

Wednesford Pentecostal Church

The Book of Isaiah Part II. Chapters 40 to 66

Bible Version

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1. CHAPTER 40

1.1. COMFORTING WORDS

Isa 40:1-2. "Comfort, yes, comfort my people!" Says your God. {2} "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

After many chapters dealing with the forthcoming judgment of God's people and the neighbouring nations, the prophetic eye turns towards the future and the message is one of hope. The message starts with the comforting words that their warfare is over and that their sin is forgiven. Their problems had stemmed from their rebellion and idolatry, but their judgment had purged them and they were forgiven.

Verse two says that the Lord had given Jerusalem double for all her sins. Receiving double does not mean been punished twice as much as required. The phrase refers to the practice of receiving the second (copy) document of a mortgage when all the payments were completed. The first copy was received when the mortgage was taken out. To receive double therefore means that the debt is fully paid.

Often times in life we all have sorrow and pain. Situations that are overwhelming, situations that are unjust; times of suffering, of loss; of misunderstanding and times of grief. We all can know times of deep seated pain and anxiety; when the pressures of life are crushing. How effective in such times are comforting words and deeds! Perhaps a friend who sits and listens; an understanding glance; a little action that lets you know that others care. It isn't logical. How can a few words, which do not change the external circumstance, help so much?

God primary aim may not to make his servants' lives comfortable but he does desire to comfort His people's hearts and to encourage and strengthen them. He is the God of all comfort¹.

1.2. THE LORD'S COMING

Isa 40:3-5. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. {4} Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; {5} The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The prophet now speaks of a voice crying out in the wilderness. We know that this was fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist² who prepared the way for Jesus. Isaiah's message may also have had a more immediate message to those returning from the Babylonian exile and the glory of the Lord returning from the wilderness to the rebuilt Temple.

Before the coming of the Lord there must be preparation of hearts and lives. If we are to experience the presence of the Lord in a greater way we must make ourselves ready. There may also be

¹ 2 Cor 1:3-5. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, {4} who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. {5} For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

² Matt 3:1-3

practical things which we need to do in order to prepare for a divine visitation; such as the Jews rebuilding the Temple.

The people of God are to make a highway for others to come to the Lord. Obstacles are to be removed and the way is to be made as direct as possible. Verse four speaks of the humbling of the hills and the lifting up of the valleys – divine reversals and upsets.

The voice of the prophet cries in the wilderness. Sometimes in life we are taken into a wilderness experience; times of dryness, times of boring monotony, times of loneliness. No one chooses to live in the wilderness because the wilderness does not support abundant or easy living; in fact the wilderness barely supports any life. But life does have seasons, and we should recognise that change does come. But change requires preparation. All our lives we go through seasons; it is foolhardy to think that everything is going to remain the same - "What could possibly go wrong in my life. I have a good career; money in the bank; a nice family?" But storms and troubles visit us all in life.

God has a purpose for the wilderness. It is in the wilderness that we hear God's message. In the wilderness our own crooked ways are straightened out and our rough edges are smoothed off. Sometimes the straightest way to God or for God is found in the wilderness.

One of the promises of God in the prophetic books is that wilderness lands will be transformed into fertile and productive fields. God will put rivers in the desert (Isa 43:19-20), which will bloom and rejoice (Isa 35:1, 6-7). The fir trees will grow, and the deserts will look as lush as the Garden of Eden (Isa 51:3). Our lives can be made fruitful by going through the wilderness with God.

The New Testament usually refers to the wilderness as a solitary place. Jesus repeatedly withdrew from the large crowds³ to these places for privacy and a time of prayer with His Father.

The great comfort to God's people is that the Lord is going to reveal his glory and all flesh will see it. There have been times throughout history that God has brought glory to his name, but this will be truly fulfilled with the second advent of Christ.

1.3. THE WORD OF THE LORD

Isa 40:6-8. The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. {7} The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. {8} The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."

Can this message bring comfort to God's people - to be reminded that we are just like grass? It is designed to. At times we feel just like grass, blown this way and that in the wind; flourishing and then quickly withering away. Life can feel futile. But we are born of God's word⁴, we have the promises of His word, and His word abides forever.

³ Luke 4:42; 9:10-12.

⁴ 1 Pet 1:23-25. having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, {24} 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, {25} but the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

Psa 103:15-17. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. {16} For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. {17} But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children,

People are a vain thing to put our confidence in, for they too are like grass. But God's word is eternally trust worthy.

1.4. GOOD NEWS

Isa 40:9-11. O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" {10} Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. {11} He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

The ultimate good news is when the presence of the Lord is in the midst of his people. He comes to protect, rule and bless his people. This prophecy was fulfilled literally when Jesus came and will be repeated at his second advent.

There are times when we can behold the works of our God and see what his strong hand and mighty arm have done in our circumstances.

1.5. WHO IS LIKE UNTO THE LORD?

Isa 40:12-17. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? {13} Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD or as His counsellor has taught Him? {14} With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding? {15} Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. {16} And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. {17} All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.

If anyone could answer yes to the questions in verse 12 then they could be considered qualified to direct God or teach him. But these are the things that only God can do. The nations are dwarfed in comparison. The telescope is needed to see the works of God, but a microscope to observe the work of the nations. In the light of the spiritual realm and eternity, the works of man are insignificant.

Isa 40:18-20. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? {19} The workman moulds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold and the silversmith casts silver chains. {20} Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot; he seeks for himself a skilful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter.

Man in his foolishness compares the Almighty to idols which are the image of beasts. These man-made gods need to be fastened down in case they fall over.

Isa 40:21-24. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? {22} It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. {23} He brings the princes to nothing; he makes the judges of the earth useless. {24} Scarcely shall they be planted, scarcely shall they be sown, scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when He will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.

The people of God need a vision of how big, how mighty their God is. The heavens are God's throne and the earth is his footstool. He is eternal; always the same; known from the foundation of the world. The nations appear as grasshoppers or ants scurrying around on the ground. But all the achievements of men are temporal and soon forgotten.

Isa 40:25-26. "To whom then will you liken me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. {26} Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing.

The stars are God's handiwork, set in place by His greatness. Although we cannot number them, God knows them each by name. By His power not one of them is missing. He is also able to keep each of his people, so that none of us will be missing on that day⁵. Peter also tells us we are kept by God:

1 Pet 1:5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

And yet the Scripture tells us that we also need to keep ourselves:

1 Tim 5:22. ... Keep yourself pure.

1 John 5:21. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Jude 1:21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

1.6. WAIT ON THE LORD

Isa 40:27-31. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? {28} Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. {29} He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might He increases strength. {30} Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, {31} But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

God hears what Israel were saying about him. Their charge is that God is blind, unfair, unjust and uncaring. The people's problem is there ignorance. God asks "Have you not known?"

⁵ John 17:12. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name. Those whom you gave me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

At times we can feel forsaken and overlooked by God, like the psalmist we ask "How long?"⁶ And other people seem to say "Where is your God?"⁷

We do grow weary in life. We can grow weary in our marriages; weary in our jobs; weary in our Christian life. Every day can appear to be a repetition of the last. Change and deliverance does not seem forthcoming. But God cannot grow weary; he does not grow tired of us.

His ways are higher than our ways⁸; we will never be able to search out the thoughts of God. If our faith depends upon us understanding what God is doing in our life, then we are in for a rocky journey. Being God He does not feel he has to explain Himself to us. Be we are required to keep trusting, keep believing.

Waiting is the expression of hope, and brings restoration of spirit, soul and body. Waiting upon God is the secret of finishing the race, and continuing without giving up. The Lord renews our youthful vigour and enthusiasm. Natural strength and will power will wane, but the Lord renews those who wait on Him.

2. CHAPTER 41

2.1. I AM HE

Isa 41:1-4. "Keep silence before Me, O coastlands, and let the people renew their strength! Let them come near, then let them speak; Let us come near together for judgment. {2} "Who raised up one from the east? Who in righteousness called him to His feet? Who gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? Who gave them as the dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow? {3} Who pursued them, and passed safely by the way that he had not gone with his feet? {4} Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? 'I, the LORD, am the first; and with the last I am He.'"

This chapter compares the nation's dumb idols with the God of Israel. The call in verse one is for the surrounding nations to strengthen themselves in order to listen to God's judgment against them.

Who is the warrior king the prophecy refers to? Three candidates would be the king of Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon or the Persian king Cyrus. Verse 9 suggests that the time frame for this prophetic word is after the return to Judah under Cyrus. In chapters 44 and 45 Cyrus is mentioned by name. The verb tense used is the past, not indicating that the events had already happened, but showing their certainty. It is as though the prophet had been transported into the future and wrote about what had just happened. These events may be decades away but they are as unalterable as the past God has already spoken the word.

It is the Lord who raises up Cyrus for His purposes, and who gives the nations into his hand. The generations of men are known to and determined by the Lord from the beginning.

⁶ Psa 13:1-2. How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? {2} How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

⁷ Psa 42:3. My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, "Where is your God?"

⁸ Isa 55:9

2.2. IDOL WORSHIPPERS

Isa 41:5-7. The coastlands saw it and feared, the ends of the earth were afraid; they drew near and came. {6} Everyone helped his neighbour, and said to his brother, "Be of good courage!" {7} So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith; He who smoothes with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil, Saying, "It is ready for the soldering"; Then he fastened it with pegs, that it might not totter.

In light of the coming invasion the nations encourage themselves, putting their trust in their idols.

These idols are made by craftsman and they have to be fixed in position so they don't fall over. And yet men will put their trust in these idols to deliver them from an invading army.

2.3. FEAR NOT

Isa 41:8-16. "But you, Israel, are my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend. {9} You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: {10} Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'

Following Cyrus' decree the Jews returned to their homeland from all the nations where they had been scattered. Despite judging them for their severe sin, God never cast off the Jews.

"Fear not" appears three times in verses 10 to 14, and seven reasons are given for us to fear not.

- (1). Presence - For I am with you.
- (2). Relationship - For I am your God.
- (3). Strengthening - I will strengthen you.
- (4). Help - I will help you.
- (5). Undergirding - I will uphold you.
- (6). Intimacy - I will hold your hand.
- (7). God said so.

Similar statement to "fear not" are found in Isaiah 43:1-7.

{11} "Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; they shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish. {12} You shall seek them and not find them; those who contended with you. Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a nonexistent thing. {13} For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'

{14} "Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you," says the LORD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. {15} "Behold, I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and beat them small, and make the hills like chaff. {16} You shall winnow them, the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them; you shall rejoice in the LORD, and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

It has always been futile for nations to think that they can strive with or subdue the Jews. God's people had suffered severe trials and wars, but they will survive, unlike their oppressors.

Israel may have been small and insignificant in their own sight, and in the opinion of the nations, but the Lord is their redeemer. The "Holy One of Israel" is Isaiah's favourite expression for the Lord.

The final verses in this section speak of a future time when Israel will be the super-power and will overcome the nations. To some measure that had been true this last sixty years.

2.4. STREAMS IN THE DESERT

Isa 41:17-20. "The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst. I, the LORD, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. {18} I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. {19} I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together, {20} that they may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Unlike the deaf idols worshipped by the surrounding nations, the Lord hears the cry of his people and supplies their need. The Lord is a covenant keeping God and does not forsake his people.

Emptiness is turned to abundance because of the word of the Lord. In response to the thirsting of His people God supplies the need with rivers, fountains, pools and springs. Similarly abundance is demonstrated by the seven types of trees are mentioned. He is Jehovah-Jirah.

2.5. IDOLS CHALLENGED

Isa 41:21-24. "Present your case," says the LORD. "Bring forth your strong reasons," says the King of Jacob. {22} "Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come. {23} Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and see it together. {24} Indeed you are nothing, and your work is nothing; He who chooses you is an abomination.

The idols are called to bring their predictions of the future or to demonstrate their strength. In response they neither speak or move. Idols are an empty hope and people who choose them commit an abomination before the Lord. Spiritual sin is as damaging and wicked as moral sin.

2.6. THE LORD DECLARES

Isa 41:25-26. I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come; from the rising of the sun he shall call on my name; and he shall come against princes as though mortar, as the potter treads clay. {26} Who has declared from the beginning, that we may know? And former times, that we may say, 'He is righteous'? Surely there is no one who shows, surely there is no one who declares, surely there is no one who hears your words.

It is God who declares the future and pronounces what will happen. It is the Lord who declared and then raised up the warrior king who will come from the east (rising sun) via the north. The invading

armies of the Assyrians and Babylonians always travelled from the North into the area around Israel, even though they came from the East.

There are many mediums and spiritists who claim to foretell the future. Seeking instruction from them is an abomination to the Lord and is also totally vain. It is the Lord who declares and determines the future.

Isa 41:27-29. The first time I said to Zion, 'Look, there they are!' And I will give to Jerusalem one who brings good tidings. {28} For I looked, and there was no man; I looked among them, but there was no counsellor, who, when I asked of them, could answer a word. {29} Indeed they are all worthless; their works are nothing; their moulded images are wind and confusion.

The NASB phrases verse 27 in a far clearer manner:

Isa 41:27. Formerly *I said* to Zion, 'Behold, here they are.' And to Jerusalem, 'I will give a messenger of good news.'⁹

Because Israel turned to idols they were spiritually confused and God could find no man to act as intercessor or mediator.

3. CHAPTER 42

3.1. THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Isa 42:1-3. "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, my Elect One in whom my soul delights! I have put my Spirit upon Him; he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. {2} He will not cry out, nor raise his voice, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. {3} A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench; he will bring forth justice for truth.

The end of the last chapter said that the Lord could find "no man" so the Lord introduces His elected and anointed Servant. The Messiah is the anointed servant, and the purpose of the anointing is described in Isaiah 61:1-3. Sometimes in our family, our work place or our street, there can be "no man". We might be the only Christian in the circumstance; we might be the only intercessor. So let fulfil our responsibilities.

As servants of God we are upheld by God's power. How was Jesus upheld? Through a living relationship with the Father. The Father protected him and kept him; ensuring that only the Father's will was done to Jesus. Outside influences, situations and disappointments (betrayal, desertion, misunderstanding, opposition etc.) could not interfere with God's plan for Jesus' life - the heavens reign. The only thing that could have interfered with Jesus' destiny was his own will. That's why He prayed not my will but yours be done.

The Father delights in His servants. He experiences great joy and pleasure when a man or woman follows Him and does His will. He is looking for good and faithful servants.

As verse 2 describes Jesus came in meekness and lowliness. Humility is a characteristic of Godliness. Jesus was humble - he was not filled with his own importance, and he surrendered his will and rights to his Father. And yet Jesus demonstrated a strong character, following and fulfilling God's purpose,

⁹*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update.*

not fearing men, or conforming to their requirements, and challenging hypocrisy and untruth head on. He never cried out for his own rights, but he did cry out for the purposes of his Father.

He was lamb-like, in that he was submissive to his Father's will. He put the kingdom of God before his own rights and comfort. Gentleness and compassion were the hall marks of the Messiah's ministry.

He gently handles broken people, restoring their hope and dignity. A bruised reed refers to breaking of the human heart and soul. A smouldering flax refers to a human spirit that has lost its vigour and flame; that had grown cool. Many people are bruised in heart, tender and crushed by circumstances. Their heart's dreams and aspirations are crushed by life, by other people. Bruised reeds hang their heads; their spirit is broken; they cannot lift themselves up. Will-power isn't strong enough and time don't heal.

The light, heat and fire have gone out of some people's lives, leaving only the smoking remnants of the hope and dreams that were once in their breast. Some people were once full of the Holy Spirit, full of spiritual fight and vigour, full of purpose. But now the fire burns low.

Jesus offers acceptance and understanding, followed by healing and hope. Moses could see no way back, David could expect no mercy; the woman caught in adultery had no right to expect compassion; the woman by the well was trapped as an outcast. Peter had blown it big time and did not know what to do or where to go; the dying thief had nothing but regrets and the knowledge that it was too late. Jesus brings hope, healing and understanding to all who will put their trust in Him.

Bringing forth is to do with travailing in birth. The travail of his soul would bring forth justice (or justification) and truth. We cannot bring anything forth, that is bring to spiritual birth, until it has been conceived within us; that is until we have received God's seed (word) within our hearts. That prophetic vision then has to be fed and nurtured within us, until it grows, fills our being and consumes us. It will define our future; it will have its own agendas and timetables. Whilst we are great with prophetic child, we will be glowing with spiritual health.

Isa 42:4-7. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for his law." {5} Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it: {6} "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles¹⁰, {7} to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

Verse 4 says that the Messiah will not fail nor be discouraged. Jesus did not fail then, and he will not fail now. There are no set backs that will cause him to be discouraged. The fruit of His labours are truth and justice. The Messiah's vision was a world vision, and it still is. Establishing is to do with completing the foundation, to bring to a point of maturity - such as when a tree or plant is well established.

We all naturally are prone to discouragement. But if we walk with Him, if we cast our care on Him, then we will not be discouraged long. We need to remember who our God is (verse 5): creator, sustainer of all things and all life - physical and spiritual.

¹⁰ Acts 13:47.

Verse 6 describes how the Messiah was called - Jesus came in obedience to the Father; he was held, or sustained - speaking of intimacy and relationship and he was given - speaking of sacrifice.

3.2. THE LORD ARISES

Isa 42:8-9. I am the LORD, that is my name; and my glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to carved images. {9} Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

The former things did not come to stay. God is always doing new things. When Moses came the expression of worship changed from what it had formerly been from the Patriarchs. The people of Israel wanted to be structured like the kingdoms around them, so the time of kings came. David and Solomon worked to put away the tabernacle and build a temple. After the exile in Babylon, there were no longer any kings in Israel. Everything changed when Jesus came - no more sacrifices, suddenly the Gentiles were no longer hated and despised but co-heirs, pork was on the menu and we are all priests.

The former things were once important, once worth dying for, but now they have to be sacrificed for the new thing that God is doing. It can take bold, dynamic and controversial leadership to bring people into a new thing. The church needs to be reshaped, not to follow a fashion, or employ a technique, but to be relevant and effective in reaching the current community.

Mat 9:16-17. "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. {17} "Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Isa will return to the theme of new things:

Isa 43:19. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

In response to the new things that the Lord is doing, the people of God need to sing a new song.

Isa 42:10-17. Sing to the LORD a new song and His praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea and all that is in it, you coastlands and you inhabitants of them! {11} Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing; let them shout from the top of the mountains. {12} Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare His praise in the coastlands.

The call to praise following the new thing is not just to Israel but all nations to the ends of the earth. Kedar and Sela are Arabian towns.

{13} The LORD shall go forth like a mighty man; He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war. He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud; He shall prevail against His enemies. {14} "I have held my peace a long time, I have been still and restrained myself. Now I will cry like a woman in labour, I will pant and gasp at once. {15} I will lay waste the mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will make the rivers coastlands, and I will dry up the pools.

The Lord will suddenly arise and will wage decisive war against his enemies.

{16} I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them. {17} They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, who trust in carved images, who say to the moulded images, 'You are our gods.'

Following the warfare the Lord will lead his chosen ones in ways of blessing. It is not easy bringing blind people along ways that they do not know, that they are unfamiliar with. At times God takes us along unfamiliar and uncertain ways. We are to trust in him fully.

God can also take the church into new things and new ways, ways we do not know, expressions of church we have not experienced before. The truth of the gospel message does not change, the doctrine of Christ is unalterable, but the way church is done, the way church relates to the world must change to be in line with what God is doing.

3.3. ISRAEL PLUNDERED

Isa 42:18-25. "Hear you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see. {19} Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as he who is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? {20} Seeing many things, but you do not observe; opening the ears, but he does not hear." {21} The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honourable. {22} But this is a people robbed and plundered; All of them are snared in holes, And they are hidden in prison houses; they are for prey, and no one delivers; for plunder, and no one says, "Restore!"

{23} Who among you will give ear to this? Who will listen and hear for the time to come? {24} Who gave Jacob for plunder and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the LORD, He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, nor were they obedient to His law. {25} Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger and the strength of battle; It has set him on fire all around, yet he did not know; and it burned him, Yet he did not take it to heart.

Being spiritually deaf and blind is a choice people make. God calls them to repentance. But Israel, the Lord's servant is deaf and blind because of their worship of deaf and blind idols. The people of God, who should have been bringing spiritual revelation, authority and purpose into the world, had been paralysed. Verse 20 ("but you do...") clarifies that this servant is Israel, to whom the message came. The one whose potential had been to be perfect (whole, complete).

When destruction, opposition and loss came upon Israel, they came from the Lord because of the people's sins. Before we can be delivered, we need to know the spiritual cause behind the situations, and also what our response should be.

4. CHAPTER 43

4.1. THE RETURN OF THE EXILES

Isa 43:1-2. But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. {2} When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.

"Fear not" appears twice in verses 1 to 7 and four reasons for not fearing:

- (1). Ownership - I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine.
- (2). Presence in trouble - I will be with you, I am with you.
- (3). Costly, precious and loved.
- (4). It is commanded!

The command to fear not is repeated in the first verse of the next chapter. If fear was inappropriate for the Old Testament people of God, how much more so for believers who are living after the death and resurrection of Jesus?

Jacob was created in the womb as "Jacob", but later he was reformed into Israel.

The people of God will have to face the trial of passing through rivers, but are assured that even if the water is neck deep, they shall not be overwhelmed. Our security is in the presence of God.

It is necessary to pass through rivers to get from one place to another. In the Exodus they had to pass through the Red Sea and later the Jordan River. If we are going to expand our territory, if we are going to come into something new, then we are going to have to cross some rivers. God does not provide a bridge or a boat, but he promises he will be with us.

On occasions trouble sweeps in like a river that bursts its banks, and threaten to overwhelm us. But again God has promised to be with us.

The people of God will also have to go through the trial of fire, when flames threaten destroy. But again we are promised that we will not be consumed. Peter writes:

1 Pet 1:6-7. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, {7} that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Sometimes for unknown reasons there is need for the people of God to endure grievous trials. Times of testing times comes. Times of persecution. But just as fire cannot harm gold, so tribulation cannot harm our faith. It is our eternal faith in God that He values. It is more important than our temporal life here.

Isa 43:3-7. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. {4} Since you were precious in my sight, you have been honoured, and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life. {5} Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; {6} I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth; {7} everyone who is called by my name, whom I have created for my glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

God rewarded the Persian monarch Cyrus for letting the Jews return to their home land, by giving him Egypt and Seba (Ethiopia).

The commands in verse 6 are unheard by human ears but nevertheless are obeyed; the voice of God commands the release of exile Jews.

4.2. THE LORD ALONE

Isa 43:8-13. Bring out the blind people who have eyes, and the deaf who have ears. {9} Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled. Who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear and say, "It is truth." {10} "You are my witnesses," says the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am He. Before me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. {11} I, even I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour. {12} I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are my witnesses," Says the LORD, "that I am God. {13} Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?"

Israel, the Servant of the Lord, was accused of being spiritually blind and deaf in the previous chapter. But here it is the other nations that are accused of being spiritually ignorant. The Lord demands that the peoples come and bear testimony to any accurate predictions their gods have made. But of course there aren't any.

But Israel can testify to what the Lord has said and revealed. Only He has revealed these strange events and political changes the nations were suffering. This is because only He is God; and neither is there any other saviour. All other religions and ways are false. They cannot save.

Verse 12 would be better understood as by reading the command "there shall be no foreign god among you".

Verse 13 reminds us that the plans of God cannot be thwarted or reversed.

4.3. FORGET THE FORMER THINGS

Isa 43:14-21. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and The Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon, and bring them all down as fugitives; the Chaldeans, who rejoice in their ships. {15} I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King." {16} Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters, {17} who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power (they shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick): {18} "Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. {19} Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. {20} The beast of the field will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. {21} This people I have formed for myself; they shall declare my praise.

The Lord will bring down the mighty Babylonians. The ships that they once rejoiced in, will take them away captive to other nations. This He does as vengeance for what was done to Israel.

The Lord's unique place in Israel needed to be recognised by the people. It is He who delivered Israel from Egypt by making a way through the Red Sea; destroying the Egyptian army in the waters. But Israel should not concentrate on the past glories of God's interventions, because He is doing a new thing.

Our past can be a snare that holds us back - whether that past is good or bad. The Pharisees knew that God had spoken to Moses, but God had been speaking for 2000 years since then, and they did not know it. Those at Nazareth looked back upon the power prophets¹¹ as the "good old days", but Jesus told them that those "good old days" were actually faithless times¹². Today we look back upon Wigglesworth, the Jeffery brothers etc. But God is working to day.

God can be doing a new thing, and yet we can be oblivious to what he is doing, therefore He asks in verse 19 "Shall you not know it?"

The prophetic voice returns to talking about making a way of deliverance through the wilderness. This could be metaphoric or literal when the Lord kept Israel when she returned from Babylon under Cyrus' command. Water was supplied over the long journey home.

¹¹ Elijah and Elisha

¹² Luke 4:4:24-30

4.4. ISRAEL'S SIN

Isa 43:21-28. This people I have formed for myself; they shall declare my praise. {22} But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; and you have been weary of Me, O Israel. {23} You have not brought me the sheep for your burnt offerings, nor have you honoured me with your sacrifices. I have not caused you to serve with grain offerings, nor wearied you with incense. {24} You have bought me no sweet cane with money, nor have you satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices; but you have burdened me with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities. {25} "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins. {26} Put Me in remembrance; let us contend together; state your case, that you may be acquitted. {27} Your first father sinned, and your mediators have transgressed against Me. {28} Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; I will give Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.

All the blessing and deliverance previously described by Isaiah are still in the distant future. His own generation faced judgement, and it is to that the prophetic voice turns.

Despite every the Lord has done and said, Israel has grown weary of serving God. They have not sought him, nor honoured him with the offerings demanded by the Law. They have not delighted in serving God, but rather seen it as a chore. Also they have wearied the Lord with their sins.

Nevertheless God wishes to forgive them and offers them opportunity for repentance. But already it is clear they will not change and therefore judgement will come upon Israel. The princes of the sanctuary is the priesthood.

5. CHAPTER 44

5.1. LIVING WATER

Isa 44:1-5. "Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. {2} Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. {3} For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring; {4} They will spring up among the grass Like willows by the watercourses.' {5} One will say, 'I am the Lord's'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; another will write with his hand, 'The Lord's,' and name himself by the name of Israel.

We need not fear because God formed us, chose us and His will shall be done. He has purposes and plans for us. God's interest in us is not passing or short lived. Neither is it based upon what we can do for him. God has been eternally committed to us and is also eternally faithful to his commitment. We can therefore respond to the command "Fear not".

Jeshurun means *upright* and is a title for Israel also used in Deuteronomy¹³.

In the previous chapter we saw God promising water in the wilderness for the return of the exiles. Here the promise is for spiritual refreshing and life since the provision is made through the pouring forth of God's Spirit. A time of spiritual revival is foretold when the people of God will thrive and be dedicated to the Lord.

¹³ Deut 32:15; 33:5; 33:26

This is primarily fulfilled at the day of Pentecost.

John 4:14. "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

John 7:37-39. On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. {38} "He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." {39} But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

During the Feast of Tabernacles the Jews enacted the Ezekiel's vision of a river of water flowing out of the temple, by pouring water down the temple mount. Jesus' cry states that when people come to Him, that prophecy would be fulfilled by living waters flowing out of their heart. The living water is the person of the Holy Spirit.

The life giving properties of water were understood in ancient Israel. The land was capable of being a garden or a wilderness. Spiritually we need the flood of God's Spirit to enable us to be fruitful. Ezekiel's vision of living water flowing from the temple¹⁴ is fully fulfilled in future time of the Millennium.

Verse 5 shows that in that day to belong to Israel will be considered an honour.

5.2. THE LIVING GOD AND DUMB IDOLS

Isa 44:6-8. "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God. {7} And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them. {8} Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are my witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.'"

Again Israel are reminded that only the Lord has predicted the future, because he is the only God. And once again the people of God are told not to fear.

Isa 44:9-20. Those who make an image, all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit; they are their own witnesses; they neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed. {10} Who would form a god or mould an image that profits him nothing? {11} Surely all his companions would be ashamed; and the workmen, they are mere men. Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, they shall be ashamed together.

¹⁴ Ezek 47

{12} The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. {13} The craftsman stretches out his rule, he marks one out with chalk; he fashions it with a plane, he marks it out with the compass, and makes it like the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. {14} He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak; he secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it.

{15} Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself; yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; indeed he makes a god and worships it; he makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. {16} He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat; he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." {17} And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"

{18} They do not know nor understand; for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. {19} And no one considers in his heart, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire, yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten it; and shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" {20} He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside; and he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Worshipping man-made idols is folly. With supreme logical argument the Lord states that man can not make something greater than himself. How can a weak man make god? A blacksmith would make a metal idol for a rich man, whereas the carpenter would make a wooden idol for a poor man.

God mocks man that takes wood, burns half of it for his need and then worships the other half.

The problem in the nations was not a lack of wisdom but hardness of heart and blindness of spirit.

5.3. FUTURE DELIVRANCE

Isa 44:21-28. "Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I have formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me! {22} I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to me, for I have redeemed you."

{23} Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel.

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{24} Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and he who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; {25} who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness; {26} who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited,' to the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built,' and I will raise up her waste places; {27} who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers'; {28} who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."' "

Israel is not blinded like the other nations because of the word that God has given them. Here God tells Israel to remember, in order to encourage faith and endearment. Previously they were told to forget the former things because the excellence of what God was about to do.

They are told to remember and return so that the Lord can forgive them. The Lord's mercy is always the foundation of our relationship with God.

Verse 23 describes how there will be great rejoicing throughout heaven and earth when the Lord appears in Zion¹⁵.

Whether it is the ancient Babylonian diviners or the modern New Age spiritists, not only do people consult with lying demons, but also the Lord will frustrate their occultic activities. In seeking knowledge they become confused. In seeking wisdom they are driven mad. In contrast the Lord confirms the word of his servant and performs the council of messengers.

The climax of the chapter is approaching. God reveals his purposes through his prophets. The Lord will rebuild Jerusalem and Judah. The Lord will call forth Cyrus, the king of Persia to enable this to happen.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote: "Now Cyrus learned this (rebuilding the Temple) by reading the book that Isaiah had left of his own prophecies 210 years before. ... These things Isaiah foretold 140 years before the Temple was destroyed. When Cyrus, therefore, had read them, and had admired their divine character, an impulse and emulation seized him to do what was written." *Believer's Bible Commentary*

¹⁵ Isa 55:12. "For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

6. CHAPTER 45

6.1. CYRUS – THE LORD’S ANOINTED

Isa 45:1-6. "Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held; to subdue nations before him and loose the armour of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: {2} 'I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. {3} I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel.

{4} For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known me. {5} I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides me. I will gird you, though you have not known me, {6} that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other;

Having introduced Cyrus in the last chapter, the Lord now addresses Cyrus directly explaining how it is the Lord who has raised Cyrus up and enabled him to achieve everything he has. All this the Lord has done for the sake of Israel and for the Lord’s name sake.

To Cyrus “the hidden riches of secret places” would refer to gold and jewels kept safe in foreign kingdoms. To the New Testament believer there are hidden riches experienced in the secret place of our personal communion with God.

Seven times in this chapter the phrase "there is no other" is used by the Lord to state that there is no other God.

Isa 45:7-8. I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.' {8} "Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together. I, the LORD, have created it.

The sovereign king of heaven ultimately controls events on earth. For the Israelites who fled from Pharaoh the Lord provided light, but their attackers were plunged into darkness. For his purposes the Lord sends war or brings peace. For Israel's sake the Lord will give Cyrus success in warfare.

The Authorised Version translated verse seven as "... I make peace and create evil...", and this has caused some individuals to stumble, believing it meant that God was the creator or author of evil. The context of the verse is warfare and strife among nations, and the Hebrew word *ra*¹⁶ would be better translated here as trouble, strife or calamity. God is not the author of evil; He created all things good. But the Lord does raise up nations like Assyria, Babylon and Persia for his purposes. He sends warfare to judge nations.

The Lord's desire is to bring salvation to the earth, such that righteousness may abound. This work starts in heaven. Cyrus' reign would help bring forth a religious revival for the Jews. When Jesus, the Lord's anointed servant arrives, then he will bring forth righteousness to all the earth.

¹⁶ Often translated as evil or wicked.

6.2. ARGUING WITH GOD

Isa 45:9-11. "Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'? {10} Woe to him who says to his father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to the woman, 'What have you brought forth?'" {11} Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me of things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of my hands, you command me.

The prophetic voice now returns to declaring woe. This time it is to people who are angry at and who argue with God. This is as ridiculous as a clay pot arguing with the potter about his workmanship. Yet this is how Israel are treating the Lord. In particular verse 13 suggests that they argue about the Lord raising up Cyrus, a foreign king, to be used as a redeemer. God says if men have to strive let them strive with their equals (earth's broken pots), but let them not imagine they can strive with God.

Verse 11 should probably be phrased as "Do you ask me... Do you command me?"

Isa 45:12-14. I have made the earth, and created man on it. I; My hands; stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. {13} I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; he shall build my city and let my exiles go free, not for price nor reward," Says the LORD of hosts. {14} Thus says the LORD: "The labour of Egypt and merchandise of Cush and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you, and they shall be yours; they shall walk behind you, they shall come over in chains; and they shall bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying, 'Surely God is in you, and there is no other; there is no other God.'"

The Lord emphasis that He is the creator of heaven and earth and can do what he wants in both for his purposes, including raising up and directing Cyrus.

As a reward for letting Israel go free, the Lord will grant Cyrus conquests in Egypt and Ethiopia (Isa 43:3). At that time these former enemies of Israel will honour the God of Israel, recognising his work.

6.3. THE CREATOR'S PLAN

Isa 45:15-21. Truly you are God, who hide Yourself, O God of Israel, the Saviour! {16} They shall be ashamed and also disgraced all of them; they shall go in confusion together, who are makers of idols. {17} But Israel shall be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever. {18} For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other. {19} I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in vain'; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

{20} "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you who have escaped from the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god that cannot save. {21} Tell and bring forth your case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour; there is none besides me.

God's designs and plans for creation and mankind are good. It is sin that destroy meaning and makes life vain. The Lord has been forthright and fair with Israel. There is a good reward in serving him.

The call is to Israel who has escaped from the nations, to understand the worthlessness of idols and the power of God. Can idol worshippers produce any evidence to argue against the Lord's claim to be the only God?

Isa 45:22-25. "Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. {23} I have sworn by myself; the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. {24} He shall say, 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him. {25} In the LORD all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.'"

The Lord is Lord of all the earth and His purpose was always that all nations be saved through looking to him. It is only in the church age that this has been truly possible.

When God establishes some eternal truth its immutability is illustrated by the Lord taking an oath. The New Testament twice quotes this verse:

Rom 14:11-12. For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." {12} So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Phil 2:9-11. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, {10} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, {11} and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Rather than "He shall say" verse 24 could be phrased as "They will say of me..." Those who are now angry at God will be filled with shame when they bow their knee before the King of kings.

7. CHAPTER 46

Isa 46:1-2. Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle. Your carriages were heavily loaded, a burden to the weary beast. {2} They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but have themselves gone into captivity.

Bel and Nebo are the Babylonian idols that will be carried away on carts by the Persians. These idols are heavy and difficult to be carried, but as gods they could not deliver themselves or their worshippers from burdens or captivity.

Like the Hebrew *Baal*, Bel is a generic term for a god but as a proper noun it refers to the chief Babylonian false god Marduk. Nebo was supposed to be the son of Marduk and in Babylonian mythology was the spokesman for the gods.

Isa 46:3-5. "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb: {4} Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. {5} To whom will you liken me, and make me equal and compare me, that we should be alike?

In contrast to idols which have to be carried by the people who worship them, the God of Israel has always carried and will always carry his people. He is not a man-made god, but Israel are the people He formed for himself. False religion is always a dead burden that weary people, whereas serving the living God is life giving.

Isa 46:6-11. They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god; they prostrate themselves, yes, they worship. {7} They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it and set it in its place, and it stands; from its place it shall not move. Though one cries out to it, yet it cannot answer nor save him out of his trouble. {8} Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors. {9} Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, {10} declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,' {11} calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.

People will always lavish their money on the thing they worship.

Rebellious Israel are charged to remember that the Lord has proven himself to be alive through the way he has led and delivered them and through the way he has revealed the future to them. They are called transgressors, stubborn-hearted and unrighteous.

In verse 11 Cyrus is described as a bird of prey.

Isa 46:12-13. "Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, who are far from righteousness: {13} I bring my righteousness near, it shall not be far off; my salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, For Israel My glory.

For His own name's sake the Lord will place salvation in Zion. This is fulfilled in Jesus.

8. CHAPTER 47

8.1. BABYLON JUDGED

Isa 47:1-5. Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate. {2} Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, take off the skirt; uncover the thigh; pass through the rivers. {3} Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame will be seen; I will take vengeance and I will not arbitrate with a man. {4} As for our Redeemer, the LORD of hosts is His name, the Holy One of Israel. {5} Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no longer be called The Lady of Kingdoms.

Isaiah now elaborates on the fall of the Babylonian empire. In previous prophecies he has not mentioned the rise of Babylon or the destruction of the temple, apart from a brief word to Hezekiah.

Babylon will be humiliated and treated like slaves - receiving what they did to other nations. No longer will the nation be considered a lady.

Israel may be judged, but always her redeemer will ensure that her future will not fail.

Isa 47:6-10. I was angry with my people; I have profaned my inheritance and given them into your hand. You showed them no mercy; on the elderly you laid your yoke very heavily. {7} And you said, 'I shall be a lady forever,' so that you did not take these things to heart, nor remember the latter end of them. {8} Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children'; {9} But these two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day: The loss of children, and widowhood. They shall come upon you in their fullness because of the multitude of your sorceries, for the great abundance of your enchantments. {10} For you have trusted in your wickedness; you have said, 'No one sees me'; your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; and you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one else besides me.'

Although the Babylonians were the means of judgment, their cruel and excessive ways brings judgment upon themselves.

Pride comes before a fall¹⁷. Pride blinds our eyes and brings self-deception. Many an empire has considered itself invincible, indestructible and eternal - but the heavens rule. Greece used to be the world wide language, but no longer. Equally English will probably eventually cease from being the world wide language.

In their pride the Babylonians could see no possibility of disaster, but disaster was coming.

God will judge their wickedness and sorcery.

Isa 47:11-15. Therefore evil shall come upon you; you shall not know from where it arises. And trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon you suddenly, which you shall not know. {12} Stand now with your enchantments and the multitude of your sorceries, in which you have laboured from your youth; perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you will prevail. {13} You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; let now the astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you From what shall come upon you. {14} Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; It shall not be a coal to be warmed by, nor a fire to sit before! {15} Thus shall they be to you with whom you have laboured, your merchants from your youth; they shall wander each one to his quarter. No one shall save you.

Despite all their horoscope predictions, the sudden destruction that will come upon Babylon will not be expected. When the Persian army came against Babylon, the defenders believed that their city was impenetrable and were blasé in their attitude towards the attack¹⁸.

¹⁷ Prov 16:18

¹⁸ Dan 5:1-4. Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. {2} While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. {3} Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his

These verse give an insight into the religion of the Babylonians, which involved sorcery, enchantments and astrology. Known of these would be able to help them either predict the future or defend the city.

9. CHAPTER 48

9.1. OBSTINATE ISRAEL

Isa 48:1-2. "Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; who swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness; {2} For they call themselves after the holy city, and lean on the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts is His name:

The prophetic voice now speaks to the Israelites of Isaiah's day, and warns believers of every generation. The word is to those who physically are the people of God, who can trace their genealogy to the patriarchs and who observe the required religious practise - but whose heart is not conformed to God's truth or righteousness. These have a nominal religion. It is worthy of note that verse 1 describes how they swear by the Hebrew proper noun of the one true God, *YHWH*.

He complains that they call themselves by the name of Israel (*prince of God*) but they are not princes. They are descended from Judah (*praise*) but they do not praise Him. They confess the God of Israel but they do not confess their sins. They call themselves after the holy city but they are not holy. They lean on the God of Israel but they are not godly.¹⁹

Isa 48:3-8. "I have declared the former things from the beginning; they went forth from my mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. {4} Because I knew that you were obstinate, and your neck was an iron sinew, and your brow bronze, {5} even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my carved image and my melted image have commanded them.' {6} "You have heard; see all this. And will you not declare it? I have made you hear new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them. {7} They are created now and not from the beginning; and before this day you have not heard them, lest you should say, 'Of course I knew them.' {8} Surely you did not hear, surely you did not know; surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb.

The age old accusation against the people of God is that they were stiff-necked, unbending and unyielding. God accuses them of dealing treacherously with him, like a wife breaking the marriage covenant.

The Lord had accurately revealed events in the past before they happened, and now he was revealing new things. These things are also certain, but they have been previously hidden. The

concubines drank from them. {4} They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

¹⁹ *Believer's Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

people of God needed to humble themselves before the Lord and take him seriously. No longer should they toy with religion but they should mend their hearts and ways.

We notice that even those who have a nominal religion are accused of having idols.

God's word to Cyrus proved to Israel as well as to the Persian king that the Lord alone is God, and that he performed all these things. This was the new thing that was previously unknown.

Isa 48:9-13. "For my name's sake I will defer my anger, and for my praise I will restrain it from you, So that I do not cut you off. {10} Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. {11} For My own sake, for my own sake, I will do it; for how should my name be profaned? And I will not give my glory to another. {12} "Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, my called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last. {13} Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand has stretched out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand up together.

The Lord had invested his reputation and the glory of his name in Israel. For this cause God will be merciful and will bring Israel's salvation and eternal security to pass - not because they deserve it. But they will suffer affliction; both as punishment and for refining.

Isa 48:14-16. "All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. {15} I, even I, have spoken; Yes, I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper. {16} Come near to me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit Have sent me."

This section appears to be speaking of Cyrus.

Isa 48:17-19. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go. {18} Oh, that you had heeded my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. {19} Your descendants also would have been like the sand and the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; his name would not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me."

The teaching and commandments of the Lord are for the profit of his people, and would produce peace, righteousness and prosperity. If they had obeyed they would not have had to go into captivity.

9.2. FLEEING FROM EXILE

Isa 48:20-22. Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, declare, proclaim this, utter it to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!" {21} And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts; he caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; he also split the rock, and the waters gushed out. {22} "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

Despite their stiff-necked attitude and disobedience the Lord will again redeem Israel, this time from the Babylonians. As in the exodus from Egypt, He will provide water in the wilderness for their return journey.

Righteous living produces peace of heart and peaceful habitations. These things cannot be bought with wealth but are the result of being right with God. The wicked therefore never know peace.

10. CHAPTER 49

10.1. THE LORD'S SERVANT

Isa 49:1-4. Listen, O coastlands, to me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The LORD has called me from the womb; from the matrix of my mother he has made mention of my name. {2} And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he has hidden me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver he has hidden me. {3} And he said to me, "You are my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." {4} Then I said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, and my work with my God."

In this passage the servant of the Lord starts by speaking to the Gentile people. He tells them that he has been specially anointed from even before his birth. The Christmas story is now known throughout the world, and is a distinguishing feature of Jesus.

In verse 3 the servant is called Israel, but subsequent verse speak of one who is to gather Israel back. He is therefore one who represents or rules Israel. This servant has been predestined, prepared and hidden. He is like a weapon in the hands of God, ready for revealing. Verse 6 is talking to the Messiah who would be a light to the Gentiles and bring salvation through the world. This is about Jesus.

Both swords and arrows require preparation. Swords are forged and arrow shafts are stripped cleansed and straightened. Before the Lord can use us like a sword or arrow he has to make us like them. An arrow consists of a arrow head, a shaft, and the flights. The arrow head is the gifting that God puts in us (our calling); the flights are our sensitivity to the Spirit and of God; the shaft is our character. They all need developing and refining. Our character needs to be strong and straight. The arrow needs to be balanced; i.e. the character needs to be strong enough and big enough, to carry the gifting.

In verse 4 the Spirit of Jesus describes his inner frustration but long term trust. Everything he had done and said appeared to be in vain and achieve nothing - He had been rejected by Israel²⁰. But he knew that God would reward his obedience.

10.2. THE EXALTED MESSIAH

Isa 49:5-8. And now the LORD says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, so that Israel is gathered to him (for I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and My God shall be My strength), {6} Indeed he says, 'It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'

²⁰ John 12:37-38. But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, {38} that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"

{7} Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD who is faithful, The Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You." {8} Thus says the LORD: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you; I will preserve you and give you as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages;

The gathering of Israel back to the Lord prophesied in verse 5 is partly fulfilled through the New Testament church containing many Jews. But it will be fully realised when Jesus returns to reign in Israel.

Verse 6 predicts the calling of the Gentile²¹. As time went by the Old Testament prophets more and more would speak about the Gentiles being saved. This was always God's plan, but could only be realised in the church age, after the Holy Spirit was given.

The Messiah is despised and abhorred, but will ultimately he shall reign.

Verse 8 is fulfilled by Jesus being given as the offering of the New Covenant. He will restore the earth. He will set the captives free, feed the people and give them an inheritance.

Isa 49:9-12. That you may say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,' to those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' "They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all desolate heights. {10} They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water he will guide them. {11} I will make each of my mountains a road, and my highways shall be elevated. {12} Surely these shall come from afar. Look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim²²."

A time of blessing and spiritual abundance will be brought forth. This verse describes the spiritual blessing enjoyed by the redeemed of the Lord using a similar language to the deliverance of the Jews from captivity.

According to Rabbinic tradition certain the roads to each of the cities of refuge had to be kept well maintained to assist and not hinder those fleeing from the avenger of blood. Similarly those now fleeing from the *wrath that is to come* need elevated highways to help them. It is the church's responsibility maintain these highways, giving clear signposts and unrestricted access to Christ.

Verse 12 describes the gathering of dispersed exiles is described and is fulfilled in the return of the Jews and the growth of the church.

10.3. THE LORD'S COMFORT AND COMMITMENT

Isa 49:13-16. Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have mercy on His afflicted. {14} But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me." {15} "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. {16} See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

²¹ Acts 13:47. "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

²² Possibly China – *Bible Believer's Commentary*

The fulfilment of God's plans will cause universal rejoicing in God. But as Israel pass through the fire of testing and judgment she accuses God of breaking His marriage covenant with her. The following verses are about the restoration of the nation of Israel.

In answer to Zion's accusation the Lord reassures her of his unfailing faithfulness. Although the closest earthly relationships can falter and people can abandon those they love the most; it is not possible that the Lord should forsake his covenant with his people. He is not a man that he should lie or change his mind²³. The people of God are continually held as a memorial before the Lord, like a tattoo on his hands.

10.4. ZION'S FUTURE BLESSING

Isa 49:17-21. Your sons shall make haste; your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you. {18} Lift up your eyes, look around and see; all these gather together and come to you. As I live," says the LORD, "You shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, and bind them on you as a bride does. {19} "For your waste and desolate places, and the land of your destruction, will even now be too small for the inhabitants; and those who swallowed you up will be far away. {20} The children you will have, after you have lost the others, will say again in your ears, 'The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell.' {21} Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has begotten these for me, since I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro? And who has brought these up? There I was, left alone; but these, where were they?'"

The Lord is speaking to Zion of her future joys, and in doing so gives assurance to the people of Israel that the nation has a future. A new day and a new generation will arise and the past oppressions will be forgotten. The Lord will cause a re-gathering and increase in the remnant of the people of God. The abundance and blessing that will result cannot be envisaged at the current time. Instead of the land being desolate, the future generation will complain because of a lack of space.

In that future day the people of God will not be defined by the current calamities.

Isa 49:22-26. Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up my standard for the peoples; they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders; {23} Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for me."

The word of the Lord is the power behind the actions of the nations. Through his oath the Jews are brought back to their promised land. The people of God will be held in a privileged position and assisted by the great authorities within the nations. Such an assisted return was fulfilled under Cyrus, in the last Century and could also happed again after the return of Christ. Although Israel has to wait a long time for their justification and exultation in the end they will not be ashamed.

²³ Num 23:19

{24} Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the righteous be delivered? {25} But thus says the LORD: "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children. {26} I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine. All flesh shall know that I, the LORD, am your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

It seems impossible that tiny Israel could be delivered from the might empires that take her captive, but it will happen. Just as Egypt suffered the judgement of God for oppressing Israel, so will all nations suffer who afflict the people of God.

11. CHAPTER 50

11.1. ESTRANGED ISRAEL

Isa 50:1-3. Thus says the LORD: "Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away. {2} Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because there is no water, and die of thirst. {3} I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering."

In the first three verses the Lord questions his people concerning the reason for their predicament. It appeared as though the Lord had ended his covenant with Israel, as though he had divorced her. With the people of God being taken into slavery, they are asked if it is because of the Lord's debts. No, they had sold themselves into slavery through their sin. This is also the reason why the covenant appears to have failed.

Other Scriptures speak of God divorcing his people because of their sin²⁴.

Israel had not trusted in the Lord nor had they sought him. They were not aware that he had visited them, but no one had responded to his call. When he had sought for mediators he found none. He asks if they thought he was powerless and unable to save.

But he is strong and able to save. He has the power to send drought and flood (clothing heaven with blackness). The drying up of the sea and rivers may be a reference to the Red Sea and Jordan River.

The response of God's people should have been to seek God, and humble themselves. They should have put on sackcloth, not the sky.

²⁴ Jer 3:8. "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also."

11.2. THE MESSIAH SPEAKS

Isa 50:4-5. "The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning; He awakens my ear to hear as the learned. {5} The Lord GOD has opened my ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away.

The prophet is speaking in the first voice, but subsequent verses indicate that it is the voice of the Messiah speaking through him.

Jesus had a ministry of speaking the word of God to people – a refreshing word in season, the answer to the weary and broken. Unlike the people in the previous verses, His ears are open to hear. God wants us to listen to Him and to speak His word – a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge or a word of encouragement. God's word and full of grace and truth. This requires a meaningful relationship, seeking God day by day.

The word for *learned* could also be translated as disciple. Jesus was submitted to the father's discipline and teaching; and was therefore qualified to led disciples of his own.

Isa 50:6-9. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide my face from shame and spitting. {7} "For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. {8} He is near who justifies me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near Me. {9} Surely the Lord GOD will help me; who is he who will condemn me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

We need to manifest stick-ability, not turning away when the persecution and misunderstanding arises. We need to be submitted to the purposes of God, and His sovereignty. Having a relationship with God will always bring opposition and persecution. Jesus suffered the abuse listed by Isaiah at the hands of his accusers²⁵.

Our confidence is to be in the Lord. He will help, we need not fear what men do, say or think. We need to set ourselves, and be determined concerning which way we shall go. Despite the hardships of verse 6 the Messiah is confident that he will not be ashamed.

If God is for us, who can be against us. Jesus' adversaries did stand against him and accuse him, but that was just a fleeting moment. When the Lord justifies his servants, there is none to condemn. Jesus was shown to be justified at the resurrection.

11.3. FEAR, OBEY AND TRUST

Isa 50:10-11. "Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon his God. {11} Look, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with sparks: Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled; this you shall have from my hand: You shall lie down in torment.

This passages defines what it means to have a relationship with God: Fear the Lord, obey Jesus, trust in the Lord and rely upon Him. Rather than trusting in the Lord or obeying his servant, some seek to overcome the darkness by their own efforts. The Lord will reward their rebellion with torment.

²⁵ Matt 26:67, Matt 27:26, Matt 27:30.

12. CHAPTER 51

12.1. LISTEN

Isa 51:1-3. "Listen to me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. {2} Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him." {3} For the LORD will comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places; he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

This is the first of three calls in this chapter for the people of God to listen.

The Lord tells those who truly are seeking after righteousness to remember their ancestors; Abraham and Sarah. The hearers are to consider their example of faith in God and how God called, led and protected them in faithfulness. Abraham was accredited as righteous through faith in the promise of God.

Those who now seek the Lord can expect the same faithfulness from God. He has not totally forsaken Zion. He will again make the city to flourish, filling it with comfort, joy and singing. The desolation and sorrow experienced in the time of judgment pass away.

For us today difficult and painful wilderness experiences can be turned into fruitful gardens and places of communion with God.

Isa 51:4-6. "Listen to me, my people; and give ear to me, O my nation: For law will proceed from me, and I will make my justice rest as a light of the peoples. {5} My righteousness is near, my salvation has gone forth, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands will wait upon me, and on my arm they will trust. {6} Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished.

The second call to listen, although a different Hebrew word is used compared to verse 1. The NASB says "Pay attention".

God will be seen to be actively involved in judging nations and bringing justice to pass. His justice and salvation shall be seen. Reference to the peoples and coastlands suggest that it is Israel and the Gentile nations that are illuminated by the light of God's salvation. This is achieved in Jesus.

Verse six describes how the things that seem most permanent and in fact temporal. But God's faithfulness and salvation are for ever.

Isa 51:7-8. "Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is my law: Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults. {8} For the moth will eat them up like a garment and the worm will eat them like wool; but my righteousness will be forever and my salvation from generation to generation."

The third listen and the same word as verse 1 is used. This call is to those who walk with God. In a time of fear they do not need to fear men who are as grass and who will decay to nothing. But the Lord is faithful and he will save.

12.2. AWAKE ARM OF THE LORD

Isa 51:9-11. Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are you not the arm that cut Rahab apart, and wounded the serpent? {10} Are you not the one who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed to cross over? {11} So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The first of three calls to "Awake, awake" (51:17 and 52:1). This one is addressed to the "Arm of the Lord", who is required to put on strength. The Arm of the Lord is asked to arise as in ancient times, to do His wonders afresh, and ransom His people. Who is talking to the arm of the Lord? Is it the people of God or the Spirit of the Lord? I believe that it is the latter. If it had been Israel I suggest that it would have said "us" instead of "the redeemed".

The Arm of the Lord is a title for the Messiah. Chapters 51 and 52 and building up to a revelation of the Messiah in chapter 53.

Rahab is an alternate name for Leviathan and is used in prophecy to indicate the enemies of the people of God, and Egypt in particular²⁶. Rehab is not the woman of the same name from Jericho. Leviathan is called the "fleeing serpent" and the "twisted serpent"²⁷ and was the creature of chaos in ancient mythology. The name is used in Scripture to refer to the enemies of God who were incited by Satan, who God has wounded and will ultimately slay.

The hope given in these passages is for a future redemption of God's people – most likely the Babylonian captivity. Just as the people of God were delivered from Egypt; they will again return from captivity with joy and gladness. However at the time of writing they had not yet been taken into captivity.

Isa 51:12-16. "I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass? {13} And you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. You have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, when he has prepared to destroy. And where is the fury of the oppressor?"

Fear is an act of unbelief. It leads us to forget the Lord our Maker and it comes because we are problem conscious rather than power conscious. Why fear the oppressor, why fear what might be; God deals with what will be. He declares "I will ..."

"Where is the fury of the oppressor?" The people of God will survive longer than their oppressors (whether Assyria or Babylon). This was true for Israel as a nation although of course individuals did perish. So we see the message is to the people of God is a corporate sense, but will not be true for each individual. This is an example of an area where we need to be careful in interpreting and applying prophecy to our selves.

²⁶ Isa 30:6-7

²⁷ Isa 27:1

{14} The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, that he should not die in the pit, and that his bread should not fail. {15} But I am the LORD your God, who divided the sea whose waves roared; The LORD of hosts is His name. {16} And I have put my words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of my hand, that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion, 'You are My people.'"

Verse fourteen describes the joy and expectancy of the captives on the day they are freed. Cyrus fulfilled this in bringing deliverance to the Jews. For all people now, Jesus brings deliverance to every sinner who repents.

The Lord put words into the mouth of Cyrus and Jesus; both of whom are called the servant of God.

12.3. AWAKE JERUSALEM

Isa 51:17-21. Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of His fury; you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out. {18} There is no one to guide her among all the sons she has brought forth; nor is there any who takes her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up. {19} These two things have come to you; who will be sorry for you? Desolation and destruction, famine and sword; by whom will I comfort you? {20} Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, like an antelope in a net; they are full of the fury of the LORD, the rebuke of your God. {21} Therefore please hear this, you afflicted, and drunk but not with wine.

The second call to "Awake, awake". This time it is directed to the people of God. They are to stand up and give account and listen to a decree. This is a call to face their God.

They have been through a time of judgement which has left Israel desolate. But now God has ended that time and removing the cup of judgement from their hand.

God's rebuke brought shame to Israel. Judah's soldiers could not withstand the siege but lay exhausted and powerless. There is no one left to comfort Jerusalem after her destruction.

Isa 51:22-23. Thus says your Lord, the LORD and your God, who pleads the cause of his people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of my fury; you shall no longer drink it. {23} But I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you, who have said to you, 'Lie down, that we may walk over you.' And you have laid your body like the ground, and as the street, for those who walk over."

Judgement is often portrayed as wine in a cup, filled with bitterness and dregs. It was to such a cup that Jesus referred to in Gethsemane²⁸. God's people had drunk of this cup, but now it was to be passed to their oppressors.

Psa 75:7-8. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another. {8} For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down.

²⁸ Mark 14:36

Jer 25:15-16. For thus says the LORD God of Israel to me: "Take this wine cup of fury from my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. {16} "And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them."

13. CHAPTER 52

13.1. AWAKE ZION

Isa 52:1-12. Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you. {2} Shake yourself from the dust, arise; sit down, O Jerusalem! Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion! {3} For thus says the LORD: "You have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money."

The third call to "Awake, awake". Having faced up to judgement and their shame, having been redeemed by the arm of the Lord, the people of God are now called to put on strength and beautiful garments. It is a call to restoration, a returning of the exiles to Jerusalem. The uncircumcised and unclean will no longer be allowed within the holy city. This refers to a future time, after the return of Christ, when the King of the Jews rules in the holy city. A new season will have dawned, the time of the Gentiles will have ended; a time of honour and holiness will have arrived for the people of God.

The phrase "uncircumcised and unclean" should not be considered to exclude Christian believers. The phrase means that only the people of God, the people of faith and covenant, will be allowed into Zion in the millennial period.

{4} For thus says the Lord GOD: "My people went down at first into Egypt to dwell there; then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. {5} Now therefore, what have I here," says the LORD, "that my people are taken away for nothing? Those who rule over them make them wail," says the LORD, "and my name is blasphemed continually every day. {6} Therefore My people shall know my name; therefore they shall know in that day that I am He who speaks: 'Behold, it is I.'"

The Lord takes personally the oppression of his people; it is a dishonour to his name. He is their deliverer and will again set them free from tyranny.

{7} How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" {8} Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the LORD brings back Zion.

The bringing back of Zion is the return of the exiles. Heralds proceed them through the mountains and watchmen see their approach. The scene causes great rejoicing and praise to God. This is most likely a reference to the return from Babylon.

{9} Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. {10} The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. {11} Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her, be clean, you who bear the vessels of the LORD. {12} For you shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

The redeeming of his people brings the Lord renown amongst the nations. Jerusalem is again populated and his people are comforted. Their departure from the Babylonian captivity will not be a hurried flight but a calm and deliberate action preceded by a call to depart, bringing back the articles of temple worship. The Lord will protect them by going before them and being their rear guard.

13.2. BEHOLD THE MESSIAH

Isa 52:13-15. Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. {14} Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men; {15} so shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.

The start of a long passage concerning the Messiah. Although Cyrus is referred to as the Lord's servant, his face was not marred and he did not sprinkle the nations.

Jesus walked in humility and wisdom during the years of ministry. He was lifted up on the cross and exalted to the Father's right hand. He submitted his face to those who pulled his beard, those who struck him and his body those who scourged him. It is the sprinkling of his blood, the Lamb of God, that will bring deliverance to the nations. Those who once were excluded from all the covenants will now be benefactors.

14. CHAPTER 53

Isa 53:1-3. Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? {2} For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. {3} He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

This chapter continues from verse 13 of the previous section. It is about the Servant of the Lord - the Messiah.

John quotes verse one with regard to the unbelief among the Jews concerning Jesus²⁹. Jesus is figuratively known as the Arm of the Lord - the obvious action of God. But despite everything Jesus did the people's hearts were hard. The Lord had not revealed Jesus to them. Those who did believe had been privileged with great revelation³⁰.

²⁹ John 12:38

³⁰ Mat 16:17. Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

The Father watches as Jesus grows up and is well pleased³¹. The meaning of these statements could only be truly understood in light of the New Testament. Israel was spiritually a dry and barren wasteland into which Jesus was born. But in Him there was life. His background was totally mundane. He didn't look any different to those around. There was nothing note worthy; nothing to distinguish him.

At the height of their rejection of the Lord's servant, the people cried "Crucify him. Crucify him." They thought that God had cursed Jesus because he was hung on a tree.

Isa 53:4-6. Surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. {5} But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. {6} All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

The religious leaders were convinced of their own righteousness and of Jesus guilt. They were convinced that Jesus had blasphemed in calling himself the Son of God. They saw the cross as God approved justice.

"But". Here is the purpose of God in it all. He suffered that we could be forgiven, healed and brought into peace with God. It was our sin that God was punishing in Jesus - not his own.

Matthew and Peter quotes verse five³².

All people are like lost sheep, and its our own fault. We chose our way rather than God's way. But the Messiah bears the consequence of our sin.

Isa 53:7-10. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. {8} He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people He was stricken. {9} And they made His grave with the wicked; But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. {10} Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When you make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

The Servant of the Lord is to suffer oppression and injustice, but he is silently resigned to this mistreatment. Like Joseph the Servant of the Lord is to endure imprisonment and judgement. He will have no prosperity or children; His life will be taken from him. All this is because of the sin of God's people.

Jesus was the sport of wicked, cruel soldiers and was crucified with the two thieves; but was then given a rich man's tomb. He had done or said nothing wrong.

³¹ Matt 3:17

³² Mat 8:17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses."

1 Pet 2:24. Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.

All of this was part of God's will and plan, who makes Him an offering for sin. Although He had no physical children of His own, He produced spiritual descendents. His life was cut short but through the resurrection his days were prolonged. Jesus is now actively involved in the work of the kingdom which is prospering.

Isa 53:11-12. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge my righteous Servant shall justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities. {12} Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Jesus will not be disappointed or frustrated with the Church, but will be satisfied. It is those that know Jesus that receive the gift of justification through his blood.

In making intercession, Jesus took the place of the transgressors, he suffered for them. He is still interceding for us before the Father.

The Father rewards the obedience of the Son.

15. CHAPTER 54

Isa 54:1-3. "Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not laboured with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman," says the LORD. {2} "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. {3} For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited.

The joy and blessing promised in this chapter are a result of the suffering of the Messiah described in the previous chapter.

Israel is described as a barren, desolate and forsaken woman and also as a widow. These are grievous terms and some have shame associated with them in the ancient world. They are describing Israel's captivity; when she appears to be forsaken by her husband, God. Nevertheless they will yet again be accepted by God and made fruitful. Their reproach will be forgotten in the days when the Lord enlarges the nation and causes them to inherit the earth.

Enlarging the tent (their dwelling place) is necessary to accommodate the children that the Lord is going to give.

The cities described in verse 3 are desolate following the destruction of Israel by Babylon. But in the Millennium the kingdom of Israel will inherit cities desolated in the battle of Armageddon.

Isa 54:4-8. "Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. {5} For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; he is called the God of the whole earth.

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{6} For the LORD has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused³³," says your God. {7} "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. {8} With a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," says the LORD, your Redeemer.

Although this chapter is about Israel, the reversal from wrath to mercy described in this chapter can be considered to describe the experience of the New Testament church. They are predominately a Gentile people once excluded and desolate but now accepted by their Maker.

Isa 54:9-10. "For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. {10} For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has mercy on you.

Although God punished Israel and sent them into captivity, nevertheless his anger was fleeting and in the days of the fulfilment of this word he promises never to be angry with them again. That suggests that this relates to the Millennial Period. Like the waters of Noah, the judgment of God was necessary, but will never again be repeated.

Isa 54:11-15. "O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colourful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. {12} I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones. {13} All your children shall be taught by the LORD and great shall be the peace of your children. {14} In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. {15} Indeed they shall surely assemble, but not because of Me. Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake.

Although God did restore Jerusalem after the exile, this passage is truly fulfilled at the second advent of Christ when all the people of God inherit the earth. Verse 11 speaks of the founding of a city with beautiful gems. Jerusalem will be honoured and glorified. The New Jerusalem in Revelation³⁴ is such a city and Paul quotes verse one in Galatians³⁵ to talk about the Jerusalem from above.

Through many chapters Isaiah has described how nations such as the Assyrians and Babylonians will come because they are God's means of judgment. But verse 15 describes how enemies will come but not because God has sent them. Perhaps this refers to the end of the millennial period Satan will incite the nations to assembly against Jerusalem.

Isa 54:16-17. "Behold, I have created the blacksmith who blows the coals in the fire, who brings forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the spoiler to destroy. {17} No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from me," Says the LORD.

³³ Leah was a youthful wife who was refused when Jacob loved Rachel.

³⁴ Rev 21:18-21

³⁵ Gal 4:21-27

The Lord is Sovereign. Men may make weapons, dictators and wicked men make schemes but it is the Lord who determine the outcome.

Verse 17 has a promise for all the people of God. The vindication may not take place in this life time - but it will happen. Weapons may only destroy the body but not harm the soul.

In verses 4 to 17 we have six reasons not to fear.

- (1). The Lord is our husband, we shall not be ashamed.
- (2). God has sworn he would not be angry with us.
- (3). He will always be kind to us.
- (4). He has made a covenant of peace with us.
- (5). No weapon or tongue will hurt us.
- (6). We are righteous in his sight.

16. CHAPTER 55

16.1. CALL TO THE THIRSTY

Isa 55:1-2. "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come; buy wine and milk without money and without price. {2} Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

The Spirit of prophecy calls out to the people of God, offering free refreshing and satisfaction to those who are in need. This is similar to Jesus' cry in John.

John 7:37-39. ... "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. {38} He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." {39} But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

In Isaiah the Lord is offering water, wine and milk. The New Testament speaks of water as representing the life giving operation of the Spirit in a believer's life. Wine is that which gladdens the heart of man and God³⁶, synonymous with joy. Milk is the refreshing and strengthening properties of the word³⁷.

To receive of this bounty a person needs to recognise their thirst and come. Although the provision offered is free, it still needs to be bought. Money is not required, but words are needed. A process of coming to God, confessing our need and humbling our self is required. Jesus counsels the church to buy from him in Revelation³⁸.

³⁶ Psa 104:15

³⁷ 1 Peter 2:2

³⁸ Rev 3:18. "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

People spend their money trying to quench the inner thirst and fill the inner emptiness with pleasures and possessions. But these things do not satisfy. But walking with the Lord in attentive obedience brings delightful abundance to the soul. The benefits of walking with the Lord include peace, joy and love³⁹. Through careful listening we fed on the word of God. As a result impoverished, frustrated aching souls are enriched.

16.2. SURE MERCIES OF DAVID

Isa 55:3. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you; the sure mercies of David.

Attention to the word of God bring covenant blessings upon our life. The everlasting covenant is the New Covenant made with Jesus, the Son of David, and guarantees mercy to those who respond. The promises that God gave David are described in Psa 89.

Psa 89:3-4. "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn to my servant David: {4} 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.'

Psa 89:28-29. My mercy I will keep for him forever and my covenant shall stand firm with him. {29} His seed also I will make to endure forever and his throne as the days of heaven.

The covenant with David is that God would not take away his mercy from David (as he had done to Saul); David's seed, the Son of David, would endure forever and the Seed's throne would be established forever.

Isa 55:4-5 Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. {5} Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you."

Some commentators interpret this to mean the after the resurrection David himself will have a governmental role in Millennial Israel. Others favour the leader and commander will be the Son of David.

Through their relationship with God, Israel will receive international honour. This may have happened in part as a result of Christian nations helping Israel, but will truly be fulfilled in the Millennium.

16.3. SEEK THE LORD

Isa 55:6-9. Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. {7} Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. {8} "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," says the LORD. {9} "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

³⁹ Gal 5:22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Psa 16:11. You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psa 29:11. The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace.

The people are encouraged to seek God in a time he can be found and not to presume that the current opportunity will always be available. In a time of grace God can be approached and people can repent. But such times are not forever, judgment will come. People today may experience the Holy Spirit convicting and convincing them - drawing them to Jesus. Grace is abounding and God is calling. But they have their own will and can say no. There may or may not be other opportunities for them to be saved. People can't choose salvation whenever they want, only when God gives them opportunity.

Verse 7 describes what it takes to seek the Lord - call on his name, forsake wicked actions and modify our thinking. To the repentant mercy is promised.

We will never be able to fully understand or know God's ways or thoughts; they are out of this world. But we can trust God and know that His ways are higher and better than ours. Faith is seeing the invisible, seeing that God is on the throne, seeing that He has our best interest at heart, seeing that He will never leave us or forsake us.

16.4. THE WORD OF THE LORD

Isa 55:10-11. "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, {11} So shall My word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

The word provides "seed for the sower and bread for the eater". Sowing is the act of evangelism, whilst the word provides spiritual food for believers. It should be noted that there is a process required to turn seed into bread. Similarly there is the process of study, comparison and contemplation required to actually turn Bible verses into spiritual food.

God's word is spiritual, powerful and creative - but it is never barren. It accomplishes that for which it is sent. We can have faith in the word, the promises of God and the gospel message.

Isa 55:12-13. "For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. {13} Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

This is the specific thing that God's word is sent to accomplish for his people – the restoration of the nation. They shall escape captivity and return to their own land. This shall be a time of great joy that even nature shall rejoice in. Scripture talks about nature responding either to righteousness or wickedness of a nation⁴⁰.

The characteristic of God's work in his people are joy and peace. The blessing of the Lord will bring forth a time of blessing, an end of curse and a reversal of conditions.

⁴⁰ Rom 8:20-22. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; {21} because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. {22} For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.

17. CHAPTER 56

The following chapters are probably directed to God's people in Isaiah's day, but have timeless application for all of God's people. The call is for repentance and righteous living. Correct observance of the Sabbath is a recurring theme.

17.1. HOPE FOR FOREIGNERS

Isa 56:1-2. Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for my salvation is about to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. {2} Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it; who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil."

In light of what God is going to reveal, people should make themselves ready and walk in an appropriate manner.

The keeping of the Sabbath is emphasised as a key factor in serving the Lord and is something that brings the blessing of the Lord. Failure to keep the Sabbath is a reason for judgement against the people of God⁴¹.

Isa 56:3-8. Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD speak, saying, "The LORD has utterly separated me from His people"; nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree." {4} For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold fast My covenant, {5} even to them I will give in my house and within my walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

{6} "Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants; everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast my covenant; {7} even them I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

{8} The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, "Yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered to him."

Under the law the sons of foreigners and eunuchs were excluded from temple worship. But here the Spirit of the Lord says that such people who fear the Lord and obey His commandments will be

⁴¹ Jer 17:21-27. "Thus says the LORD: "Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; {22} nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. {23} But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction. {24} And it shall be, if you heed Me carefully," says the LORD, "to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it, {25} then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, accompanied by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever. {26} And they shall come from the cities of Judah and from the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin and from the lowland, from the mountains and from the South, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, bringing sacrifices of praise to the house of the LORD. {27} But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.'" "

rewarded and receive an everlasting reward. This apparent contradiction shows that the law with its restrictions failed to achieve what God wanted, or represent His character. The law excluded foreigners but God's heart was that all nations should be worshipping Him. These outsiders will know the joy of salvation and will be heard from on high. Jesus quotes verse 7 in Mark 11:17.

Verse 8 may be predicting the acceptance of the Gentiles as worshippers under the New Covenant?

Any man with damage to his genitals was not allowed to participate in temple worship⁴². A eunuch could not leave his inheritance to children and his name would not be perpetuated. Hence being a eunuch was considered a great shame. But the Lord promises those who serve him an everlasting name within the Lord's house, something better than offspring. This is an example of the way Isaiah prophesies about life after death.

These verses also warn the Jews that it is their true blood or physical wholeness that is important, but the keeping of the covenant.

17.2. BAD LEADERSHIP

Isa 56:9-12. All you beasts of the field, come to devour, all you beasts in the forest. {10} His watchmen are blind, they are all ignorant; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. {11} Yes, they are greedy dogs which never have enough. And they are shepherds who cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his own gain, from his own territory. {12} "Come," one says, "I will bring wine, and we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; tomorrow will be as today, and much more abundant."

This chapter now changes tone. Judgement is prophesied and the leaders are blamed. Instead of serving the people they are serving themselves, being lazy, greedy and drunk. This could be a word against the national political leaders or the spiritual leaders or both.

The foolishness of these blind leaders is shown in their belief that "tomorrow will be as today."

18. CHAPTER 57

Isa 57:1-2. The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. {2} He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.

In the dark idolatrous days the righteous are dying, whether by natural causes or by being killed is not stated. The Lord is allowing this to save the righteous from the evil that is coming. In dying they enter peace and rest, and continue to walk in uprightness. This speaks of a conscious existence after death.

Isa 57:3-10. "But come here, you sons of the sorceress, you offspring of the adulterer and the harlot! {4} Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth and stick out the tongue? Are you not children of transgression, offspring of falsehood, {5} inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks? {6} Among the smooth stones of the stream is your portion; they, they, are your lot! Even to them you have poured a drink offering, you have offered a grain offering. Should I receive comfort in these?

⁴² Lev 21:17-20

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{7} "On a lofty and high mountain you have set your bed; even there you went up to offer sacrifice. {8} Also behind the doors and their posts you have set up your remembrance; for you have uncovered yourself to those other than Me, and have gone up to them; you have enlarged your bed and made a covenant with them; you have loved their bed, where you saw their nudity. {9} You went to the king with ointment, and increased your perfumes; you sent your messengers far off and even descended to Sheol. {10} You are wearied in the length of your way; yet you did not say, 'There is no hope.' You have found the life of your hand; therefore you were not grieved.

This strong word is against the idol worshippers who are mocking God and the righteous, committing spiritual adultery an offering child sacrifices. Instead of being holy seed, they are called the children of a sorceress, adulterer and harlot. They serve their false gods in garden groves, by streams and upon high mountains. They defile the land is serving their fertility deities.

This could be a word against the people of Israel and Judah prior to the exile. Some commentators think that it is a word to the people in exile who continue their idol worship.

The people of God should have been writing the law of God on the door posts of their houses; but instead they have their idols and images.

They made agreements with foreign kings and served their gods. Alternatively the king may be the false god Molech which means king. Through spiritism they seek to explore Sheol.

Despite not finding satisfaction and being wearied, they strengthen themselves to continue with their abominations.

Isa 57:11-13 {11} "And of whom have you been afraid, or feared, that you have lied and not remembered me, nor taken it to your heart? Is it not because I have held my peace from of old that you do not fear me? {12} I will declare your righteousness and your works, for they will not profit you. {13} When you cry out, Let your collection of idols deliver you. But the wind will carry them all away, a breath will take them. But he who puts his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain."

In the Day of Judgment their idols will fail them. But the righteous will inherit the earth.

Isa 57:14- And one shall say, "Heap it up! Heap it up! Prepare the way; Take the stumbling block out of the way of my people." {15} For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones. {16} For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before me, and the souls which I have made. {17} for the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. {18} I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners. {19} "I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near," Says the LORD, "And I will heal him." {20} But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. {21} "There is no peace," Says my God, "for the wicked."

A road is constructed for the true people of God to return.

Although God is far off in the sense that He dwells in eternity and is holy; He is also the God who is near to those who are humble and contrite. He sustains and revives such people.

Israel's judgment is measured and God will heal them and led them.

To those who confess the Lord as their God and humble themselves before him, whether they are far off or near by, God will bless them with peace and healing. Those far off could be the Jews in exile or possibly the Gentile nations.

The wicked will not know peace.

19. CHAPTER 58

19.1. EMPTY FASTING

Isa 58:1-2. "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. {2} Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God.

The prophet is called to broadcast the sin of the people of God. He is not to hold back and he is not to spare their blushes.

Israel enjoyed and were comforted by their spiritual heritage and the religious rituals. Everything on the outside looked okay; but their religion was to be proven empty. They went through the rituals but they failed to draw near to God.

Isa 58:3-5. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and you take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your labourers. {4} Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. {5} Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

The people say "It isn't working. God isn't answering our prayers. He ignores us when we fast". They are religiously performing the set fasts, but their heart is not right. In the day of their fast they still lived for pleasure and acted unjustly. Perhaps they thought that they were purchasing the required answers from God in their fasting; not realising that fasting is something we perform to change ourselves and not to change God.

But during their fasting it was still business as usual. Their was no soul searching; no humbling of themselves; no repentance or mourning. But while they are fasting to God, they are having fist fights with each other. One true purpose of fasting is revealed in this passage; "to make your voice heard on high."

Their theatrical and empty performance, with its special cloths and expressions, did not consist a day acceptable to God.

Isa 58:6-7. "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? {7} Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?

External religious performance is not as important as social justice.

Christianity should be practical. The church should help the poor and weak in society. It should speak up for those who are trodden down. Individual believers should also demonstrate practical spirituality; caring for the poor and fulfilling family responsibilities.

Some Christian teachers have suggested that this chapter negates the need for fasting among the people of God. However Jesus said to his disciples "When you fast do not be like the hypocrites."⁴³

There are benefits in fasting and reasons why believers should fast. But fasting is only of any benefit if it's a real reflection of a humbled and hungry heart and if we are walking right with people around us.

Mat 5:23-24. "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

19.2. REVIVAL IS POSSIBLE

Isa 58:8-12. Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. {9} Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' "If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, {10} If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, t your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. {11} The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. {12} Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

The word of the Lord gives great promises to the country if practical, social justice and care are demonstrated. They would healing, blessing prosperity and protection. If God's people would respond and set everything in order then the Lord would hear and answer their prayers. But their criticism of others and wicked speech are reasons why prayers aren't currently being answered.

Guidance and abundance are promised if God's people they walk in true righteousness and a foundation would be laid for future generations.

Isa 58:13-14. "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honourable, and shall honour him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, {14} then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Again failure to observe the Sabbath resulted in powerless religion. The people lived for their own pleasure on God's day. The instruction on the Sabbath and social action are important because they are what is required to make room for the Lord to dwell in the midst of his people.

⁴³ Matt 6:16-17

Despite the simplicity of the instructions, Isaiah's generation failed to respond. The instructions are simple and straight forward, but they are threatening. The thought of opening our home and sharing it with strangers, or giving our food and money to help the poor is frightening. It threatens our private zone.

Indeed it is easier to perform empty religious activities such as fasting than to follow some of these practical instructions. That is because they are costly in a very personal sense.

20. CHAPTER 59

Isa 59:1-3. Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. {2} But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. {3} For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue has muttered perversity.

The reason for the apparently unanswered prayer was not a failing with the Lord, but because of the sin of God's people. God refuses to answer prayer when their hands and lips are defiled.

Isa 59:4-8. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. {5} They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; he who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. {6} Their webs will not become garments, nor will they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. {7} Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. {8} The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

Israel might be a religious society, but truth and justice have been forsaken. This is similar to the accusation Jesus made against the religious leaders of his day.

Mat 23:23-28. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. {24} Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! {25} Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. {26} Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. {27} Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. {28} Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Building on lies and iniquity is foolishness. It shall not last and shall not satisfy. Snakes eggs cannot be eaten and spider's webs cannot be woven into cloths. The fruit of their works shall be worthless and poisonous.

The way of greed leads to violence and injustice; were people are trampled on and exploited. Soon the end justifies the means and crooked paths are followed. Those who walk in such ways will not know peace in their heart.

Isa 59:9-15. Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! {10} We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as at twilight; we are as dead men in desolate places. {11} We all growl like bears, and moan sadly like doves; we look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.

{12} For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them: {13} In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. {14} Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. {15} So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice.

The voice has changed from talking about "them" to talking about "us". Whether this is Isaiah's response or the Messiah interceding, is not clear.

The chosen paths have led the nation into darkness, blindness and stumbling; and the leaders are as blind as the people. Like Pharaoh and his magicians they are helpless. They cannot steer or guide.

Despite their religion the nation had departed from God. Perhaps they hoped that their empty religious performance would keep God at bay. Society is in pain all around. Social breakdown results from the sin. Anyone who sought to be righteous and follow God finds themselves persecuted.

God is watching and is displeased. Scripture reveals that on a previous occasion God was grieved by man and that resulted in the Genesis flood⁴⁴. Is God about to again judge his people Israel, or even all of mankind?

Isa 59:16-21. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore his own arm brought salvation for him; and his own righteousness, it sustained him. {17} For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. {18} According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; the coastlands he will fully repay. {19} So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him. {20} "The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the LORD. {21} "As for me," says the LORD, "this is my covenant with them: my Spirit who is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."

Instead of judgment God plans a work of salvation.

There was no one to effectively intercede for the people of Israel. Abraham had interceded for Sodom. Moses and interceded for Israel. But now there was no one to stand in the gap between

⁴⁴ Gen 6:6-7

God and man; no one to pray for mercy. Is that because no one cared? Or is it because no one has clean hands and heart whereby they can be heard on high?

God responds zealously by bringing salvation. His own arm is a euphemism for his strength, action or the person of the Lord Jesus. It is Jesus who brought salvation to mankind to who became the mediator between God and man.

This is no half hearted action from the Lord. He dresses for war and throws everything into this plan of salvation. This is what the New Testament calls God's eternal purpose. The judgment of his enemies is also part of God's plan. This salvation is not just for Israel but for the globe.

The second half of verse 19 is often quoted: when enemies (spiritual or otherwise) attack like a flood, then God will protect his people by raising a flag. However other translations translate the phrase differently:

Isa 59:19. So they will fear the name of the Lord from the west and his glory from the rising of the sun, for he will come like a rushing stream which the wind of the Lord drives. (New American Standard Bible).

Here it is not the enemy that comes like a flood but the Lord (or His glory). This better fits the structure of the passage.

A new covenant will be brought in which will empower people with God's Holy Spirit.

21. CHAPTER 60

Isa 60:1-5. Arise; shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. {2} For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, and his glory will be seen upon you. {3} The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. {4} "Lift up your eyes all around, and see: They all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side. {5} Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.

Having introduced in the previous section salvation by the Lord's arm (the Messiah) and the Spirit filled life; the spirit of prophecy now reveals the resulting glories. These verses describe the glory of Israel in the millennium.

The call is: "Get Up. Its morning." As the moon has no light of its own but reflects sun light, so the people of God are to shine by reflecting the glory of the Lord. In the New Testament Jesus is called the light of the world, and then the Church is called the light of the world. We are to bear the light of Christ.

The description of light and glory reminds us of the Shekinah:

2 Chr 5:13-14. Indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying: "For he is good, For his mercy endures forever," that the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, {14} so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

Shekinah means dwelling and its is a visible manifestation of the presence of God. Although the word is not found in the Bible, it occurs frequently in later Jewish writings. It refers to the instances when God showed Himself visibly. For example on Mount Sinai and in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and in Solomon's Temple. The Shekinah was a luminous cloud that rested above the altar in the place of worship and lit up the room⁴⁵.

The term glory is used to refer to God's beauty, power and honour. The Hebrew for glory is *Kabod* the root of which means weightiness or heavy. In the New Testament the Greek word for glory is *doxa* which came to mean the splendour, radiance and majesty. In subsequent verses there are references to the brightness and radiance which come from the glory of the Lord.

Today the people without Christ are in deep darkness but the church is the light of the world. This darkness is an ignorance of spiritual truth, an inability to discern God and a blindness concerning mankind's moral bankruptcy.

The years of the Great Tribulation shall be extremely dark, particularly because the One who restrains (the Holy Spirit) will do so no longer. After the events of the Great Tribulation the world shall also be in chaos having found out everything that had been confidently promoted was a lie and had failed. Broken and shattered the people of the earth will find hope in the leadership of Christ from Jerusalem.

The second advent of Christ is the rising of the kingdom of Israel. The nation shall be rebuilt and will be honoured and enriched by all people of the earth. Once the focus of nations' wrath, Israel will have prominence and pre-eminence in the world. The scattered Jews will return. The New Testament teaches that the resurrected saints of Christ will return with him to Zion.

Isa 60:6-15. The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD. {7} All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall ascend with acceptance on my altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. {8} Who are these who fly like a cloud, and like doves to their roosts? {9} Surely the coastlands shall wait for me; and the ships of Tarshish will come first, to bring your sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them, to the name of the LORD your God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you.

{10} The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls and their kings shall minister to you; for in my wrath I struck you, but in my favour I have had mercy on you.

{11} Therefore your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, and their kings in procession. {12} For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined. {13} The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. {14} Also the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. {15} Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no one went through you, I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations.

⁴⁵ Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary

The surrounding nations, who previously had shown enmity towards Israel, shall come and worship the Lord. People return to or visit Israel by the plane full. The common wealth of Israel will be blessed with the best of the nations

Does verse seven mean that literal sacrifices will again be made? Some commentators suggest they will. But following the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross the slaughter of animals is now longer required. So I suggest that these are poetic phrases rather than literal statements.

Kedar and Nebaioth were sons of Ishmael - Arab tribes.

Isa 60:16-22. You shall drink the milk of the Gentiles, and milk the breast of kings; you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Saviour and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. {17} Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver, instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron. I will also make your officers peace, and your magistrates righteousness. {18} Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.

{19} The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. {20} Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended. {21} Also your people shall all be righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. {22} A little one shall become a thousand and a small one a strong nation. I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time."

The description of Jerusalem in these verses is similar to that of the New Jerusalem in Revelation.

Rev 21:23-27. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. {24} And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. {25} Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). {26} And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it. {27} But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Isaiah seems to describing the New Jerusalem, the city that descends from above after the second resurrection.

The walls of the city are described as Salvation and the gates as praise. Our Salvation is a shield of protection around about us, such that we should not fear. Praise is the door way for the saints to enter into the presence of the Lord.

Psa 100:4. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, And into his courts with praise. Be thankful to him, and bless his name.

Isaiah 60 verse 22 appears to describe how the world shall be repopulated during the millennium.

22. CHAPTER 61

Isa 61:1-3. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; {2} To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, {3} To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

The first few verses define the ministry of the Messiah - the "Anointed One", and subsequently the ministry of the anointed church. The ability to perform the wondrous deeds that are described are attributed to the "Spirit of the Lord God" being "upon me". The anointing brings the authority and power. It makes us empowered representatives of God. The New Testament uses the term ambassador. To be able to minister effectively we need to be sent and anointed by God. We also need to be convinced of our calling and anointing.

The focus of the ministry is the hurt of humanity. The Hebrew word translated as poor is *anaw* and means humble, afflicted or poor. We are to preach (proclaim, herald), to heal and to open. We have good news for the poor in spirit; we have a healing balm for the broken hearted and we have kingdom keys which can open prison doors and loose fetters.

In verse one Lord GOD is *adonay YHWH* and LORD is also *YHWH*. Also the opening of the prison is literally opening wide the eyes.

The year of favour reminds us of the year of Jubilee when debts are cancelled, and slaves released and the people of God are brought back into their inheritance. Jesus quoted verse 1 and half verse 2 in Nazareth⁴⁶. He abruptly ended his rereading before the day of vengeance. He is yet to fulfil that part of his calling.

Verse 3 describe God offering comfort and consolation: this is a process of healing and deliverance. Ashes are the remains of something which had value: memories. Anointed ministry seeks to bring health into the soul of those who are mourning and are oppressed.

We are to be clothed, covered, and wrapped in the garment of praise. Like a thick coat keeps out the wind and the cold, so the garment of praise insulates us from spiritual forces that would oppress us. Praise is an antidote to the spirit of heaviness. When we are feeling low or oppressed we should seek to offer the Lord the sacrifice of praise.

Acts 16:25-26. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. {26} Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

The enemy plays with our feelings in order to stop us praising God.

Those who belong to the Lord are planted by God. He is the Master Gardener who selects what he plants where.

⁴⁶ Luke 4:18-19

Isa 61:4-7. And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. {5} Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the foreigner shall be your ploughmen and your vinedressers. {6} But you shall be named the priests of the LORD; they shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast. {7} Instead of your shame you shall have double honour, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs.

New life, a new hope and a brighter future comes from dealing with the issues of brokenness and poverty of spirit. Many people seek to bury their pain rather than work through the process of deliverance.

The description of raising up desolations is similar to the promises in Isa 58:12-13. The subsequent verses seem to be describing the millennium period when the people of God will be considered priests; nations will serve Israel and everlasting joy will be theirs.

The phrase in verse seven about having double honour could be considered what the eldest son received in the inheritance. All the people of the earth will be blessed when Jesus reigns in Zion, but Israel will receive particular favour.

Isa 61:8-11. "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, and will make with them an everlasting covenant. {9} Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom the LORD has blessed."

{10} I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. {11} For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Jesus is currently directing the work of his church. In the millennium he will direct all nations.

In verse 10, like in the previous chapter, the voice of the narrator changes. Is this the Messiah rejoicing? If so the chapter starts with and ends with the voice of the Messiah.

23. CHAPTER 62

23.1. FUTURE GLORY OF ZION

Isa 62:1-5. For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. {2} The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will name. {3} You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, And a royal diadem in the hand of your God. {4} You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. {5} For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

The future glory of Jerusalem is the focus of this short chapter. The Lord is not going to be silent and neither is he going to stop working until Jerusalem is transformed into the delight of the earth. The process of God's eternal purpose is even now working towards this but the fulfilment is seen in the millennial reign of Christ.

The glorious, luminous city is a place for righteousness. Just as the city in Rev 21 is for the pure only.

Rev 21:23-27. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. {24} And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. {25} Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). {26} And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it. {27} But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The Lord will glorify Jerusalem before all the nations and yet reveal a new name for her. This new name is not among the terms mentioned in verse 4.

The city will be a precious ornament which shall emphasis to the world the kingship of the Lord. The phrase "in the hand" suggests in the Hebrew that the crown and the diadem are held out in the Lord's palm for display⁴⁷. Diadem may refer to the crown worn by the High Priest. The crown and the diadem are not worn by the Lord but are the people of God's. The picture suggest that the people of God are kings and priests to the Lord.

Destroyed by the Babylonians and the Romans, Jerusalem has suffered depopulation and has been left desolate. But in that future day she will be called Hephzibah (My delight is in her) and Beulah (Married). Because the Lord shall delight in her and be married to her. Instead of appearing as a barren widow the city will be alike a young bride and a fruitful wife.

If the Lord is to be King of the whole earth in the Millennium, then Jerusalem might be considered as his Queen. Rather than meaning a physical geographical city, the Queen might be considered to be the Bride of Christ - the saints of God consisting of Old and New Testament believers. In Revelation the New Jerusalem is referred to as the Lamb's Bride.

Zion will also be a delight to her inhabitants, but the Lord will also rejoice over the city.

⁴⁷ King James Version Bible Commentary.

Zeph 3:16-17. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion let not your hands be weak. {17} The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

23.2. WATCHMEN

Isa 62:6-9. I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, {7} and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. {8} The LORD has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength: "Surely I will no longer give your grain as food for your enemies; and the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your new wine, For which you have laboured. {9} But those who have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the LORD; those who have brought it together shall drink it in my holy courts."

The Lord is not going to rest nor hold his peace, but He requires his intercessors (watchmen or overseers) not to rest nor hold their peace. They are to pray until God performs all of this for Jerusalem.

These verses give us an insight into the mystery of intercession - standing on watch; petitioning God day and night; praying for the will of God to be done. In a world that does not want God's will to be done, the prayers of the saints give God the means to intervene in a positive way rather than through judgement. It is the Lord's will to establish Jerusalem as a praise in the earth, but the saints of God are going to have to want it and be dedicated in praying for it. Other Scriptures talk about the saints entering into the rest of the Lord, but we are also to enter into the labours of the Lord.

In that future day Zion will enjoy prosperity and the fruit of her labours. Foreign armies will not steal from her or oppress her any more, as they did in the days of her judgment.

23.3. TRAVELLING TO ZION

Isa 62:10-12. Go through, Go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, Build up the highway! Take out the stones; Lift up a banner for the peoples! {11} Indeed the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.'" {12} And they shall call them The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.

Who is going through the gates? Is this the return of exiles from Babylon or is it the entrance of Messiah into the city? The reference in verse 11 to his and him suggest the later.

A highway is to be made and signposted for the people to come to Jerusalem. The use of repetition in the phrases "go through" and "build up" is a Hebrew literary technique to emphasis the importance of the calls.

Salvation comes with a person - the Messiah. He brings his reward but his work is before him. Perhaps this is a reference to the return of Christ whose work was done previously on the cross.

Jerusalem will be a city sought out. It will be the centre of attention in ages to come.

24. CHAPTER 63

24.1. WINEPRESS OF WRATH

Isa 63:1-6. Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?; "I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save." {2} Why is your apparel red, and your garments like one who treads in the winepress? {3} "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me. For I have trodden them in my anger, and trampled them in my fury; their blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my robes. {4} For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed has come. {5} I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore my own arm brought salvation for me; and my own fury, it sustained me. {6} I have trodden down the peoples in my anger, made them drunk in my fury, and brought down their strength to the earth."

This section is about the day of vengeance of God; when the Messiah comes to judge the world.

In this section there are two voices. Someone asks questions and then the main character replies. Isaiah appears to be a witness to this conversation, perhaps through a vision in which he saw the main character in his stained clothes. The main character is quickly identified as the Lord since he speaks about his day of vengeance and his redeemed. From a New Testament perspective we understand this to be the Lord Jesus.

The Lord is coming from Edom and Bozrah. Edom is the country to the South East of Israel which was inhabited by the descendants of Edom or Esau, Jacob's brother. Edom means red which is apt considering the stains on the Lord's clothing. Bozrah was a city of Edom. Esau was a carnal man who sold his spiritual inheritance for a single meal. Edom no longer exists, but the name is used here to signify the wicked, godless nations.

A feature of the end time prophecies is the gathering of the nations against Israel and their destruction by the Lord Jesus. Three different locations are mentioned suggesting that a very wide area is involved. The locations are Edom (this chapter), Armageddon⁴⁸ (commonly known as the Plain of Esdraelon) and the valley of Jehoshaphat⁴⁹. Jehoshaphat is the name of the famous king of Judah, but it means "YHWH judges". So this is the valley of God's judgement. The Kidron Valley is the ravine between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This became known as the Valley of Jehoshaphat in about the fourth century AD.

The question is asked in Isaiah 63 "who is this mighty one whose cloths are stained with blood". The answer given is the righteous Saviour. The destruction of the wicked is compared to the trending of grapes in a wine press. It is a messy and personal experience. He treads the grapes of wrath in his anger and fury. We should not consider that this is a reluctant action of the Lord. It is the just and right response to the sin and rebellion.

⁴⁸ Rev 16:16. And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

⁴⁹ Joel 3:12-14. "Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. {13} Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great." {14} Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

Rev 19:15. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

The One who speaks righteousness and is mighty to save is known to us as Jesus. This is the one who was silent as a lamb before its shearers and who did not retaliate when struck and beaten. But these verses describe the day of wrath and vengeance.

In Isa 61 we read of the year of the Lord's favour and the day of his vengeance. Now we read of the day of vengeance and the year of the redeemed. In Luke 4 Jesus proclaimed that he was fulfilling the year of the Lord's favour. That cycle of time corresponds to the current time of grace. But this time will end and the day of vengeance and judgement will come. But that brief time will bring forth the year of the redeemed which corresponds to the Millennial Reign of Christ.

Verse five returns to the theme of Isa 59:

Isa 59:16. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.

24.2. THE LORD'S LOVINGKINDNESS

Isa 63:7-14. I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to his mercies, according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. {8} For He said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not lie." So he became their Saviour. {9} In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bore them and carried them all the days of old. {10} But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so he turned himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them. {11} Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying: "Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock? Where is he who put his Holy Spirit within them, {12} who led them by the right hand of Moses, with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them to make for himself an everlasting name, {13} who led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness, that they might not stumble?" {14} As a beast goes down into the valley, and the Spirit of the LORD causes him to rest, so you lead your people, to make yourself a glorious name.

The Spirit of Prophecy now recounts the Lord's goodness, mercy and lovingkindness shown to his people. The Exodus events are remembered because it was the redemption of Israel from slavery that defined them as God's covenant people. Now the people of God are defined by the New Covenant made when Christ redeemed us from sin and death.

God is Truth and his people need to be true: children who will not lie.

The Lord felt the pain and suffering of his people and he took it personally. The Angel of His Presence, verse 9, went with Israel on the Exodus in the form of the pillar of cloud and fire. For the New Testament Church, her Lord has bore their affliction.

In contrast to the Lord's devotion to his people, it was Israel's rebellion, sin and lying that brought the curses of the law upon them. The Lord who had acted to bless them now acted against them in judgment.

In verse 11 who is remembering? Is it the Lord, a narrator (used as a literary aid) or the prophet? The question is being asked "Where is the Lord?"

Verse 14 describes how the Lord wants to bring his people into spiritual rest, where we are no longer wondering aimlessly or striving to obtain favour.

Isa 63:15-17. Look down from heaven, and see from your habitation, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your strength, the yearning of your heart and your mercies toward me? Are they restrained? {16} Doubtless you are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is your name. {17} O LORD, why have you made us stray from your ways, and hardened our heart from your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, the tribes of your inheritance.

The narrator is asking God to take note of the Israel's state and once again be for his people. In his intercessions Isaiah reminds the Lord that he is the father of this people through an everlasting redemption. Although he previously has acknowledged that it was Israel's failure that caused their difficulties; now he asking God why he hardened their hearts caused them to stray. He also asks why the Lord has lost his zeal.

These seem bold words from the prophet. Normally Christians like to think that any reluctance in people concerning coming to God is due their own choice. Many think that God is continually offering salvation to everyone all the time. How can men blame God for the hardness of our heart? Perhaps Isaiah is remembering the words he heard at the beginning of his ministry:

Isa 6:9-12. And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' {10} "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return and be healed." {11} Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, {12} the LORD has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

So God does harden people's hearts. He does provide an acceptable time when people may approach him, but that time has limits. Like Isaiah we should recognise that no one can come to God unless God draws them. Jesus told the Jews that they could not come unless the father draws them. The choice was the father's not theirs. Paul tells us that when people turn from God and choose sin then the thinking of the hearts and minds becomes darkened and God gives them up to uncleanness, vile passions and a debased mind⁵⁰.

Isa 63:18-19. Your holy people have possessed it but a little while; our adversaries have trodden down your sanctuary. {19} We have become like those of old, over whom you never ruled, those who were never called by your name.

Sadly the people of God had only enjoyed the Promised Land for a short period of time, and the beloved Temple, symbol of God's abiding presence in the land and a key feature of the nation is

⁵⁰ Romans 1:21-28

polluted and destroyed. These events happened approximately a hundred years after Isaiah wrote these words, but the writer is speaking of them in the past tense.

25. CHAPTER 64

Isa 64:1-5. Oh, that you would rend the heavens! That you would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence; {2} As fire burns brushwood, As fire causes water to boil; To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence! {3} When you did awesome things for which we did not look, you came down, the mountains shook at your presence. {4} For since the beginning of the world Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him. {5} You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, who remembers you in your ways. You are indeed angry, for we have sinned; in these ways we continue; and we need to be saved.

This is most likely a continuation of the discourse started in the previous chapter.

In this short chapter the prophet cries out to God and asks that He perform some awesome act, similar to those performed in the past. God had previously performed such deeds for his people that only the true and living God could perform. These deeds had been a sovereign act of God which had not been sort or expected.

Isaiah states that Israel's problems are two fold: their sin and their adversaries. He says that they need the Lord to forgive them their sin and deliver them from its power. The peoples' powerless to change themselves is emphasised.

Paul quotes verse 4 when talking about the mystery of God's wisdom.

1 Cor 2:7-10. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, {8} which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. {9} But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." {10} But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

In verse 5 Isaiah sites three things that attract the Lord to a man: rejoicing, acting righteously and remembering the Lord. Alternatively the phrase can be translated as rejoicing in doing righteousness and remembering the Lord. Isaiah paints a hopeless picture of the people trapped in sin and unable to change. They need deliverance from an external source.

Isa 64:6-12. But we are all like an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. {7} And there is no one who calls on your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities.

{8} But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you our potter; and all we are the work of your hand. {9} Do not be furious, O LORD, nor remember iniquity forever; indeed, please look; we all are your people! {10} Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. {11} Our holy and beautiful temple, where our fathers praised you, is burned up with fire; and all our pleasant things are laid waste. {12} Will you restrain yourself because of these things, O LORD? Will you hold your peace, and afflict us very severely?

Despite their religious activity the spiritual and moral state of the people is dire. Even their righteousness is unclean and unacceptable. The Hebrew phrase translated as filthy rages is literally menstrual cloths. As a result of their sin they have become like a dried leaf; dead and driven by the wind.

In their sin induced, spiritually desensitized state there is no one who seeking after the Lord. No one is willing to make the spiritual effort. The Lord has removed his presence from his people and the nation is being consumed by their enemies as judgement for their sin.

In verse 8 the prophet now reminds the Lord that they are the nation he chose, redeemed and formed. They are his people. He is their God. Will he be angry forever? Isaiah is mourning because of the vision he has seen of the future destruction of the land, cities and temple.

The pain and frustration in Isaiah's words is clearly visible. In view of this destruction is the Lord going to do nothing? The next chapter brings the response.

26. CHAPTER 65

26.1. REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

Isa 65:1-5. "I was sought by those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by my name. {2} I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts; {3} a people who provoke me to anger continually to my face; who sacrifice in gardens, and burn incense on altars of brick; {4} who sit among the graves, and spend the night in the tombs; who eat swine's flesh, and the broth of abominable things is in their vessels; {5} who say, 'Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you!' These are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day."

In this chapter we see the Lord's response to Isaiah's questions. Verse 1 is startling. The Lord talks about another people and another nation – thoughts considered blasphemous to the Jewish mind. People who previously were not considered the people of God are those who will find the Lord.

In contrast Israel have obstinately refused the Lord and ignored his calling. The previous chapter had accused the Lord of ignoring his people, but here we see that the Lord had been continuing holding his hands out to the Israel.

People, who do what they think is best and who do what they want, are described in verse 2 as being rebellious. They rebel against the word of God and refuse to submit themselves to the ordinances of the Lord.

In verses 3 to 5 the full extent of Israel's sin is exposed. Not only have they ignored God but they are involved all types of spiritually unclean activities and have provoked him to anger. The gardens described are groves built to their idols - very New Age. Contrasting to the altars to the Lord that

were to be built of uncut stone, these false gods were served with altars made of brick. A Jew should not even pass over a grave since it makes him unclean. But here they were performing spiritual acts in graveyards. They were also eating forbidden food.

Verse 5 speaks of the people's pride, something that God always hates. These demon worshipers, who had been initiated into these foreign religions, thought that they were more spiritual and holier than other people. Their actions and attitude were a continual irritation to the Lord.

Isa 65:6-7. "Behold, it is written before me: I will not keep silence, but will repay; even repay into their bosom; {7} your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together," says the LORD, "who have burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed me on the hills; therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom."

The books of heaven keep an account of all the actions and sins of men. These sins of idolatry are about to receive their wages.

Every person is responsible for their own sin. Elsewhere we read that children are not punished for the sins of their fathers⁵¹. These verses in Isaiah are not contradicting that principle. God had been warning Israel for years giving them opportunity to repent. This generation had continued in the sins of the fathers and now time had run out. Judgement, long overdue, was now coming. The land would be cleansed from years of sin.

26.2. A REMNANT

Isa 65:8-10. Thus says the LORD: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, 'Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it,' so will I do for my servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all. {9} I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah an heir of my mountains; my elect shall inherit it and my servants shall dwell there. {10} Sharon shall be a fold of flocks and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down; for My people who have sought Me.

A remnant will be spared and replanted in the land. They will be fruitful and will repopulate the land. These will be people who sought their God. This confirms that righteous, godly living is always the better option in the long term.

26.3. THE RIGHTEOUS CONTRASTED WITH THE WICKED

Isa 65:11-16. "But you are those who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who prepare a table for Gad, and who furnish a drink offering for Meni. {12} Therefore I will number you for the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before my eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight."

{13} Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed; {14} behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and wail for grief of spirit.

⁵¹ Ezek 18:2-4. "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? {3} "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. {4} "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine; the soul who sins shall die.

{15} You shall leave your name as a curse to My chosen; for the Lord GOD will slay you, and call His servants by another name; {16} So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from my eyes.

In contrast to those who seek the Lord, those who forsake him and worship false deities will be slaughtered. Gad means troop or fortune and Meni means number or destiny. Both names are used for false gods.

When judgment came and the slaughter started the people of God asked where God was in all of it. But the judgement came because God had called for repentance but the people did not hear.

Verses 13 and 14 contrast the blessings for the servants of the Lord but the curse upon the rebellious.

Does “your name” in verse 15 mean Israel. The calling of God’s servants by a different name may be partially fulfilled in the church, but new names will be used in future ages.

Verse 16 foretells of a future time when the blessing will outshine the current hardships. The troubles that Isaiah has been complaining about are necessary to bring about this bright future. Judgement must proceed the blessing. In that future day the current sorrows will be forgotten by both the people and the Lord.

26.4. NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH

Isa 65:17-25. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. {18} But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. {19} I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in my people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

{20} "No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. {21} They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. {22} They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of my people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

{23} They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. {24} "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear. {25} The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain," Says the LORD.

The whole of history is moving towards God's eternal goal of a new heaven and a new earth. The future will be so bright that this current age will be obscured from memory. Although the people of God will be called by a new name, Jerusalem is still the name of the city of the King. There is no abandoning of the past. Verses 20 onwards appear to describe the millennium period; which is from our time the next major period before the new heavens and the new earth.

In that future age joy will abound and grief and sorrow will be no more. People will have long life spans, like those in Genesis. Infants and children will not die, but people shall fulfil their days; part from sinners who will bring a curse upon themselves.

Life will not be in vain when Jesus reigns on earth. Enemies will not steal or destroy. Part of the blessing of God upon our lives is to give satisfaction and reward; so that our labour and time are not spent in vain.

In this current age many things come to destroy the fruit of our labour. This life is filled with uncertainties. But in that age life will be far simpler. Current family life is a great uncertainty. Children can cause distress and heartbreak. But in that age the blessing of God will be upon people.

Everyone will know the Lord and their will be no obstacles, delays or hindrances in prayer.

There will also be a new natural order. Animals, and presumably people, will no longer eat meat. Neither will creatures attack or devour each other or people. We have read similar verses before in Isaiah:

Isa 11:6-9. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. {7} The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. {8} The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. {9} They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Although snakes will not be dangerous they will still crawl in the dust:

Gen 3:14. So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.

27. CHAPTER 66

27.1. FALSE RELIGION

Isa 66:1-2. Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build me? And where is the place of my rest? {2} For all those things my hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word.

A temple, a church building or a man made structure are all inadequate. They cannot contain or manifest the glory of God; neither can the works of man bring the Lord's work to completion, to bring him to rest.

David thought that he would build God a house. The divine reply was not what he expected:

2 Sam 7:5-6. "Go and tell my servant David, "Thus says the LORD: "Would you build a house for me to dwell in? {6} "For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle.

Stephen quotes these verses from Isaiah at his trial:

Acts 7:48-50. "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: {49} 'Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me? says the LORD, or what is the place of my rest? {50} Has My hand not made all these things?'

Fine buildings do not impress God. They do not meet a need that God has. They are not adequate to house his glory. The finest temple is "him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, who trembles at my word." It was always God's intention to dwell within the hearts of human beings.

27.2. HYPOCRITICAL OFFERINGS

Isa 66:3-4. "He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol. Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, {4} so will I choose their delusions, and bring their fears on them; because, when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before my eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight."

These verses seem to contradict the whole sacrificial system of the Law. David previously had recognised that God did not require sacrifice and offerings:

Psa 51:16-17. For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. {17} The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart; these, O God, you will not despise.

But Isaiah's prophecy seems to go much further than David. Legally acceptable sacrifices are described as being unclean. Can Isaiah be talking about the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law? Apparently he is, but the reason the ritual is unacceptable to God is not their authorship, but that they are practised by people who do not respond to the word of God and who persist in doing evil. These hypocritical acts of orthodox rituals are described as "their own ways", "abominations" and "delusions".

27.3. ENCOURAGEMENT TO TRUE WORSHIPPERS

Isa 66:5-6. Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at His word: "Your brethren who hated you, who cast you out for my name's sake, said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy.' But they shall be ashamed." {6} The sound of noise from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the LORD, who fully repays his enemies!

Encouragement is offered for those who fear the Lord. They shall be vindicated at the end, though presently they are persecuted by the religious hypocrites. As Ishmael persecuted Isaac so the carnal man persecutes the spiritual man.

The Lord will come as judge and suddenly appear in the Temple. Malachi warns the same:

Mal 3:1. "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, he is coming," says the LORD of hosts.

27.4. SUDDENLY

Isa 66:7-9. "Before she was in labour, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child. {8} Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labour, she gave birth to her children. {9} Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?" says the LORD. "Shall I who cause delivery shut up the womb?" says your God.

There are different ways of interpreting these verses. Some commentators look for meaning in the statements and suggest that the male child is the Messiah and that the mother (she) is Israel. I think that the prophet is using proverbs to illustrate that the thing that God will do shall be done very swiftly and that it shall not fail. God was going to do unexpected and unheard of things. The nation will once again flourish.

The nation of Israel was reformed in a single day, 14th May 1948. Was this in the prophet's mind?

Verse 9 illustrates that the Lord's threats of judgement and promises of restoring a remnant are certain. He shall cause his word to be performed.

Isa 66:10-14. "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her; {11} That you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom, that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory." {12} For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed; on her sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on her knees. {13} As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." {14} When you see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like grass; the hand of the LORD shall be known to His servants, and His indignation to His enemies.

Those who mourn now for the purposes of God will be satisfied, comforted and share in the glory of that future day. Jerusalem in the Millennium is described. She will be exalted by the offerings and services of the nations. The people of God will be satiated with peace and comfort.

27.5. JUDGMENT

Isa 66:15-18. For behold, the LORD will come with fire and with his chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. {16} For by fire and by his sword the LORD will judge all flesh; and the slain of the LORD shall be many. {17} "Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves, to go to the gardens after an idol in the midst, eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse, shall be consumed together," says the LORD. {18} "For I know their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see my glory.

The means of God's judgement are seen as chariots and fire and a whirlwind. The same language is used when Elisha witnessed the angelic armies that fight for Israel⁵².

⁵² 2 Ki 2:11-12. Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. {12} And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces.

The New Testament warns that as God once destroyed the earth with a flood, so next time God will judge the world with fire:

2 Pet 3:10. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

In preparation of this judgement God gathers the nations together, and they assemble to oppose Israel.

Isa 66:19-24. "I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations: to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard my fame nor seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. {20} Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to my holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. {21} "And I will also take some of them for priests and Levites," says the LORD.

{22} "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me," says the LORD, "so shall your descendants and your name remain. {23} And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before me," says the LORD. {24} "And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

Those who escape Armageddon will come and worship the Lord at Jerusalem. The far off nations shall bring all the Jews back to the land.

We previously read of how the people of God will be called by a new name⁵³. But here we are reminded that the name of Israel will remain through eternity.

Residents of the earth will make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship but also to see battle field's (Armageddon, Valley of Jehoshaphat (Kidron) and Edom). Jesus uses the same phrase in verse 24 in the gospels - "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."⁵⁴

2 Ki 6:17. And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

⁵³ Isa 65:15

⁵⁴ Mark 9:43-48. "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; {44} "where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' {45} "And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; {46} "where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' {47} "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire; {48} "where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'

28. CONCLUSIONS

So the great book of Isaiah ends with a description of the peace, rest and reward of the Millennium. Isaiah has taken us on journeys through time. He has described the Lord as judge of the nations and as judge of the people of God. He foretold the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel; the humbling of the Assyrian threat and the rise of the Babylonian Empire. He has wept over the destruction of the Temple.

But he has also told us of the Son that is to be given; the Lord whose glory fills the Temple; the servant of the Lord who would suffer and make an offering of himself for sin. He has taken us through seasons of judgment to bring us into new ages of blessing. He has described the peaceful world of the millennial reign and also the New Heavens and New Earth.

Isaiah encourages us that although kingdoms and nations rise and fall, our God reigns. The plans and purposes of the Lord are not thwarted. He reigns. He does what he wants in heaven and on the earth. He knows the end from the beginning. His word shall be performed and he is faithful to those who tremble at his word.

What a fitting end this is to this great prophetic journey. The people of God safe in the purposes of God.