah 14:14.

As mentioned in the notes, for 66:10-11, both those who carry the children from the nations to Jerusalem and the mothers of Jerusalem will comfort those the children coming and arriving in the city. The LORD also, in 66:13, states that He will comfort those coming to Jerusalem. The time of this comforting of the children of Zion, will be at the end of the tribulation, upon the return of the Messiah who will establish His millennial kingdom. The Messiah will be present in Zion to comfort His covenant people who are arriving from the nations of the world after being oppressed by the rulers and inhabitants of these nations. Their previous oppressors will become their comforters as they bring them to Zion. They will also bring their wealth with them for the inhabitants of the kingdom to use under the wise counsel of the Messiah who will rule over them. The LORD promises that His covenant people, the faithful remnant will see the fulfillment of these promises and their hearts will rejoice and they will also experience good health, including strong bones. It is likely that the faithful remnant faced starvation and very poor living conditions under the tyrants who oppressed them in the nations of the world where they endured the devastation of the tribulation. Now they
will flourish like fresh grass and their bodies will be strong as they face a very long life in the kingdom of the Messiah. See Isaiah 12:1-6; 33:20; 40:11; 49:13; 51:3; 58:8-12; 65:20-23 and Zechariah 10:6-7.

The concluding phrase of Isaiah 66:14, is a link between all that Isaiah has declared to this point and the final section of the writings of Isaiah. This first part of this phrase, “The hand of the LORD will be known to his servants,” summarizes not only 66:7-14 but all the wonderful statements that have preceded it throughout the book, regarding the blessings that will be given to the faithful remnant, the servants of God as they are gathered to Zion and live under the rule of the Messiah within His kingdom. The last part of this phrase, “and his fury to his enemies,” summarizes the statements that have preceded it in Isaiah’s writings that declare, so strikingly, the ultimate doom of those who have rebelled against God. The entire phrase prepares the reader of this prophecy for the statements to come, in 66:15-24, which conclude the magnificent writings of the prophet Isaiah.

15. Destinies of the Faithful and the Wicked: 66:15-24

Isaiah 66:15-24 graphically summarize the great teachings of the entire book of Isaiah. There are two contrasting destinies revealed. Those who are faithful to God, both the faithful remnant of the Hebrew people who are the covenant people of God, and those Gentiles from the nations who are believers in the Messiah, who will have selected positions within the messianic kingdom and then forever in the eternal state. Those, however, who have rebelled against God, will receive their due punishment by being cast into fire that will not be extinguished and they will forever be punished by God who is holy, righteous and just in all His dealings with mankind.

At the beginning of this final section of Isaiah, the prophet declares that God will come with fire as He delivers His righteous indignation, by executing judgment on all flesh, and many will be slain by the LORD, vss. 15-16. All those who practice pagan religious rites will perish, vs. 17. God will gather all nations to see His glory and He will perform a sign among them and send those who have survived the judgment of the tribulation to all nations to declare His glory, vss. 18-19. God’s covenant people from all the nations will be brought to Jerusalem as a special presentation to the LORD and some of them will serve the LORD as priests, vss. 20-21. The LORD promises that the descendants and the name of His servants will last forever, vs. 22. All humanity (the redeemed) will also forever come before the LORD to worship Him, vs. 23. However, the wicked will face eternal punishment, vs. 24.

66:15-16 For, look, the LORD will come with fire, and his chariots will be like a whirlwind. He will manifest his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.
16 For by fire and his sword the LORD will execute judgment on all flesh, and many will be slain by the LORD.

The final section of the book of Isaiah begins in 66:15, with “For, look” (For, behold). The prophet is emphasizing that this message is very important, and his audience is exhorted to pay attention and heed the message Isaiah had received from the LORD. It is a message of God’s coming to the earth in fiery judgment. He comes to deliver His furious anger (against the wicked) which is depicted as “flames of fire.” In 66:16, the sword is added to the fire as an instrument of God’s judgment against all flesh (the wicked) and there will be many that will be slain by the LORD.
It is implied in 66:15-16 that Isaiah is declaring the judgment that will come on the “day of the Lord” which is also described as a “day of vengeance.” See Isaiah 34:8; 35:4; 47:3; 59:17; 61:2; 63:4 and Jeremiah 46:10. The prophet Joel also mentions this day, Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14 and 18. It is often also referred to simply as “that day.” For a more detailed discussion on the day of the Lord, refer to: David M. Levy, *Joel: The Day of the Lord: A Chronology of Israel’s Prophetic History*, Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1993. Also, Irvin A. Busenitz, *Commentary on Joel and Obadiah*, Mentor, Christian Focus Publications, 2003. An additional resource is by Richard L. Mayhue, *The Bible’s Watchword: Day of The Lord*, The Master’s Seminary Journal, *MSJ* 22/1 (Spring 2011) 65-88. The depiction of fire as the instrument of God’s judgment upon the wicked is often described by Isaiah. See Isaiah 1:31; 5:24; 10:17; 26:11; 29:6; 30:27-33; 47:14; 50:11; and 66:24. See also Daniel 7:11; Joel 2:30; Amos 7:4; Obadiah vs. 18; Micah 1:7; Nahum 1:6; Habakkuk 2:13; Zephaniah 1:18; 3:8; Malachi 3:2; 4:1; Matthew 25:41; Luke 3:17; 12:49; John 15:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; Hebrews 10:27; 12:29; 2 Peter 3:7-12; Jude vs. 7; and Revelation 20:14-15. The Old Testament also describes God as coming on the clouds as if riding in a chariot, Psalm 104:3; and Jeremiah 4:13. Isaiah also described God as using a sword as an implement of His judgment upon the earth, Isaiah 1:20; 34:5-6; and 65:12. Fire and sword are also described together as instruments of judgment in Ezekiel 23:25 and Nahum 3:15.

Gary V. Smith comments on Isaiah 66:16:

“In order to reemphasize the terrible fury of God’s wrath, the prophet once again in v. 16 states that “surely, truly” (kî, NIV and others, “for”) the fire that characterizes the outward presence of God’s purifying holiness and his sword will execute his judgment on all flesh. Earlier Isaiah predicted that fire would destroy those who rejected the law of God (5:24), will destroy both the pomp of the proud Assyrian (10:16–17; 30:27–31) and the proud people of Babylon (47:14), and will consume all God’s sinful enemies (26:11; 33:14). The power of God’s sword will destroy those who resist and rebel (1:20), Leviathan (27:1), Assyria (31:8), all nations (34:5–6), and those who forsake the Lord and worship pagan gods (65:12). The reference to “all flesh” suggests that this message is describing a climactic final universal eschatological judgment. This is not just a punishment of one foreign nation that does not follow God. The exact meaning of “all flesh” is explained in the following discussion as every person (including Israelites) who has rebelled against God (66:17). “All flesh” does not include the millions from the nations and from Israel who will proclaim God’s glory and come to his holy mountain to bow down before him (66:18–23). This must be referring to the Day of the Lord or the Day of God’s Vengeance (2:6–22; 13:1–16; 24:1–23; 34:1–15; 63:1–6).” (Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, page 746).

66:17 "Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves by going into the pagan gardens, as followers of the idolatrous one in their midst, eating the flesh of pigs, disgusting creatures, and rats, they will perish together," says the LORD.

Isaiah in 66:17, recorded the judgment of the LORD upon those who participated in pagan worship rituals whom “sanctify themselves and purify themselves” as a part of their ritualistic pagan devotion. This perhaps is so detestable to the LORD because He had commanded Moses that the people of Israel had to be consecrated before Him, including the washing of their clothes before He would come down to them on Mount Sinai, Exodus 19:10-16. The Levites needed to be purified by the cleaning of both their bodies and their clothes and being consecrated to the LORD before they could serve Him in the tabernacle, Numbers 8:5-22. Aaron and his sons needed to wash their hands and feet before entering the tent of meeting in service as priests, Exodus 30:17-21. Those who perform purification rites before participating in pagan rituals are also detestable to God for they follow an idolatrous person (perhaps the leader of the pagan worship ritual) in eating creatures which have been forbidden by the LORD, Leviticus chapter 11. It is also possible that Isaiah
was alluding to the days of Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry described in Ezekiel 8:5-18, as suggested by Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. 2, page 747.

The involvement of the covenant people of God in these abominable pagan worship rituals is strongly condemned by the LORD. The judgment upon them is that they will perish. Isaiah had often declared God’s abhorrence against His own people for their persistent involvement in pagan and idol worship, see, 1:29-31; 2:8, 18-20; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 21:9; 30:22; 31:7; 40:18-20; 41:7, 22, 29; 42:8, 17; 44:6, 9-20; 45:16, 20-25; 46:1-7; 48:5, 14; 57:3-13; 59:3-8; 65:2-7; 66:3, and 17. In 66:17 and 24; the prophet declares God’s final words of judgment upon those of His own covenant people who have rebelled against Him by worshiping other gods before Him. It is astonishing that a people who, for so many generations, had memorized the ten commandments would so blatantly and persistently break the first one, “You shall have no other gods before me,” Exodus 20:3. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 66:15-17:

“In these verses we find the reason why the servants of God in Israel will be blessed and the enemies will be destroyed. Jehovah, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, will come "with fire, and his chariots shall be like the whirlwind; to render his anger with fierceness, and his rebuke with flames of fire." In Psalm 97:3,4 David foretold the coming of Messiah in flaming fire: "A fire goeth before him, And burneth up his adversaries round about. His lightnings lightened the world: The earth saw, and trembled."

The Apostle Paul, in II Thessalonians, chapters 1 and 2, foretold that, when Jesus returns, He will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all who know not God, and all who obey not the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus there is perfect agreement with reference to Messiah’s coming in flaming fire as seen in the testimony of David, Isaiah, and Paul.

The Lord will enter into judgment with His enemies by fire and by sword. These judgments will be upon all flesh, "and the slain of Jehovah shall be many" at that time. "The slain of Jehovah shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the face of the ground" (Jer. 25:33).

The end of all idolaters and workers of iniquity is set forth in verse 17 of our passage. Even the enemies of Messiah and of Israel will hold to a form of godliness, to a form of religion, but it will not be the worship of the true God. From verse 17 it is clear that the Jews, who are included in this prophecy, will have given up the dietary rules set forth in the law of Moses with regard to their eating pork. They will act in this respect just as the Gentiles do. Yet they will go into gardens and places of worship to purify themselves and to commit gross abominations in God's sight. All of these, however, will come to an end by the personal appearance of the Lord Messiah, when He comes in glory and power.” (D. L. Cooper, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Biblical Research Monthly – September and October, 1946).

66:18 For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming when I will gather all nations and languages; and they will come and see my glory.

The statement by the LORD, Yahweh as recorded in Isaiah 66:18 should remind all readers of the prophetic writings of Isaiah of God’s unfathomable omniscience. Bible scholars point out that the words “I know” and “the time” are implied as an elliptical grammatical device which the text itself does not state but are necessary to the understanding of the verse. However, the intent of the prophet’s statements about God, are clearly indicated. Other Scriptures reveal God’s all-knowing abilities. For example, King David had earlier stated in Psalm 139:1-6:

1 O LORD, you have searched me, and known me.
2 You know when I sit down and when I get up;  
   you understand my thoughts even at a distance.
3 You sift through my every path and my lying down,  
   and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,  
   O LORD, you know it entirely.
5 You have protectively hemmed me in from behind and before,  
   and laid your hand on me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
   it is so high I cannot grasp it.

(Psalm 139:1-6)


Some Bible scholars suggest that those being gathered are the wicked of 66:17 but this does not seem plausible for God will have eliminated the wicked from the world by the end of the tribulation as the world is being prepared for the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. The Messiah will return to the earth at the request of the faithful remnant who will repent of the national sin of Israel, which was the rejection of the Messiah during His first advent. The faithful remnant will confess their sin against the Messiah and plead for Him to return. The Messiah will return and destroy both the enemies of Israel and those who have rebelled against Him. Those whom God will gather, Isaiah 66:18, will be those from every nation who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah during the tribulation and have survived.

God will gather all nations and all languages, meaning that there will be those from every tongue and tribe. The Apostle John recorded in Revelation 4:9-10 regarding his great vision, of the song of the those who sang about the Messiah the Son of God, Jesus Christ: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and with your blood you purchased for God people from every tribe and language, people and nation. 10 You made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.” The purpose God states in Isaiah 66:18 for this gathering of those from every nation and language is that they will see His glory. As mentioned often in this study of Isaiah, the great overarching reason why God created the heavens and the earth is for the display and declaration of His glory. Creation itself displays (declares) His glory, Psalm 19:1. Also God created His image bearers to righteously declare and display His glory to all His creation. To accomplish this purpose for His image bearers, God knew before His creative works began, that He would need to have a Savior to redeem all who would believe in His Son, so that this great company of the redeemed would declare and display His glory to all of His creation. One aspect of this great purpose of God is recorded in Isaiah 66:18. He will gather all nations and languages (tongues) to see His glory. They will see His glory manifested in His Son who is the Messiah, who will be reigning on the Davidic throne in Zion presiding as Lord and ruler of all the earth during the period of His messianic kingdom. All who are alive during these days will come to meet and worship their Messiah. This will be the glory God desires them to see. See also Zechariah chapter 14.
66:19 I will perform a sign among them, and I will send their survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, famous for drawing the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have never heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will declare my glory among the nations.

Among all the nations and all peoples of every language, God will perform a sign. It is not stated by Isaiah in 66:19 just what this sign will be. The first “sign” God established before mankind was the rainbow as a sign of the covenant with Noah, Genesis 9:8-17. God made many other “signs and wonders” as a witness to His people that He keeps His promises and as an encouragement and reminder to them to continue to faithfully follow and worship Him. God gave king Ahaz (and His covenant people) the sign of the virgin birth of the Messiah, called Immanuel, Isaiah 7:10-14. An altar will be set up in Egypt, in the last days, as a sign and a witness to the LORD, Isaiah 19:19-25. God had set “signs” before king Hezekiah, Isaiah 37:30; and 38:7. The restoration of the land during the millennial kingdom will be an everlasting sign and memorial, Isaiah 55:13. The “sign” that God will perform among the survivors of the tribulation will be a witness to them of His glory.

Selected faithful survivors from the nations will be sent out into the world to declare His glory. The nations that are mentioned in Isaiah 66:19 were likely the furthest nations known at the time of Isaiah. Tarshish (Isaiah 60:9 and many other references) was most likely what is now Spain at the far end of the great sea (the Mediterranean Sea). Pul, or perhaps Put, Jeremiah 46:9; Ezekiel 27:10; 30:5; and Nahum 3:9, may refer to Libya or to a country which is beyond Egypt. Lud, Jeremiah 46:9; Ezekiel 27:10; and 30:5, which was famous for its archers may refer to Lydia in what became known as Asia Minor. Tubal, Ezekiel 27:13; 32:26; 38:2-3; and 39:1, also may refer a country in Asia Minor. Javan, Ezekiel 27:13, 19; and Zechariah 9:13; also translated as Greece in Daniel 8:21; 10:20; and 11:2; was an early reference to the country that was later known as Greece. The people from these and other countries, “to the coastland afar off,” which have not seen or heard of God’s glory will have an opportunity to do so, from those sent to them to hear about the glory of God. Those selected will have the mission of declaring God’s glory to the nations as well as another task stated in Isaiah 66:20.

66:20-21 They will bring all your kindred out of all the nations for an offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots and wagons, on mules and camels, to my holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "just as the Israelites bring their offerings in clean containers into the house of the LORD. Some of them I will select for priests and Levites," says the LORD.

The selected messengers of God’s glory, 66:19, will also have the task of bringing “your kindred” (the Jewish faithful remnant) from all the nations to Zion, God’s holy mountain, where they will be likened to the faithful covenant people of God who bring offerings into the house of the LORD. See Isaiah 10:13-14; 14:1-2; 43:1-7; 45:14; 49:7, 14-23; 60:1-62:12; and 66:12. Some of the faithful remnant from God’s covenant people will be chosen by God to serve Him as priests and Levites in the messianic kingdom, likely in the millennial temple that will be established for this purpose, Ezekiel chapters 40-48. David L. Cooper comments on Isaiah 66:20:

“According to Isaiah 66:20 the Gentile nations will assist Israel in the final return to the "holy mountain Jerusalem." The prophet thinks of them as oblations unto the Lord which are thus brought back into their own land as an offering to the God of Israel. Of the faithful remnant God will take priests and Levites to conduct His worship. On this point see Isaiah 61:5.6. Israel’s golden era is yet in the future.” (D. L. Cooper, Commentary on Isaiah, Biblical Research Monthly – September and October, 1946).

Some Biblical scholars suggest that faithful Gentile servants of God will be included in the service as priests to the Lord. Victor Buksbazen comments in Isaiah 66:20-21:
“20 And they shall bring all your brethren from among the nations

“All your brethren” refers to the scattered of Israel. Israelites have lived abroad almost from times immemorial. They were the descendants of those who from time to time were carried away into slavery by the numerous invaders, or voluntarily settled abroad as traders, craftsmen, or specialists in various fields and professions. These exiles shall be brought home again by their brethren with the cooperation of converted Gentiles who will put every means of transportation at their disposal. This they will do out of love and reverence for Jehovah, the God of Israel. Parallel passages are found in Isaiah 60:4ff. and Zephaniah 3:10.

Even as the children of Israel bring their offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord

The bracketing together of Gentiles who believe in Jehovah with the children of Israel indicates a new dispensation in history, the ingathering of believing Jews and Gentiles into a new fellowship, a prophetic anticipation of the Church which later became a reality through the Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of Jews and Gentiles, (Eph. 2:10-16).

The motely collection of animals and conveyances enumerated in this verse expresses the eagerness of the believing Gentiles to hasten the return of the remnant of their homeland when prompted by the Spirit of God.

21 And also from among them will I take for priests and for Levites…

The question arises: to whom does the expression “of them also will I take” apply? Some have thought that the reference applies to the formerly exiled Jews. But this would in any case be the normal privilege of the descendants of Aaron and Moses. What the prophet has in mind here is a completely new order of things: the inclusion of Gentiles in the service of the LORD, without regard to race or descent. The only condition implied is the acceptance of the LORD in faith and a willingness to serve Him.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, pages 495-496).

Thomas Constable adds his comments on 66:20-21:

66:20 “The message having gone out, the Gentiles will escort the Israelites back to the Promised Land—and the holy city of Jerusalem—as a thank offering to the Lord (cf. Zech. 8:23; John 11:52). Evidently many Israelites will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ during the Tribulation and will return to their ancient homeland to worship Him (cf. 11:10-16). Jews will evangelize Gentiles (v. 19), and Gentiles will evangelize Jews.”

66:21 “Evidently the Lord will "take" some of these converted Gentiles and make them leaders in His worship (cf. 56:5-6). He would accept Gentile believers as freely as Israelite believers, and would bless them with equal privilege in His service.” (Thomas Constable, Isaiah, page 336).

66:22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, will remain before me," says the LORD, "so your descendants and name will remain.

The LORD, Yahweh promises that the descendants of the ones whom He has chosen to be priests and Levites to serve Him, will remain (with Him), along with their name, as long as the new heavens and the new earth He has made will exist. These chosen ones, whom will serve the LORD in Zion, likely in the millennial temple, will begin their service in Zion at the start of the messianic kingdom. They will live long lives, 65:20 but likely will not live for a thousand years. It will be their descendants who will transition between the end of the millennial kingdom and the eternal state, thus preserving them and their names for eternity. A similar passage to Isaiah 66:22 occurs in Jeremiah 31:35-37 and 33:25-26 See also Isaiah 56:5; 61:8-9; and 65:22-23. The LORD had also discussed the creation of the new heavens and earth in Isaiah 65:17. See notes on this verse. See also Hebrews 12:26-28. 2 Peter 3:13; and Revelation 21:1-27.
66:23 From one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all humanity will come to worship before me," says the LORD.

It is not certain if the reference to the worship of the LORD by all humanity occurs only in the millennial kingdom, before the creation of the new heavens and earth or is it a reference to both the millennial kingdom and the future state or only just to the future state. A strict literal reading of Isaiah 66:23 may lead some to suggest that God is discussing worship to Him only during the millennial kingdom because of the mention of “one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another.” A mention of the new moon in the context of worship in the millennial temple is made in Ezekiel 46:1, 6. The moon will not exist in the new heavens and earth for there will no longer be any need for its light nor of the light of sun, Revelation 22:5. However, the references to the new moons and the sabbath may just be Isaiah’s depiction of the ongoing, eternal worship of God’s people before Him. Therefore, if this is correct, the worship of God that has begun in the millennial kingdom will continue forever as the millennial kingdom transitions into the eternal state.

The reference in Isaiah 66:23, that “all humanity will come and worship” before the LORD, certainly refers to both Jews and Gentiles, who will form His redeemed community. Victor Buksbazen comments:

“Formerly only the Israelites used to appear before the LORD, at the appointed times, according to the lunar calendar, that is, “from month to month.” But in the new dispensation not only the Jews, but Gentiles also will participate in the worship of God. Here is one of the highlights of prophetic vision: that the LORD will one day include in His kingdom also the Gentiles, without rejecting or casting away His people, Israel.” (Victor Buksbazen, Isaiah, page 496).

66:24 "They will go out, and look on the corpses of those who have rebelled against me; for their worms will not die, neither will their fire be extinguished. They will be abhorred by all humanity."

In stark contrast to those who will worship eternally before the LORD, and enjoy His presence forever, the last verse of the writings of the prophet Isaiah, remind who read and all who hear this prophecy, that the destiny of all those who have rebelled against God will be in an eternal fire where their worm (their spiritual entity), will not die. They will experience the ongoing, eternal punishment from God for their wickedness of which they did not repent. They will be abhorred by “all humanity,” that is by all of God’s redeemed community, both Jews and Gentiles who will be able to see them in this state of punishment. The word “abhorred” (abhorring in the KJV, abhorrence in the NKJV, NASB, and ESV, and loathsome in the NIV), is the Hebrew word deraon, which only occurs in Isaiah 66:24 and in Daniel 12:2, in a similar context. In Daniel 12:2, deraon is translated as “contempt” in most English versions.

Some may have an aversion to this understanding of Isaiah 66:24 and may understand it only as a figurative depiction of the punishment of the wicked. Others also may understand this as a reference only to the description of the burning piles in the Hinnom Valley of garbage and sometime human corpses, 2 Chronicles 28:3; Jeremiah 7:30-33; and 31:40. See also the description of hell in Matthew 5:22; Mark 9:43; and Luke 12:5. Others may suggest that this depiction of the punishment of the wicked will only occur during the millennial kingdom as it would have no place in the eternal state as it is a cause of abhorrence to those who view this site. However, some such as Edward E. Hindson, Isaiah, King James Bible Commentary, page 866 suggest that it has an appropriate place in the eternal state for those who are redeemed will look upon the eternal punishment of the wicked from a transformed mindset. Whatever viewpoint is considered, one must remember that this depiction of the wicked is placed at the very end of Isaiah’s prophecy because God, the author of all Scriptures, wanted it to be the last word of this greatest prophetic writing in the Old Testament. Also, as it is also described in Mark 9:48 and described in Revelation 19:20; and 20:14-15 as the lake of fire, it is certainly a real place where the wicked will spend eternity.
Teaching Outline for Isaiah Chapter 66:
66:1-6  God’s Discernment of the Faithful and the Wicked
66:7-14  God’s Design to Bless the Faithful and Punish the Wicked
66:15-24  God’s Declaration of the Destiny of the Faithful and the Wicked

Final Comments on the Prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah has often been called the fifth Gospel writer because his prophecy centers on the salvation of the LORD. Isaiah vividly portrays God’s covenant people in their rebellion against Him. They persisted in worshiping false idols which by definition are worthless. They also continued to practice vile pagan rituals which involved the eating of animals that were forbidden by God. Although succeeding generations of these people memorized many portions of the Torah, including the ten commandments, they consistently broke the first one, not to have any false gods before God. Isaiah’s ministry involved bringing many messages of rebuke and encouragement to his own people, even though he knew that these people would not respond positively to his message and would desire he not bother them with any more messages from the Holy One of Israel. They had sunk so low in their depravity that they openly displayed their sin before God. They also claimed to be holier than God which was a most vile blasphemy against Him and would have been certainly unforgiveable were it not for God’s faithfulness to His covenants with His people.

God had chosen these most stiff-necked and stubborn people for the purpose of his glory which included the declaration of His glory and salvation to all nations. Their continual failure to fulfil His purpose for the nations meant that God had to provide salvation for them and for the nations by His own strength and divine power. He did this by a most amazing act of love ever devised or witnessed. God sent His own unique Son, called the Servant in Isaiah’s writings to take upon Him, the sins of His covenant people and all humanity. God send His son to be slaughtered like a helpless lamb so that His righteous indignation and wrath would be satisfied. The sacrifice of the Servant was a substitutionary atoning sacrifice on behalf of all who were without hope and had no righteousness of their own. God’s acceptance of this substitutionary atoning sacrifice meant that, all who had faith in the Son, would be declared righteous before Him.

Why did God bring salvation to His covenant people and to the nations of the world? The ultimate answer was that God created His image bearers to righteously declare and display His glory to all of His creation, forever. God also deemed that He would live (tabernacle) forever among those whom He had provided salvation. The declaration and display of His glory to all of God’s creation, and His living among His created people forever, would not have been possible without God’s intervention into history by sending His Son as the Savior to the world including His covenant people. They are called God’s covenant people because of the covenants He made with them. God faithfully keeps His covenant promises even though His people consistently fail to obey Him.

The dual themes of the punishment of the wicked and salvation for the faithful are often stated together in that order throughout the entire prophetic writing of Isaiah. Messages of salvation are declared immediately after stern warnings of pending judgment. Although God repeatedly warned His covenant people of His anger and wrath that would be coming upon them for their wickedness, He also comforted them with promises of salvation and future blessings. These future blessings most often concerned the coming of the Messiah to rule on the earth in a peaceful kingdom. The inhabitants of this kingdom will desire to come to its capital city, Jerusalem (also called Zion) to meet with and worship the Messiah who will rule the kingdom sitting upon the Davidic throne. This kingdom would eventually transition into the eternal state following the creation by God of new heavens and a new earth.
Appendix 1

The Kingdom of God

It can be argued conclusively that the kingdom of God is the central theme of the Scriptures. God’s kingdom
is seen from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation. One major study of the kingdom of
God suggests that it is so grand in its scope that it embraces all other themes. See Michael J. Vlach, *He will
recommended books on the kingdom of God include Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An
Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God*, BMH Books, 1959; Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion, A
Theology of the Old Testament*, B & H Publishing Group, 2006; Andrew M Woods, *The Coming Kingdom,
What Is the Kingdom and How Is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church?* Gospel Grace
Press, 2016. See also J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come, A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, (Durham
Publishing Company) Zondervan, 1958; and *The Masters Seminary Journal*, MSJ 23/2 (Fall 2012) for
several articles on the Kingdom of God.

God’s kingdom thus has within it all of the covenants of God, God’s sovereign promises and plans for His
creation, including the role of His chosen people Israel, salvation, the future messianic rule of Christ on the
earth and the eternal state. To say that the kingdom of God is the central theme of the Scriptures does not
indicate that it is the grand purpose or reason why God created the heavens and the earth. The Scriptures
reveal that God’s creative acts were ultimately and exclusively for His glory. The Seraphim who stood in the
temple with Lord in Isaiah vision, recorded in Isaiah chapter six, exclaimed, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD
of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” Isaiah 6:3. In a later passage Isaiah stated, “everyone who is
called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed, yes, whom I have made.”
Isaiah 43:7. See also Numbers 14:21. King David exclaimed, “the heavens declare the glory of God, Psalm
19:1. See also Psalm 8:1; 97:6; and 108:5; 113:4; and 148:13, (above bolding intentional). God’s image-
bearers, humans, not only were charged to fill and subdue the earth and rule over it, they also exist to display
and declare His glory to all creation. See selected verses (not an exhaustive list): 1 Chronicles 16:24, 28, 29;
Jeremiah 4:2; Ezekiel 3:12; Daniel 7:14; Habakkuk 2:14; Matthew 6:13; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 1:31;

Many Biblical scholars have identified at least two distinguishable components of God’s majestic kingdom
that are revealed in the Scriptures. The first component is God’s universal rule of all of His creation over
which He is identified as a King. The second component is referred to as the “mediatorial kingdom” over
which God has placed a mediator to superintend and rule God’s creation upon earth as God’s divinely
appointed representative. This “so called” mediatorial kingdom has within it two segments of rule. The first
segment is the rulership by humans who, from the time of the rebellious and sinful acts of Adam and Eve,
rule with unrighteous and unjust hearts. The second segment of the mediatorial kingdom is a rulership by the
Son of God, the Messiah who will reign on the earth in perfect righteousness and justice. This brief study on
the Kingdom of God will assist the student of the Scriptures in the accurate identification and proper
understanding of these components of the kingdom of God

1. The Majestic (Universal) Kingdom

Many Scriptures clearly identify God as the “King” of His creation. For example, Psalm 22:28 states, “For
the kingdom is the LORD’s and He rules over the nations.” (NKJV). Psalm 45:6 declares, “Your throne, O
God, is forever and ever; a scepter of fairness (righteousness) is the scepter of your kingdom.” And Psalm
47:2 proclaims, “For the LORD Most High is awesome; he is a great King over all the earth.” King David
gave praise to God as recorded in Psalm 145:10-13, “All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and your faithful ones will praise you.” They will proclaim the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty deeds, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your rule endures through all generations.”

Isaiah declared in 44:6, “This is what the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts says, I am the first, and I am the last; besides me there is no other God.” Jeremiah in 10:10 stated, “But the LORD is the true God. He is the living God and everlasting King.” Both John (the Baptist) and Jesus began their itinerate ministries with proclaiming, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Matthew 3:2 and 4:17. John and Jesus did not need to explain the meaning of the “kingdom of heaven” for their audience would have clearly understood its meaning as it is described in the Old Testament. The last two verses of the Book of Acts states that Paul, “stayed two whole years in his own rented dwelling, and welcomed all who came to visit him, proclaiming the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness without any restriction.” Acts 28:30-31. These are just a few of the great number of passages in the Scriptures that attest to the presence of God’s universal kingdom over which He reigns as King.

Aspects of God’s Majestic (Universal) Kingdom
First, it is ruled by God. There is no one greater, more exalted, deserving, glorified, powerful (or any other of a multitude of descriptive words that could apply) than the awesome Creator of the universe. God created it and He rules it! King Hezekiah of Judah, in his prayer to God declared, “O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who sits enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made heaven and earth.” Isaiah 37:16. See also Psalm 47:8; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; and 146:10.

Second, it is a kingdom that is universal in its scope and sphere of influence. As God is its ruler, wherever He exists, and is present, there also is His majestic rulership evident. It is impossible to separate God from His role as King over his kingdom. God’s kingdom and thus God’s reign extends and exists beyond mankind’s feeble imagination to comprehend its limits as it has no limits or boundaries. Everything and everyone including all created beings, even Satan must submit to the rule of God over His kingdom. Nothing is permissible unless God ordains it. Nothing escapes His oversight. No event surprises God or takes Him unawares. God’s plans and designs for His kingdom will unfold exactly be completed as He has purposed and ordained.

Third, it has a throne from which God rules. Is must be remembered that God is spirit, John 4:24 and to human eyes is invisible, 1 Timothy 1:17. The perception of Scripture of God sitting on a throne must be understood as a theophany, which is an appearance of God in a manner than humans can perceive. Isaiah for example “saw” God in a vision. “In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” Isaiah 6:1. It is significant that Isaiah “saw” God sitting upon a throne to authenticate His role as King and Ruler over His creation. The prophet Daniel, Daniel 7:9-10 had a similar vision of God sitting on a throne, as did the Apostle John, Revelation 4:2.

Fourth, it is an everlasting kingdom, Psalm 145:13, existing now and will continue forever with God reigning on His throne in heaven, Revelation 21:5. It could be argued that God’s kingdom has always existed in eternity past, although there is no definite Scriptural reference to this. Moses, as recorded in Psalm 90:2, stated, “from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.” God has always existed, and He is King forever. There will never be a time when He will not reign as King over His creation.

Fifth, God’s rule over His universal kingdom superintends and oversees those who rule as mediators upon the earth. This included rulership over those kings of Judah and Israel who ruled from the days of Saul to the
time that the army of Babylon conquered Jerusalem. It included and includes rulership over any king, president, prime minister, dictator, or any ruler at any time upon the earth, in the past, in the present and in the future. It will include also the superintendence and oversight of the messianic kingdom when God’s Son, the Messiah will rule upon the earth, sitting on the physical throne of David for a thousand years, following His second advent to the earth.

2. The Mediatorial Kingdom

The second component of God’s kingdom revealed in the Scriptures is what some Biblical scholars designate as the “mediatorial kingdom.” It is not that there are two differing kingdoms with competing spheres of influence and purposes. There is in reality only one ruler, the eternal God who is King and sovereign over all things who has elected to rule on the earth through a human regent or mediator. See Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, pages 41 and following. This decree of God to have a representative ruling on earth began on the sixth day of creation, where He gave mankind the mandate to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue (rule over) the earth, Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8:6-8. One major promise of God’s covenant with Abraham was that kings would come from him, Genesis 17:6. This was a reference to the line of Abraham, the Hebrew people, that would extend for generations to come and from whom God would appoint kings to rule over them. Thus, beginning with Saul and extending to the days when Babylon conquered and destroyed Jerusalem, the children of Abraham had a mediatorial king rule over them. These kings ruled first for 120 years (Saul, David and Solomon) over a united Israel and then several kings ruled for a period of several hundred years over two distinct “kingdoms,” Israel to the north and Judah in the south. There is also a possibility that the reference to “king in Jeshurun” in Deuteronomy 33:5 refers to Moses. See note by John MacArthur on this verse, John MacArthur Study Bible, NASB, page 295.

From the day humans were created, God’s instructions for them included a role of mediatorial rulership over the earth. The apex of this rulership is God’s covenant with David which included the promise that David’s house and kingdom and throne would endure forever, 2 Samuel 7:16. David’s greatest descendant, a Son who would be born (given to us) would rule (His government) on the throne of David and over his kingdom forever. See Isaiah 9:6-7 and Luke 1:31-33. This greater “Son” is the promised Messiah who when He returns to earth following the days of the Tribulation will set up a kingdom in which He will rule the earth as He sits upon the throne of David on Mount Zion. That which previous “kings” could not do, which is to rule with perfect righteousness and justice, this greater Son will accomplish. This Son will fulfill all that God intended for His regents (mediators) to accomplish. Sinful and rebellious human mediators failed to fulfill God’s role for them on the earth. Thus, God provided His unique and divine solution, in that a human would be born from the lineage of Abraham and David who could perfectly fulfill God’s purposes for a mediatorial to represent Him as ruler on the earth. This human, a son, was also God, Jesus Christ, John 1:1, 14, who now sits at God’s right hand on God’s throne in heaven and will one day sit on the throne of David on the earth, and will rule the earth for a thousand years, Revelation 20:1-6.

Aspects of the Mediatorial Kingdom

First, it was in the past and is now “ruled” by sinful and rebellious human mediators. God’s mandate for humans is to be fruitful, multiply, fill and subdue (rule) the earth. Genesis 1:28, Psalm 8:6-8. This mandate has not been revoked. God’s image bearers are imperfect, unrighteous and often have little or no concern for their gracious, merciful and very patient Creator. The kings of Israel and the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah were also sinful and rebellious against God. The present days, which began from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. are called the “time of the Gentiles,” Luke 21:24, because from that time, the people of Israel have been “ruled” by Gentile nations which will continue until the time of the Gentiles have been fulfilled. The prophet Daniel received revelation from God about the end of the domination of God’s covenant people by Gentile nations. This end will come when God will establish an
everlasting kingdom that will destroy the Gentile kingdoms, Daniel 2:36-45. This kingdom God will establish will be the messianic kingdom, ruled by the Messiah.

A brief discussion on Christ as ruler “now” and Israel’s current status as a nation is necessary. Many conservative and evangelical Biblical scholars hold to the view that although Christ is not reigning over His kingdom upon an earthly throne, He nonetheless is “ruling” while sitting upon the Davidic throne in heaven as He sits at the right hand of His father in heaven. This viewpoint is often referred to as the “already/not yet” aspect of the mediatorial kingdom. The members of the body of Christ, the Church therefore, receive the blessings of this heavenly rule by their Savior, Jesus Christ. To enhance this viewpoint, the Church is also often understood to be a spiritual nation which completes the requirements of a proper kingdom, which has a King who has the divine right to rule, a throne, and a kingdom (nation). Other conservative and evangelical Biblical scholars strongly disagree with this viewpoint. One of these scholars is Andrew M. Woods who defends the view that Christ’s rule over His kingdom is still in the future and will only be realized when Christ returns to the earth and only then will He sit on the Davidic throne. Christ currently, according to Woods, sits at the right side of His Father upon the Father’s throne. Woods also defends the viewpoint that the Church is not a kingdom or nation and emphatically claims that the Church has not replaced Israel as a nation and thus does not receive the benefits and promises promised to Israel stated in the Old Testament. See Andrew M Woods, The Coming Kingdom, What Is the Kingdom and How Is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church? Gospel Grace Press, 2016. Others, such as Michael J. Vlach have a modified viewpoint, in that Vlach defends the truth that the Church has not replaced Israel but allows for some spiritual benefits of Christ’s rulership to accrue to the Church as Christ is understood to be “ruling” over His kingdom from heaven although the earthly aspect of His kingdom will not be realized until He returns to earth and rules on the Davidic throne which will be set up in Mount Zion/Jerusalem. See Michael J. Vlach, He will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God, Lampion Press, 2017.

The current status of Israel may also cause some to consider that the “times of the Gentiles” has been fulfilled in that Israel is not under the domination or nor is being “ruled” by a Gentile nation. The clear teaching of Daniel 2:36-45 is that the Gentile nations will be destroyed by a kingdom that God will set up. Some understand that this kingdom was inaugurated at the time of Christ’s first advent and thus the process of destroying the Gentile nations began at that time and will be fully realized when Christ returns to the earth to establish His dominance of the earth’s kingdoms over which He will rule from His throne in Jerusalem/Mount Zion. Others understand that even though Israel exists as a nation, it is a nation of unbelievers in the Messiah and thus it is not functioning as God’s covenant people who are responding in faith and obedience to the Messiah. The current status of Israel may have some application to the “dry bones” prophecy of Ezekiel chapter 37 in which the people of Israel have the “bones” of a people but have not yet received the Spirit of God within them, Ezekiel 37:14. However, this passage in Ezekiel is best applied to the gathering of Israelites from the nations which will occur during the days of the Tribulation just prior to the return of the Messiah to the earth to establish His kingdom. The statement of God in Ezekiel 37:14 also directly applies to the “Spirit” promises of the Davidic Covenant, as stated in Ezekiel 36:27.

Second, it will be ruled by a righteous and divine mediator who will rule on the earth. God’s intention for a regent to superintend and rule over the earth as His representative will be most righteously realized in the rule of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, when Christ returns at the conclusion of the days of the Tribulation to establish a just and peaceful kingdom. Christ can fulfill this mandate because He lived as a human and was the only human who righteously fulfilled the law of God. Christ also was the perfect lamb who was killed as an atoning sacrifice, taking upon Himself the sins of mankind, one time for all people. Therefore, Christ is the perfect “representative” to rule the earth as God intended. This rule by Christ has not yet occurred and will be evident upon His return to the earth to establish His kingdom.
Third, the mediatorial kingdom began at the sixth day of creation. It did not exist before this time. As a component of God’s Majestic (universal) rule over His creation, the mediatorial kingdom had a definite beginning on the sixth day of creation as stated in Genesis 1:28. It has not yet been concluded but will have a “ceremonial” fulfillment when Christ will deliver (give to) the kingdom to the Father, 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. Thus, the purposes for the mediatorial kingdom will be fulfilled in that all enemies will have been defeated. This defeat will happen at the end of the thousand-year messianic kingdom as stated in Revelation 20:7-10.

Fourth, it involves a promise of a house, kingdom and throne that would be everlasting. The mediatorial kingdom is intertwined with the Davidic Covenant and aspects of this covenant: (house and David’s line); (kingdom and land); and (throne of David) apply to the governance of the kingdom. These aspects will transition into the eternal state as Christ will forever rule on the Davidic throne, representing the house of David and David’s kingdom. The mediatorial kingdom is also intertwined with the Abrahamic and New Covenants of which the promises of these covenants are everlasting and will also transition into the eternal state. The passage in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 refers to the end of the earthly domain of the mediatorial kingdom but not its existence. Christ will continue to rule forever along with His Father in the eternal state.

Fifth, the plans of God involving His covenant people, Israel will be fulfilled during the messianic kingdom stage of this mediatorial rule. As Biblical revelation unfolds from Genesis to Revelation, it is evident that one major pillar of the mediatorial kingdom involves God’s covenant people Israel. God told Moses to tell these people that “if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant then you will be my special possession from among all peoples. For although all the earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Exodus 19:5-6. The Scriptures reveal God’s unique relationship and plans for His covenant people and the responsibilities they have in the spiritual administration of the mediatorial kingdom. They were to be a kingdom of priests bearing witness of God’s greatness and salvation to all nations. However, instead of righteously proclaiming God to the nations, they profaned His name, Exodus 36:20-23. God’s solution for these sinful acts of His covenant people is to cleanse them, put new hearts in them and give them His Spirit, Ezekiel 36:25-27. In the future days of the messianic kingdom, they will fulfil their role as priests to the nations, Isaiah 61:6 and 66:21.

Sixth, all nations of the earth (1) have been are being blessed spiritually through the mediatorial ministry of the “Son” and (2) will be blessed as God fully intended them both spiritually and physically during the messianic kingdom stage of this mediatorial rule. Jesus Christ, as Abraham’s and David’s greater son, has blessed all nations through His sacrificial atoning sacrifice. He also is blessing the nations, including Israel through His mediatorial role as an advocate and providing cleansing and forgiveness of sins, Acts 5:31; 1 John 1:7-9; and 2:1. During the days of His future messianic kingdom, Christ will be present on earth to bless the nations with health, peace and the nations will worship Him. Isaiah chapters 60-66 and Zechariah chapter 14:16-21.

3. The Messianic Kingdom
The millennial or messianic kingdom is a future extension of the mediatorial kingdom which is governed by the divine rule of the universal majestic kingdom of God. There are not two or three separate “kingdoms” having competing spheres of influence. The kingdom of God is one kingdom with at least two components, (1) the majestic kingdom, which is universal and governing all things by God and (2) the mediatorial kingdom on the earth which is “ruled” by God’s appointed mediators, humans, who are His image bearers. God’s image bearers have been unrighteous and unjust in their administration of the mediatorial kingdom. However, God has lovingly and graciously given His one unique Son to be the one, who through His sacrificial atoning sacrifice and resurrection, has the divine right to rule over this mediatorial kingdom at the
exact time of God’s choosing. This rule by the Son of God will be on earth in the future. Many Biblical passages attest to the literal reality of this earthly future kingdom, including its: reason (necessity), ruler, realm, and residents. These aspects of the messianic kingdom will be briefly examined below. The following description of the Messianic kingdom is an overview only and is not intended as an extensive or exhaustive study. Refer to the resources in the first paragraph of this brief essay on the Kingdom for an extensive study of the Messianic Kingdom.

It is necessary to biblically define the messianic kingdom before individual aspects of the kingdom can be examined. Some may have the mistaken understanding that the only reference to this kingdom is in Revelation 20:1-10. This passage of Scripture reveals the duration of the kingdom, one-thousand years and its divine ruler Christ and some of its co-rulers, the martyred saints. This passage also reveals that Satan will be bound in captivity the entire length of the duration of this kingdom and will be released when the thousand-year period is over. The duration of the kingdom is mentioned six times in these verses, which is significant because the multi-references to its length is extremely emphatic and cannot be ignored or allegorized as if it just represented a long time period. The repeated references to the thousand-years should be taken as a literal time period. The plain teaching of Scripture on this issue should be accepted as fact.

Prior to the Revelation chapter 20 reference, the Scriptures reveal a great amount of information about this kingdom which is often referred to as the millennial kingdom because of its duration of one-thousand years. Many of these Biblical references will be stated below. From an examination of the Biblical evidence it is possible to attempt to define the messianic kingdom as: a future reign on earth by the Messiah, Jesus Christ that will fulfill God’s plans to have the earth ruled by a mediator who is righteous and just and also fulfill God’s purposes for His covenant people to be a blessing to the nations of the earth. This is only an attempt at a basic definition for a conclusive definition would consume many pages of text and then likely it would miss some important and salient aspects of the kingdom. It is also important to add that during the messianic kingdom, and as it transitions into the eternal state, God’s covenant promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic and New covenants will be completely fulfilled. Thus, the promises of the messianic kingdom and these covenants are intertwined and cannot be properly understood without this relationship to each other.

The Reason for the Messianic Kingdom
God deemed that His image bearers would rule over the earth He had created as His regents and mediators. This rule included rule over all plant and all animal life, Genesis 1:28-29, and the works of His hands, Psalm 8:6-8. It is also evident that humans would rule over each other, not because God desired them to overtake His theocratic rule, but because humanity had rejected God from being a divine King over them. God made a covenant with Abraham which included the promise that kings would come from his lineage, Genesis 17:6. Many generations later, God appointed human kings to rule over His covenant people. God selected one person in particular, David whom He had chosen as king to be the head of a dynastic royal house, which include a throne and regal lineage that would be everlasting. These promises are included in the covenant God made with David, 2 Samuel 7:8-17.

The Abrahamic covenant, from which all other covenants God made with His covenant people derive, included a basic set of promises. These promises involve a land, a seed and a blessing to all nations. The land is identified in the Scriptures as Israel which had decreed boundaries. It was a realm with set limits to its size and not just a nebulous or misty promise of a landscape somewhere. The seed blessing included Abraham’s descendants which included a nation, the Hebrews and included the kings of this nation Israel and later the divided kingdoms (nations) of Israel and Judah. However, the seed blessing much more imminently included a single seed, a person who would in a future day, rule over, not only the covenant people of God but all nations of the earth. This person is clearly identified as the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. His rule over the
earth is yet future. The blessing promise was first to be administered to the nations through God’s covenant people and then through the life, death, resurrection and future rule of the singular seed, Jesus Christ.

The image bearers of God, humans did not righteously and justly carry out their role as God’s regents on the earth. The two who were first created, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God by their sinful response to the insipient interjection of temptation by Satan. This resulted in the curse of the ground, the earth, by God and the separation of humanity from perfect fellowship and a righteous relationship with God. This also resulted in the sinfulness of all who descendants of Adam and Eve, even from birth, Psalm 51:5. God’s ultimate plans and purposes for His creation was not doomed to failure. God, Himself provided the means for the “reverse of the curse” by first enacting a divine covenant with Noah, his descendants and the earth itself after purging the earth of its mass of sinful, corrupt and rebellious image bearers. God next enacted divine covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David that included land, seed (including a nation) and blessing. God also enacted a unique new covenant in which contained promises that He would create a new heart within His people and inscribe His laws within them and also put His Spirit within them.

To perfectly fulfill these covenant promises, God deemed that the problem of humanity’s sinfulness would need to be dealt with in a manner that satisfied His holiness. Sinfulness had a most terrifying result, eternal death which forever separated God’s image bearers from their Creator. The great “message” of the Scriptures is that God Himself provided a solution to the consequences of the sinfulness of humans. God demanded a holy, perfect and sinless atoning sacrifice that He could accept as sufficient to remove the penalty of humanity’s sinfulness. God, though His infinite love and mercy to his created image bearers, gave His unique Son, who is truly God, to be this atoning sacrifice. God’s unique, virgin born Son fulfilled His role as humanity’s sin bearer by His death on a cruel Roman cross and forever conquered sin and the grave when He was resurrected to life. The resurrected Son returned to heaven to sit at His Father’s right side with the role of mediator and advocate between the Father and His image bearers. But there is more to be accomplished before God’s covenant promises can be perfectly fulfilled. In a future day, known only to God, His unique Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah will return to the earth, as a warrior King, who will defeat His enemies and the enemies of His covenant people and establish an earthly kingdom that will transition into the eternal state and through which, all of His covenant promises will be fulfilled. Therefore, to summarize, first, the Messianic kingdom will have a righteous and just Regent, the singular Seed of Abraham, who will rule the nations of the earth in perfect holiness. Second, this kingdom, during its duration and as it transitions into the eternal state, will witness the perfect completion of all God’s covenant promises to His covenant people including a specific land and nation. Third, through this divine Regent, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

The Ruler of the Messianic Kingdom

If this kingdom is rightfully called “messianic” it is because its ruler is the Messiah who is revealed in the Old Testament with titles such as Branch, Servant, Redeemer, Savior and the four-fold titles in Isaiah 9:6, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. The title “Messiah” is mashiach in the Hebrew and may apply in the Old Testament as a reference to the coming Savior, Jesus Christ in 1 Samuel 2:10; 35; 2 Samuel 22:51; 23:1; Psalm 2:2; 20:6; 28:8; 84:9; 89:51; Daniel 9:25-26; and Habakkuk 3:13. Not every scholar or Bible student would agree that all of these references refer to the coming Savior. For an excellent discussion of “Messiah” in the Old Testament, see Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic*, B & H Publishing Group, 2010. The Messiah (Hebrew mashiach) is the one who is called Jesus Christ in the New Testament in (Greek messias) in John 1:41 and 4:25. The NASB translates the Greek word christos as Messiah in Matthew 1:1, 16. An important passage in the New Testament regarding Jesus Christ and His rule of a future kingdom is Luke 1:30-33, *The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Look, you will conceive in your womb, give birth to a son, and will call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.*
The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

The Scriptures give evidence of the divine status and role of the Ruler of the coming Messianic kingdom by the various names and titles that are ascribed to this Ruler. Some of these names and titles have been introduced in the above paragraph. The following short listing of a selected number of these names and titles are representative only of the great volume of these names and titles that appear in the Bible. They are simply stated in an alphabetical order but are not stated in a chronological order or order of importance for all of them are defining characteristics of this most beloved Ruler, who is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. As this list reveals, many of these names and titles are stated in the prophecy of Isaiah.

Anointed: Psalm 2:2; Acts 4:26
Apostle: Hebrews 3:1
Christ (the Greek Christos has the meaning of anointed or Messiah and occurs over 500 times in the N.T.)
Everlasting Father: Isaiah 9:6
Great Priest: Hebrews 10:21
High Priest: Hebrews 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1, 3; 9:11
His Holy One: Isaiah 10:17
Holy One of Israel: Isaiah 10:20
Immanuel: Isaiah 7:14; 8:8; Matthew 1:23
Jesus (the Greek esous has the meaning “God is salvation” and occurs over 900 times in the N.T.)
Judge: Isaiah 11:3-4; 16:5; 33:22; 51:4-5; Ezekiel 34:17, 20; Joel 3:1-2; Micah 4:2-3.
King: Psalm 2:6; 24:7-10; 45:6-7; Isaiah 6:5; 33:22; Ezekiel 20:33-34; Daniel 2:47; Zephaniah 3:12-20;
Zechariah 9:9; Luke 1:30-33; 19:38; John 1:49; 12:12-16; 18:37; Revelation 17:14;
King of Kings: Revelation 19:16
Light of Israel: Isaiah 10:17
Lord: Isaiah 2:2-5; 10:20;
Lord of hosts: Isaiah 6:5; 24:23; 44:6
Lord of lords: Revelation 19:16
Lord our Righteousness: Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:16;
Messiah: Daniel 9:26
Messiah the Prince: Daniel 9:25
Mighty God: Isaiah 9:6; 10:21
Mighty to save: Isaiah 63:2
Priest: Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 2:17; 5:6; 7:17, 24
Prince of Peace: Isaiah 9:6
Prince of Princes: Daniel 8:25
Redeemer: Job 19:25; Isaiah 59:20; 60:16;
Root of Jesse: Isaiah 11:10
Ruler: Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6; Revelation 1:5
5:23; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; 2 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6; 2 Peter 1:1;
2:20; 3:2, 18; 1 John 4:4, Jude vs. 25
Servant: Isaiah 42:1; 49:5-7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11
Shepherd: Isaiah 40:10-11; Micah 7:14; (compare with Jeremiah 23:1-3, Ezekiel 34:11-31, and 37:24)
Son: Isaiah 9:6; Hosea 11:1
Wonderful Counselor: Isaiah 9:6
The Realm of the Messianic Kingdom

The Scriptures prophesy of the works of the Messiah who will be the Ruler of the Messianic kingdom. These descriptive works provide insight into how His Realm will be governed. The government of the kingdom will be upon the shoulders of the Messiah, Isaiah 9:6. He will rule His kingdom with a rod of iron, Psalm 2:9; Isaiah 11:4; Revelation 12:5 and 19:15 destroying His enemies and ensuring complete compliance to Him by the people who inhabit the kingdom. The Messiah will reign and judge the people of the kingdom with wisdom, righteousness, faithfulness and justice, Isaiah 11:1-5; Jeremiah 23:5.

Others will have leadership roles including judges, Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; elders, Isaiah 24:23; Revelation 4:4 and 11:16; princes, Isaiah 32:1; rulers with Christ, 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6. A resurrected king David will also have a role as prince, Ezekiel 34:24 and 37:25.

It will be a realm of peace, security, health and rest, Psalm 72:7; Isaiah 2:4; 29:18-19; 32:18; 33:24; 35:3-6; Jeremiah 30:17; for the nations will turn weapons of warfare into other uses and the Messiah will now allow any rebellion or evil acts to shatter the peace. The animals will also be at peace with each other and with humans, Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:24-25.

It will be a realm of righteous instruction and justice. Peoples from the nations on the earth will journey to Mount Zion to receive the Messiah’s instruction, and righteous judgments, Isaiah 2:3-4. See also Psalm 96:10; Isaiah 16:5; 61:3, 11; and Malachi 3:3, 17-18. The inhabitants will have God’s law written on their hearts, Jeremiah 31:33. It will also be a realm of truth, Psalm 85:10-11; Jeremiah 33:6; and Zechariah 8:3, and 8.

It will be a realm of holiness as those who inhabit Jerusalem will be called holy, and the kingdom will be a holy place, Isaiah 4:3-4; Joel 3:17; Zechariah 2:12; and 14:20-21. Those who journey to Mount Zion from the nations of the earth will travel on a “highway of holiness, Isaiah 35:8-10. Jerusalem will also be called faithful and a city of righteousness, Isaiah 1:26. Mount Zion will be called God’s holy mountain, Psalm 48:1; Isaiah 27:13; and Jeremiah 31:23, for the Lord will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, Isaiah 33:5. It will also be a realm in which the inhabitants will be filled with the Spirit. Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 36:27; 37:14; and Joel 2:28-32. The peoples of the realm, the families of the nations, will worship the Lord, Psalm 22:27-28, Malachi 1:11. A temple will be built where offerings will be made to the Lord and His priests will minister to Him, Ezekiel chapters 40-48. God’s covenant people will be called priests and servants of God, Isaiah 61:6. The most exalted place of the realm, Mount Zion will be covered by a canopy of the glory of the LORD which will provide shelter from heat and protection from storms, Isaiah 4:5-6.

The Residents of the Messianic Kingdom

The Scriptures reveal that following the terrifying days of the Tribulation, Revelation chapters 6-19, which is also known as the time of Jacob’s trouble or distress, Jeremiah 30:7, the Messiah will return to the earth when the remnant of His covenant people have repented of their national sin of having rejected the Messiah during His first advent. The confession of this sin is recorded in Isaiah 53:1-9 and 64:1-12. See also Psalm 79:1-13; and 80:1-19. They will also call upon their Messiah to return, Hosea Isaiah 63:15-64:12; 5:15-6:3; Zechariah 12:10-13:1 and Matthew 23:37-39. Only then will the Messiah return, 2 Chronicles 7:13-14; Zechariah 14:3-5 and defeat the enemies of His covenant people and begin the process of establishing His kingdom on the earth. Those who are rescued by the Messiah will journey with Him to Zion as He begins His rulership of the earth, Micah 2:13.

Those who have been rescued from their enemies will be accompanied by those whom the Lord will gather from the nations to come to Jerusalem and Israel where they will take up residence under the glorious rule of their Messiah. See Isaiah 11:12; 27:12; 34:16-17; 40:9-11; 43:1-7; 49:5-6, 14-26; 54:1-17; 56:1-8; 60:1-22;

 Others who will be residents of the Messianic kingdom include those who will be martyred for Christ during the tribulation, Revelation 20:4-6. It is possible that 2 Timothy 2:12 refers to all believers in Christ who will be resurrected to rule with Christ in the Messianic kingdom. Revelation 5:10 refers to the role of resurrected believers who will be priests and who will reign upon the earth which can only be during the period of the Messianic kingdom. Others, including resurrected Old Testament saints, like king David will have leadership roles in the Messianic kingdom. See Ezekiel 34:24 and 37:25. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will also be present, Matthew 8:11. Some, however, dispute the role of resurrected believers being resident in the Messianic kingdom. For a discussion on this, see J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come, pages 532 and following. Matthew 25:31 states that angels will also be present when Christ comes to sit upon His throne.

Appendix 2

The Covenants of God

This brief study on the covenants of God is intended to introduce students of the Scriptures to these covenants as they are essential to understanding of God’s relationship to His covenant people and to all who believe in the Son of God for salvation. This study complements the essay on the kingdom of God that precedes this study. Recommended resources for studying the covenants in more detail is the Master’s Seminary Journal, TMSJ 10/2 (Fall 1999). See also, Dispensationalism, The Church and the New Covenant, by R. Bruce Compton, the Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal, DSBJ 8 (Fall 2003): pages 3-48. Rodney Decker has also written a specific study of the New Covenant in Hebrews, The Law, the New Covenant, and the Christian: Studies in Hebrews 7-10; Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, September 2009.

Introduction to the Covenants

God, as revealed in the Scriptures, has made covenants with those who are His image bearers. Most of these covenants were made with Abraham and his descendants. One covenant, the Noahic was made with all of His image bearers. These image bearers are those described in Genesis chapter 1:26-28. They are humans God has created to fill the earth and rule over it and superintending it as God’s mediatorial representatives. This role of humans in relation to God’s creation will be explained in greater detail in the study on the kingdom of God. When God had completed His creative works, including the creation of humans, He pronounced that everything He had made was “very good,” Genesis 1:31. This was not to stay this way however, for the first two humans that were created fell into sin, seriously affecting the relationship between God and humanity, bringing physical and spiritual death to humanity, corrupting the natural world as it received the judgment of a curse from God upon it and establishing the need for a Savior to restore a righteous relationship between God’s image bearers and Himself. God’s intent in creation was to have the heavens and earth He created bring glory to Him. His image bearers were to both display and declare God’s glory to all creation. The introduction of sin into the world God had created also brought humanity into a critical danger of being destroyed and removed from the earth, which would have prevented them from fulfilling their original task stated in Genesis 1:26-28 and from displaying and declaring God’s glory to all His creation.

The covenants identified in this study are the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, The Mosaic Covenant, the Priestly Covenant, and the New Covenant. Although many other pledges and promises in the Scriptures between humans are designated as covenants, they do not have the divine authority or purpose as do these major covenants between God and His people. Also, there are a few sub-covenants identified by Biblical scholars, such as that of the “land” in Deuteronomy chapters 29-30, however, they may best be understood as re-confirmations of the promises God has made in the covenants to Abraham, Moses and David. Refer to Thomas Constable, Notes on Deuteronomy, Chapters 29-30, latest Edition, Sonic Light. The first covenant between God and mankind that is clearly stated in the Scriptures as a covenant is the one God made with Noah in which the word “covenant” is mentioned, Genesis 6:18, 9:9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 and 17.

The named covenants of Scripture between God and His image bearers are in form of obligations that are legally binding and can be understood as a grant or a treaty. These covenants were not made with parties who are equal. In each one of them God is the incomparably superior, supreme and sovereign designer and director of the covenant which is revealed to humans who had no part in the drafting of the covenant nor were they consulted in this process for any input whatsoever. The Abrahamic, Davidic, Priestly and New Covenants are grants from God that are unilateral and unconditional in that the obligation for the keeping of
the covenant promises rests with God alone. The Mosaic Covenant was a treaty (contract) agreement that was bilateral and conditional as there were obligations and requirements from both “parties” of the covenant to keep in order for the covenant agreement to stay in force. The unilateral and unconditional covenants between God and mankind are still in force but the bilateral and conditional Mosaic Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant.

It must be understood that the term “unconditional” applies in a general sense to the unilateral covenants between God and mankind. The only truly strictly unconditional covenant is the Noahic which requires no involvement by humans for the covenant to remain in force. The other unilateral covenants have some aspects where humans must be involved in them. The involvement of humans is typically a reaction of faith and trust in God. If faith and trust is not evident, individual humans will not enjoy the benefits of the covenant. However, God will complete the covenant promises, whether some or many individual humans have no involvement by faith in Him. Their completion is a guarantee from God, who is the covenant maker and He will fulfil His obligation to ensure the covenant is met perfectly as He intended.

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament for covenant is berit which, according to Irvin Busenitz is difficult to define based upon its etymology. See Irvin Busenitz, Introduction to the Biblical Covenants, The Master’s Seminary Journal, TMSJ 10/2 (Fall 1999) pages 174-175. The most likely meaning of berit based upon its context in the Old Testament is that it is a binding obligation that has its legal status based upon the sovereignty of God. In the New Testament the Greek word for covenant is diatheke which can be translated as “testament” and care must be taken not to confuse it with a “last will and testament.” The enactment of a “last will and testament” occurs when one party is deceased. This is not the case with “testament” which is in force while both parties are alive. Refer to article by Irvin Busenitz stated above.

1. The Noahic Covenant
Humans did not stop rebelling against God following the sinful actions of the earth’s first family. This sinfulness increased in intensity until God finally dealt with this sin in a most dramatic display of His wrath. God set apart only eight image bearers, Noah, his wife, Noah’s three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives, to escape His display of wrath upon the earth. All other persons upon the earth died when God caused the earth to be completely covered in water and Noah and his family escaped death by being secured in the ark that God instructed Noah to build. The narrative of these dramatic events is described in Genesis chapters 6 to 9. Following the receding of the flood waters, God by His own volition and divine will made a covenant with Noah which included all living things upon the earth and Noah’s descendants which effectively included all persons on the ark and all who would be born after them.

The details of the Noahic Covenant are stated in Genesis 9:8-17 with a pre-amble to the covenant stated in Genesis 6:18 and 8:21-22. The content of the covenant is (1) it was made by God, without prior consultation with anyone or anything; (2) It was made by God with Noah and his family and descendants and with every living creature upon the earth; (3) It consisted of God’s promise to never again destroy all living things in the world with a flood, Genesis 8:21-22; 9:11; 15. (4) It would be an everlasting covenant (berit olam) that would be in effect as long as the earth remains, Genesis 8:21-22; 9:12, 16; (5) It would have a covenant sign, the rainbow, which was a promise to the living creatures on the earth that upon seeing the rainbow in the cloud, God would remember His covenant promises, Genesis 9:12-17. God’s preamble to this covenant in Genesis 8:21-22 included the promise that “as long as the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night will not cease.” This is a promise of the continuation of the cycles of the seasons and that of day and night as the earth revolves around the sun. In the continuation of the preamble to the covenant, in Genesis 9:1, God told Noah and his sons to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” This command was a re-commission by God to humans that He first gave to Adam in Genesis 1:28 to fulfil God’s intention that His created earth be filled with humans He had created.
The Noahic covenant was the only covenant God made that was not specifically connected to His chosen people. However, this covenant has implications for His chosen people including all of Abraham’s descendants. The background or basis for God’s everlasting covenant with Noah is not discussed in Genesis chapters 6-9 other than the immediate need for it as God was to destroy all living things on the earth. The purpose for this covenant extends backwards to Genesis chapter 1, where it is revealed that God created image bearers to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth and to have specific tasks including having dominion over every living thing upon the earth. The purpose for this covenant also extends forward to passages such as Isaiah 43:7 which reveals that God’s image bearers were created for His glory. See notes on Isaiah 43:7 in this study of Isaiah. God’s purposes for His creation also included the renown of His name, Psalm 102:12 and 135:13 which was also connected to other works He has and will accomplish such as the miracle of the escape of His people through the parted waters of the Red Sea, Isaiah 63:12 and the future blessings of the Messianic kingdom, Isaiah 55:13. Another and some would claim the most important basis (for redeemed mankind) for God’s covenant with Noah is God’s desire to live forever (tabernacle) with those who have faith in Him. This is evident in a much beloved name for God in Isaiah, Immanuel, which has the meaning of “God with us,” Isaiah 7:14, 8:8, 10. In order for God to fulfill His perfect plans and purposes for those He has created for His glory, God needed to preserve His image-bearers until the time when He would live among (tabernacle) his glorified people forever in the eternal state, Revelation 21:3. God also needed to preserve His image bearers among the people He chose to come from the lineage of Abraham so that His chosen Servant, the kinsmen Redeemer, from that line would fulfill His salvific purposes in order for God to live forever among His redeemed people.

It is very significant that Revelation 21:3 contains what Biblical scholars suggest as the “covenant formula.” The formula, stated in the NKJV as, “and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.” Similar forms of this formula are found in the Scriptures in passages that discuss God’s covenants with His people, specifically those relating to the New Covenant, see Jeremiah 24:7, 31:33; 32:38 and Ezekiel 37:23, 37. If, as this study of the covenants suggests, is correct, the supreme reason God established His covenant with Noah was to ensure that He would forever be the God of His people to live with them and receive everlasting praise and worship from them as they display and declare His glory.

2. The Abrahamic Covenant
The Abrahamic Covenant is critical to God’s sovereign purposes for the redemption of those who by faith would enter into permanent relationship with Him and glorify Him forever. Students of Scripture must comprehend the significance of God’s covenant with Abraham in its connection to the entire scope of God’s plans for creation and the complete teaching of the Scriptures. This covenant directly impacts every major doctrine and theological teaching of the Bible. It is also the specific basis for (1) God’s faithful and longsuffering dealings with His unique chosen people to give them a land for their possession, (2) His care to protect His chosen people from the idolatrous and self-exalting influences of pagan societies; (3) His desire to bless all nations through the intended faithful ministry of His chosen people; (4) His promise of a blessed future both in the messianic kingdom and in the eternal state to all those who would have faith in Him; (5) His sovereign choice of a unique people through whom, a Savior (a seed) would come to become the means by which redemption would be made available to these chosen people and to all others on the earth who would have faith in this Savior.

The Circumstances Leading to the Abrahamic Covenant
Genesis chapters 10 and 11 provide details of the days following the great flood during the days of Noah. The flood did not exterminate sinfulness from the earth and mankind’s rebellion against God again became an abhorrence to God as it did in the Garden of Eden and in the days prior to the great flood. Genesis chapter 10 includes a narration of the powerful influence of Ham’s grandson and Noah’s great grandson Nimrod who among other things was the founder and ruler of Babel and other pagan city states such as Nineveh. These
pagan peoples who spoke the same language rebelled against the command of God to fill the earth and subdue it, Genesis 1:28 and 9:1, 7. In the land of Shinar in which Babel (Babylon) was founded by Nimrod, the people decided to build a tower, which would have a top “in the heavens” and to make a name for themselves which would thwart the plan of God of having people fill the earth, Genesis 11:1-4. Underlying this effort of tower building was the idolatrous hearts of the people, from which flowed their wicked intentions to exalt and govern themselves. These post-flood peoples who should have learned from the stories of their immediate families of cause of the great flood, deliberately flaunted their wickedness in God’s face.

God judged the people of the earth and rather than eliminating them, He kept His covenant promise to Noah by allowing them to live. His judgment upon them was to confuse their single language and cause them to speak in different languages which resulted in their spreading out over the face of the earth, each in their own language group. This action of God did not exterminate their wicked hearts and they continued to exalt themselves wherever they spread out upon the earth. God hated this and every form of the worship that did not exalt Him alone. He had a redemptive plan to preserve to Himself a people through which His promise of Genesis 3:15 would be kept and to whom He would be their covenant God and they would be His people, worshipping Him and glorifying Him only. While the people of the earth, now speaking many different languages spread out to fill the earth, God called one man, Abram including his immediate family, to leave the pagan culture of Ur, located south of Babylon, and travel to a land God would show him.


The Content of the Abrahamic Covenant
The Scriptural references to the Abrahamic Covenant include the direct covenant language of Genesis 15:18 and 17:1-21 but include the wider discussion God had with Abraham recorded in Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 18:17-33; 21:12-13; and 22:1-18. God re-confirmed this covenant with Abraham’s son Isaac, Genesis 26:2-5 and Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, Genesis 28:10-17. References to permanence (everlasting, forever) of this covenant occur in 1 Chronicles 16:15-17 and Psalm 105:8-9. See also a possible reference in Isaiah 24:5. Other specific references occur in Exodus 2:24; 6:2-5; Leviticus 26:42-45 and Deuteronomy 4:31. There are many other references in the Old Testament where this covenant is mentioned in terms of what God had sworn by an oath to the forefathers of the people descended from Abraham. God’s faithful servant Stephen mentioned this covenant as a promise sworn to Abraham, Acts 7:17. Paul also mentioned this covenant in terms of a promise, Romans 4:13-25; Galatians chapter 3; and 4:23. The author of Hebrews also mentions this covenant in terms of a promise, 6:13-18; 7:6; 11:8-10, 17-18. Paul, however explains that there is a distinction between promises and covenants, Romans 9:4. Keith Essex discusses this issue in “The Abrahamic Covenant,” the Master’s Seminary Journal, TMSJ 10/2 (1999), pages 193-194. Other New Testament references to the Abrahamic Covenant include Luke 1:72-75; Acts 3:25; and 7:8.

The content of God’s covenant with Abraham can be understood in at least three major areas: land, seed and blessing. The introductory declaration by God regarding His covenant with Abraham (then Abram) in Genesis 12:1-3, 7 is an example of these three significant aspects of the covenant. Land is stated in 12:1, 7; nation (signifying seed) is stated in 12:2; and blessing is stated in 12:2-3.
The Covenant Stipulation of the Land
The statement by God of “a land” that He would show to Abram is a significant theme of the Abrahamic Covenant. The land promise is also stated in specific passages directly pertaining to this covenant in Genesis 13:14-17; 15:7, 16-21; 17:8; 26:3-4; 28:13, 15. God’s promise of this land is also stated, for example in Genesis 35:11-12; 48:4; Deuteronomy 11:24-25; 30:1-10; and Joshua 1:4-5. The boundaries of the land of the messianic kingdom are enumerated in Ezekiel 47:13-23. These are representative examples only and not an exhaustive listing of all the land promises. The stipulation of land that God included in His covenant with Abraham meant that the people He had chosen to be descendants of Abraham would have a significant place of their own among the peoples of the earth. This stipulation was of major importance to Abraham’s son Isaac, his grandson Jacob and great-grandsons who became the heads of the tribes of Israel. These tribes were allotted specific territories within the land, as homelands in themselves for the members of each tribe, Numbers chapters 32-34 and confirmed in the book of Joshua.

The “land” is of extreme importance in our modern day. The people of Israel still long for occupation of all the land of promise and Isaiah wrote often of the future return of the faithful remnant to the land from the many countries where they are scattered. This return will follow the terrifying days of the Tribulation as the Messiah will defeat His enemies who are also enemies of His people and He will establish His messianic kingdom which will be a complete fulfillment of the land promise contained in the Abrahamic Covenant. Selected references in Isaiah to the fulfilled land promises including Zion and the return of the faithful remnant to the land occur in Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 9:6-7; 10:20-23; 11:11-16; 14:1-2; 26:1-4; 27:12; 35:1-10; 40:2-3; 41:9; 43:1-7; 49:5-26; 51:10-16; 54:1-17; 55:12-13; 57:13, 18; 60:1-22; 61:2b-11; 62:1-12; 65:8-10; 66:5-13, 18-21. See also Psalm 105:1-45. These are selected references only and not an exhaustive listing. It is critical to the understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant that God’s stipulation of a land for Abraham’s descendants has not been obliterated or removed. The land is as important today as it was to Abraham and the twelve tribes of Israel and it will continue to be of utmost concern until God creates a new earth and a new heavens. It is of utmost concern to the Servant of God, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will reign for a thousand years on the throne of David on Mount Zion in the midst of the land that God stipulated in His covenant with Abraham thousands of years ago.

The Covenant Stipulation of Seed
The second major stipulation of the Abrahamic Covenant is the mention of a nation to come from Abraham which is also described as seed, which is revealed in Scripture both in a plural and a singular sense. Beginning in Genesis 12:2 with the mention of a great nation to come from Abram and it is repeated within the covenant context in 13:14-16, 15:4-5; 17:1-21; 18:18-19; 21:12; 22:17-18; 26:3-4; and 28:14. Other references in the Old Testament include Psalm 105:6; 106:40-45; Jeremiah 33:23-26; and Micah 7:18-20. In the New Testament the seed stipulation of the Abrahamic Covenant is stated in Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:16-18; and 4:21-31.

In Genesis 15:1-5, the promise of “seed” is emphasized. Abraham (Abram) stated, “Look, you have given me no children, (seed), so one of my servants will be my heir,” Genesis 15:3. God responded in 15:4, “a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” God told Abram to look up at the heavens and to count the stars if he could number them for his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, Genesis 15:5. Abram’s response to this promise and God’s act following this response is stunning in its theological significance. “And Abram believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness,” Genesis 15:6.

Within the greater context of the God’s covenant promises to Abraham is this double response between Abraham (Abram) and God. God made a promise of innumerable seed that would come from Abraham. In response Abraham expressed his faith in God and in response to Abraham’s faith (he believed the LORD), God reckoned (counted) to him as righteousness. The apostle Paul, writing of this exchange between
Abraham and God said in the fourth chapter of Romans, said “faith was counted to Abraham for righteousness,” Romans 4:9. In Galatians 3:5-14, Paul expands upon this simple statement by stating, “Does He, who gives you the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by your doing works of the law or by believing what you heard? Just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, know that those who believe are the sons of Abraham. The Scripture foresees that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, when it proclaimed the gospel to Abraham saying “All nations will be blessed in you.” So those who believe are blessed along with Abraham, who believed. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not keep doing everything written in the book of the law.” Now obviously no one is justified before God by the law, because “The one who is righteous will live by faith.” But the law is not based on faith; but the one who does works will live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree,” so that the blessing of Abraham by Christ Jesus might come to the Gentiles and so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith.”

The “seed” promise of the Abrahamic Covenant is declared by God in Genesis as an heir that would come from Abraham leading to innumerable descendants and a great nation. However, the “seed” promise would be applied in the New Testament in a singular sense with the meaning of One specific “seed.” Paul stated in the third chapter of Galatians, “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say “and to your descendants,” as of many; but as of one, “and to your descendent,” who is Christ.” Galatians 3:16. Paul was quoting from Genesis 12:7 where the word “descendants” is literally “seed.” Keith Essex (TMSJ 10/2 (Fall 1999), page 205, suggests that the word “seed” in Genesis 22:17b-18 should be understood in the singular. In Genesis 49, the patriarch Jacob makes a prophecy about this “seed” who will come from the descendants of his son Judah referring to a future person, as “him” and “he,” Genesis 49:9-12. This “seed” would also be revealed as one who would sit upon the throne of David in a future kingdom, Isaiah 9:6-7 and Luke 1:32-33. The prophet Micah revealed where this singular “seed” described as one who was to be ruler in Israel, would be born, Bethlehem Ephrathah in Judah, Micah 5:2. This was
confirmed in Matthew 2:1-6 as the birthplace of Jesus Christ. For an extended discussion on Paul’s use of the singular “seed” in Galatians 3:16, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Zondervan, 2010, pages 228-230. However one understands the meaning of “seed” as plural or singular in the Abrahamic Covenant, Scripture points to this seed as the greater Son of Abraham, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be from the tribe of Judah, who would be born as a son, who will be the Savior of the world and who will rule on the throne of David over His kingdom on the earth.

The Covenant Stipulation of Blessing

The third major stipulation of the Abrahamic Covenant is blessing. In the initial statement of the covenant, Genesis 12:1-3, God states the blessings of the covenant in 12:2 (twice) and three times in 12:3. In 12:2 God states, “I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” In 12:3 God promises that “I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you, I will curse. Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” In Genesis 17:16 God promises blessings on Sarah who shall bear the promised heir. In Genesis 18:18, God promises that all nations would be blessed in Abraham. In Genesis 22:17, God again promises to bless Abraham and in 22:18, as discussed above, God stated “and through your descendants (seed) all the nations of the earth will be blessed.” It is certainly significant that in the midst of the greater context of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis, Abraham meets Melchizedek, who is described as the king of Salem and the priest of the “God most High,” who conveyed a blessing on both Abraham (Abram) and God, Genesis 14:18-20.

God in His covenant with Abraham pronounces a blessing on Abraham. God also states that Abraham would be a blessing, states that all who bless Abraham would themselves be blessed, states that Sarah would be blessed and that through Abraham and his descendants (seed), all the families and all the nations of the earth would be blessed. These blessings are re-confirmed with Abraham’s son Isaac in Genesis 26:3, 4, 12 and 24. Isaac conferred the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant on his son Jacob, Genesis 27:29 and 28:3-4. The blessings of the covenant were also confirmed by the LORD upon Jacob, Genesis 28:13-14, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The ground on which you lie, I will give to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west, east, north and south. Through you and your offspring (seed) will all the families of the earth be blessed.”

In the Old Testament, God promised to bless His people in Numbers 6:27; Deuteronomy 7:12-14; 15:6; 26:15; 33:29; Psalm 33:12; 37:22; 67:7; 72:17; Isaiah 19:24-25; 44:1-3; 51:2; 61:9; 65:23; Jeremiah 4:2; Zechariah 8:13. In the New Testament God’s promised blessing through His covenant with Abraham is stated in Acts 3:25; Romans 4:9; Galatians 3:8, 9, 14; and Hebrews 6:13-20. Because of the failure of the physical descendants of Abraham to be a blessing to the nations, the ultimate blessing of God through the Abrahamic Covenant is through the singular “seed,” the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, who is the Lord Jesus Christ who will bless all nations through His work of salvation. Although Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 speaks of the Servant as being a covenant to the people, which is a New Covenant stipulation, the outcome of the Servants ministry fulfills the aspect of blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant. In Isaiah 42:6, the Servant will be a light to the Gentiles and in 49:8, He will be used by God to restore the earth. In Isaiah 49:6 the Servant will be God’s salvation to the ends of the earth. The blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant directed to all the families and nations of the earth are blessings of salvation wrought through the salvific cross work of the “seed” of the covenant, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The blessings of salvation apply to all who have faith in the Son of God, and just as it was said of Abraham, those who have such faith, their faith will be reckoned to them as righteousness.
Other Important Considerations of the Abrahamic Covenant

1. Everlasting Promises
The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are stated to be everlasting in Genesis 13:15; 17:7-8, 13 and 19. They are everlasting in the sense that they will continue until God establishes the new heavens and the new earth. In another sense they will truly last forever in that all who have put their faith in the Son and fulfil the promise of blessing to all families and nations of the earth will live forever in the new heavens and new earth. They will live with God who will “tabernacle” among them, as He has promised them in stating the great covenant formula, they shall be His people and He will be their God. It is not correct to claim that all the promises of blessings to the people of the earth of the Abrahamic Covenant were met with the first advent of Jesus Christ. The salvific and blessing promises continue to this day and will continue into eternity for it is those who have been declared justified (righteous) by their faith in Christ, will continue to live forever in the presence of the LORD and the Lamb, who sit upon their throne, Revelation 22:1. Also, once the covenant people of God are restored spiritually and have returned to the land of promise at the inauguration of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah, they will then fulfill their role under the Abrahamic Covenant to be a blessing to all nations and families of the earth, Isaiah 61:6a, 9, 11; 62:1-3.

2. Sign of the Covenant
As with many covenants the Abrahamic Covenant has a sign attached to it. The sign for the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision, Genesis 17:9-14, which signified the obedience by Abraham and his male descendants to the requirements of the covenant. Those who were not circumcised were said to have broken the covenant, Genesis 17:14. This conditional individual requirement was to be kept for all generations for it is an everlasting condition. It does not mean that the Abrahamic Covenant itself can be destroyed by disobedience to this requirement, but only that individuals who are directly in the lineage of Abraham, who are not circumcised to not participate in the temporal blessings of the covenant directed to such things as family and land issues. God’s promises are sure and cannot fail for He will fulfil all that He purposed to do through the promises of this covenant. It should be noted that the requirement of circumcision applies to the actual physical male descendants of Abraham and not to Abraham’s spiritual descendants, Galatians 3:7, 29. Paul discussed the pros and cons of circumcision in Romans 2:25-29; 3:1-8, 27-31; 4:9-12; 1 Corinthians 7:18-19; Galatians 2:3-21; 5:1-6, 11-12; 6:12-15; Ephesians 2:11-13; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11; 3:11 and Titus 1:10.

3. The Mosaic Covenant
The Mosaic Covenant is vast in that it is begins in Exodus and has content that extends to the end of Deuteronomy. It is often referred to as “the law” in a singular sense although it contains many hundreds of stipulations, regulations and ordinances that are legally binding “laws.” Although many understand the Mosaic Covenant to be bi-lateral and conditional, it is “basically” unconditional and unilateral in that God’s purposes for this covenant was completed as He intended. It was a covenant that was given from One who was absolutely Sovereign and the only God to a specified chosen nation of individuals who were corrupt, rebellious and weak, unable to fulfill the least of the legally binding stipulations of the covenant. It did not require acceptance by the people of God for it to be ratified or in-force. It was in place when God declared the various segments of the covenant to Moses, beginning at Mount Sinai and during the long wilderness journeys of the covenant people of God. The covenant had conditional elements in that God’s blessings on His people were contingent on their obedience to His covenant decrees. Disobedience to the covenant’s requirements by God’s people did not destroy and end the covenant. God who cannot lie or commit sin could not “break” the covenant’s legal requirements so the other party to the covenant, God’s people were solely responsible for keeping them. The penalty for breaking the covenant resulted in spiritual and physical consequences for God’s people including physical death, spiritual separation from God and the removal from the promised land for a specified period of time.
The Mosaic Covenant can be understood as the legally binding constitution for the new nation that emerged from slavery in Egypt to take residence in their own unique land that God had promised them. This covenant—constitution was necessary for God’s people to properly and righteously live in relation to their God and with each other. The covenant contained legal, ceremonial and moral aspects which were inter-twined and should be considered as inseparable integral stipulations. The Mosaic Covenant, like all other covenants God made, were given or pronounced without any prior consultation or input or review by God’s image bearers. It would be an abhorrence to God for Him to seek the advice of sinful humanity before making any decree that regulates the relationship between Himself and His created beings. The Mosaic Covenant is the only covenant that has been replaced by another covenant that Scripture calls the New Covenant. It was not replaced because it was imperfect or did not accomplish all God intended it to accomplish. It was perfect, sure, right, pure and true, Psalm 19:7-11 and its divine author was perfect. It was replaced because it had perfectly accomplished its purpose was completely fulfilled in Abraham’s and David’s greater Son, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The central teaching of the Mosaic Covenant is found in Exodus chapters 19-24. However, elements of the covenant in its wider sense are found in Exodus chapter 25 to the end of Deuteronomy. The essential core of the covenant is the ten commandments or as some scholars are prone to say, the ten words, Exodus 20:1-17. But, there are a total of 613 commands within the wider scope of the covenant, 248 being positive commands and 365 being negative commands. Jewish legalism added much erroneous teaching and comment on the commands of the covenant and Jesus spent considerable time during His public ministry at His first advent correcting these additions and comments. This is seen for example in the first public sermon of Jesus which is called the sermon on the mount, Matthew chapters 5-7. Jesus called the legalistic Pharisees and Teachers of the law hypocrites because they so corrupted the teaching of the commands of the covenant that they led astray the people of Israel by making entrance into God’s kingdom based entirely upon works and not by faith. Jesus stated that no one could gain entrance into God’s kingdom unless their righteousness exceeded that of the scribes and the Pharisees, Matthew 5:20.

The Preparation for the Mosaic Covenant
God was preparing His people for the covenant before they were freed from Egypt. When God met Moses at the “burning bush,” Exodus chapter 3, He said to Moses “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” Exodus 3:12. God was preparing His people who were then in slavery in Egypt for a new life of freedom in a land He had promised them. Before this would become a reality, God gave Moses an indication of what was expected of His chosen people. They were being freed so they could worship Him. This was also a repeated stipulation during the days when Moses met with Pharaoh of Egypt demanding that Pharaoh release the Hebrew people, so they could worship their God. See Exodus 4:23; 7:16; 8:1; 20, 9:1; 13: 10:3, 7, 8, 11, 24, 26; and 12:31 in the NIV. The KJV, NKJV and ESV translate the Hebrew word ‘abad as “serve” for these verses. The NASB translates ‘abad as worship in Exodus 3:12 and 12:31 but translates ‘abad as “serve” and in all the other verses. The word “serve” has several meanings but in the context of Exodus chapters 3 to 12 it has a direct relationship to worship, thus to serve God is to worship Him.

The Prologue to the Mosaic Covenant
When the people under the leadership of Moses arrived and camped near mount Sinai, God spoke to Moses and said, “This is what you will say to the house of Jacob and tell the Israelites: 4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant then you will be my special possession from among all peoples. For although all the earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Exodus 19:3-6. Prior to the declaration of the covenant, God told Moses that He desired the people to obey Him and keep His covenant. If they did this, then they would be His special possession from all the earth’s peoples and also be
a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Thus, from the very beginning of God’s statements regarding His covenant, 19:5; there is conditionality, (if / then) attached to it. However, this conditional aspect must be understood in conjunction with God’s earlier covenant with Abraham.

The unconditional premise of the Abrahamic Covenant of land, seed (with its inclusion of nation) and blessing is not diminished or contingent upon the obedience of God’s people to His covenant with Moses. God will fulfill completely all He had promised in His covenant with Abraham. If the covenant people of God did not obey His voice and keep the Mosaic Covenant (and they did not), they would not receive the offered blessings of being His special possession, nor would they righteously serve (worship) God as a kingdom of priests, nor would they be a holy nation before Him. Later revelation in Scripture shows that God indeed kept the Mosaic Covenant in force until it was perfectly fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. See Matthew 5:17; Galatians 3:13, 21-24.

It is not that the law has completely vanished, for Christ stated, “for truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one dot or one pen-stroke will in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished.” Matthew 5:18. However, believers in Christ are not under the law, Romans 6:14-15 and Galatians 5:18. Because of a fundamental change in the priesthood, in that Jesus Christ is an eternal priest in the “order of Melchizedek and not in accordance with prescriptions of the law itself, the law was in need of change, Hebrews 7:11-28. Christ, through the sprinkling of His blood which was superior to the sprinkling of the blood of animals, therefore has become the surety or guarantee of a better covenant, Hebrews 7:22, 8:8, 13; 9:13-15; 12:24. Also, what the law was not intended to accomplish, that is unhindered and free access to God was accomplished by the mediator of the new covenant. This was symbolically performed at the death of Christ when the great curtain in the temple torn from top to bottom, Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45, and Ephesians 2:11-18, signifying that believers can with boldness now enter the holy place (meet with God) because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, Hebrews 10:19-22. Christ has brought us into a direct relationship with God, and all who believe in Him, both Jews and Gentiles are one in Him. Christ is the mediator of the new covenant, Hebrews 9:15 through His shed blood, Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; and I Corinthians 11:25. Christ therefore fulfills what was prophesied of Him in Isaiah 42:6, 49:8 and 52:13-53:12 regarding His role in the new covenant which has replaced the Mosaic Covenant.

The Preamble to the Mosaic Covenant
God in Exodus 20:2 declares a brief preamble to the Mosaic Covenant. God makes two defining statements of His qualifications to unilaterally declare His covenant with His people at the inauguration of their nationhood. God first declares, “I am the LORD your God.” He confirms His great name by which He told Moses to reveal to the people of Israel who were in slavery in Egypt. In Exodus 3:14 God states, “You will say this to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.” God by stating that He is Yahweh, their God in Exodus 20:2 declares His sovereign right to make a covenant with those people who He had earlier described as His “special possession,” Exodus 19:5 and would later describe as “a holy people to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be his own special (treasured) people, above all peoples on the face of the earth.” Deuteronomy 7:6. See also Deuteronomy 14:2. God did not need to authenticate His right to make a covenant with His people but made this simple statement of His name to remind them that He alone is their God and they alone are His special people.

The second brief statement God makes in Exodus 20:2 in the preamble to the Mosaic Covenant, is that it was He “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” God was reminding His covenant people of His great love for them by freeing them to worship Him. This momentous act by God on their behalf is declared often in the Scriptures, for example, Psalm 78:12-16; 81:10; Isaiah 11:16 and Jeremiah 11:4. God’s frequent statements to His covenant people of their freedom from Egyptian slavery is not an egotistical boast about His past accomplishments but is a reminder that He can be entirely trusted. He
is the only true God, for no other “god” could accomplish this, certainly not their idols who could accomplish nothing. This statement of their freedom of slavery also serves to reassure God’s people that they can have confidence in the future for their God will stand with them and provide safety from their enemies, Isaiah 37:36; provide release from captivity, Ezra chapter 1; provide a Savior for them, Isaiah 63:1-6; provide a future peaceful and righteous kingdom to be ruled by their Messiah, Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 9:6-7, (and many other passages in Isaiah); they will finally be priests and ministers of God, Isaiah 61:6, and they will have everlasting joy, Isaiah 61:7.

The People of the Mosaic Covenant
God’s covenant, declared to Moses was specifically for His covenant people, whom He had just freed from slavery in Egypt. God did not enter into this covenant with a people who were obedient, faithful and who desired to worship Him. They were rebellious, unfaithful and continually worshipped worthless idols. They often willingly ignored God and sought the aid of pagan nations for help when threatened by their enemies. There was little to commend them as ready recipients of God’s graceful care for them. Yet they were God’s people whom He chose for His own sake, and for the glory of His name. The people of Mosaic Covenant were those who were linked uniquely to God through the provisions and promises of the covenant God made (cut) with Abraham. God’s plan for them involved a Savior who would come from this people, a seed, who Isaiah describes as the Servant who would bring salvation to them as well as those from all nations of the earth. God would fulfill His desire for worshippers from these people and all peoples who would display and declare His glory to all creation.

The Precepts of the Mosaic Covenant
As mentioned above, the central content of the Mosaic Covenant is found in Exodus chapters 19-24 with the most well-known part of this central content being the ten commandments known also as the decalogue. This central content is called the “Book of the Covenant” in Exodus 24:7. The teachings of the covenant, which is called the law, also include the material from Exodus 19 to Deuteronomy 33. The teachings of the covenant are called precepts, statutes and laws in Nehemiah 9:14. Many Psalms reference the teachings of the law as being precepts, an example being Psalm 119:4, “You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently.” (NKJV). William D. Barrick discusses the key stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant, in The Masters Seminary Journal, TMSJ 10/2 (Fall 1999), pages 2123-232. Barrick suggests that the law is a unity comprising of three key areas involving Moral stipulations, Exodus 20:1-17; Civil stipulations, Exodus 20:22-23:33; and Ceremonial stipulations, Exodus 25:1-31:18. It is evident that these suggested stipulations extend beyond the content of the “Book of the Covenant,” indicating that the law is much more than the decalogue or the few chapters following its declaration.

The Purpose of the Mosaic Covenant
Exodus 19:3-6 reveals God’s intentions for His people if they obeyed His voice and keep His covenant. Their obedience would result in being a treasure to God above all peoples. They would also be a kingdom of priests and also be a holy nation. Other specific purposes were revealed in the New Testament. Paul in Romans 3:19-20 and 7:7-14 stated that knowledge of sin came by the law therefore humans understand their sinfulness through the precepts of the law. Also, the law acted as a teacher or tutor with the intention of bringing people to Christ in that justification comes by faith and not through obedience to the law, Galatians 3:24.

The law was summarized in two statements by Jesus Christ in Matthew 22:34-39. Jesus stated, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments the whole law and prophets hang.” Matthew 22:37-39. See also Mark 12:28-34 and Luke
10:27. Jesus was quoting from two passages in the law, the first from Deuteronomy 6:5 and the second from Leviticus 19:18. Thus the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant, the law has three general aspects, (1) A Special People (treasured by God, who are holy and are priests to God); (2) A Salvific Premise (a tutor to lead people to Christ) and (3) A Specific Pursuit (to love God and neighbor).

Other Important Considerations of the Mosaic Covenant

1. The Promises of the Mosaic Covenant
Although the Mosaic Covenant had personal or individual conditions which if breached by God’s people resulted in a loss of blessings, its overall intent was unilateral in that God’s plans and purposes could not be defeated by any person, human or otherwise or by any event. Thus, the promises of the Mosaic covenant were permanent as they coincided with the Abrahamic, Davidic and New covenants. The following promises within the Mosaic covenant although not completely fulfilled at present, will be fully completed in the days of the millennium kingdom of the Messiah. (1) The covenant people of God are to be God’s treasured people above all other peoples, Exodus 19:6. (2) They are to be a kingdom of priests, Exodus 19:6. (3) They are to be a holy nation, Exodus 19:6. (4) They are to be given a land, Exodus 20:12. Finally (5) They are to be blessed by God above all peoples, Deuteronomy 7:14.

2. The Sign of the Mosaic Covenant
Covenants in the Old Testament were often symbolized with a sign that indicated their significance as a binding treaty, accord and promise between God and His people. The sign of the Noahic covenant was the rainbow, Genesis 9:12-17. The sign of the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision, Genesis 17:9-14 and the sign of the Mosaic covenant was the Sabbath, Exodus 31:12-17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20. Exodus 31:13 states, “Tell the Israelites, You must keep my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; so that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.” The keeping of the Sabbath was inculcated in the decalogue as the fourth commandment. The sign of the Sabbath was to remind the Israelites of the creation by God of the heavens and the earth and that God rested on the seventh day. This day was to be holy to God’s people, for it was a holy God who sanctified them and they were to keep it “holy,” Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12. However, it was because of the failure of the Israelites to keep the commandment regarding the Sabbath, that God judged His people and removed them from their land. This was stated as a consequence of breaking the Sabbath in Leviticus 26:27-46. But in future days, still to come, following the present Church age, the Sabbath will again have significance for God and His people. Isaiah spoke of future blessings of those who keep the Sabbath, Isaiah 56:1-8; 58:13-14 and 66:23. In the days of the millennial kingdom, the sabbath will once again be kept, Ezekiel 44:24; 45:17; 46:1-15. Although the Sabbath is the only commandment of the decalogue not to be re-confirmed in the New Testament, as being significant for the Church age, its will re-emerge in importance during the earthly reign of the Messiah following the Tribulation.

4. The Priestly Covenant
The immediate context of God giving a covenant of a perpetual priesthood is found in Numbers chapter 25. The historical background to the covenant is the story of Balak and Balaam, Numbers chapters 22-24. The time of these events was near the end of the Israelites forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. Balak, the king of the Moabites was afraid that the advancing Israelites would do to the Moabites all that they had done to the Amorites. So Balak called upon Balaam, who practiced divination, to curse the Israelites in the hope that the Moabites would defeat God’s people and drive them out of Moab, Numbers 22:1-6. Balaam was prevented from cursing the Israelites during three attempts and pronounced a blessing upon them. See also Deuteronomy 23:3-6 and Joshua 24:9-10. Numbers 31:16 reveals however, that Balaam was successful in having the women of Moab seduce the men of Israel and draw them into sinning against God. Balaam was later put to death by the Israelites, Joshua 13:22.
As a result of Balaam’s intrigue against Israel, the men of Israel committed harlotry with the women of Moab and also committed idolatry by bowing down to the gods of Moab, Numbers 25:1-2. This brought the anger and judgment of God upon Israel through a plague that resulted in the deaths of twenty-four thousand of the Israelites, Numbers 25:9. There would have been many more Israelites killed had not Phineas, a priest, who was the grandson of Aaron, taken direct action against an Israelite male and a woman from the Midianites. The man, in sight of all Moses and all of Israel, took this woman into his tent. Phinehas went into the tent and killed both of them with a spear, Numbers 25:6-8. God defended the action of Phinehas by a remarkable declaration that he was giving to him a covenant of peace, which was described as a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because Phinehas was zealous for God and made atonement on behalf of the children of Israel, Numbers 25:10-13.

The DASV for Numbers 25:10-13 states:

10 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 11 Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned my wrath away from the Israelites, by showing such jealousy as I have for them, so that I did not consume Israel in my jealousy. 12 Therefore declare, 'I am giving to him my covenant of peace.' 13 So it will be to him and to his descendants after him, a covenant of a permanent priesthood; because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites.

Four Aspects of the Priestly Covenant

First, God introduced the priestly covenant as a covenant of peace, Numbers 25:12, thus it has an aspect of blessing, in that the act of Phinehas in his zeal for God brought the blessing of God’s peace upon the priesthood and upon the Israelites. Second, this covenant was perpetual in that the priesthood would last beyond the duration of the Mosaic covenant into the millennial kingdom of the Messiah, Ezekiel 40:46; 44:15-31 and 48:10-12. The permanence of the Priestly covenant is also clearly stated in Jeremiah 33:19-22. Third, this covenant involved a lineage or seed as it was not only made to Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, but to the descendants or seed of Phinehas who would serve as priests to God. It is also called the Levitical priesthood as Aaron was a Levite (a descendant of Levi), Exodus 4:14; as was Phinehas, Exodus 6:25. The Levites had a specific role in the ministry of the tabernacle, Numbers 1:51-53. They were as sons of Aaron, the anointed priests to God, Numbers 3:2. Their role and ministry is further described in Numbers chapters 3 and 4. Fourth, this covenant had an aspect of atonement. The act of Phineas, in putting to death, as a sacrifice those who were openly defying God, was described by God as making atonement for the Israelites. The Israelite man and the Midianite woman were identified by name and tribal association in Numbers 25:14-15. Because of their open rebellion against God, He commanded Moses to attack the Midianites and destroy them because of the Midianites involvement in the treachery of the men of Israelite in that the Israelites were seduced into worshipping the Baal of Peor, Numbers 25:3, 16-18.

5. The Davidic Covenant

All of the major covenants identified in this study are inter-connected. First, they build upon the promises that God has made beginning in the Noahic covenant and continue with additional promises from each covenant until the fulfillment of all covenantal promises in the New covenant. Second, they are interconnected because they all, excepting the Noahic covenant, are promises made by God to His unique covenant people, the Israelites and their descendants. Third, all covenants including the Noahic, are interwoven with the great purpose of God in creating the heavens and the earth. God’s creation was, is and forever will be, a demonstration of His glory. God’s image-bearers, humans have, are doing and will continue forever to display and declare His glory to all creation and thus the covenants ensure that God’s purpose in the display and declaration of His glory will be perfectly and completely fulfilled. When God’s glory is to be seen in all creation and within each nation, God has not simply delegated this to humans and withdrawn from this task. He divinely and sovereignly oversees every step of it and will continue to do so for all eternity.
A vital continuation of the covenant promises of God occurs in His covenant with David. The major covenantal promises of land, seed, blessing and nation from previous covenants are not ignored in the Davidic covenant and a very significant element is added. This addition involves the promise that the royal “house” and throne of David will be everlasting and that a “seed,” a Son will come from David’s line who will be later identified as Jesus Christ to whom God will give the throne of David, and this Son will reign on this throne over the house of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom will be everlasting, Isaiah 9:6-7 and Luke 1:31-33.

The Circumstances Leading to the Declaration of the Davidic Covenant
The first statement of the Davidic covenant occurs in 2 Samuel 7:8-16. Prior to this declaration of the statement of the covenant, the ark of God had been brought by David into his city following the defeat of the Philistines, 2 Samuel chapter 6. David desired to build a permanent house for the ark which still was “housed” within tent curtains, 2 Samuel 7:1-2. God however had other plans for a permanent building to house the ark and instructed the prophet Nathan to deliver a message of covenant to David that was of far greater importance than David’s concern for the ark.

The Content of the Davidic Covenant
The initial content of God’s declaration to David through the prophet Nathan is in 2 Samuel 7:8-16:

8 Now therefore tell David my servant, ‘This is what the LORD of hosts says, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be leader over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies before you; and I will make your name great, as famous as the greatest who have ever lived on earth. 10 I will establish a place for my people Israel, and will plant them there, so that they may live in their own place, and not be disturbed anymore; neither will violent men oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning, 11 from the day that I appointed judges to be over my people Israel. I will give you rest from all your enemies. Furthermore the LORD declares to you that he will build you a house. 12 When your days are completed and you sleep with your fathers, I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he sins, I will discipline him with the rod of men and with stripes inflicted by human beings. 15 But my steadfast love will never be taken from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I ousted before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will be made secure forever before me. Your throne will be established forever. See also 1 Chronicles 17:7-15.

From this initial statement in 2 Samuel chapter 7, of the declaration of the covenant, many significant elements of the covenant are important to emphasize. First, David was to be a leader over God’s people Israel, thus emphasizing the element of nation. Second, God promises to make David’s name great, “as famous as the greatest who have ever lived on earth,” 2 Samuel 7:9. Third, God promises a place for His people Israel, where they will be (forever) free from oppression, and have rest from all their enemies, vss. 10-11. Fourth, God promised to build a “house” for David’s lineage, vs. 11. This is irony as David was so concerned to build a “house” for God’s ark that would eventually decay, but God promised to build a house that would never see decay (as later revelation reveals). Fifth, a male descendant would come from David who will build a house for God’s name, vs. 13. Sixth, the throne of David’s kingdom through his descendant, would last forever, vs. 13. Seventh, the human (non-divine) descendants of David, who sit upon the throne of David, who sin, would be disciplined by God, vs. 14. Eighth, God’s steadfast (merciful) love will never depart from David’s royal line, vs.15. Ninth, David’s house, kingdom and throne will be established forever, vs. 16.
Although the word “covenant” is not expressly stated by God in this initial statement, David certainly understood God’s promises to him as a covenant as David states in his “last words” recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 23. David stated, “Is not my house like this with God? For he has made an everlasting covenant with me, order in all things and secure. Will he not deliver me and bring all that I desire to fruition?” 2 Samuel 23:5. God confirmed that He had made a covenant with David when He spoke with David’s son Solomon, 2 Chronicles 7:18. It is also mentioned specifically as a covenant in 1 Kings 8:23-26; 2 Chronicles 21:7; Psalm 89:3 and 35; 132:12; and Jeremiah 33:19-22.

Other Scriptures attest to the promises of the Davidic covenant. Many of the Psalms are known as “royal” or “messianic” because of their content that mention the promises God had made to David regarding his everlasting kingly lineage involving David’s greater Son, the Messiah (His life, death and resurrection), and also regarding David’s everlasting house, throne and kingdom which had some limited application in the first advent of Jesus Christ but will completely be fulfilled in the earthly millennial kingdom of the Messiah. These Psalms include 2, 8, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 72, 89, 91, 101, 102, 110, 118 and 144. For a very helpful exposition of the royal and messianic content of these Psalms, see T. Ernest Wilson, The Messianic Psalms, Gospel Folio Press, 1997. A magnificent statement of the Davidic covenant is also stated in Isaiah 9:6-7:

6 For unto us a child is born,  
unto us a son is given,  
and the government will be upon his shoulders:  
and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government  
and of peace there will be no end.  
He will rule on the throne of David,  
and over his kingdom,  
to establish it,  
and to uphold it with justice  
and with righteousness from this time forth forever.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

The Completion of the Davidic Covenant
As with other covenants, the Davidic covenant has similar significant elements, such as land, nation, seed, and kingdom which are stated in 2 Samuel 7:8-16 and blessing stated in Psalm 72:17. The greatest addition to these elements, however is that God’s Son, the suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Messiah, Jesus Christ would be the fulfillment of the entire covenant. It is only through the life, death, resurrection and return of Jesus Christ that God’s covenant with David could be perfectly completed. Jesus Christ was recognized as a king during His first advent, Matthew 2:2; 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; and John 18:37. The angel Gabriel announced to Mary before she gave birth to Jesus, 30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Look, you will conceive in your womb, give birth to a son, and will call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1:30-33.

It will be at Christ’s second advent, when the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant will be witnessed by all living upon the earth at that time. Christ will establish His messianic kingdom. He will reign upon the throne of David, for Christ came from the line of David, both during the messianic kingdom and into the eternal
state. He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, Luke 1:33 indicating that God’s people Israel will have a recognized identity in heaven eternally.

Christ’s rule will be characterized by peace, righteousness and justice, Isaiah 9:7. He will also rule with a “iron sceptre” (rod of iron), Psalm 2:9 and Revelation 19:15. There are many other aspects of the rule of Christ upon the throne of David that this very short study cannot state. However, it is important for the student of the Scriptures to understand that all who have faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ will participate in the promises and blessings of not only the Davidic Covenant but also the Abrahamic Covenant through their participation in the New Covenant. God, being so loving, merciful and gracious to the people He has created, provided a way through which those who trust Him by faith and believe in the salvific works of His Son, have direct and unencumbered access now (in the present) to the One who will rule upon the throne of David. This “way” was through the wonderful promises and elements of the final covenant of our study, the New Covenant, which also was revealed in the Old Testament.

6. The New Covenant
God’s covenants with Abraham and David are unilateral in the sense that God will perfectly and completely fulfill all of His covenant promises with His covenant people. God will also enable His covenant people to fully participate in these promises and benefit from them. As was evident from the conditional aspects of the Mosaic covenant, God’s people were unable to keep the regulations and commands of the covenant because of their wickedness and rebellion against God. It was not that they occasionally or rarely transgressed the precepts and statutes of God’s law, but they continually walked in open rebellion against God. Therefore, there were three major objectives among many others that God intended to accomplish by His declaration of the new covenant. First, God provided the means by which people could participate in the blessings of these unilateral covenants. God’s own arm provided salvation, Isaiah 59:16 and 63:5, through the shedding of the blood of suffering Servant, the Messiah who was revealed in the New Testament as Jesus Christ. It was the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ that God intended to be means by which all who believed in Christ would participate in the New covenant, Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25, and Hebrews 12:24. Second, God accomplished what His covenant people and all mankind could not do. God radically changed the hearts and minds of those who were to have faith in Christ. God performed “spiritual surgery” by giving them a new heart, and by putting His Spirit in them, Ezekiel 36:26-27. It is only by this radical act of God that they could walk righteously before Him and participate in the blessings He had promised them. Third, it was necessary for God to replace the Mosaic covenant, for it was intended to be “our tutor until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith,” Galatians 3:24. The KJV for this verse states, “wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” See notes on the Mosaic Covenant for the fulfilled purposes of the law and its replacement by the New covenant.

Scriptural Content of the New Covenant
The specific words “new covenant” is only stated in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 31:31-34 although it is referenced by its intended meaning in many other passages such as Isaiah 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8; Jeremiah 24:7; 32:40; 52:5; Ezekiel 11:19-21; 16:60; 36:24-28; 37:26-27; and Hosea 2:16-23. The Servant Songs in Isaiah can be understood as an indirect (words “new covenant” not mentioned) but describe essential aspects of the means by which God enacts the New covenant. This would also be true of many OT passages that speak of God’s provision of spiritual salvation and prophetic passages regarding the Messiah who as the Servant of God was given by God as a covenant, as stated in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8. Many other OT passages have been suggested by Biblical scholars as referring to the New Covenant but many of these may be a reference to either the Abrahamic or Davidic covenants. These references are not listed in this short survey of the New covenant. The New covenant is referenced in the New Testament in Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Romans 11:27; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews chapters 7-10; 12:24 and 13:20-21.
Specific Conditions of the New Covenant

As the actual mention of a “new covenant” is stated in Jeremiah 31:31-34, (wider context in Jeremiah chapter 31), it is useful for the student of the Scriptures to first examine this passage to understand important specific conditions of this covenant. Other new covenant passages will also be examined. Jeremiah 31:31-34 states,

31 Look, the days are coming,” says the LORD,  
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel,  
and with the house of Judah.

32 But it will not be like the covenant  
that I made with their forefathers  
in the day that I took them by the hand  
to bring them out of the land of Egypt;  
for they broke my covenant,  
although I was their husband,” says the LORD.

33 But this is the covenant  
that I will make with the house of Israel  
after those days,” says the LORD.  
I will put my law within them;  
I will write it in their hearts.  
I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.

34 Each person will no longer have to teach his neighbor,  
or each one his brother, saying,  
'Know the LORD.'  
For they will all know me,  
from the least to the greatest of them,” says the LORD.  
For I will forgive their iniquity,  
and remember their sin no more.

First, it is a future covenant (days are coming, vs.31 and after those days vs. 33)  
It was not revealed in the Old Testament when God would “make” a new covenant. The first direct mention that it was now in place occurs in Matthew 26:28 where Christ revealed that it was through (or in) His shed blood that the new covenant was enacted for the remission of sins.

Second, it is a covenant that is made between God and the house of Israel and Judah (vs. 31)  
This statement has been the cause of much debate among Biblical scholars as to the extent of the new covenant in the days of the first advent of Jesus Christ and following days and if the Church participates in any way in this covenant. A first set of questions arises regarding the recipients of the blessings of the covenant. Is the new covenant for the benefit of the covenant people of God only or does the Church participate in it in some way or has the Church replaced Israel as the sole recipient of the blessings of the covenant? A second set of questions arises around the timing of the completion of the new covenant. Was the new covenant fulfilled at the first advent of Christ, or is there only a future fulfillment, or is this there a partial fulfillment now and a completion of the covenant blessings in the future? A third set of questions by some traditional dispensationalists arise when they question whether there may be two new covenants, one for the covenant people of God and another for the Church.

From an examination of the Biblical evidence it is clear that the covenant people of God, the faithful remnant of the nation of Israel will completely fulfill the new covenant in the future messianic kingdom. They will totally participate in all the blessings of the new covenant during the messianic kingdom era when they will
be ruled by the promised seed, the Messiah who will be physically present with them in all of the land which has been promised to them and who will sit on the throne of David and who, along with His covenant people, will bless all nations of the earth thus fulfilling the Abrahamic, Davidic and New Covenants. Also, the Church now and since the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, participates in the spiritual aspects of the new covenant. These spiritual aspects can be understood as the blessings that result from having “new hearts” and having been indwelt by the Spirit of God, Ezekiel 36:26-27. These blessings to the Church do not represent a replacement for the blessings promised to the covenant people of God. Members of the body of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles comprising the Church, have been given these spiritual blessings because they are now “in Christ” and have spiritual regeneration through belief in Christ and in the atoning efficacy of His shed blood. It is only because they are “in Christ” that they derive these spiritual blessings of the New Covenant. There is also, no Scriptural evidence for two new covenants, one for God’s covenant people, Israel and another for the Church.

Third, it was not like (or according to) the Mosaic Covenant (vs. 32)
The old Mosaic Covenant was broken by God’s covenant people even though God was “their husband,” (vs. 32). Hosea 2:19-20 states, “I will betroth you to me forever. I will take you as my wife in righteousness, justice, loyal love, and compassion. 20 I will take you as my wife in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD.” See also Hosea 2:16; and Isaiah 54:5. God had considered His covenant given at Mount Sinai as a marriage vow between a husband (God) and a wife (Israelites). God was faithful in keeping all of the covenant promises of the Mosaic covenant. However, the Israelites, like an unfaithful wife, broke the covenant and God therefore decreed a “new” covenant that would not have contingencies for obedience which would result in a broken covenant.

Fourth, God promises to instill His law in their hearts (vs. 33)
King David had earlier exclaimed as recorded in Psalm 40:8, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is in my heart.” David had also spoken of the righteous in Psalm 37:31, “The law of his God is in his heart; not one of his steps slip.” These and similar statements reflect a desire by followers of God to be obedient to His laws, but they ultimately fail because of sin that besets everyone. God in the specific conditions of the new covenant indeed promises something “new.” God promises that in future days He will put His law within His covenant people. This is a guarantee that the “law” (all that God commands and requires), will be obeyed to His satisfaction because God will also put His Spirit within His people, Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26-27. It is this intervention by God by making a permanent solution to sin in that God will justify all who have faith in His Son. Those who are justified by faith will have God’s law and His Spirit residing permanently in them. These are New Testament blessings promised long before by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. All who have faith in the Son, both Jews and Gentiles are recipients now of these promises by God. In the far future, as the messianic kingdom begins, God’s covenant people, national Israel will come to faith in their Messiah and also will have God’s law and His Spirit within them.

Fifth, God’s covenant formula (vs. 33)
A significant promise statement of the new covenant is made by God in Jeremiah 31:33. This statement is often referred to as the covenant formula. This formula is, “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” This statement is more than a slogan. It is the confirmation that finally, after generations of a broken relationship between God and His covenant people, there will be a restored fellowship. God’s people will be perfectly reconciled to Him through their belief in the atoning sacrifice of His Son. This covenant formula was first plainly stated by God in Jeremiah 24:7. It also occurs in Jeremiah 32:38, Ezekiel 11:20; 14:11; 34:30; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zechariah 8:8; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:10 and Revelation 21:3. It is this final occurrence of this promise-statement that is the most satisfying for those who have faith in their Messiah. God intended this statement, not as a temporary measure leading to His eternal relationship with His people,
but as the defining foundation of this relationship that will last forever. He forever will dwell (tabernacle) with His people as their God.

Sixth, knowing the Lord (vs. 34)
Another outstanding promise of the new covenant is that God’s covenant people will know Him. It is not that they will know about Him and all He has done for His people and all humanity, but that they will know Him through a perfectly holy relationship with Him. The Apostle Paul expressed this as an attainment, having cast aside all personal accomplishments, and being found in Christ, not in his own righteousness, but through the righteousness which was given to Him from God by faith (in Christ), Philippians 3:7-10. Jeremiah earlier, in 9:24, had declared the words of God, “but let the one who boasts boast in this; that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD who acts with loyal love, justice, and righteousness, in the earth, for these are the things I delight in.” God, through the provisions of the new covenant made it possible for all who have faith in the Messiah to truly know Him. An excellent publication on this topic is Knowing God by J. I. Packer, IVP Books, 1993.

Seventh, forgiveness of sins (vs. 34)
The final specific promise to God’s covenant people in the Jeremiah 34:31-34 passage is that God will “forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” (vs. 34). Several chapters of the New Testament book of Hebrews address the various aspects of the new covenant in comparison to the mosaic covenant. In Hebrews chapter 10, the writer states, “For since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, not the true form of these things, it can never with the same sacrifices offered continually year after year, make perfect those who approach for worship.” Otherwise would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having been cleansed once for all, would have had no more consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Hebrews 10:1-4. Thus, it is only through the provisions of the new covenant that sins were forgiven and forgotten by God. Those who lived before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ appropriated this forgiveness in that they looked forward in faith to God’s promise of a Redeemer that was first stated in Genesis 3:15. Those who were alive at the time and following Christ’s death and resurrection look to the fact of Christ’s atoning sacrifice and by faith appropriate the forgiveness of their sins through the covenant promises of God who is always faithful and perfectly keeps His promises.

Another prominent new covenant passage in the Old Testament is Ezekiel 36:24-28 which states,

24 For I will take you from the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land.
25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean from all your filth, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you.
26 I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you. I will remove the stony heart from your body, and I will give you a heart of flesh.
27 I will put my Spirit within you, so that you walk in my statutes, and keep my regulations.
28 Then you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; and you will be my people, and I will be your God.

A brief analysis of this passage reveals that first, this passage confirms a major aspect of the Abrahamic covenant regarding the “land” that God has promised to His covenant people. Some may understand that the present migration of Jews from the nations of the world to Israel is a pre-cursor to or an anticipation of the complete fulfillment of the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:24 and 28. As noted in the Messianic Study of Isaiah which precedes this essay on the Covenants, the fulfillment of the “land” promise will occur at the end of the Tribulation and at the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Thus, the Abrahamic, Davidic and New covenants all have land promise provisions that await a final fulfillment. Second, God will cleanse His
covenant people from their wickedness, 36:25. This is a picture of forgiveness which is clearly described in the New Testament in 1 John 1:9. Third, God will instill a new heart in His covenant people that will enable them to respond righteously to Him, 36:26. Fourth, God will put His Spirit within them, 36:26-27, an action that ensures an everlasting righteous relationship between God who is holy and His Spirit-indwelt image-bearers. Fifth, these cumulative actions will result in God’s ultimate desire being fulfilled forever, that they will be His people, and He will be their God, Ezekiel 36:18 and Revelation 21:3.

There is a blending of the Davidic and New covenant promises in Ezekiel 37:24-28. The Davidic covenant promise of a king to rule over God’s covenant people as a prince forever is the topic of vss. 24-26 and the new covenant, which is described as a covenant of peace is the topic of vss. 27-28. In these later verses, God promises to first, establish His people, guaranteeing that they will live securely in the land and fulfill the earlier promise that they will be a blessing to all nations. Second, God promises to multiply them which is also emphasized in Isaiah 66:7-11. Third, God promises to set His Sanctuary and Tabernacle in the midst of them forever. This is clearly a promise of God Himself being the Sanctuary who dwells (lives with them as living in a tent together) with them. This will be fulfilled on earth during the Messianic kingdom when the Son of God, the Messiah will live among His covenant people and forever in heaven as revealed in Revelation 21:3. Fourth, God confirms His ultimate desire to live in the midst of His people with the covenant formula, Ezekiel 27:27, He will be their God and they shall be His people. Fifth, God confirms the covenant promise first made to Abraham that his descendants, (Israel) will be a blessing to the nations in that when God, sanctifies Israel by His presence, 27:28, the nations will know that is the LORD who has accomplished all He has planned through His covenant people.

In Isaiah, the aspects of the new covenant include the identification of the person who fulfills the “seed.” promise of the Abrahamic covenant and the person who fulfills the promise of an eternal ruler of the Davidic covenant. Direct references to this person occur in 42:6; 49:8. In Isaiah this one is identified as the Servant of God of whom the LORD gives as a covenant to the people. The New Testament reveals that it is Jesus Christ who is this Servant and is specifically identified with the new covenant through His shed blood, Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; and Luke 22:20.

Hosea 2:18-23 emphasizes a few additional aspects of the new covenant. First, the earth will know peace, “in that day” (Messianic kingdom). Animals (ie: beasts, birds, creeping things) will be at peace with each other as will humans who will not engage in battle with one another, 2:18. Second, God describes His relationship with His covenant people in terms of a marriage (betroth) that has as its basis, righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, mercy and faithfulness, 2:19-20 (NKJV). Third, the covenant people of God will truly know Him, vss. 20b-23.

7. Covenants in Isaiah
Direct references to a covenant, the Hebrew word berit, in Isaiah occur in 24:5; 28:15, 18; 33:8; 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 56:4, 6; 59:21; and 61:8. A brief analysis of these occurrences will aid the student of the Scriptures to identify to which specific covenant between God and His covenant people they refer and which occurrences refer only to a treaty or agreement among mankind. Isaiah 28:15, 18 and 33:8 do not refer to a covenant made by God with His covenant people but refer to pacts and agreements made between unregenerate Jews and pagan nations which lead to physical and spiritual death.

Isaiah 24:5, “The earth is defiled by its inhabitants; because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.”

The context of 24:5 is within a separate section of Isaiah dealing with apocalyptic or end-times issues and specifically why God will punish the earth and its inhabitants. One of the reasons for God’s judgment is that
the people of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, have transgressed His laws and violated His statutes. They have completely rebelled against God and turned to their own way. They also have “broken the everlasting covenant.” Isaiah does not identify which “everlasting covenant” has been broken. Many have speculated that this covenant may refer to the Noahic, Abrahamic or Davidic Covenants. Others suggest that this everlasting covenant may be a reference to God’s commands to mankind that they subdue, rule over and fill the earth, Genesis 1:28. However, this also is speculation. As the context of Isaiah chapters 24-27 is certainly eschatological (end-times) judgment on the wicked and the restoration of Israel, it seems best not to attempt to conclusively identify which covenant that God was referencing. It may be a general statement that mankind is so wicked that they have “broken” all of God’s covenants and they have no desire to repent of their sinfulness and rebellion against Him.

Isaiah 42:6, “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and protect you. I will give you as a covenant for the people, and a light for the nations.”

Isaiah 49:8, “This is what the LORD says, In the time of my favor, I answered you; and in a day of salvation, I helped you. I will protect you, I will give you as a covenant for the people, to restore the land, to reestablish their desolate inheritances.”

Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 both occur within passages that are often called “Servant Songs”, Isaiah 42:1-9 and 49:1-13. Other “Servant Songs” occur in 50:4-11 and 52:13-52:12. These “songs” are prophetic statements about the great suffering Servant of the LORD who is identified in the New Testament as the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Among other wonderful truths revealed in 42:6 and 49:8, the LORD states that He will give His Servant (the Messiah) “as a covenant for the people.” This is a highly significant statement about the intention of God to save His covenant people from their sins and provide the means by which they can live forever with Him. That these statements refer to the role of Jesus Christ in the New Covenant is clearly stated in the New Testament in Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; and 1 Corinthians 11:25. See also Romans 11:27; Hebrews chapters 7-10; 12:24 and 13:20-21. Although the New Covenant was in the Old Testament specifically made between God and the house of Israel and Judah, Jeremiah 31:31, the statement by Christ in Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24 and Luke 22:20 reveals that some of the spiritual benefits of the New Covenant were applicable to those who believe in Christ for salvation and have therefore become members of His body, the Church. See notes above on the New Covenant.

Isaiah 54:10, “For the mountains may be moved, and the hills shaken, but my loyal love will never leave you, nor will my covenant of peace ever be broken, says the LORD who has compassion on you.”

The promise of God in Isaiah 54:10 is that His “covenant of peace” will never be broken. Many Biblical scholars suggest that this is a clear reference to the New Covenant for God has taken the initiative to make peace with His covenant people and this could only be accomplished through the provisions of the New Covenant. This is very clear in Ezekiel 37:26 where God mentions this covenant of peace and also states that He will set His sanctuary, (Himself) among them forever. This covenant of peace is also mentioned in a New Covenant context in Ezekiel 34:25. As the notes on the New Covenant, (see above) reveal, God promises in the Old Testament that for His covenant people, He will cleans them, exchange their hearts of stone and instill a new heart within them and will put His Spirit within them, Ezekiel 36:25-28. It is this radical change to His people ensuring that they will be prepared to live righteously with Him that God states is His “covenant of peace” with them.

Isaiah 55:3, “Incline your ear and come to me; listen, so you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, just like my loyal covenant made to David.”
Some may suggest that this promise is a reference to the Davidic Covenant because of the translation of some English versions of the Old Testament. See the KJV, NKJV, NASB and the ESV for comparison. However, as it refers to the covenant with David that God had previously made with His covenant people, it is most likely that God is referring to another covenant which is everlasting. This can only be the New Covenant through which believers appropriate the blessings of the other unilateral covenants because they are “in Christ.”

Isaiah 56:4, “For this is what the LORD says: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and hold on tight to my covenant.”
Isaiah 56:6, “Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not defile it, and holds on tight to my covenant.”

From the context of Isaiah 56:4-6, the covenant statements in 56:4 and 56:6 most certainly refer to the Mosaic covenant. These verses should be compared to Exodus 19:5-6 and Psalm 103:17-18. The reference to the Sabbath in both Isaiah 56:4 and 6 also help to confirm the identity of the “covenant” in these verses. These verses are clear statements of the Lord’s intention, in the days of the Old Testament, to offer salvation to all peoples including eunuchs and Gentiles (foreigners). It was one of the primary tasks of Israel to be the Lord’s representative to all nations so that all peoples could join themselves to the Lord through faith in Him. Israel failed miserably in this role and the Lord assigned His Servant, the Messiah to fulfil this task, Isaiah 49:6.

Isaiah 59:21, “As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD, my Spirit that is on you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, will not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouths of your children, nor out of the mouth of your children’s children, says the LORD, from now to forever.”

The statement of the LORD in Isaiah 59:21 regarding His covenant including His Spirit that is upon them and including words that the LORD has put in the mouths of His covenant people and in the mouths of their children forever is an unmistakable reference to the New Covenant. These words will not depart from His covenant people forever. This new covenant reference is confirmed in Jeremiah 31:34 and in the New Testament in Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16.

Isaiah 61:8, “For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing. I will faithfully repay them, and make an everlasting covenant with them.”

The final occurrence to “covenant” in Isaiah in 61:8 is another clear reference to the New Covenant. Chapter 61 begins with a prophetic statement regarding the first and second advents of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 1-2a speak of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ during His first advent and verses 2b and following are prophecies of the days His second advent when Israel will finally fulfil their responsibilities as “priests of the LORD,” 61:6 and have everlasting joy, 61:7. Isaiah completes chapter 61 with joyful statements about the salvation and righteousness that he describes as his garments, and about the righteousness and praise the LORD will cause to sprout up before all the nations of the earth, 61:10-11. All of Isaiah chapter 61 is therefore a prophetic revelation regarding the glorious aspects of the new covenant.