

# **Getting Into The Promised Land Without Falling Asleep In Leviticus**

## **12. The Divided Kingdoms The Southern Kingdom – Judah – The Prophets, Part 1 - Isaiah**

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**A Teaching Commentary  
of the Old Testament**

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## 1 The Prophets of the South

The Southern Kingdom had many prophets. Scripture records the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and (probably) Joel (the dating of Joel's prophecy is uncertain). The historical backdrop of these prophets is somewhat different than the prophets of the north. For one thing, the south had some kings who were faithful to God.

The prophets listed above tended to cluster towards the end of the kingdom, when the nation of Judah was falling further and further into apostasy. Because of that, their message sounds very much like that of their counterparts to the north. The overriding theme is one of judgment, which could be avoided by repentance. God planned to refine his people. If it took pain for that to happen then he would allow that pain. That was not his goal. His goal was reconciliation.

The prophecies of the south did have one major variation from those of the north. The people of the south were promised destruction and exile, as were the people of the north. The Southern Kingdom was promised restoration in the end, however. They would see a return from exile. The promises made to David were still valid. And still true were the words of Jacob, "The scepter will not depart from Judah."

## 2 Isaiah

The opening of the book of Isaiah tells us that he was a prophet who served during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This makes Isaiah a contemporary of Micah in Judah and Hosea in Israel. These were turbulent times. Hezekiah was king of Judah when Israel finally fell to the Assyrians. Their brothers to the north served as a stunning portrait to the citizens of Judah of what could happen if they persisted in unfaithfulness.

Uzziah, Isaiah's first king, was a righteous man for the most part. Judah experienced military success during his reign. He was afflicted with leprosy, however, towards the end of his reign because he became arrogant about his success. His son Jotham succeeded him and again was a righteous man for the most part. Judah experienced military success under Jotham. Ahaz was another sort of king. Ahaz was a zealous Baal worshipper. He participated in child sacrifice. Because of his unfaithfulness, Judah experienced military problems during his reign. He turned to Assyria for help. This alliance later caused problems for Judah. Hezekiah was the fourth king that Isaiah served. Hezekiah was one of the best kings that Judah ever had. He experienced great favor with God. He inherited the Assyrian problem that Ahaz had created. Ahaz had left Judah subject to Assyria. Hezekiah fought to end that subjection. The fighting took a great toll on Judah. God finally gave Hezekiah victory, however.

This is the historical backdrop for the book of Isaiah, but who was Isaiah, the man? We know very little about him. The book of Isaiah identifies him as "son of Amoz" (not Amos the prophet). Tradition says that Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah of Judah, which would mean that Isaiah and Uzziah were cousins. Although we do not know whether or not this is true, it seems likely. Isaiah was a well-educated individual with free access to the "upper crust" of society. He was close to the kings of Judah and they respected him. He may well have been related to them. If he and Uzziah were cousins, then we may assume that he was quite a bit younger than Uzziah because he received his call from God the year that Uzziah died. His most active ministry occurred during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah. It is obvious from the text of Isaiah and of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles that Hezekiah and Isaiah were quite close. Isaiah's influence may have been one of the primary reasons that Hezekiah was such a righteous king.

Tradition also accounts for Isaiah's death. It is said that he was executed by Manasseh, Hezekiah's evil son. In fact, tradition says that Manasseh had his men saw Isaiah in two. Again, we do not know for sure whether or not this is true. Many people believe that Hebrews 11:37 is a reference to Isaiah's death.

The book of Isaiah is a problem for some biblical scholars, primarily because of the predictions it contains. Perhaps the greatest problem occurs in Isaiah 44:28-45:1, in which Isaiah names Cyrus, the king who will release the Jews from Babylonian captivity. This was written well over a hundred years before Babylonian captivity began. At the time of its writing, Babylon was not a world power. Since the text accurately discusses Babylonian captivity and even gives the name of the king who released the nation from captivity, the only conclusion that some people can draw is that this portion of the text must have been written after the captivity was over. Thus they conclude that there was more than one "Isaiah." The first part of the book must have been written by the "real" Isaiah and later parts of the book were written by other men and then added to Isaiah's writings. They refer to a "Deutero-Isaiah" and even a "Trito-Isaiah". Such a conclusion, however, overlooks the fact that God inspires Scripture. Some of prophecy is predictive in nature. God inspires these predictions and then brings them to fulfillment in order to demonstrate that he is God and that his word is true.

There have been different outlines proposed for the book of Isaiah, and they all agree in one area. The book is divided into two main sections. The first is chapters 1-39, which focuses on the judgment of God. The second is chapters 40-66, which focuses on the mercy and comfort of God. Oddly enough, the Bible itself consists of two groupings. The Old Testament consists of the first 39 books of the Bible, and it has more of a focus on the judgment of God. The New Testament consists of 27 books (books 40-66) and it has more of a focus on the mercy and comfort of God. Do not be too quick to try to draw theological significance from this parallel. The books of the Bible were written without chapters. They were added hundreds of years after the fact. Still it is an interesting observation.

Interspersed throughout the sixty-six chapters is a great deal of messianic prophecy. Isaiah eagerly anticipated the coming of the Lord.

The name "Isaiah" means "The Salvation of Jehovah." It is a fitting name. The salvation of God is a two-edged sword, having his judgment on one side and his mercy and comfort on the other. It was delivered to the world through his Messiah. The book of Isaiah is a warning and a promise of this salvation. Let's see what it has to say.

## **2.1 A Warning to Judah**

Isaiah 1

Chapter 1 is a strong message of God's displeasure with Judah. They have turned away from God and failed to follow his instructions. Because of this, they are experiencing pain and oppression. Verses 5-7 say:

Why should you be beaten anymore?  
Why do you persist in rebellion?  
Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted.  
From the sole of your foot to the top of your head  
there is no soundness –  
only wounds and welts and open sores,  
not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.  
Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire;  
your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you,  
laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.

This is the physical manifestation of their rebellion. The nation is experiencing corporate pain and harassment by enemies. There is a spiritual consequence of the rebellion as well. Their religious activities have become detestable to God. In verse 10, he refers to the leaders of Judah as the rulers of Sodom and the people of Judah as the people of Gomorrah. The implication is not too subtle. Verses 11-15 tell how God feels about their rituals.

"The multitude of your sacrifices –  
what are they to me?" says the Lord.  
"I have more than enough of burnt offerings,  
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;  
I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.  
When you come to meet with me,  
who has asked this of you,  
this trampling of my courts?  
Stop bringing meaningless offerings!  
Your incense is detestable to me.  
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations –

I cannot bear your evil assemblies.  
Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates.  
They have become a burden to me;  
I am weary of bearing them.  
When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even if you offer many prayers,  
I will not listen.  
Your hands are full of blood;

This is important stuff. The offerings and sacrifices and observances mentioned in these passages are things that God himself had instituted. He told the people to do these things. Why then would he find their obedience in these areas detestable? The sacrifices and observances and prayers mentioned in these verses are things that the people did to restore relationship with God. God is not interested in restoring relationships with people who have unclean and unrepentant hearts. The people were going through the motions of sacrifice and prayer, but they were doing so with unyielded and unsubmitted hearts. Many years earlier, David wrote in Psalm 51:16-17:

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise.

Nothing had changed. God would not delight in their sacrifice because they did not have broken and contrite hearts.

The next question that one might ask is, "What were they doing that was so bad that it made them detestable to God? What was the nature of their sin?" That question is answered in the Isaiah 1:16-17:

Wash and make yourselves clean.  
Take your evil deeds out of my sight!  
Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!  
Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.  
Defend the cause of the fatherless,  
plead the case of the widow.

This section of prophecy is believed to have been given during the reign of Uzziah or Jotham. During their reigns, idolatry was not a big problem for Judah. The nation experienced a measure of success under their reigns. As is all-too-common in times of prosperity, the rich began to oppress the poor. God has no tolerance for this. He really does care how we treat one another. That is why over half of the Ten Commandments deal with the way man should treat his fellow man. If we do not treat one another properly then we do not measure up to his standards. The apostle John put it rather succinctly. 1 John 4:20 says:

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

Isaiah tells us that the consequences of this include pain and oppression and being unacceptable to God. You will not experience the presence and power of God if you do not live in right relationship with him and with your fellow man.

The amazing thing about God is that he always stands ready to reconcile. He will bring us back into his favor if we desire or he will turn us over to the consequences of our choices. It is up to us to choose. Isaiah 1:18-20 says:

"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord.  
"Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson,  
they shall be like wool.  
If you are willing and obedient,  
you will eat the best from the land;  
but if you resist and rebel,  
you will be devoured by the sword."  
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

God stands ready to take his people back, but to do so on his terms.

In the remainder of the chapter, God promises (warns) that he will clean up his land. The people can either clean up their acts and survive the refining or they can persist in their rebellion and be purged from the land. The choice is really very simple.

## **2.2 The Restoration of Jerusalem**

Isaiah 2:1-5

The close of chapter 1 looks ahead to a time when God will purify Judah. What would Jerusalem be like if it were a center of righteousness rather than a place where God's commandments are ignored? 2:2-5 gives us a glimpse:

In the last days  
the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established  
as chief among the mountains;  
it will be raised above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.  
Many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths."  
The law will go out from Zion,  
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 take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.  
Come, O house of Jacob,  
let us walk in the light of the Lord.

There are a couple of interesting facts about this passage. First of all, it is repeated almost verbatim in Micah 4:1-3. Although God may have inspired each man separately to give the almost-identical prophecy, it is more likely (since they were contemporaries) that one of them

quoted the other. It is also possible that they both quoted some common third-party source. None of this diminishes the fact that it is prophecy inspired by God.

From a more contemporary viewpoint, the Mormons say that this prophecy pointed to their temple in Salt Lake City. They have it posted in very big letters in the visitor's center at temple square. You only have to move back one verse to see that the prophecy is introduced with "This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." Unless one considers Salt Lake City to be a remote suburb of Jerusalem, it is a bit hard to reach this conclusion.

Isaiah was looking ahead to a time when the world would consider Jerusalem to be the place of righteousness, the seat of God's throne in the world. This is presented as a "last days" prophecy. Although the last days have been in effect ever since the resurrection, this is a prophecy that we have not yet seen fulfilled. There has not been a time since the day of Isaiah when Jerusalem has been the center of righteousness. Although several major world religions look to Jerusalem as a holy place, we have not yet seen the time when "Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.'" Looking at this from a post-Revelation perspective, this seems to refer to a time after the second coming.

### **2.3 *The Purging of Judah***

Isaiah 2:6-4:6

Having given us a glimpse of a future time when Jerusalem will be a holy place, Isaiah draws back and shows how God is going to bring this about. Purifying is a painful process. He is going to deal harshly with those who are responsible for debasing the nation. Included in the issues with which he will deal are:

- He will rid the land of idolatry and of false religions brought in from the East. This is interesting, since so much of what we see as false religion today has come from the East.
- He is going to bring down the rich and the arrogant who have ignored the needs of the poor and the oppressed.
- He is going to cause havoc among the leaders of the people since they have led the people astray. The day would come when people would look to children for leadership.
- Haughty women who have been caught up in riches and finery will have them replaced with sores and stench.
- People will be judged individually and the nation corporately. Filth and guilt and bloodshed will be washed away.
- The righteous will be protected through all of this. They will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.

Those who survive this purging will enjoy the presence of the Lord once this is through. He will be their shade and their refuge. They will enjoy the now-pure land.

### **2.4 *The Song of the Vineyard***

Isaiah 5

Chapter 5 contains a parable that compares the nation to a vineyard. A man planted a vineyard. He cleared the land and prepared the soil. He planted and tended the crops. He prepared a winepress, anticipating the goodness of the fruit. When harvest time came, however, there was only bad fruit. Everything possible had been done for the vineyard, yet it would only yield bad fruit. Isaiah then concluded that the only logical to do with the vineyard was to tear it down and

destroy it. He would tear down its walls and let it be trampled. The land could be overtaken by briars and thorns. It would see rain no more.

The analogy is clear. The vineyard represents Judah. It produced only bad fruit. It would be destroyed.

The rest of chapter 5 describes the process of "tearing down the vineyard," or bringing judgment on Israel. They are to be judged because:

- They pursue wealth and pleasures of the flesh rather than the things of God.
- They have no regard for God or the work of his hands.
- They lack understanding.
- They are arrogant.
- They love evil rather than good and darkness rather than light.
- For a bribe they pervert justice.
- They have rejected God's laws and his word.

The judgment that they will experience includes:

- Their crops will fail.
- Their wealth will be torn from them.
- They will be taken into exile.
- There will be a great number of deaths among them.
- The arrogant will be humbled and God will be exalted.
- They will be consumed as fire consumes dry straw or as decay consumes roots. They will be blown away like dust.
- They will be invaded by foreign nations. Those nations will be strong and fierce against Judah.

In Luke 13:6-9, we see Jesus pick up on the parable of the vineyard that fails to produce fruit. His conclusion is the same. Either the vineyard becomes fruitful or it is destroyed. The message is fairly pointed.

## **2.5 The Call of Isaiah**

Isaiah 6

The call of Isaiah was a pivotal event in his life. It was a special time when God consecrated him to his task. One might wonder why it does not take place until chapter 6. Several explanations are possible.

When we read Scripture, we tend to assume that it is chronologically ordered. More often than not, that is an assumption that we impose on the text rather than a claim that the text makes for itself. Isaiah's call may have happened early in his life – before he received the prophecies in chapters 1-5 – and he may simply have recorded it out of order.

The other possibility is that the text is indeed chronological and that the events in chapter 6 occurred after Isaiah had actually begun his prophetic ministry. The call in chapter 6 may have been a renewal rather than his initial call from God. Most of us hear from God in stages. Most of us have less dramatic communications from God before we experience "big" dreams or visions. In fact, the way we respond to the less dramatic communications often determines whether or not we will ever have the big dreams and visions.

It does not matter when Isaiah had the vision. It matters that he did. It was a dramatic event. It is described in Isaiah 6:1-8:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

The first thing that we learn is that this happened in the year that King Uzziah died. This would have been significant in the life of Isaiah. In the introduction, we mentioned that he might well have been first cousins with Uzziah. At any rate, he was close with the royal family. When Uzziah died, the nation lost a leader and he probably lost a friend. It would have been a time of emotional trauma for him. It is at times like this that we are often open to spiritual renewal. For Isaiah, it was a time when he was open to the call of God on his life. This call came in a vision.

Isaiah found himself standing before the throne of God. What a wonderful and yet terrifying place. Hovering above God in a place of service were seraphs. There are two kinds of angels. Cherubs were the smaller angels, often depicted by artists as babies with wings. Seraphs are the big angels – the warriors. They were powerful. They were the ones that God sent to destroy armies that God opposed. And yet when they were in the presence of God, they themselves were awed by his presence. With one pair of wings they hid their eyes because they considered themselves unworthy to look upon God. With another pair of wings they hid their feet because they considered themselves unworthy to be looked upon by God. They were overwhelmed with the goodness of God and could only shout "Holy holy holy."

So this is the scene in which Isaiah found himself. As is true with any of us when we approach the presence of God, Isaiah immediately felt unclean. There is no other way to feel before God. It is interesting that he said that he had unclean lips. So much about us manifests through our speech. Isaiah knew that his lips were not worthy to join in the praise of the angels.

One of the seraphs had pity upon Isaiah. He took a coal from the altar and touched it to the lips of Isaiah. The altar was a place of sacrifice – where atonement was made for sin. The coal contained fire and was an instrument of refining. By touching the coal to the lips of Isaiah (remember that this was a vision), the lips of Isaiah were cleansed. His guilt was removed.

God had a task that needed to be done and called out "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah responded "Here am I. Send me." When a person has experienced purification from guilt and

reconciliation to God, the proper response is willingness to serve. When God has restored us to a right relationship, we should be willing to do whatever he needs to do.

The task that God had for Isaiah was that of being a messenger. God sends different people at different times to bear different messages. For some, it is an occasional thing. For Isaiah, it became a task that would consume the rest of his life.

His initial message after his calling is given in the remainder of chapter 6. God said that the people should keep on hearing but not understanding. They should keep on seeing but not perceiving. They should persist in having dull hearts. If they did not, they might actually understand, perceive, turn to God, and be healed.

There is a bit of a sarcastic edge to the message. God surely wanted the people to turn to him but God knew that they would not. If they did, they would find healing. Since they would not, they would find destruction.

Isaiah asked how long this would persist. God told him that it would continue until the cities had been desolated. The people would be wiped away and only a remnant would remain. But even God's message of destruction contains a word of hope. Isaiah 6:13 says:

But as the terebinth and oak  
leave stumps when they are cut down,  
so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.

Even though desolation would come, a seed had been planted that would sprout again. Judah would return again to its land. Israel was given no such promise.

## **2.6 Immanuel**

Isaiah 7-12

This section of Isaiah contains some of the best known verses in Scripture (thanks, in part to George Frederick Handel). This is also a difficult section of scripture to understand. This is caused by several things, including:

- A lack of understanding of the historical context of the passage. Many people who have heard these verses have no idea what was going on in the background when the verses were delivered. Without that perspective, one cannot really understand what they mean.
- Some of the prophecies had a double fulfillment. They described events that would happen in the lifetime of the hearers and at the same time described events that would take place in the future. This is not uncommon with Old Testament prophecy.
- The prophecies shift from focusing on the events that were imminent in Isaiah's days to the events of the first century to events that have not yet been fulfilled. Isaiah's look into the future can be compared to a man looking out across a mountain range. He sees various peaks but is unable to see the valleys in-between. Isaiah was able to see events that would happen, but did not have the "3D" perspective that would have allowed him to put them into a chronological perspective. The panorama of history is reduced to a two dimensional canvas.



So what is the historical context of this section? Ahaz was king of Judah. Ahaz was a terrible person. Assyria was the undisputed world power at the time. Most of the nations surrounding it were subject to Assyria and paid tribute to it. Pekah, king of Israel and Rezin, King of Syria, had decided to revolt against Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria. They tried to get Ahaz to join them in their rebellion. He refused. Thus to punish him, Israel and Syria went to war against Judah. Ahaz had turned to Assyria for protection when this happened. Rather than relying on God for deliverance, Ahaz turned to the ungodly nation of Assyria. God did not want this alliance to take place. He sent Isaiah to tell Ahaz to look to God for help rather than to Assyria. In verses 7:7-9 he told Ahaz that Syria and Israel would be defeated, and that within sixty-five years time the nation of Israel would be shattered. This sets us the well-known prophecy in 7:10-17.

## 2.6.1 The Virgin Will Conceive

Isaiah 7:10-17

Isaiah 7:10-17 says:

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah – he will bring the king of Assyria."

Ahaz had already made up his mind how he was going to deal with the crisis before him. He had every intention of making an alliance with Assyria, no matter what God wanted him to do. He was not interested in Isaiah's advice that he should avoid Assyria.

Isaiah had just told him that God would get him out of the trouble and invited him to ask God for a sign that would confirm that the promise was true. Ahaz came back in a falsely pious manner and said, "I will not put the Lord to the test." What he was really saying is that he was not interested in a sign because he had already made up his mind.

So Isaiah came back and gave him a sign, even though he did not ask for one. Isaiah told him that a child would be born and before that child reached the "age of accountability" (knew the difference between right and wrong) the two nations that threatened Judah (Israel and Syria) would be laid waste. After that, Assyria would come against Judah unlike any nation had in the past.

Taken in simple historical context, this is all that this passage says. One does not have the option to consider this passage only in its historical context, however, for two reasons. One is the fact that Matthew said that it predicted the birth of Jesus (a prophecy with a double fulfillment). The other is the controversial concept that "A virgin will be with child."

Matthew 1:18-23 says:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us."

The concept of the virgin birth has divided theologians for hundreds and hundreds of years. It seems a bit ironic. We live in a day when any woman – including a virgin – could go to a doctor, undergo in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination, and behold, that virgin could conceive and bear a son. This is not science fiction. These are common medical procedures. If a physician, who is a created being, can bring about virgin conception and birth, then why would anyone doubt that the creator of the universe could do the same thing?

This is not intended to minimize the miracle of the conception of Christ. The point is that we know for a fact that it is possible to bypass the normal method of conception and that it is absolutely possible for a virgin to bear a child. Knowing that, it is difficult to understand why people still scoff at the possibility of the virgin birth.

God bypassed the normal method of conception. He did it in a way that physicians have never done, however. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he caused the ovum to be fertilized. It was a miracle that set Jesus apart from every other man born of a woman.

The miracle of the conception of Jesus is a wonderful work of God. Having firmly established that, we need to consider the language of the Matthew and the Isaiah texts.

In the Matthew passage, the word that is translated "virgin" is the Greek word "parthenos." When Matthew quoted Isaiah, he was quoting the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> The Isaiah 7:14 passage in the Septuagint also uses the word "parthenos" for "virgin." "Parthenos" in Greek may be translated as "virgin," "marriageable maiden," or "young married woman."

In the original Hebrew text, the word "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 is a word that would be roughly transliterated as "almah." This is not the word that is normally used for "virgin" in Hebrew. That

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<sup>1</sup>During the exile, a large number of Jews resettled in Egypt. The Jewish community in Egypt translated their Scriptures into Greek, which was the common language of the day. The product of that translation is called The Septuagint. When Old Testament passages are quoted in the New Testament, most often they are quoting from the Septuagint.

word would roughly be transliterated as "bethoolah." The meaning of "bethoolah" in Hebrew is "virgin – mature girl whom no man has known." The meaning of "almah" (the word used in 7:14) in Hebrew is "girl of marriageable age, a young woman through the birth of her first child, a maid or newly married woman."

"Almah" is not commonly used in the Old Testament. It may be found only in the following verses (other than Isaiah 7:14):

- Genesis 24:43 – Here it is used to refer to Rachel. When Abraham's servant went to look for a wife for Isaac, he sat by a well and waited for a woman (translated "maiden" in the NIV) to come and draw water.
- Exodus 2:8 – Here it is used to refer to Moses' sister Miriam at the time that Pharaoh's daughter found Moses in the river. In the NIV it is translated "girl."
- Psalm 68:25 – a reference to women (translated "maidens" in the NIV) playing tambourines.
- Proverbs 30:19 – Here it is used in a description of love between a man and a woman. In NIV it is translated "maiden."
- Song of Solomon 1:3 – Here it is used to refer to the attendants of Solomon's lover – translated "maidens" in the NIV.
- Song of Solomon 6:8 – Here Solomon compares his lover to queens and concubines and virgins. In NIV it is translated "virgins."
- Obscure references in Psalm 46:1 and 1 Chronicles 15:20. Most likely it is intended as instructions on how a song is to be sung. It probably means that the song is to be sung by women or by boys using falsetto voices.

The Genesis 24 passage gives interesting insight into the usage of the word. In that same chapter we find both the word "bethoolah" and "almah." Genesis 24:16 says "The girl was very beautiful, a virgin (bethoolah); no man had ever lain with her." Genesis 24:43 says "See, I am standing beside this spring; if a maiden (almah) comes out to draw water and I say to her, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar," ... 24:16 makes a particular point of the virginity and uses the word "bethoolah." 24:43 does not emphasize the virginity and uses the word "almah." They refer to the same woman, Rachel.

What is the point of all of this? The word that Isaiah used in 7:14 does not normally mean "virgin." It may not be the best translation for this particular verse. Do not go crazy, here. I did not just question the virgin birth of Jesus. I questioned the translation of Isaiah 7:14.

Unfortunately, questioning the translation of this verse is like walking into a mine field. When the Revised Standard Version was initially released, it was branded a work of the devil and liberal poppycock because it translated 7:14 as "young woman" rather than "virgin." In fact, "young woman" may be a better translation. Unfortunately the controversy around this word has clouded the real significance of Isaiah's prophecy.

Jumping back to the historical context for the verse, Isaiah delivered this prophecy to Ahaz. An "almah" (virgin, young woman, whatever) would conceive a child and bear a son. Before that child reached the age where he knew right from wrong, the kings of Israel and Syria would be defeated and no longer a threat to Ahaz. This was the message. It referred to an event that would happen in the life of Ahaz and Isaiah. If one forces the word to mean "virgin," then it implies that a virgin birth took place during the life of Ahaz and Isaiah. There is no evidence that such a birth took place.

There is also no evidence that the Jews interpreted Isaiah's words to be a prediction of a virgin birth. Messianic prophecy was not lost on the Jewish people. They understood that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. They understood that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. They did not anticipate that the Messiah would be born of a virgin.

Jesus, on the other hand, was born of a virgin. When translating the Matthew passage, the word "virgin" makes perfect sense. It is possible that our understanding of the events in Matthew have been superimposed on the way that Isaiah 7:14 is translated. As was mentioned earlier, it is unfortunate that the controversy over the translation of "almah" has clouded the real significance of this prophecy.

When Isaiah delivered this message to Ahaz, he was predicting something that would take place in his own day, but he was also looking to the future. He foresaw the incarnation. But the real significance of the incarnation does not revolve around the word "virgin." It revolves around the word "Immanuel." The significance of the coming of Jesus was that he was God with us. When Matthew said that the Isaiah prophecy had been fulfilled, he was talking about Immanuel. That is the miracle of the incarnation. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. That is where we get our hope and that is what we as the church celebrate.

## 2.6.2 Assyria

Isaiah 7:18-8:10

The prophecy in the previous section had two predictions concerning other nations. First of all, the nations that currently threatened Judah would be defeated. Second, because Judah turned to Assyria for help, Assyria would turn on Judah and be a threat to her. This section expands on the latter part of that prophecy. God will summon Assyria to invade Judah. They will oppress the people. The land itself will become overrun with briars and thorns so that the people will be unable to cultivate crops.

God told Isaiah to take a scroll and write on it "Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz." This means "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." It was a word describing the manner in which Assyria would invade Israel and Syria, and later Judah. The scroll was delivered to the priests so that they could be witnesses of the prophecy. 8:3 then says that Isaiah's wife ("the prophetess") gave birth to a son and they named him "Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz." Verse 8:4 says, "Before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria." This parallels the prophecy given in the previous section. This son of Isaiah may have been the child mentioned in Isaiah 7:14.<sup>1</sup>

Verses 8:6-10 contain another two-pronged prophecy. The first part warns Judah that Assyria is about to sweep down onto it. This part of the prophecy is given in verses 6-8:

Because this people has rejected  
the gently flowing waters of Shiloah  
and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah,  
therefore the Lord is about to bring against them  
the mighty flood waters of the River –  
the king of Assyria with all his pomp.  
It will overflow all its channels,  
run over all its banks  
and sweep on into Judah,  
swirling over it,

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<sup>1</sup>Remember that the 7:14 prophecy has a double fulfillment. It was fulfilled sometime during the life of Isaiah and Ahaz. It was fulfilled again at the birth of Jesus Christ.

passing through it and reaching up to the neck.  
Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land,  
O Immanuel!

This is an interesting use of the word "Immanuel." We are accustomed to thinking of "Immanuel" as being the individual – Jesus Christ who was God incarnate (i.e. God with us.) In this passage, "Immanuel" is used to refer corporately to the nation. More on this as we discuss the next passage.

8:9-10 finishes the prophecy:

Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered!  
Listen, all you distant lands.  
Prepare for battle, and be shattered!  
Prepare for battle, and be shattered!  
Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted;  
propose your plan, but it will not stand,  
for God is with us.

God has warned Judah that Assyria is going to bring oppression. He now warns Assyria that they will not succeed, because ultimately God is on the side of Judah. Verse 10 concludes with "for God is with us."

The "God is with us" in verse 10 is the exact same word (actually 2 words) in Hebrew as the "Immanuel" in verse 8. What we are reading here is Hebrew poetry. Much of Isaiah is written in poetic form. It seems that Isaiah poetically used the term "God with us" in verse 8 in reference to the nation to emphasize the fact that Assyria was invading God's chosen people.

Some people (i.e. the Jews) pick up on verses like this and conclude that the Messianic references in Isaiah refer to the nation as a whole. They believe that the suffering servant in Isaiah is the nation of Israel rather than a single individual. The fact is that Isaiah 7:14 specifically refers to a child that would be born who would be called "Immanuel." This man, "Immanuel" is a product of the nation "Immanuel" mentioned in verse 8:8. God's call was originally to the nation of Israel. The nation corporately failed him. Thus God brought about his plan through a single individual.

### 2.6.3 The Fear of God

Isaiah 8:11-22

God informs Isaiah not to fear things that men fear but to fear God instead. God will be a sanctuary to those who fear him. To both Judah and Israel, he will be "a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall" (8:14).

Isaiah and his family stand as a testimony to the living word of God. People have this testimony available and yet they consult mediums and spiritists for direction. Because of this, they wander about in hunger and distress. Ultimately they look up and curse God. These people can look forward only to distress and darkness.

## 2.6.4 For Unto Us a Child Is Born

Isaiah 9:1-7

Chapter 9 offers a sharp contrast to the distress and darkness present at the end of Chapter 8. 9:1-2 says:

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan –  
The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.

The territory that once belonged to Zebulun and Naphtali was resettled after the exile and became known as Galilee. The area includes such cities as Nazareth, Cana, and Capernaum, which figured significantly in the life and ministry of Jesus. Isaiah was looking into the future when a great light would shine from that place. There would be no more gloom for those in distress. The prophecy goes on to speak of the time when a yoke would be lifted from their backs. The rod of their oppressors would be removed. The nation would be enlarged and the harvest plentiful. Isaiah 9:6-7 contains another section of Scripture that was later orchestrated by Handel:

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom  
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
will accomplish this.

Here we have another prophecy of a child being born. We look at these passages through a New Testament filter and see this and Isaiah 7:14 as both being references to Jesus Christ. Those in Isaiah's time may not have seen these two prophecies as referring to the same individual. Still they both offered hope to the nation.

A child was going to be born to the house of David. He will be called, among other things, Mighty God. This is amazing. Good Jews do not call people God who are not God. Blasphemy was a major crime. Yet they have a prophecy that says that a son of David will be Mighty God. This divine son of David will be Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. He will establish a Kingdom and will rule over it forever.

It would be hard to find other passages of Scripture in the Old Testament that give such bold predictions about the coming of Jesus.

### 2.6.5 Judgment on Israel

Isaiah 9:8-10:4

This section contains a stern message of judgment that is about to be poured out on Israel. God has endured their spiritual apostasy long enough and he is about to take action. He will cut off both the head and the tail of the nation – the head being the elders and the tail being the false prophets. The leaders lead the people astray and the people walk in falsehood. There is no justice or caring for the widow or orphan or needy. God's anger is great against them and they will soon see his wrath.

### 2.6.6 Judgment on Assyria

Isaiah 10:5-19

The attention now turns to Assyria. God has chosen to use Assyria as a rod of punishment. His intention was to have Assyria inflict a certain amount of oppression on Israel in order to bring them back to their senses. Assyria had other ideas, however. Assyria wanted to destroy. Assyria had become arrogant. They believed that they were doing all of this in their own power rather than under the permission of God. Because of this, God will deal with Assyria as well. Once they have served his purpose in punishing Israel, he will pour out judgment on Assyria.

There is an important lesson in this for us. When God uses us to accomplish his purposes, we must be careful to give him the glory. When we begin to think highly of ourselves over such deeds then we rob him of his credit. The result might be to bring punishment on ourselves. At a minimum, it is apt to reduce our usefulness in his Kingdom.

### 2.6.7 The Remnant of Israel

Isaiah 10:20-34

A message is given to those who will survive the purging of Israel. Destruction will surely come on the land but there will be a remnant who survive. That remnant is told not to fear the hand of the oppressor, Assyria. They are assured that God is using Assyria for a season as an instrument of punishment. In due time God would pull Assyria back and pour out his punishment on them.

### 2.6.8 The Branch of Jesse

Isaiah 11:1-12:6

This is the last part of the "Immanuel" section that began in chapter 7. It contains the well-known "Branch of Jesse" prophecy, which picks up on the theme begun in chapter 9 (for unto us a child is born ...).

The metaphor that begins chapter 11 is best understood if considered in context. At the end of chapter 10, Isaiah is talking about destruction that is going to come upon Israel. This destruction is compared to leveling a forest. Proud trees will be cut down. Isaiah 10:33-34 says:

See, the Lord, the Lord Almighty,  
will lop off the boughs with great power.  
The lofty trees will be felled,

the tall ones will be brought low.  
He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax;  
Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One.

The metaphor shifts in chapter 11 to regeneration. Even though the "tree of Jesse" has been cut down, its roots run deep. In 2 Samuel 7:16, God had promised to establish the kingdom of David forever. That promise was still valid. Thus even though it seemed that the house of David had been destroyed, a shoot will come forth from that old root. Isaiah 11:1-5 says:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.  
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of power,  
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord –  
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.  
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;  
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.  
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.  
Righteousness will be his belt  
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The Branch of Jesse would be a king who would come to reign in righteousness. He offers justice and protection for the poor – the very things that the nation had forgotten. His words would be like a rod, slaying the wicked. This is the exact sort of king and kingdom that God had wanted the people to have all along, but nobody had ever lived up to the standards. Isaiah 11:6-9 continues the prophecy, and sees the Kingdom as it will be when it reaches its ultimate fruition. Since we have never seen the conditions described in this section, we may assume that they are yet to come.

The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;  
and a little child will lead them.  
The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,  
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

There will come a time when the order on earth will return to the Edenic days. Genesis portrays the earth as a place where creatures all got along with one another prior to the fall. In Romans 8:19-21, Paul tells us:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,

in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

When man fell, he took the rest of creation with him. The day will come when the effects of the fall will be reversed. It is this Branch of Jesse that will be the instrument of change. The day will come when the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. The end result of that is that creation will again be at peace. "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, and a little child will lead them." Maranatha.

There will also be a regathering of the exiles. Note that Isaiah wrote this prior to the exile, but God inspired him to look ahead and see the day when God's chosen would be regathered to their Promised Land. He also saw a time when the remnant of Judah and the remnant of Israel would be one again. Together they will retake their land from their enemies. 11:10-16 says:

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.

He will raise a banner for the nations  
and gather the exiles of Israel;  
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah  
from the four quarters of the earth.  
Ephraim's jealousy will vanish,  
and Judah's enemies will be cut off;  
Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah,  
nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim.  
They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west;  
together they will plunder the people to the east.  
They will lay hands on Edom and Moab,  
and the Ammonites will be subject to them.  
The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea;  
with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand  
over the Euphrates River.  
He will break it up into seven streams  
so that men can cross over in sandals.  
There will be a highway for the remnant of his people  
that is left from Assyria,  
as there was for Israel  
when they came up from Egypt.

When this time comes, the natural response of the people will be praise. They will no longer feel at odds with God but will feel the warmth of his protection. Chapter 12 contains the song of rejoicing that will follow.

In that day you will say:  
"I will praise you, O Lord.  
Although you were angry with me,  
your anger has turned away and you have comforted me.  
Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.  
The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song;  
he has become my salvation."

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.  
In that day you will say:  
"Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name;  
make known among the nations what he has done,  
and proclaim that his name is exalted.  
Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things;  
let this be known to all the world,  
Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion,  
for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

## **2.7 Oracles Against Nations**

In the section that spans chapters 13-23, Isaiah delivers specific prophecies against specific nations. These are people who are past or present or future enemies of Israel. Judgment will be poured out on each of them.

To us this might all sound rather weird. Israel is unfaithful. God withdraws his protection and lets these neighboring peoples harass Israel in punishment. Then, once it is all done, God comes down in wrath against these other nations for being instruments of his own punishment. How can this be if they are simply fulfilling his purpose?

We have already seen an example of this with Assyria (see 10:5-19). These other nations have chosen evil. For a season, God uses the evil that they have chosen to accomplish his purpose, but it does not take away from the fact that the people are acting in a way that is abhorrent to God. He deals with it in his own time.

### **2.7.1 Babylon**

Isaiah 13:1-14:23

The first prophecy is against Babylon. This may have seemed strange to the listeners, because Babylon was not a world power at this time. Babylon was not a threat to Judah. God was able to look ahead and see the time when Babylon would become a world power and would ultimately take Judah into exile.

The day of God's wrath is going to fall on Babylon. They will be overtaken by foreign enemies who will pillage their land and kill the men, women, and children. The city of Babylon will be destroyed and never rebuilt.

13:17 specifically names the Medes as those who would bring about this destruction. History records that the Medes under Darius did indeed destroy Babylon. Apparently Alexander the Great resolved to rebuild it but died at an early age and was unable to do so. The land remains desolate to this day.

Chapter 14 says that out of the destruction of Babylon will come a regathering of the sons of Jacob. 14:1-2 says:

The Lord will have compassion on Jacob;  
once again he will choose Israel  
and will settle them in their own land.  
Aliens will join them  
and unite with the house of Jacob.

Nations will take them and bring them to their own place.  
And the house of Israel will possess the nations  
as menservants and maidservants in the Lord's land.  
They will make captives of their captors  
and rule over their oppressors.

Again history shows that the regathering of people to the Promised Land began after Babylon was conquered by the Persians and the Medes.

Chapter 14 contains a passage of Scripture that is fairly well known and often misunderstood. 14:12-15 is directed at the king of Babylon and says:

How you have fallen from heaven,  
O morning star, son of the dawn!  
You have been cast down to the earth,  
you who once laid low the nations!  
You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven;  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God;  
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,  
on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.  
I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High."  
But you are brought down to the grave,  
to the depths of the pit.

This prophecy bears great similarity to a prophecy given against the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:11-19. Both passages speak of a human king who began to think of himself a bit too highly. He fantasized that he was a god (such notions lasted well beyond the time of Isaiah – Yul Brenner labored under the same delusion in "The King and I."). In response to this arrogance, God will bring him down and humble him.

The passage above seems fairly simple. Its interpretation, however has been clouded somewhat. It is not uncommon to see this passage and the Ezekiel 28 passage pulled out of context and used as an explanation for the fall of Satan. This interpretation says that Satan was a high-ranking angel who began to aspire to be greater than God. As a result he was cast out of heaven. It is difficult to construe this to be a viable interpretation of the verse contextually. Satan may have been a high-ranking angel who was cast from heaven, but that information does not come from this passage or the Ezekiel 28 text. The Bible does not give any clear-cut explanations for the origin of Satan.

What it does say, however, is that a man who begins to fancy himself a god will be brought low.

## 2.7.2 Assyria

Isaiah 14:24-27

This section contains a promise that God will remove Assyrian oppression from the land and from his people. We saw God deal a great blow to the Assyrians during the reign of Hezekiah. They were ultimately conquered by the Babylonians during the reign of Josiah.

### 2.7.3 Philistia

Isaiah 14:28-32

This prophecy is dated as being given in the year King Ahaz died. It is directed at the Philistines. The Philistines had been a problem for the Israelites since the time they entered the Promised Land. This oracle pronounces their defeat by a people from the north. 2 Kings 18:8 tells us that Hezekiah ultimately defeated the Philistines. Verse 14:32 says:

What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation?  
"The Lord has established Zion,  
and in her his afflicted people will find refuge."

When the defeated Philistines ask, "What happened," they are to be informed that God takes care of his own.

### 2.7.4 Moab

Isaiah 15-16

Isaiah now delivers an oracle against Moab. Moab was across the lower portion of the Dead Sea from Judah, in an area that now includes part of the nation of Jordan. 16:6 cites pride and insolence as her crimes. The entire passage describes the destruction that will come on that land. The people of Moab will become fugitives.

This prophecy against Moab has a different tone to it than the ones we have just seen. Isaiah seemed to have no emotional reaction to the oracles against the Babylonians, the Assyrians, or the Philistines. In 15:5, however, he says, "My heart cries out for Moab." 16:11 says, "My heart laments for Moab like a harp, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth." Isaiah was personally moved by this message of destruction against Moab.

Isaiah 16:1-5 deserves closer consideration. It says:

Send lambs as tribute to the ruler of the land,  
from Sela, across the desert, to the mount of the Daughter of Zion.  
Like fluttering birds pushed from the nest,  
so are the women of Moab at the fords of the Arnon.  
Give us counsel, render a decision.  
Make your shadow like night – at high noon.  
Hide the fugitives, do not betray the refugees.  
Let the Moabite fugitives stay with you;  
be their shelter from the destroyer."  
The oppressor will come to an end,  
and destruction will cease;  
the aggressor will vanish from the land.  
In love a throne will be established;  
in faithfulness a man will sit on it –  
one from the house of David –  
one who in judging seeks justice  
and speeds the cause of righteousness.

2 Kings 3:4 indicates that the king of Moab formerly sent lambs as tribute to the king of Israel. Isaiah is saying that such tribute is to be sent to the king of Judah instead. Then he moves into a section the meaning of which is not intuitively obvious. There is talk of sheltering fugitives.

Chapter 15 closed by talking about the fugitives of Moab who would be wandering about at the time of Moab's destruction. Isaiah seems to be giving instructions to the people of Judah to provide these people with shelter in their time of need. The oppressor would vanish from Moab in time. It also seems that the people of Moab would ultimately benefit from the faithful ruler that would come from the house of David, being benefactors of his justice and righteousness.

This might all make more sense if it is viewed in the context of other verses of prophecy that deal with Moab. Jeremiah 48 is another oracle against Moab and it describes destruction similar to that in Isaiah 15-16. That section closes, however, with a promise that Moab would be restored. Daniel 11 is a chapter that is typically interpreted as describing the final battles – Armageddon. Daniel 11:41 indicates that when that fighting begins, Moab is one of the lands that would be spared. In Matthew 24:16, Jesus says that at the time of the final battle, people in Judea would flee to the mountains. This is understood by many to be a reference to the mountains of Moab.

Moab may have a part to play in the final unfolding of history. Isaiah was telling the people of Judah to provide shelter to the refugees from Moab. The day will come when the people of Moab will provide shelter to the refugees of Judah. It is interesting that David took his family to Moab and obtained shelter for them at the time he was being pursued by Saul.

Isaiah seems to have been sensitive to the role that Moab would eventually play and thus he was bothered by the trouble that was coming upon them.

## 2.7.5 Damascus

Isaiah 17

The oracle against Damascus (Syria) is next. Remember that the historical backdrop to Isaiah includes Syria and Israel joining forces and coming against Judah in war. Isaiah pronounces their defeat. Implied in this section is the fact that Israel will be pulled down alongside Syria. The grievance that is sighted against them is not attacking Judah. Rather it is forgetting God and turning to idolatry instead. (If they had been in tune with God they would not have attacked Judah – that was a symptom and not the cause.) Because of this, they can expect destruction. We saw this fulfilled when Assyria defeated both Israel and Syria.

## 2.7.6 Egypt and Cush

Isaiah 18-20

Chapters 18 and 19 talk about destruction and distress that will come upon the land of Egypt. The ultimate result of this distress is that they will turn away from their idols and become worshippers of God.

Isaiah 19:23-25 contains a prophetic glimpse into the future:

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

Israel had spent most of its existence struggling with its neighbors to the west (Egypt) and to the east (Assyria is an example). The day will come when these will be united in service and devotion to God. Israel will be at the center. Peace will prevail.

Chapter 20 contains a narrative of an unusual event. In the background is the historical fact that the Philistines had formed an alliance with the Egyptians against Assyria. Sargon, king of Assyria attacked Ashdod (a Philistine city) and overthrew it. God told Isaiah to go about naked for three years. This was done as a warning to the people that the Assyrians would conquer the Egyptians and march them off naked into captivity. The message was that people should not turn to Egypt for protection; they should look to God.

Isaiah may not have been required to go about completely naked. He may have worn some sort of loincloth, but at a minimum his backside was exposed. Fortunately this is not God's normal way of having his prophets deliver their messages.

### 2.7.7 Babylon

Isaiah 21:1-10

In 21:1-10, Isaiah has further prophecy against Babylon. He already spoke against them in chapters 13-14. Isaiah describes terrible destruction that will come upon Babylon. Verse 2 identifies the Medes as the ones that will bring the destruction. Isaiah cannot sleep because of the intensity and horror of the destruction in the vision.

### 2.7.8 Edom

Isaiah 21:11-12

The next two verses contain a prophecy against Edom:

An oracle concerning Dumah:

Someone calls to me from Seir,  
"Watchman, what is left of the night?  
Watchman, what is left of the night?"  
The watchman replies, "Morning is coming, but also the night.  
If you would ask, then ask; and come back yet again."

Genesis 32:3 identifies Seir as being the land of the Edomites (the descendants of Esau). The passage opens with "An oracle concerning Dumah." This is a play on words in Hebrew. "Dumah" is "Edom" with the Hebrew letters rearranged. "Dumah" means "silence," and has a connotation of death. In the prophecy, a man from Edom is calling out, wanting to know when the darkness will be over. A watchman replies to him that morning is coming, but it too will be enshrouded in darkness.

The image is one of darkness and death coming on the land of Edom. Isaiah does not offer any specific reason for the judgment, but the Edomites had long been enemies of their brothers, the Israelites. They were being punished for their inability to peacefully coexist.

## 2.7.9 Arabia

Isaiah 21:13-17

Chapter 21 concludes with a message of judgment against Arabia. Within a year, trouble would be brought upon them. They would face the swordsmen and the bow. They would suffer great losses.

## 2.7.10 Jerusalem

Isaiah 22

Isaiah 22 contains two parts. Verses 1-14 contain prophecy against Jerusalem or Judah as a whole. Verses 15-25 contain specific words to specific individuals in Jerusalem.

The first part describes judgment that is coming on Judah. Warriors would come from Elam and Kir, which are cities in Assyria. We know that Assyria did bring great trouble on Judah in the time of Isaiah. Isaiah says that when this happens, the people would look to their own scheming and military might for deliverance but would not look to God. The purpose of the judgment was to bring people back to God but the people missed the point. At a time that they ought to be repenting and seeking God's face, they are having one last party. Isaiah 22:13 says:

"Let us eat and drink," you say,  
"for tomorrow we die!"

Because of their refusal to turn to God, God cannot atone for their sin according to verse 14.

Verse 15 turns the attention to an individual named Shebna. This was a high-ranking official in Hezekiah's court. He was in charge of the palace. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 19 and in chapters 36 and 37 of Isaiah. Shebna's position had gone to his head. He had begun to indulge himself with the benefits that were available to him. Among other things, he had built himself a very fancy tomb. God is going to send him captive to another nation and he will die there. He will never get to use the tomb he had carved for himself. Another of Hezekiah's servants named Eliakim will be exalted in his place. He will serve more faithfully and righteously. Verse 25 indicates that he will eventually be brought down from his position as well.

## 2.7.11 Tyre

Isaiah 23

Tyre is a port city north of Israel. It was a major center of commerce in the Mediterranean. God was about to bring judgment on Tyre because of its pride and irreverence. The destruction of Tyre would shock the entire Mediterranean region. The destruction would last seventy years and then Tyre would resurface. The new Tyre would not be much better than the old (the passage describes the new Tyre as a prostitute) but her profits would benefit those who are devoted to God (verse 23:18). We know from Ezra 3:7 that the people of Tyre did help in the rebuilding of the temple after the exile, thus fulfilling verse 23:18.

## **2.8 Devastation**

Isaiah 24

In Chapter 24, Isaiah speaks of a day when God will bring massive destruction on the entire earth. The magnitude of it is unlike anything ever experienced. If you look at this section through a New Testament filter, it seems to describe the time of tribulation, which is foretold in the book of Revelation. The devastation will be on all classes of society. The earth itself will wither from the destruction.

24:5 gives the reason for the judgment:

The earth is defiled by its people;  
they have disobeyed the laws,  
violated the statutes  
and broken the everlasting covenant.

Once again, God is dealing with his apostate people. Verse 6 says that the earth's inhabitants are burned up (Revelation 8:7) and that very few are left. But even this devastation has a thread of hope running through it. 24:13-16 says:

So will it be on the earth and among the nations,  
as when an olive tree is beaten,  
or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest.  
They raise their voices, they shout for joy;  
from the west they acclaim the Lord's majesty.  
Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord;  
exalt the name of the Lord, the God of Israel,  
in the islands of the sea.  
From the ends of the earth we hear singing:  
"Glory to the Righteous One."

The reference to the gleanings after the grape harvest indicates that there will be those who are left behind after the destruction. Those will rejoice in God's majesty. In spite of all the pain, the righteous will be glad to see the earth purified. The end result is joy.

## **2.9 Praise**

Isaiah 25-26

Chapters 25 and 26 contain songs of praise that will be sung to God by the remnant that survive the devastation in chapter 24. We find in these words an understanding of God's eternal salvation and the concept of eternal life. These are ideas that are much better developed in the New Testament, but these and other references show that they did not originate in New Testament. 25:7-8 says:

On this mountain he will destroy  
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,  
the sheet that covers all nations;  
he will swallow up death forever.

This contains the idea of eternal life. 25:9 contains the concept of receiving God's salvation through faith:

In that day they will say,  
"Surely this is our God;  
we trusted in him, and he saved us.  
This is the Lord, we trusted in him;  
let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

This is echoed in 26:2-3:

Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter,  
the nation that keeps faith.  
You will keep in perfect peace  
him whose mind is steadfast,  
because he trusts in you.

The passage also contains the idea of the resurrection of the dead. 26:19 says:

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise.  
You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy.  
Your dew is like the dew of the morning;  
the earth will give birth to her dead.

## **2.10 Deliverance**

Isaiah 27

Chapter 27 continues the theme of praise and focuses on a future time of deliverance for the people of God. Israel is compared to a vineyard that God guards with jealousy. 27:6 says:

In days to come Jacob will take root,  
Israel will bud and blossom  
and fill all the world with fruit.

Verse 9 says that it will be a day when atonement has been made for the sin of the nation. Idolatry will be removed from the nation. Verses 12-1 say:

In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

There will be a time of regathering those who have been scattered. Isaiah lived before the exile of the Northern or the Southern Kingdom but the Holy Spirit enabled him to look beyond the exiles to a time of restoration. A day would come when Israel would produce fruit that would benefit the entire world.

## 2.11 Woes

### 2.11.1 Woe to Ephraim

Isaiah 28

Chapter 28 begins a series of "woes." The first is directed to Ephraim, which is a common way of referring to the entire Northern Kingdom. In this reference, it seems to refer to the Southern Kingdom as well.

The chapter begins by painting a rather revolting picture of the leadership of the nation. They are very self-indulgent people and walk about in a drunken stupor most of the time. The visions of the prophets are a product of their intoxication. Likewise the decisions of the leaders are influenced by their drunken state. God is going to pour out destruction on them. Verse 28:5-6 says:

In that day the Lord Almighty  
will be a glorious crown,  
a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people.  
He will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment,  
a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

As we have seen earlier in Isaiah, despite the pain and destruction, those who are faithful to God take joy in seeing the land purified.

The chapter goes on to say that the leaders have not looked to God for protection. 28:15 says:

You boast, "we have entered into a covenant with death,  
with the grave we have made an agreement.  
When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by,  
it cannot touch us,  
for we have made a lie our refuge  
and falsehood our hiding place.

"Death" and "the grave" are symbolic references to Assyria and Egypt. God's people had a bad habit of turning to Assyria and Egypt for military support in spite of the fact that God kept telling them not to do so. They sought security in these pagan nations. In fact, these nations would do them harm. God's response to this is in verses 16-18:

So this is what the Sovereign Lord says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,  
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;  
the one who trusts will never be dismayed.  
I will make justice the measuring line  
and righteousness the plumb line;  
hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie,  
and water will overflow your hiding place.  
Your covenant with death will be annulled;  
your agreement with the grave will not stand.  
When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by,  
you will be beaten down by it.

God would "knock the legs out from under" their alliances. As long as they had continued to look to Egypt and Assyria, they would not look to him. God is jealous for his people. He was going to send one who would be the tested stone – the precious cornerstone. In ancient times, the dimensions of the cornerstone determined everything else about the building, i.e. the dimensions of all other components of the building were a function of the dimensions of the cornerstone. Israel needed a true cornerstone to become its foundation. It needed a standard by which everything else could be measured. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:19-21:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

## 2.11.2 Woe to Jerusalem

Isaiah 29

The next "woe" is for Jerusalem. The chapter has much to say about the spiritual state of the city.

- They have a great deal of "religion activity" but their hearts are far from God. 29:13 says that "their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." This is exactly what Jesus fought with the Pharisees most of his ministry.
- To them, the words of the prophets were as a sealed-up scroll. Because of their own spiritual condition, the words were beyond their understanding.
- They had adopted an attitude of self-sufficiency. They did not perceive any need to rely upon God. Verse 29:16 says "You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He did not make me' Can the pot say of the potter, 'He knows nothing'?"

Because of these things, several things are promised. First of all, Jerusalem would be attacked militarily. Foreign invaders would be allowed to inflict punishment upon Jerusalem, but then suddenly God will come and disperse the armies like dust blown by the wind. We saw this happen to the army of Sennacherib in the time of Hezekiah. We see promise of this happening in Revelation.

Isaiah also looks to a future time. 29:18-24 says:

In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll,  
and out of gloom and darkness  
the eyes of the blind will see.  
Once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord;  
the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.  
The ruthless will vanish,  
the mockers will disappear  
and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down –  
those who with a word make a man out to be guilty,  
who ensnare the defender in court  
and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice.

Therefore this is what the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, says to the house of Jacob:

"No longer will Jacob be ashamed;  
no longer will their faces grow pale.  
When they see among them their children,  
the work of my hands,  
they will keep my name holy;  
they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob,  
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.  
Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding;  
those who complain will accept instruction."

This is a glimpse at the millennial kingdom, when the world will be in submission to the reign of Christ.

### 2.11.3 Woe to Obstinate Children

Isaiah 30-31

Chapters 30 and 31 are written as two different sets of "woes," but they are directed at the same target. They both pronounce judgment on "obstinate children" who refuse to turn to God for help and instead seek protection from Egypt. God has repeatedly warned Israel not to turn to pagan neighbors for protection, but they continue to do so. This is a sin of rebellion and faithlessness and in 30:13-14 God says that:

this sin will become for you  
like a high wall, cracked and bulging,  
that collapses suddenly, in an instant.  
It will break in pieces like pottery shattered so mercilessly  
that among its pieces not a fragment will be found  
for taking coals from a hearth  
or scooping water out of a cistern.

God has put up with their disobedience long enough. He has entreated them through the prophets, but they want no instruction. 30:9-11 says:

These are rebellious people, deceitful children,  
children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction.  
They say to the seers, "See no more visions!"  
and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right!  
Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions.  
Leave this way, get off this path,  
and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"

Therefore God would bring punishment. Again, the purpose of the punishment is only to bring them back. It is not vindictive in nature. God longs for restored relationship. 30:18-22 says:

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you;  
he rises to show you compassion.  
For the Lord is a God of justice.  
Blessed are all who wait for him.

O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help. As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears

will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold;

When the people have returned to God, he will restore their land and make it fruitful once again.

God also says that he will deal with Assyria. It is not necessary for Judah to seek protective help from anyone but God. 31:4-9 says:

"As a lion growls, a great lion over his prey –  
and though a whole band of shepherds  
is called together against him,  
he is not frightened by their shouts  
or disturbed by their clamor –  
so the Lord Almighty will come down  
to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights.  
Like birds hovering overhead,  
the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem;  
he will shield it and deliver it,  
he will 'pass over' it and rescue it."

Return to him you have so greatly revolted against, O Israelites. For in that day every one of you will reject the idols of silver and gold your sinful hands have made.

"Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man;  
a sword, not of mortals, will destroy them.  
They will flee before the sword  
and their young men will be put in forced labor.  
Their stronghold will fall because of terror;  
at sight of the battle standard  
their commanders will panic,"  
declares the Lord, whose fire is in Zion,  
whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

God has not changed since the beginning of time. He wants relationship with the people he created. When those who are his own fall out of relationship, he disciplines in order to bring them back under the protection of a healthy relationship with him (thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me). When others try to do harm to his people, he protects them with a vengeance. What should we learn from this? If we will fight his battles then our lives will be permeated by his success. Unfortunately we like to be in control.

## ***2.12 The Kingdom of Righteousness***

Isaiah 32:1-8

The first part of chapter 32 contains a glimpse into the Messianic age. 32:1-2 says:

See, a king will reign in righteousness  
and rulers will rule with justice.  
Each man will be like a shelter from the wind  
and a refuge from the storm,  
like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

A king is coming who will reign in righteousness. His followers will be like "a refuge from the storm." It will be a time when the fools and scoundrels will no longer be esteemed (Lord give us that age!). Noble men will not be afraid to be noble.

### **2.13 The Complacent Women**

Isaiah 32:9-20

Isaiah now speaks to the women of Judah. They live complacent and comfortable lives. He tells them to wake up and fear what is coming. Within a year distress will come on the land. It will experience a season of fruitlessness and desolation. At the end of this, however, God will pour out his spirit on the land. 32:16-17 says:

Justice will dwell in the desert  
and righteousness live in the fertile field.  
The fruit of righteousness will be peace,  
the effect of righteousness  
will be quietness and confidence forever.

### **2.14 Destroyers and Traitors**

Isaiah 33

Chapter 33 contains a message to destroyers and traitors, but in a broader sense to sinners in general. The day is coming when destroyers will be destroyed and traitors betrayed. The theme of this chapter is that God's presence will come to Jerusalem. When it does, sinners will melt from the heat and the righteous will shine from the radiance. The presence of God either destroys or edifies; which depends on the spiritual state of the one being affected. When this happens, it will be a time of great discomfort to those who are in rebellion but it is a time of great hope for those who are right with God. 33:14-17 says:

The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless:  
"Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire?  
Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"  
He who walks righteously and speaks what is right,  
who rejects gain from extortion  
and keeps his hand from accepting bribes,  
who stops his ears against plots of murder  
and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil –  
this is the man who will dwell on the heights,  
whose refuge will be the mountain fortress.  
His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him.  
Your eyes will see the king in his beauty  
and view a land that stretches afar."

Jerusalem will finally become what God has wanted it to be all along. 33:20-22 says:

Look upon Zion, the city of your festivals;  
your eyes will see Jerusalem  
a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved;  
its stakes will never be pulled up,  
nor any of its ropes broken.  
There the Lord will be our Mighty One.

It will be like a place of broad rivers and streams.  
No galley with oars will ride them,  
no mighty ship will sail them.  
For the Lord is our judge,  
the Lord is our lawgiver,  
the Lord is our king;  
it is he who will save us.

Thus we have two images. Nobody is neutral to the presence of God. It either causes great comfort or great discomfort. How does one ensure that he is on the "comfort" side of the equation? 33:6 says:

He will be the sure foundation for your times,  
a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge;  
the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.

## **2.15 Judgment Against Nations**

Isaiah 34

The theme of chapter 34 is vividly portrayed in 34:2-4:

The Lord is angry with all nations;  
his wrath is upon all their armies.  
He will totally destroy them,  
he will give them over to slaughter.  
Their slain will be thrown out,  
their dead bodies will send up a stench;  
the mountains will be soaked with their blood.  
All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved  
and the sky rolled up like a scroll;  
all the starry host will fall  
like withered leaves from the vine,  
like shriveled figs from the fig tree.

The chapter describes a time of tremendous bloodshed and destruction that will come upon the earth. 34:8 says, "For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution to uphold Zion's cause." The destruction seems to be focused on all nations who have been enemies of Israel at some time in the past.

The scene that is described is much like the sort of destruction that is portrayed in Revelation. Revelation 14 describes a time of terrible judgment on the earth when blood will flow as high as a horse's bridle. Revelation 6:12-13 says, "There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind." Isaiah and John were spectators of the same scene – a time not yet fulfilled. The day will come when God's patience will have been completely exhausted and he is going to bring the rebellion to an end. It will not be a pretty sight.

## 2.16 Future Joy

### Isaiah 35

Chapter 35 continues the theme laid out in chapters 33 and 34. The presence of God brings fear to the sinner and hope to the righteous. In chapter 34, God brings great destruction to the sinner. This act, which strikes fear in the heart of the unrighteous, brings joy to the redeemed. To them, this is the time when God's righteous Kingdom is established on earth and they get to enjoy its benefits. 35:1-6 says:

The desert and the parched land will be glad;  
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.  
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;  
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.  
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,  
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;  
they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.  
Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;  
say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear;  
your God will come, he will come with a vengeance;  
with divine retribution he will come to save you."  
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.  
Then will the lame leap like a deer,  
and the mute tongue shout for joy.  
Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

35:8-10 continues the idea:

And a highway will be there;  
it will be called the Way of Holiness.  
The unclean will not journey on it;  
it will be for those who walk in that Way;  
wicked fools will not go about on it.  
No lion will be there,  
nor will any ferocious beast get up on it;  
they will not be found there.  
But only the redeemed will walk there,  
and the ransomed of the Lord will return.  
They will enter Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy will crown their heads.  
Gladness and joy will overtake them,  
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Just before that, he said "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Those who mourn at the spiritual state of the world and who hunger and thirst for a time when righteousness prevails will find comfort in the millennial kingdom. The longing in them will be filled as God pours out his grace on the redeemed.

The Jews looked forward to the time of this Messianic kingdom. They recognized that it would be a time when the blind, the deaf, and the lame were healed, as described in 35:5-6. In Luke 7:18-23 we see a reference to this expectation:

John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Jesus pointed out to John that he was fulfilling the signs expected of a Messiah. Scripture talks about a king who will reign in righteousness and care for the poor, the sick, and the underprivileged. Jesus was that Messiah. His presence is offensive to those in rebellion. It is a source of great comfort to the redeemed.

## **2.17 Historical Interlude**

The majority of Isaiah is poetic in form and prophetic in function. The next three chapters are mostly a prosaic narrative. This section is referred to as the "historical interlude." It describes events that occurred in the reign of Hezekiah. The material parallels information found in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. In fact, it is almost word-for-word a duplicate of 2 Kings 18:17-20:21, except that the account of Hezekiah's illness in Isaiah 38 varies a bit from the wording in 2 Kings.

### **2.17.1 The Assyrian Threat**

Isaiah 36

Isaiah 36 describes Sennacherib's assault of Jerusalem. He was the king of Assyria. He had attacked and conquered most of Judah. Now he was at the gates of Jerusalem. After assaulting the city for a time, he sent messengers to call up to the watchmen on the city walls. They encouraged Hezekiah to submit. They reminded him that nobody had been able to withstand the army of Assyria and that defeat was certain. They spoke in Hebrew because they wanted all of the people in the city to hear and understand. They hoped to strike fear in the hearts of the people, thinking that the people would then pressure Hezekiah to surrender.

### **2.17.2 The Deliverance of Jerusalem**

Isaiah 37

Isaiah brought Hezekiah a message from God, telling him that Sennacherib would not be able to take Jerusalem. In fact, he would receive a certain message that would cause him to withdraw. Ultimately he would be killed. Sennacherib sent Hezekiah a letter saying that Jerusalem would not be able to stand and that they should surrender. Hezekiah trusted God to protect Jerusalem.

God came back with a message promising destruction to Assyria and deliverance to Jerusalem. He promised Hezekiah that he would soon be able to eat the fruit of his own fields. (During the extended siege by Assyria, the people of Jerusalem would not have been able to go outside the city walls to work their fields.) That night, an angel came and killed a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib withdrew and went home. Soon after arriving, he was assassinated by two of his men.

### 2.17.3 Hezekiah's Illness

Isaiah 38

Hezekiah was ill. Isaiah informed him that he was about to die. Hezekiah wept and prayed that God would spare him. God told Isaiah to tell him that he would receive fifteen more years. As a sign that it was true, God would have the sun go backwards so that the shadow on a certain set of steps would reverse ten steps from its normal progression. Chapter 38 contains a psalm written by Hezekiah to commemorate this event. This psalm does not appear in the parallel passage in 2 Kings.

### 2.17.4 Babylonian Visitors

Isaiah 39

Chapter 39 describes the occasion when messengers from Babylon visited Hezekiah after his illness. While they were there, Hezekiah showed them all of the treasures in the palace. Isaiah informed Hezekiah that he should not have done this and that as a result, one day all of these treasures would be carried off to Babylon.

One might wonder what Hezekiah did that was so wrong. He was entertaining his guests and giving a tour of the house, right? On the spiritual level, Hezekiah's error seems to have been pride. On the natural level, he showed his treasures to the Babylonians, and they made a note that this might be a good place to conquer. His pride and their greed set up events that would take place in the future, when the Babylonians would take Judah by force and carry the people and their treasures off into captivity.

## **2.18 Comfort**

Isaiah 40

As was mentioned in the introduction to Isaiah, there are two main divisions to the book. Chapters 1-39 dwell more on the judgment of God. Chapters 40-66 dwell more on his mercy.

Thus far the sections of Isaiah that we have seen included:

- A Warning to Judah
- The Purging of Judah
- Judgment on Israel
- Judgment on Assyria
- Oracles Against Nations
- Devastation
- Woe to Ephraim
- Woe to Jerusalem
- Woe to Obstinate Children
- Destroyers and Traitors
- Judgment Against Nations

Overall there has been a theme of judgment and destruction – painful discipline. The tone of the book changes with the beginning of chapter 40. Isaiah 40:1-5 says:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her  
that her hard service has been completed,  
that her sin has been paid for,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.  
A voice of one calling:  
"In the desert prepare the way for the Lord;  
make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.  
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,  
and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Jerusalem can take comfort in the fact that her time of discipline is over. What unfolds in the rest of the chapter is a remarkable Messianic promise. The section beginning with "A voice of one calling..." indicates that a messenger will come to prepare the way for the Messianic king. This messenger's job is to clear the path that the Messiah will travel. He will smooth the way, raising the valleys and lowering the mountains. Once the preparation has been done, the glory of the Lord will be revealed.

Looking at this passage from a New Testament perspective, we realize that John the Baptist fulfilled the role of the messenger. We read in John 1:19-23:

Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ."

They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

It was common in the Ancient Near East that when a monarch traveled, he would send servants ahead to make sure the roads were in good condition. In that manner, John was sent ahead of Jesus to lead the people into repentance, preparing the spiritual road for Jesus to travel.

The coming of the Messianic king will be a joyful event. Isaiah 40:9 says:

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!"

This is a truly remarkable statement. A ruler would appear in Judah. The proclamation that would be made about this one is "Here is your God!" Faithful Jews did not call things God that were not God. What we have here is a declaration of a man who was God. The rest of the chapter bears out this concept. 40:10-11 talks about this king who rules with gentle power and who cares for his people like a shepherd cares for his flock:

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,  
and his arm rules for him.  
See his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.  
He tends his flock like a shepherd.  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.

The remainder of the chapter extols the glory of God. It declares that he is worthy to be followed. 40:12-15 says:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,  
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?  
Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket  
or weighed the mountains on the scales  
and the hills in a balance?  
Who has understood the mind of the Lord,  
or instructed him as his counselor?  
Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him,  
and who taught him the right way?  
Who was it that taught him knowledge  
or showed him the path of understanding?  
Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;  
they are regarded as dust on the scales;  
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

God is obviously set apart from all men. There is no other like him. God is also to be praised for the way he takes care of his people. 40:28-31 says:

Do you not know? Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.  
He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.  
Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

Thus chapter 40 tells the people that their time of judgment will come to a close and there will be a glorious revelation of God to Jerusalem. A king will come to Judah who will be worthy of their allegiance. God will be there to renew their strength.

## **2.19 Israel and the Gentile Nations**

Isaiah 41

In chapter 41, God sets his people apart from the Gentile nations. He promises to bless and protect the Jews. Furthermore he promises to come against any nation that might oppose them.

41:2-3 says:

Who has stirred up one from the east,  
calling him in righteousness to his service?  
He hands nations over to him  
and subdues kings before him.  
He turns them to dust with his sword,  
to windblown chaff with his bow.  
He pursues them and moves on unscathed,  
by a path his feet have not traveled before.

The passage talks about a king that will come from the east. He will be a mighty conqueror and he will be operating in service to God. Because of the fact that he is doing God's will, God will give him much success. Students of the Bible generally assume that this is a reference to Cyrus. After the Babylonian captivity, Cyrus is the Persian king who conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to Israel to rebuild and resettle their land.

This chapter refers to that time when they will return from exile (remember that this was written before Babylon was even a world power and long before any sort of exile took place.) 41:8-11 says:

I took you from the ends of the earth,  
from its farthest corners I called you.  
I said, "You are my servant";  
I have chosen you and have not rejected you.  
So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my right hand.  
All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced;  
those who oppose you  
will be as nothing and perish.

Isaiah told the people that the day would come when they would be scattered. God would regather them from the ends of the earth and restore them to their nation. He would protect them. Any nation that sought to oppose them would be destroyed.

The nation of Israel does not deserve the world's unconditional approval just because it is the nation of Israel. Israel today is not the nation of priests that God called. They are people out trying to make a living just like everyone else. As a nation they have political agendas just like every other nation. It would be foolish as a nation to give them carte blanche support for everything that they want to do. But it would be insane to oppose them militarily.

God promises blessings for the land. 41:18-20 says:

I will make rivers flow on barren heights,  
and springs within the valleys.  
I will turn the desert into pools of water,  
and the parched ground into springs.  
I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia,  
the myrtle and the olive.  
I will set pines in the wasteland,  
the fir and the cypress together,  
so that people may see and know,  
may consider and understand,  
that the hand of the Lord has done this,  
that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Jews today consider that this has taken place in their own lifetime. Earlier this century when the Jews began to resettle Israel, they found that their homeland was a wasteland. Those who had occupied the land for centuries had not taken very good care of it. Much of it was swampland. That which was not swampland was desert. It was not suitable for agriculture and minimally acceptable for living. The early settlers of modern Israel began pumping the swamps dry. They irrigated the desert. Today much of the land is fertile and blossoming. They have seen the words of this prophecy unfold before them and they perceive it to be a sign that God's promises to them are still true.

God has a heart for his people. He is not finished with them yet.

## **2.20 God's Servant**

Isaiah 42

Chapter 42 has three distinct parts. Verses 1-9 talk about an individual who is God's righteous servant. Verses 10-17 are a song of praise to God for his protection. Verses 18-25 contain words of rebuke to the nation of Israel for being God's unfaithful servant. In chapter 8 we saw that the concept of God's servant sometimes refers to the nation collectively and sometimes it refers to a single individual. We see it used both ways in chapter 42.

The book of Isaiah contains four "servant songs." These are sections of prophecy which are Messianic in nature. They point to the individual who will ultimately fulfill the role assigned to the nation – to bring the salvation of God to the world. The first of these is in the first part of chapter 42. The others are in Isaiah 49:1-7, Isaiah 50:4-11, and Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

42:1 says:

Here is my servant, which I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight,  
I will put my Spirit on him  
and he will bring justice to the nations.

There will be an individual who will be God's righteous servant. He will bring justice and healing. His ministry is not confined to the Jews. 42:6-7 says:

I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;  
I will take hold of your hand.  
I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,

to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon  
those who sit in darkness.

Verses 10-17 contain praise to God, primarily for the way he protects and defends his people. There is also a warning that those who cling to idols will be outside the realm of his protection.

Verses 18-25 contain rebuke for the nation. God chose the Jews to be his servants. They have done a poor job of it. 42:18-20 says:

Hear, you deaf;  
look, you blind, and see!  
Who is blind but my servant,  
and deaf like the messenger I send?  
Who is blind like the one committed to me,  
blind like the servant of the Lord?  
You have seen many things, but have paid no attention;  
your ears are open, but you hear nothing.

The servant is Israel (which includes Judah). They have been blind and deaf to the instructions of God. As a result, they have been a useless servant. It is this reason that they will be plundered by foreign powers. When it happens, they need to realize that they are not being defeated by the military might of other nations. Instead, they are being handed over for punishment by God. 42:24 says:

Who handed Jacob over to become loot,  
and Israel to the plunderers?  
Was it not the Lord,  
against whom we have sinned?  
For they would not follow his ways;  
they did not obey his law.

## **2.21 Israel's Redeemer**

Isaiah 43

Chapter 43 continues the thought begun at the end of chapter 42. Israel is indeed a blind and deaf servant. She has ignored God's instructions. For that, God allows her to be punished. God's purpose is redemptive, however. He will not forget his people. Chapter 43 contains a promise to bring them back from exile. 43:5-8 says:

Do not be afraid, for I am with you;  
I will bring your children from the east  
and gather you from the west.  
I will say to the north, "Give them up!"  
and to the south, "Do not hold them back."  
Bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the ends of the earth –  
everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made.  
Lead out those who have eyes but are blind,  
who have ears but are deaf.

43:25 is an interesting verse:

I, even I, am he who blots out  
your transgressions, for my own sake,  
and remembers your sins no more.

What an interesting idea! We tend to think of God's forgiveness as a byproduct of his mercy – and it is. We tend to think of reconciliation as a favor that he does for us – and it is. But in this verse, God has "tipped his hand." Forgiveness and reconciliation are things that he does for his own sake. God created us for a purpose. He wanted to have fellowship with us. He wanted to be involved with us. Our sin frustrates his purpose. His forgiveness is the only way that we can be brought back together so that his purpose in creation can be fulfilled. Restoring the captives from exile and forgiving people of sin are not things that God does because we deserve them. They are things that he does because he longs to have a relationship with us. When Adam and Eve rebelled, it broke God's heart. He has spent eternity trying to put things right again – for his own sake and for ours.

#### 2.21.1.1.1 God, Not Idols

Isaiah 44:1-23

This section has two parts. Verses 1-5 talk about the provisions that God has made for his people. He loves and cares for them. He is jealous for their affection. Verses 6-23 show the foolishness of those who choose idolatry over God. 43:13-19 are classic:

The carpenter measures with a line  
and makes an outline with a marker;  
he roughs it out with chisels  
and marks it with compasses.  
He shapes it in the form of man,  
of man in all his glory,  
that it may dwell in a shrine.  
He cut down cedars,  
or perhaps took a cypress or oak.  
He let it grow among the trees of the forest,  
or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow.  
It is man's fuel for burning;  
some of it he takes and warms himself,  
he kindles a fire and bakes bread.  
But he also fashions a god and worships it;  
he makes an idol and bows down to it.  
Half of the wood he burns in the fire;  
over it he prepares his meal,  
he roasts his meat and eats his fill.  
He also warms himself and says,  
"Ah! I am warm; I see the fire."  
From the rest he makes a god, his idol;  
he bows down to it and worships.  
He prays to it and says,  
"Save me; you are my god."  
They know nothing, they understand nothing;  
their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see,  
and their minds closed so they cannot understand.

No one stops to think,  
no one has the knowledge or understanding to say,  
"Half of it I used for fuel;  
I even baked bread over its coals,  
I roasted meat and I ate.  
Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left?  
Shall I bow down to a block of wood?"

Isaiah's remarks sound a bit sarcastic. This is by design. The idea that someone would worship something produced by his one hands is ridiculous. Unfortunately many people still do it today.

## 2.22 Cyrus

Isaiah 44:24-45:25

As we discussed in the introduction to Isaiah, one of the most remarkable and controversial things in the book is the naming of Cyrus as the individual that God had chosen to initiate the return of the Jews from exile. The thing that makes this both remarkable and controversial is the fact that Isaiah lived well over a hundred years before the exile and around two hundred years before Cyrus issued the decree allowing the Jews to return to Israel. Conservative scholars look on this as a remarkable demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal specific events to God's prophets. Some scholars say that this can only mean that this part of Isaiah was written after the exile – otherwise how else did he know Cyrus' name. Thus the controversy. My advice is to ignore the controversy and be impressed with the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no good reason to doubt that Isaiah wrote this prophecy.

44:28-45:1 says:

(I am the Lord...)  
who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd  
and will accomplish all that I please;  
he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt,"  
and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."  
This is what the Lord says to his anointed,  
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of  
to subdue nations before him  
and to strip kings of their armor,  
to open doors before him  
so that gates will not be shut:

This was written at a time when Judah still stood as a nation, when Jerusalem was intact, when the Solomon's temple was standing, long before Babylon was a threat, and decades before Cyrus was born. It is truly a remarkable revelation.

God promises to aid Cyrus and make him successful because Cyrus cooperates with God's purpose. God will not bring success to those who frustrate his plan and question his authority. 45:9-10 says:

Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker,  
to him who is but a potsherd  
among the potsherds on the ground.  
Does the clay say to the potter,  
"What are you making?"  
Does your work say, "He has no hands?"

Woe to him who says to his father,  
"what have you begotten?"  
or to his mother,  
What have you brought to birth?"

Again in verse 45:13, God promises to uphold Cyrus because he is faithful to fulfill God's plan:

I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness;  
I will make all his ways straight.  
He will rebuild my city  
and set my exiles free,  
but not for a price or reward,  
says the Lord Almighty.

45:18-24 contains some extremely important concepts:

For this is what the Lord says –  
he who created the heavens,  
he is God;  
he who fashioned and made the earth,  
he founded it;  
he did not create it to be empty,  
but formed it to be inhabited –  
he says: "I am the Lord,  
and there is no other.  
I have not spoken in secret,  
from somewhere in a land of darkness;  
I have not said to Jacob's descendants,  
'Seek me in vain.'  
I, the Lord, speak the truth;  
I declare what is right.  
Gather together and come;  
assemble, you fugitives from the nations.  
Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood,  
who pray to gods that cannot save.  
Declare what is to be, present it –  
let them take counsel together.  
Who foretold this long ago,  
who declared it from the distant past?  
Was it not I, the Lord?  
and there is no God apart from me,  
a righteous God and a Savior;  
there is none but me.  
Turn to me and be saved,  
all you ends of the earth;  
for I am God, and there is no other.  
By myself I have sworn,  
my mouth has uttered in all integrity  
a word that will not be revoked;  
before me every knee will bow;  
by me every tongue will swear.  
They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone

are righteousness and strength.'  
All who have raged against him  
will come to him and be put to shame."

God made the world for a purpose – to be inhabited by those with whom he wanted to have fellowship. He has not hidden himself from man. His revelation has been ever present. Men have no excuse for not knowing him. Those who have chosen idols have purposely chosen to reject him. He is waiting patiently for people to come to him. The invitation is there to turn to him and be saved. The day will come, however, when every knee will bow to him and every tongue will swear by him. Those who are faithful will find righteousness and strength. Those who are not will be put to shame.

We need to choose now the allegiance that will be ours when the time comes.

The writings of Paul give us two different glimpses of this time. Romans 14:9-12 says:

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written:

"As surely as I live,' says the Lord,  
'every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will confess to God."

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

This time when every knee will bow and every tongue confess will be at the judgment seat of God. It will be a time when we each have to give an accounting before God. It will be a very bad time to have idolatry as an unrepentant and unconfessed sin in our lives.

Philippians 2:10-11 says:

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Our bowing and confessing will be to Jesus. At that time of judgment and accounting, he will be our intercessor. We do not have to go through it alone if we are his.

## **2.23 *Bel and Nebo***

Isaiah 46

Verse 1 of chapter 46 talks about Bel and Nebo. These were two of the Babylonian gods. The chapter is another dissertation on idolatry. These manufactured idols have to be carried about by beasts of burden. When it comes time for the people who worship them to be carried off into captivity, they have no power to deliver. In fact, they end up being another piece of baggage – a burden – to be carried with the captives.

The people are admonished to turn away from idols, who can do nothing for them, and turn to God, who offers salvation.

## **2.24 Babylon Will Be Defeated**

Isaiah 47

In chapter 47, Isaiah pronounces judgment on Babylon. God chose them to be an instrument of punishment for Judah. He allowed them to come against Judah militarily. Babylon's problem is that they did it mercilessly. They were cruel. Furthermore, they were arrogant. They did not realize that their military success was given to them by God. They viewed it as being a product of their own abilities. They envisioned perpetual greatness for themselves (Proverbs 16:18 – Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.). Because of this, calamity will fall upon them. They will taste defeat.

## **2.25 Deliverance of Israel**

Isaiah 48

The first eleven verses of chapter 48 contain another dissertation on the superiority of God over idols. God reveals events that will occur through his prophets so that nobody will credit their fulfillment to idols (verse 5). He is jealous for his people and will not share his glory with anyone or anything (verse 11).

The remainder of the chapter talks about the deliverance that God will give the Jews from Babylon. Verse 12 says:

Listen to me, O Jacob,  
Israel, whom I have called:  
I am he;  
I am the first and I am the last.

This is the same verbiage that Jesus applies to himself in Revelation 1:17. The Father and the Son are united in purpose. Both existed as the first – before creation began. Both will exist as the last – for eternity.

48:18-19 says:

If only you had paid attention to my commands,  
your peace would have been like a river,  
your righteousness like the waves of the sea.  
Your descendants would have been like the sand,  
your children like its numberless grains;  
their name would never be cut off  
nor destroyed from before me.

This is a reminder that God's promises to Israel were contingent upon their obedience and they have not done such a good job of obeying. Still God plans deliverance for them. Verses 14-16 seem to be another reference to Cyrus and the deliverance that he will ultimately bring to the Jews. God's chosen people will be freed from Babylon. They will be redeemed.

## 2.26 Israel's Restoration

Isaiah 49

The first part of chapter 49 contains the second "servant song" in Isaiah. It speaks of an individual who was formed in the womb to be a servant of God. This is a reference to an individual and not the nation as a whole. 49:6-7 says:

he says:  
"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant  
to restore the tribes of Jacob  
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.  
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,  
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."  
This is what the Lord says –  
the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel –  
to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,  
to the servant of rulers:  
"Kings will see you and rise up,  
princes will see and bow down,  
because of the Lord, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.

This echoes an idea that was in the servant song in chapter 42. The redeemer of Israel is also charged with the task of bringing salvation to the Gentiles. God's love was never confined to the Jews and his plan was never to redeem them alone. This passage also gives us a view into something that was fulfilled in the life of Jesus. The servant would be a man "despised and abhorred by the nation," but ultimately kings and princes would bow down to him.

Verses 8-26 of chapter 49 contain another promise that God will redeem the nation from captivity. This theme may seem to be reaching the point of being "overdone" because it is repeated so many times. There is a reason for this, however. The Jews were going to face some devastating times. God warned them about it. He also gave them abundant promises to redeem and restore them. When they saw the first part of his word come true, they could take comfort in the hope that the other part of his word would be fulfilled as well. Things were going to be very difficult for them for a time. They needed the reassurance that God would not forget them. 49:15 says:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget,  
I will not forget you!

This repeated theme of redemption has another purpose as well. Cyrus was God's chosen servant to physically lead the people from captivity back to the Promised Land. This redemption / restoration that occurred in the natural was a foreshadow of the redemption / restoration that Jesus would provide in the spiritual realm. Years after Cyrus had fulfilled his mission, Jesus would become God's chosen servant to lead the people out of their captivity to sin and back into the promise of relationship with God. The message of redemption in Isaiah is strong. The Jews needed that hope while they were in captivity in Babylon, longing to be restored to their land. We need that hope while we are in captivity to sin, longing to be restored to a full relationship with God. We, too, have a Promised Land waiting for us.

## **2.27 The Servant Instead of the Nation**

Isaiah 50

The first three verses of chapter 50 explain that the nation will suffer not because of God's inability to rescue them but because he willingly turns them over for punishment. They have failed to fulfill the role of servant corporately. For this they are punished. As a result of this, he fulfills his plan through the individual who becomes his chosen servant.

Verse 4 begins the third "servant song" in Isaiah. We see more conditions that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus. 50:4-9 says:

The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue,  
to know the word that sustains the weary.  
He wakens me morning by morning,  
wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.  
The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears,  
and I have not been rebellious;  
I have not drawn back.  
I offered my back to those who beat me,  
my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;  
I did not hide my face  
from mocking and spitting.  
Because the Sovereign Lord helps me,  
I will not be disgraced.  
Therefore I have set my face like flint,  
and I know I will not be put to shame.  
He who vindicates me is near.  
Who then will bring charges against me?  
Let us face each other!  
Who is my accuser?  
Let him confront me!  
It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me.  
Who is he that will condemn me?  
They will all wear out like a garment;  
the moths will eat them up.

Jesus faced the beating and the mocking and the spitting at the time of his crucifixion, but he knew that God would sustain him through it. He knew he would be vindicated and that those who opposed him would be defeated.

Chapter 50 closes by encouraging those who walk in darkness to seek the light that God brings through his servant.

## **2.28 Another Promise of Restoration**

Isaiah 51:1-52:12

This section contains yet another promise of restoration for the nation. The day will come when the time of discipline will be over. The righteous will have God's favor. It will be a time of joy when those who are redeemed will return to Jerusalem.

## 2.29 *The Suffering Servant*

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

This section contains the last of the four "servant songs" in Isaiah. This one is commonly known as the "suffering servant" passage. It is one of the most important pieces of literature ever written. To those familiar with the life and specifically the execution of Jesus, it requires little explanation. Every reading will produce awe and hope. It gives assurance that Jesus' atoning death provided forgiveness for sin, healing for bodies, and peace for those who believe in him. Verse 9 even gives specifics about his burial. Since Jesus was executed as a common criminal, he was to be buried in a common grave with other criminals ("he was assigned a grave with the wicked"). Instead, Joseph of Arimathea asked for his body and buried him in a private tomb ("and with the rich in his death").

See, my servant will act wisely  
he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.  
Just as there were many who were appalled at him –  
his appearance was so disfigured  
beyond that of any man  
and his form marred beyond human likeness –

Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged,  
and handed him over to be crucified. Matthew 27:26

so will he sprinkle many nations,  
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.  
for what they were not told, they will see,  
and what they have not heard, they will understand.  
Who has believed our message  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?  
He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God  
and men. Luke 2:52

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from  
there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people  
in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this  
man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked.  
"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary,  
and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?  
Aren't all his sisters with us? Where did this man get all these  
things?" And they took offense at him. Matthew 13:53-57

He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.  
Like one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. John 5:18

Surely he took our infirmities  
and carried our sorrows,  
yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.

When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Luke 23:32

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.  
He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. Mark 15:3-5

By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
And who can speak of his descendants?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living,  
for the transgression of my people he was stricken.  
he was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Mark 15:43

though he had done no violence  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.  
yet it was the Lord's will to crush him  
and cause him to suffer,  
and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. Mark 16:6

and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.  
After the suffering of his soul,  
he will see the light of life, and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant  
will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal  
life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the  
world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,

At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on  
earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus  
Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10-11

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and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless,  
Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a  
righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly  
dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:  
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in  
Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

### **2.30 Israel Rejoice!**

Isaiah 54

Chapter 54 is a call to Israel to rejoice. There are two analogies in the chapter. The first compares Israel to a woman who has been barren suddenly having many children. The second compares Israel to a bride who was temporarily abandoned suddenly having the devotion of her husband. The husband is God, and he says that he deserted her because of his anger but only for a short time. He is coming back and will provide for her lavishly.

The analogies are similar. In the past there was a time of dismay and disappointment. The future, however, is full of hope and promise. God has a bright and promising future for his people. When they find themselves in the despair of captivity, they can hold out for the hope that lies ahead.

## 2.31 Come and Be Filled

Isaiah 55

Chapter 55 contains a marvelous invitation for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness to come and be filled. It opens with an analogy in verses 1-2:

Come all you who are thirsty,  
come to the waters  
and you who have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come buy wine and milk  
without money and without cost.  
Why spend money on what is not bread,  
and your labor on what does not satisfy?  
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,  
and your soul will delight  
in the richest of fare.

An invitation to someone who has no money to come and buy food is an act of unmerited favor on the part of the one distributing the food. Taking this to the spiritual realm, we realize that none of us has the "money" to buy the righteousness that will fill the hunger in our souls. God's act of unmerited favor is to give it to us freely. This is good news! God will fill us if we will turn to him and turn away from sin. Realize that God and sin are 180 degrees apart. You cannot turn to him if you are still turned towards your sin. The invitation to come to him and the joy that follows are described in verses 6-12:

'Seek the Lord while he may be found;  
call on him while he is near.  
Let the wicked forsake his way  
and the evil man his thoughts.  
Let him turn to the Lord,  
and he will have mercy on him,  
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.  
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord.  
"As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.  
As the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it,  
without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower  
and bread for the eater,  
so is my word that goes out from my mouth.  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.  
You will go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and hills

will burst into song before you,  
and all the trees of the field  
will clap their hands."

### **2.32 The Gentiles**

Isaiah 56

The message in chapter 56 is twofold. First of all, Gentiles who seek the Lord will be included in the fold of those who receive his favor. Second, Jews who are unfaithful will be excluded from his favor. This is extremely important. Jews throughout history have believed that their status before God is merely a matter of heredity. In chapter 56, Isaiah is saying it is a matter of the heart. God's favor goes to those who seek him. God's promises to the Jews are still valid and he is not finished with them as a people, but we saw the favor of God shift to the Gentiles in the first century. This was because the Jews by and large rejected their Messiah. By the end of the first century, most believers were Gentiles.

56:6-7 says:

And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord  
to serve him,  
to love the name of the Lord,  
and to worship him,  
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it  
and who hold fast to my covenant –  
these will I bring to my holy mountain  
and give them joy in my house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar,  
for my house will be called  
a house of prayer for all nations.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus quoted the latter part of this passage when he cleared the moneychangers from the temple (see Mark 11:17). Herod's temple was built such that the central point was the Holy of Holies. Surrounding that was the Holy Place. Surrounding that was the Priest's Court, then the (Jewish) Men's Court, then the (Jewish) Women's Court, etc. The outmost court was the Court of the Gentiles. This was the only place in the temple area where Gentiles were allowed. This is where the moneychangers would have been operating. Their activity would have been loud and distracting and anything but prayerful. Jesus was offended by their presence because they were preventing the declaration in Isaiah 56 from being true. The Gentiles needed a place of prayer. The moneychangers were robbing them of that place. Jesus took care of the situation and gave the Gentiles back their house of prayer. As we saw in chapter 55, God's word does not return empty, but it accomplishes what he desires.

### **2.33 The Righteous and the Wicked**

Isaiah 57

Isaiah 57 continues themes that are already well developed in the book. God upholds the righteous and punishes the wicked. Those who seek help from idols will find the wrath of God. Those who seek the comfort of God will find it.

57:1-2 contains the answer to a question asked by men throughout time.

The righteous perish,  
and no one ponders it in his heart;  
devout men are taken away,  
and no one understands  
that the righteous are taken away  
to be spared from evil.  
those who walk uprightly  
enter into peace;  
they find rest as they lie in death.

"Why do the innocent suffer?" is a very nebulous question, more fully addressed by the book of Job. At times we wonder why good people die, seemingly before "their time." This passage gives an answer to that question. There are times when God will take the righteous to be with him in order to spare them from some misery that would otherwise come their way. The passage offers assurance because it says that the righteous find rest in death. For them, the presence of God offers comfort.

### **2.34 True Fasting**

Isaiah 58

In chapter 57, the theme of the righteous versus the unrighteous is explored. Chapter 58 gives further definition to unrighteousness. God says that there are many people who go through the motions of religiosity, but their acts of "worship" are unacceptable to him. They fast, but on the day of their fasting, they engage in fraud and corruption and violence. In chapter 1 we saw this same theme. If a man's heart is not right, then his offerings of worship are merely rituals and of no interest to God.

In chapter 58, God gives his definition of true fasting. It includes:

- Taking a stand against injustice.
- Freeing the oppressed.
- Feeding the hungry.
- Sheltering the wanderer.
- Clothing the naked.
- Taking care of one's own family.
- Abstaining from malicious or accusing talk.
- Observing the Sabbaths.

He gives promises to those who will observe this sort of true fasting. They include:

- Your light will break forth like the dawn (verse 8).
- Your healing will quickly appear (verse 8).
- Your righteousness will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard (verse 8).
- God will quickly answer your cries for help (verse 9).
- God will guide you, strengthen you, and satisfy your needs (verse 11).
- You will be like a well-watered garden or a spring that never runs dry (verse 11).
- Your cities will be rebuilt (verse 12).
- You will find joy in the Lord (verse 14).

## **2.35 Sin, Redemption, and Glory**

Isaiah 59-60

Chapter 59 starts out by stating the problem that has plagued all of creation since the fall of man. Verses 1-2 say:

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save,  
nor his ear too dull to hear.  
But your iniquities have separated you from your God;  
your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Sin has separated man from God. In addition, since there is no man free from sin, there is no one to intervene between man and God. 59:16-20 says:

He saw that there was no one,  
he was appalled that there was no one to intervene;  
so his own arm worked salvation for him,  
and his own righteousness sustained him.  
He put on righteousness as his breastplate,  
and the helmet of salvation on his head;  
he put on the garments of vengeance  
and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.  
According to what they have done,  
so he will repay  
wrath to his enemies  
and retribution to his foes;  
he will repay the islands their due.  
From the west, men will fear the name of the Lord,  
and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory.  
For he will come like a pent-up flood  
that the breath of the Lord drives along.  
"The Redeemer will come to Zion,  
to those in Jacob who repent of their sins, declares the Lord."

The passage says that the Lord himself will come to those who repent, armed with righteousness and salvation. Note that Paul expanded the illustration of the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation in Ephesians 6.

The coming of the redeemer is a cause for celebration. 60:1-2 says:

Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth  
and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the Lord rises upon you  
and his glory appears over you.

Chapter 60 describes a glorious rebuilding of Jerusalem. It is a time when foreigners will rebuild her walls. The gates of the city stand open at all times because there is peace and safety in the land. It will be a day when there is no more need of sun or moon because the radiance of God will light the city. Isaiah is seeing the same scene that John saw in Revelation 21:23. It is a time not yet fulfilled and is still our future hope.

## **2.36 The Year of the Lord's Favor**

Isaiah 61

Chapter 61 opens with a very familiar passage. verses 1-3 say:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion –  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendor.

This is a declaration by the servant of God. The individual whom God has chosen to fulfill the mission of the nation has come to bring about the true fasting described in chapter 58. The chapter goes on to describe how this individual will bring about the rebuilding of Jerusalem described in chapter 60. 61:10 says that he comes arrayed in the garments of righteousness and salvation described in chapter 59.

In Luke chapter 4, there is a time when Jesus was invited to read the scriptures at his hometown synagogue. He turned to this section of Isaiah, read it, and then told the people that this was being fulfilled in their presence. The implication was that he was the servant described in Isaiah. They clearly understood his implication and their response was to attempt to kill him. But the fact is that Jesus did come to bring good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to set captives free, and to bring both God's favor and judgment. That part of his mission has already been fulfilled. He will bring about the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the future glory described in Chapter 60. He was the perfect fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies. Nobody else could have fulfilled the mission because no one else ever lived without sin.

## **2.37 Zion's New Name**

Isaiah 62

Chapter 62 continues God's promise to bless his people in the future. It promises his protection to them. They will receive his favor above other people. Verses 2-5 say:

The nations will see your righteousness,  
and all kings your glory;  
you will be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.  
You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand,  
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.  
No longer will they call you Deserted,  
or name your land Desolate.

But you will be called Hephzibah,  
and your land Beulah;  
for the Lord will take delight in you,  
and your land will be married.  
As a young man marries a maiden,  
so will your sons marry you;  
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,  
so will your God rejoice over you.

"Hephzibah" means "my delight is in her." "Beulah" means "married." Isaiah picks up on a theme that is found other places in the Old Testament (e.g. Hosea), that the Jews are the bride of the father. He longs to rejoice over them as a man rejoices over his new wife.

If we could all get our acts together, the benefits of being faithful to God are great.

### **2.38 The Judgment and Salvation of God**

Isaiah 63-66

The remainder of Isaiah is built around the theme of the judgment and the salvation of God. Often we think of these as being two different and almost opposite sides of God's nature. Isaiah sees the two aspects of God's personality as being inextricably tied. Only by purging and refining creation can God make it the holy place suitable for his righteous, faithful followers to live in his presence. When we look ahead to that day when "Thy Kingdom Come" has come to full fruition, we anticipate a world where we do not have to put up with those who constantly confront us with immorality, materialism, and other forms of godlessness. We look forward to a time when it is popular to be righteous. The only way that day will ever come is for God to rid the world of godless people. We may think of this as being a fearful day – and it will be – but it is also the day when God prepares the world for his remnant. In the midst of the terror there will be rejoicing. Our ultimate freedom and release will come at last.

63:1-6 contains an image of God just after he has "trodden the winepress." It is an image of judgment. As grapes are crushed in the winepress, so the wicked will be crushed in the judgment of God. In 63:7-64:12, the remnant sing the praises of God. They also pray for his favor. The section acknowledges the rebellion that is characteristic even of the remnant. 64:6 says:

All of us have become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;

They acknowledge their total reliance on God to save them. 64:8 says:

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father.  
We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.

65:1-16 again promises that God will pour judgment on the wicked but he will uphold the righteous.

In 65:17-25, Isaiah sees the same scene that John saw in Revelation 21. 65:17-18 says:

Behold, I will create  
new heavens and a new earth.  
The former things will not be remembered,

nor will they come to mind.  
But be glad and rejoice forever  
in what I will create,  
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight  
and its people a joy.

This looks ahead to that time when God will ultimately establish his Kingdom on earth. The section says that it will be a time of health and prosperity and happiness for those who are chosen to inhabit the Kingdom. Our heart's desire should be to be included in that number.

And what are the selection criteria? Chapter 66 addresses this. Those who are chosen are not necessarily those who engage in religious activity. Again Isaiah makes the point that God is not pleased with the rituals of those who are not right with God. 66:2 says:

This is the one I esteem:  
He who is humble and contrite in spirit,  
and trembles at my word.

The end of chapter 66 contains a promise that some of the remnant of Israel will be sent out to Gentile nations to bring them into the knowledge and favor of the Lord.

The revelation of God through the prophet Isaiah is an incredibly important piece of literature. It offered hope to Isaiah's contemporaries. It warned those generations that closely followed Isaiah about pending judgment and yet gave them hope of deliverance from their captivity. It contained volumes of Messianic prophecy and explained how the responsibility that had been intended for the servant of God – the nation of Israel – would be fulfilled through the servant of God – this individual called Messiah. Through Isaiah God also revealed events that are not yet fulfilled – the final judgment and the establishment of God's Kingdom on the new heavens and the new earth.

We look to the book of Isaiah with awe, gratitude, and hope. We eagerly anticipate that day when God's judgment and redemption will unfold. Until they come, we cling to the promises. We strive to be humble and contrite in heart and to tremble at his word.

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