



# PT Butler

## Bible Study Notebooks

### Study of ISAIAH part 1

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chapter	page
introduction	2
1:1 – 4:6	11
5:1 - 6:13	16
7:1 – 9:21	22
10:1 – 12:6	29
13:1 – 17:14	35
18:1 – 20:6	42
21:1 – 23:18	49
24:1- 27:13	56
28:1- 30:33	65
31:1- 35:10	73
36:1-39:8	82
bio	92

# ISAIAH, Introduction and Background

## Introduction

Our study of Isaiah will be a rich and rewarding study. Anything worthwhile involves cost. Getting the treasures in Isaiah is like getting oil from beneath the surface of the earth—one has to “drill” for it. But even more fundamental than drilling, one has to believe what one’s drilling for is important. A person will never really dig or drill for anything unless one wants to; and one’s want-quotient is equal to his value-quotient. What Isaiah has to say to our lives is more valuable than oil or even gold.

(a) Apologetic value: Isaiah’s prophecies preceded their fulfillment by hundreds of years. This proves God knows the affairs of men before they happen, that he cares, and that he is absolute Sovereign over all that is or that happens. It proves God’s revealed word is inexorably constant. It does not “return unto him void, but accomplishes the purpose for which he sends it..” (Isa. 55:11). Strengthens our faith!

(b) Praise value: Isaiah has some of the loftiest, most spiritual tributes to the majesty and mercy of God in all the Bible. “Sing O heavens, for the Lord has done it...” (Isa. 44:23). We will come to a new appreciation of the holiness of God and want to praise his name like Hezekiah (Isa. 38:20). Edifies our hearts!

(c) Historical value: Isaiah’s accuracy and scope of human history for his own era and for centuries afterward cannot be excelled. He deals with ancient empires and famous people long since lost to secular history. Writing from divine inspiration, his sweep of human events puts it all in sensible perspective. Educates our mind!

(d) Moral value: Human behavior in rebellion against God remains constant—only technology changes! Isaiah’s preaching is as incisive as the surgeon’s scalpel—as relevant as this morning’s newspaper. He exposes sin for what it is and what it does by documenting the perversity of his own people. He knows how to lance the cancer, but he also has the divine prescription for healing (Isa. 48:17-19). Regenerates our souls!

Isaiah’s name means, “Salvation of Jehovah.” That is Isaiah’s ministry and message for us. He is the “Gospel Prophet.” He proclaims that God atones for human sin by his grace through a Suffering Servant. He declares to the world that man finds identity and purpose in faithfulness to God’s redemptive covenant. Isaiah preaches that God’s absolute faithfulness is the divine drawing power unto sinful human beings. He preaches that God faithfully chastens sin through preaching and providence, and that God faithfully redeems the penitent through forgiveness and restoration. That is the way to Life! That is valuable!

A good outline of the book of Isaiah:

- I Perversity and Prophet, ch. 1-6
- II Crisis and The Christ, ch. 7-12
- III People and Pagans, ch. 13:23
- IV Judah and Judgment, ch. 24-27
- V Emancipation Not From Egypt, ch. 28-35
- VI Chastening Through Captivity, ch. 36-39
- VII Salvation Through God's Servant, ch. 40-53
- VIII Communion through God's Covenant, ch. 54-59
- IX Zion, The Zenith, ch. 60-66

Isaiah, the man, the prophet of God: Born probably around 780 B.C., lived about 90 years, died about 690 B.C.

Lived through the reigns of four kings of Judah—Uzziah (Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (perhaps into the reign of Manasseh).

Isaiah's father's name was Amoz; Isaiah was a man of the palace, counselor of kings.

He was bold, earnest, unafraid, uncompromising, always standing for the truth when such a stand was unpopular and dangerous.

His style covers the whole spectrum of human emotions—blunt, sarcastic, tender, cajoling, angry, pleading.

He lives through seeing his countrymen, the 10 northern tribes ("Israel"), invaded by Assyria and carried off to Mesopotamia to captivity; he lives to see his own country (Judah) invaded by Assyria and its capital city surrounded; he lives to see Assyria fade and Babylon come to the forefront of world domination.

By faith, Isaiah "saw" the glory of the Messiah and spoke of him (John 12:41).

Tradition says Isaiah was placed between two planks of wood, by order of Manasseh (Hezekiah's son), and sawn in two!

## Background

Isaiah was called by God at one of the most critical and unique moments in the history of the covenant people. It was a time when men needed to be turned away from their own self-centered and carnally-oriented schemes of utopianism. They were bent on saving themselves in their own way. They were certain that salvation was merely a matter of making the correct sacrifices and observing the proper rituals and making the proper right international political alliances. Isaiah's era and message form the precise historical and theological pivotal point between the theocracy and the church, between Moses and Christ. There were definite predictions and historical inferences that the old order and old relationships were to pass away and God was preparing to deal with all mankind (including Gentiles) through a new order and new relationship. The crucial questions were, where is Judah's place in this unfolding drama—and how is Judah to fulfill her function, once it is known? Isaiah was called to answer both those questions for Judah.

The history of man from his first sin was one long account of man's attempts to save himself in his sins, by his self-centered methods. But man grew more and more wicked. God judged the world by a great flood. Not long after that men made another attempt to storm the ramparts of heaven by building a tower to reach up to God at Babel. Again, their attempt to save themselves resulted in an awful judgment of God when he confounded their speech and scattered them abroad in the earth. Thus God would not permit sin to be concentrated in one place where mankind could concentrate all his efforts in a united way to save himself. God deliberately scattered mankind to persuade mankind to seek him (see Acts 17:26). Nations and societies arose. From among them God chose one particular nation to be for him a kingdom of priests—to exemplify in the earth, among the nations, his plan for redemption and man's necessity to give up self-conceived ways of saving himself and trust in God (see Deut. 4:6-8; Ezek. 5:5). But the covenant people faltered. They begged for "a king like the nations." They divided into warring camps (Israel and Judah). They both became, in fact, worse than the pagan nations about them. In the midst of this world of many nations and cultures, the old spirit of Babel again asserted itself. In such world wide nationalism and particularism, man could not unite to find his utopia, so, as never before in the history of the world, the idea of conquest gained ground and one nation sought to subdue other nations and to make them a part of "one-worldism." The powerful Assyrian monarch appeared on the scene of history and his appearance signaled the striving of man for a new world-order—universalism. Assyria would be followed in succession by four great universal, world-empires. There would be no tower reaching to heaven, but there would be world-empire. Mankind would not be concentrated in one spot; he would cover the earth but belong to one kingdom, the kingdom of man. Man was to rule and extend his sway so that man alone would be exalted through such universalism. Sound familiar? It should, for this is prevalent in our world today in many different ideologies (Communism, United Nations, World Council of Churches, even in some who want Democracy to be the "universal utopia"—a form of humanism).

Where would the covenant people fit into this scheme? Were they to be swallowed up in the universal world kingdom, or would they, for some reason have the courage and faith to resist the march of civilization and universalism? The covenant people seemed to be infatuated with the prospects of being like the nations about them—even guardedly in favor of universalism. God’s purpose for man stood in diametric opposition to such an idea. He had made it known in the past that he and he alone was capable of bringing man to his created purpose. Man must learn that his deliverance cannot come from himself. To God alone must he look.

Isaiah lived during the domination of the Middle East by Assyria. Assyria (Nineveh), founded before 2000 B.C. by Nimrod, fought for hundreds of years with Babylon for control of Mesopotamia. After the division of Israel (ca. 900 B.C.) into two “nations” (i.e., Israel and Judah) Assyria became a world empire for the next 300 years. Jonah brought Nineveh (even its king) to repentance about 800 B.C. Sixty years later, however, Israel was threatened with extinction by the Assyrians as they attempted to conquer all the Middle East, and even Egypt.

Ahab halted an Assyrian invasion of Palestine at the battle of Qarqar (845 B.C.). But the Assyrians drove down again under Pul (a.k.a., “Tiglath-pileser III”) about 740 B.C. Isaiah was God’s prophet and counselor to kings at that time. Pul conquered much of Galilee and deported some of the ten northern tribes (“Israel”) Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel tried to get Ahaz, king of Judah, to form a coalition to resist invasion by Assyria. Ahaz refused; Rezin and Pekah conspired to dethrone Ahaz (2 Kings ch. 16). Ahaz appealed to Assyria for help. Assyria gladly offered on the condition that Ahaz pay tribute and incorporate the worship of Assyrian “gods” (idols) in Judah. Isaiah rebuked Ahaz and promised if he would ask for a sign, he would be shown that Immanuel (i.e., “God with us”) would deliver according to his redemptive plan (Isa. chs. 7-12). But Ahaz rejected God in favor of Assyria’s offer.

Shalmanezar V, king of Assyria, invaded Syria and Israel (see Hosea 10:14), but it fell to his son, Sargon II (721-705 B.C.) to conquer this territory and take 27,000 Israelites into captivity (2 Kings ch. 17). Judah lay exposed to the Assyrians. Sargon was challenged by a coalition of Egyptians and Philistines who tried to get Judah to join them. Isaiah persuaded Judean leaders not to join (Isa. 20:1-6) and Judah was spared. Sennacherib, Sargon’s son, invaded Judah (ca. 701 B.C.), conquered 46 Judean cities, took 200,000 captives, received tribute from Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14), and besieged Jerusalem with his army “commander-in-chief” named Rabshakeh (see Isaiah chs. 36-39). During all this the Judean people clamored for alliance with Egypt. Isaiah was sent by God to persuade the Judeans to trust completely in God to fulfill the covenant made with Abraham. Hezekiah, a man with the spiritual stature of David, hesitated, then turned to God, and Judah was delivered by a miraculous slaughter of 185,000 Assyrian troops by God’s “death angel” in one night. Hezekiah, tempted by flattery from a Babylonian prince, proudly exposed Judah’s treasury and armory to the Babylonians, and Isaiah had to deliver God’s judgment of captivity for Judah (Isa. ch. 39). Captivity did not come for another 100 years, while Isaiah’s good news from God was that out of that captivity would be formed a “remnant” of faithful believers who would produce the Suffering Servant of God, God’s “new covenant,” and his glorious kingdom. Isaiah (and

other prophets) were trying to establish that “remnant” through their preaching before the exile (cf. Isaiah and his disciples in Isa. 8:16-20; and the “foundation being laid in Zion” Isa. 28:14-22). Micah was preaching the very same message to the same people at the same time (see Micah 4:1—5:15). Isaiah and other prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) predicted the movements of great world empires, emperors and events, often in minute detail. Their predictions came to pass centuries later to the minutest detail. Their words were, and are, the words of God (Jer. 1:9-10). Read the following chapters in the Bible: 2 Kings, chapters 15-20; 2 Chronicles, chapters 26-32; Isaiah, chapters 7-12; Isaiah, chapters 36-39.

The captivities of the Jews, God’s “indignation” on their rejection of his calling for them (see Isa. 10:25; 13:5; 26:20; 30:30; Jer. 10:10; 50:25; Ezek. 21:31; 22:24,31; Dan. 8:19; 11:30; 11:36; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 1:12, etc.) must come upon them in order that through their exile a holy remnant might pass and return. From that remnant the Suffering Servant, man’s Savior would finally come. They must understand that the bondage to Babylon (just like Egypt) from which Cyrus (God’s Servant in “type”) would free them was but a type of the greater bondage to which all men are enslaved—the bondage of the spirit in sin. They must learn that salvation is not in human universalism. Isaiah, in glowing, emotional, figurative and symbolic language (which hopefully his contemporaries would best understand) predicted that the experiences of the covenant people past and present were merely types of the redemptive work which God was going to culminate in “Zion” (the NT church) through the Servant of the Lord (the Anointed One, the Messiah). The Servant will accomplish the purpose of God as the nation itself could never do.

The task of Isaiah was to explain to the people of God that the old order of God’s method of redemption, in a particular nation (the Jews) was passing away and that the new order (universal salvation in a “kingdom of the Servant of God”) was approaching. The covenant people had defaulted their commission to be a light to lighten the world. They must be purged. Captivity would come. But a “faithful remnant” is seen by Isaiah which would, at some future time, return to the land and out of this remnant would come the “seed of woman” to bruise the serpent’s head. Then would be fulfilled the covenant made with Abraham to bless the world through his “seed” (singular—the Messiah, Gal. 3:16). It is no wonder that Isaiah is called “The Gospel Prophet.”

But in Isaiah’s own day, as never before, the covenant people had to know that their help was in Jehovah. The threatening appearance of Assyria had to be explained for the people of Judah were tempted to turn to Assyria (then to Egypt) for help. And in spite of Isaiah’s warnings, they still turned to Assyria (under Ahaz). They turned to the one who accomplished their defeat. But the Lord, who overrules all things for his glory, brought upon them what they had asked for, and then brought out of it his redemptive remnant. Assyria did come, and the whole course of human history was changed. Isaiah advised one after another of the kings of Judah against dependence upon Assyria (or Egypt, or Babylon) but to no avail. It became his God-appointed duty, therefore, to explain the course of events that would follow (such as Babylonian exile, restoration of the Jews, and finally, the Messianic glories) so that the faithful remnant might be encouraged in the midst of dire circumstances.

All the forces of the world are subject to Jehovah. The great empires, though free to exert their own intentions, unconsciously fulfill the will of God in his plan of redemption. He uses their evil for both judgment and chastening (Isa. 10:5-34). The heathen empires rage against God (Psa. 2:1-11), but God will not allow them to utterly annihilate his people. A "faithful remnant" will survive. To this end Isaiah is called to predict its survival and its glorious destiny. Jerusalem (meaning, of course, the faithful remnant which grows into the NT church) shall remain inviolate. Judah may be overrun by the heathen, but "Zion" cannot fall.

"Zion" or Jerusalem (both symbolic of the NT church see Gal. 4:25-26; Heb. 12:22), it must be remembered, was the one spot on earth where Jehovah was to be worshiped. His shrine was there. There lived the only community on earth (the Jews) which preserved for mankind the true knowledge of Jehovah and his purposes. The little band of faithful Jews to whom Isaiah committed his testimony and revelation was there. The preservation and continued existence in the world of this spiritual "Israel" culminating in the church of the NT (Rom. 2:28; 11:26; Gal. 6:15-16) is what Isaiah proclaims with such unwearied assurance against both the fears of the rulers of Judah and the arrogance of the heathen who sought their exploitation and obliteration.

So, the gist of Isaiah's prophecy is this: The sinners having been destroyed (1:28), and Jerusalem purified, the city shall be a city of righteousness (1:25ff), under a righteous ruler (9:7; 11:4ff). But above all, Jehovah's own presence and government shall be very manifest, with exceeding joy and glory. As a result, some men shall abandon all their idols (2:20), the worship which had not wholly disappeared from Israel, in spite of the fact that the national religion was that of Jehovah, would be fulfilled. With righteousness shall come forth peace (2:40), and with peace the renewed fertility, and the free enjoyment of the spiritual fruits of such prosperity (1:19; 4:2; 30:23-26, etc.). Over all, a wonderful light shall be shed, dispersing the people's gloom (9:1-7). Moreover, the Gentiles shall willingly come to "Jerusalem" ("Zion") to be taught of Israel's God and his law.

## **Interpreting the Prophets**

Although the prophets wrote in human language, their literature is unique. That's because it predicts the future and talks about spiritual things, as well as recording snippets of contemporary history along the way. Therefore, it employs some literary expressions not usually found in other writings. To get the most from our study of Isaiah, a few definitions of the communicative techniques which are characteristic of the prophets need to be made:

**Historical Contemporaneity** (or, "Times-Coloring"): The prophets predicted the future in the terminology of their own times. Speaking of great spiritual innovations in the future, they had to "color" such predictions in the vernacular of their own people if they were to

be comprehended. We, therefore, must try to understand the vernacular (terminology) of the times of the prophets.

**Covenant Background:** Everything the prophets preached or predicted was on a background of God announcing that he was going to keep his covenant (promise) and produce a spiritual “nation” from the faith of Abraham and his descendants. The prophets are not primarily concerned with a physical nation or land.

**Unifying Focal Point:** All Old Testament prophecy has one central focus—the Messiah (i.e., the Christ) and the Messiah’s kingdom (i.e., the church of the NT) (cf. Isa. 53:1-12; Dan. 9:24-27; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Lk. 24:25-27; 24:44-49; Acts 3:17-26; 13:16-41, etc.). The OT prophets were not really concerned with the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world—they had all they could do to convince the Israelites that a Messiah was coming a “first” time to establish a new covenant which would put an end to (fulfill) the old covenant (e.g. see Jer. 3:15-18; 31:31-34, Dan. 9:14-17, etc.).

**Shortened Perspective:** Occasionally, the prophet will jump from his own time down to the time of the Messiah, from one verse to the next, without filling in all the centuries of history in between. Joel 2:27 to 2:28 is a classic example; Jesus used this literary vehicle in Matthew 24 where he jumped from predicting the destruction of the temple and Judaism in A.D. 70, to the end of the world and his Second Coming (Matt. 24:35 ends the discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem and Matt. 24:36 begins the discussion on Christ’s Second Coming); John used the same literary vehicle in the book of Revelation at Rev. 20:6 and 20:7.

**Double Emphasis:** The OT prophets picture God as moving toward his goal of redemption in the Messiah and the Messianic “nation” through a series of judgments and redemptions (or deliverances). This includes the Babylonian captivity and the restoration of physical Israel to the land of Palestine in 536 B.C.. The prophets predict the Jews will suffer a series of troubles and deliverances until finally the Messiah will come to the world, in the flesh (Dan. 9:24-27; Micah 5:2) and “judge the unbelieving” and “deliver the believing.” This was accomplished at the cross and the resurrection and the establishing of the NT church. It all points to Christ’s first coming—not his second coming! The NT tells us about its consummation at Christ’s second coming.

When the saintly Augustine asked the sage Ambrose which Bible book was the best to study following conversion, the answer was, “Isaiah.” Isaiah presents the clearest view of the grace of God in the entire OT. It is indeed, “the Book of Salvation” and its writer has been called “the Fifth Evangelist (i.e., Gospel).” There are 66 chapters, 1291 verses—be sure you read every verse. Reading the whole book in one sitting should take about six hours. We’re going to study about 3 chapters per week. Three chapters at one sitting should take less than one half an hour to read. Surely, you have that much time each week to give to God’s word! Read the whole book of Isaiah through; you can do it in one week by reading about 5 chapters in the morning, and five chapters in the evening.

## New Testament References to Isaiah

The apostle John wrote that Isaiah “saw the glory (Christ’s) and spoke of him (Jn. 12:41). Isaiah is the most frequently quoted book of the Old Covenant Scriptures in the New Covenant Scriptures. Isaiah wrote more about the Messiah and his kingdom than all the other prophets combined. His book is, indeed, one of the most precious in all the Old Testament. Isaiah wrote other books which have not been preserved by the Holy Spirit for us (2 Chron. 26:22; 32:32). The oldest known Hebrew language manuscript existing today is of the book of Isaiah (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, dated about 200 B.C.). Thirty-six times Isaiah is quoted or paraphrased in the New Testament scriptures:

1:9 (Rom. 9:29) Rom. 10:16)	29:13 (Mt. 15:8-9)	53:1 (Jn. 12:38;
5:1-2 (Mt. 21:33-46)	35:5-6 (Mt. 11:5; Lk. 7:22)	53:4 (Mt. 8:17)
6:9-10 (Mt. 13:14-15; Jn. 12:39-41; Acts 28:26-27)	40:3 (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4)	53:5-6 (1 Pet. 2:24-25)
7:14 (Mt. 1:23) Lk. 22:37)	40:6-8 (1 Pet. 1:24-25)	53:11 (Rom. 5:18-19)
8:14 (Mt. 21:44)	42:1 (Mt. 12:18-21)	53:12 (Phil. 2:9-11;
8:17-18 (Heb. 2:13) 19:46)	42:1-3 (Mt. 12:18-21)	55:3 (Acts 13:34)
9:1-2 (Mt. 4:15-16)	42:7 (Acts 26:18)	56:7 (Mt. 21:13; Lk.
11:1 (Acts 13:22-23)	43:20-21 (Lk. 1:74-75; 1 Pet. 2:9)	61:1-2 (Lk. 4:18-19)
11:10 (Rom. 15:12) Acts 7:49-50)	44:6 (Rev. 1:8,17; 2:8)	63:10 (Acts 7:51)
14:13-15 (2 Thess. 2:4)	50:6 (Mt. 26:67; 27:30; Mk. 15:19;	66:1-2 (Mt. 5:34;
	Lk. 22:63)	

28:11-12 (1 Cor. 14:21)                      52:7 (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:15)

28:16 (Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet.    52:11 (2 Cor. 6:17)

2:4-6; Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11)

Isaiah is a miniature Bible in structure. It has 66 chapters, just as the Bible has 66 books. There are two great divisions, just as in the Bible, with 39 chapters in the first (like 39 books of the OT) and 27 chapters in the second (like the 27 chapters of the NT). Every important section of the book of Isaiah is quoted in the New Testament, thus Isaiah is confirmed as the author of the entire book by the NT writers! Every teacher should look up every Isaiah quotation in the NT listed above.

## ISAIAH 1:1—4:6

No! You will not find one of the OT prophets advocating abandonment of the law of Moses. As a matter of fact, every OT prophet had as the center of his message the keeping of the law of Moses—especially the spirit of the law. Of course they all, including Isaiah, strongly advocated keeping the “letter” of the law along with the “spirit” of the law because there were so many people, including priests, who were disobeying the “letter” of the law as well as the “spirit” of the law. The “spirit” of the law of Moses is “righteousness” or, as Micah so aptly sums it up, “...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8). SO, ISAIAH HERE IN THE OPENING WORDS OF HIS MESSAGE IS ADVOCATING KEEPING THE “SPIRIT” OF THE LAW OF GOD! Isaiah does not say “bring no more offerings”—he says “bring no more vain offerings.” Their offerings were vain because they were being brought with the wrong “spirit” upon the heart! The “law of God” has never been abandoned! Not even Jesus “abandoned” the law! Jesus fulfilled (i.e., brought to its goal, filled-up-full, completed) the law—he did not destroy it (Matt. 5:17-20). The “law of God” is brought to its goal (fulfilled) in agape (i.e., God-like, selfless, sacrificial love---Rom. 13:8-10). It was the priests who were supposed to teach the “spirit” of the law (Lev. 19:1-18), but the priesthood was thoroughly corrupted. That is why God had to call into being a succession of “prophets” to teach those who would listen the “spirit” (and “letter”) of the law. The corrupt priesthood was not even teaching the “letter” of the law—they were violating it for carnal gain! That is so thoroughly documented in all the prophets it would take an entire page to list all the references! Clearly, in Isaiah’s day the priests were teaching the people, and the people were believing it, that “a multitude of offerings” (no matter what was on the heart of the offerer) would please God, procure righteousness, prosperity and security for the offerer. THAT WAS NOT, AND NEVER SHALL BE, TRUE! The NT scriptures are plain to point out that it is what is on the heart of the worshiper that counts with God—not how much (2 Cor. Chs. 8-9, etc.). Ritual without regeneration is of no avail with God. Ceremony without morality is an abomination to God. The Jews of Isaiah’s and Micah’s day (Micah 6:6-8) were very “religious.” God never disposes of ritual altogether; what man needs to learn is that he should do the ritual but not reserve any part of his “heart” for himself—his heart must be totally devoted to God along with the ritual (Isa. 51:7; Psa. 37:31; 40:8; 119:11). These Jews of Isaiah’s day were acting worse than dumb oxen and dumb donkeys! (Isa. 1:3). Dumb animals acknowledge and “love” those who feed them—these Jews, while bringing many offerings, were not doing it out of love for God but love for themselves! The Jews (for the most part) misunderstood God’s purpose in giving the law of Moses. He never intended his OT law of sacrifices to be divorced of personal spirituality. God never intended his OT ceremonies for anything but to focus the heart of man on his spiritual relationship to the Creator. He never intended them to be ends in themselves. That is true even of the ceremonies and rituals in the NT! “Ritualism,” (i.e., ritual devoid of spiritual surrender) quite contrary from displaying reverence, really is considered by God the ultimate irreverence! It is abominable! It bothers God! It agitates God! He is made angry because it is an insult to him and a challenge to his sovereignty. He cannot let it go unanswered. Isaiah is

saying, “Get your heart right!” “Separate your desires, ambitions and actions from wickedness and rebellion and stop trying to fool God by hypocritical ritualism.” First, they had to “cleanse” themselves (by seeking forgiveness and repentance because a person must be made holy judicially, (by appropriating the grace of God through covenant terms kept) before anything he does is accepted as holy by God. The process involves just plain, old, everyday acts of goodness; standing for what is right, just and merciful. That is pure religion (James 1:27). If God came to earth and walked among men would he still insist on this? **GOD DID COME TO EARTH IN THE BODY OF JESUS. HE NOT ONLY INSISTED ON IT, HE, HIMSELF, DID IT!**

God invites all people to THINK! The Bible is a reasonable book! It assaults the mind with facts, history, and revelations from heaven’s throne (from Almighty God). But God never invites human beings to make any decisions about the means or method of salvation and redemption. **GOD ALONE DECIDES ALL THAT HAS TO DO WITH REDEMPTION!** Human beings are given the powers (i.e., facilities) to reason and the freedom to choose. If people will only reason, in the light of God’s mercy, they will conclude that it is their logical duty to give themselves as “living sacrifices” unto God (Rom. 12:1-2—the Greek word translated “spiritual” in RSV, in the original texts Rom. 12:1, is *logiken* and is the word from which the English “logical” comes—the KJV correctly translates it “reasonable”). Every book of the Old and New Testament is designed to appeal to the reasoning capabilities of human beings! **GOD REVEALS HIMSELF IN CREATION** (i.e., “THE THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE” Rom. 1:18-20) **AND IN HISTORY AND MIRACLES DONE THROUGH HIS MESSENGERS SO THAT THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR HUMAN BEINGS TO THINK WRONGLY!** Isaiah pleads (Isa. 1:18-20) that if God has demonstrated his faithfulness to redeem his people in times past when they repented and obeyed, is it not logical to believe he will always do the same? Yes! God keeps his word! The bloodiest sin can be erased and the sinner given a cleansing that makes him white like pure, undefiled snow or lamb’s wool. There is no unpardonable sin except the choice to reject God’s offer of pardon, precisely as God has offered it! If you are willing and obedient, not forced obedience, not pretended obedience, but willing obedience, like that of a loving son to his father—it is “logical” or “reasonable” to believe God will do what he has promised to do! Humans have no alternative of their own making. They cannot reject God’s offer and create one of their own. If they refuse and rebel against God’s offer of “goodness” the only alternative is “destruction” for the only true goodness is what God creates and controls. This alternative is inexorable in a moral creation. All human attempts to revise God’s New Testament redemptive plan are “unwilling obedience.” God does not approve! God does not want humanity destroyed—he wants it saved!

God appeals to his people through Isaiah by means of picturing (predicting) the great Messianic destiny they have. Their destiny is to become the central attraction for the world. Their destiny is to teach the world God’s “way.” Their destiny is to unite people of all nations in a kingdom of peace. This was to come to pass in “the latter days.” The “latter days” of God’s redemptive program is always what “latter days” means in the OT prophets. “Latter days” in the OT means the Christian dispensation (the end of the Old dispensation—not the end of the world). The whole Christian age is the “latter days” (see Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Pet. 1:5,20; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 Jn. 2:18; and especially

1 Cor. 10:11 where Paul indubitably states that the Christian dispensation is “the end of the ages”). There will be no more “ages” after this one in which we are now living! Redemption was “finished” at the death, resurrection of Christ and establishment of the church. “Zion” (i.e., “the mountain of the house of the Lord”) is the church (Heb. 12:18-24 is apostolic proof that “Zion” is the symbol in the OT for the NT church). Daniel symbolized the church (God’s universal kingdom) as a “rock without human hands which grew into a great mountain which filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:44-45). God’s “mountain” will be exalted above every other “mountain” (i.e. kingdom). All the nations (goyim, in Hebrew language—Gentiles) flowing to this exalted kingdom means people from all the Gentile nations and cultures will become members of the Messianic kingdom (the church). The purpose of the Gentiles flowing to the Messianic kingdom is “that the God of Jacob may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths” see Acts 15:12-18; 13:44-40; 17:30-31; 19:17-20; 1 Thess. 1:8-10. The gospel was profoundly attractive to millions of Gentiles who had become dissatisfied, cynical and desperate for the truth as a result of centuries of idolatry. “Zion” (the NT church) would be the origin and impetus for the “law” or “word of the Lord.” “Zion” originated in geographical Jerusalem and in the Jewish nation—but it was never intended to remain provincial—it was to “go forth” (see Lk. 24:27; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 13:46-47, etc.). The word (“law” or torah in Hebrew) is figurative for “will, message, covenant” and does not mean the law of Moses, per se. Even the OT indicates the Mosaic covenant was to be abrogated (Jer. 3:15-17; 31:31-34; Dan. 9:24-27, etc.).

“Beating of swords into plowshare” etc., is a symbolic way of saying peace has been wrought! The Messianic kingdom (“Zion”—the church) is to be characterized as peace. This is not what is hoped for it; this is what it shall be! Any individual who is not surrendered to be at peace with God and at peace with his fellow man (so far as it depends on him, Rom. 12:14-21) will not be in this kingdom! God, himself, will be the judge, the One who arbitrarily says what peace is, and who is at peace. Those who willingly let God be the arbitrary judge will obey him and turn from enmity and war, to peace and productiveness. This does not mean, of course, in a “fallen world” that unregenerated individuals and nations will no longer be at enmity with one another. It does mean that out of every nation people will become citizens of the Messianic kingdom and these will no longer be hostile toward God or one another (see Rom. 8:1-29; Eph. 2:11-22). This only happens when people let “the peace of Christ rule (Greek, *brabeueto*, “arbitrate, umpire, officiate”) in their hearts” (Col. 3:15). God and his word must do all the deciding, judging and officiating for those who are citizens of his pre-eminent kingdom!

The time for God’s patience had run its course. The only hope for Isaiah’s people was to try to hide—WHICH IS NO HOPE AT ALL, FOR NO ONE CAN HIDE FROM GOD! God must humble haughty people; God must vindicate his sovereignty. The only hope for saving any of mankind is that God’s sovereignty be vindicated, proved, and established! If God is not almighty, there is nothing absolute in which mankind may hope! The Lord alone must stand proved as exalted. Satan’s lie to Adam and Eve must be disproved (i.e., “you shall become gods”) unequivocally! Human pride was to be humbled. The cedars of Lebanon, the mighty oaks, the high mountains, towers and walls of cities, huge ships of world commerce; all will be destroyed! These are the

things human beings assume will go on forever. These are things mankind uses to build, acquire wealth, and fortify against its depletion—and mankind takes great pride in them. God can, by providence or by using the wicked ambitions of warring men, devastate all these things in which mankind places such confidence. God can destroy all this in an instant, or in a lengthy time! Idols, other “gods” (philosophies, objects) are of no power to rescue, explain and comfort when the ultimate judgment of God falls. Man’s “gods” are all proved impotent by God’s judgments! Science, medicine, money, fame, power, philosophy, human friends, even self, cannot stop death—God’s original judgment. Trust in idols is in a sense trust in man himself, for idols are the products of human ingenuity and mentality. Any trust in man for redemption and salvation is to be stopped! Man’s knowledge, limited by the finitude of his being, is not able to extricate him from his predicament. In all cases, human knowledge alone (without the revelation of God) only buries man deeper and deeper in estrangement from God because the more man knows (without accept God’s revelation) the prouder he becomes of himself and the more dedicated to dethroning any divine Wisdom he becomes. But of “what account is he?” Man’s life, so far as he knows is extremely transitory (Psa. 146:3-4; 118:8; 104:29; Eccl. 12:7; Psa. 33:10; James 4:13-16). And what can man do against the judgment of God—physical death? NOTHING!

Ruined government is what happens when “boys become princes!” God was going to visit Judah with judgment in the area of “bread and water”—the two primary necessities to physical life would be devastated. This happened to Judah when the Assyrians marched down into their land (during the reign of Hezekiah) and took 46 Judean cities, burned their crops, poisoned their wells, and killed many of their people. Isaiah told Hezekiah it would take 3 years to restore the crops (Isa. 37:30) thus destroyed, after God saved Jerusalem and Judah from the Assyrians when Hezekiah repented. But even more important, civil, political, and cultural “stay and staff,” every form of governmental authority would be devastated. In place of wise adult leaders, Judah would subsequently (after Hezekiah) be ruled by “children”—incompetent, inexperienced, childish, brat-like rulers. A whole line if such kings followed Hezekiah—Jehoahaz, 23 years old (2 Kings 12:31); Amon, 22 years old (2 Kings 21:19); Zedekiah, 21 years old (2 Kings 24:18); Jehoiachin, 18 years old (2 Kings 24:8); Manasseh, 12 years old (2 Kings 21:1); and Josiah, 8 years old (2 Kings 22:1). When respect for age goes, moral anarchy is at hand. Respect for old age is in the law of God (Lev. 19:32) and in the NT (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:1-22, etc.). In such social chaos, when “boys” rule (brats, whether they are 50 years and older or not like some of our church elders have been) people tend to arrogate power to those who only appear to be leaders (i.e., “having mantles”). Outward appearances as the criterion for choosing leaders gets God’s people into trouble constantly! They did it as far back as King Saul. God’s concern is the heart—the mature heart—when it comes to leadership! But there will be such chaos, Isaiah predicts, no one will want the responsibility of leadership of such a mess. Men will see that such a rebellious people cannot be led.

The women of the covenant nation, especially rich women, had become vain, proud, arrogant, self-seeking. They walked in a manner to bring attention to their bodies. They dressed, put on cosmetics, and made lascivious gestures to receive attention. It was their way to exert power, to gain security. It is as ungodly as masculine arrogance and

haughtiness. Immodesty always breeds degradation. These women were going to reap what they had sown. If they advertised their bodies for sale, they would be exploited. They would not get the power they expected in exchange for their bodies. The Lord was going to allow foreign invaders to carry off these women to captivity and exploitation. Jewish women became slaves and concubines in Mesopotamia (Assyrian and Babylonian) harems. Those who delighted in immodest exposure were rewarded with immodest exposure at the hands of heathen men. Why are women who delight in attracting men by immodesty always so shocked and offended when immodest and vulgar men demonstrate their attraction and often violently abuse such women? The fine jewels of the Jewish women and their beauty would be plundered by pagan armies—the work of slavery would take all their finery away. Those wanton women were contributing to the moral death of their own culture and nation. With the moral decay of womanhood comes the weakening of all the fibers of a society. An invasion would come to Judah (because the society was too weak to care to resist and trust God for deliverance), war, killing, captivity. A great disproportion between the sexes would appear. No longer would the women of Judah have enough men around to afford the luxury of flirtation—they would shamelessly beg any and every man to take them in marriage. It precipitated a reversal of the order of the sexes—women took the lead in seeking men. This was especially against the Jewish culture. Isaiah predicts here a complete catastrophic reversal, and abrogation of their system because they defaulted on it by breaking their covenant with God.

“In that day” is a flashback to chapter 2:2 “...in the latter days.” Judah sinned (1:1-31); she must repent because of the glorious Messianic destiny she has (2:1-5); but she will not—she will go right on until complete chaos (2:6—4:1) reigns in the land; but a remnant will remain faithful, and out of that remnant will come the “Branch” (4:2-6). This “Branch” will come and demonstrate the true beauty and fruitfulness of God’s redemptive program (cf. Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8 6:12). The “Branch” will be the “fruit of the land”—that is, the Messiah will be produced through the remnant. In those “latter days” those who have come to the true Zion will be called “holy,” have their names recorded in the book of life, and be cleansed of guilt (cf. Joel 2:28—3:3). The Lord himself will take action to cleanse “Zion” (cf. Zech. 12:10—13:9). This will take place by a Messianic judging and burning (see Malachi 3:1-4). It will be something the Lord “creates.” That is, it will be the Lord’s doing, not man’s; it will be something different than the “old” order. But it is revealed and spoken of by Isaiah figuratively in “old order” terminology, i.e., “cloud by day, and smoke and fire by night” is the way God led and protected his covenant people when he redeemed them from Egypt. In the “new order” (the church) God will guild his people, protect his people, and dwell with them in his presence (the Holy Spirit), even more fully than in the old order. There will be a “covering and a booth” (Heb. sukkah, “tabernacle”) for “shade” and “refuge” from the storm. This points out the symbolism of the Israelites dwelling in “booths” in the wilderness. The Christian dispensation is symbolized as a Feast of Booths in Zech. 14:16-21. The Feast of Tabernacles was also called “Feast of Ingathering.” Jesus used the Feast of Tabernacles to point to his Messianic work (see John chs. 7,8,9). Also John ch. 1 indicates that the “Word became flesh and ‘tabernacled’ (dwelt) among us.”

## ISAIAH 5:1—6:13

### Introduction

In these two chapters we will see a vivid contrast between ingratitude and gratitude. The nation of Israel (both north and south, Israel and Judah) defaulted on their privileges mainly because of ingratitude. God graced them nationally with singular prerogatives and favors. He gave them his law in written form—what a great privilege over all the other nations of the world! He put them in the center of world commerce, politics and culture. He gave them material abundance and political power. Their culture became internationally influential. But were they thankful, humble, gracious, loving and adoring of the One who gave all this to them? NO! It wasn't that they simply forgot Jehovah, they despised him and his word! They flaunted their contempt for Jehovah shamelessly by worshiping other "gods," as if the other "gods" were responsible for their blessedness. Hosea and Ezekiel make a metaphorical story of "spiritual adultery" out of Israel's and Judah's prostitution of its God-given beauty (see Hosea 1:1—3:5; Ezek. 16:1-63). As a result, their society disintegrated and chaos and mourning reigned. The ungodly nations round about, seeing their helplessness, devoured them.

Isaiah, on the other hand, seeing the glory of Jehovah and the grace of the Lord, offered his life as a sacrifice of gratitude (Isa. 6:1-13). Isaiah was constrained by the love of God to volunteer to proclaim God's love to even those who would not want to hear it. In the face of discouragement, resistance and loneliness, Isaiah preached and preached. He preached to the high and low. He preached the word of God. And he saved a "tenth" (a remnant). Of that "tenth" (remnant) came the "holy seed" (i.e., the Messiah, see Gal. 3:16). And millions have been touched by Isaiah's faithful service to the Lord through, not only Isaiah's prophecies, but through the Incarnate Son who was "Immanuel" (i.e., God-with-us).

Indeed, the most heinous sin must be ingratitude. When men cease to honor God and give thanks to him, they become futile in their thinking and their senseless minds are darkened (Rom. 1:21). Ingratitude produces insensitivity and behavior worse than animals. Even animals know to give thanks to those who care for them—the meanest dog will wag his tail at anyone who feeds him! "Count your many blessings, name them one by one" is not just a nice song—it is a matter of spiritual life and death!

Isaiah composes a "song" (Heb. shir, see "Song" of Solomon). It is somewhat like one of America's real "country" (i.e., "Blue Grass") folk-songs. Whether it was sung to the accompaniment of an instrument or not we have no information. This song was intended for teaching, not entertainment (i.e., not for the "beat")—it was the lyrics that mattered! The "vineyard" was a favorite subject for parabolic, metaphorical instruction, both in the OT and the NT (see Psa. 80:8ff; Song of Solomon; Hosea 10:1; Jer. 2:21;

Ezek. 15:6; 17:1ff; 19:10ff; Matt. 20:1-16; 21:33-43; Jn. 15:1-11). Herod the Great had a huge golden “grapevine” embossed on the gates of the temple as a national emblem. The “vineyard” belongs to God (Heb. daveed, “beloved” or “David”—may be a metaphorical reference to the Messiah—the “Word” before he became flesh—whatever the case, it is God who is the “beloved”)—it does not belong to Abraham, Moses, or David—it is the “Chosen nation” that belongs to God. God made abundant provision for this “vineyard” that it might produce prolifically. He put in a strategic place (on a very fertile, or “fat” hill, i.e., the Promised Land of Canaan). At that time the land of Canaan was the garden spot of the whole “Fertile Crescent”—a land “flowing with milk and honey.” Spies sent in by Moses (Num. Ch. 13) carried one cluster of grapes on a pole between two grown men! God “dugged it and cleared it of stones” (he sustained the nation for centuries by driving the heathen out so there would be no hindrances to the “vineyard’s” growth. God built his “watchtower in it—made provisions to harvest the fruits of this nation for the whole world. Then with divine patience and long suffering he cultivated this “vineyard” (nation) with blessings and chastenings. He sent his servants (the prophets) to tend it. He had every right to anticipate an abundant harvest of sweet-righteousness. Instead, God found it had produced rottenness (the Hebrew word translated “wild” in RSV is beushim, literally, “rotten grapes.”). The “Beloved” (God) calls upon the vineyard to examine itself and acknowledge the logical conclusion that it has had every privilege and blessing that could be afforded it. Nothing more could be given to it to produce sweetness and plenty in it. The “vineyard” is called upon to answer the question, “Why did it yield rotten grapes”? The accused is given an opportunity to honestly assess justice (cf. Matt. 21:28-32; 21:33-43; Lk. 16:19-31). If they can find any wrong in God for their condition, let them say so (cf. Jer. 2:5; 7:25-26; Micah 6:3). They cannot! They are speechless. Their silence condemns them! All the “Beloved” God has to do is withhold his grace and death and destruction ensue. God upholds all things by the word of his power (Heb. 1:3). When God gives up man destroys himself and his society (Rom. 1:18ff). All men have life and breath—the live and move and have their being in God (Acts 17:26-29). God gives rains and fruitful seasons from heaven (Acts 14:17) or he withholds them (Amos 4:7-9). When God removed his protection from Israel and Judah, the “wild bull” Assyria (see Isa. 10:13) and the lion, bear, leopard and iron beast of the book of Daniel (Dan. Chs. 7-12) all trampled “the vineyard” down. When God withdrew his sustenance from Israel and Judah, she suffered famine and hunger (both spiritual and physical, see Amos 8:11-12). There even came a time when God practically ceased all “pruning and hoeing” of Israel and Judah through chastening them or sending prophets to them. Israel and Judah were “wasted” in the dispersion of the captivities. The land of Canaan became a wasteland (God did send an occasional prophet or deliverer during the captivities to preserve the “remnant,” e.g., Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, Mordecai; then a few after the restoration, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; then he ceased “pruning” altogether until John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, Messiah, came on the scene). Ezekiel portrays the Spirit of God leaving the Jewish nation near the end of Judah’s national existence (Ezek. 11:23), not to return until the NT church era (Ezek. 48:35; Matt. 23:36-39).

Israel and Judah prostituted God’s beneficence. They rose early, not to work, but to revel and play in riotous music, feasting and dancing (see Amos 6:1-8). A greedy, grasping, monopolizing people, they were lovers of luxury, drinking, feasting and

reveling. Consuming the land—while the rest of the people had to live like servant-slaves. There was no room in their besotted brains for serious thought. There was no remembering God, no thanksgiving to God—no thought but for themselves. Their only thought was how to enjoy the moment; to squeeze every day dry and fling it to one side, on a waste heap of other days. Captivity was the inevitable consequence of such dissipation. Moral, intellectual, political and spiritual disintegration surely follows such decadence. Another society or culture with some moral fiber, would take over. Along with the degradation came loss of personal worth, personal identity and death. In both Israel's and Judah's case, the people, their wealth, and their haughtiness would come to an end. Both high and low would meet the same end—captivity. The money of the wealthy would not save them from that. The power of the powerful would not extricate them. Lambs and sheep of foreigners would feed in their land. Places formerly owned by the wealthy would be occupied and used by “unclean foreigners.” Assyrians, Arabs, Samaritans and other nomadic tribes did inhabit their land during the Jewish exile! In it all, God would vindicate his sovereignty and his faithfulness. In it all, some Jews would learn that God means what he says! By it they would learn they cannot reduce Jehovah to the level of paganism. HE IS HOLY!

Without faith in God, many Jews sinned openly! They “pulled” their sins around with them; they didn't want to ever be without their sins. They were enslaved to their sins like oxen harnessed to heavy loads. Oxen do it because they are forced to; men do it because they prefer to believe the lie of Satan. They were brazen about it too! When warned of God's judgment by the prophets, instead of fleeing to hide in the rocks, they scoffed, “What is God waiting for—tell him to come on down. We would like to see him come in judgment!” This is shocking coming from a people with a history of centuries of divine judgments and redemptions—miracles shown both to their ancestors and to them. No wonder such severe judgment came upon them for rejecting their Messiah when he came! Moral perversion always results from unbelief (Rom. 1:18-32). Where there is no faith in an Absolute God, there are not only no clear-cut moral distinctions, there is a complete reversal of right and wrong. Moral relativism is the result of unbelief in God and his word—something is right because I want it to be right. That is moral anarchy. Frederick Nietzsche, the insane German philosopher, insisted that what the world needed was a “transvaluation of values.” In other words, turn all moral values upside down. Nietzsche said weakness or humility was evil, the will-to-power was good. The Nazi Third Reich was founded on Nietzsche's philosophy. In Isaiah's day there were those who called good “evil” and evil “good.” see Isa. 29:16! Someone will say, “How does anyone know what is good or evil?” Obviously, there has to be an Absolute Dictator, worthy of being trusted by all mankind who will arbitrarily reveal (or dictate) the norms of good and evil (both by precept and principle). The only other alternative, is good and evil is relative to each individual human being's autonomous decision. THAT IS MORAL ANARCHY (every man doing what is right in his own eyes). Moral anarchy results in civil and social destruction and death. It has happened to one civilization after another—it happened to the Jews! Such moral anarchy is being advocated and practiced on a large scale in America and all over the modern world! The more mankind takes to itself the prerogatives of God (determining what is right and wrong), the more conceited it becomes. The farther men drift from God in unbelief, the more conceited they become (Rom. 1:18-32; 2 Pet. 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 10:7-12). God

pronounces woe upon those who are wise in their own eyes. Man eventually begins to think of himself as “god.” Humanism is a form of idolatry. Scientism, the worship of science, is a form of man’s self-worship. Political ideologies become a form of humanism (all the way from communism to democracy). The Jews of Isaiah’s day were wise in their own eyes. A case in point was the refusal of Ahaz, king of Judah, to seek a sign and help from the Lord (Isa. 7:3-17)—he decided on his own to seek help from Assyria. The people God had chosen to be a “light” to the Gentiles, were, instead, darkness. Those who could have chosen blessedness, chose cursed-ness. Why did they become this way? Was it because of their environment? Was it because of their economic destitution? Was it because they were illiterate? The answer, which the world considers too simplistic, is they did not trust the revelation of God through the prophets—they did not believe in God’s word—they simply chose to walk by their own sight and not by faith!

No one will “get away with” despising God. He will be surrendered to or he will be avenged! The nations of Israel and Judah were to be taken away as fire devours stubble. The fundamental cause for all their depravation is the rejection of the law of God. They have not only rejected him, they have despised him (see Jer. 6:19; Isa. 30:9; Hose. 4:6). They despise God’s law and God himself because he exposes their sinfulness, their stupidity, their ingratitude, their evil (Jn. 3:19-21). God’s “scourge” will come. It is so sure to come the prophet speaks of it as if it has already come! This is known as “predictive present.” When it comes it will be devastating. It will be a “nation afar off” (i.e., Assyria, Isa. 10:5ff).

It will be at God’s “signal”—he is in command of history and nations! God’s scourge, the Assyrians will be expert at what they do. God has ways to “signal” or precipitate action in history which we do not know except as we read it in the Bible. What is said of such actions by God in one case can generally be applied to others. When God wanted to release the Jews from their captivities it is written that “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation” (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1). Isaiah says that God would “grasp the right hand” of Cyrus to do God’s bidding (Isa. 45:1ff). The Bible says God gave all the ancient nations into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:5-7). Isaiah clearly says God “used” the king of Assyria to execute his punishment upon Israel (Isa. 10:5-34). Just HOW God does all this, specifically, we do not know—but THAT he does it, we may be sure! God does not do things in a slipshod way. His word will be fulfilled—note: Assyria was to come “from the ends of the earth” when it actually comes only from as far away as Mesopotamia—a figurative statement. Assyria’s carrying away of the 10 northern tribes (and Babylon’s carrying away of Judah and Benjamin) will be like a lion carrying away a lamb. No one will rescue when God’s judgment falls. None of Israel’s fortifications, none of her military alliances with other nations (i.e., Egypt), none of her false “gods,” none of her own wisdom or wise men—nothing will keep the judgment of the Omnipotent God from falling. **THEY SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT.** It had been happening to their pagan neighbors (and even to themselves) for centuries. But, like all others who refuse to trust God’s word, they said, “It can’t happen here.” And, when Israel, down in captivity, looks back to their Precious Land, they will see only the darkness of a cloudy and obscure future. They will see a future and a land darkened by divine judgment.

God promised that the throne of David was to be forever (Ex. 19:46; 1 Sam. 8:7; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; 2 Chron. 6:16) and it was to be the throne of God on earth. Now, however, in Isaiah's day, King Uzziah (a.k.a. Azariah), one of the best kings of Judah since David (Uzziah reigned 52 years), who seemed as if he would reign forever, was dead! All the stability brought to Judah by such a good king with such a long reign, was over. The people of Judah are weakened by sin and self-indulgence. They vacillate, they are indecisive, they are helpless. Isaiah senses impending national trouble. At this time God grants to the prophet Isaiah a supernatural look (vision) at the Throne of Heaven. (God granted such a look at the Omnipotent, Omniscient Throne at other crises in the redemptive program; Daniel, ch. 7; Ezekiel, chs. 1-3; Zechariah ch. 1; Revelation chs. 4-5). God is on the Throne! Earthly thrones come and go, empires rise and fall, but there is One whose Throne is never vacant! No matter the failings of mankind, no matter it may appear that circumstances rule in the affairs of men—GOD RULES, BECAUSE HE IS ETERNAL AND OMNIPOTENT. This was given to Isaiah so he might give assurance to all who needed it (and that is all men at all times), assurance positive and beyond doubt, that the world is not out of control. Things are not upside-down. Every circumstance, every person will fulfill the ultimate purpose for the good of men who choose to belong to God (Rom 8:28-29). God still reigns and controls all things for his "elect" in Christ!

Isaiah's vision of the Absoluteness, Holiness, and Power of God brought conviction of his own "undone-ness" or sinfulness. "I am undone" (Hebrew, *damah*, "silenced, cut-off, severed, lost"). Isaiah saw immediately that he was not fit to even look on God's presence, let alone approach him. Isaiah saw there was something keeping him from being reconciled to his God. "I am unclean" (Hebrew, *tame*, opposite of "pure"—*tame* is the Hebrew word the lepers had to call out, "tame, tame"—"unclean, unclean"). Anyone who sees the glory of God will, without hesitation, cry out, "I am lost, I am not pure, I need grace!" (Cf. Lk. 5:8; 8:37). Anyone who sees the glorified Christ as the Son of God will fall down as if dead (Rev. 1:17). In fact, the only way sinful man can ever be saved is that he recognize and acknowledge the glory of God and his own lost condition, for it is only then that man is prepared to receive grace! It is very significant that Isaiah's preaching constantly focuses, throughout his entire book, on the glory of God, not of "religion"! From God's Altar came a purging, purifying coal of fire. Altar symbolizes a place where sacrifice is made—thus Isaiah's uncleanness was taken away by sacrifice. Isaiah was cleansed by a gift from God provided by someone else's sacrifice—Isaiah did not earn his cleansing. What human beings need (forgiveness, cleansing) God gives without price in the Messiah's redemptive work (see Isa. 55:1-5 and compare Acts 13:34ff). Note: God cleansed Isaiah through secondary agents, an angel and a coal from the altar. God could have merely pronounced Isaiah cleansed, but humans need these agencies for their own experiential participation in redemption. That is why the "Word" became flesh, and people saw and heard and touched the "Word of Life" (1 Jn. 1:1-4). That is why people need to be baptized (i.e. immersed in water—God's "secondary agent") to know they are cleansed in the New Covenant. The grace of God extends itself to human finite limitations and needs.

Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord (Hebrew, *shema*, "hear, obey"). Isaiah did not make this up; it is not something he assumed should be done—he reports it as something

God actually spoke to him, audibly, in understandable language, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Note: “us” (the Trinity). More than one Person in the God-head is not foreign to the Old Testament (Gen. 1:26; Prov. Ch. 8; Isa. 48:16). Even the Hebrew word Elohim (often translated “God”) is plural! God wants someone to “go” for him. God’s way to work redemption in the hearts of people is to send believing people to preach his glory and grace to lost mankind (Rom. 10:14-17; 2 Cor. 5:11-21). Isaiah volunteers; God did not force him, through some irresistible grace, to go. Isaiah could have done otherwise had he chosen. But Isaiah had seen the glory of God, mankind’s lostness, God’s grace, and that was what compelled him to answer God’s call. There is no mention of Isaiah’s “personal qualifications” or his family traditions, etc., only his experience with the glory of God. Sending forth messengers for God has more to do with motivation of beholding the glory of God than with any training or expertise.

Isaiah is to say (preach), “You are hearing—but you do not understand; you are seeing—but you do not know.” In preaching truth, Isaiah will force people to make decisive stands. They will either stand for God or stand against him. Preaching the unadulterated truth of God’s word has that awesome power—it either softens the heart for God, or hardens the heart against God. Jesus himself insisted that truth demands one be for God or against him—either gathering or scattering. It was for judgment that Jesus came into the world—it was for judgment that Isaiah preached; it is for judgment that anyone preaches God’s truth. Both Jesus and Paul repeated this characterization of the awesome power of truth (Matt. 13:14-15; Acts 28:26-27). Isaiah’s audience was so carnal-minded they would not understand what Isaiah was explaining. Preaching the good news demands strong motivation because preaching is so often heard but rejected. Preaching demands faith in God because it is so often spurned, so unpalatable to the carnal-minded.

Isaiah reacted to the announcement of difficulties, hardness, and apparent failure with: “How long, O Lord?” How must he be expected to preach to those who will not listen or understand? God’s answer is that the prophet is to preach until thee captivity takes everyone away and there are no more people to whom to preach! Preach until there are no more audiences, never stop, never give up! In all of Isaiah’s preaching he will save about 1 in every 10 for a remnant. That 1/10th will return, and even it shall be put to the purifying fire until only a “stump” remains—the holy seed. The interesting fulfillment of this is seen in the over 500,000 taken captive; the approximately 50,000 which returned from exile; the purging of the returned Jews through the remaining centuries until the coming of the Messiah! Christ is the “holy seed” (singular) (cf. Gal. 3:16). And, so, ultimately, the Messiah is “the seed” whom Isaiah produced by his faithful preaching,

## ISAIAH 7:1—9:21

### Introduction

In this section (the “Immanuel” section) we cover chapters 7-12. We are going to be dealing with some characteristic prophetic literature which will come under the interpretative principle of “Shortened Perspective.”

God’s covenant people faced a terrifying crisis. Godly leadership was nowhere to be found except in Isaiah. But Isaiah could do nothing more than preach to the king (Ahaz) and attempt to bring him back to godliness and thus bring the nation back. It was the king’s responsibility to lead.

While Isaiah was exhorting Ahaz (and the whole nation) to ask for a sign that God was “with them” (i.e., “Immanuel”), he was at the same time predicting a time in the far distant future when God would be with mankind in the flesh—God Incarnate in the Messiah.

The prophets, you see, preached the present in light of the future, and predicted the future in light of the present. Isaiah (speaking for God) gives this glorious view of the future relationship of God to his people to make of them then and there a holy people. God expects to challenge the people of Isaiah’s day to make themselves available to him that he might work out through them the redemption of all mankind in all ages. God’s future is always relevant to our present! So, God holds forth in prophecy the future glory of the Messiah (God, in the flesh, among men) as an incentive to persuade Isaiah’s audience to repent and love righteousness.

It may seem that parts of this section (chs. 7-12) are not related to the Messiah—but they are. Whether Isaiah is talking about “things present” to his day, or “things to come” after his day, they are all related to the ‘Unifying Focal Point’ of all prophecy—the Messiah on earth and his kingdom. Whether Isaiah speaks of Israel, Immanuel or the Infidels (Assyria), it all focuses on God’s redemptive program.

Yes! It took courage for Isaiah to confront king Ahaz. It always takes courage to speak the truth to evil people in powerful places! Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel (whose capital city was Samaria), had formed a coalition to resist Assyrian domination of their territories. They tried to force the king of Judah (Jotham) to join with them against Assyria. They attacked Judah when Jotham was on the throne (2 Kings 15:37). They also attacked Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:5ff), captured him and took him hostage killing 120,000 Israelites. But Ahaz was suddenly released at Jericho and returned to Jerusalem. Ahaz was willing to become a satellite-state to Assyria in return for Assyria’s protection against the northern coalition (2 Kings 16:7-9). It was just prior to Ahaz’s overture to the Assyrians that Isaiah met Ahaz to deliver the Lord’s promise that the coalition of Rezin and Pekah would not be able to conquer Judah. Ahaz was overcome with fear for his throne. Rezin and Pekah were going to depose Ahaz and put a puppet-

king of their own on the throne of Judah who would involve Judah in war against Assyria. God had already pronounced the captivity of Syria and Israel (the 10 northern tribes) through the prophets Amos and Hosea (Hos. 9:6). Ahaz, by seeking the help of Assyria, opened the way for the heathen power that was to become the scourge of God to nearly destroy Judah! Ahaz had to buy protection by paying tribute to Assyria; and he was also required to adopt Assyria's pagan idolatry! Isaiah and his son, Shearjashub (meaning, "A remnant shall return") were sent to meet Ahaz at a precise point—the point where the water from the "Upper Pool" emptied into the conduit. Isaiah's son was to serve as a symbolic sign of hope. Ahaz was told to be "quiet and calm." Rezin and Pekah were, looked at from God's perspective, "lots of smoke, but no fire." They were only smoldering stumps and posed no threat to the throne of David; if Ahaz would trust God. Israel and Syria would not stand. They were human (like the "beast" of Revelation, Rev. 13)—they were not invincible—God had their number! But the head of Judah is Almighty God! Isaiah predicted this to Ahaz about 734-733 B.C. In 721 B.C. Sargon conquered Samaria (2 Kings 17:16-24). In 669 B.C. Esar-Haddon of Babylon sent Mesopotamian heathen to colonize the territory of Israel and entirely destroyed the nationality of Israel (the 10 northern tribes). This was 65 years after the time of Isaiah's prediction here. All Ahaz had to do was to believe Isaiah and accept God's promise and he would be established on the throne of Judah—but Ahaz would not believe (2 Kings 16:7-18; 2 Chron. 28:16-20).

Ahaz had been spoken to before from the Lord. He refused to believe. Again God's prophet says, "Ask for a sign...deep as death or high as heaven"—(i.e., the impossible). But Ahaz refuses; not out of piety, but out of unbelief. Ahaz has already decided how he will deal with the threat to the throne of David; he will go to the wicked, cruel, ungodly kingdom of Assyria (see 2 Chron 28). If he were any kind of believer at all, he would know that the "nations conspire and plot" against the Lord and his anointed (see Psa. 2) but the Lord has them in derision! The world (i.e., Assyria) is intent on wiping out the kingdom of God on the earth—not saving it! Isaiah tells Ahaz that he may try the patience of men (prophets) and not suffer dire consequences, but it is no small matter to put God to the test by hypocrisy and rebellion. The word "sign" in 7:11,14 is the Hebrew word 'oth; it is the word denoting a sign which is not miraculous (except in two cases, Deut. 11:3; Num. 14:22). Mopeth is the Hebrew word used for miraculous signs. 'Oth is often used for natural events which become signs (cf. Ex. 3:12; 1 Sam. 2:34; 10:1-2; Isa. 37:30; 8:18; 20:3). In the Jewish ostraca discovered by archaeologists in 1935 at Lachish (contemporary with Jeremiah) the term 'oth is used for "fire signals" to warn of approaching military threats. We say all this to indicate that what Isaiah has done in this context is use a word for "sign" which is not precise, or has enough ambiguity to it, to predict that there will be a "sign" in the natural realm for Ahaz and a "sign" later (as Matthew indicates, 1:23) in the supernatural realm when a virgin conceives and gives birth to the Messiah. Isaiah predicts a "double sign." The Hebrew word 'almah in 7:14 is translated "virgin." 'Almah is used only 9 times in the OT (Gen. 24:43; Ex. 2:8; Psa. 68:25; Prov. 30:19; Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8; Isa. 7:14; 2 Chron. 15:20; Psa. 46:1 (introduction to Psa. 45). Genesis 24 is a good example of the use of three words to describe a young virgin girl. Rebekah is called na'ar in Gen. 24:14,16,28. In Genesis 24:14 and 16, the LXX translates parthenos, but in Gen. 24:28, the LXX translates na'ar as pais (young girl). In Gen. 24:16 the word bethulah ("no man having known her") is

translated parthenos by the LXX. Thus bethulah is the ordinary Hebrew word for virgin. 'Almah is more ambiguous in usage than bethulah. Isaiah chose an ambiguous word so that the "sign" of the "virgin" or "young girl" could be for both the day of Ahaz and 700 years later for the Christ. Even the Hebrew word, harah ("will conceive") is an adjective in the predicate position. Isaiah did not use either a perfect verb (in Hebrew, "already pregnant") or an imperfect verb (in Hebrew, "will be pregnant"). The adjective in predicate position may be either future or present! Maybe both! So, we have another ambiguous word—and no doubt by design by the prophet. Many authorities on Hebrew language (Brown, Driver and Briggs; Gesenius; Keil and Delitzsch, et al) say 'almah may mean simply a young woman of marriageable age, or even a newly married woman who is young. The context seems to demand that some sign connected to a young woman giving birth and the child growing to a certain age must occur in the time-frame of Ahaz in order that God may provide a "sign" for the house of David then and there. It is our conclusion that a child was to be born to one of the young women of the court of Ahaz (a virgin probably at the time the prediction was made). Before this child should grow to the age of accountability (7:16—733 to 721 B.C., or 12 years of age), Rezein and Pekah (Israel and Syria) would be deserted. Hebrew boys became "Bar-Mitzvah" (i.e., "son of the commandment") at age 12—accountable for knowing and doing right. This prophecy could apply, of course, directly to Christ and the "sign" to Ahaz could be within in the 12 years, at the end of which God would bring about the fall of Israel and Syria. There is no reason the "sign" could not have a double fulfillment! The calling of God's "son" out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1) had two fulfillments—the return of the Jews from captivity and deliverance of the Christ-child from Herod (Matt. 2:15). Some Bible-believing scholars who hold to two fulfillments for Isa. 7:14 are: Dr. J. Gresham Machen; James Strauss; S. Edward Tesh; Edward J. Young (all very conservative Biblical scholars)! The immediate demonstration of God's foreknowledge and power in the perpetuation of his covenant with the throne of David should establish and confirm his faithfulness to fulfill his future redemption in "Immanuel" (the Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit of God in a virgin who had never known a man sexually). That is exactly what Isaiah is trying to accomplish with Ahaz and Judah; and this is the application made of the prophecy by Matthew 1:23. Modern Jews of course do not admit this prophecy applies to a Person future to Ahaz such as Jesus of Nazareth. Rabbinical literature—the Talmud and the Midrash—does not mention the name "Immanuel". What about Micah 5:2 where the ruler of Israel was predicted to be "Ancient of Days"? Jewish literature says that prophecy does not mean the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but that his origin of old would be Bethlehem (David's family). Modern Judaism teaches that the phrase "Ancient of Days" probably gave rise to the later Jewish doctrine that the Messiah existed in the mind of God from time immemorial as part of the Creator's plan at the inception of the universe. In the Talmud, the name of the Messiah is included in the seven things created before the world was brought into being. Jewish doctrine will not permit the Messiah to be of supernatural origin—much less may he be God-incarnated in human flesh.

Ahaz refused the gracious offer of God through Isaiah for a "sign"—Ahaz would not accept the "sign" because he believed he knew better than God how to deliver Judah. He turned to the Assyrians for help. The prophet Isaiah delivers God's judgment for unbelief—days would come upon Judah unequalled since the shame and humiliation of

the revolt of the Ten Tribes. The Lord would “whistle” (Hebrew, *sharok*, “hiss”) or go, “psssst” and call for the hordes of Assyrian soldiers to swarm into Palestine like flies and bees and overrun Judah. At the same time the Egyptians would swarm into the land of Palestine as these two great empires (Assyria and Egypt) struggle for domination of the Middle-East. God almost always used “secondary” means to bring his judgments upon the impenitent in the O.T. God used either “natural disasters” (i.e., floods, whirlwinds, droughts, pestilence, etc.), or he used evil rulers and their armies to bring war and the devastations following war upon those whom he desired to judge. **GOD STILL SENDS HIS JUDGMENTS UPON THE WORLD IN THE SAME MANNER—PRIMARILY THROUGH “SECONDARY” MEANS!** (See Matt. Ch. 24:1-35 and parallels in Mk. 13; Lk. 21; Luke ch. 13, Acts and epistles and Revelation). Only rarely did God use direct miraculous interventions to execute his judgments. The “hired razor” would be the king of Assyria (see Isa. 10:5ff). Shaving the head and the beard completely off was a sign of deep humiliation and shame. This is the way God would shame Judah. About 701 B.C., 32 years after Isaiah’s prediction here, Sennacherib, the Assyrian emperor, invaded Judah in his campaign to conquer Egypt. He conquered 46 cities of Judah, took 200,000 captives, and received tribute from Hezekiah. The swarming armies of Assyria and Egypt would tramp through the land of Judah and completely devastate the land’s agricultural potentialities. In Isa. 37:30-32 Isaiah predicts that it would take three years after the Assyrian’s leave the land of Judah before the Judeans would be able to eat the fruit of their re-sown fields. The massive armies of antiquity fed and supplied themselves almost entirely from foraging upon the countryside where they encamped. To feed, clothe, and supply other necessities for armies in the hundreds of thousands would take incredible amounts of commodities. Devastation would be so thorough the only thing left to eat for the local residents would be milk, butter, and honey; vineyards would be stripped and burned—weeds would grow in their place. Precisely what Ahaz hoped to avert at the hands of Israel and Syria, by becoming a vassal of the king of Assyria, was what happened to the land because he refused to trust God.

Isaiah turns from the unbelieving king and his court and the general public which is so ungodly to an “inner circle” of “disciples” (see Isa. 8:16), and begins to teach them concerning “Immanuel.” God’s pledge to be “with” his “remnant” begins with a symbolization in Isaiah’s children. The sign of “Immanuel” was abstruse and hidden. In its more spiritual sense it appealed to faith in an event far distant (the Messiah). But even in its contemporary fulfillment it would not do much to cheer and encourage more than a few, since neither the young woman who was to have the child to grow to 12 years of age, nor her child was pointed out with any distinctness. A fresh sign was given by God to reassure the “remnant”—the sign of the son of Isaiah himself. This son was to be born immediately. His name signified the rapid approach of the “spoiling of Judah.” Maher-shalal-hash-baz means literally, in Hebrew, “Plunder speeds—spoil hastens.” People would be able to verify the prophecy concerning Isaiah’s son. God told Isaiah to write it on a large tablet. People would be able to check up on the fulfillment of this prophecy—soon! Besides the fact that it would be in writing, it would be verified as having been written by Isaiah by two reliable men. The prophecy was that before this son of Isaiah could utter the first words a child is supposed to be able to speak (da-da, or ma-ma) Damascus and Samaria (Rezin and Pekah) would be plundered. That would be about two years. Isaiah must have made this prophecy

about 733 B.C. because by 732 Tiglath-pileser III (Pul) had plundered Damascus and Samaria—not totally conquered, but plundered. Archaeology confirms this in the annals of both Pul and Sargon. The “Waters of Shiloah” refer in a general sense to the streams, springs, reservoirs and conduits which supplied the temple service and worship in Jerusalem. To “refuse” the Waters of Shiloah means to refuse the temple service and worship which is exactly what Israel (the 10 northern tribes) had done from the time of Jeroboam. The northern kingdom had set up its own priesthood and hired its own false prophets and built its own temples to “golden calves” (see Hosea 13:2; Amos 4:4). God was about to send upon the northern kingdom the raging “river” which would be the “flood” of the Assyrian armies into their land. This “flood” would overflow even to the nation of Judah (Isa. 8:8)—and “reach even to the neck.” Assyria almost overwhelmed Judah—but not quite. God saved her in Hezekiah’s day by slaying 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night and sent the rest back to their land (cf. Isa. ch. 36-39; 2 Kings 18-20). The “Immanuel” of 8:8 is the land or nation as it typifies the Messiah. Israel is supposed to be a type of God’s “Servant” throughout the OT—though apparently overwhelmed God will be with Israel to deliver a “remnant” (8:10). Centuries later the Messiah is tempted and attacked by the “god” of paganism (the devil) and almost overwhelmed, but he conquers, because the Father is “with” him. Although the land called “Immanuel” (“God with us”) will suffer the ravages of Assyrian invasion, Jehovah promises the forces of the world will not be able to defeat his purposes nor harm his faithful believers. The reason for this is that Jehovah IS “Immanuel.” He is not a God separate from or indifferent to his creatures. He is not an impotent God like the idols of the heathen. Jehovah challenges the pagan nations to assemble themselves, arm themselves and do their very best against Immanuel (the Chosen nation) see Joel 3:9ff; Isa. 10:5ff. The whole world against Immanuel cannot stop his redemptive program. The Lord spoke to Isaiah in a dramatic and emphatic manner warning him not to go along with the plans of Judah to become a vassal of Assyria (which Ahaz planned to do). Ahaz and the “Assyria-party” were calling anyone who disagreed with them, (such as the prophets), “conspirators”. But God told Isaiah the real conspirators were the pro-Assyria people. God’s people cannot put any hope in unbelievers! To do so is treason and conspiracy! The unbelieving world seems bent on fearing and respecting and reverencing the wrong power—carnal, worldly power. What mankind should fear is the power of righteousness and truth, which is Almighty God and his Son, Jesus Christ. When people fear the Lord, the Lord becomes a “sanctuary” (safety and security) for them; refuse to fear the Lord and he becomes a destruction. People are created moral beings whose lives are dependent upon truth, innocence, good, beauty, righteousness and justice. God is the author and perfect benefactor of all mankind’s need. When people reject this ultimate source and rebel against it, their eternal death is inevitable. The sinner loses himself by sinning. This has been demonstrated again and again. It was being demonstrated before the very eyes of Israel and Judah in Isaiah’s day. This text, especially 8:14-15, is quoted as a typical prophecy of the evil forces arrayed against God’s purposes in the Messiah when they sought to kill him (Matt. 21:44; Lk. 20:18) and in doing so, destroyed themselves!

The real crisis in the nation was in its CHOOSING THE WRONG SOURCE FOR TRUTH AND LIGHT. Isaiah’s mission was to “bind up” (complete) the “testimony” (revelation from God) and “seal” (authenticate, prove) it among God’s “disciples” (the

faithful remnant). The “testimony” was all that God had revealed through the Law and the Prophets (up to that time) concerning the conditions of the covenant people—what God wanted them to be and do—and how they might do it! Isaiah and his children had even been named to symbolize God’s promises (“signs and portents”)—(1) “Isaiah” means, “Jehovah will save”; (2) Shearjashub means, “A remnant shall return”; (3) Maher-shalal-has-baz, means, “Your enemies will soon be preyed upon and spoiled.” These persons were given as a “testimony” displaying the image of God in their lives and of God’s presence in the midst of an unbelieving society. God protected them and that should have been a “sign” to their contemporaries! The testimony of Isaiah and his family, in word and in deed, is where the nation is to seek for Jehovah’s will, not in the obscure and ambiguous and false teachings of witches and mediums. Isaiah and his children are types of the Messiah! Isaiah 8:18 is quoted in Hebrews 2:13 as Messianic prophecy—meaning Christ, the Great Prophet, the Divine Being, coming into the world and his “disciples,” (i.e., all believers in Christ) partaking of the divine nature through faith. They display the image of God in the midst of an unbelieving society and are given for a testimony of God’s power, presence and protection. “To the law and to the testimony!” The Hebrew word torah is “law” and means the law of Moses. The prophets called the people to return to the true, spiritual keeping of the law. Light is found only in the law of God. There is no alternative source of spiritual light (truth). Any teaching that does not have its origin from God’s revealed word is dark, false and destructive. It makes no difference who the teacher is—he may be a king or a commoner—if his teaching contradicts what God has revealed, he is a false teacher! When people deliberately choose ignorance, falsehood and sin, they lose the power to reason, to relate, and to understand (Rom. 1:18-32). Nothing makes sense. They say things like, “Meaning is to be found in meaninglessness” (existentialism). People in sin suffer a dehumanizing, deranging, despairing experience. When calamity strikes, as it surely will, those who disobey God’s moral principles of human social existence, chaos reigns. Distresses of many kinds are the consequences of casting away divine truth—both physical and psychological distress! Such conditions are described in 8:21-22. Such is a description of the covenant people at the time of their captivities.

This whole section (9:1-7) is Messianic. It is plainly declared to be so by the Messiah himself (Matt. 4:13-17). The ultimate fulfillment of this section is the first advent (first coming) of the Messiah. To those who faithfully accept the sign of the almah (7:14) to the house of David, and the sign of Isaiah’s sons—to those gloom and despair will be dispelled. But when? The Great Light (Messiah) will come at some time future to Isaiah and his generation. It would turn God’s contempt into God’s glory upon God’s people—that is for sure, because Jesus said so in Matt. 4:13-17. But the prophecy may also have an initial fulfillment in the deliverance from the Assyrian oppression in the days of Hezekiah. It may be another one of those prophecies which has an initial fulfillment with an ultimate fulfillment intended at a much later time in the Messiah himself. The ultimate fulfillment, the Messiah (Jesus), began his public ministry in Galilee. Galilee was scorned by most of the orthodox Jews in Jesus’ time as “the region of the Gentiles.” Jesus was reared there in Nazareth (a despised village, Jn. 1:46). Jesus called most of his apostles from Galilee. His greatest acceptance was in Galilee. This northern frontier of the Promised Land was the first to abdicate to paganizing inroads; first to be overrun by Assyria and Babylon; but was the area God chose first to glorify with the

presence of his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. The coming of the Messiah brought fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. His coming brought about the multiplication of the covenant nation through the institution of the kingdom (the NT church) and the calling into it of the Gentiles. The two figures of speech in verse 3 are favorite prophetic metaphors to express the way in which this future kingdom of God will extend itself among the Gentiles. Preaching and conversion of the Gentiles is spoken of, prophetically, as a harvest and a conquest wherein the Gentiles become the “booty” of God’s war against his enemies (cf. Obadiah 17-21; Isa. 60-66, etc.). Oppression, whether physical or spiritual, is usually illustrated in the OT by physical metaphors. The physical oppressions of Israel symbolized the great oppression, the bondage to sin and Satan, to which God’s people had surrendered. God delivered his people from both the physical oppression of Assyria and from the oppression of sin through the Messiah 700 years later. The deliverance from captivity became a type and prophecy of the mighty and miraculous deliverance from Satan. When God delivers his people from their enemy (no matter who that enemy is) he does so perfectly and complete. The enemy will be disarmed (cf. Ezek. ch. 38-39; Col. 2:15; 2 Cor. 10:3-5) and his power destroyed (John 12:31; 16:11; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Jn. 3:8) and his weapons burned. God’s great victory in “the valley of Jehoshaphat” (Joel 2:28—3:21) is a prophetic metaphor of what God was going to do on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The word “child” is the first word in the Hebrew text. It would literally read, “Child is born to us, a son is given to us”—placing the emphasis on child emphasizing the Messiah’s human incarnation. He will be Governor-Supreme (“ruler” Micah 5:2); he will be Deity because he will be: (a) *pele yoetz*, literally, “A Wonder of a Counselor”; (b) *el gibbor*, lit., “God the Almighty” or “God the Hero”; (c) *abi ad*, lit., “Father, Eternal”; (d) *sar shalom*, lit., “Prince of Peace.” There is no mistaking the implications of this passage unless a person on this side of the NT simply does not want to see them—they are that the One to rule for God will be both human and Divine. The Incarnation is taught in the OT (more than once, i.e., Micah 5:2; Isa. 7:14). Edersheim says this passage is applied to the Messiah in the Jewish Targums. The reign of this “child” will be justice and righteousness; two qualities so blatantly abused in the days of the prophets by rulers, priest and false prophets and almost all the people of Israel and Judah. Christ (Messiah) came and satisfied the justice of God, teaching people to be just and he imputed to people (who believe) the righteousness of God teaching people to be righteous. And his kingdom has continued to reach out to all people everywhere, increasing in quantity and quality since its establishment. Spiritual birth and growth into the image of God is the very essence of the kingdom of God. What accomplishes this? “The zeal of the Lord of hosts.” But zeal for what? One recurring phrase in prophetic literature is “For my own sake,” or “For the sake of my name, I will do it!” Nothing could bring more blessedness or abundance to God’s people than the vindication of God’s name! He must vindicate his holiness, his faithfulness, his word. Zeal for his own honor will redound to all who trust him. Jesus always made first priority the honor and glory of the Father’s name (Jn. 17:1-4). Zeal for the house of God consumed Jesus (Jn. 2:17).

## ISAIAH 10:1—12:6

### Introduction

Isaiah ch. 10 brings us to the early years of Hezekiah, king of Judah, or at least a prediction of what will happen in those years. Syria and Israel attacked Judah during the reign of Ahaz; the Edomites attacked from the east; the Philistines from the west; and Judah was brought very low because Ahaz refused to believe in God's prophet that he should seek a sign from "Immanuel" ("God is with us").

Hezekiah (ca. 726—697 B.C.) inherited a disorganized kingdom and a heavy burden of extortion of tribute (taxation) to Assyria. In Hezekiah's 6th year (i.e. 721 B.C.) the Ten Northern Tribes (Israel) fell to Assyria. Seven years later, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Judah. Isaiah predicts in minute detail exactly the path of the Assyrian invasion of Judah in ch. 10. He warns the Assyrians they shall be held accountable to God for their arrogance and cruelty. God holds all nations (regardless of their religious convictions) responsible to him for their deeds in history (see Amos 1:1—2:16; Obadiah; Nahum; Jer. 27:7; Isa. chs. 13-23; Ezek. chs. 25-32; Jer. chs. 45-51; Dan. chs. 7-12, etc.).

In chapters 11 and 12, Isaiah suddenly skips forward 700 years to the time of the Messiah. The prophet offers the Messiah's rule as the solution to the enmity, cruelty and despair of God's chosen people.

Isaiah 10:1-4 is basically a continuation of the prophet's characterization of wickedness given in 9:8-21. We must remember there were no chapter or verse divisions in the original manuscripts of the scriptures. Isaiah is declaring that God's chosen rulers and judges decreed false and illegal edicts—others were writing deceptive documents—to rob the poor. They were using their positions of power to defraud instead of protect; evil men pervert God's purposes for government, turning everything upside down (Micah 3:1-3). Human nature hasn't changed much in most instances since 700 B.C. has it? Science and technology and democracy doesn't change people—only the gospel, the word of God has the power to do that. When that does not occur, the unregenerate go on being evil (Rev. 22:10-11). A righteous and just god cannot allow social and moral chaos to go uncorrected for long or constant civil upheaval would be the result (Habakkuk 1:1-4) and man cannot continue to exist in such circumstances. So, Isaiah announces that judgment for such behavior is inevitable—it is sure to come. The question for Isaiah's people was, "What will you, who have renounced God's will and made enemies of your brethren, do when the 'storm' which comes 'from afar' is upon you?" The storm was, of course, the invasion of Judah by the Assyrians (documented in Isaiah chs. 36-39). All the wealth the Judeans had accumulated through fraud, exploitation, dishonesty and oppression would be of no help whatsoever when the "storm" came. In fact, their wealth would make them more vulnerable to the plundering by the Assyrians! They would not take it with them! Money cannot be used to buy immunity from God's judgments!

This passage 10:5-6 reveals the majestic, omnipotent, cosmic, sovereign purposes of God being carried out in conjunction with (and in spite of) the evil machinations of human power inspired and supported by the devil. God controls and uses men and nations and events to carry out his purposes of redemption and salvation. People scheme—God redeems. All the evil humans propose, God turns to serve his purposes. God was going to take the evil purpose and intentions of the king of Assyria and use them to serve his long-range plan of preparing a remnant of the Jewish people to deliver the Messiah into the world. The cruel and inhumane Assyrians (who skinned people alive, collected human skulls as trophies and impaled live prisoners of war on sharp-pointed posts) intended to conquer the world. God said, “Go head, have your way for a season—I’ll use it to chasten my holy people, and then I’ll requite your wickedness upon your own heads.” God later used Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) to punish both the Assyrians and his covenant people in Judah and actually called the Babylonian emperor, “My servant” (cf. Jer. 27:1-22); he used Cyrus, king of Persia, to punish Babylon and deliver the Jews back to their land after their exile, and called Cyrus his “servant” (actually, God called Cyrus, “my messiah—or anointed one” Isa. 45:1). Obadiah wrote that God sent a message among the nations that they should rise up against Edom (Obad. 1-4). How are we to understand God using the free-willed intentions and actions of wicked, ruthless, murderous rulers to serve his purposes? We cannot understand it fully! We are told, along with Habakkuk, we must simply believe in God and trust him to know what he is doing (Hab. 1:5-11). The book of Revelation clearly teaches that God used the profligate, perverse, persecuting Roman Empire (A.D. 100-450) as a “wilderness” into which God “flew” the “woman” (the church) in order to “nourish” her! Yes! God still uses free-willed intentions and actions of ungodly forces, people and circumstances to “chasten” and purify his church. It is a clear teaching of scripture from Genesis to Revelation! The Assyrian emperor would not admit he was an instrument of the Hebrew God! It was his intention to serve his own purpose of world-conquest. He claimed to be “king of all kings”—other kings were his “subordinates.” The Assyrian emperor reasoned thus: “I have conquered Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, Samaria and Damascus—I have conquered them in spite of the ‘gods’ they worshiped (he even carried off their “gods”)—who is to keep me now from conquering Judah and Jerusalem?” He believed he was stronger than any “gods.” The Assyrian attitude was manifested later in the words of Rabshakeh (2 Kings 18:33-35; Isa. ch. 36-38) “Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?” A long line of Assyrian emperors intended to conquer the world: Tiglath-Pileser; Shalmaneser IV; Sargon II, and Sennacherib. Sennacherib was probably the king Isaiah predicted here and in chapters 36-38).

God rules in the affairs of earthly governments to carry out his divine redemptive purposes Isa. 45:5-7! It could not be otherwise unless Satan and evil have equal power with Almighty God! He permits nations and rulers to govern the earth according to his will (cf. Jer. 27:5-10; Dan. 2:21; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). God’s intent for human rulers is that “they serve to execute his wrath on wrong-doers and reward the right-doers,” but he permits even evil rulers to exercise their tyranny—only so far. There is always a point, in the wisdom of God, beyond which he will not permit evil to govern. When evil reaches that point the Sovereign Ruler of the universe intervenes. God will not let evil take over his world (Isa. 14:21-27; Dan. 5:17-28). Of course, human tyrants

refuse to acknowledge Divine Providence in their successes or failures. They will not even avail themselves of the logic which demands recognition of Divine Sovereignty (Rom. 1:18-32). Sennacherib, later, had Jerusalem surrounded by God promised to deliver her (2 Kings 19:20ff; 2 Kings 19:34; Isa. 37:35). On an inscription called the Taylor Cylinder discovered at the site of ancient Nineveh in 1830, Sennacherib tells that he made many Palestinian cities yield to him, but when he describes his campaign against Jerusalem he fails to tell of the capture of that city and its king, Hezekiah. He writes of Hezekiah in this way: “As for himself, like a bird in a cage in his royal city Jerusalem I shut (him) up.” Isaiah was predicting this in 10:14 long before Sennacherib was to say it! Actually, Hezekiah was dwelling quite securely in his “cage” because God was protecting him and would deliver him and Jerusalem. Almighty God declares “the axe shall not vaunt itself over him who hews with it.” God “hews” with human beings (Hosea 6:5). God uses people as his instruments—but the instrument cannot magnify itself over the Creator! God is the potter—men are the clay (Job 10:9; Isa. 45:9; 64:8; Jer. 18:1-11). When God had finished using Assyria’s wickedness to bring Judah to repentance, he sent an angel to smite the Assyrian army surrounding Jerusalem and 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were slain in one night (2 Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36). Sennacherib returned to Nineveh defeated! There is no historical evidence that Sennacherib ever returned to the land of Palestine. He finally met his death at the hands of his own sons and successors (2 Kings 19:37; Isa. 37:38). Esarhaddon (681-668 B.C.), his son, tells of this assassination in an inscription. In 625 B.C. the Assyrians were driven out of the Mesopotamian—Babylonian area by the Chaldean prince Nabopolassar, founder of the Neo-Babylonian empire and father of Nebuchadnezzar. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C. (See Nahum’s book) for a graphic prophecy of Nineveh’s fall). The Assyrians fled to Haran awaiting help from Egypt—her one-time enemy—but help did not come. Josiah, king of Judah, fought against Egypt and prohibited her from going to the aid of Assyria (2 Kings ch. 23). Nabopolassar struck the death blow to the Assyrian exiles. All that was left of Assyria, that “great forest” were a few scattered “trees”—so few that “a child may write them down” (i.e. count them) see Isa. 10:18-19.

Judah is warned not to fear Assyria. God reminds Judah to remember how mightily God delivered their people from Egyptian bondage. The word “indignation” in Hebrew language is *za’am* (“fury”) and is a technical word used by the prophets to designate the furious wrath of God as he executed it in giving the covenant people over to captivity and exile by their pagan enemies (see Isa. 26:20 “wrath” and Dan. 8:19; 11:36, “indignation”). It has nothing to do with the end of the world! God’s “indignation” on mankind was not to be lifted until the end of the Jewish dispensation and the FIRST coming of the Messiah who would die for the forgiveness of sin (cf. Dan. 8:1-27 and Dan. 9:24-27). This is what the Messiah was to accomplish at the end of 490 years of Jewish “trouble” (Dan. 9:24-27)—the removal of God’s “indignation” or wrath or hostility (See Eph. 2:1-22). The “indignation” here in Isa. 10:25 has reference initially to the return of the remnant from captivity, but ultimately to the coming of the Messiah. The Hebrew word *shomen* (“fatness”) in v. 27 may also be translated, “anointing, or fertility.” For this reason some think this passage is Messianic and is pointing to an ultimate deliverance when all men shall have the opportunity to become “seed” of Abraham. God would lift the “rod” or burdensome yoke of Assyrian oppression from his people

who return to him in repentance and desire to carry out his will for their Messianic destiny. Isaiah 10:28-32 are a prophetic description of the approach of the Assyrian army. Isaiah predicted what was to come as if it were presently occurring in his own time (it is called “predictive present” and is a common vehicle of communication by the OT prophets). Entering the borders of Judah at Ai and leaving his heavy baggage section behind (support troops), the main Assyrian army attacked toward Jerusalem. As it advanced, the inhabitants of the smaller cities and villages named fled from their towns and cities, trembling and crying for help. At last the army stands at Nob (a city of King Sauls’ day, 1 Sam. 22:19) which was in sight of Jerusalem. From this vantage point the Assyrian general (Rabshekah) made threatening gestures at the holy city (Isa. 37:22-23). God’s judgment fell on Assyria; Assyria fell with a resounding crash just like a great tree of the forest. “Trees” symbolizing powerful human rulers were favorite figures of speech in the OT (see Dan. ch. 4; Ezek. ch. 31). When 185,000 soldiers were slain in one night (it took 3 years for 40,000 American soldiers to be killed in Korea; and about 10 years for nearly 60,000 American soldiers to be killed in Viet Nam), there was much terror in the Assyrian camp. They left Judah, never to return. That proud, arrogant, boastful nation later reduced to a fleeing horde of disorganized refugees was chased by Babylon and eventually reduced to oblivion. GOD KEEPS HIS WORD!

The chosen nation is also about to be felled like a great tree! All that will be left of her will be a “stump” (remnant, see Isa. 6:13). From this “stump” will sprout a Shoot or Branch from the tribe of Judah and the family of Jesse (David’s father). This “Branch” is none other than the Messiah (Isa. 4:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). The main emphasis focuses on the “Branch’s” character. He will be in complete contrast to previous rulers of the chosen people. He will be supernatural—divine, the Spirit of God abiding in him. He will rule righteously, justly, fairly. He will judge according to facts, impartially. He will be filled with divine wisdom, counsel and power—all this will be resident in him. He will delight in doing God’s will (cf. Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4). He will destroy the enemies of righteousness, justice and faithfulness. The manifest destiny of the Hebrew nation was to culminate in producing a “Shoot” or “Branch.” It was not to perpetuate itself—it was to be “cut down” and only a “stump” was to remain which, though dead, would produce the beginning of something new!

Isaiah 11:6-9 is speaking figuratively of a condition that will be accomplished in the believer at the FIRST COMING of the Messiah. The Messiah will make peace a reality to those who trust him (Eph. 2:11-22). People at peace with God are at peace with God’s creation. God’s creation will then work for their good—perfecting them in holiness. Some day, even creation itself will be redeemed (Rom. 8:18-25). But new circumstances alone do not make a heaven! God’s redeemed creation could never be heaven without regenerated people. Isaiah is talking here about man’s conversion. Potentially, man’s dominion over creation, which he once enjoyed in Eden and lost, has been restored (potentially, we repeat) through the work of The God-Man, Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:5-18). Man can now enter into that potential Edenic dominion by faith in Christ, for Christ has restored the harmony of man to God and God’s creation. Entering this potential dominion, man begins to prepare himself for the realization or consummation of the dominion which will come at the consummation of the Messiah’s age (i.e., the end of this world). The “holy mountain” and “earth” of 11:9 is simply figurative of the church

or the “kingdom” of the “Branch.” We shall see these terms being used figuratively over and over in Isaiah as symbols of the “new Israel”—the church. There is a passage in Hosea 2:16-23 which sheds light on the figurative language here. Hosea speaks there of the New Covenant in the first coming of Christ (no doubt about it because Hosea is quoted in Rom. 9:25 as applying to the church in terms of a “covenant with the beasts of the field, etc.” It is all wrapped up in the idea that the church is Paradise Restored, potentially, and awaiting only the consummation of all things.

The “Branch” or “Shoot” from the stump of Jesse is to stand as an “ensign” (Hebrew, nes, “a banner erected on a pole”). In ancient times a banner flying from a pole was used as a rallying-point for soldiers in battle in order to regroup and unify forces against the enemy. Such standards were objects of faith, hope and sources of power. This “Branch” (i.e., the glory of God resident in human form) or “Shoot” from the stump of Jesse would be a Person around whom all nations might gather in unity against the common enemy of mankind. They would be able to look upon him as an object of faith and receive power from him (Jn. 3:14-15; Zech 12:10-14). Jesus Christ was mankind’s “polestar.” The great scandal in the history of God’s OT people was the division of God’s kingdom on earth caused by idolatry (i.e., rallying around a false “ensign”). God sent prophets to call the apostate people to repentance and to point to the Messiah who could heal the breach. The prophets delighted to picture as one of the blessings of the Messianic age (i.e., the Christian dispensation) the healing of the breach caused by idolatry and the unifying of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, in the “Polestar” or “Messiah-Ensign” (Ezek. 37:15-28 is a classic example). In Christ all the division caused by unbelief, apostasy, nationality, culture, etc., is abolished and the brotherhood of believers is established. Isaiah 11:14-16 is a figurative description of the evangelistic militancy of the church (Messiah’s kingdom) and its victories. True unity and brotherhood comes when people are “conquered” for Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5). It is vain to idealize about human brotherhood on any other basis! It will not come outside of surrender to Christ. The secret is that the Lord supplies the power. Nothing shall stand in the way of his Spirit from bringing men and women of all nations and tongues into his kingdom. Two great obstacles of the ancient world (Red Sea and Euphrates) symbolically blocked the Hebrews from incorporating these great cultures and peoples into God’s kingdom. But they will not be obstacles to the Messianic kingdom. God will not only remove obstacles, he will provide a WAY. Jesus is the Way (the incarnate Word). The Holy Spirit is the Way (the Word through human language). The church (i.e., Christians) is the Way (it is a city set on a hill, the light of the world, the salt of the earth). The “highway” from Assyria may refer initially to the return of the Jews from captivity—but it most certainly applies ultimately to the Messianic “Way” (cf. Isa. 19:16-25; 35:1-10; 42:16; 43:19; 49:11). The great “highway” leading to “Zion” is opened to all mankind, to the ends of the earth (from Assyria to Egypt) and that Way is Jesus. In context, that is what Isaiah is predicting. The return from exile by the Jews is merely a “step” in that direction!

Be sure to note—it is the inhabitant of Zion who is invited to praise God and draw water from the wells of salvation. An “inhabitant of Zion” is a member of God’s covenant people. Covenant relationship to God is by the terms of God’s revealed covenant—not on the terms of humanity’s wishes. The inhabitant of Zion today is a Christian—a

member of Christ's church. This is very clear from Hebrews 12:22! Furthermore, it is in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ that the Spirit of God dwells (Eph. 2:11-22). The church is God's new "Israel" (Gal. 6:15-16). "Drawing water from the wells of salvation" is a clear figurative description of partaking of the nature of Jesus Christ (Jn. 4:10; 7:37-38, see also Isa. 41:17-18; 35:7; 49:10; 55:1; Psa. 42:1; 36:9; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 13:1; 14:8)

## ISAIAH 13:1—17:14

### Introduction

In the darkest days of the Second World War, Winston Churchill spoke to an American audience and said: “The destiny of mankind is not decided by material computation. When great causes are on the move in the world...we learn that we are spirits, not animals, and that something is going on in space and time, and beyond space and time, which, whether we like it or not, spells duty.”

This section of Isaiah, chapters 13-23, should fill us with even great awe of the evidence of the powerful spiritual force of Almighty God at work in history and through mankind. Pity the poor unbeliever! His perspective on the events of history leaves him confused, cynical and despondent. There is no “light at the end of the tunnel” for him. His highest hope is annihilation at death—a surcease from this vale of tears. But then, if life is to end only in annihilation, what an absurdity life is! History is indeed, meaningless, “a tale told by idiots, full of sound and fury” as Shakespeare has one of his characters say in a play, or, “En effet, l’histoire n’est que le tableau des crimes et des malheurs as the atheist Francois-Marie Arouet Voltaire said (“Indeed, history is nothing more than a tableau of crimes and misfortunes.”).

There are some who think human government or human rulers are the movers of history. Some, basing their philosophy on evolution, like Frederick Nietzsche or Karl Marx and Lenin, think of all events in a dialectic frame of reference (i.e., history is the result of a constant clash between capitalism and communism—between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy). They do not believe there is anything or Anyone outside of history—above and beyond history—guiding humans and events toward an eternal destiny.

Some politicians and human rulers are arrogant enough to think of themselves as “gods” of history. They think the destiny of the world and mankind lives or dies with them. Napoleon Bonaparte once said: “What is the throne?—a bit of wood gilded and covered with velvet. I am the state—I alone am here the representative of the people...France has more need of me than I of Frances.” Adolph Hitler’s last will and testament read: “My possessions belong to the party, or, if this no longer exists, to the state. If the state, too, is destroyed, there is no need for any further instructions.”

But the Christian’s perspective of history (as wicked, perverse and cruel as it may appear at times) is that it is under the sovereign control of a loving God. He is over and above all events and in all events, using them (even the cruel ones to fulfill his redemptive grace to mankind. This perspective is given to humanity by revelation—but that revelation is validated by supernatural confirmation (fulfilled prophecies, miracles) done in history, through the agency of divinely selected human servants of God.

So the prophet Isaiah will reveal to us that God knew of the cruel and arrogant threats of

world powers and wicked rulers hundreds of years ahead of time. Isaiah will reveal to us the power of God to direct, control, use and dispose of all history to serve his eternal purpose. And I believe God has been the Lord of history in the same way from the beginning of creation until this very day and that he will continue to be forevermore—working today through Divine Providence, as he did then (minus the miraculous, since his eternal word has been fully and completely revealed and authenticated).

Isaiah now directs a message of hope to the “remnant” of Jews who will believe his word. He reveals the activity of the Divine government of God dealing with the heathen empires which oppose his redemptive work through the Jewish people. God’s people (the remnant) must have assurance that the hostile powers of the world in their most powerful manifestation would never stop the purposes of God. That same principle is revealed to the church of the NT in the book of Revelation, not even the most powerful empire of all time—Rome—could not stop Christianity from becoming God’s kingdom established world-wide. Isaiah wrote about 730 B.C. Babylon did not dominate the world until about 606 B.C. (124 years later), and Babylon was not conquered until 538 B.C. (nearly 200 years after Isaiah wrote). How could Isaiah know all this? Plainly, it was by Divine inspiration and revelation! **YOU SEE, GOD KNOWS ABOUT NATIONS AND EMPERORS BEFORE THEY EVER COME INTO EXISTENCE. HE ALSO KNOWS WHERE THEY WILL FIT INTO HIS REDEMPTIVE PLAN FOR THE WORLD!** In Isa. 13:2, God’s covenant people are directed to cheer the conquerors of Babylon on! Those who are to destroy Babylon (200 years hence), are under the “command” of God (13:3). God “consecrated” i.e., set apart certain nations to execute his wrath on Babylon. **THEY ARE THE MEDES AND PERSIANS** (cf. Isa. 13:17; 21:2; Dan. 5:18). Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in the reign of Belshazzar, and went on to conquer the “world” and set up the great Persian empire. These Medes and Persians would come “from the end of the heavens”—that is, “at the end of heaven” (where the horizon is) as far as the Hebrews were concerned, the end of civilization. “To destroy the whole earth” is hyperbole (exaggeration). It is a prophetic figure of speech, apocalyptic in nature, emphasizing the complete downfall of the Babylonian empire, which would be “the end of the world” for Babylon! It does not refer to the Second Coming of Christ!

Babylon will not brag and boast as Nebuchadnezzar did upon his housetop (Dan. 4:27) when the Persians bring them to destruction. Babylon will scream with terror and howl and mourn (see Jer. ch. 50 & 51—be sure to read these chapters). People of Babylon are pictured by Isaiah as paralyzed with astonishment and fright. They cannot believe it is happening to their “impregnable” city! Cyrus diverted the Euphrates river stream by digging a new channel around the city and marched into Babylon, under the walls, on the old, dry, river-bed (see comments in Daniel, ch. 5, by Paul T. Butler, College Press). The destruction of Babylon by the Persians (Medes) will be “the day of the Lord.” Any great judgment or redemption is called in the Bible, “the day of the Lord,” even the locust plague in the book of Joel. God wants the Hebrews to know that what is to befall Babylon is his doing—not just an accident of history. God creates both “weal” and “woe” (Isa. 45:7). Judgment does not come upon a nation or city unless God has done it (Amos 3:6). God puts rulers on thrones and takes them off (Dan. 2:21; Psa. 75:1-10).

When a government and culture which dominates the world like Babylon comes to an end it will be as if God had turned off all the light in the world, it would be as if the whole universe had caved in (Isa. 13:10,13). So the figure of the stars and the sun and the moon being darkened is a favorite metaphor of prophetic literature (see Joel 2:10; 2:31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Micah 3:6; Matt. 24:29). It is a metaphor used to depict destruction of anti-God human structures in which people have trusted and poured every bit of their lives. When such things are destroyed, their whole world is destroyed (for an example remember the Nazis committing suicide when their “world” collapsed). The “world” of the Jews collapsed when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. Jesus predicted it in cosmic metaphors as a time when “the sun would be darkened and the moon turned to blood” (Matt. 24:29). Paul portrays the end of Judaism as the end of the Jewish “world” in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 12:25-29). Babylon’s destruction will be so complete that a man cannot be found. This also is hyperbole. Of course, there were men left at Babylon’s fall, but they became Persians, not Babylonians any longer. All of this refers, not to the Second Coming of Christ, but simply to the fall of Babylon in 538 B.C. God was going to “sake down” the Babylonian “world” (13:13) and replace it with a “new” world—the Medo-Persian “world.” That “wonder” of the ancient world, Babylon, with its hanging gardens and canals and massive ziggurats, was partially abandoned in the era of the Selucids (ca. 300 B.C.) and complete abandoned in the days of the Sassanian dynasty (ca. A.D. 226-651). In A.D. 1300 there was nothing left of this magnificent city but a few ruins. Though Arabs today will pitch their tents at nearly any spot, they are superstitious about Babylon, and when you hire one as a guide, he will not stay there at night. The nitrous soil of the Babylonian mounds allows them to produce nothing but the coarsest and most unpalatable plants. Shepherds will not feed their flocks on them. The site of ancient Babylon today is literally the habitation of jackals and many other kinds of wild animals.

The emperor of Babylon had boasted (Dan. 4:28ff). He was indeed a brilliant star on the stage of human political history. But he fell prey to an occupational hazard of kings and potentates—braggadocio (see Dan. 8:10). Kings and rulers are sorely tempted to exalt themselves into various forms of “god” and “savior” of mankind instead of servant of the Most High God (cf. Isa. 10:5-15; Jer. 27:51-7; Dan. 7:25; 11:20ff; Acts 12:20-23). Many of the ancient Roman Caesars arrogated to themselves the title “god.” Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin were called “gods” by their followers. **BUT THEY ARE IN SHEOL WITH THE KING OF BABYLON!** “Day-star” (or “Lucifer,” as the KJV transliterates from the Latin text) is, in the Hebrew text, helel ben shachar and means literally, “son of morning dawn.” From the highest of political heights (ruling the “world”), high as the “heavens,” where he shone in glory and splendor, the king of Babylon has tumbled to disgrace to the lowest of the low (see Dan. 4:1-37)—in Sheol. Early church fathers and some modern expositors have interpreted this as documenting the fall of Satan, but the context indicates it is to be applied to the king of Babylon! There may be here a symbolic or typical allusion to the history of Satan, since ancient world rulers were sometimes considered personifications of the “prince of the power of the air” (Dan. Ch. 10). However, the word “Lucifer” is not in the original text. It is from a transliteration of the Latin. Furthermore, lucifer means, “morning star” and is from the Latin word lucidus, meaning, “bright, glittering.” “Lucifer” does not mean, “Satan.” Clearly, the Babylonian king’s pride reached satanic proportions. The estimate of the king of

Babylon by his long-since-dead predecessors is quite different than that of the king's own self-estimate. The residents of Sheol scrutinize and stare at him in amazement. They reflect: "So this is what the world's greatest braggart comes to—so this is the man that made the earth to tremble and shook kingdoms?" (14:15-21). That "man" (the king of Babylon) who attempted to deify himself (be worshiped) is dead along with all the other "greats"—he is not a god, he died like all other human beings! His carcass rotted and was eaten by worms just like all human beings! He was not buried, his body was trampled by men and horses (this may have been referring to Belshazzar). For him there is no grave, no monument (one remembers Hitler and Mussolini—no graves, no monuments, their bodies desecrated). The Babylonian empire lasted only 70 years—extremely short for empires. The names of its emperors were not perpetuated for more than 2 generations (except as recorded in the Bible).

God will never let evil-doers possess the whole earth! (See Psa. 2:1-11). God was going to completely eradicate one of his most implacable enemies—Babylon. Babylon was noted for its materialistic wealth and pagan idolatry. It was dedicated to the exploitation of weaker peoples for its own pleasure and wealth. Many weaker nations prostituted their national sovereignty to Babylon for survival and indulgence. They adopted the ways of the Babylonians, signed military and trade treaties with her and finally ended up paying extortion in the form of "tribute." The word "Babylon" was used some 800 years later by the apostle John in Revelation as a symbol of ancient Rome's materialism and idolatry. Babylon characterized all the most subtle and tempting dangers to the faithfulness of God's people. She posed such a threat that God vowed to make a "clean sweep" of the whole nation. God would leave no Babylonian to rule the world—ever again! God also planned to destroy Assyria and deliver Israel. God's plans and predictions came to pass in spite of the most powerful men and nations which opposed him. God's plans were announced ahead of time, and they still came to pass. God planned to send Israel (the 10 northern tribes) into Assyrian captivity and later deliver some of them. And he did! God planned to send Judah into Babylonian captivity, but then deliver them after 70 years. And he did! If human beings wanted to prove that Jehovah was not God, all they had to do was take his predictions by the prophets and make them not come to pass! BUT THEY DIDN'T—THEY TRIED—BUT THEY COULDN'T. Jeremiah (33:19-26) taunts man that if man can stop God's "covenant" with day and night (i.e., keep the sun from rising and going down), then man can stop God from keeping his covenant with David (and Abraham) from being fulfilled—BUT MAN COULDN'T—GOD KEEPS HIS WORD!

Both God's heart and Isaiah's heart cried out for the suffering they knew was to come to Moabite people (some of whom might be "innocent" of hatred for the Jews. The Moabites descended from Lot. Moab was a grandson of Lot by Lot's daughter's incest with her father (Gen. 19:30-38). Moabites were, for the most part, arrogant and insolent toward the Jews. Israel on its march to the Promised Land under Moses, was seduced when Balaam a prophet of God advised Balak, king of Moab, how best to resist Israel (see Num. Chs. 22-24). Moab dominated and exploited Israel for 18 years during the reign of Eglon, king of Moab, but Israel was delivered by the Israelite judge, Ehud (Judg. 3:30). Moab continually tried to seduce the Israelites into pagan worship involving human sacrifice—worshiping the "god" Molech. Many Israelites were tempted into such

worship because of the agricultural success Moab claimed from its idolatry. God, through his prophets, pronounced Moab's doom for her pagan sins and atrocities. Isaiah's prediction of complete desolation was fulfilled by Shalmanezzer of Assyria and his successors (cf. also Ezek. 25:8-11; Jer. 48:1ff; Zeph. 2:8-11). A vivid picture of Semitic or Oriental demonstrativeness is portrayed. When peoples of these races mourn they do so in a highly emotional state and make a public display of it by shaving their heads and beards, tearing their clothes, wearing sackcloth and weeping and wailing and throwing dust into the air until they literally exhaust themselves over it and "collapse in tears." The bloody destruction in this area (apparent from archaeology) by the Assyrian hordes is awful to behold. Isaiah contemplates what he has just prophesied. He is no more oblivious to the great suffering of this "enemy" nation (cf. 16:9, 11) than Americans were to the suffering of their German and Japanese "enemies" in WWII. Although most Moabites were insolent toward Judah, there were racial and social ties between Judah and Moab. The story of Ruth shows us that the greatest king of Israel (David) had Moabite ancestors! David, when in difficulty with Saul, took his father and mother to the king of Moab for protection (1 Sam. 22:3-4). So Isaiah's heart is touched with this prediction of the desperation of the Moabites—thousands of weeping refugees fleeing their homes and cities, carrying what possessions they could hastily snatch up in a moment's time. They flee southward for asylum in Edom. The slaughter by the Assyrian armies rampages until the waters of Dibon (an important city of Moab mid-way east of the Dead Sea) are stained red with human blood. Those that remain in Moab have still more slaughter and destruction to come upon them. God was going to send a "lion" (probably the Babylonians and Persians yet to come in conquest) to hunt them down. Such is the destiny of proud and inhuman Moab.

Moab was in a state of panic; confusion reigned. God's (and Isaiah's) compassion counseled Moab to plead with Judah for help. When Moab was formerly under the rule of Judah (2 Kings 3:4ff) she paid tribute to Judah in the form of sheep and lambs. Judah protected Moab as long as this arrangement continued but Moab revolted from the rule of Judah. Moab had suffered invasion and enemies were despoiling her. Isaiah's advice was for Moab to turn in a submissive attitude, send a tribute of lambs to Judah and plead for Judah's help and protection. If Moab did not, her panic and confusion would increase until she was homeless like a bird whose nest is scattered. Isaiah's advice continues. He suggests even the words for Moab to use in her plea to Judah; she should ask Judah to do a risky thing; give asylum to the displaced refugees; hide them; protect them. Isaiah also counseled Judah to do what Moab plead for. Judah's protection from the Assyrian made her able to help others and she was obligated by God's law to do so! A very intriguing verse (16:5). It was considered to be a Messianic prophecy as far back as the Jewish Targums (Aramaic translations of the Hebrew text—very old texts). Isaiah seems to take it for granted that the Moabites had some knowledge of the divine purpose in the nation of Judah. The account of Ruth confirms this. Moabites were, for the most part, idolaters, but they knew the nature of David's throne! The fact that Ruth became an ancestress of David means the Jewish race (and throne) was not pure, genetic Hebrew! The exile of the Jews in Assyria and Babylon (and intermarriage there) also proves there is no pure, genetic, Hebrew race! Isaiah seems to say here: "If you Moabites come to seek refuge under the wings of Judah we will give you a share even of the best that our heritage has to offer—the

Messianic hope! This is one of the many passages in the prophets where the truth concerning the Messiah of the Jews is offered to those of non-covenant nations. Israel or Judah has a throne with a future, not like the doomed thrones of human governments. The throne involves the house (i.e., “tabernacle”, see Amos 9:11-12 and its fulfillment in Acts 15:15-18) of David. It involves the rule of One (Jesus Christ) who will judge justly and righteously to a degree never displayed in any earthly ruler (Isa. 9:6ff; 11:1-10; Micah 5:2ff). The very fact that this Messianic hope was offered to Moab (alien to the covenant) proves once and for all that the Messianic expectations as expressed by the prophets were not tenuous and vague—they were specific!

Damascus was founded some 2200 years before Christ by Uz, a grandson of Shem (Ge. 14:15; 15:2; Josephus, Antiq. 1:6:4). It is the capital of Syria; its 2000 ft. elevation gives it a delightful climate. Caravan routes from the east, west and south crossed at the city in ancient times, carrying treasures of silks, perfumes, carpets, and foods. It has always been strategic both militarily and economically. In Isaiah’s day, Damascus (Syria) and Israel (the 10 northern tribes) had formed an alliance to overthrow the government of king Ahaz in Judah (see notes on Isa. 7). Now, Isaiah repeats the predicted downfall of the Syria-Israel coalition. Syria became nothing more than a province of later empires (i.e., Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome). The territory of Syria was to be made so desolate that sheep would pasture in the ruins of her cities and fortresses. There would be no people in these lands to scare the sheep away. After the destructive forces of God’s judgment have done their work, the glory of Syria and Israel would be only a shadow and skeleton of its former self. Today, in the 21st century, none of that territory is self-sustaining—it exists and is populated ONLY because it receives “foreign aid” from western civilization! Isaiah predicted the civilization as he knew it would vanish as the fatness of a man leaves him when he is wasting away with an incurable disease. All that was to be left of the two would be one or two scattered, “left-over” insignificant survivors. Those two nations would be picked clean and left barren like a field when the gleaners are through with it. “In that day”—when the Damascus-Israel coalition collapses, Israel’s great fortified cities will be as useless as those ruins of the old Canaanite cities still visible in the “woods” and on the “mountain tops” then. The people of Israel were often smug and arrogant about those ruins, remembering the illustrious history of their forefathers as they conquered Canaan. “Pleasant places” and “strange slips” refers to the little “Adonis-gardens” the Jews of Israel had learned to plant in worshipping the aline, pagan “gods” (idols) of fertility. Women of Israel were giving these pagan “gardens of idolatry” their most careful and tender attention. They were making them grow on the day they planted them (probably a slight exaggeration). They were involving themselves in the pagan fertility cults expecting to insure a good crop at harvest time or produce more children or for some other reason (maybe even sexual gratification). Whatever their reasons, God predicts through Isaiah they will not reap what they expect. Instead they shall reap days of grief and desperate sorrow.

Isaiah 17:12-14 is rather like a soliloquy. He is talking as if to himself. Isaiah hears the roaring of the Assyrians and Babylonians swooping down upon that portion of the world (Syria, Moab, Israel and eventually, Judah). They roar like the sound of many waters (i.e., like a powerful sea or flood or waterfall). Psalms 2:1-6 depicts the nations raging against God and his Anointed. But God defeats them through the Anointed (the

“remnant” and the Christ they shall bring forth). Daniel’s interpretation of the great image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream has the “stone” (God’s kingdom) crushing the four great empires of man into dust and the wind blowing them away! God has defeated his enemies (Satan and his helpers) and he did so at the Cross and the Empty Tomb (Col. 2:15, etc.). God has proven once for all that he is Sovereign over all—even over life and death.

## ISAIAH 18:1—20:6

### Introduction

The territory of which Isaiah speaks was originally known as the kingdom of Kush (or Cush) in the Hebrew language. Descendants of Ham (Gen. 10:6-8) populated it. Moses married a “Kushite” woman (Num. 12:1). By 2000 B.C., a thriving kingdom was there. Today it is called “The Sudan” (ancient Nubia). The people were nomadic herders of goats and cattle. The land was conquered by Egypt about 1500 B.C. But the people won their freedom from Egypt about 1000 B.C. (Near the time of David, king of Israel), and became known as Ethiopia. People of Ethiopia claim their descendants came from Sheba. Menelik, their first king, was believed to be the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Thus we have black-skinned people claiming “Jewish” ancestry in the 21st century. Ethiopians conquered Egypt about 725 B.C. (In the days of Isaiah) and held control of Egypt for 25 years. In Rehoboam’s time, Ethiopians came against Judah with the king of Egypt (2 Chron. 12:3); in the reign of Asa (2 Chron. 14:9-13; 16:7-9) Zerah, the Ethiopian with a million men, was defeated in Judah. There is some Biblical indication that Ethiopia includes the lands on both sides of the Red Sea in the Arabian peninsula and in Africa (2 Chron. 21:16). The people had skin of a different appearance (Jer. 13:23). The word in Greek, Aithiops, means, “burnt-face” showing the color to have been dark. Pictures on monuments show they were a mixed race, some Negro, some Semitic (Mesopotamian), some Caucasian. It became a great trading nation because of its strategic location between interior Africa and the Middle-East and Far-East. Its people were known far and wide as fierce warriors and hardy workers. Ethiopia became a reservoir of manpower for ambitious rulers (Isa. 18:1ff). When the Roman Empire spread into Egypt, Ethiopia’s ascendancy waned. By the late A.D. 300s, Ezana, king of Ethiopia, had become a Christian. He made Christianity the official religion of his kingdom. By A.D. 640 the Muslim religion spread across North Africa. Ethiopia was cut off from her trade with Christian countries and become completely isolated. The idea that a Christian country existed in Africa’s interior became a legend in Europe. But it was not until the 16th century A.D. that this Christian country was “rediscovered.”

During Isaiah’s era we are dealing with the 22nd through the 26th dynasties of Egypt—The 22-24th Dynasty of Egypt was the era of Shishak (as the OT calls him (945-715 B.C.). He involved himself in Hebrew politics by harboring Jeroboam and then allowing him to return when Solomon died to precipitate the division of the Israelite kingdom (1 Kings 11:40; 12:2ff). Later pharaohs of this dynasty had neither the ability nor the political power of Shishak. “So,” the king of Egypt was appealed to by Hoshea, king of Israel, but got no help, because by this time (725 B.C.) Egypt’s ruling class had split into two twin lines of pharaohs, competing against one another in civil war (2 Kings 17:4). About this time, also, Ethiopia (Cush) invaded Egypt and took over the throne. The 25th Dynasty (715-664 B.C. was the era of Shabako and his brother Tirhakah. Tirhakah was sent to oppose the Assyrian forces led by Sennacherib surrounding Jerusalem in Hezekiah’s day (Isa. chs. 36-39). Tirhakah failed, but Hezekiah survived. Egypt was then invaded by the Assyrians, Thebes was sacked. All this is just as Isaiah predicted it!

The 26th Dynasty (664-525 B.C.) was the era of Necho II. He marched to support Assyria against Babylon in 609 B.C. but was severely defeated by Josiah of Judah (2 Kings 23:29). The Babylonians defeated both the Egyptians and Assyrians at Carcemish (609 B.C.). Jehoiakim, king of Judah, rebelled against Babylon, hoping for aid from Egypt, but no aid came. Psammetichus II, ruler of Egypt, maintained neutrality between Judah and Babylon, but Hophra, his successor, encouraged Zedekiah in rebellion against Babylon which soon brought about Judah's captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. Egypt was no help to Judah—Isaiah warned them, but they would not listen to him!

Egyptian people are descended from Ham, also. They are not really African, nor Caucasian. They are, like the Ethiopians, a mixture of all three—African, Caucasian and Semitic. Ancient religion was a complex polytheism (many gods), with many local deities of varying importance. Seven of the more well known “gods” were: Osiris and Isis; Set (rival of Osiris); Amon-Re; Ptah; Khnum; Ra or Re; and Horus. Much of Egypt's ancient religion consists of a morbid preoccupation with death (probably a futile gesture to transfer earthly life to an eternal dimension). Although Egypt was a central factor in Israel's earliest history (Moses, et al.), she became a stumbling block to Israel in the days of Isaiah. Egypt fell into obscurity, just as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted. With Alexander the Great came the end of the dynasties and of native rule. She was ruled successively by foreign conquerors until the days of Nassar (1950s). Today she is a “third rate” country at best, dependent almost entirely on aid from the United States and other western powers for her very existence.

Ethiopia was noted for the abundance of “whirring wings” (insects) populating its territories. Ethiopia was located “beyond” Egypt to the south. Ethiopia apparently sent envoys to Judah seeking political affiliation against Assyria and Babylon; they came in papyrus boats (archaeologists have discovered boats made of papyrus in that territory). God send “messengers” to this nation of tall, smooth-skinned (non-hairy) people—Ethiopians—to tell them they shall be desolated and eventually a possession of the Lord. The envoys sent to Judah from Ethiopia were told to watch for the “signal” of the Lord that he was entering into battle with his enemies. The “signal” was to be to the whole world that God was taking the situation in hand to establish his rule upon the earth in his kingdom (18:7). There were probably those in Judah becoming impatient with God's postponement of judgment upon their enemies. Isaiah had predicted it twice (Isa. 10:5-34; 14:24-27)—and nothing had happened. Judah would be tempted to seek alliance and help from Ethiopia—God says Ethiopia's help will not be needed. In fact, Ethiopia will be helpless herself. Isaiah depicts the Lord dwelling quietly, serenely, observing unperturbed as his enemies prepare against him. God is in control. He does not even have to prepare to meet his enemies. He waits patiently, giving them time to repent if they will. When they refuse and their rebellion begins to ripen, he will harvest it before it can come to fruition. Isa. 18:7 is another instance of “shortened perspective.” Isaiah skips from dealing with Ethiopia contemporary with himself, to days in the far distant future in the days of the Messiah without telling us what is to go on in between! There may be an initial prediction here of the days in Hezekiah's reign when the Assyrians were defeated and Jerusalem delivered—and all the nations (including Ethiopia and Egypt) acknowledged the power of the Hebrew God. This is documented

in 2 Chronicles 32:23. However, one has only to remember the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts ch. 8) to realize this prediction also had a distinct reference to the Messianic age. In a context definitely Messianic (Zeph. 3:10) Ethiopia is depicted as bringing offerings to the Lord. This verse parallels the many predictions of Isaiah and other prophets that in Messianic times (the church) God and his people will “possess” peoples from every nation of the world (e.g. Amos 9:11-12 confirmed as Messianic in Acts 15:15-18). The “treasure” of gifts are the people themselves—people are the wealth of any nation. Many Ethiopians became Christian and a church flourished throughout Ethiopia and Egypt as early as the first and second century A.D. There were Jews from Egypt at Peter’s sermon on Pentecost (Acts ch. 2) who might have been baptized and returned to evangelize their country. WE DISCUSS THE COPTIC CHURCH (the Christian church in Egypt and Ethiopia) in the notes at the close of chapter 19.

God’s first judgment on Egypt will be civil strife within Egypt herself (19:1-4). Governments founded on falsehood in any form, have the seeds of instability and self-destruction within them. Where there is falsehood there will be injustice; where injustice rules, there will be much civil strife. Historians like Herodotus tell of civil wars in the days of Psammetichus (655 B.C.); Daniel predicts civil war in the days of the Ptolemies (300-200 B.C.); there is still much civil strife in Egypt. Civil strife is part of the reason for Egypt’s being a second-rate country today (in the 1980s, Sadat, ruler of Egypt, was assassinated, and there are many terrorist groups agitating against the government in Egypt in the 21st century). Egypt, today, is so weak it cannot even fight against a small nation like Israel. Giving over Egyptians into the hand of a “cruel lord” may parallel the prophecy in Ezek. 30:13 that there would no longer be a prince in the land of Egypt—Egypt was to be ruled by “strangers” (i.e., not royally descended from the pharaohs). Ever since the domination of Egypt by Assyria (722 B.C.) she has been ruled (or at least dominated) by a succession of foreign powers or persons—Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Saracens, Turks, English and Arabs. EVEN TODAY THE POLITICAL RULER OF EGYPT IS AN ARAB! The second judgment on Egypt will be commercial depression on her economy (19:5-10). God has both spectacular and non-spectacular ways of bringing about the demise of civilizations which arrogantly think to oppose his will for mankind. When he chose to obliterate the Edomites (see Obadiah), he simply saw in his providence that the great caravan route from East to West was re-routed around Edom and through Palmyra. Edom soon disappeared. In a non-spectacular way God gradually reduced Egypt to an insignificant and lowly people by drying up her great “sea” (i.e., the Nile River). The Arabs today still call the Nile the “sea” (because of the way it flooded the Nile valley) regularly. In the days of Egypt’s great glory (3000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.) she was the “breadbasket” of the world. She was a highly technological and scientific culture in the areas of medicine, architecture, art, and commerce. She was a world-controlling empire. Egyptians made a linen so fine there were 540 threads to the inch. They knew secrets of manufacturing glass still unknown today. They practiced dentistry, treatment of the eyes, brain surgery and other medical skills unknown in other civilizations of that time. Their astronomers and mathematicians were familiar with principles which would do credit to mathematicians of today. Their mechanical skills are unparalleled even today! In conjunction with this passage in Isaiah, read Ezekiel chs. 29-31. Ezekiel predicted Egypt would become “desolate in the midst of desolations.” The Nile River is far from being completely dried up. However,

for many centuries it has not produced the massive flooding of the valley which was so necessary in ancient times to prepare the lowlands for pasture and crop. Windblown sand dunes and stony, sandy plains comprise 90% of Egypt's land! The government fights a constant battle with the slowly creeping, encroaching Sahara desert. Tiny plots of vegetation are worked today with tools much like the ancient tools of the Pharaoh's time. Today foliage of reeds and rushes have almost disappeared. This was one of Egypt's largest industries in ancient times (i.e., papyrus from reeds and rushes). Another of its chief industries, fishing, has ceased to be important because of diminishing fish and lack of technology. Before Russia and the U.S. supplied Egypt with modern weapons they were so powerless that a small, Israeli army defeated them in 6 days! The irrigation system, in spite of all modern attempts to restore it to its former glory and efficiency, carries water to only a small fraction of the former territory served by the ancient canals. Many of those canals of ancient Egypt are today only soggy, foul-smelling gobs, unusable. Egyptians today attempt to irrigate using hand-made, wooden, water-screws—a method out of the ancient past. GOD SAID IT—AND IT IS SO! The third judgment on Egypt will be counseling disasters (19:11-15). Zoan was an ancient city near the mouth of the Tanis branch of the Nile. It was once the capital of Egypt. Israelites who sought alliance with Egypt would probably have entered into negotiations with the "princes of Zoan." But Isaiah's warning is that these Egyptian "princes" had already given their Pharaoh "stupid" and "brutish" counsel. They were as stupid as animals. How could they be expected to know any wisdom from Jehovah-God. The stupidity of the idolatrous world is graphically presented in Romans 1:18-32; men who have a revelation of an Omnipotent and Omniscient God in nature, and turn to worshipping nature rather than its Creator, are stupid. Men who cannot govern their own lives, cannot govern a nation. Men who do not wish to practice truth and just for themselves cannot legislate it for others. The princes of Zoan were drunk with the wine of rebellion against truth and morals. Sooner or later, however, the wine of rebellion and falsehood is vomited up and those who have drunk it are forced to stagger in the regurgitation of the filth they have swallowed. There is nothing that either "head" or "tail" of the nation of Egypt can do. When individuals lose control of their own lives, social and national structures cease to function properly.

"That day" all through this chapter is a Messianic term! Isaiah 19:16,18,19,23,24 are transitional verses. Isaiah is looking forward centuries and centuries to the time when the Middle-East would be evangelized by Christian apostles and their converts. These verses bridge the gap (i.e., "shortened perspective") between the earlier predictions of Egypt's judgment, and the following predictions of Egypt's turning to Jehovah-God. When Egypt acknowledges Jehovah as God, as a result of chastening (i.e., "receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their errors" as per Rom. 1:27), they will begin (some of them) to seek Jehovah's purpose in their lives (i.e., some would eventually become Christian). Isaiah predicts a time when the mere mention of Judah would remind Egypt of Judah's God and cause some of her people to remember that Judah's God keeps his word. They would fear Jehovah rather than "Ra." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Egypt's wisdom had evaporated. But it would come back when they feared Jehovah (i.e., the Messiah). At last, some Egyptians would be persuaded of the sovereignty of Judah's God. Persuaded of Jehovah's sovereignty, many Egyptians would, according to Isaiah, someday repent and worship Jehovah-God.

We know it took place from the ancient (and modern) Coptic church in Egypt and Ethiopia. “Five cities” is a metaphor meaning “a considerable number,” not exactly five or six (cf. Amos, ch. 1, “three transgressions and four”). A “sixth” city or “one” other city will continue in its worship of the sun. In other words, some of the Egyptians would not repent but remain pagan.

“Speaking the language of Canaan” etc. is to speak the truth about Jehovah-God and worship him. This statement implies more than that there would be Jews in Egypt! There were and still are Jews in Egypt, but few Egyptians became Jewish proselytes. Many Egyptians did, however, become Christian. The “altar” to Jehovah is prophetic of the worship of the One true God established in Egypt through the preaching of the gospel in the first century A.D. That “sacrifices” would be offered does not limit the prophecy to Judaism, for there are certain sacrifices to be offered in New Testament religion (i.e., “the fruit of lips” or praise, and “doing good and sharing” Heb. 13:15-16; Rom. 12:1-2). The “pillar” is in Hebrew matztzevah which is a stone pillar resembling an obelisk. Such a matztzevah was erected by Jacob (Gen. 28:16-22) to memorialize the presence of god. This “pillar” in Egypt is metaphorical language to say that when one approaches the border of Egypt he comes to a land that is also the Lord’s for the presence of Jehovah is there (in the Coptic, Christian church). It would be an especially vivid figurative picture for Isaiah’s Jewish audience. Isaiah is telling his countrymen that one day Palestine will not be the only land where the presence of Jehovah-God dwells. The universal kingdom of Jehovah (the NT church) will extend into Egypt as well as Palestine! The Jews who wrote the Septuagint (i.e., LXX) about 200 B.C. thought this prophecy of Isaiah (plus those of Ezekiel and Jeremiah) against Egypt was fulfilled in the days of Onias, a Jew of great distinction, and a high priest. Onias was compelled to flee Palestine. He fled to Egypt and sought permission from the Egyptian ruler to build a temple like that in Jerusalem. Onias pointed out to Ptolemy this passage in Isaiah for proof that such a temple should be built. Ptolemy gave his permission—the temple was built, but Titus Vespasian, Roman emperor and general, destroyed it in A.D. 70 at the same time he destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. We believe this passage has a much larger and grander fulfillment than that—as subsequent verses will show. These things mentioned (“altar, sacrifices, pillar”) were “to be a sign and for a witness unto Jehovah of hosts in the land of Egypt.” They were to signify and testify that these Egyptians were God’s people and he was their God. But when they became God’s people, they would have to suffer as his people everywhere (Jn. 15:19). They who were formerly oppressors would become the oppressed. But they would be able, in covenant relationship to Jehovah through Christ, cry out and be strengthened, saved and delivered. Jehovah would be known to Egypt and the Egyptians would know Jehovah “in that day.” Their relationship would be experiential as well as intellectual. They would enter into a life-style of belief in God. It would be done willingly. The offering of vows is done not by way of obligation or legislation, but willingly (Num. 30:1ff). Furthermore, since these Egyptians were to be true children of god they would be treated like his children (cf. Heb. 12:3-17)—they would be chastened and then healed.

The “highway” joining Egypt and Assyria (with Israel as a “third”) as a “blessing in the midst of the earth” is Jesus Christ. He is “the Way the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6) and no one comes to the Father except by him. Whoever does not honor the Son does

not honor the Father who sent him (John 5:23). There is salvation in no other name under heaven (Acts 4:12) than the name (authority) of Jesus Christ. It is the same “highway” Isaiah writes about in Isaiah 35:8-10. It certainly is not a literal highway in that territory today, nor shall it ever be a literal one! God’s kingdom and his “way” is not of the flesh (carnal) (Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 3:1-232 Cor. 4:16—5:21; 2 Cor. 10:3-5, etc.).

Isaiah 19:23-25 is a portrayal in metaphorical language of the consequences of God’s redemptive work in Egypt and Ethiopia. Egypt and Assyria (modern Iraq) were inveterate enemies for many centuries. When the universal kingdom of God (the NT church) is established, men out of every tribe and tongue and nation and people (Rev. 7:) will join together in peace and unified worship of God. The reference is not to any literal highway or literal Egypt or literal Assyria. These two nations stood at opposite poles geographically and politically and socially. They represented in this particular context a metaphorical figure the conversion of many of the heathen and the formation of those converted into a kingdom of peace (Eph. 2:11-22). What God accomplishes in his redemptive work, the unification of men of all nations into one kingdom of believers, would be a divine reversal of what occurred at the Tower of Babel. So the prophets, especially Isaiah, predicted this reversal of Babel. Ephesians 2:11-22 is the precise fulfillment of this passage in Isaiah 19. The “Israel” joined as a “third” party with Egypt and Assyria (v. 24) is none other than the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16 which is none other than the NT church! It would require a Jew who is one “inwardly” (Rom. 2:28-29), a “descendant of Abraham by faith (Rom. 9:6-13) to ever agree to a unity with Egypt and Assyria as is described in Isaiah 19:24-25! It certainly would not happen in 21st century Israel, Egypt, Iraq and Iran! The ultimate fulfillment of this passage is, therefore, Messianic. It has to do with Christ and the church. The “blessing” in the midst of the earth is the NT church—it does not have to be geographically located in the Middle-East—it is now universally a blessing in the earth to those who believe and become members!

Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) was an Assyrian king, mentioned by name in the Bible only in Isaiah 20:1. In fact, up to the last 160 years, the Bible is the only place his name could be found. That caused destructive critics of the Bible great glee and an opportunity to accuse the Bible of “making up” names of fictitious characters to give the Bible a “flavor of historicity.” In 1843 Botta discovered the ruins of Sargon’s palace in Khorsabad, just north of ancient Nineveh (in what is now Iraq), with inscriptions showing Sargon II to have been one of Assyria’s greatest kings. Other inscriptions indicate Shalmaneser died while besieging Samaria, and he was succeeded by Sargon II, who completed the capture. Furthermore, these inscriptions verify the statement in Isaiah 20:1 exactly, in detail! The year Sargon II subdued Ashdod was 711 B.C. “Tartan” is the title of the commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army. What God told Isaiah to do was, take off his saq (Hebrew for “hairy mantle”) worn by prophets to prove to men they were not ones to pamper their bodies (cf. Zech. 13:4; Mk. 1:6), and take off his sandals, and go about “stripped.” This disrobing would still leave Isaiah clad in the typical undergarment, a kind of linen tunic. People were not accustomed to go about stripped to their undergarments! While this would not offend all moral decency like absolute nakedness would, it did bring offense against customary modesty. It symbolized shame, saying, in effect, “After mourning (sackcloth) comes disgrace (underclothing). Sargon was

murdered in 705 B.C. and succeeded by his son Sennacherib against whom Hezekiah revolted (see Isa. chs. 36-39).

The defeat of Ashdod and Isaiah's "stripped" (humiliating, shameful) appearance were to signify to the inhabitants of Palestine (Jews) that Assyria was about to defeat Egypt and Ethiopia and mourning and shame would come to the Jews should they continue to trust in these two condemned countries for their deliverance from Assyria. Evidently Judah had been trusting in and solidifying alliances with Egypt for years (cf. 2 Kings 18:21). But they had also been making alliances with Assyria against Egypt (2 Kings 16:8ff)! Judah tried to play one "ally" against the other—and it didn't work! Egyptians and Ethiopians, whose glory and power had continued for centuries, would be taken captive and exiled, and all of them stripped of their outer garment and be barefoot, as was proverbially the case with captives and exiles in that day. Those too young and too old for military service would be taken as well. Some would be stripped even of their undergarments, so they went with "buttocks uncovered" involving the highest measure of disgrace for this once proud and arrogant people. This took several decades to see its fulfillment, but it did come to pass. All this is to make the people of Judah dramatically aware of the folly of placing any trust in Egypt and Ethiopia as a protection from Assyria. The Egyptians "are men, and not God" (Isa. 31:3). But what success did Isaiah have in convincing his people of this? Whatever it was, it was only temporary for we find a very strong and pervasive movement in Judah for Egyptian alliance in Jeremiah's day (Jer. 44:24-30). The people of Judah put so much reliance on Egypt and Ethiopia on account of their armies and horses and chariots. Judah took no account of the fact that it is righteousness, truth and justice that exalts (makes strong) a nation. These are the inner strengths of societal structure that protect nations against their worst enemies—themselves!

## ISAIAH 21:1—23:18

### Introduction

Someone has said, “Pride is the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the one who has it.” Of course, that is true, in one sense but not true in another. First, pride is not a “disease”—you don’t physically “catch” it from someone else, it is a deliberate choice of the individual against the humility that ought to be chosen in light of one’s creature-ship. Second, it is the proud who, whether they acknowledge it or not, who are really in need of humbling—not the rest of civilization. Pride is the catastrophic deliberation which produces many other psychological/spiritual side effects.

We have in the text we are studying, nations and peoples deliberately choosing pride which has resulted in: (a) cruelty; (b) insensitivity; (c) anxiety; (d) frivolity; (e) irreverence; (f) pessimism; (g) profligacy; (h) shamelessness.

The tragedy of our text is that it must record for all time the fact that God’s “chosen people” (Israelites) had become irreverent, frivolous, pessimistic and rebellious. With all the advantages and privileges given to them by the grace of God, they still let pride destroy them.

Much of their problem was due to distrusting God to produce the success he wanted in them—they turned to copying their heathen “neighbor’s” philosophies and methods. They simply turned their minds to thinking like heathen instead of thinking God’s thoughts from his revealed word. They began to practice their politics, social customs, businesses and farming by heathen methods. Their leaders (like Shebna) were proud and arrogant men. All this soon resulted in the inevitable side-effects listed above. It always will!

Let us so learn from Isaiah, God’s messenger, that we shall not let the kingdom of God in our age (or succeeding ages) fall prey to pride and its side-effects. If we see any of these side-effects or symptoms creeping into the church today rest assured, the problem is pride. Let us learn from God’s word what the cure is!

Isaiah was grieved at the predicted fall of Babylon. That this is ancient Babylon (“wilderness of the sea”) is evident from 21:9. Babylon was situated in the Mesopotamia lowlands—the Euphrates River cut through the center of the city; hundreds of canals branched off the River into all the areas of the city making it literally a “wilderness (desert) of seas.” It is not unusual for a river to be called a “sea” (cf. Isa. 19:5, etc.). A cyclonic force of humanity from a “terrible land” is to swoop down upon Babylon at some future time. Isaiah has already predicted it would be

“Elam” (or Medo-Persia, modern Iran), Isa. 13:17. Isaiah characterizes Babylon as the one who has caused “sighing” throughout the world (21:2) and is to be brought to an end. Isaiah characterizes his feelings about this violent and sudden catastrophe (21:3); he is grieved, overwhelmed with grief, writhing in anguish like a woman giving birth; he can concentrate on nothing else; its awesomeness made his mind reel and his heart palpitate; he could not sleep at night (21:4). How could a Jew be so compassionate toward Babylonians? Isaiah characterizes the warfare at the time of Babylon’s fall (21:4) exactly as it happened (Isaiah is predicting it 170 years before it happened). The rulers of Babylon are feasting and reveling. Suddenly the enemy is upon them, they have no time to “oil the shields” (i.e., anoint them with oil from pagan altars for “good luck”). Daniel describes it vividly in Dan. 5:1ff. The grief devastating Isaiah is, first, for the Jews down in Babylon since their exile; second, for all those who will die without God and without hope! Paul felt the same way toward the heathen of his day! Jesus was debilitated with grief over rebellious and unbelieving Jerusalem (Matt. 23:36-39; Luke 19:41-44). Any Christian who does not grieve for the lost and innocently ignorant dying in their sins in today’s world needs to get a heart of compassion and love like Christ. Everyone should grieve when a stable government (whether heathen or otherwise) falls into anarchy—because the whole world suffers when such a catastrophic event occurs.

“Go set watchmen” means Isaiah was instructing his “disciples” (8:16) who believed his prophecy to pass along this message to future generations who would “watch” diligently for the historic events which would fulfill it. Thus, they could verify that everything Isaiah predicted would surely come to pass, sooner or later. These future generations of a “faithful remnant” would see Babylon’s fall. After having been taught Isaiah’s prediction of it by former generations, they could remind all who would listen that Isaiah’s prophecies were sure and certain. Joel directs the people of his day to pass on the facts of the locust plague and his interpretation of it for many generations (Joel 1:1ff). Jeremiah predicted the death of Hananiah (false prophet—Jer. 28:5-17) so his message was verified. God had ways of verifying every one of his true prophets. The cry of those who took Isaiah at his word and watched is: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon!” They would cry out, “Babylon’s gods are impotent!” Babylon’s fall is Isaiah’s prelude to the triumphant message of conquest and joy for the people of God in Isaiah, chs. 40-66. The fall of Babylon and the return of the “remnant” is the first stage in making the last (the coming of the Messiah) possible. John the apostle sees the same procedure in the fall of Rome (“Babylon”) and the victory of the church in the book of Revelation.

Dumah (a play upon the word Edom) means “stillness” like the silence of death. There really was a place called “Dumah” some 250 miles east of Petra, mentioned on some NT maps. Edom is the subject of some of the severest judgments of the OT (Isa. 34:5ff; Jer. 49:7ff; Amos 1:11-12; Obadiah). Edom is the only neighbor of the Israelites not given any promise of mercy from God. Esau, her founder, was a “profane” person who irreverently sold his spiritual birthright for a bowl of “lentils”

(beans). Edomites, the descendants of Esau, were haughty, insolent, irreverent, insensitive and implacable enemies of God's people. She not only applauded every tribulation that came upon Israel, she exploited their misfortunes for her own gain. God pronounced Edom's obliteration. She disappeared as a nation in about A.D. 70. The silence of death fell upon the region of Mt. Seir, Edom's ancient stronghold. "Watchman, what part of the night is it?" would be a more literal translation of Isaiah 21:11. The idea is like that of an ill person suffering through a long night of affliction, repeatedly asking, "How long until morning?" The question put in Edom's mouth, is "Will the night of judgment you pronounce upon us ever break—will a morning ever dawn upon us again?" The answer of Isaiah and his "disciples" through the generations is "Yes, morning (relief) is possible, even for you, Edom, if you will turn and seek the Lord (inquire by coming back), but the night comes also if you do not."

"Valley of vision" is a metaphor for Jerusalem as the repository of God's revealed word. Isaiah is predicting God's judgment upon Judah! The events of this chapter (Isa. 22) concern the invasion of Judea by the Assyrian armies when they captured 49 cities and only Jerusalem was left to wonder when the Assyrians would attack it! According to 2 Kings 18:14-16, Sennacherib advanced into the land and demanded a heavy tribute; Hezekiah was able to amass the demanded tribute and buy-off the attacker. Sennacherib let Jerusalem alone, temporarily. The first part of ch. 22 reflects the frivolity permeating the whole city after learning about their temporary escape from Assyrian armies. Isaiah rebukes the people's irreverence and frivolity—they should have been reverently seeking God's direction. He asks, "What is the matter with you? You are running up to the tops of the houses, gawking, shouting gleefully to one another, and all over the city there is a frivolous holiday revelry." In spite of all the warnings of the prophets the people of Jerusalem could not seem to grasp the impact of what had happened by the Assyrian invasion of their land. They did not see the Assyrian threat as a warning from God that they should repent. They went on reveling as if their armies had been victorious in battle—but their dead had not died on the field of battle. They had died of starvation and pestilence due to the siege of Assyria. Evidently someone had tried to get Isaiah to join in the fun and celebrating—but Isaiah's reply was: "Do not look toward me for consolation—this is the time for weeping bitterly. I cannot take comfort in the impenitent self-destruction of my people."

Isaiah and the apostle Paul, both, make it quite clear that God is not pleased with such a hedonistic/fatalistic attitude toward life and death! Apparently, the veil of frivolity was ripped from the faces of the Jews momentarily. Somehow they began to take a serious look at things. They could see the situation called for help. But where did they go for help? To their own devices—not to God! They went to the "armory of the forest." This armory had been built by Solomon with cedars from Lebanon (1 Kings 7:2-6) and contained the golden shields which Solomon had made (1 Kings 10:17). It was the armory which Hezekiah later showed to Merodach-baladan (Isa. 39:1-8). They were proud of their water reservoirs as life-support-systems. They calculated

how many bricks it would take to repair the breaches in the city's walls and they tore down houses and repaired it. They were like the "three little pigs"—you Assyrians can huff and puff, but you can't blow our house down. But when they saw what the Assyrians were capable of doing to the other cities and villages around them, they became serious. But the tragedy is, they were not led to repent of their sins against God and their own countrymen. They responded with a foolish fatalism—"Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." (22:12-14). It was a cynical, flippant, irreverent insult to God for them to take this attitude. Of course, pessimism, cynicism or flippancy is the only alternative to belief in God. Paul said so in 1 Cor. 15:34. Not believing in God, but playing like it one does, is stupidity. "If there is no God, everything is permissible!"—was the philosophy of the Bolsheviks of the Russian revolution (1917) and Dostoevski wrote this as a statement of one of the characters in his book, *The Brothers Karamazov*. PEOPLE NEED TO BE TAUGHT THAT THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS AN HISTORICAL FACT, AND THUS, THEY CAN BE ASSURED OF THE RESURRECTION OF THEIR OWN SELVES TO STAND BEFORE GOD FOR JUSTIFICATION OR CONDEMNATION (1 Cor. 15:1-58). "Life" is not over at the death of the physical body, so "Life" is more than "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"! Even those who do not have the Bible must know that there is something beyond this physical creation (Rom. 1:18-21).

This "treasurer" or "steward," Shebna by name, was a classic example of the times. of the irreverence and insolence toward God and what is holy. Shebna was probably one of the king's most trusted staff members—perhaps "chief of staff," chief administrator of the king's governmental policies. Why Isaiah denounced him publicly, we do not know for sure. It may be he was leading the "look-to-Egypt-for-help" movement. Some suggest he may have been a foreign usurper who had schemed his way into office (an Aramean as his name hints). God's main indictment against Shebna appears to be that Shebna is exploiting his position and office for his own selfish aggrandizement and not using it to serve and "be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem," as Eliakim would (22:21). Shebna is indifferent to the people. He demands to be served rather than serve. He is having an expensive and prestigious burial vault hewn out for himself when others are starving to death. It is placed "on high" (where kings are buried). Shebna is a case in point of the leaders of Judea immersing themselves in selfish ends. Most of the "rulers" have complete disregard for the people under their care (including kings, priests, princes, the rich, and false prophets). Judean leaders are very little different from the pagan rulers who exploit their people for their own ends. On the other hand, we learn from Isa. 36:3,22, etc., that Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah, had been appointed "over the household" of the king. Eliakim had been chosen by God to replace Shebna as "chief of staff" to the king. He was known as God's "servant" and "father" to God's people. He evidently fulfilled in a humble manner what the office was intended to fulfill. He was second to the king. He was a good administrator and a "peg" upon which much "weight" and responsibility of government was fastened. Evidently, he was trustworthy. His "giving way" and "cutting off" is in Hebrew, a conditional clause. Apparently he was going to suffer great

pressure to yield to granting favoritism and partiality to family and friends. If he yields he, too, will fall and be cut off. Apparently Eliakim did not yield to the pressure. Although most of Jerusalem's people were hedonistic, irreverent, cynical and fatalistic, a few like Eliakim, Isaiah, and Hezekiah and the "remnant" (i.e., "disciples" of Isaiah 8:16) believed God's word and acted accordingly. While a majority, like Shebna, demanded to be served, a few were content to be servants; none of them perfect, but they were faithful.

Tyre was the glory and crown of Phoenicia, founded about 2700 B.C. The Hebrews and Tyrians maintained cordial relationships for many centuries. Hiram, the king of Tyre, furnished Solomon with cedars from Lebanon and many other woods for the building of the Temple. About 200 years after Solomon, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre, married Ahab, king of Israel, and she brought the wicked idolatry of Baalism, cruelty, and greed into Israel with her. Tyre grew in power through economic commerce. She exported her cedar forests of the Lebanon mountains and her Tyrian purple (a dye made from shellfish). Tyre became a great maritime city with a fleet of freight-ships unparalleled in the ancient world. She was famous for her sea-faring men and ships. She became the commercial capital of the world—she was the ancient world's "stock-market." In 876 B.C. she began to pay tribute to the king of Assyria; suffered some plundering in the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C., but maintained her independence. Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser (kings of Assyria) both laid siege to the city, for five years. In 722 B.C. she made a treaty with the Assyrians and her king was deposed by Sennacherib as she gradually began to lose her independence. What part of her fall Isaiah is predicting in this text is uncertain. Her complete downfall did not come until Alexander the Great tore her to the ground about 332 B.C.—400 years after Isaiah's prophecy here. Isaiah probably means to predict Tyre's fall as gradual, but inevitable and complete. Isaiah indicates Tyre's fall will be international news! People will hear of it as far away as the Aegean Sea (Kittim). There will be shocked silence. Some people thought Tyre would endure forever! She traded in an immense grain market from the ancient granary of the world—Egypt. The grain "of Shihor" (meaning, "black") came from the fertile, black-dirt, fields of the Nile delta. Tyre was the "middleman" between the Egyptian grain resources and the rest of the nations who needed it. "Sidon" (the chief city of Phoenicia) is used here (Isa. 23:4) as a metaphor for the whole region of Phoenician to be affected by the coming judgment. Phoenicians were "sons of the sea," figuratively speaking. But after God's judgment the sea will have no more "sons" from Phoenicia. Their great maritime fleet of ships which was once their pride and life would be only a matter for dejected shame. Phoenician's death would affect the whole world! Egypt would be distressed at the news of her fall. Tyre's citizens would be scattered among the coastal cities of the Mediterranean. So the question comes: "is this the great wealthy and proud Tyre?" Tyre had exerted profound influence on the world. The great city of Carthage on the coast of North Africa was one of Tyre's colonies! The fleet of her merchantmen traversed the whole known world (maybe even North America)—but what is she after the judgment of God falls? Only a wasted memory—turn to Ezekiel chapters

25,27,28. There it is evident Tyre took advantage of some calamity which had befallen Jerusalem and exploited God's people (Ezek. 26:1-2). She was also proud and self-exalting (Ezek. 27:1-3) and blasphemous (Ezek. 28:1-10). Jehovah-God is the Author of Tyre's judgment, but he usually employs human agents in carrying out his will in such matters. Isaiah metaphorically pictures that when her judgment comes it will be as shocking and traumatic as a virgin being raped. Even if she flees to Cyprus she will find no relief. WHO SHALL RAVISH HER—EVENTUALLY IT WILL BE ALEXANDER THE GREAT. But Isaiah is looking at a more immediate "ravishing" of Tyre by the Chaldeans (Babylonians) (23:13). Assyria would be the most likely to execute God's wrath at the time Isaiah was prophesying. But Isaiah predicts Babylon's use by God before she had even risen to eminence. In 585 B.C. (almost 200 years after Isaiah was prophesying) Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre for 13 years. In 572 the old city was overrun. From that time her prominence plunged. But the citizens escaped and fled to the island off-shore about one mile and built a new city of Tyre.

Nebuchadnezzar could do nothing more. Tyre remained a "thorn" for that portion of the Mediterranean world. Alexander the Great, on his way to conquer all of civilization in 322 B.C. conquered Tyre once and for all. His conquest fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 23, Ezekiel 26-28, and Zech. 9, in minute detail: (a) Alexander used the captured fleets of other cities and attacked the island fortress of Tyre by taking the ruins of the old city and casting them into the sea and building a cause-way out to the island (cf. Ezek. 26:12); (b) other neighboring cities were so frightened of Alexander they opened their gates to him without opposition (Ezek. 26:15-16); (c) the old city was scraped flat like the top of a rock and today you may go there and find fishermen spreading their nets on the stone-ruins of ancient Tyre (Ezek. 26:14); (d) there are great artesian wells there that would supply a city with water (10 million gallons daily) yet the city has never been rebuilt on the old location. Sidon, a city just a few miles from Tyre, has been destroyed and rebuilt many times. There remains there a small city of no international significance (not on Tyre's original site). Travelers today may walk over the very causeway of the ruins of old Tyre. GOD SAID IT—AND IT CAME TO PASS! Alexander the Great took the city killing 8000 and selling 30,000 into slavery. He imported many foreigners into the ruined city to colonize it and left it after spending 7 months to subdue it. After Alexander's death, Tyre passed into the hands of Ptolemy Lagi (one of Alexander's generals) and then when Antigonos took Phoenicia from Ptolemy in 314 B.C. it fell into the hands of the Syrians. The period 70 years (Isa. 23:15) might represent Babylon's control of Tyre or it might represent simply a symbolic number of completeness—we believe the latter. The "Song of the Harlot" (23:15) suggests a song whose lyrics tell the story of how a forgotten, derelict, old "harlot" might seek to rehabilitate herself in her old occupation. She might take up a harp and start strumming an accompaniment to her little "song." She might wander up and down the streets advertising her wares. Perhaps she could bring herself to the attention of her former customers. Tyre became a permanent part of the Syrian (Seleucid) kingdom when Antiochus III drove the Ptolemies from Syria (in 198 B.C.) and the Syrian kings regarded the city of importance and gave it certain rights. The Romans who took over that portion of the world about 64 B.C. granted Tyre status as a

“free city” and recognized it as her ally. Tyre is mentioned in the New Testament several times: (a) Christ visited its territory (Matt. 15:21; Mark. 7:24); (b) people came from Tyre to hear Christ (Lk. 6:17); (c) Herod Agrippa I had trouble with Tyre (Acts 12:20); (d) Paul visited Tyre on his journey from Asia to Jerusalem (Acts 21:3-7). Christianity was accepted by the people of Tyre, and in A.D. 100-200 a bishopric was established there; in 300-400 a church council was held there which brought the church at Tyre into disrepute. Tyre was already obnoxious to Christians because the anti-Christian philosopher Porphyry was from there. Tyre today is a small city of approximately 5000 people. Isaiah 23:17-18 seems to indicate a two-fold result of God’s permitting Tyre to be restored after a period of obscurity. A part of her will return to her former ways of prostituting herself before the world for commercial purposes. A part of her will become a treasure, not selfishly hoarded, but put to use as holiness to Jehovah. This second has its beginning, no doubt, in Ezra 3:7, when she supplies goods to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple. But we believe the ultimate fulfillment of this passage is in those people converted by the gospel who became precious jewels in the kingdom of God whom the apostle Paul visited (Acts 21:4ff). The conversion of Gentiles and their incorporation into the kingdom of God through the gospel is symbolized and prefigured in just this manner in Isaiah 60:1-14; 61:1-9; Hab. 2:7-9, etc. In spite of Tyre’s former material wealth and glory, her greatest remembrance for all eternity will be those precious saints (like the Syro-Phoenician woman who believed Jesus, Matt. 15; Mark 7) who are the jewels of the kingdom of God and who have supplied “food” and “clothing” to many hungry and naked sinners through their proclamation of the grace of Jesus Christ. Most sins in this world have their physical penalties which are warnings to repent (Rom. 1:27). The world will never be able to stand before God and excuse itself because it had no warning to repent.

## ISAIAH 24:1—27:13

### Introduction

The only things certain in this world are death and taxes! Some one said that a few decades ago. But why is death so certain? Believers know the Bible teaches death to the physical body is the sentence of God upon the human race because of the sin of humanity's first woman and man. Unbelievers know death is certain, even if they refuse to admit it! Almost everyone goes through life thinking that death always happens to someone else!

There is a certainty beyond death, however, and that is judgment from the Judge (Creator) of all the Earth! He has, in fact demonstrated in the events of history and in creation itself that there is a day of reckoning yet to come (Rom. 8:18-25)

Harold Walker said, "When you read history it is quite astonishing to discover that there never was a day when men thought times were really good. Every generation in history has been haunted by the feelings of crisis!" Well, Mr. Walker, the greatest crisis of all has already come and gone—in case you and others didn't know it! Jesus said, (if you translated the Greek NT phrase literally), "Now is the crisis of the cosmos..." speaking of his death and resurrection (John 12:31). The most critical point in history has come and gone, the redemptive plan of God was culminated in the atonement and resurrection of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. Everything after that is delight or desperation. That is exactly the way Isaiah represents (in figurative terminology) the anticipated Messianic age in these chapters.

God was so sure of victory through the Messiah's first coming, he had Isaiah predict it as the defeat of the world (Isa. ch. 24—its judgment) and the celebration festival (Isa. ch. 25-26) of believers. It is not easy to think of life in this world as a "festival" but apparently that is the way God wants believers to see it. The OT prophets are profuse in their predictions of the Messianic age as one of festive character. Jesus told many parables about the kingdom using the "feast" (e.g., Matt. 21; Lk. 14,15,16) as his picture of it. The book of Revelation extends an invitation to those who would to come to the "marriage supper of the Lamb" as a present experience. Paul said the whole Christian dispensation is a "feast" (1 Cor. 5:5-8). Such a view of life here and now requires faith. Faith gives reality to things not seen and victory over opposite circumstances.

Yes, the battle has been fought at Gethsemane and Calvary. The victory has been won at the Empty Tomb of Jesus. The glad tidings have gone out and some from every tribe and tongue and people on earth have responded. They have come (and people are still coming every day) to the marriage supper of the Lamb—the "feast" is

still in session. The only thing left now is for the King of kings and Lord of lords to usher himself into the presence of his faithful ones while he banishes forever his enemies (many who have tried to come to the feast without the proper “wedding garment”—i.e. having not “put on Christ, the new man”) to outer darkness.

God’s judgment was predicted to fall upon the Old Testament dispensation (see Dan. 9:24-27; Jer. 3:15-16; 31:31-34; etc.). Eventually it was to be fulfilled and replaced by the New Testament dispensation of grace through faith in Jesus Christ. These chapters form a close connection with the preceding prophecies against the nations (chs. 13-23). They are a climactic conclusion to those about the judgment of the nations. God says through Isaiah that he is going to judge all human governments and institutions because they are inadequate at best, and opposed to him at their worst. His judging of all human institutions will involve (as we shall learn later) the establishment of his kingdom of heaven on earth (the church of Christ) which will be what mankind needs to save it. This same picture (judgment upon worldly schemes and the setting up of a divine scheme to redeem man) is found throughout the prophets, and throughout Isaiah (e.g., Isa. 2:12ff) and Daniel and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and all the rest. This is basically and fundamentally and foremost the message of the prophets! This is what the Old Testament theocracy was teaching. Jesus said so (Luke 24:25-27; 24:44-49). This is what the NT Acts and epistles teach in so many passages we could not list them all here. Mankind seems determined to unite all humanity under one human government (Tower of Babel; Assyria; Babylon; Persia; Greece; Rome, United Nations, etc.). God is determined to scatter such an attempt and unite people out of every human culture into one kingdom ruled over by the Messiah (Jesus Christ and his church). Human stature and rank makes no difference (Isa. 24:2-3)—“as with people, so with priest,” with citizen, so with President. All will be subjugated by the sovereignty of God. None can escape his plan or resist it. No pillar of humanly conceived society or culture will be able to save mankind. All of man’s structures are vulnerable to the inevitable judgments of God (Rom. 8:18-23). In some cases it may take centuries, but inevitably they are all to be judged.

The cause of judgment is moral rebellion and disobedience to the law of Jehovah (24:5)...“they have transgressed the laws, violated that statutes, broken the everlasting covenant...therefore... a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.” **THERE IS A MORAL OBLIGATION OF THE WHOLE WORLD TO ITS CREATOR!** Human beings are not amoral animals, inventing their own morality or acting purely out of physical instinct. In order to invent their own morality, human beings would have to be their own creators (i.e., ultimate authorities)—and that is not a rational possibility. The word “pollution” (24:5) is a translation of the Hebrew word *khanepah*—used to denote defiling, profaning, or exploiting something until it is destroyed. The word “languish” (24:4) means to lose strength or vitality and to droop, wither and fade. Isaiah predicts that the “lofty” people of the earth will “droop, wither and fade” when God’s judgment falls upon the world. The “lofty” people are those

wicked human world leaders who think they will be able to thwart or destroy God's redemptive program for mankind and take over God's creation. The earth is pictured as mourning and fading away as a flower fades away. Wars, pestilence, famines, disease—the results of sin—cause this wasting. The sinfulness of humanity has polluted the earth. Falsehood brings moral disobedience. Moral disobedience inevitably brings social disintegration (Ro. 1:18-32). This moral malady of mankind has been transferred to the earth itself so that it is also polluted. When human beings selfishly exploit, waste, profane and spoil what God has created to be good, they eventually find they have perverted and cursed themselves. Mankind wipes itself out, one culture or civilization after another, but for the most part it does not repent or turn to its Creator for redemption (Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9-21).

Admittedly Isaiah 24:17-23 is difficult to interpret. Many want to make these verses apply to the second coming of Christ and the end of time. Taken in context, however, they clearly are to be applied to Christ's first coming and his work of redemption and the establishment of the church of the NT. These verses are a continuation of the idea begun in the first verse of chapter 24, i.e., human efforts to take over the work of redeeming mankind are doomed to failure and defeat. God's defeat of humanism is inevitable (Amos 5:18-20). God's power to defeat man's rebellion is overwhelming and inundating in the same manner as when God opened the windows of heaven and sent out the flood (Gen. 6-9) and purged the earth of evil. God, as Isaiah predicts, was going to open the windows of heaven and send down his Son who would flood the earth with both judgment for the unfaithful covenant-despisers and redemption for the faithful covenant-lovers. In this prophecy of Isaiah we hear the crash and roar of defeated humanism and human schemes to create utopia on earth. Humanity is made to stagger at the great demonstration of God's redemptive plan coming to a climax—even the old Jewish system is to be abrogated and judged. Isaiah is not depicting the final great judgment here but the overthrow of all earthly systems trying to save mankind through some universal kingdom of the world. Daniel spends his whole book predicting the very same message! Daniel's predictions makes it plain that a universal rule of the civilized world will never be in the hands of one political or religious system again after his "fourth" empire (fourth part of the great image, and/or fourth beast, i.e., ancient Rome). This is so because the fifth universal "empire" is to be the church of Christ (Dan. 2:44-45). Isaiah is simply agreeing with Daniel! When God brings about this defeat of humanism at the crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection from the dead, God will VISIT the "host of the high ones on high" and the kings of the earth upon the earth, to punish them (see Psa. 2) because they did not "kiss the Son." The Hebrew word in 24:21 is *poqad* and translated "punish" but it is usually translated, "visit." At the accomplishment of redemption (the cross and the empty tomb) the "god" of this world, Satan, was "cast out" (John 12:31; 16:11). Satan was "bound" (Matt. 12:28-30; Rev. 20:1-3). Satan's power was "destroyed" (Heb. 2:14-15). The NT also indicates (as does Daniel 10:13,20) that the devil had "angels" or "princes" of the abyss to help him lead sinful humans in rebellion (cf. 2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:10-18). But these rebellious "princes" have been vanquished to a prison house of God (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude

6) awaiting final punishment. Christ triumphed over all principalities and powers (Col. 2:15; Eph. :20-21; Col. 1:16), and he led captivity captive (Eph. 4:8). Seven centuries after Isaiah penned this 24th chapter, God visited the earth in his Son and vanquished the principalities and powers arrayed against his rule over mankind. He freed mankind from their power, and bound the rebel Satan and his helpers. Those who sat in darkness have seen a great light (Isa. 9:1-7). Captives have been liberated (Isa. 61:1-4; Luke 1:68-75; 4:16-30). The great planets and heavenly bodies are used by the prophets over and over to symbolize cataclysmic changes or portents to be experienced by mankind during the progress of history (Joel 2:31; 3:15; Isa. 13:9-10; Matt. 24:29ff; Rev. 6:12; 8:12). In Isaiah 24:23, the prophet portrays God's triumph over the world at the Cross as so exceedingly glorious the sun and moon will pale into insignificant shame in comparison with the Messiah's glory! No created thing in this universe, no matter how magnificent or majestic, can ever be compared with the glory of redemption's "Captain" (Jesus Christ) and his work of bringing all who believe into reconciliation with their Creator (2 Cor. 5:14-21). As C. S. Lewis once wrote, Even the glory of the future heavens and earth will not compare with the glory that is in us. It is not changed circumstances that bring glory to God. Those he can create without surrender—but to recreate the soul of a human being requires his/her surrender to God's great love and grace! The Lord reigning in Zion and Jerusalem is a Messianic term for the NT church (see Heb. 12:22ff).

Judah's covenant-God promised in Isaiah ch. 24 to triumph over Judah's "enemies" and reign in glory and power. On behalf of the "faithful remnant" Isaiah begins in chapter 25 a paean of praise and thanksgiving. That is what God expects as a result of the future redemption he has planned! Isaiah praises God for the future on the basis of God's past faithfulness to keep his word! God's sovereign deeds are performed supernaturally in history as he carries out his plan of redemption. Such deeds and demonstrations of faithfulness causes some people to marvel (cf. Psalms 40:5; 98:1; Eph. 1:11, etc.). The Hebrew word *yodoh* is translated "praise" in 25:1. It is the same word from which the Hebrew name Judah originates. God demonstrates in the gospel of Christ unequivocally that he is Sovereign over history and death and "strong cities" and everything else that exalts itself against God (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Therefore, some even of God's pagan enemies will "glorify" him and seek him as a refuge. The Hebrew word *dol* (25:4) means literally, "exhausted," but is translated "poor" (RSV). Isaiah praises God that he (God) is a refuge for the exhausted and the word stronghold in Hebrew, *ma'on* means, "fortress." The Hebrew people had plenty of evidence that God was a "Mighty Fortress" for them. God sheltered them from their enemies century after century so long as they trusted him and depended on him. All these metaphors—"storm, refuge, heat, shade, fortress" should register vividly on the Hebrew mind. Jehovah was to them, "A shadow of a Mighty Rock, within a weary land." The storms of worldliness and evil rage against God's elect. Looked at from a human perspective, it might appear the city of God will fall. But the Divine perspective shows refuge and fortress, and shade and victory for the city of God. Just as a cloud can obscure the heat of the sun and give refuge to a perishing traveler or a city, so the

Lord will easily bring to nothing the “heat” (rage) of his people’s enemies and save them.

The OT prophets spoke glowingly of the coming Messianic age as one of feasting and rejoicing for the covenant people of God (see Isa. 55:2; 61:1-7; Jer. 3:15-18; Ezek. 34:20-24; Zech. 8:14-23). All the Hebrew feasts of the Mosaic law were “shadows” of the good things to come in Christ (Heb. 10:1ff). Jesus likened the kingdom (church) to a time of great feasting (Lk. 14:1ff; Matt. 22:1-14; 25:1-13). Jesus spoke of himself as the “manna” that came down out of heaven (Jn. 6:35-63). The epistles liken the whole Christian life unto a feast (1 Cor. 5:6-8; 10:1-5). The present Christian experience (to be consummated in the next life) is symbolized as the “marriage supper of the Lamb” to which all who are invited may now come (Rev. 19:6-10). Thus, this passage (Isa. 25:6-9) is definitely Messianic! The Hebrew word *shemoneem* is the word for “fat things” and it is used to speak of the “fatness of the land” meaning “abundance.” The Hebrew word *shemoreem* is the word for “lees” and is used metaphorically to speak of stability, peace, and security. God predicted through Isaiah that he was going to provide a spiritual feast for his people of spiritual abundance, stability and peace. His people will include some from all nations, just as Jesus said in Matt. 22:1-14; Lk. 4:1-24). The “mountain” is, of course, “Zion,” symbolizing the church (Heb. 12:22ff). Isaiah uses two different Hebrew words for coverings—*loat* “concealment” and *mosokh* or “veil.” He uses two Hebrew words for people—*haameem*, “peoples,” and *goim*, “Gentiles or nations.” The covering or veil that is to be removed from even Gentiles has reference to full and final revelation of God’s redemptive program in Christ and the church (2 Cor. 3:12-18; Eph. 1:3-10; 2:11-22; Col. 1:24-29) which had been a “mystery” (not fully revealed) in the OT. Those who will come to Zion and acknowledge and worship the true God will have the “curtain” removed that stands between them and knowing the Holy God (see Heb. 9:6-28, etc.). That “curtain” was man’s sin—removed in Christ’s atonement. That “curtain” was man’s guilt and the resulting fear of death, removed in Christ’s atonement and resurrection. Now all men may have access into the very presence of the Absolutely Holy God through Christ and need have no fear of death (Heb. 10:1-25). The rending of the veil of the temple at the death of Christ symbolized the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy here (see Lk. 23:45). “Swallowing up death forever” undoubtedly refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not to the general resurrection except as it is anticipated because of Christ’s resurrection (see 1 Cor. 15:1ff). The OT does teach a future life after death, but it is very obscure in its teaching. This passage also teaches that God will remove all cause for sorrow, frustration and tears in the Messianic age. We are not to sorrow as those who have no hope—we are not to be anxious. **GOD HAS CALLED US TO A FEAST!**

“That day” 26:1 has as its antecedent the “day” of 25:9—the Messianic age. Those feasting will be singing Isaiah’s song about the “strong city” (Zion—the church—Heb. 12:22ff). God’s new “city” will be impregnable. Only those who dare to live outside his city are vulnerable to destruction. Gates are opened to the “righteous nation” that it

may flee to safety inside the walls of the “strong city.” The “righteous nation” is the one which “keeps faith.” Keeping the faith means holding on to it—it does not mean that we must hide it from others to keep it safe. The “faith” does not mean protecting—it needs proclaiming. “Perfect peace” in the Hebrew text is literally, shalom, shalom, or “peace, peace.” The word shalom means, “complete, perfect, whole, entire.” It is very much like the Greek word teleios of the NT translated, “perfect.” Thus, this phrase might be translated, “Thou wilt keep him in complete completeness whose mind is stayed on Thee.” The Hebrew word somach is translated “Stayed,” but means “supported, or based, or founded.” Only when God and his will (expressed in his word) is the basis or foundation of our thinking may we find perfect peace. It doesn’t mean just read his word, it means read it and accept it so that we act upon it. The center of the will is the mind and the center of the mind is the attention; thus, we will become like that to which we give our attention. The Hebrew word botuhk means “trust, rely on, hope in.” The imperative exhortation of 26:3-4 is to rely totally and eternally in Jehovah Jehovah (Lord God) exclusively. The Hebrew word aolamem is translated “everlasting” but is from the root word which means “hide, cover, conceal.” Jehovah is the tzoor (“rock”) who is the trusting person’s everlasting hiding place. In the desert, desolate land like Palestine, large rocks became hiding places from the blistering, exhausting sun (because there were no trees).

The first objective of God’s justice is to govern his creation. This he does through providential and revelational manifestations of his justice. The true citizen of God’s kingdom will be a man of righteousness because that will be his way of life. Changing people into just people is the purpose or God’s just judgments. God’s justice works for the good of the believer and makes him the kind of person God can govern in his new-order-kingdom (the church). In the atoning death of Jesus Christ God showed himself to be just and the justifier of him who believes (Rom. 3:21-26). As a matter of fact, God showed the same thing, in a more obscure way, from the day of creation. He always acted faithfully and expected people to respond in kind. God established a memorial name (reputation) for absolute justness and trustworthiness. The true man of God must have a deep and abiding desire to see justice done in order that men might learn righteousness. True men of God cannot condone lawlessness and injustice in the name of indulgent mercy. Mercy does not exclude justness, for to be promiscuous or indulgent is not merciful. God forgives sinners, but he does not indulge them. The collapse of justice and punishment for evil was precisely the major cause of the downfall of the Hebrew people of the divided kingdom. The man who does not eagerly and passionately search for truth, honesty, justice and fairness is not the kind of man God calls into his kingdom. This entire context is related to the “New Order” (i.e., the Messianic age—the church) being predicted by Isaiah. Indulging the lawless only causes him to scoff at righteousness. Pampering and indulging wicked people will only intensify their appetite for wickedness (cf. Hosea 4:1-3; 5:3-4; 7:1-7; 10:3-4; Habakkuk 1:1-4). The second objective of God’s judgments is to glorify his name. To exalt the name of God is the most fundamental need of man! If God’s integrity and faithfulness can be successfully impugned then all mankind and this

magnificent universe is doomed to extinction, at best. So, all of God's actions are "for the sake of his name (cf. Ezek. 20:9,14,22,44, etc.). All that man holds to be true, real, valuable, right or wrong, good or bad, depends upon the integrity of God and his word. If God is not Absolute, everything is false. God's most factual, arresting method of proving his Absoluteness is in his just judgments. Thus, the true man of God prays for God's justice to be done, and waits upon the Lord to carry out his judgments in his own time and in his own way (Rom. 12:14-21). And the true man of God does all within his own power to support God's ordained structures of human government which are working relatively within God's will to administer some of the divine judgments (Rom. 13:1-10). God's justice moves his people to praise his name. Isaiah 26:13 contains the three major Hebrew names for God—Yaweh, Elohim, Adonai. God's works of justice cause men to renounce their idol-gods. God's greatest work of justice and mercy (the Cross of Christ—Rom. 3:21-16), the gospel, has the power to cast down "strongholds and every imagination that exalts itself against God (2 Cor. 10:3-5). God took a small, nomadic band of sheep-herders, put them into the crucible of Egyptian bondage, delivered them, established for them a "beach-head" in the land of Canaan, enlarged them numerically and geographically at the very center of world commerce and politics until their influence was felt all over the world. Miracles and providence were so evident in all this honest men had to acknowledge God's working as the source of it all. The establishment of God's new-order-kingdom (the church) is even more spectacular and demonstrably divine in origin. One despised Galilean took 12 assorted fishermen, a tax collector and one tent-maker and conquered peoples from every tribe and tongue and nation on earth, and has been doing so for over 20 centuries. In the days of Samuel, God's people cried out for "a king like the nations." Many "lords" came and went, most of them leading God's people into idolatry. Through it all Jehovah sought to bring his people back to his own rule. After long centuries of "troubled times" (cf. Dan. 9:24-27) God came to earth, incarnate, and re-established his rule among men. So, now, God has increased the nation and enlarged all the borders of the land to include all who have and all who will believe Jesus and obey his commandments. **AND IT ALL REDOUNDS TO GOD'S GLORY!**

Isaiah 26:16-21 represent the prayers of the faithful "remnant" (Isaiah's disciples 8:16), in all of history, making known its frustration in looking for justice and deliverance in the midst of its trials and unable to understand what seems like God's indifference to injustice. Batsar is the Hebrew word for "trouble, distress, oppression." 26:16 is speaking of the corrective discipline by which the Lord had oppressed the Israelites in the past. It is also predicting that in the future, after Isaiah's time, "distress" the covenant people in the Babylonian exile—Daniel calls it "the indignation" of God (Dan. 8:19; 11:36). So the "remnant" is driven to hope in God's justice which seems to "walk with leaden feet" cf. Habakkuk 1:1-4; Isa. 59:14; Ezek. 9:9; Rev. 6:9-11). Saints of God cry out, but God is trying them, purging them, building in them endurance, faith and character, if they will believe and trust God. Like a pregnant woman, Israel had endured pain and anxiety. She had produced nothing. She is told by the prophets she is to give birth to a "new nation." Faced with a predicted captivity, she is gripped with

frustration and anxiety about her Messianic destiny. All Israel (Judah) can see in the future is death and dispersion. The answer from God (Isa. 26:19-21) is that as slow as justice may seem, it is sure to come. What they think is dead shall live! Isaiah is saying in metaphoric language exactly what Ezekiel said in Ezek. 37:1ff, and Hosea said in Hosea 6:1-3; and Daniel said in Dan. 12:1ff. God's covenant people will "arise from the dead" with a rebirth in the Messianic kingdom (the church of Christ). God's light of life will fall like refreshing dew upon them (see Hosea 14:4-7). The Messianic destiny will not be obliterated. Isaiah promises God's "remnant" they will be able to hid themselves for a little while until the "indignation" is past. God will protect them until he is ready to raise them from the dust of captivity and put them on the road to the Messiah again. At the birth of the Messiah the "indignation" is over (see Dan. 8:19; 9:24-27). The long sought for deliverance arrives with Messiah's birth (Lk. 1:67-79; 2:25-38). At his birth comes the "resurrection" of the remnant's Messianic destiny—its very life! The "indignation" will last some 600 years, but it is only a "little while" in God's perspective. All during that time he will be chastening, perfecting and delivering his people so he may work through them to serve his purpose for them. God promised to do it. The world could not hide itself or its guilt. It could not forego the Lord's deliverance of the remnant. **GOD'S WORD IS SURE TO COME TO PASS!**

Isaiah 27:1-13 predicts that God is going to join Judah and the people from the "nations" (Gentiles) and "Jacob" (God's covenant people) will "...fill the whole world with fruit." (27:6). Two Hebrew words in 27:1 may be translated "monster"—liveyathan and thaniyn. Liveyathan is translated "crocodile" in Job 40:25 (RSV). Thaniyn is translated "serpent" in most uses. In Ezek. 29:3; 32:2, thaniyn is translated "dragon," referring to Egypt. Some have concluded that the first leviathan, since it is swift, symbolizes Assyria which was built upon the swift, serpent-like Tigris River; the second thaniyn, winding, crooked, symbolizes Babylon built upon the winding, serpent-like Euphrates River, and the monster that is in the sea symbolizes Egypt built in the middle of the Nile delta. "That day" of 27:2 is a continuation of the "day" of Isaiah chapters 24,25,26, the Messianic age. The "serpents" to be punished or slain are obviously the enemies (symbolic and literal) of God's people. This prophecy in chapter 27 apparently has two fulfillments—the first is the "immediate" fulfillment when the Jews are restored to Palestine in 536 B.C.; the second is the "ultimate" fulfillment in the Messiah when "Jacob shall fill the whole world with fruit." In Revelation, Rome is symbolized as the "beast, false prophets, and harlot" which is allied with "the old serpent," the devil, or the "great red dragon." It is defeated. In Daniel God's enemies are symbolized by various "beasts." They are defeated. Wherever the spirit of opposition to God appears, in whatever beastly kingdom it may be, Satan is the author of it! On the same "day" God defeats leviathan, the "monster," he dispenses mercy to all men (27:2-6). He will replant the "vineyard" he condemned to be destroyed (see Isa. ch. 5). God's vineyard (the church) in that "day" will be producing according to his will. Jehovah refreshes it daily. He protects it constantly (Psa. 121:4). God tramples the enemies of his "vineyard" like thorns and thistles are trampled. There is one alternative to judgment open to his enemies—they may "take hold of his strength"

(27:5). God bids his enemies take refuge in his maoozyi (“fortress”). But if the enemy is to come into God’s fortress, he must first “make peace with God.” To make peace with God is to accept God’s covenant on his terms (Psa. 2:1-11; Lk. 3:7-9; Jn. 15:6; Jer. 12:10ff). In the Messianic age, Israel will take root. The Messiah is to be the “shoot” and “branch” out of the stump of Jesse (Isa. 11:1ff). The Messianic people will take root, flourish, produce fruit and fill all the earth with its fruit (see Hosea 14:4ff). In view of the fact that the Messianic age is sure to come, and all God proposes to do for mankind on that “day,” he now calls Judah to repent (27:7-13). Thus closes a very significant section of Isaiah’s message (i.e., chapters 24-27). It is a message to the remnant (and that includes people in the Christian dispensation). God was going to judge his covenant people—send them into exile. The remnant would have to suffer along with the impenitent Jews. But God’s judgment toward the remnant is merciful and purposeful. His purpose is to purge the remnant of any worldliness and strengthen them in order that they may progress toward God’s goal which was the Messianic order or age. For, in the Messiah will come redemption for all mankind in the rule of God through his word. HAVE YOU TAKEN HOLD OF GOD’S STRENGTH? HAVE YOU COME INTO HIS FORTRESS? HAVE YOU MADE PEACE WITH GOD?

## ISAIAH 28:1—30:33

### Introduction

Tell a person something is “bad” and he is not at all sure he wants to give it up. Describe it as “stupid” and he has enough self-respect, usually, to at least be cautious about it. This is what the prophet Isaiah is trying to tell the Jewish people of his day about their behavior. They are drunkards; they reject prophetic instruction; they tried to play the game of political intrigue; they pretended they could not understand; they tried to think they were hiding from God; they sought help from a helpless nation; they insisted on living in a fantasy world. IS THAT STUPID, OR WHAT? Remember, Isaiah had already said the sinful people of his day were dumber than oxen and donkeys (Isa. 1:3).

Chapter 30 indicates Isaiah did not turn many from their stupidity. This was as God predicted to Isaiah when he called him to his prophetic ministry. In chapter 6 Isaiah was told to expect less than 10 per cent success. That means 9 of every 10 persons in Isaiah’s audience deliberately chose to behave with stupidity! Is it possible that people today, with the final and complete gospel (good tidings) message God has given to the world, behave with stupidity? Would the New Testament speak of people behaving that way?

The New Testament, even from the lips of Jesus himself, uses words such as “fool,” or “foolish” (Lk. 12:20; Eph. 5:17; Rom. 1:22) to describe some; “without understanding” is another term (2 Cor. 10:12); “senseless” (Rom. 1:21); irrational animals” (2 Pet. 2:12,22); and “immature children” (1 Cor. 1:6; 3:1) are other terms used to caution people about spiritual stupidity.

Those terms seem rather harsh. But Isaiah’s people were in a life and death struggle with worldliness that had become pandemic. It was about to exterminate the Messianic nation. But when one thinks about it even the Lord himself and his apostles were not exactly always amiable and cordial with their words:

Jesus with the Pharisees (“snakes, disciples of Hell”).

Jesus with Peter (“Satan”)

Jesus with other disciples of his (“foolish men,” “faithless generation”).

Paul with the Judaizers (“dogs”).

Spiritual stupidity results to a large extent from scriptural ignorance. Scriptural ignorance may be due to some small degree in the 21st century to non-availability of the Gospel—some people may never have had the opportunity to hear it. However, for the major portion of the world, it is a deliberate choice not to listen to the truth it has (Rom. 1:18-32).

That does not mean we should give up proclaiming it. God told Isaiah in the 6th chapter to go on preaching to a “stupid” indifferent people who would not listen until there were no more people to whom to preach. God told Ezekiel to preach whether people heard or refused to hear (Ezek. 2:1-10). God held neither of these prophets responsible for success—only for faithfulness. LET US THEREFORE BE STEADFAST...FOR OUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN IN THE LORD—WHETHER PEOPLE HEAR OR REFUSE TO HEAR!

“Ephraim” is a metaphor for the 10 northern tribes—otherwise known as “Israel” as contrasted with “Judah” the southern kingdom. This section of Isaiah was probably written in the early years of the reign of Hezekiah, before Hezekiah’s “reforms.” The main thrust of Isaiah’s prophesying (preaching) in this section is that God has revealed his objections to the utter debauchery, faithlessness, idolatry, and cowardice of “Israel” That is the message of chapters 28-35. Isaiah intended to remind Hezekiah and Judah that Israel’s predicament (Assyrian invasion) was a consequence of her debauchery. Drunkenness causes ruin—individually and socially (society at large suffers). Drunkenness is only a symptom of a much more critical problem—self-indulgence or permissiveness. And that in turn stems from a fundamental rebellion against the word of God. Drunkenness is not a “disease” (allegedly called “alcoholism”)—it is a lack of self-control! You don’t become “infected” with drunkenness. There’s nothing in the human body of psyche that forces a person to become a drunkard. It is chosen behavior. The same is true of homosexual behavior. Debauchery in any form is not a “sickness”—it is sin! The Lord has an instrument of judgment to use against Israel (28:2)—Assyria. It is going to be a violent judgment (28:3-4). When Israel and Samaria fall, there will be a “remnant” (Heb. shear) which will reaffirm its faith and trust in Jehovah. When the remnant sees Samaria fall, they will renew their stand for righteousness and justice, take new courage and strength from the Lord’s actions. The true foundation is the God of Justice, not self-indulgence or permissiveness. Judah needed to learn this from Israel—so must the church today! So, Isaiah turns his stern prophesying to Judah (“these also”, 28:7) who also “reel with wine.” It is the religious leaders who are pointed out—priests and prophets! These are the servants of God through whom the rest of the nation were to contact God! Completely overcome with drunkenness, they misrepresented God’s will to the people—or did not represent it at all. The nation was being led by drunkards (except for Isaiah and a few others). Isaiah paints a vile picture of drunkards, but it is a true picture of vomit and filthiness (28:8). Drunkards (including priests and false prophets) manifest their utter depravity by mocking Isaiah’s attempts to instruct them in the revelation of God. They say, in effect, “Who does Isaiah think he is, to talk to us like

one would talk to children—are we children?” Isaiah is trying to teach them but they contemptuously call it “line upon line, precept upon precept” (i.e., blah, blah, blah, blah). Isaiah wasn’t really all that pedantic or boring. They were just immature brats and did not comprehend the value of learning by thinking! As a matter of fact, God was going to treat these people like brats and speak to them in a “line upon line, precept upon precept” manner through the language of a nation they do not know. God was going to make believers out of some of those drunken scoffers by delivering them to the Assyrians. They were too immature and unbelieving to heed Isaiah’s instructions so they would have to be dealt with as immature brats—they would have to be shown. Interestingly, the apostle Paul chides the Corinthians by quoting Isaiah 28:11 in 1 Cor. 14:21. And the way Paul used Isaiah’s message helps us understand Isaiah’s intent. Corinthian Christians had a mania for the charismatic, spectacular, show-business of speaking in foreign “tongues” (i.e., languages). They were disparaging the really important gift of teaching (prophecy) which was appreciated by the mature. “Tongues” were not to edify but to be a crutch for the immature babies; those who have to be shown are spiritually immature and a hindrance to the spirituality of the rest of the church. Isaiah’s “babies” mocked his sincere and untiring simplicity. They demanded thrills, excitement, and sophistication. Within two generations what Isaiah predicted about captivity came to pass, and perhaps a few realized they had stumbled at the truth and were trapped by their own stupidity and bratishness. That which they had mocked was about to mock them. God is not mocked!

The rulers of Judah sitting in their fortress city Jerusalem, scoffed at Isaiah’s prophecies of Judah’s judgment. They had made agreements or “covenants with death.” “Covenants with death” probably refers to covenants with Assyria and Egypt. The Israelites had entered the game of international political intrigue attempting to play one “friendly” nation against another for their own safety—that is a “deadly” game! Dealing with nations who do not acknowledge the moral sovereignty of the Almighty Creator is disastrous—it involves ruthless power. The leaders of God’s Messianic nation were trying to perpetuate the kingdom of God by deceit and falsehood and compromise with paganism (idolatry). **IT CANNOT BE DONE—ESPECIALLY WITH THE CHURCH TODAY (GOD’S NATION).** Worldly empires may rise on that basis, but they also fall on that basis. The kingdom of God today (the church) cannot be built by making alliances with unbelief! Because human beings (the Jews of Isaiah’s day) could not make a proper foundation for the redemptive kingdom of God, God lays a true, tested, solid foundation upon which to build redemption. The Hebrew word *yisad* (“lay”) is past tense. God had already started to lay the foundation as early as Abraham and David (2 Sam. 7:12ff). The “foundation” was the doctrine of the incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah! The completion of the foundation would be found in the Messiah himself (Matt. 21:42,44; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:33; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-6). But God was laying in “Zion” (the faithful remnant in the OT) even then the beginnings of that Messianic hope through the message of the prophets. The faithful few in these promises resulted in the coming of the Messiah and the church (the habitation of God in the Spirit, Eph. 2:21-22). For the

most part, Isaiah's prediction that God was going to come In Person was rejected by sinful men. Mankind wanted God's "vineyard" for itself so they killed the messengers of God and then the Heir, Son of God (cf. Matt. 21:33ff). For a faithful few, however, even as early as Abraham, the foundation, the Messianic hope, was believed. The belief of the patriarchs, David and the prophets, made them children of faith and fit for God's redemptive community (cf. Galatians and Hebrews). Those who trusted in God's "already-laid-foundation" would not be "in haste" (anxious or fearful) when God's chastening captivities came! Isaiah promises the scoffers of Judah that all their cherished plans and schemes for protection from Egypt and Assyria would be canceled and wiped out. Isaiah uses a proverb or parable familiar to the people of his day. "A bed too short" for a man to stretch himself full length and "covers too narrow" to wrap himself in on a chilly night are, to say the least, inadequate and a vexation! Judah's political intrigues were like that—inadequate and a frustration; they would be a vexation to Judah when judgment fell. The Lord judging his own people would be considered a "strange work." Most Jews of Isaiah's day refused to believe or consider the idea that God would judge them (cf. Isa. 5:12). God's intent was to "purify for himself a holy people" (cf. Malachi 3:1-5). His method may seem strange to human beings, but to God it is part of his all-wise plan. Isaiah claims his message is a divine revelation (28:22) from the Lord and they had better not scoff at it. The rulers of Judah did not have their facts straight. They were building on a false foundation—they were not even using good common sense and logic. They must not only build on a stable foundation, they must think! (28:23-29). Isaiah attempts to penetrate the calloused and crooked thinking of the rulers by using illustrations from everyday experience. He says, "This is the way things work; men do not continually plow a field. Once the field is plowed and prepared a man sows seed and later reaps a crop." God is going to "plow his field" to prepare it. But he will not continually plow it. After plowing, he expects to sow and then reap. **BUT THE PLOWING MUST BE DONE FIRST!** Plowing is chastening, instituting repentance (i.e., "Break up the fallow ground" Jer. 4:3). God is the author of systematic seasons. Man should learn that is the way God operates. Man must also be logical, systematic, disciplined, and orderly. Man must learn that effect follows cause. **THE PROPHETS, JESUS, AND THE APOSTLES REASONED WITH SINNERS!** God will plow and sow (scatter) but he will not do so forever. He will reap also! If men want to be God's harvest, they must submit to the preparation (chastening—see Heb. 12:1-29). It's only logical!

Isaiah portrays his audience as standing in a stunned, hesitant, stupefied state of sullen disbelief. Jeremiah calls them stupid (Jer. 4:22; 10:8-21; 51:17). They consider it incredible that Jerusalem is being predicted as a "bloody altar" to the Lord's vengeance. They stare at the prophet like a drunken man's stare. That is because they are inebriated in the intoxication of pride and rebellion against God. The Lord made humans as moral beings whose choices either make them better or worse. A human's moral choices either blind him or enlighten him. That is how the prophet can say that it is the Lord's doing in closing their eyes! God was saying the people of Jerusalem were sullen, brooding sinners, refusing to pay heed to what Isaiah was

preaching. When someone asked them what Isaiah's revelation meant, they called it a lot of gibberish and incredible nonsense which, they said, no one could understand. They said his writings were like a "sealed book"—the writings of a "mystic." The religious leaders, prophets and priests, would not read Isaiah's writings, and called what they had not read, unrealistic and far-fetched. God turns Isaiah's attention upon the cause of Jerusalem's blindness—its religious leaders (29:13-16). Those leaders had created a syncretism of paganism and Jewish tradition and called it worshiping God. It was a religion of self-merit based on ritual observance and disassociated from any relationship to a personal, righteous, holy, loving God. It was a religion of motions and mouthings. It had nothing to do with trusting in God or obeying him. It compartmentalized religion pretending that it was only a small part of life. But, a man's life is the consequence of his religion in totality. Man becomes what he worships (Hosea 9:10). They did not treasure God so their heart was not with him (cf. Matt. 5:21). They revered the esteem of men; they treasured their opinions more than the word of God; they believed they were able to take care of themselves, so they did not need God. Jesus quoted Isa. 29:13 in a confrontation with the Pharisees in his day (Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23) because of their hypocrisy. They paid lip service, and put on a good "show" of believing God, but in their hearts they despised him. All the "wise" men of Jerusalem were scoffing at Isaiah's word from the Lord. But the Lord is going to make the wise men's wisdom perish. The Lord did this initially in the Babylonian captivity. The wise men were proven wrong. Ultimate God did bring all the wisdom of the world to humiliating defeat at the cross of Christ. That is why Paul paraphrased Isaiah 29:14 in 1 Cor. 1:19-20. Every historic demonstration of God's wisdom versus man's foolishness in the OT was a type and prophecy of the climactic demonstration at the Cross of Christ and the Empty Tomb (his resurrection). When a person takes it upon himself to exclude God from any area or circumstance of his life, that person has turned things upside down. The person who tries to hide from God or escape from him is a fool. It is as absurd as a clay vessel attempting to say that it made itself and the potter had nothing to do with it (Isa. 29:16; 64:8; Jer. 18:4-6). When humans get their relationship to God upside down, saying that man invented God instead of God creating man, then all of man's existence gets perverted.

God predicts through Isaiah that he is going to work a transformation of the people described in chapters 28:1—29:16. Some out of this nation of stupid, unstable, sullen, unheeding (un-hearing) people is to form the basis for a changed society sanctified unto the Holy One of Israel. God is going to refocus the ideas of men concerning the value of human structures as compared with God's kingdom. Human autonomy and schemes are going to be hewn down, and made to be fields from which God's kingdom will reap its citizenry. The helplessness of human schemes of salvation is going to be demonstrated by centuries of judgments and redemptions of the Jewish nation—and by one great historic act of god when he takes what men have counted common and unimpressive (the covenant of belief) and make it a majestic forest through the Messiah and his church (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31). Lebanon (a great forest) represented all world-utopian schemes of empires and emperors. It will be brought

low. Judah represents the faithful covenant people of God (a fruitful field) ultimately, the church. Absolutely necessary to such a fruitful finish to God's work is the reorientation of men's sense of values—a regeneration of their thinking so they will put the kingdom of God and the eternal, unseen treasures first. This reorientation will necessitate all the captivities, oppressions, deliverances, restorations, predicted by the prophets and will finally culminate in the death and resurrection of the Messiah and the establishment of his church. When this takes place, or as it takes place, some of the spiritually deaf and spiritually blind will pay heed to the words of God's messengers. When this process takes place, pagan philosophies and religions will show themselves to be more harmful than helpful, but those who believe and obey the Lord will show that they may be changed into the image of their Creator. When this process takes place (i.e., the Messianic fulfillment) the Lord will remove from his new society (the church) all who want to destroy men's souls—tyrants, scoffers and evil-doers (see Zech. 13:1-9). Isaiah does not say that those who kill the body will be cut out of the new society. As long as the world exists there will be those who want to destroy God's community, but God will not allow them that power. Especially will God's community be safe from spiritual destruction—dishonesty, greed, and evil will not be a part of his new Jerusalem (the church). God rescued Abraham from Ur. Abraham became a powerful (spiritually) man. God will rescue "Jacob" (i.e., the Messianic people—Jacob's descendants) and they will become powerful. Israel often thought of herself as inferior to the rich, powerful sophisticated and indulgent pagans surrounding her. Her consuming desire was "to be like the nations." She was ashamed of her God and ashamed of herself. When God completes his redemption in the Messiah (Jesus Christ), Jacob's descendants (spiritual descendants, Rom. 9:6-13) need longer be ashamed or afraid. She (the New Covenant people—the church) will have the power of God manifested for her and through her. Those "wandering in spirit" and "finding fault" (29:24) will also have their minds changed when they accept the instruction God is going to give in his ultimate demonstration of power—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Alas for Judah—she is chasing illusions—dreams, "make-believe."! She makes plans and institutes programs without considering God's advice. God's advice is in his word. It is there for all to seek and know. No one has to wait on God—he had given his advice. Judah conducted her commercial, social, national and international political affairs all without knowing or caring what God's will was in any of these areas (God's will for all these areas were in the Law he gave to Moses). Judah was just like her sister (Israel) a few years before her (Hosea 4:1-6; 5:4, 13; 8:1-5; 8:9-10; 10:3). Israel was like a "silly dove, without sense," flitting hither and yon (to Egypt to Assyria, etc.). Now Judah plays the stupid fool, calling to Egypt against Assyria and calling to Assyria against Egypt. The Jews were a specially called society. They were called to commit their total existence (political, social, cultural, international) to the guidance and glorification of Jehovah-God. When they did not do so, they forfeited their reason for being! Judah not only did not seek God's guidance—her second violation of her divine calling was to call upon a pagan society with pagan gods for help—especially Egypt!

Egypt's "greatness" was millenniums in the past—but her idolatry was still pervasive. "Egypt" came to represent in both OT and NT the world as opposed to God's kingdom (see Rev. 11:8). Judah's princes have already made contact with Egypt at Zoan. But their arrangements, which they think will result in something to boast about, will turn into shame and embarrassment when Egypt proves impotent to help them. And that is exactly what happened in history. Egypt proved helpless against both Assyria and Babylon in her attempts to help the Jews. Isaiah calls Egypt, Rahav (or "Rahab") which in Hebrew means, "big mouth, puffed up," and Isaiah also calls Egypt, shavvath (or Sabbath) which in Hebrew means, "rest, inactivity." So Egypt is "big-mouth who does nothing." Egypt is a "paper tiger." Judah seeks her help in vain. IT IS ALL AN ILLUSION IN JUDAH'S MIND THAT EGYPT WILL HELP HER! First the Lord directs that a permanent record of his revelation to Isaiah be made concerning Egypt's helplessness and Judah's folly. Isaiah is to write this revelation on a lukha, "a tablet of stone or wood," and then he is to write it in a sepher, "a ledger, a book, in epistolary form." This emphasizes two things: (a) the seriousness of the message and the need for permanency—if they will not listen now, perhaps future generations will; (b) in written form it will be a vindication of the prophet Isaiah against whom the whole nation (almost) has declared itself (30:9-10). Judah not only refuses to hear God's word from the prophets, she presumes to instruct God's messengers what to say to her. She blatantly refuses to hear "right" things and demands to hear chalaq ("smooth, clattering slippery") things, and mehathaloth ("lofty, illusory, fantastic, deluding") things. It is almost incredible that people would demand to be deluded! Isaiah is not the only prophet to record such an attitude among God's people (see Micah 2:6-11; Jer. 6:10-19; Ezek. 2:3-7; 3:4-11, etc.). The prophet of God is not responsible for their attitude—only for preaching what God told him to preach. The phrase "let us hear no more..." in 30:11 is from the Hebrew word hasheveethu and is a derivative of the word for "Sabbath." They want a prophet (and a God) who will "gimme a break—take a rest—shut up, do nothing." They are especially opposed to the repeated emphasis on the holiness of God. It is a constant stabbing at their consciences to hear of the Holy One of Israel. But the Holy One of Israel (God) is going to act in accordance with his holiness. Because they have held his word in contempt and trusted in perverseness, God must correct them. God is going to allow them to reap the fruit of their perversity. When rulers and spiritual leaders despise and pervert the word of God, it becomes a "breach" in the wall of moral cohesiveness. Soon the whole wall is weakened and falls. The "breach" is unnoticed by the sinner, at first, but it gradually does its weakening work until the wall falls suddenly and everyone wonders why, all of a sudden, the wall has fallen. Judah will also be broken and useless like a potter's vessel is broken when it cannot be used.

Isaiah told his people that their salvation depended on "turning" back (i.e., repenting) to the Lord where they would find the "calmness" which comes from trusting in the Lord. But turning to the Lord in the face of the tests and trials they are enduring was not easy. It would take faith. But they were not willing to trust God! The majority of Isaiah's people were turning to the "swift horses" of Egypt's supposed military prowess

for deliverance from Assyria. But Egypt was a paper-tiger! Isaiah predicted Judah would see swift horses, alright, but they would be the horses of her enemies, pursuing her. Judah's enemies would be so terrible and awesome it would only take a few of them to put hundreds of Jews to rout. So few Jews would be left, Judah would look like a lonely signal fire, a solitary flag pole on a hill. This probably refers to the days of Hezekiah (Isa. chs. 36-39) when the Assyrians had overrun and devastated all of Palestine except the city of Jerusalem which Assyria had under siege. God was going to be gracious to Judah—but he was going to wait a while to do it. He would wait through a period of “indignation” (chastening)—then he would show grace. Judah must be prepared to receive grace!

Judah must be turned from rebellion to crying to God for “The Teacher” who is yet to come as Isaiah predicts (30:20-21). Teacher in the Hebrew language is *moreyka*. It is a plural, masculine noun. The RSV translators translated it singular—so does the English Standard Version—so does the New American Standard Version (the KJV translates it as a plural). We believe *moreyka* (“Teacher”) probably applies initially to the prophets (plural), but ultimately it applies to the Messiah who was the fulfillment of the law and the prophets! The Messiah (God-incarnate) is the One who will come and Teach (Isa. 54:13—fulfilled in John 6:45). Some translate Joel 2:23, “...he has given the Teacher Unto Righteousness...” where the same Hebrew word, *moreh* appears in a Messianic context. They are going to “see” their Teacher. When the Teacher comes they will (the remnant, at least) listen to him and purge the Messianic community of idolatry (see Zech 13:1-9 for a Messianic prediction of the purging of idolatry). Another reason we believe the passage is ultimately Messianic is the statement in 30:23-26—“he will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground” which sounds like Peter’s exhortation to repentance and belief in the Messiah, in order that “seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...and that they may be blessed in being turned from their wickedness” (Acts 3:17-26). Peter says this is what the prophets predicted would happen in the Messiah! That the light of the moon would be as bright as the sun, and that the sun seven times greater, would kill all forms of life on the earth as we know it now if this text is to be interpreted literally! But Isaiah is portraying a “healing.” This is “reverse” apocalyptic metaphor. Usually apocalyptic language portrays the sun as turning to darkness, etc., which means judgment. This “reverse” metaphorical use of the sun’s brightness, therefore, must mean life—eternal life—which will come in the Messiah (see Isa. 53:4-12). Furthermore, Isaiah predicts that the Lord would come from his place (afar) to destroy the enemies of his people (after a waiting period of chastening on his people). Then the Lord’s people would rejoice—praising God for his glory and faithfulness to keep his word. Their deliverance will be like a great feast (see comments on Isa. ch. 25—it’s Messianic). The primary purpose of judgment and deliverance is to cause God’s voice to be heard and his power to be exhibited. The word “battling” in 30:32 is in Hebrew, *tenoophah*, which means literally, “shaking.” God is going to shake all the nations and all human systems, even Judaism (see Heb. 12:25-29), and establish a kingdom that cannot be shaken, HIS CHURCH! Topheth (“burning place”) was located in the valley

of Hinnom south of Jerusalem and was the place where unbelieving Israelites offered up their sons and daughters to Molech. Here, too, the refuse of the city was deposited and burned—the fires burned continually. Thus the place came to take on the name, Gehenna, which means “the valley of Hinnom,” and was a symbol of the place of “eternal damnation” (Hell).

## ISAIAH 31:1—35:10

### Introduction

Throughout these chapters, Isaiah is preaching God's message that the "chosen" people's (the "remnant's") emancipation (freedom, security, independence) is not from Egypt, Assyria or Edom (these represent all the heathen alliances and influences the "chosen" people so coveted). God tells his people that he is going to judge Egypt and Edom (they both metaphorically represent all worldly based "kingdoms" and ideas and philosophies). Judah (and Israel) fell into the devil's trap of admiring human power, human wealth, and so-called human "wisdom." Judah was certain that such worldly power could deliver her out of any political or physical (or even spiritual) circumstance she did not like. God's judgments upon the "nations" is going to be total (Isa. ch. 34). All of this applies initially to God's deliverance and restoration of the "remnant" to their "holy land" in 536 B.C. But ultimately it applies to the death and resurrection of Christ which will "disarm the principalities and powers and triumph over them in Christ" (Col. 1:14-15)—it applies to the word of Christ which is able to cast down strongholds and imaginations and everything that exalts itself against God and bring every thought into obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5)—it applies to the gospel by which God makes foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

Throughout this section, Isaiah makes parenthetical statements about the coming glory of the Messianic age. A "king will reign in righteousness," and there will be such a change that the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will hearken (Isa. 32:1-8). They will "see" their king and they will "look upon Zion" and the Lord will be there (Isa. 33:17-24) and they will be forgiven their iniquity. God will provide them with a "highway" and the unclean shall not pass over it—only the redeemed—and they will come to Zion with singing and everlasting joy will be upon their heads (Isa. 35:1-10). Anyone who can't see that these passages are ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah does not have a clear grasp of the statements in the New Testament which definitely point to their fulfillment in Christ and the church (e.g., Lk. 1:32-35; 1:46-55; 24:25-17; 24:44-49; Acts 3:17-26; 13:32-39; 15:12-21; Rom. 9:6-13; 1 Cor. 10:11; Gal. 3:15-18; Heb. 12:18-29; etc. etc.). Jesus is the "Way, the Truth and the Life, and no one comes to the Father but by him" John 14:6.

Always remember to apply the prophetic remonstrances, admonitions, and ultimate promises, for God's "chosen" people in the OT to the church in the NT—and not to secular nations. Isaiah's admonition to Judah not to seek Egyptian help does not prohibit secular nations from making alliances against international aggression. But it does apply to the principle that the church of Christ (in any dispensation) should not be seeking the "help" of heathen (see 3 John 5-8). Egyptian terrain (desert, flat-lands) made it ideal for vast fleets of war-chariots and horses. That was about the extent of Egypt's threat—chariots. But chariots would not be much help against the

mountainous country when Assyrians invaded Palestine! Judah thinks she is wise in going to Egypt for help. But Jehovah-God is wiser. He is the wisest of all. "He never calls back his words" (31:2; see also Isa. 55:10-11). That is absolute wisdom—never having to call back one's words! "God is not man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent. He has said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Num. 23:19). The great multitude of chariots made the Egyptian war-machine appear invincible to Judah. The prophet says, sarcastically, "The Egyptians are men, not gods." They are not invincible. One is reminded here of the temptation of the churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 13:4) to think of the "beast" (Roman emperor) as invincible. Christ told those churches that the "beast" was "human" (Rev. 13:18) and not invincible. The power of God is as awesome as that of a lion devouring sheep. Such a lion will not flee no matter how many shepherds shout at it. Let the Assyrians surround Jerusalem and let them shout at the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (God)—he will show no fright nor will he be cowed by them. He will, in fact, pounce upon the taunting Assyrians and devour them. God will hover over the "remnant" like a bird hovers over its young with wings to shield and protect. There is no way the Assyrians are going to overrun Jerusalem, if Jerusalem will repent of its haughty and rebellious determination to seek Egypt's help. Apparently this is exactly what happened in the incident with Hezekiah (Isa. chs. 36-19; cf. Also 2 Kings chs. 18-20; 2 Chron. Ch. 32). Jesus would have "gathered Jerusalem under his wings as a hen gathers her chicks, but Jerusalem would not (Matt. 23:37-39), so Rome destroyed her. The condition for God's deliverance of Jerusalem in Isaiah's time is that Jerusalem must "turn back to him from whom they had deeply revolted." (31:6). The Hebrew word translated deeply is *aemiyq* and sometimes means "to conspire." In other words, Judah's revolt is deliberate and "grass roots" or down to the foundations. The evidence of true turning back to God will be the "casting away of idols which their hands had sinfully made." No one forced them into idolatry—they made the idols with their own hands, in sin ("lawlessness" 1 John 3:4). This would cost, because the idols were made of silver and gold. All true repentance costs—but the rewards are beyond all comparison. The Lord will cause the Assyrian enemies to fall—not from some human action of man, but from some non-human power (see Isa. 37:36). This "sword" (31:8) will eventually bring the Assyrians into "forced labor" (bondage to Babylon). The "rock" or foundation (military might) which Assyria had trusted in would pass away in terror (see the book of Nahum for a graphic prophecy of the terror of the Assyrians when Babylon conquered them). Assyria's downfall was when she attacked Jerusalem. God's "fire" is in Zion. When Rome began to try to obliterate God's new Zion (the church), Rome was consumed with God's "fire"—God's church is the "apple" of God's eye, Zech. 2:8 (that is the pupil of the eye—the most sensitive spot)—to hurt God's church is to hurt God at his most sensitive spot!

Isaiah predicts a "king who will reign" in absolute righteousness (see Isa. 9:1-7; 11:1-16; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-18; Ezek. 37:2-28; Zech. 9:9-13). It can be none other than the Messiah! This "King" (Jesus) and his "princes" (the apostles) will be hiding places from the storms, streams in the desert, shade of a great rock in a weary land. It is the

Messianic age! A result of God's judgment upon Judah (captivity) and her repentance and restoration will be a "King" to rule in righteousness who will set up a kingdom of justice.

When this "King" comes, God's kingdom will be as God wants it to be. The contrast between the new kingdom and that of Isaiah's day will be like the difference between daylight and dark. Citizens of this "coming kingdom" will see as they should and hear as they should and obey. In the new kingdom men will not act rashly (Hebrew, mohar, impetuously) or hastily or in confusion. They will not stammer with drunkenness or stupidity as most of those of Isaiah's day did. The word knave ("churl" ASV) is nokal in Hebrew, and means, "miserly, deceitful, crafty or fraudulent." In the Messianic Kingdom (the church) people will be known for what they are, not who they are. If people are "knives," that is what they will be known as, whether rich, famous, or poor. Isaiah reveals in 32:6-7 what these people held in such esteem in his day really were. The man who profaned God by rebelling against God's law and taught error to exploit others for their own ends, were "fools." There will be no "fools" in God's new kingdom! Those who are to be ruled by the "King of righteousness" will be noble people. The Hebrew word here is nediyviym which connotes "willingness" as opposed to stubbornness, or "liberality" as opposed to miserliness. Nobility consists in being easy to be entreated (teachable), and one who gives of self. That is exactly how Jesus characterized citizens of the kingdom of heaven in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5) and in Matt. 11:25-30 and 13:10-17, etc.

The desolation of the Jews, which at its very core was spiritual would continue until the Spirit was poured out from on high (32:14-20; see also Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi for the spiritual destitution of the Jews even after their restoration from the captivities). The Spirit "poured" out had to be after Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi! Isaiah predicts the accomplishments of the Messiah (as in Daniel 9:24-27) in the redemption and establishment of the NT church! The agricultural setting of this prophecy should not confuse the careful student since there are plenty of NT passages which provide clues to proper interpretation of such figurative language: (a) compare Isa. 61:1-4 with Luke 4:16-30; (b) compare Isa. 55:1-5 with Acts 13:26-41; (c) compare Amos 9:11-12 with Acts 15:12-21). The idea is that of fruitfulness in things of the Spirit, not literal fruits and vegetables, but justice and righteousness. Relationships of people to God and God to people is what Isaiah predicts. These "fruitful" relationships can only be produced through the Spirit of God, at first incarnate in the Son, then dwelling in believers through faith and the agency of the word of God. When the "poured out Spirit" comes from on high, those who receive him will have the effects of righteousness, peace, quietness, trust and security forever (32:17). This can't be fulfilled ultimately in the restoration of the Jews in 536 B.C.! This is a promise for the NT covenant people of God. One thing is certain, the promises in 32:16-28 have not found fulfillment in the Jews of yesteryear or today, as Jews. They are promises offered for fulfillment in Jesus Christ and his new covenant holding out a special dispensation for the Jews in some future age seems to us to disparage the

finality and completeness of the New Testament. Isaiah 32:19 is a prediction of the defeat of all that opposes this future Messianic purpose of God—all “forests” will be hewn down by God and “cities” opposing him laid low. Those who by faith become citizens of the kingdom of God will be free, will sow and reap in abundance. Whatever they do will prosper—there will be “free range” to their activities.

This text (Isa. 33:15-16) is describe the character of every “citizen of Zion” who is faithful to God—OT and NT Zion. Even when the whole world was in chaos, fleeing the wrath of God at the downfall of empires, the remnant believed Jehovah-God would be the “stability” (Hebrew, amen, “so be it,” or “faithfulness”) of Zion. So, the whole world is called to attention to watch the change that is about to take place in Zion (33:13). Many of the scoffers are shaking with terror now that it appears Jerusalem will be next on the agenda of Assyrian conquest. They have given up hope in themselves and are now crying out to God, “What can be done to survive the fire?” (33:14). God tells them through the prophet Isaiah—REPENT! That is God’s message in both the OT and the NT! To repent means to walk uprightly and speak uprightly. To do that there must be an absolute standard of “uprightness” by which to judge whether one is walking or speaking uprightly. To repent means to live up on the plane of selflessness; despising any gain one might get from the oppression of others; to be “openhanded” with business dealings and do not take bribes; do not enjoy hearing about bloodshed and violence; and “abhor the very appearance of evil” (see Rom. 12:9; 2 Thess. 5:22; Psa. 15:1-5; 24:3-10). Good deeds in themselves do not produce serenity, but they do make it possible for the Lord to have the glory and that is what produces serenity. It is absolute faith in the grace of God that brings serenity. The godly, serene person is like the person who has a safe refuge high in the inaccessible mountains, a fortress well stocked with all that is needed to sustain him against the siege of his enemy (33:16).

The “king” in this context refers, again, to the Messiah! They will “see” the king in “his beauty.” No other “king” except the Son of God could qualify for that characterization. They will also behold a land that stretches afar, and look upon Zion...Jerusalem...a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken. The only “Jerusalem” that will “never be plucked up” is the NT church of Jesus Christ—“Mount Zion”...“the heavenly Jerusalem”....“a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (see Heb. 12:18-29). Jerusalem (the faithful remnant and those to come centuries after them) needed a “captain” to come and overhaul the “ship of Zion” (the redeemed). Her tackling was loose and her mast was so insecure she could not set sail. The “ship of Zion” was unseaworthy. She needed a “shake-down” cruise to make her a “taught ship” again. She was sick and ailing. When repentance came she would be fitted to sail the stormy seas of life again with her captain at the helm steering her to safe harbors. If she will continue to acknowledge Jehovah-God as Judge, Ruler and King she will get well and ready to “sail on to the completion of God’s redemptive journey.”

Yes! This is our God! He is not maliciously “bloodthirsty.” BUT HE IS ABSOLUTELY SOVEREIGN—AND WILL TOLERATE NO HUMAN REBELLING AGAINST HIS OMNIPOTENCE, OMNISCIENCE AND OMNIPRESENCE! All who are “hostile” toward our God will suffer his infinite wrath! Isaiah is bringing a section of his written prophecy to a climax. (He has done so before in chapters 6, 12, and 23). Chapters 34-35 are the climactic conclusion to the section warning Judah (and warning, by Messianic prophecies the future church) not to seek help from Egypt (symbolic of the heathen, secular world) which warning began in chapter 28. Chapters 34-35 summarize the reasons God’s covenant people should not seek help from the world (pagan, God-opposing systems): (a) because God has decreed doom for all worldly systems; (b) because God has a glorious future planned for his “Zion.”

What God is going to do in judgment involves the entire cosmos (universe) (earth and heaven). He is going to defeat all the “principalities, powers and world rulers of this present darkness, and all the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places and disarm them, and make a public example of them, triumphing over them in Christ Jesus” (see Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15). The total physical destruction of the world is not what is being talked about here. It is the defeat of the spiritual power opposing God and enslaving men which is much more imperative and cosmically significant—the victory of Christ over the world, the flesh, and the devil, on the cross and at the empty tomb. Historically, of course, God destroyed those physical enemies opposing his redemptive program—one by one he destroyed them or defeated them (Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome). And, of course, he will, in the future, destroy the whole physical creation as we know it now. But physical destruction would be of little consequence without the once-for-all defeat of Satan and his hosts at the Cross. Isaiah is predicting the same great overthrow of the world-opposition which Joel predicts (Joel 2:28—3:21)—the same as Ezekiel predicts in his book in chapters 38-39—the same as Daniel predicts in his chapters 2 through 12—and the same as Zechariah predicts in his chapters 9-14. The OT prophets, and even Jesus, predicted the end of the Jewish dispensation and the beginning of the New, Messianic age, as a “Day of Jehovah,” a great judgment and redemption. It was put in apocalyptic language—eschatological, cataclysmic, cosmic figures of speech. See for example, Malachi 3:1-5; Ezek. 38:1—39:20; Dan. 9:24-27; Luke 4:16-29; Matt. 23:37---24:35; Col. 2:14-15; Heb. 12:18-29, etc. The main predictive function of the OT prophets, even as the NT plainly points out, was to proclaim the FIRST advent of the Messiah and the judgment of worldly systems, the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth (the church) (see 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:12-21; Luke 2:25-27; Luke 24:44-49; John 12:31; 16:11; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8; 1 Cor. 1:18-31, etc.). Edom is used here as a representative of the God-opposing human governments. Edom was one of the first human governments to oppose God’s redemptive work when she tried to block God’s placing his covenant people in the land of Canaan. Edom is thoroughly condemned throughout the OT prophets. One prophet (Obadiah) devotes his whole ministry to pronouncing God’s judgment upon Edom. Edomites, of all people, should have been in harmony with God’s Messianic people because the Edomites and

Israelites originated from the same father (Isaac) and were descendants of the “brothers” Esau and Jacob. Racial or human familial relationship does not count with God—it is relationship to his covenant that counts. The sword of the Lord in heaven is filled with blood. The judgment of God is portrayed as a “great sacrifice.” The wrath of God accumulates (cf. Rev. 15:7; Zeph. 1:7-18; Jer. 46:10; 50:27). Sacrifice was worship of the Lord. Slaughtering of animals was never very pretty to behold. In fact, it is always rather revolting. **BUT A HOLY GOD MUST DISPLAY HIS WRATH UPON SIN—EVENTUALLY AND ULTIMATELY UPON THIS ENTIRE FALLEN CREATION!**

God is going to “lay waste” to all the human attempts to save (redeem) mankind and prove it by “laying waste” Edom who thought she was impregnable (see Obadiah) and could never “be brought low.” All human systems to create “heaven on earth” will be utterly devastated—**NO ONE WILL EVER FIND A “WAY” TO GOD AND REDEMPTION THROUGH HUMAN WORKS, PHILOSOPHIES OR GOVERNMENTS.** Only the work of God, the viewpoint (philosophy) of God, and the government (kingdom) of God can provide the “WAY” to human redemption and salvation!!! And that is what Isaiah will portray in metaphorical language in chapter 35. Chapter 35 stands in stark contrast to chapter 34. Chapter 35 finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Messianic kingdom (the church). Just as all worldly systems are portrayed as judged in Edom (ch. 34), so, all redemption in Christ is portrayed in a rejuvenated land of Canaan (ch. 35). It does not fit Bible teaching to apply ch. 35 to a literal physical rejuvenation of the land of Palestine or the restoration of a Jewish system or nation: (a) so far as we are able to discover, the New Testament says nothing of literal, genetic Israel’s reoccupation of Palestine and restoration of a Jewish system (see the books of Galatians and Hebrews); (b) Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple but he said nothing of its rebuilding for the restoration of Jewish system (see Matt. 24:1-35; Mark. 13:1-31; Luke 21:5-36); (c) Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36); (d) Paul told the Gentile Ephesians they were blessed with every spiritual blessing in the church (Eph. 1:3); (e) Paul told the Corinthians Christians they were living in the “end of the ages” (1 Cor. 10:11); (f) Paul told the Gentile Galatians that all who were in Christ were heirs of Abraham and the promise made to Abraham (Gal. 3:15-29; see also Romans 9:6-13); (g) to restore a Jewish system would invalidate the credibility, authenticity, finality and superiority of Christianity as revealed in the book of Hebrews; (h) to establish again the kingdom of Israel of the Old Testament would be to establish a kingdom conceived in disobedience, born in rebellion and perpetuated in apostasy. That is exactly what the OT kingdom of Israel was in the days of the prophets. In the Messianic age the best of every pagan kingdom will be blended with the best of God’s chosen people to form the beautiful productive, joy-filled, new kingdom (the church)—this will be done by redemption through Christ. This thought is amplified by Isaiah in 60:8-22; 61:1-11. The wealth of any nation is its godly, redeemed people—they shall be the “treasures” brought to Zion from the nations. Isaiah 35:3-4 are paraphrased in Hebrews 12:12-13. Hebrews, chapter 12, contrasts the Mosaic (Mt. Sinai) dispensation with the Christian dispensation (Mt Zion) and those Hebrew Christians were exhorted to cling to

Christianity, “a kingdom which cannot be shaken” as the OT dispensation was about to be “shaken” and dispossessed by God in A.D. 70. The writer of Hebrews is saying that Isaiah chapter 35 is fulfilled in the Christian age (Zion). Therefore, the Messianic age is the point upon which God’s people of Isaiah’s day were to focus in order to strengthen their weak hands and confirm their feeble knees. The glorifying of the Jewish people in a rejuvenated “land” is not to be understood, therefore, literally, but to be fulfilled in Christ and the church in “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). With salvation comes sanctification. The first step in salvation and sanctification is a renewal of spiritual discernment—“eyes opened, ears hearing.” Jesus spoke of the Messianic age in just such terms in Luke 4:16-30 (there quoting Isa. 61:1-4). It is sin that opposes God. People are deceived by sin. Sin is the great mirage. People think they see life, refreshment and sustenance in the mirages of worldliness and rebellion against God. Isaiah says that when the Messianic age has come, instead of a mirage, there will be real water for thirsty souls. There will be a lovely, refreshing, satisfying, life-giving oasis (Jesus—the “water of life”) in the mist of the arid false, spirit-killing wilderness of sin. IT WILL BE THE WELL OF LIVING WATER, THE BREAD OF LIFE—JESUS (Jn. 4:1-42; 7:37-39; 6:51ff) and all who believe in him will become “rivers of living water,” oases themselves in the desert of sin. Isaiah continues to wax eloquent concerning the Messianic age. God is going to provide a WAY through the desolate wasteland of worldly confusion and chaos. The Hebrew word is *maselul*, meaning, “a raised way” as opposed to a mere path or trail—i.e., a main thoroughfare, unmistakably leading to an important destination. It is the only WAY characterized by holiness. Its uniqueness is that of the separateness of those who walk on it. The spiritually stained and morally soiled will not travel this Way because they choose not to do so (cf. Matt. 7:13-14; Luke 13:22-30; John 14:6). This Way will be so unmistakably demonstrated or marked out by God that even the man who has never seen God’s Way before will recognize this as God’s Way. The one with no experience in the Way of God will be able to comprehend and walk in it. It will not be complex or confusing. The “Way” became a favorite synonym for the Christian life in the early church (Acts 9:2; 19:9; 19:23; 24:22). This “Way” would be one of safety, security and peacefulness—no dangerous “beast” (worldly power—see Daniel & Revelation)—nothing predatory would prey upon those who choose to walk in this Way. The wayfarers—those who travel this eminent Way will be the redeemed and the ransomed. They belong to the Ransomer. The fact of their being ransomed produces everlasting joy and the banishment of sorrow and sighing. The emphasis is on everlasting. Its ultimate fulfillment is, therefore, not to be found in a land or a nation, but in the church which is the only eternal “Way.” Those on this Way are coming to Zion. Those coming to Zion are coming into the church of Christ (Heb. 12:22). Those on this Way have joy—the joy Jesus gives (John 15:11; 16:22-24; 17:13; Rom. 14:17; 1 John 1:4, etc.) and that is everlasting joy. Walking on this Way of holiness will eliminate the need for sorrow and sighing—frustration is eliminated and hurt or damage is impossible, in the spiritual and eternal sense and the wayfarer is assured of reaching his destination because his price of passage (the toll) has been paid in full by Christ. It is interesting that this glorious chapter, describing all the

beauty, glory and gladness that is to be the redeemed's is followed (after the historical interlude of 36-39) by the great Suffering Servant section (chapters 40-53). All that is to come to the "ransomed" is a result of the work of God's Suffering Servant," the Messiah—Jesus Christ!

force any one to walk in His Way. It is by choice and it involves something a person must do. God has marked out His Way so that no one can mistake it, but it is exclusively for those who choose holiness. Those who choose wickedness cannot walk on it. Jesus Christ is God's "Way" (John 14:6). We must walk in his steps, with him, obeying him.

## ISAIAH 36:1—39:8

### Introduction

This section of Isaiah is one of three different historical records of these events. Please read 2 Kings chapters 18-20 and 2 Chronicles chapters 29-32 for the other accounts and to get a good background for today's lesson. These three records do not contradict—they supplement one another. The account in 2 Chronicles is the “theological” view of what these events mean.

One might wonder why Isaiah would insert an historical narrative squarely in the middle of a series of grandly soaring and metaphorically majestic prophecies. Without doubt his purpose is to give proof of his prophetic call and mission. The rapid fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction concerning the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians, the restoration of Hezekiah and the death of the Assyrian king would prove conclusively that Isaiah was sent from Jehovah-God and spoke Jehovah's word, and was to be obeyed.

The events recorded in these four chapters occur from 703-701 B.C. (2-3 years). Hezekiah has been ruling by himself for 14 years already. The then northern tribes (Israel) have already been overrun and taken captive eighteen years before this (722-721 B.C.). Actually, these chapters in Isaiah should be arranged to fit the historical chronology as follows:

Chapter 38—Prostration

Chapter 39—Presumption

Chapter 36—Pressure

Chapter 37—Perseverance

However, for this lesson and to deter any confusion, we will study these chapters in the order Isaiah wrote them. Teachers might want to re-read these chapters in the proper chronological order as outlined above just to get the events in the right sequence.

Rab-shakeh in the Hebrew language means “chief of staff.” He was undoubtedly the “leading general” of the armed forces of Assyria—not the king or emperor of Assyria. The king of Assyria at this time would have been Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), the son of Sargon II (722-705 B.C.). Sargon II had completed the captivity of the ten northern

tribes, had died, and his son, Sennacherib had ascended to the throne. Sennacherib and his armed forces had taken 46 cities of Judah. He was presently engaged in an assault upon Lachish (just south of Ashdod and Jerusalem), so he sent his “Rabshakeh” (chief-of-staff) to inquire of Jerusalem’s intentions toward his campaign in Judea. The king of Assyria had sent Rabshakeh to Jerusalem with a “great army.” Hezekiah had not rolled over and played dead like the king of Assyria thought he would. Presently, Hezekiah was engaged in a religious reform involving the obliteration of idols, restoring the Word of God to the temple, and breaking off paying of tribute to foreign kings (2 Kings 18:1-8; 2 Chron. 29:1—31:21). Hezekiah had rebelled against paying tribute, but it appears from 2 Kings 18:13-16 he had second thoughts and sent an apology to the king of Assyria at Lachish, stripped the gold from the doors of the temple, etc., and gave it to the Assyrian king. How would Hezekiah justify a reversal of the courage, faith and godliness he was preaching to his countrymen during his revival? He probably rationalized: “The throne of David is in imminent danger of being extinguished. I am old, my days are numbered, I have no son to succeed me. The king of Assyria must be placated a while longer until a royal successor to David’s throne is produced.” Or, perhaps Hezekiah simply compromised his convictions out of fear! Lachish is 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. It would take the Rabshakeh 2 days to march there and set up camp. Upon arriving the Assyrians probably set up their bivouac in the Kidron Valley or on the slope of the Mount of Olives, eastward from the main gates of the city. Located there is the Gihon Spring and the Upper Pool with its new secret conduit hewn out of solid rock by Hezekiah’s workmen to store Jerusalem’s chief emergency water supply (2 Chron. 32:1-8). Here, by the conduit of the Upper Pool in the highway of the “Fuller’s Field” Ahaz (741-726 B.C.) (Hezekiah’s father) had rejected the word of God and the promises of the “True King” and had turned to the Assyrians for help against Syria and Israel (Isa. 7:3). Now, the Assyrians are here on this very spot, a terrifying, threatening consequence of the disobedience of the rulers of God’s covenant people! Accompanying the Rabshakeh were officers called “the Tartan and the Rab-saris” (2 Kings 18:17). Upon their arrival at the “Upper Pool” they called for “the king” which was calculated to show insolence and contempt for Hezekiah (kings do not negotiate—they have their subordinates do that). These Assyrians are treating Hezekiah like a subordinate official (2 Kings 18:18). But Hezekiah did not appear. He sent Eliakim, Shebna and Joah. Eliakim is the king’s representative and Shebna (formerly the one who exalted himself, Isa. 22-20) is the “scribe.” Rabshakeh always speaks of his emperor as “king” or “great king”—but never once does he call Hezekiah, “king.” Another attempt at psychological warfare. The Rabshakeh’s entire speech is masterfully, though rudely, done. Rabshakeh begins by challenging the confidence of Judah by letting Judah know that he knows what Judah’s planning has been.. Apparently, the Assyrians had a well-run “intelligence” system or they had spies within the court of Hezekiah or Jewish traitors telling them what was being planned. Perhaps the Egyptians sent word to the Assyrians about Judah’s overtures to her for military assistance. It may be the Rabshakeh was simply lying. Whatever the case, Rabshakeh is trying to destroy this confidence for he uses the words “trust” and “rely” over and over again in his speech.

He intimates that he knows even of the words (“counsel” and the preparations, “strength”) the Jews have made to war against the Assyrians. He arrogantly boasts they are useless.

The Assyrian chief-of-staff answers his own question to Judah—they have trusted in the “broken reed,” Egypt. To lean on a broken reed is stupid, because it cuts or pierces the hand! The Assyrians had probably already met the Egyptians in battle and routed them (at Eltekeh). Next, this Assyrian braggart turns his sarcasm upon Judah’s religious confidence. Hezekiah had caused to be demolished the Asherim (2 Kings 18:4-5; 2 Chron. 31:1) and the Nehushtan (bronze serpent)—pagan idols. The Rabshakeh looked at Hezekiah’s “demolition” through the eyes of a pagan and tried to persuade the people of Jerusalem that Hezekiah was destroying their worship of Jehovah when he destroyed the idol-altars. Some of the Jews may have been impressed! The Rabshakeh was trying his best to use Hezekiah’s religious reforms as “psychological” warfare to frighten the people inside the city walls of Jerusalem. Rabshakeh’s next intimidation was a dare. He dared the Jews to wager on their escaping the Assyrian take-over. He said he would give them 2000 horses, if they could prove they had 2000 cavalymen to ride upon them and fight against the Assyrians. Again, psychological warfare! He taunts that the Jews are unable to offer reasonable opposition to the smallest and least significant of one of the Assyrian war-parties (probably only a “company”).

The Rabshakeh’s verbal assault upon the Jews inside the city of Jerusalem is a graphic reminder to all Christians of the way the secular, pagan world verbally assaults and tempts Christians to turn against their faith in Christ and his promises. Rabshakeh’s next intimidation was his brag that he had come to Jerusalem under Jehovah’s commission to destroy it. He says Jehovah spoke directly to him in a command to go against Judah! This might impress the Jews since even Isaiah, their own prophet, had predicted earlier that Assyria would be God’s chastening “rod” and “staff”—5:26; 7:18ff; 10:5ff; 28:11ff. What Isaiah meant was that God would use Assyrian imperialism to carry out his purposes—but God would not give a direct call to Assyria (specifically, the Rabshakeh) to make war on Judah! Rabshakeh was simply using “psychological warfare” tactics.

This so unnerved the emissaries from Hezekiah, they insisted the Rabshakeh speak in Aramaic and not in Hebrew (Judean). They were afraid his intimidations would reach the ears of those Jews upon the walls of Jerusalem and would be repeated and repeated (exaggerated with each telling, of course) and cause chaos inside the city. It is interesting to note the Rabshakeh knew Hebrew! Rabshakeh makes it plain in the crudest and most humiliating language that he did not come to Jerusalem to banter pleasantries and subterfuge with Hezekiah—he makes it plain he came to intimidate the Jews with the most degrading threats. He is not interested in diplomacy—he’s interested in their surrender and his victory. But look how skillful he is—he turns to

cajolement. Rabshakeh stepped forward and defiantly shouted his taunt in Hebrew to the people on the walls. He cried, "Hezekiah is deceiving you—neither he nor his God can deliver you from the king of Assyria." He had the people "psyched" into paralyzing fear—that was the moment to promise deliverance in exchange for surrender. Note the Rabshakeh repeats 4 times the idea that Hezekiah was deceiving them by telling them Jehovah would deliver them. Next the Rabshakeh applies the pressure of fleshly concern for physical well-being, innocent enough in itself, but idolatrous when it supercedes godliness as a first concern. He urges the people to think first of their stomachs. If they surrender, he promises, they will be taken to a "big rock-candy-mountain" land as fertile, productive and prosperous as their own. And the land of Mesopotamia was as fertile, or more so, than Palestine—and that is the catch! The appeal was physical. The temptation was casting physical survival against a spiritual birthright—their Messianic destiny. When God later, himself, removed them from their land it was to symbolize they had forfeited their spiritual legacy by sin and idolatry. Next the Rabshakeh appealed to what seemed to be the facts of history. He tabulated all the victories the king of Assyria had over the gods of the nations he conquered. He warned, "Do not let Hezekiah sweet-talk (Heb. yasiyth, "soothe") you into depending upon your God." He reasoned, "If all the powerful gods of the many nations conquered by Assyria were prove powerless, what hope could the Hebrews hold that their God was any more powerful." He lists Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim and Samaria—all peoples and cultures in the immediate vicinity of Judah. And this would make the argument of Rabshakeh even more persuasive. Especially when he mentioned Samaria (capital of the 10 northern tribes), Jewish people just like those of Jerusalem and Judah! Hezekiah and his envoys "held their silence" (the Hebrew word is yaheriyshu, not shalom which is the word for "peace"). They knew that any answer they might give about Jehovah not delivering them would not convince the Assyrians to refrain from their threats and actions, but would only agitate them. There are times when the "pearls and bread should not be cast before swine or dogs!" Matthew Henry once said, "It is sometimes prudent not to answer a fool according to his folly." It would not be easy for the Hebrew officials to keep silent. Their dismay and despair is demonstrated in their "rending" their clothing. Jews tore their clothing when they were sorrowful, penitent, distraught, confused and angry. All these emotions may have been welling up within the Jews. They knew the Assyrians were powerful and had done all they said they had. What the future held for them they did not know. Their alternatives were surrender, fight or wait upon the Lord. The first two alternatives held no hope for deliverance; the last required much faith and endurance. These Jews had plenty of evidence that God keeps his word. God had promised, through his prophets, to deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians (specifically). It simply came down to the "gut-level" point of life—WOULD THEY TRUST GOD'S WORD OR NOT?!—no "ifs, ands, or buts."

It is significant that Hezekiah, upon hearing the report of Rabshakeh's threats turned immediately to worship God in penitence. Hezekiah also sent to get God's word from God's prophet! Hezekiah went into the temple and through prayer left the matter in

the Lord's hands. He then instructed his subordinates to also seek God's will by the prophet Isaiah. Hezekiah sent people to Isaiah—he did not demand Isaiah come to him. This shows Hezekiah's deep reverence for God's word in God's messenger! Hezekiah's evaluation of the situation was that unless some extraordinary help is forthcoming, death will be the result—like a woman struggling in labor to give birth and her womb will not open to deliver. Hezekiah understands these despairing circumstances were by the permissive will of God to correct his nation for its contemptible idolatry and rejection of Jehovah (see 38:17). No wonder God compared Hezekiah to David! Isaiah's answer is authoritative, direct and simple. But it will not be simple to apply (be not afraid). Jehovah promises to put "a spirit" in the king of Assyria whereby he will turn away from Jerusalem, return to his own land and fall by the sword. How God does this remains a mystery to man because God does not choose to reveal exactly how he does it (but see Isa. 10:5-19; 44:28—45:6; Jer. 51:20-23; 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). God is capable of speaking to pagan rulers through dreams and visions (Nebuchadnezzar) or stirring up their spirits (Cyrus). Sennacherib does not seem to have been given a vision, but he apparently heard something from his own land that caused him to return where he was slain 20 years later by his own sons!—as Isaiah predicted! Rabshakeh left Jerusalem and went directly to Libnah, along the Gaza-strip, to confer with his king, Sennacherib. The emperor was there to meet a threat from Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia/Egypt. Sennacherib associated Tirhakah's show of force with Hezekiah's refusal to surrender—assuming the Egyptians were in collusion with the Hebrews and the Egyptians were coming to rescue Jerusalem from the Rabshekah. So, the emperor of Assyria sent a written message to Hezekiah (37:14). The message from Sennacherib was a warning. It intended to remind Hezekiah of current political history. Assyria's ruthlessness and overwhelming power was common knowledge in the world of that day. Assyria dominated the whole civilized world, except Egypt, and was on its way to dominating Egypt, too. No nation could stand in its way. Famous kings and potentates had been killed or deposed, taken captive and killed or deported. Whole cities and areas had been repopulated with Mesopotamian immigrants. Assyria was changing the whole face of the political, cultural, racial world, and did little, weak, religiously-oriented Judah think it could stand against a military machine like that? Hezekiah could not take the Assyrian threat lightly. The threats were extremely critical tests of the faith of God's covenant people. Hezekiah did the only thing he could do—he took it to the Lord in faith and prayer! Unlike Ahaz, his father, Hezekiah turned to the Lord, and without any prompting. Hezekiah did not spread the letter before the Lord because he thought the Lord could not know its contents unless it was spread out. It was an act of faith and trust—men need to act out their faith in deeds and demonstrations! Hezekiah's prayer (37:16-20) ranks along side the great prayers of the Bible as a model for today: (a) it is brief, compared to many today; (b) it is reverent and believing; (c) it begins and ends with praise to God; (d) it petitions God in total dependence upon him; (e) it asks what it asks for God's glory alone. Hezekiah thinks of God as a Person (anthropomorphically—i.e., God has ears and eyes) but that is the only way a human being can think of God as a Person, because that is man's limit of experience. God is

a Person—he is not an idea or an “it.” Hezekiah was precise in his prayer. He did not just pray for deliverance “from all my enemies,” but for rescue from the Assyrian king by name—Sennacherib. Hezekiah was a realist—not a foolish optimist. He knew what Sennacherib had done and told God he knew. But Hezekiah also was wise enough to see that if the Assyrians could conquer all these other nations, then the conquered nation’s gods were not really gods at all. Hezekiah’s primary purpose in asking deliverance was not for himself or even for his nation (not even for other people)—BUT FOR THE VINDICATION OF THE NAME OF GOD. Hezekiah’s main concern was that the honor, power, sovereignty and uniqueness of Jehovah be manifested before the eyes of the world. God acts in all his actions, even in answering your prayer “for his own name’s sake” (see 2 Sam. 7:21; 1 Kings 8:41; 2 Chron. 6:32; Psa. 6:4; 23:3; 25:7,11; 31:3; 44:26; 79:9; 106:8; 115:1; 143:11; Isa. 37:35; 42:21; 45:4; 48:9,11; Jer. 14:7,21; Ezek. 29:9,14,22,44; 36:22; Dan. 9:17,19, etc.). THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCEPT OF THE BIBLE!

God promises the reversal of Assyrian contempt. God is going to show contempt for Assyria. God will not allow Assyrian arrogance to go unchallenged. God will show Assyria that they are not dealing with gods of wood and stone—they are dealing with The Almighty God, the Only God. Sennacherib was boasting nothing could stop him—not even the mountains of Lebanon. To move an army of chariots over forest-laden, snow-capped mountains 10,000 ft or higher, is no small feat. But that does not prove he is invincible. God will show this to all who will accept it. God probably says, “Has it never occurred to you, ‘king’ Sennacherib through your conscience or common sense that there is Some One greater than you in control of circumstances and lives? (37:26). Perhaps God is even asking why the Assyrians did not remember Who was in charge of history from the sermon their ancestors heard from the prophet Jonah! Whatever the case (from nature, history, conscience, common sense or from Jonah) the Assyrians had plenty of proof that man does not control circumstances or destiny. Assyria, and many other such pagan empires following her, simply proves that pride can override conscience and common sense if men allow it to do so! Unbelief is a deliberate choice, an exercise of the will and action on the part of human beings. It is God who gives one nation into the hand of another and it is moral perversity for nations to think otherwise! Whatever the king of Assyria does, it never escapes the knowledge or purpose of God. God knows his “sitting down, going out, and coming in” (Psa. 11:4; 44:20-21; 139:1-12; Jer. 12:3; 17:9-10). God knows man’s thoughts and deeds (John 2:23-25; Mark 9:33-35; Luke 9:46-48; Matt. 25:31-46). God allowed the Assyrians to conquer most of Judah (49 cities) in order to wake Judah and Hezekiah up. Hezekiah led the nation in repentance. God is going to punish the arrogant boasting of Assyria to prove he keeps his word and will deliver the penitent and believing. Isaiah predicts the Assyrians will be gone for good and, as soon as can be expected, the people left in Judah will be reaping and harvesting their own crops again. There will be no miraculous, immediate restoration of agriculture. For the immediate year and the one following people will suffer—eating from crops produced by “volunteer” seed for the first 2 years. But the 3rd year would see agriculture

returned to normal processes. The remnant will be saved. The cosmic work of Divine redemption has always been entrusted to a minority—"a band of survivors" (37:32). Isaiah made quite a prediction—that not even an Assyrian arrow would find its way into Jerusalem—in view of the fact that the Assyrians at that moment controlled all of Palestine and had surrounded Jerusalem. BUT IF GOD IS FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US? The only possible way Jerusalem could be delivered was by a miracle, directly or indirectly. It is a matter of historical record that God did just that (2 Kings 19:35-37; 2 Chron. 32:20-23). An angel of Jehovah went into the Assyrian army camp and killed 185,000 soldiers in one night! (See Exodus 12:12-23; 2 Sam. 24:1-16, for other destroying angels). Angels do not have to take human form to do God's commands—he can make them into winds and fires (Heb. 1:7; Rev. chs. 8-9). They may come as diseases, pestilence, floods, earthquakes, famines or in whatever form God wants them. We simply do not know how this angel killed 185,000 men in one night—we just believe the record! There is a record in the annals of Sennacherib that tells about his army engaged in the frontiers of Egypt being completely overrun by an "army" of field mice which gnawed apart all of the leather and wooden weapons and vehicles in one night. The next morning, the Assyrian army was put to rout, fled and thousands were slain. Some have conjectured the mice may have carried bubonic plague which is both swift and deadly. Whatever the case, the scene which greeted Sennacherib that morning with 185,000 corpses, must have stunned him and cast great fear into his heart. That is 2 times more military people than the U.S. lost in both the Korean and Viet Nam wars in 13 years! "And he set out, and he went, and he returned to Nineveh." Although Sennacherib subjugated the entire eastern coastline of the Mediterranean, he never returned to Judean territory again. He never tried to conquer Egypt again. Something about that territory haunted him for the last 20 years of his life. Sennacherib lived another 20 years in Nineveh. One day as he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch (or Marduk), he was slain by two of his sons in insurrection. In an inscription near Beirut, Lebanon, by Esar-haddon, one of his sons tells about this event. Esar-haddon succeeded to the throne, eventually restored the city of Babylon, conquered Egypt, imported foreigners into Samaria, forced Manasseh (Hezekiah's son) to pay heavy tribute and extended the Assyrian empire to its greatest power.

Hezekiah died in the year 695 B.C. (After being allowed 15 more years of life, 38:5). The time of his sickness was at least 15 years prior to 695 B.C.—somewhere near 710-705 B.C. So Hezekiah's sickness here took place before his 14 year of reign which was in 703-701. Hezekiah was "sick" about 9 years before the Rabshakeh came to the walls of Jerusalem (ch. 36-37). The un-chronological order here poses no real problem. All the data in these chapters is accurate, and that is what is important. Hebrew writers were not as concerned with chronological order as they were with the meaning of the events. Matthew's gospel is a prime example of un-chronological writing stressing the meaning of the data. Isaiah came to say to Hezekiah, "Order your house, for die you shall, and not live" (verb is first in Hebrew sentences because the action is more important than the actor). The Hebrew word shehiyn, translated,

“boil,” can also be translated “ulcer,” even in “leprosy” (Lev. 13:18ff) and other ulcerated diseases (Ex. 9:9; Deut. 28:27,35; Job 2:7). Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed, not that this is some specially holy way to pray—perhaps for privacy or out of shock and grief. It is permissible to pray in bed! He cried to God that he had been faithful—not that he thought himself perfect—but he prayed on the basis of OT standards. He claimed a perfect heart—i.e., single-mindedness, not sinlessness. He claimed his motives were right, whether all his actions were perfect or not. He wept bitterly (Heb. *bechiy gadol*). Why didn’t Hezekiah simply resign himself to God’s will and die? He was only 39 years old at this point. Manasseh was not to be born for 3 more years. He had no other son. It was contrary to all Hezekiah believed concerning the perpetuation of the Messianic destiny of his throne that he should die without a successor to the throne of David. And, as much as anything else, he was questioning whether, in view of his godly life, he deserved such an untimely death. Such an announcement would have a shocking, sobering, humbling effect on any human being. But Hezekiah was exactly where God wanted him—totally humbled, totally dependent upon Almighty God. God could now answer Hezekiah’s prayer as God saw fit—to serve divine purposes. God added 15 years to Hezekiah’s life, not simply to satisfy Hezekiah for longer life on earth, but to perpetuate the throne of his servant David for the whole world’s salvation. It is not just Hezekiah’s life that is to be spared—but the whole city of David, too. God is announcing that his program is to continue through Hezekiah and a penitent city, in spite of all the threats of Assyria. Hezekiah asks for a sign (according to 2 Kings 20:8-11; Isa. 38:22). Ahaz, his father, had been offered one but scoffed at it. Hezekiah did not follow in his father’s arrogance and unbelief. Hezekiah asked for the “shadow” to go back ten “steps”—the unnatural way for the shadow to go (2 Kings 20:8-11). Hezekiah was given a sign from the Lord! But, alas, Hezekiah was still a man with weaknesses. Like many another man—even the apostle Paul, Rom 7:13-25)—whose intentions are higher than their deeds. After his recovery, the king did not “make return according to the benefit done him, for his heart was proud” (2 Chron. 32:24-25). When the envoys of Merodach-baladan came (Isa. 39:1ff) from Babylon he compromised his faith in God. Hezekiah’s experience of near-death and reprieve is expressed in a “Psalm” which is unique for its frankness and pathos—it reaches into the deepest recesses of a human’s soul. He describes his feeling when he believed he was about to die as: (a) the desolation and un-fulfillment of a spot where the tent of a shepherd had once been staked and made to be home—but has been pulled up and moved away—abruptly there is nothing left; (b) as a piece of cloth or carpet finished on the loom and clipped off without anything to follow; (c) evidently Hezekiah temporarily composed himself after the first shock of Isaiah’s announcement of his imminent death; then the depression came upon him again tearing him to pieces psychologically, like a lion tears a carcass apart. He began to come apart all over again. He began talking and chattering like a bird, to himself or anyone else who would listen. He wore himself out crying unto the Lord and is so weak he can hardly lift his eyes in prayer once more—yet the Lord is his only hope. He is oppressed, despairing and hopeless. He asks the Lord to be his “security, pledge, surety”—to “bail him out,” to “take his place.” HUMANITY HAS CRIED OUT

## FOR A “SUBSTITUTE” EVER SINCE THE FALL IN EDEN!

Paul “learned” and then admitted that the grace of God was sufficient for him to endure his “thorn in the flesh” and that he could be “content” with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities (2 Cor. 12:7-10). We can “learn” it and “admit” it, too. Hezekiah has something to add about his experience with near death. The Hebrew word translated “softly” is *edadeh* and means, submissively. Hezekiah is acknowledging that the stressful experiences, lack of sleep, etc., have taught him submissiveness, humility and faith (see David’s same experience, Psa. 119:65-104). Hezekiah vows to live the remainder of his life in submission to God’s discipline. At first, he admits, his major concern was that his personal comfort had been taken away. But after prayer and Isaiah’s reprieve from the Lord, he realized that the real blessing in life was not personal comfort but to be worshiping the Lord and fellowship with friends of the Lord. He also considered it a sign from God that he was a recipient of God’s forgiving grace! However the NT (John 9:3) indicates that ill-health does not necessarily mean the illness is a consequence of sin! Hezekiah vows to praise God in song and worship all the days of his life in the house of the Lord. The Hebrew word *marahk*, translated “plaster” means “rub, bruise, crush.” Isaiah’s instructions were to crush some figs into a soft, fluid ointment or salve that could be rubbed on the boil. Figs and their juices were used by the ancients for healing purposes. Here is medicine at the command of God (Isaiah) being used as a secondary agent by God to cure Hezekiah of his disease. God works through medicine! The Hebrew word *aoth* is translated, “sign,” and also may be translated “token or type.” When a divine sign is demonstrated it is displeasing to God to seek after more signs (Matt. 12:38-42). Hezekiah did not incur the Lord’s displeasure in asking for this “token” because the Lord had already indicated the “sign” would be the shadow going backward (Isa. 38:7-8; 2 Kings 10:8-11).

2 Chronicles 32:31 relates that the envoys from Babylon were sent “to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land.” Word had gotten back to Mesopotamia about Hezekiah’s miraculous recovery from impending death. Perhaps the Babylonians thought this was an omen that they should enlist Hezekiah’s aid in their attempt to throw the Assyrians out of Mesopotamia—perhaps the Babylonians were merely using this opportunity to appeal to Hezekiah’s pride and ambition to “spy-out” Hezekiah’s military strength so they could convince him to join them in a “coalition” against Assyria. Whatever the case, Hezekiah did not seek the Lord’s guidance in dealing with the Babylonians, so God “left him to himself, in order to try him and to know all that was in his heart” (2 Chron. 32:31). This is the proper chronology of Hezekiah’s faux pas (a) Assyria conquers 46 cities of Judah; (b) Hezekiah pays tribute to Assyria; (c) Hezekiah becomes ill unto death, but is cured; (d) Babylonian envoys come; Hezekiah joins in some kind of agreement with them against Assyria and shows his armory to the Babylonians; (e) Assyrians surround Jerusalem; Rabshakeh demands surrender; (f) the Lord delivers Jerusalem; 185,000 Assyrians slain in one night. Hezekiah made two mistakes; (a) political stupidity to show off all your national

secrets to anyone—they might be a potential enemy some day; (b) personal stupidity to let pride and arrogance occupy one's heart after just being shown by God how totally dependent for life one is on God. Enter—the voice of God's prophet! Isaiah was sent by God (39:5). Hezekiah's impression was where the Babylonians came from—he was not concerned with what they had said, only to notice how important he felt that they would come all the way from the great city of Babylon to see him! Isaiah asks, "What have they seen in your house?" The prophet asks in order to reveal to the king his blunder. He asks in order to reveal to the king that he had not trusted the Lord as he vowed to do. It is ironic—all the treasures Hezekiah showed off would one day be carried away by these same Babylonians, ironic—that which Judah feared, Assyria, was no real threat at all as God had sent his prophet Isaiah to declare! That which Judah trusted to be helping them, Babylon, was the real threat and would some day carry them away to captivity! Actually, the real threat was Judah's relapse into sin, idolatry, and rebellion against God (see the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah). Even more foreboding was Isaiah's prediction concerning Hezekiah's sons! Hezekiah does not even have any sons, yet! But when he does, their destiny is that of slavery in a pagan land. Manasseh was taken to Babylon by the Assyrians; Jehoiachin, a gr.gr.gr.gr. grandson of Hezekiah was taken captive by the Babylonians. The throne of Judah, the house of David, so precious to Hezekiah, would cease to exist in Canaan and those who were to sit upon the throne after Hezekiah would be forced into shameful servitude in an unclean, idolatrous pagan court. Hezekiah's reaction is that of a man of great faith: (a) he is not proud and arrogant after God's prophet chastens him; (b) he acknowledges his sin and repents; (c) he is apparently acknowledging the good that will come from the Babylonian captivity to his nation and royal lineage; (d) he is acknowledging the justness of God's chastening. Mercy is extended for Hezekiah's nation for a short time. But soon they must be cast into the crucible and purified. Soon they must suffer the discipline of God that produces the fruit of righteousness so they may prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Chastening must come, says Isaiah. But what about the future fortunes of the people of God? What ultimate comfort awaits? THESE ANSWERS COME IN ISAIAH CHAPTERS 40-66.

#### Introduction to Paul T. Butler Th.D

Paul was born in Springfield Missouri and graduated from Conway High School prior to enlistment in the US Navy. He began serious bible study with correspondence courses from San Jose Bible College. He later enrolled in Ozark Bible College and acquired his Bachelor of Theology degree June of 1961. He received a Master of Biblical Literature degree from Ozark in May of 1973. He received a Doctorate of Theology from The Theological University of America in October of 1990.

Paul taught at Ozark Christian College from 1960 to 1997. He also served many years as registrar for the college.

#### Introduction to the Sound Bible Study project.

The Sound Bible Study project is a cooperative effort of Christian educators and Jordan Media Enterprises LLC to provide the serious examination of the Scriptures for the conscientious student. All the teachers are experienced educators who have spent countless hours in the classroom on both sides of the lectern. The audio recordings and written notes are made available for those who wish to learn God's Word at a collegiate level but have been unable to matriculate. There is no intention to compete with the many faithful Bible schools, but rather to serve along side and strengthen both the student and the teacher for a stronger and more effective Kingdom of God that knows how to properly divide the Word of God.

