

# Isaiah

a study of selected texts

Class notes compiled by

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## ISAIAH: A STUDY OF SELECTED TEXTS

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Additional study materials are available, free of charge, at [www.ConcerningJesus.com](http://www.ConcerningJesus.com).

## REBELLION AND RESTORATION

## Isaiah 1:1-20

**Read Isaiah 1:1.** There is not a great deal revealed about the man Isaiah. “In Hebrew his name is *Yesha-Yahu*, meaning ‘Jehovah is salvation,’ a designation which actually sets forth the tone of this great document’s message.”<sup>1</sup> We know he was the son of Amoz (1:1) and married to a prophetess (8:3). “He had at least two sons who had prophetic names. Shear-jashub (‘a remnant shall return’)...(7:3). The name of Isaiah’s second son was Maher-shalal-hash-baz (‘the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth,’ 8:3).”<sup>2</sup> Though inspiration does not reveal it, some believe he was “a cousin of King Uzziah and thus of royal lineage.”<sup>3</sup>

Isaiah was considered a statesman and his message was accessible to all. “The prophet’s ministry of some forty to sixty years occurred within the reigns of four of Judah’s kings. Uzziah (767-740 B.C.), Jotham (750-736 B.C.), Ahaz (736-716 B.C.), Hezekiah (716-698 B.C.).”<sup>4</sup>

He was tasked with declaring God’s Word to Judah and Jerusalem (1:1). Micah was contemporary with Isaiah in Judah, while Hosea and Amos labored in the northern kingdom about the same time.

“According to tradition he was placed in the trunk of a tree by order of the wicked king Manasseh, and there sawn asunder, thus dying a martyr to the Cause he loved. Some believe that there is an allusion to Isaiah’s death in Heb. 11:37.”<sup>5</sup>

“The first chapter is a prototype of the entire book. Contains the basic outline of the whole message: (a) sinfulness of Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 3-8); (b) appeals for repentance (vv. 16-19); (c) the coming judgment (vv. 24,25,29-31); (d) the blessings of the salvation to come (vv. 26,27).”<sup>6</sup>

**Read Isaiah 1:2-9.** The message is harsh in response to the people’s behavior. God, through Isaiah, laments that His people refuse to recognize their dependence upon Him. “Jehovah’s complaint is expressed in terms of Fatherhood (Cf. Hosea 11:1-7).”<sup>7</sup> Despite the nourishment He provided, they rebelled. Even the ox and donkey, widely considered the dumbest of animals, know who they depend on. Our cat may stay out all night, but when she gets hungry, she knows which house to come back to for food. Unlike animals who have this innate knowledge, “My people do not consider.” This defiance was not new to Isaiah’s day. “One has only to read the Bible in order to see that such an attitude has characterized the human race, since the day of the great transgression in Eden. (Cf. Jer. 8:7).”<sup>8</sup> Sadly, there are many in today’s society who still behave in this manner.

Notice the words and phrases Isaiah uses to describe Judah in verse 4: “sinful nation,” “laden with iniquity,” “brood of evildoers,” “corrupters.” What is the result of these actions and attitudes? “They have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel.” “He has not forsaken them, but they Him, and even now He is trying to reach them and turn them back to Himself.”<sup>9</sup>

Isaiah describes the extent of Judah’s punishment in verses 5 through 9. “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints,” he says. “The *whole head*, the seat of intelligence and knowledge, is sick; the whole *heart*, the fountainhead of affection and love, is faint, having no courage or conviction. When the mind is corrupt, it is impossible to restore the heart to health, for one cures the affection by knowing goodness and truth.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jackson , p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Hailey, p.26.

<sup>3</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Woods, Guy N., p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Butler, *Vol.I*, p.72.

<sup>7</sup> Butler, *Vol.I*, p.72.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas (1964), p.10.

<sup>9</sup> Hailey, p.38.

<sup>10</sup> Hailey, p.38.

Their sin had caused suffering from head to toe! “Some Bible students think that the word ‘where’ should be substituted for ‘why,’ and if that were done, the question would be, ‘where,’ that is, ‘upon what part of your body is there room for wounds, bruises, and fresh stripes?’”<sup>11</sup> “The picture in Isaiah 1:5-6 is not of a sick man but of someone who has been flogged in an inch of his life, yet asking for more.”<sup>12</sup>

Does the presence of suffering necessarily indicate sinfulness or righteousness? Consider the life of Job, “blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). He suffered greatly, but not for doing evil. Often we can trace the presence of suffering back to the cause, and it is good to perform such self-evaluation. Judah refused to recognize the cause of their suffering, but continued in the iniquity that brought it upon them. As Christians, we should expect to suffer to some extent, but be sure the reasons for our suffering are righteous. Peter reminds us, “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Peter 3:17).

The country was so desolate that it is described as “a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers.” “‘A booth in a vineyard’ is a shelter of boughs, or straw, or something similar, used for a short time, while the fruit is ripening, by watchmen, who protect and gather it. (See Job 27:18). ‘A lodge in a garden of cucumbers’ is a similar construction of rude material for the same purpose, soon to fall into decay. This was a figure of the ruined condition of Jerusalem.”<sup>13</sup> “This description harmonizes with that of Micah 6:13-16, and corresponds with the curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.”<sup>14</sup>

Just how desolate would God’s judgment leave Judah? “If Jehovah had not been merciful to leave a very small remnant, Judah would have been as Sodom and Gomorrah, extinct and forgotten except as proof of the justice of a God that will not allow sin to go unpunished.”<sup>15</sup>

Historically, the time period under consideration “probably alludes to the condition of Judah during Sennacherib’s invasion of 701 B.C....2 Kings 18:13-19:37. In his own annals, the Assyrian king boasted of taking many thousands of captives, besieging and conquering forty-six walled cities, and imprisoning king Hezekiah in Jerusalem ‘like a bird in a cage.’”<sup>16</sup>

**Read Isaiah 1:10-15.** God does not want sacrifice without submission. “They are religious, but only going through the motions of worshipping God and they are not living as they should with proper regard for the fellow man (Mat. 5:23-24).”<sup>17</sup> Doing all the right things in worship means nothing if one’s heart is not right according to His Word. He calls upon the “rulers of Sodom” and the “people of Gomorrah” to take stock in how they are living their lives, not just how they are performing religious rituals. God takes no “delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats” when His people’s “hands are full of blood.”

“It was, indeed, an offense to God for the people to offer such to him when they were so wicked....When men oppress the poor, the widow, and the fatherless, and their lives are corrupt and wicked, prayers, pious participation in worship, and all religious activity is abomination in the eyes of Jehovah.”<sup>18</sup>

This truth is revealed many times throughout the Scriptures. Proverbs 15:8, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.” Paul tells us that when we pray we should do so “lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8). James writes, “The effective, fervent prayer of the righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). When our lives are not right, His response will be the same as it was in the time of

<sup>11</sup> Thomas (1964), p.11.

<sup>12</sup> Coffman.

<sup>13</sup> Elam, p.330.

<sup>14</sup> Hailey, p.39.

<sup>15</sup> Lanier, p.281.

<sup>16</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.4-5.

<sup>17</sup> Berard, Bob, *Houston Vol.1*, p.51.

<sup>18</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.5.

Isaiah. “When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear.” “The message is that ritual without righteousness is worthless; rite without right is wrong.”<sup>19</sup>

**Read Isaiah 1:16-17.** Restoration is called for. “Before one repents he must see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, feel its terribleness, realize its awfulness, and loathe and abominate it. So long as sin seems a light matter with people they will not put it away and ‘cease to do evil.’”<sup>20</sup> “The O.T. abounds in the use of the figure of washing to refer to repentance (Cf. Psa. 51:2, 7; Jer. 4:14; Ezek. 36:24-26; Zech. 13:1)...Repentance is surrender; a change of thinking, willing, acting; a life directed toward the will of God as revealed in His Word.”<sup>21</sup>

They are told to stop doing the evil things, but that alone is not enough. They also had to “learn to do good.” “Isaiah is saying that by their evil practices the people have so confused their knowledge of right that they must now be taught what is well and good in God’s sight.”<sup>22</sup> The same principle is commanded in Ephesians 4:25-32. There is the cessation of sin, but also the commencement of right. “This emphasizes the fact that goodness is not merely the absence of badness! One is not good simply because he is not evil. The judgment parable emphasize the important lesson that men can be condemned not only for what they do that is bad, but also what they *fail to do* that is good.”<sup>23</sup>

**Read Isaiah 1:18-20.** Reason is a big part of righteousness. The Lord calls upon the people to “reason together” with Him, and see what course of action makes sense. Paul often reasoned with the people he taught (Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8-9; 24:25) and actually called what he spoke “the words of truth and reason” (Acts 26:25). He told the Romans that offering one’s own body as a living sacrifice was “reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

The people’s sins were “like scarlet.” Concerning the scarlet dye commonly used in that day, “When goods were dipped in the dye the color became fast, or fixed, so there was no removing it.”<sup>24</sup> God has the power to forgive regardless of how terrible one has previously behaved; He says with repentance, one can be “white as snow” and “as wool.”

The people of Judah had a decision to make; likewise, people today have a choice. The eternal blessings of God are conditional upon whether a person is “willing and obedient” or if they “refuse and rebel.” “This was a merciful provision of Jehovah. It was within the reach of all.”<sup>25</sup> However, one had to be “willing” to accept His salvation. “The grace, mercy, and love of God cannot save people in disobedience and sin.”<sup>26</sup>

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:22).

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the force of the comparison of the people of Judah to the ox and donkey?
2. What sickness did the people have?
3. God commanded sacrifices through Moses; here He says He takes no pleasure in them. Does He contradict Himself?
4. What positive commands were the people given?
5. Is it reasonable to serve God? Why or why not?

<sup>19</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Elam, p.331.

<sup>21</sup> Butler, Vol. I, p.77.

<sup>22</sup> Hailey, p.41.

<sup>23</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.5.

<sup>24</sup> Lanier, p.279.

<sup>25</sup> Lanier, p.281.

<sup>26</sup> Elam, p.331.

## ISAIAH'S PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD

### Isaiah 5:1-12

**Read Isaiah 5:1-2.** Usually, when we think of parables, our minds automatically turn to the spiritual lessons taught by Christ to the people of the first century. Certainly, those are the most studied of the parables, but He was not the only one who used parables. Here we have a parable of a vineyard as told by the prophet Isaiah.

“‘This is the first appearance, chronologically, of the vineyard as a symbol of Israel.’ Later, the same figure was adopted by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 12:10), and by the Psalmist (Psalms 80). In the New Testament, Jesus utilized the metaphor in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mark 12:1-10).”<sup>27</sup>

Isaiah wisely adapts his delivery to a more palatable format. The prophet does not change the message; we must never compromise the truth. Rather, he considers the audience and what might grab their attention and still get the message across. “The opening lines of the piece are quite rhythmic and would have captured the attention of an audience disenchanted with the more direct forms of prophetic discourse.”<sup>28</sup> “This seems to be a song composed rather like some of our contemporary folk-songs—by on-the-spot improvisation. Whether sung to the accompaniment of an instrument or not is immaterial. The song was intended for teaching, not entertainment!”<sup>29</sup>

“My Well-beloved” is God; He has planted His vineyard “on a very fruitful hill.” He built a tower and a winepress, and the expectation was for a good crop to produce good wine. Instead of “good grapes,” however, the vineyard produced “wild grapes.” “The choicest vine” likely has reference to the great patriarchs of old, most notably Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “They did indeed establish benchmarks of human conduct which were far in advance of their times and infinitely above the sordid behavior of the pagan society in which they lived. This is seen in the truth that God Himself consented to be known as the ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’”<sup>30</sup>

What we call “wild grapes” today is far different than what Isaiah has under consideration; “they were offensive, noxious, and poisonous.”<sup>31</sup> “Some think the word may refer to poisonous berries.”<sup>32</sup>

**Read Isaiah 5:3-6.** “Isaiah turns from the foregoing scene of beauty to a song of lament and eventually of judgment.”<sup>33</sup> God is perplexed; He did everything He could, but the grapes were not good. “What more could have been done?” Of course, God Himself is not really perplexed. He knows exactly what caused the problem. He wants the people to recognize their own shortcomings when He asks them to “judge...between Me and My vineyard.” This is a similar approach to that of the prophet Nathan when he confronted King David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-15); Jesus also employed this method in several of His parables, including His own parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-9).

“What more could have been done?” “There is, by God’s will, a limit to His power in salvation.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus lamented Jerusalem’s rejection of the truth in Matthew 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I

<sup>27</sup> Coffman.

<sup>28</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.23-24.

<sup>29</sup> Butler, Vol. I, p.115-116.

<sup>30</sup> Coffman.

<sup>31</sup> Coffman.

<sup>32</sup> Moffitt, *Houston Vol.1*, p.90.

<sup>33</sup> Hailey, p.64.

<sup>34</sup> Moffitt, *Houston Vol.1*, p.91.

wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” God will not violate our freedom to choose or reject Him, but He absolutely wants us to come to Him (2 Peter 3:9).

God is longsuffering, but His patience does have limits. There will come a point that He no longer waits for repentance, and He will mete out punishment. He promises to take away the protection in verses 5 and 6, and He will allow it to become a wasteland. “Furthermore, the Beloved will command the clouds not to come up, leaving the vineyard without rain. Here judgment is exerted through divine control over the elements; they are subject to the will of their Creator.”<sup>35</sup>

**Read Isaiah 5:7.** Isaiah reveals the meaning behind the parable, pointing his finger at God’s people in Judah, warning them of the punishment to come because of their infidelity.

This is one of the most interesting verses of this passage, but much is lost in translation. There is a literary device used here called paronomasia; it is a play on words or pun in which the words sound similar but have vastly different meanings. Isaiah says the Lord “*looked for justice* (‘mishpat,’ Hebrew), *but, behold, oppression* (or bloodshed) (‘mispah,’ Hebrew); *for righteousness* (‘sedakah,’ Hebrew), *but, behold, a cry* (‘seakah,’ Hebrew).”<sup>36</sup>

“This is the same complaint of covetousness, greed, injustice, lack of mercy, violence, bloodshed, and continual wickedness which we have heard from Hosea, Amos, and Micah.”<sup>37</sup>

**Read Isaiah 5:8-10.** Isaiah proceeds to pronounce six woes against the people. The first is against an “insatiable desire of men to own more and more” and “a gross materialism in the heart.”<sup>38</sup> “Covetous, greedy land-grabbing is here accursed. This practice of wealthy landowners stood in contradiction to the covenant ideal which had originally provided for equitable land distribution and property ownership among the Israelite families.”<sup>39</sup> “This violated the Mosaic law which had apportioned a parcel of land to each family head. This land was to remain in the family. If it should have to be sold, it was to be returned to the original family in the year of Jubilee.”<sup>40</sup> Other prophets revealed similar curses in their works (Micah 2:2; Jeremiah 22:13-17; Habakkuk 2:9-12).

Their actions resulted in a drastically reduced harvest. “The phrase *ten acres of vineyard* is thought to indicate the area that one yoke of oxen could plow in ten days. This large area will produce a quantity of wine only slightly in excess of eight gallons; and *a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah*, which is one-tenth the amount sowed (an ephah is one-tenth of a homer).”<sup>41</sup> “Ten acres of vineyard normally should produce 4,000 gallons of wine instead of 8 gallons.”<sup>42</sup>

Such results should not come as a surprise; God had warned during the days of Moses the consequences of disobedience. Leviticus 26:20, “And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.” Deuteronomy 26:15, 18, “But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: . . . Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land. . .”

<sup>35</sup> Hailey, p.64.

<sup>36</sup> Hailey, p.64.

<sup>37</sup> Elam, p.335.

<sup>38</sup> Coffman.

<sup>39</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.25.

<sup>40</sup> Butler, Vol. I, p.121.

<sup>41</sup> Hailey, p.65-66.

<sup>42</sup> Butler, Vol. I, p.121.

The fulfillment of these curses are revealed by the prophet Haggai 1:5-6, “Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Consider your ways’ You have sown much, and bring in little...”

**Read Isaiah 5:11-12.** The second woe is pronounced against those whose very existence revolves around drunkenness. “Generally men rise early in the morning to pursue worthy occupations, but no the people of Judah....This is not an occasional thing, but a daily practice; drinking has become a way of life with the people.”<sup>43</sup> It is not just the poor that rely on alcohol to get them through the day, but many in positions of power were involved in such activity. “Judah’s leaders especially were hard drinkers and big eaters who loved a good time.”<sup>44</sup> The pursuit of intoxication lasted from “early in the morning” “until night, till wine inflames them!”

Music was closely associated with such revelry, as it continues to be today. Is there anything wrong with music, in and of itself? No, but one must judge the content of the songs they play, and prevent themselves from being tempted by such. This is not just a rock ‘n’ roll problem, but crosses all genres of popular music, from rap to heavy metal to country music. Research the lyrics on the internet and guard against songs that promote sinful lifestyles such as described in these verses. Drunken revelry is condemned multiple times in the New Testament (1 Peter 4:1-4; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21).

The latter part of Isaiah 5:12 reveals the real problem: “they do not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of His hands.” When the things of this life draw us away from the things of the Lord, there is a problem. “The prophet condemns the people’s unconcern for their nation’s ruin, as Amos had similarly condemned the same wickedness in the Northern Kingdom (Amos 6:1-7).”<sup>45</sup> Jesus encouraged us to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33); Paul wrote, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

### Discussion Questions

1. What had God done to ensure the success of the vineyard?
2. How did God respond to the vineyard’s failure?
3. What is wrong with acquiring houses and fields?
4. What are some popular songs that Christians should avoid because of content?
5. Jesus warned against a preoccupation with the “riches and pleasures of life” (Luke 8:14); what is the result of such according to Christ?

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<sup>43</sup> Hailey, p.66.

<sup>44</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.26.

<sup>45</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.27.



**“HERE AM I! SEND ME!”****Isaiah 6:1-13**

**Read Isaiah 6:1-4.** The opening verse of Isaiah indicates that the prophet served “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (1:1). Here, we are told of the call of Isaiah which occurred the same year as Uzziah’s death. “The year of King Uzziah’s death is usually placed somewhere in the period 748-734 B.C.; 740-739 (Thiele) is the date most often accepted.”<sup>46</sup> Uzziah (also identified in the Scriptures as Azariah, 2 Kings 15:1-7, 32) reigned righteously at the beginning; the Scriptures say that “he did what was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 26:4). However, he took it upon himself to burn incense in the temple against the objections of the priests (2 Chronicles 26:16-19). Because of the king’s transgression, God struck him with leprosy. “King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 26:21).

Isaiah’s vision presents a grand scene of the throne of God. Passages such as found in this chapter as well as other prophetic and apocalyptic works that describe the grandeur of the Almighty are awe-inspiring.

The seraphim are particularly interesting, as this is the only revelation we have about this particular being. Six wings—two covering his face, two covering his feet, and two providing flight. “Some have seen in this fact that the covering of the face and feet suggests humility and reverence, and the two wings to fly with indicating obedience.”<sup>47</sup> “According to Ezekiel 11:22 there are other heavenly beings called cherubims which are under the throne of God while the seraphims are above the throne.”<sup>48</sup>

The seraphim worship the Lord on His throne: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” Why is the word “holy” repeated three times? Symbolically, the number three represents perfection or completeness. There is also the thought that each Person of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—is recognized as holy. “Because three is the number of divinity, the threefold recital of ‘holy’ probably indicates the absolute holiness of Him who sits on the throne; He is absolutely separate from all sin or uncleanness.”<sup>49</sup>

As the seraphim proclaim God’s holiness, causing “the posts of the door” to be “shaken,” “the house was filled with smoke.” Similarly, in John’s vision of Revelation, when the “seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God” were delivered to the seven angels, smoke filled the temple “from the glory of God and from His power” (Revelation 15:7-8). Destruction was imminent upon the Jews in 70 A.D., and destruction was the subject of Isaiah’s prophecy as well.

“We should not overlook the fact that, in this wondrous vision Isaiah was privileged to have, *there is no representation of God himself*. Mentioned specifically are his robes, the throne on which he sat, the seraphim who attended him, but God is not described. Man, in his finite state is incapable of such a conception. In other instances, (Rev. 1, for example), the representation is symbolic, and the details figurative. We must await the day of full realization, and the shedding of our finite minds to apprehend the Holy Being.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Hailey, p.74.

<sup>47</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.8.

<sup>48</sup> Kamp, *Houston Vol. 1*, p.109.

<sup>49</sup> Hailey, p.75.

<sup>50</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.8.

**Read Isaiah 6:5.** When he witnessed God's glory and this vision of praise and worship from the seraphim, Isaiah recognized his own unworthiness to serve. "Isaiah felt doomed to destruction because he had seen God. For the sinner, divine holiness is a consuming fire."<sup>51</sup> This should impress upon us the importance of diligent study of the Scriptures so we may ever be reminded of the awesome glory of God and our complete dependence upon Him. Without His grace, we are without hope, as "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "Throughout the Bible, this reaction on the part of any person become aware of God's presence is normal, indeed without exception. Examples of this are Gideon (Judges 6:22), Manoah (Judges 13:22), Job (Job 42:5,6), Peter (Luke 5:8), John (Revelation 1:17), and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:40,41)."<sup>52</sup>

"It is only when a man truly sees the Lord, whether in visions like those in Bible times, or by faith which is possible for any of us, can he be counted on to render faithful service to him."<sup>53</sup>

"In view of this spectacular scene, the prophet exclaimed: 'Mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts.' Of this important point several matters need to be noted: First, the apostle John cites this passage and observes that in this vision Isaiah actually saw the preincarnate Word, *Christ* (John 12:36-41). Thus, the 'Jehovah' of Isaiah 6:5 is the 'Christ' of the first century. This is an important point in view of certain cultic claims that the title 'Jehovah' applies only to God the Father. Second, the vision seems to emphasize that though the reigning king (Uzziah) is a leper due to his rebellious pride (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:16), the true King, the Lord, still occupies the throne of Israel."<sup>54</sup>

**Read Isaiah 6:6-7.** God responds to Isaiah's recognition of his own sin with forgiveness. One of the seraphim touched a hot coal from the altar to the prophet's lips, taking away his iniquity and purging the sin. Clyde M. Woods quotes H.H. Rowley, "He who a moment before felt that in the presence of the Holy God sin could not exist, and that therefore he must perish with his sin, now felt that he was separated from his sin so that it alone might perish, and he might live."<sup>55</sup>

Those who wish to serve God and lead others to Him must come to Him seeking purification. The Psalmist pleaded, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You" (Psalm 51:10-13).

In the first century, Saul of Tarsus "made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison" (Acts 8:3). He was known for "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). He told Agrippa, "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities" (Acts 26:9-11). Yet, despite all of these atrocities, he was given the opportunity to repent, to have his sins washed away (Acts

<sup>51</sup> Kamp, *Houston Vol. 1*, p.111.

<sup>52</sup> Coffman.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas (1964), p.16.

<sup>54</sup> Jackson, p.19.

<sup>55</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.33.

22:16), and serve God. Still today, regardless of how badly we have transgressed in the past, if we penitently seek His forgiveness, He can and will give us opportunities to serve.

“The Hebrew word translated *forgiven* in this passage means ‘to cover up, to extinguish, to destroy;’ and thus Isaiah was cleansed and made a fit vessel for service. From this, we learn, (1) there is forgiveness for all who come to God; (2) man is unfit to serve God without cleansing; (3) those thus cleansed are accepted by the Lord and should not be restrained from his service by any consciousness of disobedience to him in the past.”<sup>56</sup>

**Read Isaiah 6:8-13.** “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Observe the use of the plural “Us,” similar to Genesis 1:26, “a reference to the plurality of the Godhead.”<sup>57</sup> This “foreshadows the doctrine of the trinity which comes into full bloom in the New Testament (cf. John 1:1).”<sup>58</sup>

God does not command Isaiah to prophecy, but asks for a volunteer. Isaiah declares, “Here am I! Send me!” He recognizes the Lord’s gracious removal of the guilt and eternal consequence of sin, and desires to spread that message to all who will hear. “He did not ask if the work were easy, the task light; he did not inquire whether the effort would be long or short; nor what advantages would accrue to him in so doing. It was an unqualified, and unconditional surrender to the will of God.”<sup>59</sup>

God issues a warning to the zealous prophet. “Isaiah was dramatically but disturbingly forewarned that his proclamation would serve only to harden further the already insensitive hearts of his people....Any illusion of immediate success or popular acceptance the spiritually reborn Isaiah may have optimistically had were, thus, immediately dispelled as the new prophet was commissioned.”<sup>60</sup> “The Lord is telling the prophet what will come to pass as a result of his preaching: his words, which should accomplish one end, will, in fact, result in another. What could and should produce repentance and salvation will end in total apostasy.”<sup>61</sup>

Despite this continual hardening of the hearts of the nation, there will be “yet a tenth,” a small remnant that will remain faithful. “So the holy seed shall be its stump.”

“Are we as willing and ready as Isaiah was to respond to the call of duty issuing from our Lord Jesus Christ? Can we truly say, ‘Here am I; send me?’ and be willing to go forth into active service for him whatever personal sacrifices may be involved?”<sup>62</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to recognize the holiness of God in contrast to our sinfulness?
2. What effect did the vision have on Isaiah?
3. What duty did Isaiah have? What is our duty today?
4. Why did God use the word “Us” in verse 8?
5. Reconcile verse 10 with passages such as 2 Peter 3:9.

<sup>56</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.9.

<sup>57</sup> Kamp, *Houston Vol. 1*, p.113.

<sup>58</sup> Jackson, p.20.

<sup>59</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.9.

<sup>60</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.33-34.

<sup>61</sup> Hailey, p.77.

<sup>62</sup> Woods, Guy N. p.11.

## THE PROPHECY OF THE COMING MESSIAH

Isaiah 7:14-16; 9:1-7; 11:1-10

**Read Isaiah 7:14-16.** King Ahaz was facing opposition from Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel. Isaiah reported to Ahaz that his foes would not defeat him, and challenged the king to request a sign of God—“ask it either in the depth or in the height above” (Isaiah 7:11). Inspiration tells us that Ahaz “did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God” (2 Kings 16:2), so it is little surprise that he declined the divine offer for a sign.

Isaiah then turns his attention away from the king individually, and toward the “house of David” as a whole. The sign is this: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (7:14).

There is no little controversy over the nature of this prophecy. All faithful Christians recognize the fulfillment in the virgin birth of Christ, as inspiration reveals in Matthew 1:22-23. The question is often asked, however: was this a dual-fulfillment prophecy that was *also* fulfilled during the days of Isaiah? The answer varies depending on who you ask or which commentaries you read. Those who lean toward the dual-fulfillment explanation include Clyde M. Woods<sup>63</sup>, Paul T. Butler<sup>64</sup>, and Roy H. Lanier, Sr.<sup>65</sup> A great number object to this with great force, believing Isaiah’s words referred to Christ and Christ alone. Wayne Jackson<sup>66</sup>, Homer Hailey<sup>67</sup>, Tom L. Bright<sup>68</sup>, and James Burton Coffman<sup>69</sup> can be counted among the defenders of the exclusive-to-Jesus fulfillment.

Bright notes that defenders of dual-fulfillment “cannot turn to a single Old Testament passage which refers to its fulfillment in Isaiah’s time. However, the New Testament argues for a fulfillment....An apostle of Christ affirmed Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in the first century.”<sup>70</sup> “All those who hold to the divine inspiration of Scripture acknowledge this: the Messiah to come was to be born through a miraculous conception in the womb of a virgin, thus coming into the world as the Son of God and the Son of man. Only the birth of Jesus fulfills this prediction.”<sup>71</sup>

Ahaz refused a sign, but Isaiah still prophesied about the duration of the threat of Rezin and Pekah. “Next, Isaiah uses the *youth period* of Immanuel...as a method, a sort of measuring device, to suggest how long Judah would suffer affliction at the hands of the Syrian/Israel alliance. Before the child would reach an age mature enough to refuse evil and choose good (i.e., accountability), the confederation of Rezin and Pekah would be destroyed (15,16). Within two or three years after this prophecy was given, these rulers were both dead (cf. 2 Kings 15:30; 16:9).”<sup>72</sup>

**Read Isaiah 9:1-3.** “One of the marvelous characteristics of the sacred writings is their strange intermixture of prophecies for darkness and disaster, followed by the most extravagant promises of blessing, victory and salvation. The chapter before us is an example. Beginning back in Isaiah 8, there is a terrible prophecy of doom and destruction for Ephraim, especially, and involving Judah also, but not as extensively. Then there suddenly appears right here the promise of joy, light, gladness, victory and success in the most glowing terms possible.”<sup>73</sup>

Gloom and doom is upon those who reject God, but there is hope. Again it is Matthew who sheds light on the fulfillment of this passage, quoting the first two verses of chapter 9 as he writes of Jesus’ ministry in Matthew 4:12-17. “Jesus, ‘the light of the world’ (John 8:12), was

<sup>63</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.39-40.

<sup>64</sup> Butler, Vol. I, p.153-154.

<sup>65</sup> Lanier, p.284.

<sup>66</sup> Jackson, p.21-22.

<sup>67</sup> Hailey, p.87-88.

<sup>68</sup> Bright, Houston Vol. 1, p.32-

34.

<sup>69</sup> Coffman.

<sup>70</sup> Bright, Houston Vol. 1, p.32.

<sup>71</sup> Hailey, p.88.

<sup>72</sup> Jackson, p.22.

<sup>73</sup> Coffman.

‘the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world (John 1:9). His life was ‘the light of men’ (John 1:4), and in Him the sun of righteousness arose ‘with healing in its beams’ (Mal. 4:2, margin). This light began to shine in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali where the gloom had first settled centuries earlier. The people of God’s nation who once walked in darkness now had a great light burst upon them.”<sup>74</sup>

**Read Isaiah 9:4-7.** The oppressed nation will be delivered, and deliverance will come in the form of a Child, the very Son conceived by the virgin of Isaiah 7:14. “The promise centers in the coming of a unique Davidic king, destined to rule permanently in peace and righteousness.”<sup>75</sup> “The government and key now belong to the Child, the Son. Jesus Himself claims to have the key of David (Rev. 3:7). The real glory of the one to be born and His relationship to deity are revealed in the names by which He will be called.”<sup>76</sup>

The names given to the Son are “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Some translations combine the first two descriptions into one, “Wonderful Counselor,” without a comma separating the words.

“He is wonderful in his pre-existence, in his Virgin birth, in his role as executive in Creation and in the ‘upholding’ of our universe. He is indeed wonderful in his mighty miracles, his unsurpassed teaching, his sufferings, his prophecies, his death, burial, and resurrection. He is wonderful in the great Christophanies of the Old Testament and his appearance as ‘The Angel of Jehovah!’ He is wonderful in the establishment of his kingdom, the Church, and in his providential protection and blessing of his Holy Bride throughout history. He is wonderful in what he will yet accomplish when he appears the Second Time, apart from sin, and shall judge the living and the dead, and assign to every man who ever lived his eternal destiny.”<sup>77</sup>

As Counselor, He will display more wisdom than our finite minds can comprehend. Paul affirms that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). “This King will have no need of being surrounded with human counsellors and advisors.”<sup>78</sup> Isaiah later says that the Lord of hosts is “wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance” (Isaiah 28:29).

He is “Mighty God.” John 1:1 affirms the same: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” “Likewise elsewhere used to portray the Lord (10:21), this title (Hebrew *‘el gibbor*) could be rendered ‘heroic God’ or ‘God of a hero,’ this latter possibility often being interpreted as ‘godlike warrior.’”<sup>79</sup> “One who overcomes, a victor, would be appropriate synonyms.”<sup>80</sup>

“Everlasting Father” is a term that can cause confusion, as Jesus is the Son and is separate from the Father. The confusion is removed when one considers the symbolic nature of the word. “He was also to be Everlasting Father, or Father of eternity, suggesting that ‘eternal duration owed itself to his paternity.’ (See John 8:58; Col. 1:17)”<sup>81</sup> “As *Father*, He is not only the Creator, but He is also the Protector and Sustainer of the new creation.”<sup>82</sup> “Christ is called the ‘Author and Finisher’ of our faith (KJV), and the author and protector of our faith (ASV) in Hebrews 12:2. In the same sense, therefore, that Abraham is called ‘The Father of the Faithful,’ Jesus Christ is entitled to be called the ‘Everlasting Father.’”<sup>83</sup>

Finally, the Messiah is the “Prince of Peace.” This is an appropriate designation as “through His exalting truth, men can find peace with God, with one another, and with themselves

<sup>74</sup> Hailey, p.100.

<sup>75</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.49.

<sup>76</sup> Hailey, p.102.

<sup>77</sup> Coffman.

<sup>78</sup> Butler, *Vol. I*, p.173.

<sup>79</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.49.

<sup>80</sup> Butler, *Vol. I*, p.173.

<sup>81</sup> Lanier, p.287.

<sup>82</sup> Hailey, p.103.

<sup>83</sup> Coffman.

(Romans 5:1; Hebrews 12:14; Philippians 4:7).<sup>84</sup> He “comes as a mighty Prince who conquers not by the sword, but by the message of peace directed to the hearts of men...a result of spiritual fullness, companionship with God, and a right relationship with man.”<sup>85</sup>

The reign of the Messiah will be forever. “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.” When He sat down as King of kings, He assumed the reign forever, “from that time forward, even forever.” Not only will it be for all time, but it will be accessible to all people. As the prophet Zechariah wrote, “His dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth’” (Zechariah 9:10).

**Read Isaiah 11:1-5.** Much of Isaiah’s prophecy deals with the judgment upon the people due to their unfaithfulness, but God continues to offer the comfort of a better day for the remnant. He identifies the house of Jesse as the source of the Messiah; He will be the Rod from the stem of Jesse, the Branch that grows out of his roots. Notice the capitalization in the some translations of “Rod” and “Branch” – showing that the translators believed they referred to Jesus. “The Assyrian forest will be left without a hint of life in it; in contrast, the house of David, although brought low, will revive in a Branch growing out of the roots of a stump that remains.”<sup>86</sup> Paul refers to this prophecy in Romans 15:12.

“The verses now before us describe the spirit and character of the rule of Christ; and he himself tells us that all authority and judgment have been given unto his hands. (Cf. Matt. 28:18; John 5:22,27.)”<sup>87</sup> “It will be seen that there are three pairs of attributes with which he is said to be endowed: *Wisdom and understanding* (intellectual faculties); *spirit of counsel and might* (practical qualities of an administrator and warrior); *spirit of knowledge and fear of Jehovah* (fundamental principles of all moral life.) His administration of justice would ever be fair and impartial.”<sup>88</sup>

**Read Isaiah 11:6-9.** In addition to the character of the Christ, Isaiah describes the character of His subjects. The prophet describes a peaceful cohabitation among several animals that would normally be antagonistic towards each other. These should not be taken literally; they are representative of how the citizens of Christ’s kingdom should relate to each other. “Poetically, nature restored to Edenic harmony portrays beautifully the perfect peace Messiah would bring to His people.”<sup>89</sup>

**Read Isaiah 11:10.** We see in several New Testament passages the Jew’s attitude about being God’s special people, and because of that, their disdain for the Gentiles. Yet it was prophesied long before Jesus’ birth that the Gentiles were to be included in His kingdom. “Around this *glory*, which would be a Person, men of all nations would gather in unity. Barriers of hatred and separation would be broken down (Cf. Eph. 2:11-22, etc.). Gentile and Jew would be at peace (Cf. Zech. 9:9-10).”<sup>90</sup> “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

### Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe Isaiah 7:14 to be a “dual fulfillment” prophecy? Why or why not?
2. Which of the descriptive names of Isaiah 9:6 is your favorite?
3. Who was Jesse?
4. What is represented in Isaiah 11:6-8?
5. Who is eligible to be a part of Christ’s kingdom?

<sup>84</sup> Jackson, p.25.

<sup>85</sup> Hailey, p.103.

<sup>86</sup> Hailey, p 121.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas (1963), p.22.

<sup>88</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.13.

<sup>89</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.61.

<sup>90</sup> Butler, Vol. I, p.203.

## SONGS OF PRAISE AND TRIUMPH (Isaiah 25:1-12)

Often when we think of the songs of the Bible, we immediately think of the Psalms. There is beautiful imagery in the inspired poetry of the Psalms, no doubt, but we should not limit ourselves to just that collection. Inspired hymns are found throughout the Scriptures. “Indeed, it has been said that fully one third of the entire Old Testament text is in poetic form. With the exception of the superscriptions, practically all of the Psalms, Proverbs, Songs of Solomon, Lamentations, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah are written in poetry; and the greater parts of Job, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, and Amos are poetic.”<sup>91</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah can be divided up into three separate songs.

“This chapter is a prolepsis, that is, an anticipation of the rejoicing and praise of God which the redeemed of all ages will sing....The three paragraphs of the chapter are: praise of God for the great things he has done (Isaiah 25:1-5), the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and the prophecy of the end of death (Isaiah 25:6-8), and the ultimate triumph of God over all his enemies (Isaiah 25:9-12).”<sup>92</sup>

**Read Isaiah 25:1-5.** This section or song speaks of the victory God provided His people over “the terrible ones” (v. 4), a victory that actually “diminished” the opponent’s own song. Isaiah begins on a personal note, declaring, “You are *my* God, *I* will exalt You, *I* will praise Your name.” Certainly his words should have been representative of the entire nation, just as the songs we sing should represent the church as a whole even if the pronouns are singular. Further, we should ever remember that when we are worshiping God in song, we are addressing Him. It is not solely an act of entertainment by which we derive joy (although joy is certainly involved, cf. James 5:13), but an act of worship directed toward the Almighty.

“Two Hebrew names of God are used in verse 1 – *Yaweh* and *Elohim*. According to the best lexicographers *Yaweh* (Jehovah) denotes God’s covenant-keeping nature (faithfulness) while *Elohim* (Lord) denotes God’s Lordship or Almightyness.”<sup>93</sup>

The “wonderful things” God has done motivated the prophet to sing this song. “God had executed judgments against the heathen nations for transgressing His laws and everlasting covenant, and against His own people for disregarding His covenant given at Sinai; these laws and covenants had been given after the counsel of His will (cf. Eph. 1:11), according to His eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11).”<sup>94</sup> Mankind has a bad habit of not treating God’s will with the seriousness it requires.

The power of God over His enemies can be seen throughout history. “Isaiah 25:2 mentions ‘a city,’; but this is not any particular city. The great cities that existed in Isaiah’s day were Thebes (Egypt), Babylon, and Nineveh, all three of which were destroyed within about a century after Isaiah’s times; but no definite city is identified here.”<sup>95</sup> “Consider the great palaces of Nineveh, Babylon, Persepolis, and scores of other cities which were erected as monuments to the pride and power of man. They now lie in ruin as monuments to man’s folly, not his greatness.”<sup>96</sup>

The result of divine destruction is two-fold, as revealed in verse 3: “Therefore the strong people will glorify You; the city of the terrible nations will fear You.” The word “fear” is often used in the Scriptures to indicate reverence for God, but in this case it could refer to fear in the sense we generally use the word. “The ‘fear’ here is not likely reverence, but terror; grave

<sup>91</sup> Thomas (1963), p.28.

<sup>92</sup> Coffman.

<sup>93</sup> Butler, *Vol. II*, p.16.

<sup>94</sup> Hailey, p.205.

<sup>95</sup> Coffman.

<sup>96</sup> Hailey, p.205.

anxiety for their own safety when under the condemnation of Jehovah.”<sup>97</sup> Coffman sees this as evidence that “people of all nations, not Jews alone, will participate in the festivities of the Messianic banquet and joys of God’s kingdom in Christ.”<sup>98</sup>

It is in Christ and His church that we find exactly what the prophet describes in verse 4: strength and protection in times of need. Jesus implores, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

**Read Isaiah 25:6-8.** In this song, Isaiah writes about “this mountain,” which refers literally to Zion and figuratively to the church. The prophet used the same symbolic language in Isaiah 2:2, as did Micah in Micah 4:1. Note that the feast the Lord prepares is for “all people,” not just the Jewish nation. It will be a feast of the finest food and drink available. “It is apparent that all the feasts of the Mosaic dispensation were ‘shadows’ of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1ff) and were to be fulfilled in the Messiah and His kingdom. Jesus likened the kingdom of God (the church) unto a time of great feasting (cf. Lk. 14:1ff, and Mt. 22:1-14; 25:1-13).”<sup>99</sup> “We should not consider the heavenly feast in a literal, sensuous way at all. These delicious things are symbols of a whole family of enjoyments and delights which men cannot know until they get to heaven.”<sup>100</sup>

In “this mountain,” that is the church, God will destroy the veil that covers all people. “Shrouds and veils customarily served as symbols of mourning (2 Samuel 15:30, 19:4; Jeremiah 14:3-4, Esther 6:12). The Lord would remove the causes of mourning – sin, suffering and even death (verse 8).”<sup>101</sup> Hailey, however, sees something more in the symbolism here, writing, “The *veil* or *covering* seems to be ignorance and hardening of the heart against God,”<sup>102</sup> referencing Ephesians 4:18 and 2 Corinthians 3:14-16. Coffman takes it even further: “One cannot read this without being aware of the veil of the temple and the rending of it from the top to the bottom upon the occasion of Jesus’ crucifixion.”<sup>103</sup>

Verse 8 provides a promise of grace and mercy: “He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.” “Here is one of the first indications in the scripture of the ultimate abolition of death. It is true that there were conceptions of a future life set out in earlier books of the Bible (Job 19:25,27; Psalm 17:15), but in this instance, there is the assurance that death itself would finally cease.”<sup>104</sup>

One cannot read the prophet’s declaration that “the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces” without thinking of Revelation 7:17 and Revelation 21:4.

Adam Clarke identified three truths to be learned from this section, as summarized by Thomas: “(1) That the gospel is a plenteous provision: ‘I will make a feast for all people.’ (2) That it is a source of light and salvation: ‘I will destroy the veil. I will abolish death, and bring life and immortality to light.’ (3) That it is a source of comfort and happiness: ‘I will wipe away all tears from off all faces.’”<sup>105</sup>

**Read Isaiah 25:9-12.** At times we are discouraged because of the adversity we face in this life; persecutions threaten us down one path, while temptations lurk down another. We must continually focus on our goal, focus on our Savior, and sing just as Isaiah sang about the salvation of the Lord. We know He will save us if we remain faithful, because He has promised to save the faithful.

<sup>97</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.17.

<sup>98</sup> Coffman.

<sup>99</sup> Butler, Vol. II, p.20.

<sup>100</sup> Coffman.

<sup>101</sup> Woods, Clyde M. p.107.

<sup>102</sup> Hailey, p.207.

<sup>103</sup> Coffman.

<sup>104</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.18.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas (1963), p.29.



“While verse 9 may have had a special reference to Israel who had waited for Jehovah, during the time of their trouble and oppression; it is very probably that the ultimate aim was to present a prophecy regarding the coming of Christ. Or, to state the same thing in another way, the people would say regarding Christ, This is the One for whom we have been waiting, he will save us; and we will rejoice in his salvation.”<sup>106</sup>

God’s protection will rest upon “this mountain.” Again, this symbolically refers to the Lord’s church. By contrast, Moab represents “all the enemies of God.”<sup>107</sup> “Ignoble in origin (Genesis 19:30-38) and history (Numbers 22:3-6, 25:1-2), Moab served to typify the oppressive wicked who seek to obstruct and frustrate the Lord’s glorious purpose.”<sup>108</sup> “Moab is characterized as very proud, arrogant, and boastful (16:6; Jer. 48:29-30), holding Israel in derision, magnifying himself against Jehovah (Jer. 48:27,42), and holding the dignity of man in contempt (Amos 2:1; Zeph. 2:8,10).”<sup>109</sup>

Motivation can be found in the blessed promises of God; it can also be found in the cursed warnings. Hell should be seen as a powerful motivation to live righteously so that we can avoid that eternal fate. “All of the figures that God uses in the Bible to describe the final punishment of the wicked are all repulsive: (1) the lake of fire; (2) the perpetual silence; (3) the outer darkness; (4) where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth; (5) where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not; (6) a pool of blood up to the horses bridles for 200 miles! Etc. This description is the seventh: (7) a man trying to swim out of a watered dung hole! Rather than being offended by such descriptions, men should strive to avoid the place or condition described.”<sup>110</sup>

Moab will try to save itself “as a swimmer reaches out to swim” but they cannot use their trickery against God and His faithful judgments. Regardless of how high God’s enemies build their fortresses, “He will bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, down to the dust.” “The faithful Covenant-God has protected and sustained and fed His kingdom upon the earth and it is alive and flourishing today. In contrast, those enemies who have threatened and warred against God’s kingdom have come and gone and dissolved into dust, one after another. So shall it ever be.”<sup>111</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. How important is singing to the people of God? What are some of the Scriptural purposes for singing? Consider James 5:13 as well as Colossians 3:16 in your answer.
2. What are the different meanings of the Hebrew names of God used in verse 1?
3. What is the literal mountain of verses 6 and 10? What does it symbolically represent?
4. What is the “feast of choice pieces”?
5. Is fear (terror) a proper motivation for serving God?

<sup>106</sup> Thomas (1963), p.29.

<sup>107</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.19.

<sup>108</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.108.

<sup>109</sup> Hailey, p.208.

<sup>110</sup> Coffman.

<sup>111</sup> Butler, Vol. II, p.25.

## THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM PROPHESED (Isaiah 2:1-4; 32:1-8)

**Read Isaiah 2:1-4.** “This is one of the most important passages in the Word of God, so important, in fact, that God gave the same message through two different prophets.”<sup>112</sup> Also found in Micah 4, the prophecy has to do with the establishment of the Lord’s church in the first century.

Concerning the phrase “the latter days” (or “the last days”), Butler explains that it is “the closing days of the Old Testament era.”<sup>113</sup> Many in the denominational world would disagree with this definition, but a careful study of the phrase in the Scriptures bears it out. In Daniel 2, the prophet says of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that God “has made known...what will be in the latter days” (Daniel 2:28). He then proceeds to interpret the king’s dream, stating that in the days of the Romans, God will “set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44). Peter, interpreting the prophecy of Joel 2, says that what Joel calls “afterward” (Joel 2:28) is “the last days” (Acts 2:17), and states that what the people on Pentecost were witnessing was the prophecy of Joel coming to fulfillment (Acts 2:16)! “Note the memory aid: the events prophesied in Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, and Joel 2 find their fulfillment in the events of Acts 2.”<sup>114</sup> “Furthermore, we read in the New Testament that Christ was manifested ‘at the end of times’ (1 Peter 1:20—literally, ‘in the last times’), and that through Him God hath ‘in these last days’ spoken unto us (Heb. 1:2, King James)...Isaiah was speaking of that which began on Pentecost and continues now. We are living in ‘the last times’; these are *the latter days*.”<sup>115</sup>

We have discussed in prior lessons the fact that this “mountain” refers to the Lord’s church. In more general terms, mountains are used symbolically to represent government (cf. Psalm 76:4; Jeremiah 51:25); in this passage (and in Micah 4:1-3), we read of “the mountain of the Lord’s house” and how it “shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills” (2:2; Micah 4:1). Simply put, the church (which is “the house of God” per 1 Timothy 3:15) will be exalted above all the governments of the world. Earthly, physical kingdoms will come and go, rise and fall, but the Lord’s kingdom, spiritual in nature (John 18:36), will remain forever.

“This house was not only going to be established, but it was going to be exalted above the hills surrounding it....Similarly, Daniel prophesied of a stone cut out without hands that smote all other kingdoms and then became a great mountain that filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:35).... However, it is possible that more than exaltation above secular kingdoms is meant. Since this was to be a spiritual kingdom, could it be that the point of its exaltation is that it would be vastly superior to every other religious system or institution?...The church of the Lord is the superior institution, compares to which there is none other. The only religious institution on the face of the earth that exists with the approval of God is the church of Christ!”<sup>116</sup>

“All nations shall flow to it.” The more one reads the prophets, the more baffled he may become at the Jews’ misunderstanding of their relationship to God as opposed to the Gentiles’ standing with the Almighty. One is not acceptable based upon his heritage, but upon his humble obedience to the Lord (Matthew 3:8-9). Yet, even the apostles struggled with this idea. “Peter made a similar statement (Acts 2:39) [about Gentiles, or “those who are far off,” being acceptable to God—JTC], but God had to perform a miracle to get him to go into a Gentile home to preach the gospel to them (Acts 10).”<sup>117</sup> The prophets did not shy away from the fact that God

<sup>112</sup> Coffman.

<sup>113</sup> Butler, *Vol. I*, p.86.

<sup>114</sup> McClish, *Houston Vol. I*, p.65.

<sup>115</sup> Hailey, p.46.

<sup>116</sup> McClish, *Houston Vol. I*, p.67.

<sup>117</sup> Lanier, p.295.

was going to open the gate wide enough for the Gentiles to have access to citizenship in His kingdom! So long as one is willing to be taught and to “walk in His paths,” he can enter “the house of the God of Jacob” (2:3).

“Perhaps the most difficult portion of this prophecy to understand is the last portion of it which speaks of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, which is often misunderstood to teach that war shall pass away as an instrument of national policy and that universal peace on earth shall prevail. This is totally in error. Christ himself taught that ‘there shall be wars and rumors of wars’ throughout the current dispensation’ (Matthew 24:6). What we actually have, therefore, is a statement of the way it will be among the citizens of the kingdom of God, or the church of Messiah.”<sup>118</sup> “Those who yield to the message of the Prince of Peace (9:6) will convert their weapons of violence into instruments of peace and learn war no more (4). Hence, people formerly hostile to one another, will, in Christ, be in peaceful harmony (cf. 11:6-9).”<sup>119</sup>

As already mentioned, Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 4:2-4 are nearly identical. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah and prophesied in Jerusalem while Isaiah focused on Judah. “A senseless controversy has long existed concerning which prophet borrowed from the other. The simple truth is that the same Spirit moved both of these men who lived at the same time and addressed the same people to serve as two independent witness of this prophecy of surpassing significance.”<sup>120</sup>

**Read Isaiah 32:1-4.** Who is the king of Isaiah 32? The non-capitalization of the word in most versions indicates the translators did not believe it referred to the Messiah. “Some scholars maintain that the Righteous Kingdom applies to the reign of Hezekiah. Others believe that reference is here made to Josiah, who was no doubt the last godly king in Judah. There are many who believe that Isaiah refers to the Kingdom of the Messiah.”<sup>121</sup> While Hezekiah and Josiah were certainly good kings (2 Chronicles 31:20; 35:26), especially in relation to other kings of the Old Testament, and a case may be made for dual fulfillment, the most complete fulfillment is found in Jesus and His Messianic Kingdom.

“If our contention that the King is the Messiah is correct, could not the princes be Christians? For they are ‘a royal priesthood’ (I Peter 2:9), related to the King as brethren (Heb. 2:11) who ‘reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17); the reign ‘upon the earth’ (Rev. 5:10). This interpretation of both the King and the princes is in harmony with what the prophet says and what developed in the purpose of God; at the same time it does not violence to Scripture.”<sup>122</sup>

Many of the things ascribed to the “man” of verse 2 are also ascribed to God in Isaiah 25:4. “In the imagery of that harsh land, the coming age is described as a period of protection from the elements and refreshment for the soul.”<sup>123</sup> The prophet predicts that “this king (or perhaps citizens of his kingdom) will become a refuge, a source of life and a rest.”<sup>124</sup> Jesus certainly fills that role, providing such relief from spiritual struggles (Matthew 11:28-30). There is an old African American spiritual in which the chorus is sung: “Jesus is a rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm.”

The truth will not be hidden from those who seek it; there will be no more spiritual blindness or deafness. “Under the enlightening guidance of truly righteous rule, the spiritual obstinacy presently controlling human hearts would be removed.”<sup>125</sup> “It is Satan that blinds the

<sup>118</sup> Coffman.

<sup>119</sup> Jackson, p.13.

<sup>120</sup> McClish, *Houston Vol. I*, p.74.

<sup>121</sup> Eoff, *Houston Vol. I*, p.397.

<sup>122</sup> Hailey, p.268-269.

<sup>123</sup> Jackson, p.63.

<sup>124</sup> Butler, *Vol. II*, p.144.

<sup>125</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.136-137.

eyes and deafens the ears and keeps the heart from understanding.”<sup>126</sup> “In this new kingdom men will not act rashly or out of confusion as the people of Isaiah’s day were acting in turning to pagan gods and pagan kings for help. They will not have their minds stupefied by drunkenness so they stammer as they were doing in Isaiah’s day (cf. Isa. 28:7-8; 29:9).”<sup>127</sup>

**Read Isaiah 32:5-8.** In the realm of the world’s government, one can use deceptive means to obtain positions of power. History is replete with examples, from the inspired record of Old and New Testament rulers, to the more recent dictators, princes, and presidents of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Within the Lord’s kingdom, however, Isaiah says the “foolish” and the “miser” will no longer have an advantage, and that he “will be known for what he is, and he will be kept out of positions of power and influence.”<sup>128</sup> Other translations of “miser” are interesting: “rogue” (NASB), “scoundrel” (ESV, NIV), “churl” (KJV, ASV).

Once in power, an evil man continues to do evil things to retain his power. He will speak with deception and keep the oppressed in such a position that they rely on whatever he is willing to give them. He does this through foolish speech and iniquitous works, through ungodly practices and the utterances of evil. If you are hungry, he wants to keep you hungry; if you are thirsty, he wants to keep you thirsty. As long as you are dependent on him, he retains his power.

“In Isaiah’s day people were calling evil good and good evil. ‘Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!’ (Isa. 5:20-21). In other words they were deceived by appearances. But in the Righteous Kingdom such will not be the case.”<sup>129</sup>

The foolish and wicked person does foolish and wicked things; the generous and noble person likewise does generous and noble things. “Like begets like; a good tree brings forth good fruit. So the noble of soul will devise good things for the people under them, and their reign will be helpful and beneficent.”<sup>130</sup> “His life manifests the nobility of a prince, one related to the righteous King.”<sup>131</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. What is “the latter days”/“the last days”?
2. Explain Isaiah 2:4 and the idea of transforming “swords into plowshares” and “spears into pruning hooks.”
3. Who do some people say the “king” of Isaiah 32 is? To whom do you believe Isaiah is referring?
4. What does Isaiah 32:3-4 mean?
5. How is a foolish person known? How is a generous person known?

<sup>126</sup> Eoff, *Houston Vol. I*, p.402.

<sup>127</sup> Butler, *Vol. II*, p.145.

<sup>128</sup> Lanier, p.294.

<sup>129</sup> Eoff, *Houston Vol. I*, p.403-404.

<sup>130</sup> Lanier, p.294.

<sup>131</sup> Hailey, p.271.

## THE HIGHWAY OF HOLINESS (Isaiah 35:1-10)

One of the limitations of an in-depth study of a book such as Isaiah in a short period of time is the necessity to select certain texts to study while omitting others. Isaiah 35 is written to show a contrast between the coming blessings for God's people and the destruction of those who oppose God, which was described in chapter 34. "Having envisioned Edom turned to desolate wilderness, the prophet-poet beheld Judah's wilderness transformed and blossoming (verses 1-2) to witness the Lord's coming (verses 3-4) to heal the disabled (verses 5-6) and bring His ransomed people through a holy highway to righteous Zion (verses 7-10)."<sup>132</sup>

**Read Isaiah 35:1-2.** "Continuing with the desert motif (which is representative of the parched lives of humanity) of chapter 34, the prophet sees the wilderness bursting into lush blossom with rejoicing as the excellency and glory of Jehovah are seen (35:1,2)."<sup>133</sup> The wilderness and desert are contrasted with the lands of Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon. Lebanon was famous for its cedar trees, Carmel and Sharon for fertile lands and flowers.

"In this section, Nature is thus made to rejoice with man in a symbolic representation of the good things to characterize the people of God when they repent of their rebellious ways and are again obedient to Jehovah."<sup>134</sup>

**Read Isaiah 35:3-4.** It is the responsibility of all of God's people to encourage and strengthen others when they are weak. Everyone suffers from the pressures of life from time to time, and need such encouragement from God's family. Jesus told Peter to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32). The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15:1-2, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification." Likewise in Galatians 6:1-2, he writes, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Paul and his companions did this very thing in "Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:21-22).

"Verses 3-4 are apparently paraphrased in Hebrews 12:12-13....This seems to indicate the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews is saying the Christian dispensation is the fulfillment of the promises made in Isaiah 35, and 'therefore' the messianic age is the point upon which God's people are to focus for 'strengthening the weak hands and confirming the feeble knees.'"<sup>135</sup>

Fear is often used by Satan to the detriment of one's faith. Throughout the ages, God's children are told, "Do not be afraid!" (Genesis 15:1; Exodus 14:13; Deuteronomy 20:1-3; Joshua 1:9; 2 Kings 1:15; Nehemiah 4:14; etc.). In the New Testament, we are commanded, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). As children of God, we should remember the words of Paul, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Isaiah talks about the vengeance of God, and how such should provide comfort for the faithful. To be sure, upon the wicked God will execute His righteous judgment. Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica that "it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed

<sup>132</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.148-149.

<sup>133</sup> Jackson, p.66.

<sup>134</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.27.

<sup>135</sup> Butler, Vol. II, p.198.

from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

The encouragement is this: “He will come and save you.” “We must all learn to wait upon God, and to rest assured that however much apparent delay there may be he will fulfill his promises.”<sup>136</sup>

**Read Isaiah 35:5-7.** In what ways were these verses fulfilled during Jesus’ time upon this earth? “When John the baptizer, perhaps in discouragement and despair, sent his disciples to ask of the Lord, ‘Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?’, the Lord responded: ‘Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them’ (Matt. 11:3-5). Sounds like Isaiah 35:5-7. The Lord Himself cites these things as absolute proof of His being ‘the messiah’ that was to come.”<sup>137</sup>

Certainly he healed many who were blind, deaf, lame, and dumb. However, we should not restrict these verses to the literal fulfillment of physical healing. “Although Jesus’ reply to John refers to His physical works among men as evidence that He is the one to come, there can be no doubt that Isaiah is looking to the great spiritual work of some future time. The eyes that have been closed to God’s appeal will be opened to see the salvation offered by Him; the ears that have been deaf to His call will be unstopped to hear and heed His word.”<sup>138</sup>

The spiritual application is further expanded in verse 7 with imagery similar to the beginning of the chapter. “In this wonderful new era, the shimmering desert will become as a refreshing oasis.”<sup>139</sup> The American Standard Version provides a marginal reading of “mirage” instead of “glowing sand.” “Many have sought salvation in mere mirages. Christ is the only source to quench man’s spiritual thirst (cf. Revelation 22:17).”<sup>140</sup>

**Read Isaiah 35:8-10.** Isaiah here speaks of the “Highway of Holiness,” and the types of people that will and will not take it. Jesus speaks of two choices in the sermon on the mount: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). He said of Himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). On multiple occasions, the church is identified as “the Way” in the book of Acts (9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22); in other instances, Luke refers to “the way of salvation” (16:17), “the way of the Lord” (18:25), and “the way of God” (18:26).

Four things that will not be found upon the “Highway of Holiness”: the unclean, the fool, the lion, and the ravenous beast. “Corruptive and wicked people would be excluded from the Lord’s highway.”<sup>141</sup>

The last sentence of verse 8 is sometimes misunderstood to mean that the gospel is simple enough that even an ignorant or uneducated person could understand and obey it. The thought reminds me of a quote attributed to Marshall Keeble: “You don’t have to be smart to obey the Gospel—just honest!” While that sentiment may be true, that is not actually what is being taught here. The wording in the New King James Version lends to this confusion. Note some of the different ways the sentence is rendered in popular English versions:

<sup>136</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.27.

<sup>137</sup> Deaver, *Houston Vol. I*, p.464.

<sup>138</sup> Hailey, p.295.

<sup>139</sup> Jackson, p.66.

<sup>140</sup> Jackson, p.67.

<sup>141</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.150.

NKJV: “Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray.”

KJV: “The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”

ESV: “It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.”

NASB: “But it will be for him who walks that way, and fools will not wander on it.”

NIV: “The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it.”

As many problems as the New International Version presents, its loose translation in this instance is spot-on. We must be cautious to define Bible words in Bible ways, and not force our definitions on words that the inspired writers used. How is the word “fool” used in the Old Testament?

“*Fool* translates the Hebrew term *evil* (or *ewil*), which occurs twenty-six times in the Old Testament; in no instance is it used of an inexperienced or an uneducated or unlearned person. The word is used of the despiser of wisdom (Prov. 1:7), of the person for whom wisdom is too high (Prov. 24:7). It is used to describe one who is foolish of lips (Prov. 10:8, 10, margin), in whose mouth is a rod of pride (Prov. 14:3), and whose way is right in his own eyes (Prov. 12:15). The fool despises his father’s correction (Prov. 15:5); he is quarrelsome (Prov. 20:3); his foolishness cannot be pounded out of him (Prov. 27:22), and there is not resolving (‘rest’) of controversy with him (Prov. 29:9). Isaiah uses the word to describe the princes of Zoan, whose counsel had become brutish, dull, erroneous (19:11); and God uses the word to describe His people who ‘know me not; they are sottish children, and they have no understanding; they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge’ (Jer. 4:22). The false prophets in Israel are called fools (Hos. 9:7; cf. Mic. 2:11). Surely, such people will not walk in *The way of holiness*. It seems, therefore, that the prophet is not saying that the way will be so simple that an inexperienced or unlearned person cannot miss it, but that the man who despises wisdom, being wise in evil instead, will not make the mistake of walking on it.”<sup>142</sup>

In contrast to the unclean and the fool, the Highway of Holiness will be trod by the redeemed and the ransomed of the church. When one comes to the Lord in humble obedience, submitting to His commands, the one who was once an unclean fool can be redeemed and ransomed from the slavery of sin. The result of such redemption is “joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (cf. Acts 2:41,46; 8:8,39; 16:34).

“How tragic it is that many have overlooked the fulfillment of these promises, as found in the New Testament church, and have imagined that they point to an alleged millennial reign of Christ upon the earth.”<sup>143</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the contrasts laid out in this chapter?
2. Why is encouragement of the weak needed?
3. What connotation does the word “fool” bring with it in the Old Testament?
4. Since “no lion...nor...ravenous beast” will be on the Highway of Holiness, does that mean the Christian will not face difficulty in life?
5. Who will experience the “joy and gladness” of verse 10?

<sup>142</sup> Hailey, p.297.

<sup>143</sup> Jackson, p.66.

## COMFORT FROM GOD (Isaiah 40:1-11)

Isaiah 40 begins a new line of thought from the prophet. The first 35 chapters dealt primarily with judgments from the Almighty, interspersed with glimpses of grace. Chapters 36-39 provide a historical interlude, dealing with Assyria, Hezekiah, and a prophecy of the Babylonian captivity. In chapter 40, Isaiah shifts his focus to the comfort that God provides and the ultimate comfort that will be found in the Messiah.

Sadly, some liberal scholars have taken this shift in focus to mean there was a second (or, sometimes, a third) author that wrote these later chapters. Such a claim should be outright denied, as several New Testament writers and Jesus Christ Himself quoted from these prophecies, and attributed the quotes to Isaiah. Since our study is focused more on the text and not liberal textual criticism, we will not delve into this topic further, but students who wish to study it more will find good information in both Coffman's<sup>144</sup> and Butler's<sup>145</sup> commentaries.

**Read Isaiah 40:1-2.** The prophet is called to provide comfort to God's people. "Since God does not provide comfort to the rebellious sinner, we may conclude that God offers comfort to Israel solely on the basis of her penitence. This has always been the case with God."<sup>146</sup> "The story is told of a teacher of young men who were preparing for the ministry who frequently said to them, 'Gentlemen, when you are uncertain, as you will often be, on what subject to preach, you cannot be wrong in following the line indicated by the prophet's cry, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably." For the truest ministry is the ministry of comfort. You are not ordained to give good advice, but to preach glad tidings.'"<sup>147</sup>

Comfort is a frequent theme of the New Testament (Matthew 5:4; Romans 15:4-5; 1 Corinthians 14:3; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; etc.). The idea of comfort is more than mere sympathy; it is an action that helps to strengthen the hearers. "The application, so far as we are concerned, indicates the strength which comes from companionship with the Lord (cf. 1 John 1:6,7; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). This sense is contained in the root meaning of the word itself, namely, 'fortitude in alliance with some one;' and when that *some one* is the Lord, we can begin to see how it is possible for the Christian to be strong and courageous, rather than weak and fearful."<sup>148</sup>

"These first two verses of chapter 40 form a prologue for the rest of the entire book. Some have outlined chapters 40-66 in a threefold division to correspond to the prologue thusly: 1. 40:1-48:22 – 'her warfare is ended.' 2. 49:1-57:21 – 'her iniquity is pardoned.' 3. 58:1-66:24 – 'she hath received...double for all her sins.'"<sup>149</sup>

**Read Isaiah 40:3-5.** The preparation here referenced was common for the rulers of the ancient Near East. "It was their custom, when they were about to travel through any part of their dominion, to send heralds before them to announce their coming, and to see that the highways over which they were to pass were in order. Any obstacle which might be in the way had to be removed, and all rough places had to be made smooth. If no highway existed in that part of the country, then one would have to be constructed, even if it required the filling up of valleys and other low places, and the cutting down of mountains and hills."<sup>150</sup> "The voice is not speaking literally of road building, but figuratively of the hearts of the people. They are to remove every

<sup>144</sup> Coffman.

<sup>145</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.1-4

<sup>146</sup> Brown, *Houston Vol. II*, p.8-9.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas (1963), p.45.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas (1963), p.45.

<sup>149</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.7.

<sup>150</sup> Thomas (1963), p.46.



barrier and fill every hindering depression, so that they will be prepared for a new relationship with Jehovah and for the rich outpouring of blessings that He has promised.”<sup>151</sup>

To ancient Israel, these verses spoke of their deliverance from Babylonian captivity. There was a greater fulfillment to come, and all four gospel writers clearly applied this prophecy to the work of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). “His work, of preaching, warning, and baptizing, was the preparatory work suggested in this remarkable prophecy.”<sup>152</sup>

John prepared the people for the Messiah by “preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3). Repentance is necessary for one to make his heart ready for obedience and submission to Christ. John taught the people of the first century to take care of those in need (Luke 3:10-11; cf. Matthew 25:31-45; James 2:14-17), to treat each other fairly (Luke 3:12-13; cf. Luke 19:8), and to be content with their wages (Luke 3:14; cf. Colossians 3:23-24; Ephesians 6:5-9).

**Read Isaiah 40:6-8.** Isaiah hears a voice that says, “Cry out!” Depending on the translation, either Isaiah or another unidentified voice asks, “What shall I cry?” The prophet is then given the illustration of the frailty of life, but the assurance that in spite of that frailty, God’s Word “stands forever.”

This passage is referenced twice in the New Testament. James uses the metaphor for the brevity of life in James 1:9-11: “Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.” One who is rich in this life should not trust in those riches, for when his life ends, his riches will remain here. Jesus warned, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).

In addition to the frailty of life, Peter makes reference to Isaiah’s words in speaking of man’s inability to save himself. “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because ‘All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:22-25).

“Only the gospel straightens man out so God can come to him. Only the gospel demonstrated ultimately that the word of God shall stand forever. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the entire ‘strengthening’ half of Isaiah’s prophecy (ch. 40-66)!”<sup>153</sup>

“What a glorious claim and assurance! In the midst of a decadent society and a crumbling world, pressured on every hand by human power and diabolic wickedness, what a sustaining assurance it is to know that there is something permanent, something enduring! The character of God, the word of God, and the promises of God shall never fail but shall endure eternally.”<sup>154</sup>

**Read Isaiah 40:9-11.** “The voice of grace has given assurance of pardon; the voice of hope has looked to the coming of the glory of God; the voice of faith has declared that His word stands forever. Now the voice of evangelism speaks: Tell the glad story.”<sup>155</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Hailey, p.332.

<sup>152</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.32.

<sup>153</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.11.

<sup>154</sup> Hailey, p.333.

<sup>155</sup> Hailey, p.334.

Here we have another difference in translations. Some indicate that the good tidings or good news are being brought *to* Zion and Jerusalem (NIV, ASV), while others show Zion and Jerusalem are the ones bringing the good tidings (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV). Whichever is the case, the one with the good news was instructed to “get up into the high mountain” and “lift up your voice with strength”—giving the message maximum exposure—and “lift it up, do not be afraid.” This should be our aim when spreading the good news of Christ! We often get excited about the success of our favorite sports teams or new music from our favorite groups, and we’re not shy at all about sharing that news. The good news of Jesus Christ is so much greater (and more permanent!) than what is going on in popular culture. Shouldn’t we be even more enthusiastic about sharing it?

You may recall that Isaiah prophesied earlier, “For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). Just before His ascension, Jesus told His followers, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jerusalem is where it started, and it spread from there (Acts 8:1,4).

The message was one of power, symbolized by “the Messiah who came as God’s ‘Arm’ to rule (cf. Isa. 51:4-5; 52:7-10; 53:1; Luke 1:51). Isaiah 52:7-10 also predicts the ‘good tidings’ by which the covenant people are to be ‘comforted’ involving the Lord ‘baring His holy arm before the eyes of all the nations.’ It is apparent that ‘arm’ here and in 52:7-10 refers to the Messiah.”<sup>156</sup>

“Isaiah 40:11 is an expression of the tenderness of God toward his people under the metaphor of a loving shepherd; and Jesus Christ our Lord called attention to the application of this metaphor to Himself when he declared that, ‘I am the Good Shepherd’ (John 10:14ff).”<sup>157</sup> “It is interesting to note that the Hebrews [*sic*] word translated *feed* includes the idea of *ruling* also. The Palestinian shepherd not only feeds his flock; he leads, directs, and rules it. From morning til night the flock is wholly under his guidance, leadership and direction. So it must be with us if we are to enjoy the care, protection and comfort which can come only from our Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4).”<sup>158</sup>

The Lord’s provision for His children is characterized by both strength (v.10) and tenderness (v.11). During this study we have made reference on more than one occasion to the Lord’s invitation to rest in Matthew 11, but it bears repeating that the invitation is extended because He is “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29).

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to proclaim comfort to the people of God?
2. What is meant by the phrase, “Make straight in the desert a highway for our God”? What obstacles are hindering your heart from fully living for God?
3. How frail is human life? Why is it important to note this when discussing spiritual matters?
4. What are the good tidings brought by Zion and Jerusalem?
5. How is the symbol of a shepherd appropriate for Christ as it relates to God’s children?

<sup>156</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.12.

<sup>157</sup> Coffman.

<sup>158</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.33.

## GOD'S CHOSEN SERVANT (Isaiah 42:1-10)

**Read Isaiah 42:1-4.** We could examine a number of theories on the identity of the Servant in these verses, and why commentators and scholars point in different directions. However, we don't even need to leave the inspired record to discover the truth. In Matthew 12:9-21, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, after which "the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him." Jesus withdrew from the area, but was followed; He continued to heal those in need, but "warned them not to make Him known." Why? "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet." The apostle then quotes the very passage from Isaiah we just read. He applies that prophecy to Jesus, forever settling the truth of the identity of the Servant in question.

"This Servant stands in peculiar relationship to Jehovah, He is the Son (cf. Jn. 1:18, etc.). This makes His servanthood astounding. Many servants have been elevated to sonship—but no father wants his son to suffer the indignities of servanthood (cf. Phil. 2:5ff; Lk. 15:19ff)."<sup>159</sup> It was the choice of Jesus to step down from His position to become a servant. Paul encouraged that we emulate the humility of Christ: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7).

Jesus Himself encouraged the same. He told the apostles, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28). "To be a servant of the world is an estate of low degree, but to be God's servant, to humble oneself before His almighty throne, is a place of honor."<sup>160</sup>

"Jehovah's Servant holds a high and noble position and is entrusted with a divine responsibility by the eternal God. Jehovah will *uphold* or sustain the Servant in all of His career. He has been chosen by God for a redemptive work, and Jehovah's soul will delight in Him as He carries out this work."<sup>161</sup> It is difficult to read the prophecy, "I have put My Spirit upon Him," in verse 1 and not think of the baptism of Jesus in Luke 3:21-22: "When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.'"

The Lord's ministry is known for its humility. "The Messiah's conversion methodology would not be sensationalistic; rather, He would persuade with truth (Cf. John 8:32; 2 Corinthians 5:11)."<sup>162</sup> "How vastly different this attitude from that of pretenders who seek and must have notoriety to keep their movements alive."<sup>163</sup> He did not seek out the large crowds; the large crowds sought Him. "The nature of the Servant of Jehovah will be diametrically opposed to all human concepts of saviourhood or messiahship. He will not put on a huge show and make a lot of noise. He will not advertise nor hire a public relations man to create for Him a popular image. He will not call attention to himself merely for His own satisfaction. He will not seek His own

<sup>159</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.47.

<sup>160</sup> Miller, *Houston Vol. II*, p.36-37.

<sup>161</sup> Hailey, p.351.

<sup>162</sup> Jackson, p.82.

<sup>163</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.36.

glory (cf. Jn. 5:41; 8:50). He comes humbly (cf. Zech. 9:9). He comes to save, not to win the acclaim of men. He comes to serve, not to be served.”<sup>164</sup>

The description, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench,” speaks to His gentleness. “So tender would his administrations be that his dealings with the people would be comparable to one handling a bruised reed with extreme care so as not to break it, and to carrying a flickering candle so as not to extinguish it.”<sup>165</sup>

Does the fact that the Lord will be tender in His ministry mean that there will be no judgment? Three times in these first four verses God refers to “justice” as being brought forth or established by His Elect One. Truly, “the coastlands shall wait for His law.” The grace of Christ does not negate the existence of the law of Christ! “Judgment would come to all nations (v.1). Judgment would be in accordance with truth (v.3). The Servant would persevere until He has set judgment on the earth.”<sup>166</sup>

**Read Isaiah 42:5-9.** Isaiah reminds us in verse 5 who is talking. These are not the words of the prophet, but of God the Lord who created the world. Not only did He create the world “in the beginning” (Genesis 1:1), but He continues to sustain life in the present day. “God is *presently* active in the affairs of this world, in contradistinction to the view that the world is like a clock wound up in the beginning and running itself down without divine intervention. It is clearly taught here, (and often elsewhere in the scriptures) that God’s hand is no less present in the operations of the world than in the original act of creation.”<sup>167</sup>

God calls His Servant “in righteousness.” There can be no questioning the righteousness of the Messiah. When John questioned Jesus’ desire to be baptized, the Lord answered, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). He said, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30). Even the centurion declared at the crucifixion, “Certainly this was a righteous Man!” (Luke 23:47).

“Christ then personifies the new covenant that would be given to the people (Heb. 8:10) ....He would be not just a mediator of the covenant, but rather He is the covenant.”<sup>168</sup> The writer of Hebrews quoted Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant, saying, “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Hebrews 8:8-12; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

“Isaiah 42:7 prophesied that the Servant would open the eyes of the blind and release the captives from prison. Christ did indeed open the eyes of the physically blind; but both that miracle and the releasing from prison found their real fulfillment in the spiritual sector. Christ referred to this in Luke 4:18,19, where he quoted from another passage in Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1f) which is very similar to this.”<sup>169</sup>

God again identifies Himself in verse 8: “I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images.” When He delivered the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, He said, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:2-5). Despite this being at the very forefront of the Law of Moses, the people of Israel struggled time and time again with idolatry. Still today, under the new and better covenant of Christ, the inspired writers of the New

<sup>164</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.48.

<sup>165</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.36.

<sup>166</sup> Miller, *Houston Vol. II*, p.38.

<sup>167</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.37.

<sup>168</sup> Miller, *Houston Vol. II*, p.39.

<sup>169</sup> Coffman.

Testament warned against idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 4:3), even equating the danger of covetousness with idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

“Isaiah then focuses their attention on the proof in prophesy. The ‘former things’ which had been spoken of by the mouth of God’s prophet are now ‘come to pass.’ In chapter 41:22,23 God had literally challenged those who followed after false gods to show their credentials by giving accurate prophesy. With His credentials before them God calls upon them to hear what He has declared concerning His Servant.”<sup>170</sup> These are not predictions based on probability, but “matters which often are without indication in the usual order of human events, and are therefore wholly dependent on inspiration for their truth.”<sup>171</sup> “Just as surely as the former things God predicted through previous prophets (Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, et al.) so these ‘new things’ which Jehovah predicts through Isaiah, as incredible as they are, will certainly come to pass.”<sup>172</sup>

**Read Isaiah 42:10.** “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations” (Psalm 98:1-2). “The ‘new things’ of verse 9 demand a new song, ‘such as has never before been sung, called for by a new manifestation of God’s grace, to express which no hymn for former mercies would be appropriate.’ (Fausset.)”<sup>173</sup> The song should be sung wherever people are found: “from the ends of the earth...down to the sea...coastlands.” “Just as the gospel would go out to all the world (Col. 1:23), all should raise their voices in praise to God.”<sup>174</sup>

James declares, “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms” (James 5:13). “Saved people who really appreciate their situation are happy people; and what greater privilege could come to them than the opportunity to express their feeling to God in song? (Cf. Ex. 15:1; Acts 8:39.)”<sup>175</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. How do we know the Servant of Isaiah’s prophecy is Jesus?
2. Describe the nature of Jesus’ ministry as revealed in this chapter.
3. How is Jesus’ ministry different than that which we see among “pretenders”?
4. How does God describe Himself? Why is this description significant?
5. What is the motivation for the new song of Isaiah 42:10? Should we be motivated today as we sing?

<sup>170</sup> Miller, *Houston Vol. II*, p.40.

<sup>171</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.38.

<sup>172</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.50.

<sup>173</sup> Thomas (1963), p.53.

<sup>174</sup> Miller, *Houston Vol. II*, p.41.

<sup>175</sup> Thomas (1963), p.53.

## GOD'S SUFFERING SERVANT (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

Sometimes the chapter and verse divisions we have in the Bible today do a disservice to the original flow of the inspired text. One such example of this is the current text. While Isaiah 53 is a popular text from the prophet, the context of his thoughts actually begin in Isaiah 52:13. "The verses are all one dissertation on the *success of the Suffering Servant*."<sup>176</sup> "The five glorious stanzas of Isaiah's final Servant Song consider various features of the Servant's character, life, and mission: (1) His exaltation; (2) His acquaintance with grief; (3) His ill treatment and vicarious sufferings; (4) His total submission to Jehovah's will; and (5) His victory and reward. On these hang the whole of New Testament preaching and the salvation of all mankind."<sup>177</sup>

**Read Isaiah 52:13-15.** These verses serve as a summary of chapter 53 in reverse order. The prophet points to the success of God's Servant (verse 13) despite His suffering (verse 14). The prophet repeats the fact of exaltation three times using progressive synonyms: "exalted and extolled and be very high."

Verse 14 speaks of the astonishment of the people at the Servant. "It is astonishment, not at what was *accomplished by Him* on behalf of man, but at what *was done to Him* by man."<sup>178</sup> Regardless of their understanding, the maltreatment of Jesus is an affront to humanity. No man should have been abused so poorly, especially since Pilate "found no fault" in Him (Luke 23:14). But, as we know, Jesus was no ordinary man. He was "the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14). He made a choice; He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7).

"Kings, possibly from among the Gentiles, will be startled and spring up in amazement, though they will keep silent, when they see and understand what they have not previously been shown or told. As for the Jews, they have long heard wonderful words and seen marvelous deeds, but they have been deaf and blind to the underlying meaning. They should have recognized the Servant-Messiah when He came, but they did not."<sup>179</sup>

**Read Isaiah 53:1-3.** Chapter 53 begins with a rhetorical question, assuming a negative answer. "Who has believed our report?" No one! It is an exaggeration, as some did believe, but not as many as should have. The sentiment is quoted twice in the New Testament. John applies it to the Lord's ministry, writing, "But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe Him" (John 12:37).

Paul also included the work of gospel preachers, lamenting the lack of response. He wrote in Romans 10:14-17. "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Despite the lack of response, we should still be diligent in giving people a chance to accept the grace of God and obey the gospel of Christ!

"The 'arm' is a symbol of power....Though Jehovah's *arm* (power) was revealed (in the miracles, in his teaching, in the resurrection, etc), the masses rejected him."<sup>180</sup> Why was He

<sup>176</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.240.

<sup>177</sup> Hailey, p.443-444.

<sup>178</sup> Bright, Houston Vol. II, p.181.

<sup>179</sup> Hailey, p.436.

<sup>180</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.41.

rejected? He did not fit their preconceived notions of how the Messiah should rule, or where He should come from. It was a variation on the cliché, “It’s not what you know, but who you know.” In their eyes, Jesus was nothing more than a carpenter’s son from Nazareth (cf. Mark 6:2-4; John 1:46). They did not believe He deserved their respect and attention. “These verses are not intended to describe Christ’s facial features or His physique. They are simply predicting that men would judge Him by that inauspicious human appearance and completely reject Him because of their presuppositions.”<sup>181</sup>

“The term ‘despised’...carries with it the idea of belittling, looking down upon, disregarding, or holding in contempt; and the reason why people felt that way about Jesus, was the result of their disappointment in him. However, the question which should concern us today, is that we do not fall in to the same mistake. There are many ways in which people can despise and reject Christ, as, for example, (1) by yielding to the fear of unpopularity, along with the desire to have the praise of men (John 12:42,43); (2) by refusing to accept the word of the Lord (John 12:49-50); (3) by refusing to suffer with him (Rom. 8:17); and (4) by a failure to relieve the needs of the Lord’s people (Matt. 25:31-46).”<sup>182</sup> “Many today despise his church, his plan of salvation, and his plan for worshiping and bringing honor to the Father. They teach and practice the ways of men and fail to regard him as they ought. Let us pray that it not be so of us.”<sup>183</sup>

**Read Isaiah 53:4-6.** Here is the reason Christ gave Himself as a sacrifice. Isaiah later writes, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). We have griefs and sorrows caused by transgressions and iniquities; we have no ability within ourselves to remove those things. Only the sacrifice of Christ as the Suffering Servant can redeem us and restore a relationship with God that we had effectively destroyed. Notice all of the instances in which Christ helps us, and how He suffered instead of us. “In spite of man’s stubborn disposition, Heaven’s love reached out; Jehovah laid upon His servant the iniquity of us all.”<sup>184</sup>

“It has been often observed that *eleven times* in this chapter the prophet represents the sufferings of Christ as substitutionary, vicarious and assumed for others, the design of which is to enable man to escape the consequences of his own sins....Many who saw the suffering of Christ regarded him as ‘stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted’ because of his own sins; when, in reality, he was suffering in behalf of those who thus scorned him! He was, of course, guilty of no sin; his sufferings were for the sins of others.”<sup>185</sup>

“Instead of *wounded*, several commentators (e.g., Alexander, Delitzsch, Leupold, Young) suggest *pierced*, which more accurately reflects what is said in other passages. Not only were the Servant’s hands and feet pierced with nails (Ps. 22:16) and His side pierced with a spear (John 19:34), but Zechariah prophesied (12:10) that one day the inhabitants of Jerusalem would look unto Him whom they had pierced (John 19:37).”<sup>186</sup>

Isaiah shows the folly of following our own wisdom and the fact that relying on our own understanding causes us to go astray. This is a truth often repeated in the Scriptures. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). It was not a new and novel idea in Isaiah’s day; in the time of the judges, before a king was anointed, the people struggled with submission to the Lord. “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

<sup>181</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.258.

<sup>182</sup> Thomas (1970), p.192.

<sup>183</sup> Stearsman, p.288.

<sup>184</sup> Jackson, p.108.

<sup>185</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.42.

<sup>186</sup> Hailey, p.438.

There is much truth in the proverb: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

**Read Isaiah 53:7-9.** How did Jesus respond to the accusations when He was brought before Pilate? He did not mount a compelling legal defense but allowed the Father’s plan of redemption to play out. He was not forced or coerced; He willingly gave Himself without a fight. “Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ So Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you say.’ And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him, ‘Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?’ But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly” (Matthew 27:11-14).

Isaiah wrote, “And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death.” It was the intention of His executioners to bury Him as others who were crucified were buried—“either with His cross according to Roman custom (Rawlinson) or at an ignominious site according to Jewish custom (Young).”<sup>187</sup> Neither of these plans came to fruition, however, as a prominent Jew who was also a disciple secured the Lord’s body for burial in his own tomb. “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man when to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed” (Matthew 27:57-60). He had done nothing deserving of such a violent death, and Joseph of Arimathea saw to it that the Lord’s body was not discarded as a common criminal.

Peter uses the behavior of Jesus in the face of His accusers to encourage us to stand firm in our faith while not sinking to the level of those who oppose us or use their power inappropriately in 1 Peter 2:18-25. We should ever be looking to imitate Jesus and His conduct, even when it goes against what the world considers “common sense.”

**Read Isaiah 53:10-12.** The Father did not take pleasure in seeing His Son in pain, but the sacrifice satisfied His wrath; in that sense He was “pleased.” “The fruit of his suffering is the redemption of men effected by the *offering for sin* which Christ made when he went to the cross.”<sup>188</sup>

What about the phrase, “He shall prolong His days”? How can one who has been put to death see His days prolonged? This is an obvious reference to His resurrection from the dead. The cross, while essential to the eternal purpose of God, was not the end of the story. In Christ’s own words to John in Revelation 1:18, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” What a glorious God we serve, who made provision for us before we were ever conceived! “And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is this passage so often read as we prepare to observe the Lord’s Supper?
2. Why was the Messiah “despised and rejected by men” in the first century? What are some reasons men today still reject Him and His message?
3. What phrases indicate the vicarious nature of Christ’s suffering?
4. In what way was the Lord’s days prolonged?
5. Identify some of the specific prophecies in this chapter and their fulfillments in the New Testament.

<sup>187</sup> Hailey, p.440.

<sup>188</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.43.



## GOD'S MERCIFUL INVITATION (Isaiah 55:1-13)

The idea of an invitation carries with it a positive connotation. There are formal invitations (such as to a birthday party or retirement party) and casual invitations (such as asking a friend to go to lunch with you after worship services). In a religious context, we offer an invitation at the close of every sermon, inviting those who are gathered to repent and obey God. That, too, is a positive and joyful event (Luke 15:10).

God extends some very well-known invitations in the Scriptures. Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Some of the last words of the New Testament include an invitation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). In this chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, we have a similar invitation.

**Read Isaiah 55:1-5.** Similar to the invitation found in Revelation 22, God offers water to "everyone who thirsts." Regardless of your economic status, even "you who have no money" are invited to "buy wine and milk without money and without price." "They are urged to 'buy,' which implies the exercise of initiative. But they cannot buy with money – for salvation cannot be earned (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8,9)."<sup>189</sup>

Like so many in our society, the people wasted their resources on things that could never satisfy them. "The immortal soul of man cannot be satisfied with the most wonderful things that the world has to offer."<sup>190</sup> We chase after the wealth of this world, trying to increase our bank accounts, living by the motto, "He who dies with the most toys wins!" But the things of this world will never truly satisfy; they will perish. That which will satisfy is God's abundant mercy. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). If our focus and desire is in the right place, we can find satisfaction in the Lord's mercy. "Let your soul delight itself in abundance."

Action is required. The invitation must be accepted. "*Incline* (bend forward so as to hear); *come* (to the Lord, and to no other; because no other can supply the need); *hear* (give heed to the things said)."<sup>191</sup> God's blessings are abundant, but He will not force them on anyone. We must desire (thirst) and seek (buy) what He offers.

God promises a new "everlasting covenant" with those who accept His invitation. This is the same covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and acknowledged by the Hebrews writer as being in effect during the first century. "The sure mercies of David has reference to the promises God made to David recorded in 2 Samuel 7:12-16....After David was dead, God would set up David's descendent upon the throne. This one would build a house for God (cf., 1 Tim. 3:15). God would be His Father and He would be God's Son (cf., Rom. 1:4). The kingdom, house, would be an everlasting throne and kingdom (cf., Heb. 12:28). On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached that God had raised up Christ to sit on David's throne—*spiritual throne*—in fulfillment of this prophecy. He now reigns as King upon His throne over His kingdom the church."<sup>192</sup> "Paul in fact quotes Isaiah 55:3 and declares it fulfilled in Christ, through whom are proclaimed the blessings of remission of sins and justification for all who believe (Acts 13:34-39)."<sup>193</sup>

<sup>189</sup> Jackson, p.111.

<sup>190</sup> Coffman.

<sup>191</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.46.

<sup>192</sup> Hatcher, *Houston Vol.II*, p.205.

<sup>193</sup> Hailey, p.454.

Despite the lowercase letters used by the New King James Version and other modern translations, the pronouns in verses 4 and 5 refer to none other than the Messiah. “Some commentators think that the prophet has David in mind—his victories gave a witness of Jehovah’s power and being to the heathen nations. However, it is much more probable that Isaiah is speaking of the new or second David (v. 3)—Jesus Christ ‘the faithful witness’ (Rev. 1:5), who was sent into the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37).”<sup>194</sup> The Gentiles, the “nations who do not know you,” will be accepted into this new covenant and serve under the “leader and commander.”

**Read Isaiah 55:6-9.** Again, it must be stressed that accepting God’s merciful invitation requires action on man’s part. Look at the action verbs of verses 6 and 7: “seek,” “call,” “forsake,” “return.” None of these are passive words.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). The Hebrews writer declared, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). If one refuses to seek the Lord, he won’t find Him. Only those who “diligently seek Him” can be rewarded with the rich mercies promised. “When people are unwilling to believe that which the Lord has said, and put forth the effort on their part to do as they are commanded, there is no way for them to be saved.”<sup>195</sup>

Verse 7 details what repentance involves: forsake your wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts, and return to the Lord. “To forsake our wicked ways, one must completely abandon his evil thoughts. Solomon knew that as a man ‘thinketh in his heart, so is he’ (Pro. 23:7). This is why Paul would write, ‘And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God’ (Rom. 12:2). To be ‘transformed’ is to forsake the wicked ways of the world. This is accomplished ‘by the renewing of your mind.’ When we bring our thoughts into harmony with the will of God, then our lives will change. No wonder Paul would instruct us to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, and ‘if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things’ (Phi. 4:8).”<sup>196</sup>

The promise of forgiveness is for the penitent, obedient believer, and that forgiveness is abundant (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 1 John 1:9; Lamentations 3:22-23). The psalmist declared, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). In another figure of speech declaring the abundance of God’s mercy, the prophet Micah writes, “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). “It matters not how great their sins may have been, God can and will forgive the penitent believer, who will do as he has commanded.”<sup>197</sup>

Man’s ways are wicked and thoughts are unrighteous; God affirms this and says His ways are higher than man’s. Man could never devise a plan of salvation like God’s. “Men tend to find it difficult to forgive those who have sinned against them; but God is not thus restrained by this human weakness, and does provide mercy and abundant pardon for those who turn in penitence to him.”<sup>198</sup> “That God Himself could become incarnate and live a perfect life (without sin in a fleshly body) and then willingly allow Himself to be ‘made sin’ on sinful man’s behalf so that

<sup>194</sup> Hailey, p.454.

<sup>195</sup> Thomas (1963), p.64.

<sup>196</sup> Hatcher, *Houston Vol. II*, p.209.

<sup>197</sup> Thomas (1963), p.64.

<sup>198</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.47.

man might be given an imputed righteousness which man does not deserve, is incomprehensible to man because man has no experiential base from which to comprehend such an event.”<sup>199</sup>

**Read Isaiah 55:10-13.** The rain and snow serves God’s purpose in providing vegetation and physical sustenance for man. The rain does not return to its source without producing results. Likewise, the word of God serves His purpose in producing fruit and providing spiritual sustenance for the penitent believer. His Word “does not return to him, barren of results; it accomplishes the design, in the hearts of humanity, which he intended. It is indeed *seed for the sower* (being the means by which the worker is enabled to proclaim God’s will; and it is also *bread for the eater*, in that it meets the needs of the hungry soul.”<sup>200</sup>

“We have the adage that the pen (words) is mightier than the sword because we recognize the power of words. How much more powerful when the words come from the Creator of the universe?”<sup>201</sup> “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

“The word of God is authenticated and validated by supernatural proofs seen by eyewitnesses and transmitted in human language under the direction of the Holy Spirit of God. So faith in the revelation of God is not a subjective leap without an objective basis. And God promises that His word is dynamic—it is *living* (Hebrews 4:12-13). His revealed word is the *source* of our spiritual life, (cf. John 6:63; I Pet. 1:22-25; James 1:18, 21, etc.). God’s word produces life like the rain and snow produces vegetation. That is one of the evidences upon which we may base our faith in God even though we may not understand His ways. We see His word produce goodness and life. Man believes many things he does not fully understand (electricity, gravity, personality, atomic structure and behavior). Man believes and acts upon those principles because of objective evidence he has seen to establish their reality. So, man can believe and act upon the revealed precepts and principles of God in the Bible, even though he may not understand them.”<sup>202</sup>

The chapter concludes with joy that comes as a result of redemption. “Whether Isaiah has in view the Jewish exiles as they go out from literal Babylon and look toward Jerusalem, or the redeemed of Jehovah as they are freed from spiritual Babylon and their captivity in sin, they *go out with joy* and *are led forth with peace*.”<sup>203</sup> “Jesus does not offer us the peace of the world. Peace is not the absence of alarm, but is the presence of God in our lives.”<sup>204</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. How abundant is God’s mercy?
2. What are “the sure mercies of David”?
3. In order to be forgiven, what must the sinner do?
4. What is the contrast between man’s ways and thoughts and the Lord’s?
5. What does He mean when God says His Word “shall not return to me void”?

<sup>199</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.306.

<sup>200</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.48.

<sup>201</sup> Hatcher, Houston Vol. II, p.213.

<sup>202</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.307.

<sup>203</sup> Hailey, p.456.

<sup>204</sup> Hatcher, Houston Vol. II, p.215.

## A NEW NAME (Isaiah 62:1-12)

On several occasions in the Scriptures, people received a name change. Abram became Abraham; Sarai became Sarah; Jacob became Israel; etc. The change of name indicated a change of character or purpose. In our text today, Isaiah prophesies that Zion would receive a new name.

**Read Isaiah 62:1-2.** There is disagreement over the identity of the speaker in this chapter. “It is difficult to determine whether the speaker of these verses is Jehovah (Delitzsch, Leupold, Young), the Servant (Rawlinson), or the prophet himself (Alexander, Calvin, Smith, Whybray, Willis)....The question is not too significant, for what we have here is the word of Jehovah made known through the prophet and revealing the Servant’s work.”<sup>205</sup> Even the commentaries I consulted for this study were not in agreement on the speaker (Hailey suggests Jehovah, Guy N. Woods proposes the Servant, while Clyde M. Woods identifies Isaiah as the one speaking). The speaker states He will not remain silent or inactive until His will—the spread of righteousness and salvation—is accomplished.

How important is it to spread the gospel? The importance we place upon evangelism should match the value God places upon it. “It is God’s will that all men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3,4; 2 Pet. 3:9); and we should determine not to hold our peace until that work is brought to pass, insofar as it is possible.”<sup>206</sup> We must continually pray and look for opportunities to do as Paul wrote, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2).

“The Gentiles shall see your righteousness.” Time and time again, the Gentiles are mentioned in relation to the coming salvation. The day was coming when Jewish heritage would not matter, but one’s acceptance of and obedience to the message of God. The new name was given by God shortly after the gates to the kingdom were opened to the Gentiles. Cornelius obeyed the truth that was preached by Peter in Acts 10. Only one chapter later, we read that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26).

**Read Isaiah 62:3-5.** “Different kinds of crowns symbolize different things. One crown may indicate royalty and another victory. In this verse, ‘crown of glory’ is used figuratively. As a crown of glory, the Church represents God’s victory over evil (1 John 5:4; Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:54-57). The ‘diadem’ stood for royalty. Thus, as a diadem, the Church should be recognized as God’s royal family (Eph. 3:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:9).”<sup>207</sup>

Due to Israel’s decision to forsake God, they were viewed as “Forsaken” and “Desolate” when they were chastised and taken into captivity. Under the New Covenant, though, God would restore the relationship and bless His obedient children once again. The people would be called “Hephzibah” (“My delight is in her”<sup>208</sup>) and the land would be “Beulah” (“Married”<sup>209</sup>). Why are these not considered to be the “new name” promised in verse 2? Simply “because neither of these was a new name. Hephzibah was the name of the mother of Manasseh, and our text also declares that ‘Beulah’ would be the name of ‘the land,’ not of the people of God.”<sup>210</sup>

“The emphasis on marriage as descriptive of the new relationship stresses the fact that God’s concern for is people is not one of mere duty; it is deeper than that—it is love.”<sup>211</sup> The marriage relationship is used as a metaphor many times in the Scriptures. One of the most familiar is found in Ephesians 5:23-28, where the husband’s relationship with and love for his

<sup>205</sup> Hailey, p.496.

<sup>206</sup> Thomas (1963), p.69.

<sup>207</sup> Hicks, *Houston Vol. II*, p.284.

<sup>208</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.52.

<sup>209</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.52.

<sup>210</sup> Coffman.

<sup>211</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.434.

wife is compared to Christ's relationship with and love for His church. Another example is found in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." "As a young man marries a virgin and dedicates himself to protecting and caring for her honor, so the sons of Zion dedicate themselves to the honor of Jehovah's land and people—His kingdom. The relationship will be pure and chaste."<sup>212</sup>

**Read Isaiah 62:6-9.** What is the function of a watchman? "Watchmen were sentinels standing watch upon the tops of walls and in watch-towers of ancient cities to cry out warning at the approach of the enemy."<sup>213</sup> Why does spiritual Jerusalem need watchmen? "Clearly this is a reference to the dangers of false teachers and their false doctrines would pose to the Church. Just as clearly, God intends for false teachers and their false doctrines to be exposed a repelled. Constant vigilance is necessary."<sup>214</sup> Peter warns, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is hard at work to draw souls away from the truth; we must be hard at work to protect souls in the truth (Philippians 1:17; 1 Timothy 4:1-6).

"These watchmen are godly saints who contend earnestly for the faith and guard the truth against heresy (Acts 20:28ff; Jude 3; 1 Timothy 6:20)."<sup>215</sup> The watchmen are more specifically identified by Hailey as "not Old testament prophets, priests and prophets, or angels, as is thought by some, but 'apostles...prophets [New Testament]... evangelists...pastors and teachers,' whose work is the perfecting of the saints (Eph. 4:11-12)."<sup>216</sup>

The righteous are to continually pray, "and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the truth." "The idea is that New Zion will have those who are constant in prayer, supplicating God on her behalf. Jesus taught constant, persistent prayer as a characteristic of the citizen of the messianic kingdom (cf. Lk. 11:5-14; 18:1-8). The point of Jesus' parables is not that we can wear God down until He gives in because we have prayed so long and so eloquently, but that if an exasperated friend or a grouchy old judge will answer the pleading of someone in need, *how much more* will our Father who is really *anxious to help*, answer us speedily?! The first century church was in constant prayer because its leaders (apostles, elders, evangelists) were men of constant prayer (I Thess. 5:16-18)."<sup>217</sup>

It is by the Lord's own "right hand" and "arm of His strength" that He swears to protect His people and prevent their enemies from plundering their grain and new wine. Just as in the case of his oath to Abraham, "because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (Hebrews 6:13). "The implication is, if such occurs, then I am not God!"<sup>218</sup>

This protection does not have reference to earthly goods, though, but the spiritual blessings made available in Christ. No one can rob a Christian of such. "Her inheritance is incorruptible and eternal—one that does not fade away (I Pet. 1:3-5). Nothing in the seen or unseen world can separate New Zion from her inheritance (Rom. 8:31-39). Ancient Zion's glory was transient but New Zion's is eternal (cf. II Cor. 4:16-5:5)....New Zion will enjoy the constant presence of the Lord. She 'eats and drinks' at the Lord's Table. She has been invited to a feast."<sup>219</sup> Jesus said, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

**Read Isaiah 62:10-12.** The prophecy encourages Zion to "prepare the way" and "build up the highway," removing obstacles that might be in the way of those who want to take part in

<sup>212</sup> Hailey, p.498.

<sup>213</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.436.

<sup>214</sup> Hicks, Houston Vol. II, p.285.

<sup>215</sup> Jackson, p.124.

<sup>216</sup> Hailey, p.498.

<sup>217</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.436.

<sup>218</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.52.

<sup>219</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.437.

the salvation offered. “Every legitimate effort must be made to facilitate the world’s acceptance of the gospel (cf. 49:22).”<sup>220</sup> “Lift up a banner for the peoples!” Let everyone see what the Lord offers to His children!

“Zion’s glory has been established (vv. 1-5), and Jehovah’s care guaranteed by an oath (vv. 6-9); therefore, it seems that Jehovah is enjoining Zion to prepare for the nations to come in.”<sup>221</sup> Coffman comments that it refers “to the diligence of the Church in her preparation and efforts to evangelize mankind.”<sup>222</sup> The proclamation of salvation’s appearance is made “to the end of the world.” “Here appears to be a reference to the worldwide proclamation of the gospel under the Great Commission embracing all the nations of the earth (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16).”<sup>223</sup>

The chapter concludes with four identifications of God’s people under the New Covenant: “And they shall call them The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.” “The new names for Jerusalem reverse the shame of her past, as in verse 4.”<sup>224</sup>

Someone should be able to look at the way you talk and live and be able to tell you are different, and that you serve someone higher than yourself. “The manner of life to be characteristic of the people of God was to be so distinct that those among whom they went would have no difficulty in identifying them as holy people.”<sup>225</sup>

“The church is holy. It is God’s Holy Temple (Eph. 2:21; 5:27). Members of the Church are they who have been redeemed (Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), bought with the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). They were sought and saved by the Messiah (Luke 19:10). Never will He forsake the Church (Heb. 13:5), which was and is eternally purposed by God (Eph. 3:11). Paul spoke of the Church when he said, ‘*We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;’ (2 Cor. 4:8-9)”<sup>226</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the “new name” and where is it revealed in the Scriptures?
2. To what is the new relationship between God and the people likened?
3. Who are the watchmen?
4. How strong is the Lord’s oath to His people?
5. What is involved in evangelism, according to Isaiah 62:10-12?

<sup>220</sup> Jackson, p.125.

<sup>221</sup> Hailey, p.499.

<sup>222</sup> Coffman.

<sup>223</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.53.

<sup>224</sup> Woods, Clyde M., p.271.

<sup>225</sup> Woods, Guy N., p.53.

<sup>226</sup> Hicks, *Houston Vol. II*, p.287.

## THE OLD GIVES WAY TO THE NEW (Isaiah 66:1-24)

Throughout the prophecy of Isaiah, several themes emerge. They are outlined in the first chapter, and again in the last chapter of the prophecy. These themes are the sinfulness of the people (Isaiah 1:3-8; 66:1-4), a divine appeal for their return (1:16-19; 66:5-14), a warning about judgment (1:24-25,29-31; 66:15-19), and salvation from captivity, whether physical or spiritual (1:26-28; 66:20-24).<sup>227</sup> One writer divided the chapter into three sections: “Burial of Old Zion” in verses 1-6, “Birth of New Zion” in verses 7-14, and “Building of Zion” in verses 15-24.<sup>228</sup>

**Read Isaiah 66:1-6.** There is a danger in putting one’s trust solely in his affiliation with religion. There were Jews who trusted in their ancestry (Matthew 3:9). Likewise, there were some who believed that as long as they were associated with the temple, where they believed the Lord dwelled, they were safe. Solomon, who built the original temple, understood that God could not be contained in a man-made structure. “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27). Yet, there seemed to be some who could not grasp that idea.

It is not the things we make that impress God, for He made all the materials we might use to create anything. Rather, it is the heart of man that God looks upon. He desires those who respect His Word in humility and contrition. His followers must strive to worship Him properly, not because we can earn salvation or because we trust in our actions, but because of His grace and mercy in giving us the opportunity to serve Him. “God proposes to dwell in such persons as this rather than in temples made of wood and stone. He prefers to dwell in a spiritual temple built of lively stones of this character. And this is what the church, or kingdom, of the Messiah is—a spiritual temple composed of this kind of stones.”<sup>229</sup>

The problem with the offerings of verse 3 is not that they were doing the wrong things, but they were doing them in the wrong spirit. “The point is, as summed up at the conclusion of the verse, worship, offered consistent with one’s ‘own ways,’ rather than God’s ways, is utterly wrong.”<sup>230</sup> This problem was not exclusive to the Israel of old, however. Even in the New Testament, we find disciples guilty of worshiping improperly. “Ananias and Sapphire fell—not in the amount given or not given to the Lord, but in the attitude they had in their heart (cf. Acts 5:1ff). Simon, the converted magician, fell—not in what he sought but the purpose for which he sought it (cf. Acts 8:9-13). Even the Corinthian church made the Lord’s Supper an abomination before the lord by the attitude of divisiveness in which they participated in it (cf. I Cor. 10-11).”<sup>231</sup> Proper actions must be accompanied by the proper spirit (John 4:24).

Those who are faithful are those that “hear” and “tremble at (the Lord’s) word.” Because of their desire to follow God’s instructions, they are mocked and hated by their own brethren. “God’s righteous minority will always be persecuted by the wicked majority because their righteousness acts as a catalyst of judgment in their midst (cf. Jn. 3:18-21; 9:35-40; 15:18-27, etc.).”<sup>232</sup> “The early church, composed of Jews (Acts 2), was persecuted by Jews as Isaiah predicted here (Acts 4-8)! Apostate Jews could not tolerate the righteous, converted Jews in the first century. And, today, is not the consistent, Bible-believing Christian under attack by his own apostate brethren!”<sup>233</sup>

<sup>227</sup> Mosher, *Houston Vol. II*, p.320-321.

<sup>228</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.491, 498, 504.

<sup>229</sup> Lanier, p.300.

<sup>230</sup> Jackson, p.133.

<sup>231</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.495.

<sup>232</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.496-497.

<sup>233</sup> Mosher, *Houston Vol. II*, p.325.

**Read Isaiah 66:7-14.** Prophetic language is often difficult to follow, and this passage in Isaiah is a prime example of that. Hailey's explanation of verses 7 and 8 is possibly the best: "Here is something unparalleled in history; for immediately following the birth of the Man-Child, a nation, its land, and Zion's children are brought forth. Only the entrance of Christ into the world and the events of Pentecost can be in view here; the Son was exalted, the new nation was established, and Zion's children began to multiply (Acts 2; 4:4)."<sup>234</sup>

Isaiah says, "Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her." Is it contradictory to talk about joy and mourning in the same breath? "It is possible for the citizens of Zion to *mourn* over sin and all that results from it and at the same time *rejoice* in the salvation and future vindication of the Lord."<sup>235</sup> We can and should lament over society's sinful state, while pointing with joy at the solution: the blood of Jesus Christ! Paul reminded the Corinthians of a host of sinful behaviors that would prevent one from inheriting the kingdom of God, including fornication, homosexuality, covetousness, and drunkenness. He went on, however, to say that while some of his Corinthian brethren had been in those states of hopelessness, they had turned to God and were now washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)! When we teach others about the dangers and deceitfulness of sin, may we never forget to also teach about the joy and peace that is available to the penitent in Christ (Colossians 3:15)!

**Read Isaiah 66:15-17.** Some answer God's appeal to repent, but others disregard His pleas. "What a pity that the beautiful and glorious cannot go without being marred by the opposite! But, as always, there will be enemies of God in the times of the Messiah, and upon them Jehovah will exercise his fierce wrath, even to the eternal destruction of many."<sup>236</sup>

"Throughout the Scriptures fire is used repeatedly as a symbol of divine punishment, of Jehovah's righteous wrath and indignation. The psalmist observes, 'A fire goeth before him,/And burneth up his adversaries round about' (Ps. 97:3); Jeremiah (Jer. 4:4) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 22:21) speak of the fire of Jehovah's wrath; and Nahum declares, 'His wrath is poured out like fire' (Nah. 1:6). Isaiah said earlier that the enemies of Ariel 'shall be visited...with whirlwind...and the flame of a devouring fire' (29:5-6), that the flame of a devouring fire will consume Assyria (30:27-31), and that Jehovah poured upon Israel 'the fierceness of his anger...and it set him on fire round about' (42:25)."<sup>237</sup>

In contrast to the Corinthians who were sanctified by God, those of whom Isaiah is speaking are attempting to sanctify and purify themselves. Such is impossible! We are without hope if we are without God, if we are relying on ourselves for sanctification. "Note that the judgment of this context is not merely local; it is upon 'all flesh.' Following the motif of both paganism, and violations of the law of Moses, the prophet warns that those who live in rebellion to God will come to an end."<sup>238</sup>

**Read Isaiah 66:18-21.** These verses allude to the worldwide spread of the gospel during the early days of the church. "All nations would see God's glory in the two-fold accomplishment of the destruction of the Old and establishment of the New. Jehovah's historical *signal* that he was fulfilling His promises made through the prophets about all this was the Messiah!"<sup>239</sup> While the sign is not explicitly stated, "It could be the resurrection of the Messiah and evidence confirming it. Or it could be the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans...Or the sign could be the establishment of the church and its power in the world."<sup>240</sup>

<sup>234</sup> Hailey, p.524.

<sup>235</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.502.

<sup>236</sup> Lanier, p.301.

<sup>237</sup> Hailey, p.525.

<sup>238</sup> Jackson, p.134.

<sup>239</sup> Butler, Vol. III, p.508.

<sup>240</sup> Hailey, p.527.



In case the prophet had not been clear enough throughout the rest of his work, here he explicitly identifies Gentiles (“all nations”) as brethren. “Many of the prophets predicted that the Gentiles would one day be brought to Jehovah, but none (save in this one place) referred to them as ‘brethren’!”<sup>241</sup> In the church, one’s nationality is of zero importance! “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

In the New Zion, the church, the priesthood would no longer be limited to those of Levitical birth; all would be (and now are) priests. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

**Read Isaiah 66:22-24.** Isaiah’s prophecy concludes with the promise that “the new heavens and the new earth...shall remain....So shall you descendants and your name remain.” Daniel declared that the kingdom established during the days of the Roman Empire “shall never be destroyed...and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44). Jesus promised, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

It must be noted that the phrase “the new heavens and the new earth” is used differently here than Peter and John use it in their writings. In the New Testament, it is understood to refer to eternal life. Here, on the other hand, the reference is simply to the dispensation of the church. “While both Isaiah and John say that weeping will cease in the new universe (Isa. 65:19; Rev. 21:4), there will **still be** death and sin in Isaiah’s model (Isa. 65:19-20). But in the model given by Peter and John absolute life and righteousness will prevail because death and all sinners and sin will be forever banished (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 20:15; 21:4b, 8, 27; 22:4, 15, 19).”<sup>242</sup>

The worship in “the new heavens and the new earth” would be regular; “from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another.” Again, this will not be limited to those of Jewish descent, but “all flesh shall come to worship before Me.”

“As gold and silver have been used to describe the glory of future Zion (60:17), so fire and worms now depict the end of the transgressors....Isaiah is probably contrasting the new spiritual Israel and the old fleshly Israel. The latter are as *dead bodies* which shall never be brought to a full end as a people (Jer. 30:11). For the worms or maggots which consume them *shall not die*, and the fire of divine rebuke and judgment which torments them shall never be quenched (cf. vv. 15-16).”<sup>243</sup> “Surely, all who live in the present age should want to be in the church of Christ purposed by God, prophesied by the prophets, prepare by John the baptizer and Christ, and proclaimed by the apostles. It is only in the church where one ceases to fall short of the glory of God (Eph. 3:10-21; Isa. 66:18)!”<sup>244</sup>

## Discussion Questions

1. Do we trust in the God we worship or the way we worship? What’s the difference?
2. What is often the result of worshipping God as He has prescribed?
3. How can one mourn and be joyful at the same time?
4. What is the difference between a Jew and a Gentile in the church?
5. Contrast Isaiah’s “new heavens and the new earth” with Peter and John usage in the New Testament.

<sup>241</sup> Butler, *Vol. III*, p.509.

<sup>242</sup> McClish, *Houston Vol. II*, p.348.

<sup>243</sup> Hailey, p.529.

<sup>244</sup> Mosher, *Houston Vol. II*, p.335.

**RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY**

- Brown, David P., editor. (1995). *Third Annual Houston College of the Bible Lectureship – Isaiah Volume I: Chapters 1-39*. Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co.
- Brown, David P., editor. (1996). *Fourth Annual Houston College of the Bible Lectureship – Isaiah Volume II: Chapters 40-66*. Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co.
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**RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY**

In addition to the fine printed materials on the previous page, I also highly recommend viewing or listening to the 2009 and 2010 Annual Schertz Lectures held in Schertz, Texas. They can be accessed via the Online Academy of Biblical Studies at the following URLs:

*<https://oabs.org/Archives/Lectures/schertz2009.htm>*

*<https://oabs.org/Archives/Lectures/schertz2010.htm>*

Also available through the Online Academy of Biblical Studies are archived classes on the book of Isaiah, taught by brother Lee Davis. These classes can be accessed at the following URL:

*<https://oabs.org/Archives/classes/isa/2019/>*