Isaiah: New European Christadelphian Commentary

Duncan Heaster

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PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. Charities such as Carelinks Ministries and the Christadelphian Advancement Trust endeavour to provide totally free copies worldwide according to resources and donations available to them. But there is a desire by many to go beyond those brief comments on each chapter, and delve deeper into the text. The New European Christadelphian commentary seeks to meet that need. As with all Divine things, beauty becomes the more apparent the closer we analyze. We can zoom in the scale of investigation to literally every letter of the words used by His Spirit. But that would require endless volumes. And academic analysis is no more nor less than that; we are to live by His word. This commentary seeks to achieve a balance between practical teaching on one hand, and a reasonable level of thorough consideration of the original text. On that side of things, you will observe in the commentary a common abbreviation: “s.w.”. This stands for “same word”; the same original Greek or Hebrew word translated [A] is used when translated [B]. This helps to slightly remove the mask of translation through which most Bible readers have to relate to the original text.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But finally- don’t fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks Ministries or The Christadelphian Advancement Trust. And please pray that our sending forth of God’s word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

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Isaiah Chapter 1

Isaiah 1:1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah- Some of these kings were generally 'good kings' but the prophecy makes clear that the state of the nation was very weak spiritually and therefore good leadership did not lead to personal spirituality. Hence the appeal is to 'heavens and earth' (1:2), to the ruling classes and also the individual Israelites- an appeal repeated in :10 to "the rulers" and "the people".

There is a very clear structure in Isaiah, which hinges around the historical interlude in Is. 37-39. This demonstrates that the prophecies in Is. 1-36 of judgment at the hands of Assyria were ameliorated and deferred by the intense repentance and intercession of Isaiah's school of prophets. But the interlude concludes with the bad news that the reformation was not thorough, and that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon; and therefore the earlier prophecies of judgment by Assyria would be reapplied to judgment by Babylon. But out of that there was to come a wonderful restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel, explained in the so called 'second Isaiah' (Is. 40-55). But sadly, the Jews who returned failed to allow that amazing potential to come true; and that is the burden of the so called 'third Isaiah' (Is. 56-66). It seems that God therefore gave up trying to restore the Kingdom in a political, national sense; and looked instead to a purpose with individuals who had His word in their humbled hearts.

There's been much talk of how Isaiah 1-39 appears different in style and attitude to Israel from Isaiah 40-66. I'm personally of the conviction that the two 'halves' of Isaiah are by the same inspired author. The phrase "the holy one of Israel" occurs 12 times in Is. 1-39, 14 times in Is. 40-66 (the so called 'second Isaiah'), and only 5 times elsewhere in the Old Testament. The New Testament quotes 'Isaiah the prophet' with the same rubric, regardless of whether 'first Isaiah' or 'second Isaiah' are being quoted (compare Jn. 12:38-40; Rom. 9:22-29; 10:16,20). The Septuagint supports the unity of Isaiah, and the Dead Sea scrolls copy of Isaiah doesn't make any break between chapters 39 and 40. These arguments for the unity of Isaiah must however be balanced against the fact that there is a marked difference in attitude to Israel when chapter 40 begins; and that parts of the prophecy are clearly relevant to Hezekiah's time, whereas other parts are relevant to the events of Judah's restoration and the fall of Babylon which enabled this. My suggestion is that, as with the Psalms and some of the other prophets, Isaiah was edited and in places re-written, under inspiration, during the

captivity. Hence, parts of it clearly have relevance to Hezekiah's time and the deliverance from Assyria, but these were used to inspire and teach the Jews in Babylon about a similar great deliverance and restoration which they could expect from Babylon. This is why some commentators have made a convincing case that the whole of Isaiah applies to Hezekiah's time, whilst others have made an equally convincing case that most of the prophecy applies to the restoration. My suggestion is that the whole of it did apply to Hezekiah's time, but it was re-written, under inspiration, as applicable to the Jews in exile in Babylon and their deliverance from Babylon, which was set up to happen after the pattern of their earlier deliverance from Assyria.

The first 12 verses of Is. 58 are similar in essence to Is. 1:1-31. This is just one of many connections between the later part of Isaiah (Is. 40-66) and the earlier part (Is. 1-35). The two sections are connected by the historical interlude of Is. 36-39, where Isaiah works with Hezekiah towards repentance, and then has to judge him for his pride and collapse of faith, concluding that his sons shall go into captivity in Babylon. The prophecies about the Assyrian invader in Is. 1-35 then become reapplied to Babylon; hence Is. 14 speaks of "Babylon" when it was initially Assyria which was in view. As I explain on Is. 36-39, Hezekiah sinned quite badly and let the baton drop. A Messianic Kingdom could have been established after the defeat of the Assyrian invader outside Jerusalem, but this possibility was ultimately deferred until our last days. But God didn't give up working with Judah. At the time of the restoration, there could again have been a Messianic Kingdom, the temple of Ez. 40-48 could have been rebuilt; but due to short termism and lack of repentance, this didn't happen. Therefore the same appeals are made to the returned exiles as were made to Judah in the days of Isaiah and Hezekiah.

The Inspired Re-Writing Of The Old Testament In Babylon

Briefly, here are corroborative reasons for thinking that perhaps the whole existing canon of Old Testament Scripture was [under inspiration] edited, re-written and codified during the exile in Babylon:

- According to Jewish tradition, Ezra edited and produced the Pentateuch in its present form in Babylon (Carl Kraeling, *The Synagogue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956) pp. 232-235 reproduces plates from the synagogue wall at Dura-Europas showing Ezra doing this in Babylon). This would account for the record of Jacob in exile being so verbally similar to the allusions made to it in the restoration-from-Babylon prophecies in Isaiah. There was certainly great scribal activity in Babylon- 2 Macc. 2:13 speaks of Nehemiah founding a library

of the Jewish scriptures there. This gives another perspective on the way Nehemiah's prayer in Neh. 1 is so full of references to Deuteronomy- if the latter had just been re-written and presented to the Jews in Babylon. The commands to build the tabernacle are repeated in Exodus, and there is the record of Israel's golden calf apostasy set in the middle of them. Ex. 25:1-31:18 give the tabernacle building commands, then there's the golden calf incident, and then the commands are repeated in Ex. 35-40. Surely this was edited in this manner to give encouragement to the exiles- the commands to rebuild the temple had been given in detail in Ez. 40-48, but the exiles failed- and yet, the implication runs, God was still willing to work again with His people in the building of His sanctuary despite their failure. There is good internal reason to think that the Pentateuch likewise was re-written in places to bring out the relevance of Israel's past to those in captivity. Consider the use of the word *pus*, 'scatter'. It was God's intention that mankind should scatter abroad in the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28); but it required the judgment of the tower of Babel to actually make them 'scatter' (Gen. 11:4). Thus even in judgment, God worked out His positive ultimate intentions with humanity. And this word *pus* is the same word used with reference to Judah's 'scattering' from the land into Babylonian captivity (Ez. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25). The intention, surely, was to show the captives that they had been scattered as the people had at the judgment of Babel / Babylon, but even in this, God was working out His purpose with His people and giving them the opportunity to fulfill His original intentions for them.

- The Talmud claims that the majority of the prophetic books were re-written and edited into their present form during the captivity, under the guidance of a group of priests called "The Great Assembly" (M. Simon and I.W. Slotski, eds, *The Soncino Talmud: Babba Bathra* 14b - 15a (London: The Soncino Press, 1935) Vol. 1 pp. 70,71). There are many verbal points of contact between Chronicles and the returned exiles.

- Time and again we encounter the phrase "to this day" in the historical books of the Old Testament (e.g. "the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there to this day", 2 Kings 16:6)- and each time it appears the reference is to the time of the restoration, when presumably those books were edited and rewritten as relevant for the Jews, either those still in Babylon or those who had returned to the land. A good case can be made, for example, that the book of Judges was rewritten at that time in order to show that God's people don't need a King in order to be His people, but rather they can be ruled by Spirit-filled leaders (See W.J. Dumbrell, 'No King In Israel', *Journal For The Study Of The Old Testament* Vol. 25 (1983) pp. 23-33).

- The way Deuteronomy refers to cities East of Jordan as being "on this side Jordan" (e.g. Dt. 4:41,49) would suggest that the editor of the book was writing from a location East of Jordan- likely Babylon. The comment in Josh. 15:63 that "the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day" sounds very much as if it were written in the captivity, lamenting the way that the local tribes still lived in Zion. "The children of Judah" is very much a phrase used about the exiles. Thus books like Joshua were written up in the captivity in order to show Judah how they were repeating the sins of their forefathers, and appealing to them thereby to learn the lessons. It's even possible that the lament that "Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel unto this day" (Josh. 13:13 RV) is a reference to "Geshem the Arabian" and Sanballat dwelling amongst Israel at the time of their return (Neh. 2:19 etc.).

- It has been observed that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings have certain similarities. For example, they all quote the Deuteronomy version of Israel's earlier history, leading to the suggestion that Deuteronomy was the first of the collection, a kind of introductory background history. The curses listed in Dt. 28 are all especially relevant to the situation in Judah before the Babylonian invasion, and a number of the curses are alluded to in Lamentations as being descriptive of the situation after the final destruction of Jerusalem. Some of the curses can have little other application, e.g. Dt. 28:41 speaks of begetting children, "but they shall not be yours; for they shall go into captivity". Other relevant passages are Dt. 28:36 (a king taken captive), 49,50,52. These "former prophets" (Deuteronomy - 2 Kings) appear to have been edited during the exile as history which spoke to the concerns and needs of the exiled people of God (The similarities of style, language and indications of common editing are explained in detail in Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); there is a good summary in Terrence Fretheim, *Deuteronomic History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989). See too M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy And The Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972)). This combined history speaks mainly of the southern Kingdom, which was the group who went to captivity in Babylon; and it explains why this captivity was justified, as well as giving many examples of where repentance could bring about a restoration (1 Kings 8:46-53 is specific). This history addresses the questions which concerned the captives- does God abandon His people for ever? Are Israel entirely to blame for what happened? Is there hope of restoration after receiving Divine judgment and breaching His covenant? Can God have a relationship with His people without a temple? To what extent will God always honour the promises to Abraham and David? Should other gods also

be worshipped? Reading these books from this perspective reveals how incident after incident was especially selected by the inspired editors in Babylon in order to guide God's people there. Take the story of Naaman's Hebrew "maid". Naaman had been the enemy of Israel, and that little child [Heb.] was one of the children of those taken captive. But she witnessed to her captor; he turned to Yahweh; and his skin became like that of "a little child" (2 Kings 5:14)- like her. The message was obvious. The children of the captivity were likewise to witness to their captors and bring them into covenant with Yahweh.

- A comparison of Psalms 14 and 53 illustrate this process of re-writing at Hezekiah's time. These Psalms are both "A Psalm of David", and are virtually identical apart from Ps. 53:5 adding: "There were they in great fear, where no fear was; For God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: Thou hast put them to shame, because God hath rejected them". This surely alludes to the Assyrian army encamped against Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:1), put into fear by the Angels, and returning "with shame of face to his own land" (2 Chron. 32:21). Yet both Psalms conclude with a verse which connects with the exiles in Babylonian captivity: "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Then shall Jacob rejoice, and Israel shall be glad". So it would appear that the initial Psalm was indeed written by David; the version of Ps. 14 which is now Ps. 53 was added to and adapted in Hezekiah's time (Prov. 25:1), and both versions had a final verse added to them during the exile. A number of Psalms appear to have some verses relevant to the exile, and others relevant to earlier historical situations. It would seem that an inspired writer inserted the verses which spoke specifically to the exilic situation. Psalm 102 is an example. Ps. 102:2-12 and 24-25a appear to be the original lament; and the other verses are relevant to the exile. Psalm 22 likewise appears to have had vv. 28-32 added with reference to the exiles; other examples in Psalms 9, 10; 59; 66; 68; 69:34; 85; 107; 108 and 118.

- There are evident similarities between the vocabulary and style of Zechariah, Job and the prophets of the restoration. Thus both Job and Zechariah refer to the ideas of the court of Heaven, "the satan" etc. My suggestion is that Job was rewritten during the exile, hence the many points of contact between Job and Isaiah's prophecies about the restoration. When we read that Job has suffered less than his iniquities deserve (Job 11:6), this is the very term used to describe Israel's sufferings in Babylon (Ezra 9:13). Job, "the servant of the Lord", is being set up as Israel, just as that same term is used about Israel in Babylon throughout the latter part of Isaiah. Job's mockery by the Arabian friends perhaps parallels the Samaritan and Babylonian mockery of Judah; his loss of children is very

much the tragedy of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians which Lamentations focuses upon. And Job's final revival and restoration after repentance would therefore speak of the blessed situation which Judah could have had at their return to the land. Job's response to the words of God and Elihu would then speak of Judah's intended repentance as a result of God's word spoken to them by prophets like Haggai and Zechariah. There are many connections between Job and the latter parts of Isaiah which speak about the restoration.

Isaiah 1:2 Hear, heavens and listen, earth; for Yahweh has spoken- The prophets often balance guilt between the leadership ["heavens"] and the ordinary masses ["earth"]. All society was guilty; it wasn't that they all suffered just because of a corrupt leadership. Leadership tends to act how the masses want them to, and so whether or not democracy is practiced, there is over time a subconscious socio-political mechanism in place in human society whereby the masses get the leadership they really want.

I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me- That may be a fair translation in the context, but the Hebrew words essentially carry the idea of exaltation- the phrase is translated 'exalt and magnify' in Ez. 31:4; Dan. 11:36 and Ps. 34:3. As Balaam's prophecy made clear, by grace God had given Israel an exalted position- not so much in the eyes of the Gentile world, but in *His* eyes. And Israel abused that by rebelling against the Father who had so loved them. Is. 43:27 uses the same word to say that "your teachers" had 'rebelled' against God. But all society, heavens and earth, were thereby rebels, because the false teaching was so eagerly accepted. But the continual conviction of Judah as rebels / transgressors [s.w.] sets the scene for the climactic statement in Is. 53:12, where the word is twice used of how all those rebellions were laid upon the suffering servant, who would die to get them forgiven.

So often in the prophets, the pronouns change. One moment we have God speaking, the next, the prophet is responding in agreement, appealing to his people, or echoing the message in his own words. So in Is. 1:2,3 we have the direct words of God, ending with “They have rebelled against me… my people don't consider”. And then in Is. 1:4 we have Isaiah echoing back those thoughts of God: “They have forsaken the Lord”. Prophecies begin with God speaking in the third person, and end with Him speaking in the first person; and vice versa. In all these examples, we see God merging with His prophet, and vice versa (Am. 3:1; Is. 3:1,4; Is. 5:1,2 cp. 3-6; 7; Is. 10:12; Is. 11:3,9; Is. 22:17,19,20; Jer.

11:17; Jer. 23:9,11; Jer. 9:1,2; Is. 53:10,12; Is. 61:6,8; Is. 1:2,3,4; Jer. 4:1,2,21,22; Jer. 8:13,14; Nah. 1:12,13). However, there was more than an echo going on between God and the prophet. There was a kind of dialectic in the Divine-human encounter. God is influenced by man, as well as man by God.

Isaiah 1:3 The ox knows his owner- Heb. 'his buyer', s.w. 'redeemer'. There should be some intuitive bond between God's redeemed people and God; if there is not, then it is because His people have consciously cast it off. They had been redeemed from Egypt, as we have been- to serve, as an ox.

And the donkey his master's crib- God had noticed from Heaven how animals and their owners / carers form a special bond. But he found even that to be lacking between Him and His people for whom He had done so much for.

But Israel doesn't know Me, My people don't consider- To live the unexamined life, doing whatever feels good and seems immediately right for us, drifting forward on autopilot as in a dream with no real sense of God... is rebellion against Him (:2) and calls for judgment of the hardest sort. It was because they of themselves would not "consider" / 'understand' that they were psychologically confirmed in their attitudes and blinded so that they would not understand / consider (Is. 6:9,10). And so God operates to this day. It was the suffering of the servant, the Lord Jesus upon the cross, which was designed to as it were jolt them into considering / understanding (s.w. Is. 52:15).

Isaiah 1:4 Ah sinful nation- Heb. *goy*, usually used about the Gentiles. When God's people are rejected they are treated as the world.

A people loaded with iniquity- This sets the scene for the image of the suffering servant, the Lord Jesus, bearing or loaded down with Israel's sins. He was their representative even in their sinfulness. He suffered as them, and therefore by identification with Him, salvation is possible. Sin is the crippling burden. The Lord's appeal to those 'heavy laden' was therefore to sinners to come to Him, and exchange their load for His load (Mt. 11:28). As with the analogy of changing masters, there is no total release from any load whatsoever.

A seed of evildoers- They had been raised as God's children (:2), but this implies they were children by adoption. Despite all His love and nourishment, they reverted to the ways of their biological parents, and forsook and despised Yahweh.

Children who deal corruptly!- Often Biblical Hebrew uses terms for destruction / condemnation which also refer to the actual sin being committed which warrants such judgment. This is because sin is its own judgment. The Hebrew word used here is an example. Three times in the record of the flood we read that the earth was "corrupt" (Gen. 6:11,12), and four times the same word is used regarding how God would therefore "destroy" the earth (Gen. 6:13,17; 9:11,15). And so any indulgence in sin is in fact an indulgence in condemnation; so that ultimately, all who are finally rejected at the last day are those who have rejected themselves from God.

They have forsaken Yahweh, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and backward- The same word is used about how idolaters would 'turn their backs' upon their idols in the time of their condemnation (Is. 42:17). The condemned are left in an unbearable limbo- they turned their backs on God, and now turn their backs on the idols of their lives.

Isaiah 1:5 Why should you be beaten more, that you revolt more and more?- They had been "beaten" by the experiences of the recent invasions ; by the Syrians (2 Chron. 24:24) and the ten tribes (2 Chron. 25:13,23). It seems the results of those invasions were still felt. They had been intended to learn from them, and yet instead they increasingly revolted- implying that a far greater invasion was to come. We too see God operating like this in our lives.

The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint- The essential problem with Judah was their heart, standing for the mind or head. The spirit, the thinking, conscious and unconscious... is what God is supremely interested in.

Isaiah 1:6 From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it: wounds, welts, and open sores- see on Job 2:7. Job represented sinful Judah. These types of wounds made them ritually unclean. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory. Significantly, Isaiah 40-53 speak of the one servant, whereas Isaiah 54-66 speak of the "servants" who fulfill in principle the work of the singular servant.

They haven't been closed, neither bandaged, neither soothed with oil- The

implication is that they had refused this. The Lord quarried the language of the wounded man on the Jericho road from this verse. The priests and Levites were unable to offer this; but the despised Samaritan Saviour did. And yet, Judah refused even that.

Isaiah 1:7 Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; foreigners devour your land in your presence and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers- This describes the Assyrian invasion of Judah at Hezekiah's time, burning the cities until Jerusalem alone was left holding out against them. Note the present tenses- the prophetic word was so sure of fulfillment in the future that it was as if it was already fulfilled. And yet as noted on :5, there had been other invasions prior to that from which they were intended to learn.

Isaiah 1:8 The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a besieged city- This could refer to how the Assyrians would take the whole land apart from Jerusalem. The entire "vineyard" of God's work was to be destroyed, apart from a "shelter"- which was Zion. But it is the "daughter of Zion", the faithful remnant, and not the literal Zion which is in view here. They were to be a "shelter", a place of refuge, for others (Is. 4:6 s.w.). As explained on Is. 4:6, Zion was intended to become not only a place of spiritual refuge, but the capital of a revived Kingdom of God in Judah. That didn't happen, Zion was saved by grace alone from the Assyrians; and so the "hut" was destroyed (only s.w. Is. 24:20).

Isaiah 1:9 Unless Yahweh of Armies had left to us a very small remnant- The same Hebrew word as in :8, where God "left" Jerusalem as the only city which didn't fall to the Assyrians. But this was by grace. The very existence of the faithful remnant within Jerusalem (centered around Isaiah himself) was by grace, they were "left" by God. In a sense, even spiritual strength is a gift from God. It was due to that remnant that God did not judge Judah as Sodom- even though their rulers were in fact rulers of Sodom (:10). They were Sodom, disobedient Israel were to be judged as Sodom (Dt. 29:23), but were not judged as Sodom because of a remnant- who themselves were preserved by God's grace. We see grace all through this. The one city that was preserved, Jerusalem, was indeed preserved by grace because 1:21 states that she had become a prostitute against God.

We would have been as Sodom; we would have been like Gomorrah- Even when

rebuking them, God sees Israel as in some ways "perfect" (Is. 42:18-20). Israel were like Sodom, and yet they weren't treated like Sodom (Is. 1:10). They were Jeshurun, the upright one, but they kicked at God (Dt. 32:15). We ought to be witnessing “to the Jew first” world-wide in these last days, as well as supporting the work of preaching in Israel itself. Paul makes the point that for the sake of the tiny group of Jews who did still hold and practice the truth, Israel would not suffer the judgments of Sodom in totality (Rom. 9:29 cp. Is. 1:9). This would indicate that there will also be a latter day Jewish remnant which will stop the faithless Israel of today receiving the judgment of permanent destruction.

Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of Yahweh, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!- The rebuke of the rulers of Judah at the time of the Assyrian invasion shows that Hezekiah's spiritual decision making was the more commendable, seeing the rest of his committee, his Government, were worthy of such condemnation. Each of her rulers is condemned in :23.

Isaiah 1:11 What are the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?, says Yahweh. I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed animals. I don’t delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of male goats- Despite all their revolt against Yahweh of the previous verses, they still religiously offered sacrifice. It just shows that there is a strong religious inclination within people; but that isn't the same as spirituality. Animals were costly; but they were still offered. Is. 65:12; 66:4 use the same phrase "I don't delight in...". Judah are destined "to the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because when I called, you didn’t answer; when I spoke, you didn’t listen; but you did that which was evil in My eyes, and chose that in which I didn’t delight". The context is their choice of sacrificing to idols; but in Is. 1:11 the same term is used of God's lack of delight in the sacrifices offered to Him. It seems that they worshipped the idols in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is an abiding temptation for all God's children- to worship our idols in the name of worshipping God.

Isaiah 1:12 When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand- This is a rhetorical question. God has made it clear that *He* had not required all this offering from them, because He couldn't bear it. Who had required it? They themselves, their own religiosity, their need to sacrifice to someone or something. That is the answer to the question. God did not "require"

sacrifices, rather He wished that men would "require" or "seek" relationship with Him (Is. 45:19 s.w.).

To trample My courts?- The Hebrew is literally 'to trample underfoot' and is used of the trampling underfoot of Jerusalem by her invaders. But the point is that in essence, this had been done by the Jews already. Their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour. And this really is the essence of condemnation.

Isaiah 1:13 Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to Me; new moons, Sabbaths, and holy gatherings: I can't bear with evil assemblies- Or "The solemn meeting"; perhaps Passover was in view? The feast became sin, just as Paul warned the breaking of bread meeting could turn into a drinking of wine to condemnation rather than blessing (1 Cor. 11:23-31). "Abomination" is a word associated with idolatry (e.g. Is. 44:19 s.w.). Their incense was offered to Yahweh but was effectively part of their idolatry; they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship (:11). This was 'unbearable' to God, as if He just could not endure it further. Hence the threatened destruction of the entire system. This kind of thing drives God as it were to the limits of what He "is able to bear" (s.w.).

Isaiah 1:14 My soul hates your New Moons and your appointed feasts. They are a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them- A love as strong as God's is going to also elicit the emotion of hatred and anger when that love is rejected and abused. He "hated" (s.w.) Judah's insincere worship and relationship with Him (Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4). But it is hard to separate the sin from the sinner. That distinction may be helpful for us in order to avoid judging others too personally, but God it seems doesn't make that decision. He gave Israel into the hands of those who hated her (s.w. Ez. 16:27,37) and in that sense He hated her. The feelings of hatred which Hosea had for Gomer due to her abuse of His love were those of God for Israel: "There I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). God is not simply "love" in the abstract. He is love for real, with all the emotion and psychological complex which goes along with love; and this will include hatred if that love is abused.

The wrath of God, His grief at sin and being rejected, is intertwined with His amazing grace and love. The gravity and emotional enormity of each 'side' of the total equation, the huge tension of the equilibrium that keeps them in perfect balance in God's character and words, was reflected in the prophets personally;

and it will be in us too. The result of this is that the anger of both God and His prophets becomes understandable as more an expression of His and their sorrow, the hurtness of their love, even their weariness. God says that He has "had enough" of Israel, even saying "I am weary to bear" them (Is. 1:11-15). Is. 43:24 specifically speaks of God's weariness with His people- and this too was part of the prophets' spirit. And yet shining through all that is God's hopefulness for His people, and His grace: "The Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore will He exalt Himself [in judgment] to show mercy to you" (Is. 30:18). This wasn't an angry God hitting back at a rebellious people; this is the God of Israel looking at judgment only as a way to reveal His grace and mercy in the longer term.

Isaiah 1:15 When you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood- See on Is. 6:7. Their incense was as an idolatrous abomination to God (:13), and their prayers likewise, seeing incense represents prayer. Full hands was an idiom for sacrifice; but God saw them as deeply unclean, and with the guilt of blood on their hands. Jer. 22:3 uses the term with reference to how human victims (perhaps not only children) were offered to the idols in the name of Yahweh, and this was done in the temple.

Isaiah 1:16 Wash yourselves, make yourself clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil- The language is priestly, as if all Israel were priests, and were intended to wash themselves and then come and offer true sacrifice. It isn't possible to make ourselves clean (s.w. Prov. 20:9); it was Yahweh who could wash them (s.w. Is. 4:4); but He would do that if they had the desire to wash themselves.

Isaiah 1:17 Learn to do well- Heb. 'be taught'. They were to accept God's teaching (s.w. Is. 48:17); this is an exhortation to be open to His leading and teaching, rather than to academic Bible study of itself.

Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow- They had to show justice to others; and if they wished to do that, then God would purge them with His "spirit of justice" (Is. 4:4). God will confirm us in the way in which we wish to go. All these sins of omission left them with actual blood on their hands (:15)- through their inaction. We would likely have chosen idolatry and child sacrifice as parade examples of their need for repentance; but God instead focuses upon their inaction in being just towards the vulnerable. For

this is of equal significance to Him.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, says Yahweh- A legal term. God and man enter into judgment- and the judge pleads with the guilty to accept forgiveness from Him. God is *beseeching* men to see the obvious logic of responding to His word (2 Cor. 5:20), *pleading* with us to see the greatness, the magnificence of His love towards us in Christ, *begging* us to realize that if He gave up His Son for us while we were yet sinners, how much more will He give us *all* things now that we are reconciled to Him through baptism (Rom. 5:6-10)! This is more than logic, way beyond the limits of linguistic reasoning.

This is extraordinary indeed. God is seeking to persuade men to accept the forgiveness available in the blood of His Son. And He asks us to do this work for Him, to reflect this aspect of His character to the world, with that same spirit of earnest humility: " As though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). No wonder in the context Paul says that we should *therefore* watch our behaviour and attitudes. The fact men turn away from God's *beseeching*, His *praying* that they will accept His grace, is surely the greatest tragedy in the whole cosmos, in the whole of existence.

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool- David's sin, desperation and restoration are typical of the experience of all God's true people (e.g. Ps. 51:7 = Is. 1:18). But this becoming white as snow was due to God's purging, the work of His Spirit; it would not be achieved by repentance alone, simply stopping sinning. A Divine program is in view here, of psychological cleansing; what Jeremiah and Ezekiel call a new heart, a new covenant, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah foresaw the invasion by the Assyrians; what was potentially planned was the complete destruction of Judah. So he appeals for repentance; and the fact that Jerusalem was saved and the Assyrians destroyed could mean that some responded to this appeal. Or perhaps the intercession of Isaiah and the faithful remnant in Jerusalem meant that God relented; but that too was of grace, see on :9.

Isaiah 1:19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land- As noted on :18, Isaiah was appealing for repentance to avert the invasion by Assyria. But more than that, there was the possibility of a Messianic kingdom of

God being established in Judah, when they would eat the good of the land. The allusion is to a repentant Israel eating the good of the land of Egypt (Gen. 45:18,20). The entire *eretz* and not just the territory of Judah would be theirs. Ezra 9:12 quotes this as being possible if the exiles repented; but it was again precluded by their lack of penitence (Neh. 9:35,36).

Isaiah 1:20 But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it- The same words are used in Hos. 11:5: "the Assyrian will be their king, because they refused to repent". For the most part, Judah did refuse; and so the fact they were not all devoured was by grace. Those who were thus devoured had done so to themselves; "your own sword has devoured you" (Jer. 2:30).

Isaiah 1:21 How the faithful city has become a prostitute! She was full of justice; righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers- There were a host of issues the prophets could've raised with Israel; but injustice is the recurring theme. Because of the injustice going on in Jerusalem, Isaiah calls her a whore (Is. 1:21). The prostitution was through forging relationships with other nations such as Egypt, in order to save them from the Assyrians; see on Is. 2:6. And part of the deal was that they worshipped their gods. They were murderers not just because of their human sacrifices, but because their injustice would lead to their being devoured by the sword; see on :20.

Isaiah 1:22 Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water- They had been intended to respond to the purging fire of previous invasions (see on :5), but instead that which was by nature supposed not to corrupt, had become dross. This was how insistent was their desire to sin. LXX "Your silver is worthless, thy wine merchants mix the wine with water". The adulteration of the silver and wine connects with the charge of adultery in :21.

Isaiah 1:23 Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves. Each one loves bribes and follows after rewards. They don't judge the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come to them- Hezekiah's personal reforms were not followed even by other members of the royal family; see on :1. They were no better than petty criminal, lowlife merchants who mixed wine with water (:22). They were unjust to the poor just for the sake of small amounts of money. The

connection with Hos. 9:15 suggests that *all* the princes were like this.

Isaiah 1:24 Therefore the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, the Mighty One of Israel, says: Ah, I will get relief from My adversaries, and avenge Myself of My enemies- We sense God in pain, needing "relief". His beloved people had turned to be His enemies. We sense His emotions pent up within Him and requiring release. Yahweh of Israel was and is no stone faced deity.

Isaiah 1:25 and I will turn My hand on you, thoroughly purge away your dross, and will take away all your tin- see on Zech. 12:4. Israel had come to perceive of Yahweh as a god like the gods of the other nations and tribes around them. The prophets consciously brought home the fact that He is unique, and *not* at all like any local pagan deity. The pagan gods were thought to punish their people for minor infringements of ritual, or simply because deities were cruel at times. Yahweh wasn't like that; His judgments came only after passionate pleading, after being deferred time and again, and even then, they came in order to bring about correction, as a purging (Is. 1:25,26 and often), and not as an expression of irritation or mere anger of a capricious, unstable deity.

Isaiah 1:26 I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterwards you shall be called 'The city of righteousness, a faithful city'- But this is right after calling them a whore in :21. Hosea's failed marriage with the unfaithful Gomer spoke of God's terribly painful and tragic relationship with Israel. But like God, Hosea lived in hope of restoration. He fantasized about the day when he would re-live his romance with Gomer, they would again wander together in love in the wilderness, they would re-marry with a new covenant, the joy of which would be so great that the birds and trees joined in with them, and he would re-name the children born during their first marriage. Time and again he wished that Gomer would go back to how things were with them at the beginning; and he tried to engineer things so that she would wish to return there too (Hos. 2:9). All this reflected the fantasy of God for Israel's return to Him, for a restoration of things (Is. 1:26; Jer. 33:7,11). And yet both Gomer and Israel were unfaithful from the beginning; and yet as Hosea decided to view their early romance positively, so God decided to view Israel in the wilderness through the lens of His amazing grace.

Isaiah 1:27 Zion shall be redeemed with justice- Justice would require that Judah be permanently destroyed. But God's redemption by grace works in such a way that justice is not infringed. LXX: "For her captives shall be saved with judgment, and with mercy". The judgment of condemnation was going to be used by God to purge them (:25) and thereby save them. If they responded.

And her converts with righteousness- I mentioned on Is. 1:1 that the original application of Is. 1-35 was to the times of Hezekiah; but it was then rewritten and reapplied to Babylon. And so "converts" is literally "they that return of her" namely the remnant that were to return from the Babylonian captivity mentioned at the end of Is. 39.

Isaiah 1:28 But the destruction of transgressors and sinners shall be together, and those who forsake Yahweh shall be consumed- The impression is given of all sinners being destroyed at the same time. Due to some repentance and intercession, this threatened outcome didn't happen in Isaiah's time; but it will come true at the last day. "Destruction" is literally "breaking into shivers" and this will happen at the last day (Rev. 2:27).

Isaiah 1:29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired, and you shall be confounded for the gardens that you have chosen- For all their offerings of expensive sacrificial animals to Yahweh, they still worshipped idols in the oak shrines. The frequent command "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17 etc.) uses the same Hebrew word translated "desire" when we read of how Eve "desired" the fruit (Gen. 3:6); yet Israel "desired" the wrong fruit (Is. 1:29). The "gardens" were planted enclosures for idolatry; the counterpart of the garden of Eden.

Isaiah 1:30 For you shall be as an oak whose leaf fades, and as a garden that has no water- They thought that oaks were symbols of immortality; but they were to fade like their idols would. They were to be "as a garden" because they had worshipped gardens (:29). People become like the gods they worship (Ps. 135:18). Thus sin becomes its own punishment and judgment (Jer. 2:9). These principles apply today, and are put into so many words in :31.

Isaiah 1:31 The strong will be like tinder, and his work like a spark. They will both burn together, and no one will quench them- GNB "Just as straw is set on fire by a spark, so powerful people will be destroyed by their own evil deeds, and no one will be able to stop the destruction". This is summing up the theme of :29,30; that sin becomes its own punishment and judgment. These people were effectively burning themselves up.

Isaiah Chapter 2

Isaiah 2:1 This is what Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem- These prophecies were about the Judah and Jerusalem which Isaiah had before him; this was the potential which could have come about at the time, had they repented. It didn't, but God's word will finally come true in essence, although not necessarily in every literal detail envisaged in the primary fulfilment.

Isaiah 2:2 It shall happen in the latter days, that the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it- God's intention was that all nations (a phrase which usually refers to all nations around Israel, those within the *eretz* promised to Abraham) would come to worship in the restored temple. It would be raised up above the mountains and hills in that the nations would 'raise up' Zion in the sense of worshipping. The nations would "flow" as a broad stream; later Isaiah in Is. 66:12 sees this as the possibility which could come about after the exile, if the exiles repented and restored Zion and the temple as Ezekiel 40-48 commanded.

The Ezekiel prophecies of Ez. 40-48 had an intended and possible fulfilment at the time of the restoration under Ezra, but this was nullified by Israel's lack of response; and therefore, at least in principle, the prophecies had their fulfilment delayed until the second coming. This enables the prophecies to fit in with others which speak of some kind of centralized worship system after Jesus returns (e.g. Is. 2:2-4; 56:7). Or it could be that these prophecies of Isaiah are likewise talking about what was potentially possible for a restored, obedient Israel; particularly at the time of the restoration from Babylon. The lesson that comes out of all this is the extent to which God is willing to work with us, to tailor His purpose according to how far we are prepared to work with Him, and in that sense to allow Himself to be limited by us. There could be no greater inspiration to a maximal commitment to His purpose and His work.

The returned exiles didn't build according to Ez. 40-48. And their behaviour meant that the small temple they did build was not exalted in the eyes of the nations around. And so these prophecies come true in essence in a spiritual sense. The New Testament quotes several passages evidently prophetic of the future Kingdom as having their fulfillment in the preaching of the Gospel today.

Is. 2:2-4 (the word of Yahweh *will* go out from Jerusalem) is alluded to by the Lord as the basis for the ecclesia's witness to the world today, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47). This, the Lord said, was in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets- and He could only be referring to those like Isaiah.

The Jews mixed with the people of the land, they didn't teach them the Name, and so the restoration prophecies like Jer. 12:14-17 didn't come true- they weren't built up in the midst of Israel as intended. Prophecies like Is. 19:18,24 were thereby disabled from fulfilment at that time- "In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt that… swear to the Lord…in that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria". Is. 2:2-4, Zech. 8:21-23 etc. speak of how Gentile nations would desire to learn the ways of God and come up to a temple in Zion for this purpose. Could it not be that these passages are to be read in the context of Jer. 12:14-17- that all this was only possible if at the time of the restoration the nations had learnt God's ways from the Jews? In this case these passages are not to be taken as 'proof' that there has to be a future temple built in Zion. And the 'establishing' of God's 'house' is the language of the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:13,16,26; and that finally speaks more of the establishment of the 'house' in the sense of family, through the great seed, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 2:3 Many peoples shall go and say, Come, let's go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem- This has the ring of psychological reality to it. People learning the Gospel very often share their new found knowledge with others. Time and time again this happens. And here we see the same; people will spread the good news to each other *as they begin to understand* the Gospel (Is. 2:3; Jer. 50:5; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 8:21). Their response to having heard the word is to go up to the temple to receive more teaching there. The Mosaic law will surely not function after the Lord returns; it ended at His death. So this initially describes the potential possible after Judah had repented. The temple system could have been exalted, and the surrounding peoples taught God's law. But it didn't happen. The Gentiles came to Hezekiah in Jerusalem, but he didn't teach them God's law, and the people continued in idolatry; and so the people were condemned to exile in Babylon, and then later Isaiah speaks of the reestablishment of the Kingdom. At that time, all peoples were envisaged as coming to the rebuilt temple. But these things didn't happen, because Judah didn't build the temple as outlined in

Ez. 40-48, nor did they repent. And they were not welcoming to Gentiles. The essence of these words is fulfilled in people coming to the temple of God, which today is the people of God; and perhaps when the Lord returns there will be a place of centralized teaching in Jerusalem. The only other use of the phrase "the law shall go forth" is in Is. 51:4, which clearly speaks of this happening at the restoration from Babylon. But it didn't. Perhaps the prophetic potential therefore never will come true; or it may be fulfilled in a reapplied and rescheduled manner.

Isaiah 2:4 He will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more- The Mosaic system featured a system of justice whereby those with issues against others could have them resolved. The Gentile nations around Israel were to have access to this same system, if they accepted the God of Israel. "Decide" is literally 'to plead' (s.w. Mic. 6:2). His judgments are in order to plead with them for repentance. The result of that judgment will be positive, as the judgment upon Israel was intended to have a positive spiritual outcome. God's judgments lead to the nations learning righteousness (Is. 26:9), or 'being taught righteousness'. The practical outcome of that judgment will be that therefore they will beat their swords into plough shares; and devote themselves to learning of God (:2,3) rather than of war. This is the revere of the latter day situation in Joel 3:10, where the enemies of Israel beat their plough shares into swords. The connection could be in that we are to understand Is. 2:4 as saying that the enemies of Israel, her previous invaders referred to as "the nations" around her, will reverse their aggression against Israel and instead come to accept Israel's God.

Isaiah 2:5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!- The rest of the chapter, and indeed the whole prophecy, beseech Israel to act as they should as “the house of the Lord” in view of their future glory. Gentiles would come to worship in God’s house, i.e. in the community of His people, and therefore they ought to live the Kingdom life themselves. Thus following straight on from the prophecy of how Gentiles would come to “the house of the God of Jacob”, there is an appeal in 2:5 for the “house of Jacob” to walk in God’s ways themselves. This was Isaiah's continued appeal to Judah to repent; to walk in the light so that this wonderful potential restoration could come about. In Hezekiah's time, Judah generally wouldn't walk in the light; but the restoration

prophecies spoke of a restored Judah after the exile doing just this, along with the surrounding nations also walking in Zion's light (Is. 42:16; 58:8; 60:3). But again, Judah didn't do this, they walked in darkness (Is. 59:9), and :6-8 suggests they preferred idolatry to walking in the light; and so the prophetic potential wasn't realized at the time.

Isaiah 2:6 For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled from the east with those who practice divination like the Philistines, and they shake hands with the children of foreigners- This idolatry (:8) went on at the same time as great apparent zeal in Yahweh worship, offering expensive animal sacrifices (Is. 1:11-13). Isaiah and other prophets were stating clearly what would be Judah's fate; and yet they turned to divination and the wisdom of the East to try to tell the future, acting no better than their historical enemies the Philistines- who were renowned for their claims to foretell the future by divination (1 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 1:2). See on Is. 3:2. "Filled" is the same word we find twice in :7; they were totally committed to these things. It was this rejection of Yahweh's word which led Him to forsake His people; and He likewise is just as sensitive towards our attitude to His word today. Striking hands with foreigners refers to the making of alliances with other nations, which was the prostitution noted on Is. 1:21.

The LXX is more concrete as to what was going on. Judah had returned the land to how it was before Israel had first entered it, acting like the Canaanites, marrying them and having children by them: "For he has forsaken his people the house of Israel, because their land is filled as at the beginning with divinations, as the land of the Philistines, and many strange children were born to them".

Isaiah 2:7 Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures- In the midst of Judah’s prosperity, with a land “filled with silver and gold” perhaps from the control of the Red Sea trading posts (2 Kings 14:22), visions of doom haunted Isaiah’s soul; he couldn’t just go along with the swing of things, knowing that all that wealth was an illusion and being used as an antithesis to faith. Now that’s something we see all the time around us and in the brotherhood; but is our soul touched like his was? Do we know the spirit of the prophets? The land full of wealth parallels the land full of idols (:8). The idols were nearly all connected with fertility cults. The idea was that by serving them, prosperity would be experienced. And it appeared to work. But in fact this was

all a reflection of deep unspirituality rather than faith. The same may be true of the apparent blessings of unspiritual people today.

Their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots- Multiplying horses and chariots was explicitly forbidden to Israel (Dt. 17:16,17; 20:1), because they were to trust instead on the cherubim Angels fighting for them. Is. 31:1 is explicit that these horses and chariots were Egyptian; they had turned to Egypt for help against Assyria rather than trust in God's heavenly armies.

Isaiah 2:8 Their land also is full of idols, they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made- See on :7. The essence of idolatry is a worship of human works rather than simple faith in God. And that is why the challenge of idolatry is real for all human history.

Isaiah 2:9 Man is brought low, and mankind is humbled; therefore don't forgive them- It makes a good exercise to go through Isaiah 2 and look at all the times when words like 'bow down' and 'lift up' are used. Judah are condemned for 'bowing down' before the idols, when in fact they were 'lifted up' in pride (Is. 2:9,11). We seem to have in :6-9 Isaiah's prayer to God after his appeal for Israel to repent in :5 went unheeded; he asks God not to forgive the people, because they bowed down to their idols rather than to God, despite having the prospect of the Kingdom placed before them in :2-4.

Isaiah 2:10 Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty- Having asked God not to forgive Judah because of their impenitence, Isaiah now appeals again (as in :5) for their repentance. He asks them to act as if the theophany of judgment day is upon them; *then* they would repent, and Isaiah asks them to do so right now. They did not respond, because the same appeal is made to the judged and exiled community in Is. 40. The whole purpose of the Gospel is to bring down the mountains of human pride and lift up the valleys of those who lack any self-respect (Is. 40:4), thereby making an equality of attitude amongst God's people. The vision of the Kingdom in Is. 2:2-4 was used as an appeal for *humility* amongst Israel (2:10-12). And it should so appeal to us today.

At the day of judgment, we will all go through the Moses experience; hiding in the rock in the presence of God's glory (Is. 2:10 cp. Ex. 33:22). And our vision

of that glory in the face of the Lord Jesus *even now* should have the same humbling effect. For the manifestation of glory to Moses is alluded to in John's gospel as pointing forward to the glory of God now perceived in the face of Jesus Christ. Isaiah besought men (in the present tense): “Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty”, and then goes on to say that in the day of God’s final judgment, “[the rejected] shall go *into* the holes of *the rock*... for *fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth” (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment.

Isaiah 2:11 The lofty looks of man will be brought low, the arrogance of men will be bowed down, and Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day- If this is to happen "in that day", then we are to humble ourselves now. See on :10. John the Baptist’s message was that the valleys are to be lifted up, and the mountains made low, thus creating a plain. I read this as meaning that those with too low a view of themselves are to be lifted up, and the heights of human pride brought down. The over confident and under confident alike are to leveled so that they can be a path for the Lord’s glory. “Made low” in Is. 40:4 is surely in the spirit of Is. 2:11, which predicts that in the day of judgment, “the lofty looks of man shall be humbled [s.w. ‘made low’], and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down”. The experience of condemnation in the coming day of the Lord will mean that “the proud and lofty” will be “brought low” (Is. 2:12,17; 5:15). In fact, Isaiah is full of references to the proud being ‘made low’ by judgment- the same Hebrew word is common: Is. 10:33; 13:11; 25:11; 26:5. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he said that our preaching is a bringing down of every high thing that is exalted against God (2 Cor. 10:5). Our message is basically that we must be humbled one way or the other- either by our repentance and acceptance of the Gospel today, or through the experience of condemnation at the day of judgment. We’re calling people to humility.

Isaiah 2:12 For there will be a day of Yahweh of Armies for all that is proud and haughty, and for all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low- If everything and everyone proud is going to be brought down "in that day", then we should live today as if that future day is upon us. For it is, in essence. We have to note the huge emphasis upon the need for humility. Israel had lost their hold on true doctrine, many scarcely knew the Law (Is. 57:4,5; 59:3). They got drunk at the temple feasts (Is. 36:10-12; 58:3,4), like Corinth they had an "eat, drink, for

tomorrow we die" mentality (Is. 22:12,13); they committed all manner of sexual perversions, along with almost every other form of doctrinal and moral apostasy (Is. 5:11-13,24; 8:19; 9:15; 22:12,13; 24:5; 27:11; 28:7; 30:10; 31:6; 44:8-20; consider the similarities with Corinth). This list is worth reading through. And consider the terrible implications of their perversion in Is. 66:17. But the early chapters of Isaiah sternly rebuke Israel for their *pride*- there is not a whisper of all these other things until later (Is. 2:11-22; 3:16-20; 5:15; 9:9). And even throughout the later rebukes, there is the repeated criticism of their pride (Is. 13:11; 16:6; 23:9; 24:4; 25:11; 26:5; 28:1,3,14; 29:4; 30:25; 50:33; 57:15). This is why Isaiah's prophecies of Christ stress His humility (Acts 8:33), and the "lofty", "high", "exaltation" of God. These words, common in Isaiah, are those translated “pride" in Isaiah's condemnations of Israel's arrogance; as if to say that *God* was the only one who could be 'proud'.

Isaiah 2:13 for all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, for all the oaks of Bashan- The cedars of Lebanon in the temple became iconic, to the point that they are put by metaphor for the temple itself (Zech. 11:1). Judah were so proud of the temple (see on Jer. 7:4). The destruction of the temple was required to humble Judah. "High and lifted up" is the same phrase used of the exaltation of Yahweh in glory in Is. 6:1. What is high and lifted up in human eyes is to be brought down before the glory of Yahweh. It is used in Ez 10:16 about the cherubim, which appear to morph into the seraphim of the Is. 6 vision (see on Is. 6:2). And it is used in Is. 37:23 of how the Assyrians were high and lifted up against Yahweh, and would be brought down- just as the pride of Judah was to be, before the high and lifted up glory of Yahweh. Both Jews and Gentiles would thereby be humbled and the intention was that together they would form part of a restored Kingdom of God in Judah.

Isaiah 2:14 for all the high mountains, for all the hills that are lifted up- The "high places" of Israel are typically associated in the prophets with idol worship. But in Is. 2:14 they are spoken of as places of pride which needed to be brought down. There is therefore a connection between idolatry and pride; believing in one God is associated with no idolatry and thereby humility.

Isaiah 2:15 for every lofty tower, for every fortified wall- The defences of Jerusalem were legendary; and they too were to be brought down, continuing this theme of humility being imposed everywhere and in every way.

Isaiah 2:16 for all the ships of Tarshish and for all pleasant imagery- I suggested on :7 that Judah became a land “filled with silver and gold” perhaps from the control of the Red Sea trading posts (2 Kings 14:22). But the trading ships, "the ships of Tarshish" and their "watchtowers", standing proudly on the ships, were to be brought down. LXX and GNB have "fine ships" for "pleasant imagery". Note that ships of Tarshish mean simply long distance trading vessels. "Tarshish" may have been Tartessus in Spain, and so a long distance vessel would have been called a Tarshish boat; just as in 18th century England, an "Indiaman" referred to a long distance trading boat, so named because the longest distance vessels sailed to India.

Isaiah 2:17 The pride of man shall be bowed down, and the arrogance of men shall be brought low- If we don’t humble *ourselves* now, then God will do this to us through the process of condemnation at the judgment. In this lies the insistent logic of humility. The theme of ‘bringing down’ pride is a major one in the first half of Isaiah (Is. 2:17; 13:11; 25:5,12; 29:4; 32:19). These passages pave the way for the announcement that in man’s response to the Gospel of Christ, “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Is. 40:4). By the hills of human pride being brought down, and the giving of confidence to those so low in the valleys of hopelessness and lack of self respect, there is a leveling of all those who respond to Christ. But more than this; in this lifting up of the hopeless and bringing down of the proud, there is a foretaste of what will happen in the future day of judgment. In essence, “we make the answer now” by whether or not we bring down our pride, or whether we summon the faith in God’s grace and imputed righteousness to believe that we, who are nothing, are lifted up in His sight. “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low” (James 1:9-10).

And Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day- The idea may be, 'exalted as one'. There will come a day when all the world realizes that God is one (Is. 37:20 Heb.)- in that they will realize that He alone is God and all else is pure vanity. Because God alone is holy, only He will be worshipped then (Rev. 15:4). "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:11,17). There is a connection therefore between the unity of God and humility in practice.

Isaiah 2:18 The idols shall utterly pass away- In :19, the AV reads "And they

shall go into the holes...". The worshippers of idols are spoken of as if they are the idols; people become like the gods they worship (Ps. 135:18).

Isaiah 2:19 Men shall go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the earth from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily- See on :18. This was what Isaiah foresaw as coming upon Judah in his day. But it didn't; the full extent of judgment was averted, by the repentance and intercession of a minority. But the essence of these words, as of all prophecy, will come true in the last days. This passage is therefore alluded to in a latter day context in Rev. 6:16.

This hiding in the rocks is the language of condemnation; Is. 7:19 says that even hidden there, they would be attacked by the Assyrians and Egyptians. But it seems many of them were saved from this by grace, and by the repentance of a remnant. Later Isaiah applies it to the judged exiles in Babylon (Is. 42:22); but with the good news that even from that humbled, condemned position- they could be exalted and returned to the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 2:20 In that day men shall cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold which have been made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats- The wealthy will hide in caves and throw their gold and silver to the animals before the awesome presence of Yahweh's glory, with unclean moles and bats gawping at all the discarded wealth of the humans. Dynamically translating this into our terms, I think we can speak of men being ashamed of their bank balances, stock portfolios, expensive cars and furnishings, holiday homes... when finally (and all too late for many) the penny drops, that all this is shameful, all the pride, wealth and human armament / defenses of man are things to be terribly awkward about before God. But for us, the essence of judgment day is now, as we face up to God's glory in the face of our Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 2:21 to go into the caverns of the rocks and into the clefts of the ragged rocks, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily- The allusion is to Moses and Elijah; perhaps both of them went into the rocks with a sense of penitence, as they came close to Yahweh's glory. Moses was brought to cower in the rocks, just as the unworthy will do (Ex. 33:22 = Is. 2:21); and he only saw the back, not the face of God, which is the attitude God adopts to those He rejects (Jer. 18:17). And only in this position could Moses see the vision of God's moral glory. Those

visions of glory are alluded to in John's Gospel as what we too can see in the face of the Lord Jesus; and we likewise should be thereby convicted of our sin, and yet also of His glory and certain salvation.

Isaiah 2:22 Stop trusting in man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he?- Our faith in God is mitigated against by our misplaced faith in humanity. We would rather trust a doctor, a repair man, a kind neighbour, before throwing ourselves upon God as a last resort. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of" (Is. 2:22) compared to the great God of Israel?

Isaiah Chapter 3

Isaiah 3:1 For, behold, the Lord Yahweh of Armies takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah supply and support, the whole supply of bread, and the whole supply of water- And yet Hezekiah's tunnel aimed to make Jerusalem have a water supply that could not be cut off by invaders and besiegers. 2 Kings 20:20 credits him for how he made "the pool, and the conduit, and brought water into the city". It would seem that he did this as it were to get around what Isaiah prophesied here. The reality was that Jerusalem was saved by grace, and also by the repentance and intercession of a minority; and so food and water were not totally removed from the city. Jerusalem's salvation was not, therefore, by dint of Hezekiah's ingenuity in apparently avoiding the judgments here given. Finally these words came true at the Babylonian invasion; see on Is. 1:1.

Isaiah 3:2 The mighty man, the man of war, the judge, the prophet, the diviner, the elder- This continues the theme of Is. 2, that all human strength in whatever form was to be brought down and humbled, so that Judah would trust in Yahweh alone. We note that 'diviners' and 'enchanters' (:3) featured within the leadership of the people; see on Is. 2:6.

Isaiah 3:3 The captain of fifty, the honourable man, the counsellor, the skilled craftsman and the clever enchanter- Enchanters and diviners (:2) were embedded throughout society. As lamented on Is. 2:6, Isaiah and other prophets were stating clearly what would be Judah's fate; and yet they turned to divination and the wisdom of the East to try to tell the future, acting no better than their historical enemies the Philistines- who were renowned for their claims to foretell the future by divination (1 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 1:2).

Isaiah 3:4 I will give boys to be their princes, and children shall rule over them- LXX "mockers". This didn't come true in Hezekiah's time because the potential scenario didn't happen at the time due to some repentance; but it could be seen as having a fulfilment in the young sons of Josiah ruling Judah in the last days before the Babylonian invasion. But "children" is s.w. "delusions" in Is. 66:4. As noted on :3, they deluded themselves by false teaching and supposed revelations from idols; and God would allow these delusions to take a psychological grip upon them which would dominate them.

Isaiah 3:5 The people will be oppressed, everyone by another, and everyone by

his neighbour- Oppression of each other was the characteristic of society (Is. 1:17,21,23). But the same word is used of the oppression of Judah by their enemies; their judgment was but an extension of how they themselves had lived.

The child will behave himself proudly against the old man, and the base against the honourable- The picture is of anarchy in the final days of the siege of Jerusalem. But this didn't happen, because Jerusalem was saved from this judgment by grace. However the idea of the elderly not being respected is likely a way of saying that the principles of the Law would be ignored (Lev. 19:32)

Isaiah 3:6 Indeed a man shall take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, You have clothing, you be our ruler, and let this ruin be under your hand- See on :5. This is a picture of the final days of the siege of Jerusalem. The royal family would be no more. And yet even in the fulfilment under the Babylonians, Zedekiah was preserved by grace. "Ruin" is literally a stumblingblock (s.w. Zeph. 1:3), and refers specifically to Jerusalem as a city (:8). Their pride in the city of Zion was their stumblingblock. In the restored Jerusalem there would be no more such a stumblingblock (Is. 57:14) because God would live in the hearts of His people rather than in any restored building.

Isaiah 3:7 In that day he will cry out, saying, I will not be a healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing. You shall not make me ruler of the people- Instead of everyone jockeying for position in the leadership, nobody would want it. This again is a feature of all condemnation- that what was so desperately sought after in this life will be seen to be of no value, just as gold and silver will be thrown to the animals (Is. 2:20).

Isaiah 3:8 For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen- For the significance of Jerusalem being a ruin, see on :6. The historical Judah fell before Joseph in repentance (Gen. 44:14 s.w.). In all God's judgments there is the hope of restoration, and this must ever be our hope and intention if ever we have to judge righteous judgment over issues we face.

Because their tongue and their doings are against Yahweh- The fact is, by our words we will be condemned and by our use of words we will be counted as righteous. The importance of our words cannot be overstressed. Judah were condemned "because their tongue and their words are against the Lord" (Is. 3:8). All their idolatry, perversion etc. was summarized in their words. Again

and again, Isaiah and the prophets say that the reason for Israel's condemnation was their words, even those they said under their breath- "your tongue hath muttered perverseness" (Is. 5:24). "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16). "The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins" (Mic. 6:12,13). Truly "death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. 18:21).

To provoke the eyes of His glory- LXX "Cloud of glory". The *shekinah* glory was still present in the temple in Isaiah's time, perhaps reflecting how God's Angel eyes still were literally present there; and they were provoked by Judah's behaviour and words.

Isaiah 3:9 The look of their faces testify against them. They parade their sin like Sodom. They don't hide it- They were witnesses against themselves. Their body language indicated their abandonment to sin; Jeremiah says they had a "whore's forehead" (Jer. 3:3). It was this psychological hardening in sin and impenitence which merited condemnation, rather than the occasional failures of an otherwise righteous person. But again we recall the grace of Is. 1:9,10- that although they were as Sodom, they would not be judged as Sodom because of the remnant and God's grace.

Woe to their soul! For they have brought judgment upon themselves- Isaiah repeatedly pronounces "woe" upon the people (Is. 3:9; 5:8,11,18,20,21,22; 8:11), and yet in that very context he can exclaim: "Woe is *me*" in chapter 6; he identified with them to the point of also feeling unworthy and under woe [in this clearly typifying the Lord's identity with us].

Isaiah 3:10 Tell the righteous Good! For they shall eat the fruit of their deeds- Just as the wicked were witnesses against themselves (:9). LXX: "Woe to their soul, for they have devised an evil counsel against themselves, saying against themselves, Let us bind the just, for he is burdensome to us: therefore shall they eat the fruits of their works". This would imply that they persecuted "the just", perhaps Isaiah and the righteous remnant of prophets, just as they were to later do to Jeremiah in the Babylonian context. Isaiah was killed by Manasseh, according to Jewish tradition.

Isaiah 3:11 Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them; for the deeds of his hands will be paid back to him- The impression given in these verses is that pay back time will come for the righteous and the wicked, with eternal outcomes. This is nothing less than saying that the day of judgment was about to come. The same word for "paid back" is used of what would happen in the day when Yahweh would be revealed and Judah saved (Is. 35:4; 59:18; 66:6). But that day was deferred in Isaiah's time, as Assyria didn't destroy Jerusalem; and the full nature of it likewise didn't fall at the time of the Babylonian invasion, to which Is. 1-35 was reapplied (see on Is. 1:1). But it will come finally true at the last day.

Isaiah 3:12 As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them- As noted on :7, instead of everyone jockeying for position in the leadership, nobody would want it. This again is a feature of all condemnation- that what was so desperately sought after in this life will be seen to be of no value, just as gold and silver will be thrown to the animals (Is. 2:20). But as suggested on :5, the "oppressors" were to be their invaders, oppressing them as they had each other. Even young men in the Babylonian army and perhaps women amongst them, would oppress the defeated people.

My people, those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths- As noted on Is. 1:1, despite the attempts at reform by individual kings, the leadership structure was apostate and was not reformed. The implication of this verse is that the ordinary people ought to have refused that leadership.

Isaiah 3:13 Yahweh stands up to contend, and stands to judge the peoples- As a judge stands to deliver a verdict. The "peoples" around Judah were to be judged at the same time, and thus would have been ushered in God's restored Kingdom, which would have included penitent individuals from amongst "the peoples".

Isaiah 3:14 Yahweh will enter into judgement with the elders of His people, and their leaders- Despite the attempts at reform by individual kings, the leadership structure was apostate and was not reformed. The implication of this verse is that the ordinary people ought to have refused that leadership. For God was punishing the whole society, and not just a corrupt leadership.

It is you who have eaten up the vineyard. The spoil of the poor is in your houses- The language of eating up and spoiling is used of the invaders; again, judgment was to be in essence what Judah had done to each other.

Isaiah 3:15 What do you mean that you crush My people, and grind the face of the poor? says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies- LXX "shame the face of the poor". Out of all the things the leadership could have been condemned for, not least gross idolatry, God focuses upon their attitude to the vulnerable and taking advantage of them. And not just in the material theft from them; but in shaming them. That was so obnoxious to God. His judgment differs from how we would have judged the situation, because shaming a poor man would likely have been far down the list of sins we would have listed.

Isaiah 3:16 Moreover Yahweh said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and flirting eyes, walking to trip as they go, jingling ornaments on their feet- Reflection upon the omniscience of God leads us to marvel at His sensitivity to human behaviour. He noticed even the body language of the women in Is. 3:16- and condemned them for the way they walked. This is how closely He observes human behaviour. This is the language of prostitution. The daughter of Zion had become a whore through seeking alliances with the surrounding nations. See on Is. 1:21. But it seems such luxury had become possible in Uzziah's prosperous reign (2 Chron. 26:5).

Isaiah 3:17 Therefore the Lord brings sores on the crown of the head of the women of Zion, and Yahweh will make their scalps bald- LXX "The Lord will expose their form", display them as naked, as foreseen also in Jer. 13:22,26. This was the punishment for prostitution; see on :16. Sores on the crown of the head again recalls Job, who is set up as representative of Judah, although personally righteous. Isaiah likewise was faithful but was asked to walk naked, as representative of his condemned people (see on Is. 20:2).

Isaiah 3:18 In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, the headbands, the crescent necklaces- Crescent necklaces recall the jewelry taken from the Midianites by Gideon. These women are portrayed as prostitutes, in that Jerusalem had prostituted herself to the nations around her in hope of getting help against Assyria. And the price for that was that they adopted their gods and symbols, which they willingly did.

Isaiah 3:19 The earrings, the bracelets, the veils- We marvel at how God noticed the body language of these people (:9,16) and also their precise jewelry. And His record of these things has been preserved all the centuries to this day. He knows all things.

Isaiah 3:20 The headdresses, the ankle chains, the sashes, the perfume bottles, the charms- These charms were part of their attraction to divination and soothsaying. Isaiah and other prophets were stating clearly what would be Judah's fate; and yet they turned to divination and the wisdom of the East to try to tell the future, acting no better than their historical enemies the Philistines- who were renowned for their claims to foretell the future by divination (1 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 1:2). See on Is. 3:2.

Isaiah 3:21 The signet rings, the nose rings- Signet rings meant that these women were within the royal family, and is evidence that Hezekiah's reforms didn't even touch his own family.

Isaiah 3:22 The fine robes, the capes, the cloaks, the purses- AV "the changeable suits of apparel", as if they had multiple sets of clothing.

Isaiah 3:23 The hand mirrors, the fine linen garments, the tiaras, and the shawls- LXX "The Spartan transparent dresses, and those made of fine linen, and the purple ones, and the scarlet ones, and the fine linen, interwoven with gold and purple, and the light coverings for couches". This all recalls the priestly garments and the tapestry of the tabernacle. And yet they were being used as part of the prostitution of these women. They mixed the things of Yahweh worship with their idolatry, and the "Spartan dresses" were clearly part of idol worship. This was how they justified accepting the gods of the nations- they worshipped them in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is our abiding temptation.

Isaiah 3:24 It shall happen that instead of sweet spices, there shall be rottenness; instead of a belt, a rope; instead of well set hair, baldness; instead of a robe, a wearing of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty- They were to go into captivity in shame, ropes upon their heads, and perhaps literally with shaved heads and branded as if in a Nazi concentration camp. The similarity is so exact that it is clear that this prophecy had some incipient fulfilment then, in the

humiliation of Europe's wealthy Jewish women; but the worst is yet to come, when all these prophetic words come to their climax in the last day.

Isaiah 3:25 Your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty in the war- LXX "And thy most beautiful son whom thou lovest shall fall by the sword". The prophecy initially applied to the times of the Assyrian invasion under Hezekiah, but was reapplied to the Babylonian invasion. In this case, we have here a prophecy of the death of Zedekiah similar to that made by Jeremiah. But by grace, Zedekiah was spared, and did not die by the sword, although many of the royal family did. The prophesy about him, like that about Nineveh's destruction in forty days, was changed in outcome because he repented; just as Jeremiah had said God operates.

Isaiah 3:26 Her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate and sit on the ground- LXX "levelled with the ground". This didn't happen when the Assyrians invaded, but the prophecy came true in the Babylonian invasion. Often Jeremiah in Lamentations laments that the walls had not just been knocked down a bit, but had actually been levelled with the ground, at the cost of huge effort by the Babylonians.

Isaiah Chapter 4

Isaiah 4:1 Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own clothing: only let us be called by your name. Take away our reproach- The implication was that there were so few men that women were so outnumbered. The law stipulated that a polygamous man must provide bread and clothing for all his wives (Ex. 21:10); but the desperation of the situation led them to accept that the law of Moses no longer functioned. They were driven by the judgments to throw themselves upon God's grace in the Messianic "branch" (:2) rather than the Law.

Isaiah 4:2 In that day, Yahweh's branch will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the beauty and glory of the survivors of Israel- The revival of Judah's kingdom, based around a Messianic "Branch" and a remnant, would happen "in that day". This is the day of :1, when Jerusalem would be overcome and left in ruins with hardly any men left. We noted throughout Is. 3 that there would be no leadership in Jerusalem; the royal family were to be no more. And yet a branch was to arise, the branch of Is. 11:1, which was to arise out of the moribund stump of the house of David. "The fruit of the land" may refer to the children who would be brought forth, and in whom the remnant would glory. These "survivors" are those saved from the ruins of a desolated Jerusalem, those who "escaped" the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 10:20; 37:31,32); the same word is used in Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17, the "remnant" of Ez. 14:22 (s.w.). The destruction of Jerusalem was intended to elicit repentance and to lead seamlessly into a revived Zion and reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel, when again all things would be "glorious" (s.w. Is. 24:23; 35:2). But this didn't happen. Jerusalem was saved by grace, and yet Hezekiah failed to act as "Yahweh's branch", and Judah were impenitent, unmoved by their salvation by grace.

And so the prophecies were reapplied to Judah's destruction by Babylon, when again a Messianic branch could have arisen (s.w. Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). The branch was to be "glorious", the word used about the glory of Yahweh being revealed at the restoration (Is. 40:5; 58:8; 60:1). But again, no "branch" appeared. Zerubbabel, "branch from Babylon", failed to live up to his potential. And so the final fulfilment will be at the revelation of the Lord Jesus at the time of Zion's final desolation. The fruit of the earth / land was to be abundant, as promised for the restoration (Ez. 34:27). But this didn't happen; the restoration prophets lament the famine at the time of the restoration, for Judah returned to

the land without returning to their God.

Isaiah 4:3 It will happen, that he who is left in Zion, and he who remains in Jerusalem shall be called holy, even everyone who is written among the living in Jerusalem- The impression from :1 is that there would literally be very few Jews left alive, and those who were would become the "remnant", and be written among the living, in the book of life, made spiritually acceptable by their purification in the holocaust to come upon the city (:4). In the latter day application, this group would then be immortalized, written among the eternally living. It could have happened at the time of the Assyrian invasion; but Judah didn't repent. The same scenario is in Zech. 13:8,9, where a third part [perhaps just meaning "a remnant"] would pass through the fire and thereby come to "call upon My Name". That too could have happened, perhaps at the time of Antiochus' invasion; but it didn't. It will therefore come true in the last days.

Isaiah 4:4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from its midst, by the spirit of justice, and by the spirit of burning- See on :3. Those who survived the holocaust to come upon Jerusalem would be spiritually purged and thus become the righteous remnant. The filth of the daughters of Zion had just been explained in Is. 3. Potentially, those very women of Isaiah's time could have been spiritually purged by the Assyrian invasion; but they weren't. And so the prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled to the time of the Babylonian invasion, which was intended to "purge" Judah (Jer. 51:34 s.w.) with a spirit / wind of burning (s.w. Ez. 5:2); and when that didn't happen, to our last days. Although it could perhaps also have come true at the times of Jerusalem's other desolations under the Greeks and Romans.

It was Yahweh who could wash them; but He would do that if they had the desire to wash themselves (s.w. Is. 1:16). They had to show justice to others (Is. 1:17); and if they wished to do that, then God would purge them with His "spirit of justice". God will confirm us in the way in which we wish to go.

Isaiah 4:5 Yahweh will create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy- See on :6. This is the language of the exodus from Egypt and the theophany at Sinai when they entered the old covenant. Perhaps it was literally intended that such a canopy would appear over

the literal glory of Yahweh which would again appear in Zion; the same word is used of Yahweh appearing from the canopy around a redeemed Zion (Joel 2:16). The symbolism suggests that Israel had been released from abuse in Egypt, and were now about to enter a new covenant and the Kingdom of God in Israel. That could have come true at the time of both the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions; but Judah refused to accept that new covenant.

Isaiah 4:6 There will be a pavilion for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from storm and from rain- "Pavilion" is s.w. "shelter" in Is. 1:8. The entire "vineyard" of God's work was to be destroyed, apart from a "shelter"- which was Zion. But it is the "daughter of Zion", the faithful remnant, and not the literal Zion which is in view here. They were to be a "shelter", a place of refuge, for others (Is. 4:6 s.w.). The storm and rain therefore spoke of the judgments to come, the warranted condemnation, using the same figures as in the Lord's parable of the builders. But there was to be refuge in Zion. This was literally the case at the time of the Assyrian invasion, and it was intended to be the case spiritually. But so much more was possible then; God would have made a literal canopy over her (:5), and established His Kingdom then. But in Hezekiah's time, Zion was saved by grace alone. The daughter of Zion was not the refuge for others she could have been. Perhaps the idea is that the storm and rain which destroys her abusers will not harm Zion. The "heat" in the last days could refer to some kind of localized nuclear holocaust.

Isaiah Chapter 5

Isaiah 5:1 Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard- This could be Isaiah's own inspired song, sung to God, summing up how he perceived things. And it is commented upon by God in :3, when the pronouns change and God speaks. But the "well beloved" is consistently Israel (Dt. 33:12; Ps. 127:2; Jer. 11:15; 12:7). Isaiah was perhaps singing this song to Israel, to get them to see their potential, to see themselves from outside of themselves. We need to look at our position before God likewise; for the message of the song is that actually, God has done everything to give us an optimal environment for spiritual fruitfulness. And yet we of course struggle to believe that, preferring to believe that if only we had a different career, home, domestic situation... we would be more fruitful. But God wants our fruitfulness; and He gives us the optimal environment for that.

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill- This may follow on from the allusions to the vineyard noted on Is. 4:6, the previous verse. The vineyard was able to bring forth spiritual fruit- Zion is described as a fruitful hill. "Fruitful hill" is a Hebrew phrase also translated "horn of oil". There is the hint that a Messiah / anointed figure could be connected with this vineyard.

Isaiah 5:2 He dug it up- LXX "fenced it".

Gathered out its stones, planted it with the choicest vine, built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein- As noted on :1, God has done everything to give us an optimal environment for spiritual fruitfulness, as He did to Judah at this time. For God wants our fruitfulness; and He gives us the optimal environment for that. Yet the vineyard of Judah was destroyed because they refused to be fruitful, and the Lord's parable of the vineyard clearly alludes to this. And the vineyard has now been given to a new Israel, for whom likewise everything has been done to make it fruitful. The gathering out of the stones means that the land was "good soil", "very fruitful" (:1). The parable of the sower alludes here- and the message is that we are all potentially the good ground. The watchtower and fence meant that it ought not to have been spoilt by others- the fact the vineyard was about to be overrun meant that Judah had removed these things.

This was the situation at Isaiah's time; but God tried again at the restoration, gathering out the stones again (Is. 60:10). But again, Judah didn't respond. And

so as the Lord's parable explains, the vineyard was given to others.

He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes- God acts as if surprised and bitterly disappointed, with so much work apparently in vain. The hewing out the winefat (Mk. 12:1) reflects His confident hope that fruit would be brought forth. He enters fully into our time-space limitations, so that He can legitimately express feelings of disappointment. This helps us understand the eagerness with which He looks to our spiritual response and growth. See on Jer. 2:21.

Isaiah 5:3 Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard- Note the change of pronouns; see on :1. They were asked to see themselves from outside themselves, and to understand that their lack of spiritual fruit was completely their fault. And thus they would judge themselves.

Isaiah 5:4 What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?- God doesn't force spiritual growth, rather does His Spirit enable the environments for it to occur; in another figure, He does all that could be thought of so that His vineyard brings forth good fruit. We of course may be tempted to doubt this, considering that if only this or that situation in our lives were different, we would be enabled to grow spiritually. But God knows best, and His Spirit works in various ways to provide [by 'providence'] the best situation for our growth and new creation.

Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes?- There even seems at times a difficulty on God's part to understand why the people He had loved could hate Him so much: "Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, We will no more come to thee?" (Jer. 2:31); "Why then has this people turned away?" (Jer. 8:5); "Why have they provoked me to anger?" (Jer. 8:19; Jer. 2:14; Jer. 30:6; Is. 5:4; Is. 50:2). "What more could I have done for my vineyard... why did it yield wild grapes?" (Is. 5:1-7). This is so much the anguished cry of bewildered middle age parents as they reflect upon a wayward child. This Divine struggle to understand reflects the extraordinary depth of His love for them; and it warns us in chilling terms as to the pain we can cause God if we spurn His amazing love.

Isaiah 5:5 Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its

hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down- The Lord's parable of the vineyard is shot through with allusions to the vineyard parable of Is. 5. When the Lord asks "What will [the owner of the vineyard] do?" (Mk. 12:9), those who picked up the Isaiah 5 allusions would have found the answer in Is. 5:4,5: "What… to do… what I will do". Ps. 80:12,13 takes the logic further- the fence was removed and wild beasts entered and destroyed the vineyard. We notice that the nations around Judah, especially the Assyrians and Babylonians, are the prototypes for the "beast" system of the last days. The same peoples are in view. God's taking away the hedge was done with a heavy heart- because such a huge amount of His work and concern was to thereby be destroyed. His judgments were not therefore painless to Himself. It was the Babylonians who broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and yet here this is presented as God doing so. We see here the principle of God manifestation; and this is why the Lord Jesus can be spoken of as functioning as God, but this doesn't mean He is God personally, just as the Babylonians were not personally God.

Isaiah 5:6 I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briers and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it- This and the similar prophecy of desolation in Is. 7:23-25 didn't happen at the Assyrian invasion; it was reapplied to the situation after the Babylonian invasion, when the land was intended to rest (Lev. 26:34,43) until Judah repented. But even that program didn't work out, and so the Lord's parable of the vineyard explained that therefore the vineyard was given to a new Israel. Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Yet "briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (Is. 9:18; 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them; and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Isaiah 5:7 For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant- Ephraim, the ten tribes, were likewise God's "pleasant" child (Jer. 31:20 s.w.). The idea is that He intensely delighted in them; just as the owner of the vineyard had been almost obsessed with his vineyard, it was his pride and joy, and for it to be fruitless was tragic; for it was as if his whole life's passion had come to nothing.

There are many passages where God emphasizes the essential unity of Israel and Judah through the device of parallelism. This is one of them. "For the vineyard of Yahweh of armies is the house of *Israel*, and the men of *Judah* His pleasant plant".

And He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry of distress- God planted the vineyard of Israel, just as He creates the environment for the new Israel, because He sought (spiritual) fruit. And that fruit was summed up so often in one word: "justice" (Is. 5:2,7). The inspiration process uses various puns through which to bring home the subtlety of the difference between true spirituality and fake. Take Is. 5:7: "He looked for justice (*mishpat*) and found oppression (*mishpah*), for righteousness (*sdaqah*) and heard cries of distress (*saqah*)". The real aim of our life in Christ, our being a Christian, our prayer, our Bible reading, our attendance at meetings, our spirituality- however you want to look at it- the real aim is to develop a character in harmony with that of God, to manifest Him. This means not getting bitter, forgiving others, being quick to overlook, to read the best motives, to be patient with your husband, with your dog, with your cat, to be full of meditation on our peerless Lord Jesus, to love the Father's word as He did... this is what it's really all about. The occasional heights of self-sacrifice and devotion, the complete dedication of one's life and thinking to the things of " the Truth" , our church (or however we want to describe it), this isn't *necessarily* the same thing as being a really *spiritual,* Christ-centered person. It often takes new converts a long time to realize this; and the quicker we do so, the better. The essential state of our *heart* is what God is ultimately interested in. This is why men may perform the same outward actions, but be judged quite differently. Consider how both Cain and Jonah fled from the presence of God; both Peter and Judas denied the Lord; both Samuel and Eli failed to control their apostate sons.

Think of how *eager* the Father and Son have been to find spiritual fruit in us. Through the centuries of His involvement with Israel, God had expected to find the fruit of justice in the vineyard of Israel- but He found only poison berries (Is. 5:4), instead of justice He found abuse and oppression of others (Is. 5:7). And all that despite doing absolutely all He could for that vineyard. But according to Mt. 21:34-38, this didn't stop Him from having a hopeful, fruit-seeking attitude. He sent His servants the prophets to find the fruit- but they were beaten and murdered. He finally sent His Son, reasoning that "*surely* they will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37). But they murdered Him. I have suggested elsewhere that this language can only suggest that God in some sense limited His omniscience and omnipotence in order to fully enter into our dimensions; and hence His

experience of dashed hope and deep disappointment. Amazing as the Father's hopefulness was, His Son's was even greater. This Father who had had all this experience of simply not getting any fruit, asked His vinedresser (the Lord Jesus) to cut down the tree of Israel, as for the three years of Christ's ministry He had sought fruit from them and not found any; and further, this tree was 'cumbering the ground', taking away nutrients which He could have given to another (Gentile) tree. But His servant argues back with Him; the servant asks to be allowed to dig and dung around the tree; and then, he says, '*You* can cut it down, although you asked *me* to do this job'. This was quite unusual for a servant to talk like this; but it's an insight into the way the Lord Jesus was even more hopeful than His longsuffering Father.

Isaiah 5:8 Woe to those who join house to house, who lay field to field until there is no room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land!- He repeatedly pronounces “woe” upon them (Is. 3:9; 5:8,11,18,20,21,22; 8:11), and yet in that very context he can exclaim: “Woe is *me*” in chapter 6; he identified with them to the point of also feeling unworthy and under woe [in this clearly typifying the Lord’s identity with us]. Fields were to return to their original owners at the jubilee, but it seems fields were stolen and the landmarks rearranged, all in disobedience to the Mosaic law. The idea is as in GNB "Soon there will be no place for anyone else to live, and you alone will live in the land". Effectively the rich were driving the population into exile from the land; and that is what was to happen.

Isaiah 5:9 In my ears Yahweh of Armies says- The implication is that what Yahweh discreetly and intimately told Isaiah, he was preaching. It seems the Lord Jesus alludes to this in Mt. 10:27 and asks us each one to live in the spirit of prophets like Isaiah: "What I am telling you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight, and what you have heard in private you must announce from the housetops".

Surely many houses will be desolate, even great and beautiful ones, unoccupied- see on 1 Tim. 4:1. This didn't fully happen in the Assyrian invasion, because Jerusalem was saved, including its houses. But the destruction of the "great houses" of the wealthy is a major theme in Jeremiah, and in the record of Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians (see on Jer. 5:27; 52:13).

Isaiah 5:10 For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield an ephah- Although they had selfishly grabbed land (:8), that land was to become very low yielding. It has been calculated that ten acres of vineyard ought to yield an average of five hundred baths (or four thousand gallons) instead of one bath (eight gallons). If a homer of corn seed yielded only an ephah, then only a tenth of the seed sown was being harvested. It wasn't worth planting them. And this is what all the condemned will realize; that what they so strove for in life will then become worthless. They will throw their silver and gold to the bats (Is. 2:20).

Isaiah 5:11 Woe to those who rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; who stay late into the night, until wine inflames them!- Israel are criticized for their early morning attitudes (see on Is. 50:4)- in the mornings they fantasized after their neighbours' wives (Jer. 5:8; Hos. 7:6), got up and wanted to get drunk again (Is. 5:11), had unjust thoughts about others (Jer. 21:12; Mic. 2:1). That's quite some emphasis- God was *so* unhappy with what His people thought about in the mornings. And Zeph. 3:7 is perhaps the most challenging of all- God condemned His people because they rose each morning and cast off all their opportunities (Heb.), despite Him every morning [potentially] revealing His word to them (Zeph. 3:5). They allowed themselves to be simply too busy to see all that God potentially enabled for them every single day. And what about us? God has prepared huge potential achievement for each of us- but we tend to fritter our days away in busyness and poor planning and lack of a self-disciplined life.

Isaiah 5:12 The harp, lyre, tambourine, and flute, with wine, are at their feasts; but they don't respect the work of Yahweh- The "but" suggests that their usage of these instruments was somehow connected to Yahweh worship, so the "feasts" were those of Yahweh. As Corinth turned the breaking of bread into a drunken orgy partly dedicated to idols, so Judah did the same with Yahweh's feasts, mixing them with idol worship; for musical instruments and drinking wine were not prescribed for the feasts of Yahweh.

Neither have they considered the operation of His hands- They did not regard Yahweh, and so He rejected them by no longer regarding or looking at them (s.w. Lam. 4:16). As Jeremiah so often demonstrates in his prophecy,

condemnation was articulated in language which showed it to be but a continuation of attitudes and positions the condemned had already adopted in their lives.

Isaiah 5:13 Therefore My people go into captivity for lack of knowledge. Their honourable men are famished, and their multitudes are parched with thirst- This doesn't mean that they went into captivity for some intellectual failures in their theology. "Knowledge" is used in the Hebraic sense of relationship. The reasons why they were going into captivity have been listed so far in Isaiah, and they don't include failures in abstract theology. They were all practical reasons. The point was, they had no relationship with Yahweh. But Judah didn't go into captivity in Isaiah's time; the threatened judgment was delayed because at least a minority repented. We marvel at God's eagerness to respond to the slightest signs of genuine repentance, and this is how we should respond to others.

Isaiah 5:14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged its desire, and opened its mouth without measure; and their glory, their multitude, their pomp- This is a similar figure as in Hab. 2:5. The grave enlarged its desire; death, the punishment for sin, is personified as if it were the sinner itself. So the sin is parallel with its punishment; which is a major theme of the prophets. It wasn't that God was judging them by lashing out in anger; their judgment was in fact an extension of their own sin and essential lifestyle. We note that *sheol* is the punishment for indulging sinful desires; *sheol* is the grave, death, and not eternal conscious punishment.

And he who rejoices among them, descend into it- The idea may be that this destruction was not just for the wealthy minority, but also for those who admired them. And there we have a challenge to us; for our society is full of people who congratulate opulent, sinful living and dearly wish to be able to live likewise. And that is just as culpable. See on :15.

Isaiah 5:15 So man is brought low, mankind is humbled, and the eyes of the arrogant ones are humbled- This is a different message to that in :14, which is of death as the punishment for sin. Here, God hopes that His people will be humbled, so that He can be exalted (:16). It was humility which He sought to inculcate by the judgments; and not humility just for its own sake, a few moments of humility before death- but the humility of repentance. The AV says that the "mean man" will be humbled; as noted on :14, those who rejoiced in the

opulence of the wealthy and wished to be like that, would be likewise punished.

Isaiah 5:16 but Yahweh of Armies is exalted in justice, and God the Holy One is sanctified in righteousness- The message was that man would be humbled, and Yahweh exalted. Peter perhaps gives his take on this in saying that we are to allow ourselves to be humbled, so that *we* may be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). It is Yahweh who is to be exalted, not us; and yet through identification with His principles, we will be exalted. And so through executing judgment, 'the holy God shows Himself holy by righteousness'. To not punish sin would be unrighteous. And yet it is through that justice that in the grand economy of Divine salvation, we are saved by grace; see on Is. 4:4.

Isaiah 5:17 Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, and strangers will eat the ruins of the rich- This is a picture of the restored Kingdom. "Strangers" may refer to repentant Gentiles who would take over the ruins of the homes of the wealthy Jews who had been judged. But it may also have reference to the way in which when Babylon conquered Judah, they took into captivity the wealthy, and the poor masses of the people therefore took possession of their ruined properties. This was Babylonian policy, alluded to several times in Jeremiah.

Isaiah 5:18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, and wickedness as with cart rope- The idea may be that they were dragging after them a load of sin by cords. But the original is unclear, and the allusion may be to a rope maker, introducing new material to the rope he is making ever longer. The sense would be that sin “is at the beginning like a fine hair-string, but at the finishing like a thick cart-rope". Sin is progressive; unless there is a sense of repentance, it becomes an ever downward spiral.

Isaiah 5:19 who say, Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it!- There was clearly opposition to Isaiah's prophecies. The idea of judgment coming would have been mocked in these kinds of words. But we wonder whether this is really a verbatim quotation from these people; or whether God read their thoughts as effectively saying this, and as being the real implication of their positions. For there is no evidence that Judah abandoned Yahweh; rather did they claim obedience and loyalty to Him, although they claimed the same about their idols whom they worshipped in His Name.

God was not deaf to their words, or the implications of their thoughts and actions. He in fact heard their mocking 'prayer', because He later says that He will "hasten His work" (Is. 60:22 s.w.). Likewise their invitation for the word or "counsel" of God to "draw near and come" was fulfilled- when Yahweh did draw near to them in judgment (s.w. Is. 46:13; 57:3).

Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet- As noted on :19, we wonder whether this is really a verbatim quotation from these people; or whether God read their thoughts as effectively saying this, and as being the real implication of their positions. For there is no evidence that Judah consciously advocated doing evil in the name of good; rather did they claim obedience and loyalty to Him, although they claimed the same about their idols whom they worshipped in His Name.

Isaiah 5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!- Their wisdom came from themselves and not from God's word. There may be an allusion to Prov. 3:7 "Don’t be wise in your own eyes. Fear Yahweh, and depart from evil". It is being wise in our own eyes which precludes repentance; and it is recognition of our own unwisdom which provokes repentance.

Isaiah 5:22 Woe to those who are mighty to drink wine, and champions at mixing strong drink- This alcoholism was apparently incorporated into their perverted keeping of the feasts of Yahweh (see on :12). They turned those feasts into the crude drinking games of many bars today- whoever can drink the most is the mightiest.

Isaiah 5:23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice for the innocent!- God will not justify the wicked (Ex. 23:7); and He hates those who do so (Prov. 17:15 cp. 24:24; Is. 5:23). But God justifies sinners, "the wicked", by grace. This paradox serves to highlight yet more the grace in "justification by grace". The fact the judiciary was so corrupt is again an indication that the reforms of the kings in Isaiah's time (see on Is. 1:1) were not very far reaching. The mass unspirituality of the leadership therefore reveals all the more how courageous were kings like Hezekiah in trying to reform things.

Isaiah 5:24 Therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust- The fire of judgment is likened to a tongue; and "the tongue is a fire" (James 3:5). Their judgment was to be an extension of their own actions and words. As their tongue had devoured others (:23), so the tongue of fire was to devour them. The fact is, by our words we will be condemned and by our use of words we will be counted as righteous. The importance of our words cannot be overstressed. Judah were condemned "because their tongue and their words are against the Lord" (Is. 3:8). All their idolatry, perversion etc. was summarized in their words. Again and again, Isaiah and the prophets say that the reason for Israel's condemnation was their words, even those they said under their breath- "your tongue has muttered perverseness" (Is. 59:3). "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16). "The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins" (Mic. 6:12,13). Truly "death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. 18:21).

Because they have rejected the law of Yahweh of Armies, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel- Again we see evidence for major opposition to Isaiah's prophecies from the leadership (:23). They would not have consciously stated their rejection of the law; but God sees to the essence, to the implication of attitudes and thoughts. See on :19,20.

Isaiah 5:25 Therefore Yahweh's anger burns against His people, and He has stretched out His hand against them, and has struck them. The mountains tremble, and their dead bodies are as refuse in the midst of the streets- The past tenses are used because the threatened judgment was so certain. But in fact, it did not come at Isaiah's time- because there was at least some penitence, and much intercession from the faithful remnant. "The mountains" may refer to the hills of Jerusalem surrounding Zion; the bodies in the streets recalls Jeremiah's lamentations of what happened when Babylon sacked Jerusalem. The intended application to the Assyrians didn't happen, because there was some repentance; but the words were rescheduled to the Babylonians.

For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is still stretched out- Because God's judgment had not achieved its end result, which was Judah's repentance. His hand was stretched out still, both in the sense of judgment, and

in seeking to save through eliciting repentance.

Isaiah 5:26 He will lift up a banner for the nations from far, and He will whistle for them from the end of the land. Behold, they will come speedily and swiftly- Clearly enough, the bronze serpent lifted up on the "standard" or pole was a symbol of Christ crucified. But time and again throughout Isaiah, we read that a "standard" or ensign will be "lifted up" in order to *gather people together* to it (Is. 5:26; 13:2; 11:12; 18:3; 62:10). This was the idea of an ensign lifted up. Thus our common response to the cross of Christ should be to gather together unto Him there. And we need to take note that several of those Isaiah passages are speaking about what shall happen in the last days, when divided Israel will unite on the basis of their acceptance of the crucified Jesus. In this context, the nations are being summoned to judge Israel. And yet Isaiah also uses the figure for gathering sinners to the ensign or standard pole of Zion. The intention was that the surrounding nations would be judged and yet some would repent, and become part of a restored Kingdom of God in Judah. But Hezekiah precluded this from happening by getting friendly with the Babylonians and surrounding nations, and his sons worshipped their gods rather than bringing them to the God of Israel.

Isaiah 5:27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the belt of their waist be untied, nor the latches of their shoes be broken- LXX "They shall not hunger nor be weary". The language here is that of God Himself and His faithful people (Is. 40:28,31; Ps. 121:4). As will be noted on :28, God's manifestations have similar characteristics; be they through His own people, or through wicked people He uses to perform His judgments. He is totally in control; there is no radical evil in the cosmos.

Isaiah 5:28 whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent. Their horses' hoofs will be like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind- They would be a manifestation of the cherubim chariot. Ezekiel uses the same idea. The cherubim would be manifest in both Judah's attackers and in God's people. God was totally in control of the whole tragedy. See on :27.

Isaiah 5:29 Their roaring will be like a lioness, they will roar like young lions.

Yes, they shall roar and seize their prey and carry it off, and there will be no one to deliver- The initial application was to the lions of Assyria; but due to repentance and intercession, that was averted. And yet lions were also a symbol of the Babylonians, who did carry off Judah into captivity. God acted as a lion to Judah through those lions (Hos. 5:14), manifested through them. God was their deliverer, as so often stated later in Isaiah; but they refused to accept Him as such, and so there was none to deliver. The princes of Judah are also likened to young lions (Ez. 19:3-6); it was their lion like behaviour in abusing their people which led to the young lions coming upon Judah. Again, judgment is articulated in terms of the sins which have brought them. Sin is its own judgment. The lions here in Is. 5:29,30 clearly represent the Babylonians and Assyrians; but the prophetic hope was that the young lion would be tamed and live in Zion (Is. 11:7). The vision was of Judah's enemies being judged and repenting, and coming to live in the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 5:30 They will roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks to the land behold, darkness and distress. The light is darkened in its clouds- LXX "as the sound of the swelling sea; and they shall look to the land, and, behold, there shall be thick darkness in their perplexity". The Lord seems to apply these ideas to the situation in Israel in the last days (Lk. 21:26), just as the light being turned to darkness happened at His crucifixion (cp. Am. 8:9). What could have happened at the hands of the Assyrians was averted by repentance; but the prophetic word came true in later judgments upon Judah, and will come finally true in the last days.

Isaiah Chapter 6

Isaiah 6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died- The idea is that although the king was dead, or had ceased to reign in his last years, Yahweh was still king. See on :5. We may enquire why we have this apparent record of the commissioning of Isaiah at this point, rather than at the beginning of the prophecy. He sees a vision of glory and then is given his prophetic calling, which seems appropriate for the start of his ministry, just as happened to Ezekiel. Perhaps Isaiah gave Is. 1-5 and then was now more formally commissioned; see on :9. But the prophets are rarely chronological; Jeremiah particularly is arranged by theme and not chronology. Perhaps the record of Isaiah's commissioning as a prophet is included here because he feels that he is of unclean lips as his people are; and the state of their lips is to be a major theme of his message. So the idea would be that he began his ministry deeply convicted that he was saved by grace and was one with his audience, no better than they, but saved by grace through his faith in the Messianic Saviour figure silhouetted in the vision which itself convicts him of his sin.

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple- The words high and lofty apply to the throne, not to Yahweh Himself (as in Is. 57:15). The same phrase has recently been used in Is 2:12-14 of how what is high and lifted up in human eyes is to be brought down before the glory of Yahweh. It is used in Ez. 10:16 about the cherubim, which appear to have morphed into the seraphim of this vision (see on :2). And it is used in Is. 37:23 of how the Assyrians were high and lifted up against Yahweh, and would be brought down- just as the pride of Judah was to be, before the high and lifted up glory of Yahweh. Both Jews and Gentiles would thereby be humbled and the intention was that together they would form part of a restored Kingdom of God in Judah. That glory is more specifically defined in Is. 52:13 where "high and lifted up" is used of the exaltation of the suffering servant, the Messiah figure who could have been Hezekiah, had he responded rightly to his sufferings. But after God's attempts to reapply it to Zerubbabel and others, it came to full term in the suffering of the Lord Jesus.

Is. 6:10 is quoted in John 12, with the information that "these things said Isaiah, because he foresaw his glory, and he spoke about him" (Jn. 12:41). The hour of glory was the hour of crucifixion. The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle... was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for Christ's sake, then we know His glory. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6

and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet Isaiah saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. So John links the visions of Is. 6 and 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Jn. 12:38-41 draws a parallel between being converted, and understanding the prophecies of the glory of the crucified Christ. To know Him in His time of dying, to see the arm of Yahweh revealed in Him there, is to be converted.

Isaiah's vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1) connects with the description of the crucified Lord high and lifted up (Is. 52:13). This vision, John tells us, was of Christ in His glory. And John combines his citation of this passage with that of Is. 53 concerning the cross (Jn. 12:41,42). The Lord, high and lifted up in glory, was the crucified Lord. There He was enthroned, in God's eyes, in His throne of glory. When He comes again and sits in the throne of His glory, He will be repeating in principle the glorification of the cross. The very vision of the lifted up Lord convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, and steeled his faith in forgiveness (Is. 6:5-8). See on Jn. 19:37.

Isaiah 6:2 Above Him stood the seraphim- The cherubim overshadowing the ark, where the shekinah glory was, are described as six winged seraphim; or perhaps in the vision, they morph into this form. The word is used of the brazen Seraph (s.w. Num. 21:8) made by Moses; and yet they have human faces, partly human like the cherubim figures of Ez. 1, which were also "high and lifted up" (Ez. 10:16 s.w.). We seem to have here a kaleidoscope of images, classic apocalyptic genre.

Each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet and with two he flew- "Feet" can also be read as "body". The sense is well expressed by the Targum: “With two he covered his face that he might not see;

and with two he covered his body that he might not be seen". The seraphim / cherubim themselves are presented as in awe of the glory revealed, and even have a sense of unworthiness before that glory; for the same word for "covered" is used of sin being covered (Ps. 32:1; 85:2). Perhaps if Angels are in view, they carry with them the sense of forgiven sin from a previous creation. So little wonder Isaiah was even more convicted.

Isaiah 6:3 One called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of Armies! The whole earth is full of His glory!- The "earth" in view is *eretz* Israel primarily, the territory promised to Abraham. And yet that area was full of sinful behaviour, as Isaiah has demonstrated. But still God's glory was articulated there at that time, and would be.

Isaiah 6:4 The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him who called, and the house was filled with smoke- This is a vision of the temple, and if the threshold pillars collapsed, the veil screening the most holy place came down. This is another similarity with the crucifixion (Mt. 27:51). The house filling with smoke speaks of God's wrath, but this wrath was averted in Hezekiah's time. It had various later fulfillments, but finally Rev. 15:8 interprets this as the wrath of God poured out in the last days.

Isaiah 6:5 Then I said, Woe is me!- Isaiah repeatedly pronounces “woe” upon the people (Is. 3:9; 5:8,11,18,20,21,22; 8:11), and yet in that very context he can exclaim: “Woe is *me*” in chapter 6; he identified with them to the point of also feeling unworthy and under woe [in this clearly typifying the Lord’s identity with us].

For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips- Isaiah realized his unworthiness: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips". He felt he was going to be condemned. But then out of the same vision, the Angel comforted him: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged". And then immediately he offered to go on a preaching mission to Israel, motivated by his own experience of forgiveness and with therefore an appropriate humility: "Here am I, send me" (Is. 6:5-8). This incident is full of allusion to the sending of an equally hesitant Moses. As God appears in the burning bush, so God appears to Isaiah among the seraphim, the burning ones. Moses is reluctant to bear God’s word because “I am a man of uncircumcised lips”, and Isaiah felt the same. Whom shall I send… who will go? (Ex. 3:8,9) is matched by Is. 6:8,9. The

willingness of Moses to go (Ex. 3:4) is that of Isaiah. And it is to be our pattern, going forth in witness firstly convicted of our own utter unworthiness.

The vision occurred "in the year that King Uzziah died" (Is. 6:1)- and he died of leprosy, smitten of God for his sin. Isaiah would've known Uzziah, and prophesied against him. And yet now, after the vision of God's glory, Isaiah declares that *he* is a man "of unclean lips". And it was lepers who had to cover their upper lips (Lev. 13:45). He felt no better than Uzziah, the well known smitten-by-God king of Isaiah's time. Likewise before the experience of God's glory as it was and is in Christ, we shouldn't feel that we are any better than the most famous sinner. See on Is. 7:20.

And I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies!- As noted on Is. 3:8, the sinfulness of Judah was epitomized in their language. Isaiah did not actually see God Himself, but an intense manifestation of Him. Likewise Yahweh was manifest in the death of the cross, but seeing Jesus there is not actually seeing God Himself crucified.

Isaiah 6:6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar- Out of the same vision of glory which convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, there came the power and message of forgiveness. This is what happens as we truly behold the cross. It should account for our conflicting emotions at the breaking of bread when we remember these things, and again encounter the Lord crucified "face to face".

Isaiah 6:7 He touched my mouth with it and said, Behold, this has touched your lips- Isaiah prophesied of the fire of Divine judgment. But the message was that contact with that fire was not necessarily destructive even to man. It is possible to “dwell with devouring fire” (Is. 33:14); that is part of relationship with God. The only other reference to lips being touched by an Angel is in Dan. 10:16, where it gives Daniel the power of speech. And so the connection is established between receipt of forgiveness and empowerment to preach that message.

And your iniquity is taken away and your sin forgiven- The Hebrew here differentiates between guilt and forgiveness of sin. Hence GNB "now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven". We can ascent theoretically to sin being forgiven; but feeling guilt removed from us is another thing. And that psychological gift is also available from God, through the power of the cross. The very terms iniquity taken away and sin forgiven are found in Is. 27:9; these

things would happen if Judah were repentant and destroyed their idols. Isaiah is set up as representative of Judah. His cleansing could have been theirs. But they didn't perceive the glory of the suffering servant, because they were impenitent. There were later chances for fulfilment of the prophecy- Zech. 3:4 speaks of how iniquity could have been taken away at the time of the restoration from Babylon. But again this was not fully experienced, and so the prophecies now come true in a new Israel who have responded to the glory of the suffering servant, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 6:8 I heard the Lord's voice, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am. Send me!- The sinful but forgiven Isaiah was representative of Judah (:7), and yet also He was 'going for us', representative of God and the Angelic seraphim. Just as the Lord Jesus was representative of both God and man; and as we as men are also the face of God in Christ to this world.

Isaiah realized his unworthiness: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips". He felt he was going to be condemned. But then the Angel comforted him: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged". And then immediately he offered to go on a preaching mission to Israel: "Here am I, send me" (Is. 6:5-8). This is the essential qualification for all preaching work. Israel's prophets sought to awaken guilt in those of God's people who were repressing it. This is different to mere moralizing. They were appealing for an awakening of true conscience and guilt. Isaiah exemplified his message in his own life. He was convicted of his sin, saying "Woe is me", in order to prepare him for the great truth that "your guilt is taken away" (Is. 6:1-7).

When God asks Isaiah whom He should send out, in a scene reminiscent of the Angelic court of Heaven in 1 Kings 22 and Ps. 89:7, Isaiah says "Send me". He wanted to be part of God's way and word. And with us too, we are all in that sense 'apostles', sent ones, in that the word we preach must be identified with us personally. For the Lord's parable speaks of how the Father sends out His servants- us- to invite men and women in to the supper of His Kingdom (Mt. 22:14). See on Is. 9:7.

The sending forth of Isaiah was the sending forth of God's word to His people (s.w. Is. 9:8). Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh. The man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached. In the immediate context, Isaiah himself was the servant messenger sent forth (s.w. Is. 42:19; 48:16; 61:1); but he was largely rejected, and Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son

Manasseh (Heb. 11:37).

Isaiah 6:9 He said, Go, and tell this people, 'You hear indeed, but don't understand; and you see indeed, but don't perceive'- It was because they of themselves would not "consider" / 'understand' (s.w. Is. 1:3) that they were psychologically confirmed in their attitudes and blinded so that they would not understand / consider. And so God operates to this day. The message Isaiah was commissioned to preach was therefore some time after they had had the opportunity to hear and see the message of Is. 1-5. This would explain why we have this commissioning of Isaiah only now in Is. 6.

Isaiah 6:10 Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed- For the quotation of these words in Jn. 12, see on :1. The opportunity to repent in Isaiah's time was spurned, for the most part. It was repeated in the times of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and likewise wasn't responded to. And again in the time of the Lord Jesus. And so He began speaking to the people in parables exactly so that they would not understand.

The Lord spoke in parables so that Israel would be deceived (unless they made specific search of the meaning of the parable) and therefore would not come to salvation. This fact is hard to get round for those who feel God *isn't* responsible for deception. Isaiah spoke likewise (Is. 6:9,10; 29:10,11). See on Is. 66:4. Thus men are confirmed psychologically in the way they wish to go.

And yet although *their* ears were "heavy", God's ears were not heavy to them, if they would pray in repentance (s.w. Is. 59:1). It was by the stripes of the suffering servant that they would be "healed" (s.w. Is. 53:5). His sufferings and related glory have been the burden of the vision just seen. But whilst they refuse to "see" that, they would not be healed.

Isaiah 6:11 Then I said, Lord, how long? He answered, Until the cities are waste without inhabitant and houses without man and the land becomes utterly waste- This is the scene of Is. 4:1, when the invasion would severely deplete the population. But the time of their healing by the suffering servant (see on :10) was to coincide with the time of their judgment, in that those left alive were to form the spiritually purged remnant. The Divine intention was that the wasting of Judah would elicit their repentance and acceptance of a suffering servant

saviour. This is why the Assyrian invasion coincided with Hezekiah's suffering in sickness. But he elected not to be that saviour servant, and turned in his heart to Babylon. And so the prophecy was reapplied and rescheduled to other scenarios, which likewise didn't come to fruition; and will come to its full term in the latter day devastation leading Judah to accept the Lord Jesus as their healer and suffering saviour.

Isaiah 6:12 and Yahweh has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land- As noted on :11, an exile "far away" and the land laying desolate or emptied of its people (s.w. "deserted place" in Is. 17:9) was required for them to "return" to God, both spiritually and literally to their land (:10 "turn again"). This clearly was the potential at the time of the restoration from Babylon; but there was no repentance. And there is evidence from archaeology and Babylonian records that the "poor of the land" who were not taken captive to Babylon were the majority of the population. Babylon had a policy of deporting the ruling classes. That may however be the scenario implied by the LXX "And after this God shall remove the men far off, and they that are left upon the land shall be multiplied". The final fulfilment will be in the latter day desolation.

Isaiah 6:13 If there is a tenth left in it, that also will in turn be consumed: as a terebinth, and as an oak, whose stump remains when they are felled; so the holy seed is its stump- LXX "and again it shall be for a spoil, as a turpentine tree, and as an acorn when it falls out of its husk". The original is unclear, but the idea is of new life being sown from a minority (ten per cent?) as a result of the destruction of the majority. The image is similar to that of the Messianic "Branch" shooting forth from the decaying stump of the house of David. A ten percent minority is also envisaged in Am. 5:3. They were perhaps the tenth, the tithe, which were intended for God's work. The idea of only a tenth surviving is repeated in Am. 6:9,10. But we read of a third surviving in Ez. 5:1-4; Zech. 13:8, and elsewhere of a quarter. The reason is that the judgments pronounced were dependent upon Judah's response to them. There were various different scenarios of both judgment and blessing, not all of which would come true. Because God is sensitive to human repentance and intercession, and changes the outcomes accordingly (Jer. 18:7-9). The point is that as those trees even when cut down retain the seed in their roots, which will again spring up into a great tree, so out of the judgments to come upon Judah there would arise a remnant who would grow up into the great tree of God's restored Kingdom.

Isaiah Chapter 7

Isaiah 7:1 It happened in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it- The way Jerusalem survived a siege was to encourage them in Hezekiah's time that with God's help they could likewise survive the Assyrian siege. It seems Syria and Israel were trying to form a power bloc against Assyria, and were doing so with Egypt's help- for this in turn would be a buffer for them against Assyria. Yet soon afterwards Judah were prostituting themselves to Syria and Egypt for help against Assyria. They became caught up in desperate politics, prostituting themselves to these nations and accepting their gods- rather than trust in Yahweh alone.

Isaiah 7:2 It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is allied with Ephraim! His heart trembled, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest tremble with the wind- James 1:6 uses this language and applies it to Christians who lack solid faith; but who like Judah turn to desperate politics to try to save them from situations rather than to their God. The house of David were the royal family, but they are spoken of in the singular, as the trembling heart of their king represented all of them. We note again that the people and the leadership are parallel. The masses were not punished for the unspirituality of their leadership; hence heavens and earth were addressed together at the start of the prophecy (Is. 1:2). The whole land was to tremble under judgment when it came (Is. 24:20 s.w. "tremble"); but judgment was but the articulation of the state of their faithless hearts. They were judged for the state of their hearts. Spiritual mindedness is of paramount significance to God.

Isaiah 7:3 Then Yahweh said to Isaiah, Go out now to meet Ahaz, you, and Shearjashub your son- "Shearjashub" means "a remnant shall return" (see on Is. 10:21). As is made explicit in :14 and Is. 8:18, Isaiah's children were 'signs'. The message of Shearjashub was that a remnant would repent / return; and Isaiah is asking Ahab to be part of that remnant, and to repent of his faithless attitude.

At the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the fuller's field- The washer or fuller uses the same word for 'washing' as used in the context of cleansing from sin (Ps. 51:2,7; Jer. 2:2; 4:14; Mal. 3:2). The suggestion was that they could repent and be cleansed of their sin; but they refused these waters which represented forgiveness (Is. 8:6). This location was signifcant, because it

was there that Rabshakeh came with his demand for Jerusalem to surrender in Is. 36:2. Hezekiah was intended to recall how Ahaz had been faced with Isaiah at that same spot; and the call was to repent, to be washed, to become the remnant which would triumph. Circumstances repeat in our lives and between our lives and those of others; in this case, the experience of Ahaz repeated in the life of his son Hezekiah. And we are intended to join the dots and learn the lesson.

Isaiah 7:4 Tell him, 'Be careful- The word is translated 'a watchman' later in Isaiah. He was to not fear but to watch- for Yahweh's deliverance.

And keep calm- It was in repentance that Judah would find "quietness", s.w. "calm" (Is. 30:15; 32:17). As noted on :3, Ahaz is being called upon to repent.

Don't be afraid, neither let your heart be faint- The Lord may be quoting from here when He urges His people to not let their heart be troubled (Jn. 14:1). The scenarios at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions didn't fully come about, and so they were applied to a new Israel.

Because of these two tails of smoking torches, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and of the son of Remaliah- The idea is that they were smoking and not burning torches, and would soon fizzle out; both Israel and Syria would be overrun by Assyria. Isaiah will not mention the name "Pekah" perhaps because he was a usurper who murdered the previous king (2 Kings 15:25). LXX "for when my fierce anger is over, I will heal again".

Isaiah 7:5 Because Syria, Ephraim and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying- It is possible that the planned invasion was thwarted because there was some repentance in Judah. But the prophetic word in essence was reapplied and rescheduled; for Assyria "plotted evil against" Judah (s.w. Nah. 1:11). Judah were intended to learn from how this previous plotting of evil had been foiled by Yahweh. Circumstances repeat in our experiences, so that we might learn, and see the same Divine hand at work.

Isaiah 7:6 Let's go up against Judah and tear it apart- The idea is of making a breach in a city wall, as was to happen under the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:4; Jer. 39:2).

And let's divide it among ourselves, and set up a king in its midst, even the son of Tabeel- Tabeel is a Syrian name; this was the puppet king they had in mind.

Isaiah 7:7 This is what the Lord Yahweh says: It shall not stand, neither shall it happen- As suggested on :6, this may have been due to some repentance on the part of a minority in Judah. Circumstances repeat in our experiences, so that we might learn, and see the same Divine hand at work. Because this very phrase is used of how Judah are warned not to make plans according to the flesh, because they would not stand nor happen (Is. 8:10; 28:18). They should have learnt from how the fleshly plans of Israel and Syria did not stand.

Isaiah 7:8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin- The idea may be that their 'heads' were but human, not Divine.

And within sixty-five years Ephraim shall be broken in pieces, so that it shall not be a people- One wonders why the ten tribe Kingdom was to cease being a people within 65 years of Isaiah's prophecy; yet we note that Ahaz was told in the same context: "If ye [the two tribe Kingdom of Judah] will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (Is. 7:8,9). Was the prophetic outline of events in Isaiah 7 not conditional upon the faith of Ahaz and the wide reaching repentance of Judah? The demise of Israel happened 15 years later, but perhaps it was somehow possible that it would have been delayed, up to a maximum of ["within"] 65 years, depending on human response? But 65 years from when Isaiah was prophesying would bring us to about BC 670, when Esarhaddon implemented his policy of bringing foreigners to live in the territory of the ten tribes (Ezra 4:2,10). This was the final breaking in pieces of Ephraim. The immediate destruction of Ephraim and Syria was to be within just a few years (see on :15,16).

Isaiah 7:9 and the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established'- "If you do not stand firm... you shall not be made firm" is a classic example of how God will confirm us in the spiritual path we wish to take. But LXX has "but if ye believe not, neither will ye at all understand", as if understanding in the sense of true relationship with God is predicated upon faith. Misunderstanding of God, in whatever form, therefore usually has a basis in lack of faith; it's not mere intellectual error in interpretation, but rooted in the moral issues connected with lack of faith.

Isaiah 7:10 Yahweh spoke again to Ahaz, saying- The "again" suggests Ahaz had

not responded to the call for repentance and faith made in :3,4.

Isaiah 7:11 Ask a sign of Yahweh your God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above- God wanted Ahaz to believe and repent, and Ahaz's refusal didn't mean God just turned away from him; He now gives him the opportunity to ask for concrete evidence upon which to base his faith. Such is God's eagerness for even wicked men like Ahaz to eblieve and repent.

Isaiah 7:12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt Yahweh- As explained on :11, God was giving Ahaz yet another chance to properly believe in Him and repent. His refusal to engage with this offer was therefore sinful, but he masks it in fake humility. We can appear to be humble, and by doing so actually express our pride. Ahaz is one of many Biblical examples of this kind of false humility. He refused to ask a sign of Yahweh, when invited to, lest he be like apostate Israel in the wilderness, and tempt Yahweh (Is. 7:12 cp. Dt. 6:16). But this was actually a 'wearying' of God, and so he was given a sign relating to his condemnation (Is. 7:12,13).

Isaiah 7:13 He said, Listen now, house of David. Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of My God also?- "My God" suggests this is Isaiah talking. But the context is of God speaking directly (:10). This was how intertwined were God and His prophet; the process of inspiration worked through this. Isaiah's patience was tested ["the patience of men"], and therefore so was that of God. As noted on Is. 1:14, God was already "wearied" [s.w. "to try the patience"] of Israel.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel- We could read this as a sign of judgment because Ahaz refused to repent; see on :13. But we could also see God's purpose in Christ as being His attempt to almost force through His saving purpose with Judah. Already in this chapter, Ahaz had twice refused the invitations to repent and believe (:3,12). And so God responds by giving His Son, rather like how in the parable of the wicked husbandmen, the rejection of the prophets is responded to by God sending His own Son. In the immediate context, Isaiah was to have another son, and his children were all children of sign to Judah (see on :3; Is. 8:18). This son could perhaps have been the Messiah figure, but presumably he failed to live up to it; or as suggested on

Is. 8:1, this plan was changed by God and the child renamed. And so it came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. This explains the ambiguity of the word "virgin", which can mean just a young woman (Isaiah's wife, in the first instance), or refer (as LXX) to a literal virgin who was to conceive without the involvement of a man. This would also explain the ambiguity caused by the verbs "to conceive" and "bear" being participles- ambiguous as to whether they refer to the present or the future.

Seeing it refers primarily to Isaiah's wife, we may wonder why it is quoted of the virgin conception of Mary in the New Testament. But the New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* strict attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. And rabbinic targums use the text likewise. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn't fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can't be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfilment outside that which the context seems to require.

Isaiah 7:15 He shall eat curds and honey when he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good- Curds and honey could be seen as representing the blessings of obedience to the covenant, which would be enjoyed by the repentant remnant after the desolation of Judah (:22). This time of blessing on Judah was intended to come in just a few years, before the child came to an age of moral responsibility. This implies very small children cannot choose between good and evil. Or as LXX "Butter and honey shall he eat, before he knows either to prefer evil or choose the good". The prophetic potential was that Assyria would invade Judah as well as Israel and take them both into captivity in the time of Ahaz, within a few years (Is. 8:3,4); and the remnant left in the land would, along with this child, eat curds and honey as the land again became fruitful for them. But Assyria didn't destroy Judah, they weren't taken into captivity, and generally didn't repent. The scenario didn't work out. God factored in the repentance of a tiny remnant and their intercession for Jerusalem; and also the fact that generally, there wasn't going to be repentance in Judah. And so this potential scenario was

disallowed. See on Is. 8:1.

Isaiah 7:16 For before the child knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings you abhor shall be forsaken- There is an ambiguity in the text, as to whether the land of Judah was to be forsaken as Ahaz feared; or whether the lands of Syria and Israel would be. Hence LXX "and the land shall be forsaken which thou art afraid of because of the two kings". The next verse in any case warns that judgment is going to come upon Judah at the hands of the Assyrians. The ambiguity may be because the outcome depended upon the repentance of Judah; and God protected them from the Israel-Syria invasion because there was some repentance. And likewise, in the end, from the full intended force of the Assyrian invasion (see on :17).

Isaiah 7:17 Yahweh will bring on you, on your people and on your father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah- God said that the division was the greatest tragedy to come upon His people (Is. 7:17). The way the new garment of Ahijah was torn up to symbolize the division, reflects the utter waste (1 Kings 11:29). For an outer cloak was a garment a man could wear for life; to have a new one was something significant.

Even the king of Assyria- But the Assyrians did not attack in the time of Ahaz, and Jerusalem and the royal family was preserved when they did attack later. As noted on :15,16, this was presumably because there was a modicum of repentance, at least amongst a remnant.

Isaiah 7:18 It will happen in that day that Yahweh will whistle for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria- As explained on :15, The prophetic potential was that Assyria from the north would invade Judah as well as Israel and take them both into captivity in the time of Ahaz, within a few years (Is. 8:3,4), with Egypt attacking from the south; and the remnant left in the land would, along with this child, eat curds and honey as the land again became fruitful for them (:22).

Isaiah 7:19 They shall come, and shall all rest in the desolate valleys, in the clefts of the rocks, on all thorn hedges, and on all pastures- This hiding in the rocks is the language of condemnation of Is. 2:19; but now we learn that even

hidden there, they would be attacked by the Assyrians and Egyptians, who like bees and tiny stinging insects would still penetrate to those hidden in clefts of the rock. But it seems many of them were saved from this by grace, and by the repentance of a remnant. See on :15,16,18. Later Isaiah applies it to the judged exiles in Babylon (Is. 42:22); but with the good news that even from that humbled, condemned position- they could be exalted and returned to the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 7:20 In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired in the parts beyond the River Euphrates, even with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard- This sounds like the shaving of a leprous man that he might be accepted back into fellowship with God. As explained on Is. 6:5, Judah were leprous, as Isaiah had felt himself to be, and had not allowed themselves to be cleansed by the vision of Yahweh's glory. So the Assyrian invasion was intended to do this for them, to bring them to fellowship with God.

Isaiah 7:21 It shall happen in that day that a man shall keep alive a young cow, and two sheep- The scenario was that the Assyrian invasion would lead to the desolation of the land; but something would be 'kept alive'. And that young cow would produce so much milk that curds would be made from it (:22). The idea was that the remnant in the land would repent and begin to experience the kingdom blessings. But this scenario didn't come about. God factored in the repentance of a tiny remnant and their intercession for Jerusalem; and also the fact that generally, there wasn't going to be repentance in Judah. And so this potential scenario was disallowed.

Isaiah 7:22 and it shall happen, that because of the abundance of milk which they shall give he shall eat curds: for everyone will eat curds and honey who is left in the midst of the land- "The midst of the land" may refer to salvation in Jerusalem. See on :21.

Isaiah 7:23 It will happen in that day that every place where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silver shekels, shall be for briers and thorns- This and the similar prophecy of desolation in Is. 5:6 didn't happen at the Assyrian invasion; it was reapplied to the situation after the Babylonian invasion, when the land was intended to rest (Lev. 26:34,43) until Judah repented. But even that

program didn't work out, and so the Lord's parable of the vineyard explained that therefore the vineyard was given to a new Israel. Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Yet "briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (Is. 9:18; 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them; and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Isaiah 7:24 People will go there with arrows and with bow, because all the land will be briers and thorns- The land of Judah was not overrun by thorns and left desolate because of the mass destruction of its population by the Assyrians. As explained on :15, the possible scenario didn't happen. These people who remained were intended to be the righteous remnant.

Isaiah 7:25 All the hills that were cultivated with the hoe, you shall not come there for fear of briers and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of sheep- The LXX suggests that from the once desolate land covered with thorns, there would come pasture at the restoration: "And every mountain shall be certainly ploughed: there shall no fear come thither: for there shall be from among the barren ground and thorns that whereon cattle shall feed and oxen shall tread". These people who remained were intended to be the righteous remnant.

Isaiah Chapter 8

Isaiah 8:1 Yahweh said to me, Take a large tablet, and write on it with a man's pen, 'For Maher Shalal Hash Baz'- "A man's pen" in Hebrew could imply 'in hieroglyphics' [see Keil & Delitszch's commentary], clearly understood visually by men (a requirement for all such prophetic work- see Hab. 2:2; 1 Cor. 14:19). It could be that Isaiah is told to draw this on a plaque for all to see, and then when his wife has a child he is told to use this name to name the child. He was told to write on it "Mahershalalhashbaz", not to write 'concerning' or 'about' his future son [as the AV incorrectly states]. It could also be that God was telling Isaiah to give his book of prophecies, or at least the prophecies in these chapters, a title on the scroll. The fact Isaiah's son had the same name would have made him a kind of 'word made flesh', a living reminder of his father's work. As we know from the example of Zacharias naming John the Baptist, a father would write his newborn son's name on a tablet. So he is naming the child before the child was even conceived (:3). His children were signs (see on Is. 7:3; 8:18), at least in their names. This naming of a new child follows right after the prediction that a young woman (Isaiah's wife) was to have a son, 'Emmanuel', and before he was a few years old, Judah would have been desolated and a righteous remnant emerge (see on Is. 7:15-25). It could be that this new child is that same child; but the name is changed, because the potential scenario changed; see on Is. 7:15.

Isaiah 8:2 and I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to testify: Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah- Presumably, to testify that he had named this child with this name before it was born; and that he somehow foreknew that it would be a male. Isaiah's knowledge of this would confirm the suggestion made on :1, that this was the 'Emmanuel' child of Is. 7:14 but renamed. We note that despite the general apostasy of the leadership alluded to in Isaiah's prophecies so far, there were at least two other faithful men. However, Uriah is mentioned as being ordered to construct an altar to foreign gods in the temple (2 Kings 16:10,11). Yet here he is considered by Isaiah to be a "faithful witness". It could be a different Uriah; or perhaps he lost his faith, or regained it- it's hard to work out when exactly Isaiah is speaking, before or after the time of 2 Kings 16:10.

Isaiah 8:3 I went to the prophetess, and she conceived, and bore a son. Then Yahweh said to me, Call his name 'Maher Shalal Hash Baz'- Mahershalalhashbaz means 'Speed the spoil, hasten the prey'. The idea is that

whilst Judah refused to repent, they were hastening the threatened judgments upon them; they were as the prey running towards the approaching Assyrian hunter, who was speeding towards them. There is a gap between God's threatened judgments and His fulfilment of them, but that gap can be reduced [or extended] by human behaviour. Things can be hastened or delayed; and Judah's impenitence was hastening the fulfilment (cp. Is. 60:22). God therefore said in this context that He was hastening the fulfilment of His word (Jer. 1:12). We can hasten the coming of the day of God (2 Pet. 3:12), for the elects sake the days shall be shortened, the bridegroom delays, yet the days of Amorite iniquity must still be 'filled up' to the required level before judgment comes... These kinds of verses show that some factors hasten the coming of judgment, others slow it down and delay it. The actual coming of the Lord Jesus will not be on some date which was arbitrarily predetermined, but rather on a day which is the result of some huge equation, considering and correctly weighting every factor in a way which only a Divine being could do.

Isaiah 8:4 For before the child knows how to say, 'My father', and, 'My mother', the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria- Judah saw Ephraim's spoil going into captivity, and yet Judah had spoiled innocent people but not been spoiled in return (Is. 33:1). Such was God's grace to them. The idea is that the wealth of both Damascus (Ez. 27:18) and Samaria would be carried away around the same time, and Assyrian inscriptions testify to this.

Isaiah 8:5 Yahweh spoke to me yet again, saying- "Yet again" reflects how the people had refused the offers of repentance and forgiveness so far made.

Isaiah 8:6 Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that go softly- The small brook within Jerusalem which Hezekiah used to give water to the faithful remnant within Jerusalem during the Assyrian siege. The New Testament "pool of Siloam" is the Greek name for the pool of Shiloah. The water was "soft", it was an apparently insignificant stream, but represented the spiritual water given in Christ (Jn. 4:10). Ps. 46:4,5 refer to the stream as symbolic of how "God is within" Jerusalem- just as Emmanuel means 'God is with us'. The reference is to the offer made in Is. 7:3, when Isaiah met Ahaz "At the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the fuller's field". The washer or fuller uses the same word for 'washing' as used in the context of cleansing from

sin (Ps. 51:2,7; Jer. 2:2; 4:14; Mal. 3:2). The suggestion was that they could repent and be cleansed of their sin; but they refused these waters which represented forgiveness (Is. 8:6).

And rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son- Yet we have just read in Is. 7:1,2 and will do again in Is. 8:12 that Ahaz and Judah were terrified at the prospect of being invaded by Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel, who had come up and besieged Jerusalem. How did they now "rejoice" in them? LXX has "... but wills to have Rassin, and the son of Romelias to be king over you". GNB offers "... and tremble before King Rezin and King Pekah". But if we stick with the Masoretic text, we can conclude that it is the ten tribes of Israel who are being spoken about in this verse. They had been offered the waters of Shiloah, the chance of cleansing in Jerusalem and Judah, but had refused it; and so they were to be destroyed by the Assyrians (:7); and that invasion of Israel was to "sweep onward into Judah" (Is. 8:8). Israel's refusal of the call to repentance, and subsequent judgment for this by the Assyrians, was to be an example to Judah; just as the judgment of others, both in Biblical history and our own contemporary experience, is to be a warning to us, to which we respond.

Isaiah 8:7 now therefore, behold, the Lord brings upon them the mighty flood waters of the River Euphrates: the king of Assyria and all his glory. It will come up over all its channels, and go over all its banks- The Assyrian invader is described as having wings and "glory" (Is. 8:7,8), both of which are terms associated with the Angel-cherubim, seeing that they were ultimately behind the invasion. All that happens on earth is somehow a reflection of, and is reflected in, the situation in the court of Heaven. This verse speaks of the Assyrian invasion of the ten tribes; see on :6. Hence "brings upon *them*".

Isaiah 8:8 It will sweep onward into Judah- The envisaged prophetic scenario was that the invasion and destruction of the ten tribes by Assyria would be at the same time as the invasion of Judah by Assyria, part of the same campaign, sweeping onward to them. This is also envisaged in Is. 17:3. Indeed according to Is. 10:7, "it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations" at that same time. But this isn't what happened. The prophecies offer various potential scenarios, which could be ameliorated, changed, hastened, intensified, delayed or cancelled because of God's extreme sensitivity to human repentance. This is why it's impossible to use Bible prophecies to construct a chronology of latter day events; there are so many variables. Not least the repentance of Israel, the

work of the faithful ecclesia in preaching the Gospel to the world and prayer for the Lord's coming- quite apart from the Divine pity which is at the core of His character.

It will overflow and pass through; it will reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, Immanuel- The waters of Euphrates were to rise until only the head of Judah, i.e. Jerusalem, was left uncaptured by the Assyrian invasion. Yet this is the very figure which the Messianic Ps. 69:1 uses in a prediction of Christ's crucifixion. There He was the One, the sufficient remnant, which enabled our salvation- just as Isaiah and Emmanuel had been in Isaiah's time. This means that the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied. As noted earlier on this verse, the potential prophetic scenario didn't happen in Isaiah's time as it might have done. The "Immanuel" Messianic figure was to be in the land when Judah was invaded and swamped by the same Assyrian campaign which destroyed the ten tribes; and that didn't happen, at the time. So it was rescheduled and reapplied. For the essence of God's word shall always come true.

Isaiah 8:9 Make an uproar, you peoples, and be broken in pieces! Listen, all you from far countries: dress for battle, and be shattered! Dress for battle, and be shattered!- All plans and schemes to resist the Assyrian invasion, trying to form power blocs against them, would fail. Resistance was futile; only the God who was with Judah (:10) could save. This was a tacit appeal for Israel and the surrounding nations to accept Judah's God. This is consistently the prophetic vision; that the surrounding nations would repent and join together as part of a revived Kingdom of God based in Judah.

Isaiah 8:10 Take counsel together, and it will be brought to nothing; speak the word, and it will not stand: for God is with us- Circumstances repeat in our experiences, so that we might learn, and see the same Divine hand at work. Because this very phrase is used of how the fleshly plans of Israel and Syria also did not stand (Is. 7:7). There is the same Divine hallmark in all His operations. The only salvation from the Assyrians was to be "Immanuel", God with us. But this prophetic scenario didn't completely come to pass; see on :8.

Isaiah 8:11 For Yahweh spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying- see on 1 Tim. 4:1. The strength of the Divine hand upon Isaiah was because he was clearly tempted to be caught up

in the spirit of panic which was in the society of Judah.

Isaiah 8:12 Don't say, 'A conspiracy!' concerning all about which this people say, 'A conspiracy!' neither fear what they fear, nor be terrorized- They considered that the conspiracy or alliance between Syria and Israel was too powerful for them to resist. So everyone was talking about this "conspiracy"; but the faithful were not to be caught up in the latest paranoia of a faithless society. And that again is a lesson for us.

The Hebrew *yare* means both fear / dread, and also reverence / worship. It is used for literal fear in Is. 8:12,13: instead of fearing the invaders, worshipping their fears, Israel were to be fearing God. Knowing the enveloping mercy of God should lead to a real fear of a God so gracious (Ps. 5:7). However, obedience to God's commands would lead to a fear of Yahweh's glorious and fearful name (Dt. 28:58); not the other way round, whereby fear of God leads to obedience. God's character is not just partly severe, partly gracious. His grace and His judgment of sin are wonderfully interconnected within His character.

Isaiah 8:13 Yahweh of Armies is who you must respect as holy. He is the one you must fear; He is the one you must dread- The heavenly armies of Angels were to be believed in, rather than the armies of their enemies. Fear, respect and dread here all effectively imply 'believe in'; for we believe in that which we fear. The fear of Yahweh's judgment is because of sin; it is our sin and its associated judgment which we should fear, more than any human threat to our existence. And if the fear of condemnation is now removed from us, then we can live boldly and confidently in this world, whatever we face in secular life.

The idea is that God's true people should not share the fears of the unbelieving world [of death, financial collapse etc.] but rather fear God. These verses are quoted and applied to us all in 1 Pet. 3:14,15. The idea of not fearing what men fear but rather fearing God is also in Lk. 12:4,5 and Is. 51:12,13. God being a rock of security for His people (:14) is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Pet. 2:8- as if to say that we are indeed in the same situation, tempted to fear the world's fear when all hearts are failing for fear, but our rock is the fact that the Lord Jesus died and rose for us and is coming again for our salvation.

Isaiah 8:14 He will be a sanctuary for both houses of Israel- The allusion is how the sanctuary was perceived as a place of asylum (Ex. 21:14; 1 Kings 1:50; 2:28,30). The implication was that Yahweh Himself would be this safe place. In

the immediate context, the reference is to how the faithful from both Israel and Judah, "both houses of Israel", fled for refuge from the Assyrians into Jerusalem. The unity of God's people was to be achieved by their joint experience of their desperation, their realization of their sin, repentance and forgiveness. These are the things which bind people together rather than on paper agreements. But the greater reference is to how God in His Son will be for the salvation of all Israel.

But He will be a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem- This didn't happen in Isaiah's day, in that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were spared; this judgment was ameliorated by the repentance and intercession of the remnant. But it did come true later in the Babylonian and Roman invasions; those who remained inhabiting Jerusalem did so in disobedience to the prophetic calls to leave the city, and so were consumed within it. They remained in the city because they believed that the Egyptians (with whom they had made a covenant) would break the Babylonian siege; and so again was fulfilled the warning that covenants with the Gentiles would be a snare to them (s.w. Ex. 34:12). And yet it is the idols of the nations which are repeatedly described as "a trap and a snare" for Israel; ""Yahweh" became that trap and snare because they worshipped those idols in the name of Yahweh worship. The day of the Lord will be a snare to the unsuspecting worldling, who will suddenly find that the Lord has come and destroyed him (Is. 8:14; 24:17,18; Jer. 50:24; Lk. 21:35). Yet the materialistic believer falls into the snare of riches here and now. Surely the point is that our attitude to riches is a preview of the judgment; the materialistic believer has condemned himself, right now.

Isaiah 8:15 Many will stumble over it, fall, be broken, be snared, and be captured- "Many" implies a remnant who would not stumble. I suggested on :14 that it was covenants with surrounding nations and accepting their gods which were the "trap and snare" for Israel and Judah in Isaiah's time. But like all things in the prophetic word, these things became reapplied to the things of the Lord Jesus, so that "Whosoever shall fall on this stone (Christ) shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Mt. 21:44). There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at His return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world. Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at His word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our

spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share His resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon Him, really feel the cutting edge of His word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment.

Isaiah 8:16 Wrap up the testimony. Seal the law among My disciples- This could be Isaiah's prayer to God for his disciples rather than God's command to Isaiah. A possible translation of Is. 8:16 is: “I will bind up the testimony, and seal the instruction by my disciples” [suggested by Dr. Martin Hengel]. The context is Isaiah speaking about his disciples in the school of the prophets he ran, and praying to God for them. "The testimony" may be that which was legally testified to in Is. 8:2. God was now hiding His face from the people (:17) and they were to be left without clear revelation from Him (Is. 6:9,10), and they would not have access to His word (see on :19). The sealing of the book in Daniel likewise means that understanding would be hidden. But Isaiah prays that the word of truth would remain amongst his disciples and immediate family (:18).

The implication could be that the disciples of Divine teaching are actually the seal or credibility of the instruction / testimony which the Gospel contains. Valid converts are therefore a sign of the validity of the preacher, and are therefore a qualification for eldership. The respect afforded to such converters / leaders should, however, be qualified by their meeting of the standards Paul lays down: e.g. their own natural children should be well led by them. The integrity and manner of life of those who converted us is what inspires us to carry on. Thus Paul urges Timothy to “continue” because he knew “of what persons” he had been taught them (2 Tim. 3:14 RVmg.).

Isaiah 8:17 I will wait for Yahweh, who hides His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him- The emphasis is upon "I". Yahweh would be hidden from the majority, but Isaiah and his family (:18) represented the remnant from whom He had not hidden His face, and who could look for Him and find Him whereas the majority could not (:21).

Isaiah 8:18 Behold, I and the children whom Yahweh has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Yahweh of Armies- The children could have been Isaiah's disciples. But the reference is more naturally to the children of sign, Immanuel and Mahershalalhashbaz, and to Shearjashub his other son (Is. 7:3), which means 'a remnant will return', whose name was used as an appeal for repentance in Is. 7:3; 10:21. The 'return' in mind is, I suggest, a spiritual return to God. That son was a "sign" to Judah and in a way, a witness to the mission and message of his father Isaiah. Just as Isaiah's son 'Immanuel' is alluded to in the statement in Is. 8:10 that "God is with us", so the idea of "Shearjashub' is in Is. 10:21,22: "A remnant shall return... to the mighty God". And practically, this found its outworking in Hezekiah's appeal to all Israel to 'return' unto Yahweh (2 Chron. 30:6). Those who responded came to live in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30:10,11)- and thus the promised "sanctuary" was created there. For many in the rest of the land died at the hands of the Assyrians; only those with Isaiah in Jerusalem were preserved. Because they sanctified Yahweh, He was a sanctuary for them (Is. 8:14). This preservation of the remnant in Jerusalem is a theme of Isaiah- it is alluded to in Is. 26:20 which speaks of coming into a place of refuge until the Assyrian invasion was passed: "Come, My people, enter into your rooms, and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation is past". Likewise Mahershalalhashbaz was a sign in that his name spoke of the coming judgment which Isaiah preached. The words forming his name are found in Is. 10:2,6 where we read of how Judah were to be prey and spoil for the Assyrian invaders. Emmanuel too was a sign, alluded to by Isaiah in Is. 8:10. He was a sign that God *is* with us. Trinitarians need to note that the child was not "God with us" but the *sign* that God *is* with us. 2 Chron. 32:7,8 shows how Hezekiah grasped the point, when he twice assures Judah that God *is* with us and they need not fear Assyria. This means that Isaiah and his wife (a "prophetess") and his three sons were perhaps the faithful remnant in Jerusalem alluded to in chapter 1, for whose sakes Jerusalem was spared. A faithful couple with three sons recalls the situation with Noah, for whose sake the 'earth' was spared total destruction, and this would explain the many allusions to the judgment of the flood in Isaiah. Here in chapter 8, the Assyrian invasion is explicitly likened to flood waters, and Is. 54:9 puts it all in so many words: "This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you".

The voice of the prophets didn't go entirely unheeded. A tiny minority

responded. Isaiah had his school of disciples, referred to in Isaiah 8. The books of the prophets were presumably written up (under inspiration) by their disciples, and the biographical sections added by them. So the very existence of the books of the prophets itself indicates they had some converts who hung on and valued their every word. And yet despite this, the prophets felt lonely men, despite the converts they made- Micah felt like a tree left alone, naked and bare at the end of Summer (Mic. 7:1). Jeremiah “sat alone” (Jer. 15:17). Not only was their perspective on human sinfulness so very different to that of their audience. They preached a message which was counter-cultural and attacked the very bases of the assumptions which lay at the core of individual and social life in Israel. They appeared to back Israel’s enemies. Their message was therefore rejected.

Heb. 2:13 applies Isaiah's words here to Jesus, making Isaiah a clear type of Christ, the faithful one by reason of whom Judah were spared from total destruction, as Isaiah 1 began by emphasizing.

Who dwells in Mount Zion- see on Gen. 33:5. There are references in Isaiah to the Lord-Angel- coming out of His dwelling place in the temple to punish the Assyrians; the sacrifices and prayers made "before the Lord" in the temple were thus made in the presence of this Angel. Such phrases as "The Lord of Hosts (Angels) which dwelleth in Mount Zion" (Is. 8:18) are common. Solomon's dedication of the temple emphasized the fact that God's Name dwelt there-which was carried by the Angel (Ex. 23:20,21), and that His eyes (Angels) were present in the house. Thus a literal Angel dwelt in the temple- see on Ps. 78:60.

Isaiah 8:19 When they tell you, Consult with those who have familiar spirits and with the wizards, who chirp and who mutter: shouldn’t a people consult with their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?- God was going to hide His face from them (:17), and like Saul when he had no revelation from God nor response to prayer, they would turn to the occult. We see here, as we do in Saul's huge efforts to get to the witch at Endor, the strength of the religious element within man. There is a desire for connection with the unseen, the supernatural and the Divine. There is therefore a hole in the human heart which only the true God can fill. But when He has been rejected, people still wish to turn to other forms of the supernatural. This is why atheism is but bravado; there is a nagging desire for connection with that beyond ourselves, arising from an innate dissatisfaction with our position and condition.

Isaiah 8:20 Turn to the law and to the testimony! If they don't speak according to this word- That which Isaiah taught to his sons and school of prophets (:16), which was no doubt challenged by the false prophets. There were clearly some in opposition to Isaiah, false claiming to speak prophecy from God, but which was in opposition to the testimony which Isaiah had perhaps literally written down and sealed (:16). Jewish tradition says that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh.

Surely there is no light in them- Keil: "they are a people for whom no morning dawns", perhaps hinting that they have no hope of resurrection to eternity in the Messianic Kingdom; or that the Messianic dawn which was potentially possible at the time didn't happen. Hence Luther: "If they do not say this, they will not have the morning dawn". Instead :22 says they will be sent out into the darkness of rejection.

Isaiah 8:21 They will pass through it, very distressed and hungry; and it will happen that when they are hungry, they will worry, and curse by their king and by their God. They will turn their faces upward- They would look up to God, only to look back down to the anguished earth (:22). Only Isaiah and his disciples would be able to look upward and find God: "I will wait for Yahweh, who hides His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him" (:17). The emphasis there is upon "I". Yahweh would be hidden from the majority, but Isaiah and his family (:18) represented the remnant from whom He had not hidden His face, and who could look for Him and find Him whereas the majority could not. That faithful minority would find food in the desolated land (see on Is. 7:22), but the majority would not; they would curse God and their king (Ahaz, in the initial possible scenario). This didn't happen as was potentially threatened; but it will come finally true in the last days for those condemned. See on :22.

Isaiah 8:22 and look to the earth, and see distress, darkness, and the gloom of anguish. They will be driven into thick darkness- The scenario envisaged didn't fully happen at Isaiah's time. Judah were saved from condemnation by grace, and the Assyrians were destroyed. But this language of condemnation will still come true, for it is quoted by the Lord Jesus about the final judgment and condemnation in darkness of the unfaithful within Israel (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Likewise distress upon the earth / land and hearts failing with anguish is applied by the Lord to the situation there in the last days, due to the Jews

refusing to believe in Him (Lk. 21:23,26)

Isaiah Chapter 9

Isaiah 9:1 But there shall be no more gloom for her who was in anguish- The allusion is to the anguish of childbirth. A new people and kingdom was to be brought forth from the suffering at the hand of the Assyrians. This was perceived by Hezekiah in Is. 37:3: "the children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth". The LXX implies that for the ten tribes (Zebulun and Naphtali) as well as Judah, the drinking of the cup of Assyrian judgment would bring forth a Messianic kingdom, if they now quickly repented: :Drink this first. Act quickly, O land of Zabulon, land of Nephthalim, and the rest inhabiting the sea-coast, and the land beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles". But Hezekiah let the baton drop and did not establish the restored Kingdom of God in Judah which was potentially possible.

In the former time, He brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time He has made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations- The present tense is used of what God was certainly going to do. The northernmost areas of the ten tribes, who had suffered most from the Assyrian invasion (2 Kings 15:29), were to be made glorious in the restored kingdom of Judah. Isaiah writes primarily about "Judah and Jerusalem", but all the major prophets envisage a repentant Israel and Judah united together in the new, restored Kingdom of God. This didn't happen as was prophetically possible at Isaiah's time. But there is the purposefully enigmatic suggestion here that this revival of Zebulun and Naphtali will be something to do with Galilee- the home area of the Lord Jesus, who would bring about the fulfilment. "The way of the sea" has been understood as referring to the region along the west side of the lake of Galilee, where the Lord did much work. It was in this very area that the Lord Jesus first proclaimed the Gospel, in fulfilment of this prophecy (Mt. 4:13).

Because God is beyond time, His prophecies appear to jump around in time; and that is also reflective of the conditional nature of prophecy, with various possible applications at different times, depending upon the potential realized amongst God's people. They only appear disjointed to us who read them with a background insistence that everything must be chronological. Thus the tenses change freely throughout Isaiah 53. And throughout Isaiah, prophecies of the Kingdom are often introduced by the rubric "in that day"; and yet the preceding context is often quite different (e.g. Is. 3:7,18; 4:1; 5:30; 7:18,21; 10:20,22; 11:10; 12:1; 17:9; 19:6; 22:20,25; 25:9; 27:13; 28:5; 29:18). It makes an interesting exercise to go through Isaiah 9 and decide to which time each verse

applies. Some of the verses are quoted in the NT and given specific fulfillments. They refer to Isaiah's day, the Assyrian invasion, the birth of Jesus, the beginning of His ministry at age 30, and to His future Kingdom. And yet the verses aren't presented in this order; they move from one to the other at ease, with no linking rubric or explanation. Likewise Daniel's prophecies seem to have a big hiatus in their fulfillment (Dan. 2:34; 8:23; 9:24; 11:39); and Zechariah is another good example. Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfillment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then :12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (Lk. 21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples).

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined- This could be seen as an invitation to perceive that light, hence LXX "O people walking in darkness, behold a great light". But they didn't. And so the returned exiles, "Zion", are asked at a later stage to arise and shine because their light had come (Is. 60:1). But again they didn't, and so these prophecies of a light coming are reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who was perceived by a new Zion as the light of the world.

The darkness of the context is that of Is. 8:22- the darkness of condemnation, for the rejected for whom there was 'no dawn' (Is. 8:20 Heb.). We can be condemned in this life and yet still change that verdict- by coming to the light of Christ. Chapter 8 concluded by speaking of the wicked being sent into the darkness of condemnation (a common figure in Isaiah, e.g. Is. 5:30; 9:19). Those who dwell in the dark shadow of death are therefore those who have been condemned- but for them, the light of Christ arose from despised Galilee and the area around the sea of Galilee (:1- "the sea" surely refers in the context to the sea of Galilee, not the Mediterranean).

The "great light" could initially have been a reference to the 'great' son of Isaiah

who was to be the saving king of Judah (:6). The holy one of Israel within Zion was to be "great" in distinction from the "great" [s.w.] king of Assyria who was as it were the anti-Christ, the opposite number of the "great" one within Zion, with his offers of a fake Kingdom of God (Is. 36:4,13).

Isaiah 9:3 You have multiplied the nation, but You have not increased their joy. They will rejoice before You according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil- Their joy not being increased is hard to square with the reference to their joy which follows. The idea may be that their prosperity at the time of Uzziah and Ahaz did not bring joy. But there was going to be great joy- because the Assyrian yoke would be lifted miraculously if they repented (:4). Keil & Delitsch render: “Thou multipliest the nation, preparest it great joy; they rejoice before Thee like the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they share the spoil". There was not such joy at the time because Judah and Israel didn't repent. And so "the joy of harvest" could have happened at the restoration from Babylon (Ps. 126:5,6). But again it didn't, and we read of the miserable restored exiles suffering famine and poor harvests because they refused to repent.

And so the prophecies were reapplied to the spiritual restoration of God's people in the Lord Jesus, the one from Galilee hinted at in :1. But there was not universal joy in Israel at Jesus of Nazareth- the prophecy was a potential possibility, but Israel chose not to fulfill it. Both Israel and Judah could have spoiled the Assyrians, but that didn't happen as it could have done; it had a limited fulfilment in the people of Jerusalem spoiling the tents of the dead Assyrians. And so the figure of spoil being divided was re-applied by the Lord Jesus to describe His victory over sin and sharing it with those who believe in Him (Mt. 12:29; Col. 2:15; 3:9 Gk.). Again, Israel should have rejoiced in this- but they generally did not.

Isaiah 9:4 For the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, You have broken as in the day of Midian- This was to be the reason for their joy and spoiling of the Assyrians (:3), with the burden of heavy taxation now lifted (Is. 10:27; 14:25).

The idea of breaking the yoke and destroying the oppressive burdens recalls Israel's suffering in Egypt (Ex. 2:11; Lev. 26:13), who were Israel's "oppressors" (s.w. Ex. 3:7 "taskmasters"). The reference to Midian's destruction (repeated in Is. 10:26,27) suggests that a small remnant, akin to Gideon's three hundred men,

would destroy a far greater military and political power which was dominating Israel. It calls for a military fulfilment, and this surely was the possibility in Isaiah's day. The righteous remnant were to release Judah from domination by the overpowering Assyria. But they did not fully achieve this, nor did they accept God's new covenant which was to be the basis for them never again being under yoke (Jer. 30:8; Ez. 34:27), and so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the victory of the Lord Jesus over sin (see on :4). His offer of *His* yoke in place of the *heavy yoke* carried by God's people surely alludes here (Mt. 11:29). And His spiritual victory will have its political and 'military' manifestation at Christ's return and His final liberation of Israel from their Arab oppressors.

Isaiah 9:5 For all the armour of the armed man in the noisy battle and the garments rolled in blood will be for burning, fuel for the fire- This is the scene of Ez. 39, when the weapons of Israel's invaders are burnt. Their bloodstained battle clothes will be burnt to cleanse the land. The language is reapplied to the last days. "The noisy battle" is the word for "earthquake". There was no earthquake recorded when the Assyrian army was destroyed outside Jerusalem; this is the language of the last days. "Fuel for the fire" is the same phrase found in :19, where this is to be the judgment upon Israel and Judah. The judgment that could then have come upon their enemies was to come upon them, because they refused to repent and thus precluded the prophetic potential of :5 from coming about.

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given- This sounds like the exaltation of parents at the birth of their child, and the initial application was to the joy of Isaiah and his wife at the birth of the promised child who could have been the saviour Messiah figure. But he was not (see on Is. 7:14; 8:1), and so the prophecy came to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. See on Is. 8:18. This is surely Isaiah's proclamation concerning his fourth son of sign, born to him and his prophetess wife (Is. 8:3). The son may be the same as 'Emmanuel'. Potentially, this son could've been the saving king of Judah. But that child didn't rise up to it, and so the prophecy will have a deferred fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. If Isaiah's disciples are understood as his spiritual children (Is. 8:16 cp. 18), then this spiritual child of Isaiah could refer to Hezekiah. But the child is not named because it failed to fulfill the prophecy.

And the government will be on his shoulders- Every step of the way along the

Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom, because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

Micah 5 speaks of Messiah being born and being smitten upon the cheek at the same time as Jerusalem is besieged and Judah has been invaded by the Assyrians. Whatever minor fulfilment this may have had in Hezekiah, it was pathetically incomplete- he wasn't born in Bethlehem, and he wasn't smitten upon the cheek with a rod. I read all this as meaning that Messiah could have been born and then suffered in such circumstances- but it didn't happen. The prophecy was fulfilled in essence, although in a different context and in a different way, in the Lord Jesus. Likewise Is. 9:6 speaks as if the birth of Messiah would be at a time of deliverance from Israel's invaders; yet Is. 9:13 RV implies this would only happen if they were obedient: "Yet the people hath not turned / repented".

His name will be called- All the exalted language about the child could therefore have been applied to Isaiah's newborn son; and Trinitarians should note that. "His name will be called..." all these things. This is not to say that He Himself by nature is all these things; they are titles. The titles are all relevant to a Divine deliverer who would arise to save Judah from their enemies and reestablish God's Kingdom in Judah.

At the judgment Jesus will give us God's name (Rev. 3:12); we then will fully carry the name of God. He calls this name, "My new name". Remember, Jesus gave the book of Revelation some years after his ascension into heaven and after he had been given God's name, as explained in Phil. 2:9. So he can call God's name "My new name"; the name he had recently been given. We can now properly understand Is. 9:6, where concerning Jesus we are told, "His *name* (note that) shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father...". This is a prophecy that Jesus would carry *all* the name of God - that he would be the total manifestation or revelation of God to us. It was in this sense that he was called 'Emmanuel', meaning, 'God is with us', although He personally was not God. Thus the prophecy of Joel 2 that men would call on the name of Yahweh was fulfilled by people being baptized into the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:21 cf. 38). This also explains why the command to baptize into the name of the Father was fulfilled, as detailed in the Acts record, by baptism into the name of Jesus.

Wonderful- "Wonderful" uses the word usually used for miracles, "wonders",

especially of Divine deliverance from enemies. And that is the context here (Is. 25:1).

Counsellor- He was to be the "counsellor" who would be the Divine answer to the wicked "counsel" of Syria and Israel against Judah (s.w. Is. 7:5).

Divine Warrior- The "warrior" (:5 AV) of their enemies could have been matched by a "Divine Warrior", a Messiah figure who could have saved Israel and Judah from this invasion. This shall come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. For "mighty God" (AV), see on Is. 10:21. Even if this translation is accepted, men are called "God" in the Bible, e.g. Moses.

This phrase is the same as 'Gabriel'. So can we conclude that at His ascension, Jesus took over the role of the Angel Gabriel? Thus until then the Angel Gabriel would have been a type of Jesus, and perhaps His guardian Angel. Maybe this implies that we will take over the role of our guardian Angel when we are glorified. Is. 9:6 also gives Jesus the title 'Wonderful'- which is the name of another Angel (Judges 13:18 mg.; or is this just another title of the Angel Gabriel?). Thus when Jesus was exalted above the Angels as explained in Heb. 1, Jesus took the names of the Angels as He took those of God Himself.

Father of the Eternal Age- The "eternal age" of the Kingdom of peace could have come at that time, with the Messianic son of Isaiah as the father of that eternal age. But it didn't. It was reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who because He never sought equality with God was given the Name above every Name, all the titles of the Father, in order to give glory to the Father (Phil. 2:8-11; the whole reasoning contradicts the Trinitarian dogma). To be a "father" of something means being the source of something; it doesn't mean that the person in view is therefore 'God the Father'. An eternal Messianic kingdom could then have been established; Judah were urged to repent and allow it to happen in Is. 26:4. And the same potential was there for the exiles who returned from Babylon (Is. 45:17; 65:18). And the "father" of that could have been a Messianic figure who arose in Jerusalem. But these potentials have been reapplied and rescheduled to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus to be established in Zion in the last days. The titles here, including "father", are applied to Eliakim in Is. 22:21; as noted there, Eliakim could have become a Messiah figure at the time, but he failed (Is. 22:25). So the prophecies were reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Prince of Peace- "Prince" is also a military term, used of the Assyrian generals in Is. 10:8; 31:9 (also s.w. Jer. 40:7 "the captains of the forces"). The Messianic prince of peace could have been the answer to them; but instead Judah preferred

to trust in the princes of Egypt (Is. 19:11). And so the Prince who would bring eternal peace from the surrounding enemies was a prophecy reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Is. 9:6 states that the Lord Jesus personally is "called" or "proclaimed" as peace. This is the same Hebrew word as in Dt. 20:10- Israel were to "proclaim peace" to cities they attacked, demanding either their submission or destruction. And yet *we* are the ones who "proclaim [the] peace" of Christ to men (Is. 52:7). Insofar as we represent Him in our witness, our hearers are faced with a radical choice- to submit to Him or eternally perish. It's easy to forget that this is how God sees it, as we witness to people. We're so used to the rejection of our message that we perhaps fail to see the eternal importance of the choice we lay before people; and this should impart a verve and urgency of appeal to our preaching, rather than an indifferent inviting of people to meetings, discussion, etc.

LXX has "and his name is called the Messenger of the great council". The members of this court of Heaven have various names- Holy ones (Hos. 12:1; Zech. 14:5); spirits (1 Kings 22:21-23; Ps 104:4); messengers/angels (Ps 91:11; 103:20); ministers (Ps 103:21; 104:4); servants (Job 4:18); those on high (Job 21:22); princes (Josh. 5:14; Dan 10:13). Supremely, Is. 9:5 LXX speaks of Messiah as "the Messenger of the Great Council" [*megales boules angelos*]. He was to be the vehicle through which Yahweh of Hosts of Angelic armies operated on earth to Israel's salvation.

Isaiah is full of allusions to Zoroastrian ideas (see on Is. 45:6), seeking to teach Judah the true position on these things. Thus it was taught that “Saviours will come from the seed of Zoroaster, and in the end, the great Saviour”, who would be born of a virgin, resurrect the dead and give immortality. These ideas are picked up in Is. 9:6 and applied prophetically to the ultimate Saviour, Jesus – as if to warn the Jews not to accept the prevalent Persian ideas in this area. Indeed as suggested on Is. 1:1, it appears that [under Divine inspiration] much of the Hebrew Bible was rewritten in Babylon, in order to deconstruct the ideas which Israel were meeting in Babylon.

The verse could be rendered: “And the wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, calls his name Eternal-Father, Prince of Peace..."- as if God gives His own titles to this son, which would fit admirably with what God gave to Jesus on His ascension (Phil. 2:7-11). If it is accepted that in the first instance, the child in view was the child of Isaiah and his wife, then we need not conclude that the

titles and Divine name given to the child imply that he was to be God Himself in person. The failure of the unnamed son of Isaiah to fulfill the intended role meant that the prophecy had fulfilment in Christ- which is in harmony with the interpretation I have offered for the preceding verses of the chapter.

Isaiah 9:7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, on the throne of David, and on his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness- As explained on :6, this was the Messianic kingdom which could have come in Isaiah's time. But the people of Judah preferred to continue in injustice and unrighteousness- two of the frequent complaints Isaiah makes about their behaviour. David did "judgment and justice" (2 Sam. 8:15; 1 Chron. 18:14), and yet David said that it was *God* who executed judgment and justice (Ps. 99:4; 103:6).

The idea is that the throne of David, i.e. the Davidic Kingdom, was to be restored- with God reigning through and manifested in the Messianic King, just as He had been in and through David in the past. The Kingdom of God will eternally increase, just as the little stone of Daniel 2 keeps expanding over the earth. It may imply that God's rulership over us will eternally increase, or that we will eternally be involved in expanding and increasing His Kingship [or Kingdom] over other entities, perhaps in the natural creation, or further throughout the infinite cosmos. Whatever, the essence of wanting to extend His Kingdom / Kingship should be programmatic for our lives now, in pastoral care, exhortation, encouragement and preaching work- as well as progressively submitting ourselves to His rulership. For this extension of His Kingship is what we shall spend eternity doing.

From that time on, even forever- AV "From henceforth even for ever". This eternal Kingdom was intended to start in Isaiah's time, through the work of his son (either his literal son, or his spiritual son / disciple Hezekiah). But it didn't- although the possibility and intention was there. Again, we conclude that the establishment of the eternal Kingdom was rescheduled for fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, the One who lived up to all God's hopes and prophetic expectations.

The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will perform this- "The zeal" is s.w. jealousy, envy. God's motivation was not because Judah were righteous but because He was jealous for His beloved but wayward people. The Hebrew word translated " zeal"

in the context of God's zeal for us (Is. 9:8) really means the jealousy which flares up in a man for a woman (the same word is in Num. 5:14,15; Prov. 6:34; Song 8:6 etc.). That jealousy burning like fire (Ps. 79:5) is His passion for us His people. He is a jealous God in His zeal for us; and therefore any other relationships with the things of this world cannot be contemplated by us. That zeal of God will be poured out upon us at the second coming, resulting in a consummation with Him as the wife of His covenant (Is. 42:13,14; 64:1). This is a figure which would be unseemly for a man to devise. But this is His passion for us, which the humility of God drives Him to use; and surely it will one day be revealed. To use this very figure of a man in love and consummating his relationship in marriage is so apparently inappropriate that it reflects the humility of God in even considering the use of it. We are God's heritage, His reward / wages (Heb.), His recompense for all His labour for us (Ps. 127:3 Heb.).

Isaiah 9:8 The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it falls upon Israel- The sending forth of Isaiah (s.w. Is. 6:8) was the sending forth of God's word to His people. Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh. The man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached.

Isaiah 9:9 All the people will know, including Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, who say in pride and in arrogance of heart- Israel had lost their hold on true doctrine, many scarcely knew the Law (Is. 57:4,5; 59:3). They got drunk at the temple feasts (Is. 36:10-12; 58:3,4), like Corinth they had an "eat, drink, for tomorrow we die" mentality (Is. 22:12,13); they committed all manner of sexual perversions, along with almost every other form of doctrinal and moral apostasy (Is. 5:11-13,24; 8:19; 9:15; 22:12,13; 24:5; 27:11; 28:7; 30:10; 31:6; 44:8-20; consider the similarities with Corinth). This list is worth reading through. And consider the terrible implications of their perversion in Is. 66:17. But the early chapters of Isaiah sternly rebuke Israel for their *pride*- there is not a whisper of all these other things until later (Is. 2:11-22; 3:16-20; 5:15; 9:9). And even throughout the later rebukes, there is the repeated criticism of their pride (Is. 13:11; 16:6; 23:9; 24:4; 25:11; 26:5; 28:1,3,14; 29:4; 30:25; 50:33; 57:15). This is why Isaiah's prophecies of Christ stress His humility (Acts 8:33), and the "lofty", "high", "exaltation" of God. These words, common in Isaiah, are those translated “pride" in Isaiah's condemnations of Israel's arrogance; as if to say that *God* was the only one who could be 'proud'.

The only other occurence of the phrase "proud heart" is in Is. 10:12, where this is said of the king of Assyria. Their hearts were no better than that of Sennacherib, and so they were punished as he was. In their hearts they were Gentiles.

Isaiah 9:10 The bricks have fallen, but we will rebuild with cut stone. The sycamore fig trees have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place- Israel were determined to overcome the effects of Divine judgment in their own strength; just as today men vainly battle every way they can to resist the effects of Divine judgment. LXX "and let us build for ourselves a tower" equates them with the builders of Babel / Babylon. And so an even greater judgment was to come upon them, at the hands of Babylon - Assyria.

Isaiah 9:11 Therefore Yahweh will set up on high against him the adversaries of Rezin, and will stir up his enemies- This suggests that the Rezin, the king of Syria, would have enemies who would unite against him (perhaps a reference to the latter day uniting of rebel factions against the Syrian regime), and yet at the same time would join with the Philistines (Palestinians) to be as the jaw of a beast closing upon Israel (:12). "Stir up" is really "join together", as AV. The enemies of Syria were going to join with Syria in devouring Israel (:12). We get a sense of politics and temporary alliances between groups which soon turned against each other, despite having Israel as their common enemy. This is precisely the situation we see in the *eretz* or land promised to Abraham today; these prophecies are coming to their latter day fulfilment. See on :19.

Isaiah 9:12 the Syrians in front and the Philistines behind; and they will devour Israel with open mouth- Again the image of a devouring beast represents the neighbours of Israel, acting as a wild beast towards her. And that continues throughout Daniel and Revelation. These ancient prophecies are beginning to be fulfilled in the last days, with Syria and the Palestinians / Philistines of the sea coast likely to crush an impenitent Israel.

For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still- Isaiah later uses this figure of His hand being stretched out still to describe how God stretches out His hand in appeal for repentance (Is. 65:2). As Emil Brunner observed, "the wrath of God is the love of God". His anger did not turn away exactly because it was His arm stretched out in appeal for Israel's repentance. The smiting of Israel by God's hand was in order that they might turn to Him (:13)- it was not any kind of vindictive anger. Our actions typically have only

one or two functions, whereas God is the God of boundless function. His words and actions therefore have multiple intentions and fulfillments- a feature often hard for us to comprehend.

Isaiah 9:13 Yet the people have not turned to Him who struck them, neither have they sought Yahweh of Armies- See on :6. God was the one behind all the enemies of His people. His hand was and still is stretched out against Israel until they turn to Him, which is why the end of Judah's final woes at the hand of her neighbouring enemies will be only when they turn to God in accepting His Son. His hand is stretched out against them *for* they do not turn unto Him (God) who smites them.

Isaiah 9:14 Therefore Yahweh will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed, in one day- Both the leadership ("the elder... is the head", :15) and the ordinary people were equally guilty, as 9:16 says in so many words, and as Isaiah opened his prophecy in chapter 1 by declaring, in his appeal to both the heavens and the earth. Following bad leadership is not, therefore, any mitigation for the sins committed by ordinary, mislead people. Verse 17 is chilling in this connection- widows and young orphans were all counted as equally guilty and were not spared. Even though God in other contexts is very much the defender of the widows and orphans. The intended judgment was to be "in one day"; suddenly, in moments, every sector of Israelite society was to be destroyed. But this isn't what happened. The various prophetic scenarios at the time didn't all happen; but they are reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 9:15 The elder and the honourable man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail- The false prophets of the last days in Israel were around in Isaiah's time, and according to Jewish tradition, they sawed Isaiah in half after Hezekiah died. His ministry was not without serious opposition from amongst his own people.

Isaiah 9:16 For those who lead this people lead them astray; and those who are led by them are destroyed- But in moral, ethical terms, those led astray were destroyed because they had been willing to be led astray. After all, Isaiah and his school of the prophets were giving them true teaching, and they chose to ignore that. "Destroyed" is better 'to devour'; the devouring of Israel by the beast of :12 was because they willfully followed their false prophets. 'Lead astray' is the

same word as in Is. 53:6: "All we like sheep have *gone astray*, we have turned every one to his own way". So although they were led astray, they had chosen this path, making the way of the false prophets their "own way". So they were not simply punished because of being naive, or listening to wrong information. There was more election in it than that.

Isaiah 9:17 Therefore the Lord will not rejoice over their young men, neither will He have compassion on their fatherless and widows; for each one is profane and an evildoer- See on :14. Their 'evil doing' was likely in not saying anything. As has been so often observed by those who have suffered from oppressive regimes, it is the silent majority who quietly tut-tut but do not oppose and thereby enable evil, who are in fact the most guilty.

And every mouth speaks folly- Isaiah and Hezekiah were alone in their faithfulness to Yahweh. The salvation of Jerusalem is explained in Isaiah 1 as only because of the existence of a faithful remnant, and that remnant was basically just Isaiah's family. Isaiah 1 and other chapters emphasize the total apostasy of Judah at this time. We note that it was because of their words that they were condemned; and that sensitivity to our language continues to this day (Mt. 12:37).

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still- See on :12.

Isaiah 9:18 For wickedness burns like a fire, it devours the briers and thorns- Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Yet "briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (here and Is. 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them (Is. 5:6; 7:23-25); and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Yes, it kindles in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke- The smoke columns caused by the invaders were actually kindled by the wickedness of God's people. The idea is that the fire spreads from individual thorn bushes and brambles to consume whole thickets of trees. Perhaps the idea is that individual apostasy called for individual judgment, but this spread to the whole nation. Not by any 'guilt by association', but insofar as personal example comes to influence the whole group.

Wickedness burns- The actual sin of the people is spoken of as the fire of judgment. Sin *is* condemnation. To choose to sin is to choose to live out condemnation and apply it to ourselves. The essence of final judgment is therefore going on right now in our behaviour.

Isaiah 9:19 Through the wrath of Yahweh of Armies, the land is burnt up; and the people are the fuel for the fire. No one spares his brother- "Fuel for the fire" is the same phrase found in :5, where this is to be the judgment upon the enemies of Israel and Judah. The judgment that could then have come upon their enemies was to come upon them, because they refused to repent and thus precluded the prophetic potential of :5 from coming about. As explained on :18, the people were both the fire and the fuel for the fire. What is envisaged here is a complete meltdown of relationships, with both Israel and Judah under attack by a group of neighbours who were enemies with each other but united against God's people (see on :11); and at the same time, Israel and Judah warring with each other. This didn't happen in Isaiah's time, and so the prophetic scenario has been recalculated and reapplied to other times and especially to the last days.

Isaiah 9:20 One will devour on the right hand, and be hungry; and he will eat on the left hand, and they will not be satisfied. Everyone will eat the flesh of his own arm- As explained on :19, the devouring of God's people by the mouth of the beast of her neighbours (:12) was to also involve God's people devouring each other. And finally, they would eat themselves. The LXX here appears to be alluded to in the New Testament, because the precise scenario here envisaged didn't quite come true in Isaiah's time: we can bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15), as the Jews did in their day of condemnation in the Babylonian invasion (quoting Is. 9:19,20 LXX; Jer. 13:14). By doing so we are acting out our own condemnation.

Isaiah 9:21 Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh; and they together shall be against Judah- This appears to be saying that Israel would be divided against itself, and also Israel would be against Judah.

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still- See on :12. What is envisaged here is a complete meltdown of relationships, with both Israel and Judah under attack by a group of neighbours who were enemies with each other but united against God's people (see on :11); and at the same

time, Israel and Judah warring with each other. This didn't happen in Isaiah's time, and so the prophetic scenario has been recalculated and reapplied to other times and especially to the last days.

Isaiah Chapter 10

Isaiah 10:1 Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers who write oppressive decrees- The writing in view may be the writing of legal judgments against the poor who were being abused (:2). God had already given His people decrees to live by, so they were effectively playing God by writing their own decrees. Jer. 8:8 seems to be saying that "the pen of the scribes" was replacing God's law. Judah precluded the reestablishment of God's Kingdom in Judah by this behaviour; and similar language is used of how the restored exiles didn't learn the lesson but acted in the same way (Is. 59:4). And so again, the opportunity to reestablish the Kingdom was precluded.

Isaiah 10:2 to deprive the needy from justice, and to rob the poor among My people of their rights, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey!- Spoil and prey are the very words used in :6 of what the Assyrians would do to Judah. But this what Judah had done to themselves; their condemnation was but an extension of how they had lived their lives. We too "make the answer now". We live life standing before God's judgment; if we are condemned at the last day, then we will have been living that way now.

Isaiah 10:3 What will you do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which will come from afar?- "The day of visitation" is interpreted as the day of the second coming of the Lord Jesus in judgment (1 Pet. 2:12). The intended day of judgment at the hand of the Assyrians was averted; but the repentance of the remnant which was responsible for this was not shared by the majority, so the essence of the prophecy shall come true in the last days.

To whom will you flee for help?- This is the phrase used of how the Philistines had fled to Egypt and Ethiopia for help (Is. 20:6). Judah had done just the same in fleeing to those same nations for help, rather than to their God. They had ignored 'Hezekiah', 'Yah is my help'. In other words, Judah gave in to the temptation which we acutely face today- to deal with our fears in the same way as the surrounding world does, rather than fall upon our God.

Where will you leave your wealth?- Under Uzziah and Ahaz, Judah had been prosperous, and they used that wealth to try to buy security against Assyria from Egypt and others. This is described in Ezekiel and Jeremiah as them being as an immoral prostitute who actually pays men to sleep with her.

Isaiah 10:4 They will only bow down under the prisoners, and will fall under the slain- The LXX simply has "that ye may not fall into captivity?". GNB "You will be killed in battle or dragged off as prisoners". This isn't what happened when the Assyrians invaded Judah; so much was averted because of the intercession and repentance of so few.

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still- Isaiah later uses this figure of His hand being stretched out still to describe how God stretches out His hand in appeal for repentance (Is. 65:2). Even if the Assyrian invasion of Judah had succeeded, God would still have been searching for their repentance. As Emil Brunner observed, "the wrath of God is the love of God". His anger did not turn away exactly because it was His arm stretched out in appeal for Israel's repentance. The smiting of Israel by God's hand was in order that they might turn to Him (Is. 9:13)- it was not any kind of vindictive anger. Our actions typically have only one or two functions, whereas God is the God of boundless function. His words and actions therefore have multiple intentions and fulfillments- a feature often hard for us to comprehend.

Isaiah 10:5 Alas Assyrian, the rod of My anger, the staff in whose hand is My indignation!- A pagan god looked after his own people against their enemies. But Yahweh of Israel sent and empowered Israel's enemies against them, and gave them victory against His own people; He encamped against His very own people (Is. 29:2-4). The archenemy of Israel, Assyria, was revealed as a rod in the God of Israel's hand, and the King of Babylon was Yahweh's servant who would come against Yahweh's own people (Jer. 25:9; 27:6 etc.). The will of Israel's God was that the capital city, seen by the people as the symbol and nerve center of a god's power and control, was to be destroyed by Israel's enemies (Jer. 34:1-5; 21:3-7). In the surrounding culture of Israel, capital cities were portrayed as women, the wives of the gods. They are always presented as pure and wonderful. But the prophets represent cities like Jerusalem and Samaria as fallen women, whores. It was all *so* counter-cultural. Yahweh's prophet even appealed for Israel to surrender when under siege (Jer. 21:8-10). Try to enter into how radical and counter-cultural all this was. The prophets were trying to share the feelings and positions of a God *so* vastly different to the imaginations and understandings of His very own people. The nervous stress of this, the psychological pressure, can't be underestimated. And we are asked to share the

spirit / mind / disposition of those prophets. Not only was God on the side of Israel's enemies; yet through all that, He somehow *was* with Israel; quite simply, "God is with us", even though it is He who encamps against them too (Is. 8:9,10; 18:4). The God of Auschwitz is somehow still the God of Israel. The very torment, even torture, of understanding that was etched clearly in the prophets, and it will be in us too.

Isaiah 10:6 I will send him against a profane nation- The word for "profane" is used about how Judah were polluted by idols and unfaithfulness to Yahweh with other gods (Jer. 3:2; Ps. 106:38 etc.). Hence the verse continues, to speak of God's related "anger". AV has "hypocritical", in which case we see how hypocrisy is a cardinal sin with God, just as proud body language is (see on :12).

And against the people who anger Me will I give him a command- This command was given from the court of Heaven. But surely Sennacherib was not consciously addressed. We see here how God works through human psychology. Sennacherib had his own agendas and motivations. But where do our agendas come from? From a complex web of personal history, desires made stronger by our experiences, our location in time and space, our genes... so many things. And yet God worked through all that to give this man a command to attack Judah. But see on :14.

To take the spoil and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets- Spoil and prey are the very words used in :2 of what Judah had done to themselves in abusing each other; their condemnation was but an extension of how they had lived their lives. For now this was what the Assyrians would do to Judah. We too "make the answer now". We live life standing before God's judgment; if we are condemned at the last day, then we will have been living that way now. A desire to take spoil and prey from Israel is the characteristic of the latter day Gog (s.w. Ez. 38:12), and we can therefore understand the Assyrian invasion here threatened to ultimately come about in the last days. For actually Assyria did not take a spoil and prey from Judah at this time, because the whole scenario was changed; due to the repentance of a remnant, the Assyrians never took Jerusalem and were destroyed by an Angel.

Isaiah 10:7 However he doesn't mean so, neither does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations- See on :11. Thus it was in

his heart to punish Israel and other nations; he didn't "mean" to solely punish Judah. Or we could read with LXX "But he meant not thus, neither did he devise thus in his soul: but his mind shall change, and that to destroy nations not a few". In this case, God put the idea in his mind when it was not in his plan; and we would then be exhorted as to the power God has to work directly on the human heart. According to Is. 8:8, the envisaged prophetic scenario was that the invasion and destruction of the ten tribes by Assyria would be at the same time as the invasion of Judah by Assyria, part of the same campaign, sweeping onward to them. Indeed as we learn here, "it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations" at that same time. But this isn't what happened. The prophecies offer various potential scenarios, which could be ameliorated, changed, hastened, intensified, delayed or cancelled because of God's extreme sensitivity to human repentance. This is why it's impossible to use Bible prophecies to construct a chronology of latter day events; there are so many variables. Not least the repentance of Israel, the work of the faithful ecclesia in preaching the Gospel to the world and prayer for the Lord's coming- quite apart from the Divine pity which is at the core of His character.

Isaiah 10:8 For he says, Aren't all of my princes kings?- He considered all his princes ought to have somewhere to reign over as kings. But LXX "And if they should say to him, Thou alone art ruler" suggests that if he were to be told that Yahweh alone is king, he would respond by saying that the cities he was planning to invade (:9) were his as much as the cities of his own existing empire. And there we would see the pride and arrogance against Yahweh which is focused upon as the reason for his destruction.

Isaiah 10:9 Isn't Calno like Carchemish? Isn't Hamath like Arpad? Isn't Samaria like Damascus?- See on :8. LXX "Have I not taken the country above Babylon and Chalanes, where the tower was built? and have I not taken Arabia, and Damascus, and Samaria?". He therefore considered that the kingdom of Judah was no different, thus despising Yahweh and treating Him as just another local city idol who was powerless before him (see on :10).

Isaiah 10:10 As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, whose engraved images exceeded those of Jerusalem and of Samaria- LXX "As I have taken them, I will also take all the kingdoms: howl, ye idols in Jerusalem, and in Samaria". It was sadly true that there were plenty of idols in Jerusalem (:11), as

well as the temple of Yahweh. Sennacherib reasoned that the gods of the surrounding nations had been powerless before him, and therefore Jerusalem would be likewise, because she had the same gods worshipped within her. And that was fair logic, on one level. Yahweh's salvation of Jerusalem from the Assyrians was therefore all the more an act of pure grace. However we could read him as thinking that Yahweh was a God without idols; other cities had more idols within them than Jerusalem did, and therefore she would be a walkover.

Isaiah 10:11 Shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?- See on :10. We have here a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words; see on Is. 3:8. These words were the 'fruit of his heart' (:12)- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. But see on :7.

Isaiah 10:12 Therefore it will happen, that when the Lord has performed His whole work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem- It was God who was going to hew down the temple in Zion, using Assyria merely as the axe in His hand (:15). The work of destroying Zion would be His work; and it would be the total finishing of Zion in completeness, so the Hebrew implies. Again we marvel at how much was averted by so few. We see the power of prayer and repentance.

He will punish the fruit of the wilful proud heart of the king of Assyria, and the insolence of his arrogant looks- The fruit of his heart were the words of :11 for which he was condemned; for by words are men condemned (Mt. 12:37), because they are reflective of the heart. And the state of the heart is of paramount importance to God. Israel were to be the light to the Gentile world around them, the righteous servant who showed light to the Gentiles. But they sadly failed. Note too how the prophets pointed out to Gentile nations their sins and failed responsibilities before the God of Israel (Am. 2; 9:7; Is. 10:5; Jer. 46; Ez. 27,29). We note here that out of all the things God could have condemned Assyria for (idolatry, viciousness, cruelty etc.), it is their proud hearts and associated body language which He focuses upon. This is how abhorrent is pride to the one God whose moral judgments and perspectives are alone of any importance to man on this earth. The only other occurrence of the phrase "wilful proud heart" is in Is. 9:9, where this is said of the ten tribes of Israel. Their hearts were no better than that of Sennacherib, and so they were punished as he was. In

their hearts they were Gentiles. Likewise the phrase "arrogant looks" is used of the Jews in Is. 2:11.

Isaiah 10:13 For he has said, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I have understanding: and I have removed the boundaries of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures. Like a valiant man I have brought down their rulers- The bringing down of Judah is described several times in Is. 2 as being Yahweh's work. He failed to perceive that he was acting on Yahweh's behalf. The fact he was culpable for this, and was punished for it, means that he ought to have looked at his career in life and perceived that the hand of Israel's God was in all this. But he refused to see that picture in his life, and became proud; the references to "my wisdom" may refer to the wisdom he thought he had from his gods. It is by reflecting upon the hand of providence in our lives that we are saved from pride. I noted on :12 that the sins of Sennacherib were essentially those of Israel; they are also condemned for trusting in "the strength of my hand" (Dt. 8:17 s.w.). See on :14.

Isaiah 10:14 My hand has found the riches of the peoples like a nest, and like one gathers eggs that are abandoned, have I gathered all the earth. There was no one who moved their wing, or that opened their mouth, or chirped- LXX "I will take with my hand all the world as a nest: and I will even take them as eggs that have been left; and there is none that shall escape me, or contradict me". This is tantamount to saying that he would not allow any "remnant" to escape; and yet the escape of a remnant from Judah was a major part of Isaiah's prophecies. The Hebrew is difficult, but the idea seems to be that he intended to totally empty the nest- taking both the eggs and the mother bird, so that there was not a sound from the nest; the mother bird would not chirp or flutter her wings when the eggs were taken, because she was going to be taken as well. This is specifically disobedient to Dt. 22:6,7; just as removing landmark boundaries of a neighbour (:13) was disobedient to Dt. 19:14. It's as if this Gentile king was being held responsible for breaking the Mosaic law. Perhaps the "command" he was given by God in :6 was a direct revelation, which made him therefore responsible to Yahweh's law. And therefore his disobedience was the more culpable. Or it could be that Gentiles are to some extent held responsible for breaking Divine laws and principles even if they don't know them.

Isaiah 10:15 Should an axe brag against him who chops with it? Should a saw exalt itself above him who saws with it? As if a rod should lift those who lift it up, or as if a staff should lift up someone who is not wood- As explained on :32-34, it was God's intention to hew down Zion. Only because He graciously counted the repentance of a remnant as the repentance of the nation was this plan changed (Jer. 18:8-10). As discussed on :14, Sennacherib apparently should have perceived that he was being used by Yahweh, but instead he purposefully refused to see this.

Isaiah 10:16 Therefore the Lord Yahweh of Armies will send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory a burning will be kindled like the burning of fire- As if he is being offered up as a sacrifice. What was so abhorrent to God was the proud glory of the Assyrians. Things like pride and proud language are enough to call down the most awful condemnations. The fatness of the Assyrians was to become lean; but fatness becoming lean is the very language used of what was to happen to the glory of Judah (Is. 17:4). By their arrogance they proclaimed themselves as no better than Gentiles, meriting the same judgment.

Isaiah 10:17 The light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame- Israel were to be the flame which destroyed the Assyrians. But instead an Angel did (2 Chron. 32:21), and God makes His Angels a flaming fire (Ps. 104:4). So the scenario foreseen in these judgments didn't come about exactly as it could have done had all Israel repented, rather than just a minority of them. Because of this, they weren't used as the fire; a single Angel was instead.

LXX "he shall sanctify him with burning fire". This may carry the hint that the fire of judgment would be intended to purify a remnant even from the Assyrians to join with a purified Judah in the reestablished Kingdom. That remnant is spoken of in :19.This is the consistent prophetic vision- that repentant Gentiles would be incorporated within the new, reestablished Kingdom of God. Sadly Hezekiah's attitude to Gentiles precluded this from happening, as he sought their acceptance rather than bringing them to Israel's God.

And it will burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day- Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Sin was its own judgment. "Briers and thorns" is a term used by

Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (here and Is. 9:18). Their whole land was to become like them (Is. 5:6; 7:23-25); and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Isaiah 10:18 He will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field, both soul and body- The Assyrian army is likened to a forest; they were to be cut down just as they intended to cut down the trees of Jerusalem; see on :33,34. They didn't actually get to do this, but they intended to; and were punished according to what they had intended to do. That God recognizes intention as action is a deep challenge as well as encouragement.

It will be as when a standard bearer faints- The idea may be of a sudden loss of heart and collapse of moral; exactly as happened when the Angel smote 185,000 soldiers in a moment.

Isaiah 10:19 The remnant of the trees of his forest shall be few, so that a child could write their number- I suggested on :17 that a remnant of the Assyrians were intended to be purified by the fire of judgment, and be incorporated within the reestablished Kingdom of Judah. But the record of the destruction of their army carries no such hint, and the record concludes in Is. 37 with the Assyrians continuing in their idolatry. The child who would write them may refer to the child of Isaiah spoken of earlier; see on Is. 8:18; 9:6. These things could have come true at that time, in the lifetime of that child; but human refusal to repent precluded them from happening.

This and the similar prophecy of desolation in Is. 7:23-25 didn't happen at the Assyrian invasion; it was reapplied to the situation after the Babylonian invasion, when the land was intended to rest (Lev. 26:34,43) until Judah repented. But even that program didn't work out, and so the Lord's parable of the vineyard explained that therefore the vineyard was given to a new Israel. See on :17.

Isaiah 10:20 It will come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel and those who have escaped from the house of Jacob- This is stated just after we have read on :17,19 of a remnant of the Assyrians surviving and turning to Yahweh. They were to join in the new people of God along with the repentant remnant of Judah and Israel, bound together in fellowship due to their common experience of forgiveness, grace and repentance. This didn't happen, but the essence of the

prophetic intention was fulfilled when both Jews and Gentiles were baptized into the Lord Jesus as "the hope of Israel". Is. 4:2 had spoken of how this "remnant" (s.w.) would be the basis of a revived kingdom of God in Judah, based around a Messianic "Branch", "in that day"- the day of Is. 4:1, when Jerusalem would be overcome and left in ruins with hardly any men left. These "survivors" are those saved from the ruins of a desolated Jerusalem, those who "escaped" the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 37:31); the same word is used in Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17, the "remnant" of Ez. 14:22 (s.w.). The destruction of Jerusalem was intended to elicit repentance and to lead seamlessly into a revived Zion and reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel, when again all things would be "glorious" (s.w. Is. 24:23; 35:2). But this didn't happen. Jerusalem was saved by grace, and yet Hezekiah failed to act as "Yahweh's branch", and Judah were impenitent, unmoved by their salvation by grace.

Will no more again lean on him who struck them, but shall lean on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, in truth- This was the bizarre thing; that Judah trusted in the gods of the Assyrians. To "lean" meant 'to trust'. Their acceptance of the Assyrian gods was not therefore a mere matter of political expediency; they 'leant' upon them. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and he uses this word to describe how Judah did "lean" upon Yahweh, claiming that therefore "no evil can come upon us", whilst at the same time worshipping idols (Mic. 3:11). We see here how we can make a profession of faith, even adhering to a 'statement of faith'- when in fact we don't have faith at all, but rather trust in secular strength. Faith, like every spiritual virtue, has both an apparent form, and a real form.

Isaiah 10:21 A remnant will return, even the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God- This is a play upon the name of Isaiah's son Shearjashub. "Shearjashub" means "a remnant shall return" (see on Is. 7:3). As is made explicit in Is. 7:14 and Is. 8:18, Isaiah's children were 'signs'. The message of Shearjashub was that a remnant would repent / return; and Isaiah in Is. 7:3 was asking Ahab to be part of that remnant, and to repent of his faithless attitude. "The mighty God" is the title of Isaiah's son in Is. 9:6 (s.w.). The remnant would repent and come to this Messiah figure. But these potentials didn't happen, and Isaiah's children remained but "signs" (Is. 8:18), pointing forward to the future work of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 10:22 For though your people, Israel, are like the sand of the sea, a remnant of them shall return- The idea was that the majority of God's people

would be killed, and the remnant that survived would return / repent (s.w.) as a result of the humiliation at the hand of the Assyrians. Their being the seed of Abraham "like the sand of the sea" was not going to save them; they would perish all the same. This level of destruction and repentance didn't happen, although it was the prophetic potential that it could have done. And so the prophecy is reapplied to the repentant of a remnant of Israel who will accept Jesus as Christ, especially in the last days (Rom. 9:28).

A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness- LXX "He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness". Paul quotes this version in the New Testament, again providing more evidence that the LXX is usually quoted over the Hebrew, Masoretic text by the inspired New Testament writers. Rom. 9:28 (see notes there) quotes this, and yet mixes in allusion to Mt. 24:22 "For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened... [or else] there should no flesh be saved". This means there will be a shortening of the originally intended prophetic program in the last days. Yet again we see that God's program is open ended and elastic, in response to a whole raft of factors. Paul quotes this verse from Is. 10:22 along with Is. 1:9,10 about a faithful remnant of Judah being preserved. The destruction determined was to result in righteousness through the repentance of the remnant; but this process of destruction has to be cut short for it to achieve this end. The implication is that they would be so slow to respond to it that they would all be consumed before they repented, and "righteousness" was achieved.

Isaiah 10:23 For the Lord Yahweh of Armies, will make a full end as already determined, in the midst of all the earth- The midst of all the earth / *eretz* refers to Zion. It was God's plan to destroy the temple at the hands of the Assyrians in Hezekiah's time (see on :32-34). But He relented of it, and so the prophecy was deferred until later; and the essence of it, until the last days. God intended to make a full end of Zion and Judah at the hands of the Assyrians; but he didn't. Various factors played their part- the repentance and intercession of a remnant, the evil of Assyria precluding their further usage by God, etc. Very similar language to Daniel 9:26 occurs in Is. 10:23: “For a complete destruction, one that is decreed, shall the Lord of Hosts execute in the midst of the land”. The context is speaking of “the Assyrian”. The same language of the last days is found in Is. 28:22: “a final destruction on all the earth.” The latter day antichrist is therefore modeled upon the “Assyrian” of the Old Testament. Note that “the man of sin” of 2 Thess. 2:8 alludes to “the wicked one” of Is. 11:4 LXX, who is, again, “the Assyrian”! So it would appear very likely that the antichrist figure is

somehow associated with ‘Assyria’. And what’s going on in Iraq and the territory of ‘Assyria’ right now is gripping the whole world’s attention. Note how the Assyrian is described in Is. 30:31–33 as being thrown into a lake of fire – just as the future beast will be (Rev. 19:20).

Isaiah 10:24 Therefore the Lord Yahweh of Armies, says: My people who dwell in Zion, don’t be afraid of the Assyrian, though he strike you with the rod, and lift up his staff against you, as Egypt did- The language is ambiguous as to whether they need fear the Assyrians or not; hence LXX "Be not afraid, my people who dwell in Sion, of the Assyrians, because he shall smite thee with a rod: for I am bringing a stroke upon thee, that thou mayest see the way of Egypt". There could be the implication that the Assyrian would not strike them with the rod if they repented. Or perhaps it is specifically the faithful remnant who are being addressed- God's people who dwelt in Zion.

Isaiah 10:25 For yet a very little while, and the indignation against you will be accomplished, and My anger will be directed to his destruction- God's anger was going to come, and the majority of the population were intended to perish (:20). But God urges the faithful remnant in Zion (:24) to be assured of their own safety; the destruction of the majority was to happen suddenly, in only "a very little while". This is the situation of Is. 26:20, when the faithful minority would somehow be miraculously preserved in Zion, whilst the majority of the Jewish population were destroyed. This didn't happen as planned, and the Assyrians never took Jerusalem. But the essence of it will be fulfilled in the last days.

Isaiah 10:26 Yahweh of Armies will stir up a scourge against him, as in the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb. His rod will be over the sea, and He will lift it up like He did against Egypt- The lifting up of the rod by Moses led to the sea destroying the Egyptian army. And the same was to happen to the Assyrians. But :28-34 go on to describe how Assyria would capture Zion. It could be therefore that this destruction of Assyria was to come *after* that. Or it could be that here God foresaw how in fact Assyria would be destroyed so that the prophecies about the fall of Zion at this time would *not* come true. The chronology of the text is therefore bound to be confusing, because so many different possible outcomes are being carried in mind.

The Assyrian was to be destroyed by stirring or (Heb.) raising up a scourge

against him, just as he had been a scourge to Judah (Is. 28:15). This is the word used in Is. 41:2,25; 45:13 of the raising up of a Messianic saviour figure who would deliver Judah from her Assyrian oppressors; Micah, contemporary with Isaiah, has the same in view (Mic. 5:5). This didn't happen, and Hezekiah let the baton drop in any case. So it is rescheduled and reinterpreted in fulfilment to the raising up of the Lord Jesus to save latter day, repentant Judah.

Isaiah 10:27 It will happen in that day, that his burden will depart from off your shoulder, and his yoke from off your neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing oil- The reference to Midian's destruction (repeated in Is. 9:4) suggests that a small remnant, akin to Gideon's three hundred men, would destroy a far greater military and political power which was dominating Israel. It calls for a military fulfilment, and this surely was the possibility in Isaiah's day. The righteous remnant were to release Judah from domination by the overpowering Assyria. But they did not fully achieve this, nor did they accept God's new covenant which was to be the basis for them never again being under yoke (Jer. 30:8; Ez. 34:27). The burden of the Assyrians was to be removed by them being trodden down upon the mountains [an intensive plural for the one great mountain] of Zion (Is. 14:25). But they never got into Zion, and were not trodden down there. And so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the victory of the Lord Jesus over sin (see on :4) and the latter day Assyrian. His offer of *His* yoke in place of the *heavy yoke* carried by God's people surely alludes here (Mt. 11:29). And His spiritual victory will have its political and 'military' manifestation at Christ's return and His final liberation of Israel from their Arab oppressors.

The salvation because of the anointing oil suggests that a messiah ['anointed one'] figure could have saved Judah at this time; but the fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the same message as in Mic. 5:4,5.

Isaiah 10:28 He has come to Aiath, he has passed through Migron; at Michmash he stores his baggage- "Migron" is LXX Megiddo. The mention of Michmash recalls Jonathan's brave victory there; and the history of that time is also alluded to in :29. The idea may be that a faithful remnant, such as Jonathan, Samuel (:29) and David, could bring about the defeat of powerful oppressors.

Isaiah 10:29 they have gone over the pass; they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah trembles; Gibeah of Saul has fled- see on :28. LXX "Fear shall

seize upon Rama, the city of Saul". It was the city of Samuel; but the historical image presented is of Saul desperate to hear God's word from Samuel and not hearing it.

Isaiah 10:30 Cry aloud with your voice, daughter of Gallim! Listen, Laishah! You poor Anathoth!- These were villages on the northern approaches to Jerusalem. The exhortation to "cry aloud" may be an appeal for them to repent and avert the threatened catastrophe; and perhaps they did, and so the Assyrians never took Jerusalem.

Isaiah 10:31 Madmenah is a fugitive, the inhabitants of Gebim flee for safety- The villages near Jerusalem were depopulated as everyone fled before the Assyrian advance.

Isaiah 10:32 this very day he will halt at Nob. He shakes his hand at the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem- We could read this as describing the Assyrians besieging Jerusalem, and expressing their intentions to destroy the temple on Zion. But LXX offers "Exhort ye them to-day to remain in the way: exhort ye beckoning with the hand the mountain, the daughter of Sion, even ye hills that are in Jerusalem". This would then be an appeal for repentance, and for the remnant who had repented to "remain in the way". For this was the way to avert the destruction of the temple described in :33,34. And indeed it seems this appeal was heard by a minority, who were significant enough for that destruction to be averted.

Isaiah 10:33 Behold, the Lord Yahweh of Armies will lop the boughs with terror. The tall will be cut down, and the lofty will be brought low- As explained on :34, it was the Divine plan for Assyria to destroy the temple. Is. 2:13 likewise associates the destruction of the temple with the bringing down of Judah's pride. The "High and lifted up" temple of Is. 2:13 uses the same phrase for the exaltation of Yahweh in glory in Is. 6:1. What is high and lifted up in human eyes was and is to be brought down before the glory of Yahweh. This language of cutting down Judah like trees paves the way for the next prophesy in Is. 11, which envisages the Messianic shoot sprouting forth out of the cut down stump of the house of David.

Isaiah 10:34 He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One- The cedars of Lebanon in the temple became iconic, to the point that they are put by metaphor for the temple itself (Zech. 11:1). Judah were so proud of the temple (see on Jer. 7:4). The destruction of the temple was required to humble Judah. Clearly the message is that the Assyrians would surround and threaten Zion (:32)- and then demolish the temple. But this didn't happen. It was intended to; but the prayer, repentance and spirituality of a remnant meant this didn't happen. This accords with the principle of Jer. 17:8-10; that God may state His purpose, but in the gap between statement and realization, there is the opportunity for repentance so that the intended outcome will not happen.

Isaiah Chapter 11

Isaiah 11:1 A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit- As explained on Is. 10:33, it was the original Divine intention that the Assyrians would take Jerusalem and cut down the cedars of Lebanon associated with the temple. That language of cutting down Judah like trees paves the way for this next prophesy in Is. 11, which envisages the Messianic shoot sprouting forth out of the cut down stump of the house of David. But things worked out differently. The temple was not destroyed at that time, and so the planned shoot didn't come forth; the potential may have been that a son of Isaiah developed into this figure, or perhaps Hezekiah (see on Is. 7:6; 8:1,18). And so the Messianic potential was reapplied to the time of the restoration, and then finally to the Lord Jesus.

When Zedekiah was taken into captivity (Ez. 17:20), it was prophesied that “a tender one” (Messiah- Is. 11:1; 53:2) would be planted “upon an high mountain”, and grow into a tree in whose shadows all animals would live (Ez. 17:21,22). This is clearly the Messianic Kingdom (Lk. 13:19). This young twig at the time of the captivity was surely Zerubabbel, and the “high mountain” upon which his Kingdom could have been established is surely he “high mountain” of Ez. 40:2 where the temple could have been built. Yet the prophecy had to suffer a massive deferment until its fulfilment in Christ.

It seems that Haggai and Zechariah returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in order to prepare the way for Zerubbabel- they were therefore the primary fulfillment of the prophecies of an Elijah-type prophet heralding the coming of the Messiah king. Zerubbabel failure therefore meant that their ministry was re-scheduled and fulfilled in the work of John the Baptist. Zerubbabel is called “the branch” (Zech. 3:8; 6:12; Jer. 23:5,6), and this obviously invites connection with the prophecy of a branch / Messiah who would grow out of the cut down stump of Jesse (Is. 11:1). Again, Zerubbabel fits the picture perfectly. The house of David had been cut down in judgment, but the prophesied branch would not be from the royal line of Kings- but rather simply from the ‘stump’ that had been left, i.e. a descendant of Jesse who was not in the direct line of kings. Mic. 5:2 speaks of a similar person- a Messiah-king who would be from Bethlehem, i.e. the family of Jesse, rather than from Jerusalem where the royal line of kings were born. His origins would be “from old”- i.e. a person who is still a descendant of Jesse, but not in the direct line of kings. But despite all this, yet again we come to the sad realization that Zerubbabel like his people simply didn’t live up to it; and the

prophecies came to be fulfilled finally in Jesus. He could have been Yahweh's signet ring (Hag. 2:23), His specially favoured son- but he baulked at the height of the calling.

Isaiah 11:2 The Spirit of Yahweh will rest on him- The Spirit was also to rest upon the dry bones of Ezekiel 37, causing the exiles to revive and become a reformed Kingdom of God in Judah (Ez. 37:1,14). Although the envisioned Messianic figure didn't arise in Hezekiah's time, he could have arisen at the restoration. But all these possibilities weren't realized, and so the ultimate fulfilment was in the Lord Jesus.

The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh- This makes six endowments of the Spirit, and the general mention of the Spirit resting upon him in the first part of the verse makes seven. Seven spirits resting upon a Messiah figure is the language of what could have happened at the restoration through Zerubbabel (Zech. 3:9; 4:2). Again we see that the Messianic figure could have appeared at various stages, but human dysfunction precluded this happening. Yet all this comes to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. Indeed "the seven spirits" of Rev. 1:4 could be read as a title of the Lord.

Isaiah 11:3 His delight will be in the fear of Yahweh- AV "Of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord". James alludes to this: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19 RV). If we are truly born by the word then we will swift to hear it, as the Lord Jesus was of quick understanding in the word. We will share His aptitude for it, and we will be slow to speak anything else. For He is but the epitome of personalization of the entire body of Christ.

The Lord Jesus is right now "quick to discern the thoughts and intents of [our hearts]" in mediating for us (Heb. 4:12 RV). But this is how He was in His mortal life here- for then He was "of quick understanding" too (Is. 11:3 is applied to Him then). He would have had a way of seeing through to the essence of a person or situation with awesome speed- and this must have made human life very irritating for Him at times. But who He was then is who He is now. It's the same Jesus who intercedes for us in sensitivity and compassion. Note carefully the tense used in Heb. 4:15: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities". It doesn't say 'which could not have been touched...', but rather "which cannot [present tense] be touched". It's

as if He is *now* touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Which opens a fascinating window into what having God's nature is all about. When we by grace come to share it, it's not just that we will dimly remember what it was like to be human.

He will not judge by the sight of his eyes, neither decide by the hearing of his ears- Judging and deciding are the same Hebrew words used in Is. 2:4. Again, the picture of the restored Kingdom of God we meet there could have come about after the arising of a Messianic figure who would save Judah from the Assyrian in Hezekiah's time.

Isaiah 11:4 But with righteousness he will judge the poor, and decide with equity for the humble of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth- In contrast to the unjust and faulty leadership Judah had at the time. And it was Messiah and not the Assyrian who was now going to strike the earth with His rod (Is. 10:5,15). There was to be a replacement of the Assyrian king with Israel's Messiah.

And with the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked- Note that “the man of sin” of 2 Thess. 2:8 alludes to “the wicked one” of Is. 11:4 LXX who is, again, “the Assyrian” in the initial context. So it would appear very likely that the antichrist figure is somehow associated with ‘Assyria’. And what’s going on in Iraq and the territory of ‘Assyria’ right now is gripping the whole world’s attention. Note how the Assyrian is described in Is. 30:31–33 as being thrown into a lake of fire – just as the future beast will be (Rev. 19:20).

Isaiah 11:5 Righteousness will be the belt of his waist and faithfulness the belt of his loins- This was the clothing and symbolism of the High Priest; but we have in view here a king-priest, after the order of Melchizedek. Zerubbabel could have met this requirement, but he too failed, and so the prophecy came to total fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

Paul’s description of the warrior of the Gospel in Ephesians 6 composites together various descriptions of Messiah’s clothing in the servant songs (Is. 11:5 = “loins girded with truth”; Is. 49:2 “mouth like a sharp sword”; Is. 52:7 “bring good tidings / publish salvation” = “the preparation of the Gospel of peace”; Is. 59:17 “breastplate of righteousness”; Is. 59:17 “helmet of salvation”). We are to be Christ to the world.

Isaiah 11:6 The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together; and a little child will lead them- This section of Isaiah repeatedly mentions "a child". As noted on Is. 7:6; 8:1,18; 10:19, this child could have been Isaiah's specially predicted son, in whose childhood the Kingdom could have been restored, perhaps with a reduction of the curse amongst the animal creation. But as noted on :7, the wild animals can be understood as representing the nations around Judah who are now at peace with her and her Messiah; and thereby also with each other. But this didn't happen, and so the prophecy will come to a much grander fulfilment in the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus on earth.

Isaiah 11:7 The cow and the bear will graze, their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox- The lions in Is. 5:29,30 clearly represent the Babylonians and Assyrians; but here the prophetic hope was that the young lion would be tamed and live in Zion. The vision was of Judah's enemies being judged and repenting, and coming to live in the restored Kingdom. Wild beasts were symbolic of Israel's enemies (see on Is. 5:5). But the idea is that they would become harmless, and through repentance as a result of their judgment, come to live in God's restored Kingdom. This was precluded at Isaiah's time by Hezekiah's wrong attitude to the Babylonians, and Judah serving their gods rather than bringing them to Israel's God. And so the prophecy will come to a much grander fulfilment in the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus on earth.

Isaiah 11:8 the nursing child will play near a cobra's hole, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den- I suggested on :6 that this child could have been Isaiah's specially predicted son, in whose childhood the Kingdom could have been restored, perhaps with a reduction of the curse amongst the animal creation.

Isaiah 11:9 They will not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain- The situation in mount Zion would reflect that in "the earth" / land of Israel- there would be no destruction on mount Zion *"for* the earth / land will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh". No longer would human sacrifices be offered there; the sins of Israel would no longer be repeated in the new Kingdom envisaged here. Destruction on Zion has been a theme of Is. 10:32-34; there was envisaged there the destruction

of both Israelites and Assyrians on that mountain. But "nor shall they at all be able to destroy any one on my holy mountain" (LXX).

For the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea- This stands in contrast to how the land was "full" (s.w.) of idolatry and trust in human philosophy (Is. 2:6,7). The descriptions of the restored Kingdom are so often expressed in terms of how spiritually, this would be the reversal of the unspiritual situation then extant in the earth / land of Israel. "The knowledge of Yahweh" doesn't so much refer to correct doctrinal knowledge as to the Hebraic 'knowing', referring to relationship. This relationship with Yahweh would be throughout the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham; there would be no person or geographical spot which held out against it. Absolutely everyone who survived the conflict around Mount Zion would enter covenant relationship or "knowledge of Yahweh".

Isaiah 11:10 It will happen in that day that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who stands as a banner of the peoples- "The nations", referring usually to those immediately around Judah, those within the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham, would seek this Messiah figure. This explains how the universal knowledge or relationship with Yahweh of the previous verse comes about. This didn't happen at the time; but His standing as a banner or ensign is alluded to in the figure of the Lord Jesus being lifted up on the cross as an ensign on a pole, and all believers coming to Him there in faith / trust. Hence the LXX "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall arise to rule over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust, and his rest shall be glorious". This is quoted in Rom. 15:12 about Gentiles in this dispensation believing in the Lord Jesus. We note again that the inspired New Testament writers prefer to quote the LXX when it differs with the Hebrew text. For "in him shall the Gentiles trust" is in the LXX but not the Masoretic text.

And his resting place will be glorious- This could simply refer to a literal appearance of glory upon mount Zion, as hinted at in several prophecies. But this was precluded at the time by Judah refusing this "rest" (Is. 28:12 s.w.). Or His resting place could be the hearts of those who "trust" in Him (Is. 66:1,2 s.w.), a resting place chosen by Him because the temple on Zion had not been rebuilt as required and therefore God chose to dwell in the hearts of individuals instead.

Isaiah 11:11 It will happen in that day that the Lord will set His hand again the

second time to recover the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea- see on Zech. 12:4. For "Pathros" LXX has "Babylon". These areas included the areas where the ten tribes had been taken captive, and where it was envisaged Judah would also be taken. The prophetic potential was that at the restoration of the Kingdom, all God's people would be gathered together, along with repentant Gentiles, united by the joint experience of conviction of sin, forgiveness and God's grace. And to this day, that is the basis of unity; "doctrine divides, experience unites", as Paul Tournier put it. Their impenitence at the time of Isaiah and the restoration from Babylon precluded this regathering; they did not return to God, and so He did not return them to their land. But "His hand", His powerful activity, was potentially ready to do this; and it is outstretched to all Israel to this day. This is why the repentance of Israel is critical to the reestablishment of the Kingdom in our days.

Isaiah 11:12 He will set up a banner for the nations and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth- As explained on :10, this ensign was refused by the Gentiles and the outcasts of Israel; and so the banner or ensign is alluded to in the figure of the Lord Jesus being lifted up on the cross as an ensign on a pole, and all believers coming to Him there in trust / faith (see on :10). The whole congregation (LXX *ekklesia*) of Israel were "gathered together" before the smitten rock, which "was Christ" crucified (Num. 20:8 cp. 21:16; 1 Cor. 10:4). The “ensign", the pole on which the brazen serpent was lifted up, would draw together the scattered individuals of God's people; and as stricken Israel were gathered around that pole, so the lifting up of the crucified Christ brings together all His people (Jn. 12:32 cp. 3:14).

We note that the repentant of the nations as well as Israel and Judah were to all come to that banner or ensign. The ensign was the rallying point for a tribe, and they would together become a new tribe or nation / *ekklesia* in the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 11:13 The envy also of Ephraim will depart, and those who persecute Judah will be cut off. Ephraim won’t envy Judah, and Judah won’t persecute Ephraim- All God's people would be gathered together, along with repentant Gentiles, united by the joint experience of conviction of sin, forgiveness and

God's grace. And to this day, that is the basis of unity. All interpersonal frictions, envy (jealousy), the perceived need to settle old historical scores... fade into irrelevance if we genuinely have these experiences of reconciliation with God. Our vertical binding with Him naturally outflows into horizontal bonding with others who have tasted the same grace; as John's letters make clear. We note that in Isaiah's time, it was Israel (Ephraim) who had persecuted Judah, even besieging Jerusalem. So Judah's persecuting of Ephraim refers to their desire for vengeance for that. But that would be no more in their hearts if they accepted the new covenant of grace and accepted their own sins.

Isaiah 11:14 They will fly down on the shoulders of the Philistines on the west. Together they will plunder the children of the east. They will extend their power over Edom and Moab, and the children of Ammon will obey them- The vision of a greater, reestablished Kingdom was of dominance over the surrounding nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. Israel and Judah "together" would do this, flying down as if in perfect league with the cherubim armies of Heaven.

Isaiah 11:15 Yahweh will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with His scorching wind He will wave His hand over the River, and will split it into seven streams, and cause men to march over in sandals- We noted on :11 that if the exiles wished to return / repent, then God's hand was ready to work mightily to literally return them to the land. Just as with a strong east wind He had dried up the Red Sea, called here "the tongue of the Egyptian sea", so He could dry up "the River", Euphrates, to allow the ten tribes and Judah [envisioned as going into captivity in Babylon] to return. As they wore sandals which didn't wear out to cross the Red Sea, also part of the miracle, so God would miraculously provide all the human side of things for this great exodus to happen. We note that here and in :12, God foresees that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon; as later Isaiah recognizes. The great possibilities at Hezekiah's time would not come about; and yet God appears to hope against hope that once they had suffered in Babylon, they would finally learn their lesson. The essential hopefulness of God for humanity is our pattern.

Isaiah 11:16 There will be a highway for the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, like there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt- LXX reads "Egypt" for Assyria here. Egypt was always attractive for the Jews; they trusted in Egypt and some even fled there, seeking help from

Egypt rather than from their God. The significance of the highway is therefore that God would give the opportunity for spiritual repentance and return to Him; playing on the idea that the Hebrew word for "return" is also used for repentance. Just as He could dry up the Euphrates for the return to happen from there, so He could build a highway in the desert. But there was no literal highway built for Israel when they left Egypt. Yet they had God's guidance, and therefore the unchartered desert was in fact a direct highway- for those with faith to perceive it. And the apparent random twists and turns of our lives must be understood by us in that same way. It's all in fact a direct highway.

Isaiah Chapter 12

Isaiah 12:1 In that day you will say, I will give thanks to You, Yahweh; for though You were angry with me, Your anger has turned away and You comfort me- God fantasizes about the words which the repentant remnant of Is. 11:10-15 will say. Their recognition of the existence of God's wrath is tantamount to recognizing the guilt of their sins; they would come to appreciate that indeed "the wrath of God is the love of God". "Turned away" is the same word used for repentance and return; they will perceive that their repentance has triggered the turning away of His anger. But this scenario didn't happen at Hezekiah's time, for soon after his death we read that God did *not* turn away from His anger, and Judah were sent into captivity (2 Kings 23:26 s.w.). Even though Hezekiah himself urged repentance so that Yahweh's anger would turn away (s.w. 2 Chron. 29:10; 30:8), as did Ezra (Ezra 10:14). He tried to bring these words to fulfilment, but his reformation failed, overall. The comfort ("You comfort me") offered by God in Is. 40:1 was also largely rejected at the time of the restoration. And so Isaiah often laments that His anger was not turned away, and therefore His hand was still stretched out- both in inflicting judgment, and seeking to thereby bring about repentance (Is. 5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4). The exiles thought that God's wrath would be turned away simply because He realized they had not actually sinned and were innocent (Jer. 2:35).

Isaiah 12:2 Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust, and will not be afraid; for Yah, Yahweh, is my strength and song; and He has become my salvation- These were the intended words of the repentant remnant; but they fit Isaiah personally, as their representative. For his name means 'Yah saves', and is a form of Yehoshua, Jesus. "Yah is my strength" is 'Hezekiah'. He was the potential Messiah figure who could have been their salvation; but he failed in this, and the destruction of the Assyrians was done by an Angel and not by him personally. In the final fulfilment of this, Judah's repentance and rejoicing in salvation will be because of their acceptance of the Lord Jesus as Christ. But the whole verse is a quotation of Ex. 15:2, the song of triumph of Moses after the salvation of Israel at the Red Sea: "Yah is my strength and song. He has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise Him; my father’s God, and I will exalt Him". The song of Moses is put in the mouth of every redeemed Israelite; all would be as Moses. Judaism saw and sees Moses as an icon of unapproachable spirituality; but here, his rejoicing is to be the experience of every redeemed individual.

Isaiah 12:3 Therefore with joy you will draw water out of the wells of salvation-

The allusion may be to how after the song of Moses, the people came to the wells of Rephidim, which Isaiah presents as representing the water of salvation, of eternal life. And perhaps the idea is also that when the returned exiles came to Jerusalem, they would do what all pilgrims were supposed to do and drink her spring water (Ps. 87:7), representing eternal life. But Judah turned down such great potentials. And so this is applied by the Lord to the present experience of the believer in Him (Jn. 4:14; 7:38). But Isaiah 12 continues to explain how the joy of that experience will lead to men saying: "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation [as He was for Israel at the Red Sea, cp. our baptism experience]... Praise the Lord, proclaim his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted". The exaltation of the Yahweh Name, the wonder of it, the sheer height of who Yahweh is, these things and our personal part in them is an unending imperative to witness these things world-wide. Men did not confess Jesus to others, despite nominally believing in Him, because they did not love the concept of the glory of God (Jn. 12:43 RV). To perceive His glory, the wonder of it all, leads to inevitable witness to others. For we are offering people the water of life eternal.

Isaiah 12:4 In that day you will say, Give thanks to Yahweh! Call on His name. Declare His doings among the peoples. Proclaim that His name is exalted!- Isaiah foretold that when Israel know their forgiveness and salvation, they will therefore quite naturally "declare His doings among the peoples", and invite the Gentile peoples to call themselves by His Name. This will be the motivation for Israel's witness to the world after the Lord's return. They will fill the face of the world with spiritual fruit – and this will be the fruit of the taking away of their sin, and their experience of repentance (Is. 27:6,9 RV).

Isaiah 12:5 Sing to Yahweh, for He has done excellent things! Let this be known in all the earth!- This continues the allusion to the Song of Moses (Ex. 15:1,25). See on :2. The desire of the forgiven and redeemed exiles and repentant Gentiles would be to spread the knowledge of their great salvation to all the earth. This is a natural response to salvation, and should be the root motivation for all our evangelism. Beholding these "excellent things" is pictured as the reward of the faithful remnant in Is. 26:10; they would then see Yahweh, which is the promise of Is. 12:6.

Isaiah 12:6 Cry aloud and shout, you inhabitant of Zion; for the Holy One of

Israel is great in the midst of you!- The prophetic vision was of Yahweh Himself dwelling in Zion, so that the city would be called "the Lord is there" (Ez. 48:35). But the exiles failed to rebuild Zion and operate the services there as commanded in Ez. 40-48, and so this literal dwelling of God amongst His redeemed people is alluded to in Rev. 21,22 as being only fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus to earth.

Isaiah Chapter 13

Isaiah 13:1 The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw- Isaiah is here specifically named as the human author. A document like this against a superpower was a dangerous thing to be author of, but he unashamedly stands up for his belief that the present system shall come crashing down- as we should. Hezekiah ended his days seeking friendship with the Babylonians (Is. 39), and this prophecy stood to condemn his seeking friendship from them. No wonder Jewish tradition has it that Hezekiah's son sawed Isaiah in half for his prophecies. Anyone who condemns "friendship with the world" faces similar hostility.

As explained on Is. 1:1, the first part of Isaiah concerns the Assyrian threat in the time of Isaiah. The appeals for repentance appear to have produced some fruit, and due to them, as well as the intercession of the remnant and also the arrogance of Assyria in refusing to be a mere tool in God's hand, the threatened Assyrian destruction of Zion didn't happen. See on Jer. 18:8-10. But Hezekiah and Judah generally didn't respond to that as fully as they might have done. And so the historical interlude concludes with the news that they are to go into captivity in Babylon. But the later part of Isaiah then goes straight on to speak of their restoration from there into a reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah; although the final section of Isaiah laments that these potential possibilities were being precluded by Judah's unspirituality. The essence of the prophecies will come ultimately true in the establishment of God's Kingdom and the repentance of Israel in the last days; albeit in a reinterpreted and rescheduled manner. And so the material about Assyria became reapplied to Babylon. Harry Whittaker correctly noted how "Assyria" and "Babylon" are used interchangeably in several places. I would argue that the terms are not interchangeable, as they were two separate entities. Rather is the confusion because the material about Assyria was reapplied and transferred to Babylon. And this transference was reflected in the way that Isaiah was perhaps rewritten, under inspiration, as explained on Is. 1:1.

Isaiah 13:2 Set up a banner on the bare mountain! Lift up your voice to them! Wave your hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles- An obvious question occurs in interpreting this chapter: Is it about a Babylonian invasion of Judah which results in Babylon being judged and destroyed by the Medes, or is it all about the fall of Babylon to the Medes? I suggest that the ambiguity of the language is intentional. The judgments Babylon was to bring upon Judah were brought upon her. This is a common feature of Divine judgment of His people's

enemies. The book of Revelation therefore has clear parallels between the judgments upon Israel, and those upon the beast system which brings those judgments.

This verse may therefore refer to Babylon coming to mount Zion and mocking it, and then going in to destroy the palatial homes of the nobles (Jer. 52:13). The waving of their hand against Zion would have been seen in the Assyrian mockery of Zion in a similar way in Is. 37:23; the Assyrians did "wave the hand" against Zion, with the same phrase used in Is. 10:32. But the LXX makes the text apply to the fall of Babylon, a city built on the plain of Dura: "Lift up a standard on the mountain of the plain, exalt the voice to them, beckon with the hand, open the gates, ye rulers". This would then refer to how some accounts of the fall of Babylon unearthed by Layard claim that some disaffected with the king opened the gates to the Medes.

The ensign set up on mount Zion would refer to the "pole" upon which the serpent was lifted up, representing the crucified Lord Jesus (Num. 21:8 s.w.). In the latter day application, this is to be the spiritual rallying point for the repentant remnant of both Judah and the surrounding nations (s.w. Is. 11:10,12; 18:3; 30:17; 31:9; 49:22; 62:10). Although this was precluded from happening at the time because those remnants didn't repent, it will become gloriously true in the last days.

Isaiah 13:3 I have commanded My consecrated ones; yes, I have called My mighty men for My anger, even My proudly exulting ones- The language here is clearly alluding to Angels as well as the Babylonians / Assyrians who were to invade Judah, and also to the Medes who were to invade Babylon. The Angels rejoiced in Yahweh's greatness, and the invading soldiers in their own greatness. This is to demonstrate that the geopolitics of the world go in waves, and they are all directly under the control of the Angelic armies of heaven. Ezekiel gives the same message, with the cherubim controlling both Judah and the Babylonians.

Hence in :4 we read that the Lord of hosts (Angels) mustered the host of the battle. Yet we clearly read elsewhere that "the Angel of the Lord" went out and smote the Assyrians. So we have some Angels sent with a mission to bring the Assyrians there and others sent to destroy them. Other Angels are actually described as the armies themselves, the weapons of indignation against the land of Israel. And another Angel 'destroys' them. So here we have the wondrous ways of God, absolute unity in absolute diversity.

All these things will come to their ultimate term in the last days. Is. 13 has many links with Joel's prophecy, which clearly refers to the last days as well as immediate situations with the Babylonians and Assyrians; :8,10 connect with the latter day prophecy of Luke 21.

Isaiah 13:4 The noise of a multitude is in the mountains, as of a great people; the noise of an uproar of the kingdoms of the nations gathered together! Yahweh of Armies is mustering the army for the battle- See on :3. In the context of Babylon's judgment, "the “mountains” would be the Zagros range, North East of Babylon, from where the Medes came. But Babylon likewise invaded Judah from the North East, appearing to come towards them leaping on the mountains (Joel 2:2,5 etc.). What they did to God's people was done to them. As explained on :3, all these things happened with the same Divine hallmark upon them, because the same Angels were manipulating the situation.

Isaiah 13:5 They come from a far country, from the uttermost part of heaven, even Yahweh, and the weapons of His indignation, to destroy the whole land- Assyria and Babylon were Yahweh's weapons (Is. 10), intended to destroy the whole land of Israel. But the language is just as true of the Medes being used to destroy Babylon. Just as Babylon had been the nation from the north who would bring God' judgments, so now she is to be judged from the north. She was to be made to realize how she had made others feel. It is not simply so that 'what goes around comes around'; there is a purpose in these judgments repeating themselves. It was so that those who had witnessed and participated in the judgment of Israel might come to see how it felt, and thereby repent. We too are at times made to feel the effect of our actions upon others- for the same reason.

Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation.

The judgment was to be upon all Babylonia, "the whole land", not just the city of Babylon. All attempts to apply this verse solely to the city of Babylon are therefore misplaced; it refers to all Babylonia. And the whole area didn't become a literal desert; the fertile crescent remained fertile. This recalls how the similar judgments upon the area of Edom likewise didn't come about at the time; see on Jer. 49:18. But this will happen in the last days.

Isaiah 13:6 Wail; for the day of Yahweh is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty- Is "Wail!" an invitation for Babylon to repent and cry to God? This verse is about verbatim in Joel 1:15 where it is an appeal for Judah to repent before the Assyrians or Babylonians destroyed them. But now it is true of those nations themselves. Jer. 18:8 clearly states that this purpose could have been changed. It was God's intention that all the nations around Israel would repent along with His people, and turn to Him. Even Babylon could have repented at this point. "Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh..." in Jer. 50:45 is also an appeal for repentance. That God should make so much effort with hardened worldlings... indicates His depth of concern for human salvation. And it should encourage us in our witness. Jer. 51:8 puts it like this: "Wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed". This opens another window into what God potentially planned at this time. Balm in Jer. 46:11 refers to repentance.

Isaiah 13:7 Therefore all hands will be feeble, and everyone's heart will melt- This is not quite the same as the impression given by surface level Bible teachers that the king of Babylon was rejoicing in his city, confident in his own strength, when the Medes diverted the course of the Euphrates and took the city by surprise. The record in Daniel 5 is correct, but that record doesn't contradict the information given here- that the king was already deeply concerned at the advance of the Medes. Here we read that he was feeble at the news of the enemy advance. Hence we should give due weight to the discovery by Layard of inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender.

Isaiah 13:8 They will be dismayed. Pangs and sorrows will seize them, they will be in pain like a woman in labour. They will look in amazement one at another, their faces will be faces of flickering flame- Even this figure suggests that something is to be brought forth; the Divine hope was that Babylon's sufferings would lead to a repentant Gentile remnant who could join in His reestablished Kingdom. See on :6. And the language here is that of Jerusalem's sufferings (Jer. 4:9 etc.), and likewise it was God's hope that a repentant remnant would be elicited by their sufferings. But this didn't happen, and so these things are transferred to the last days. Then, the day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travaileth" (Is. 13:8; is quoted in 1 Thess. 5:3).

The Lord also seems to have alluded to this when He spoke of how the faithful just before His coming would be like a woman in travail, with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of acceptance at Christ's return (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man... shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14).

Isaiah 13:9 Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger; to make the land a desolation, and to destroy its sinners out of it- As explained on :18, the judgments here are not only upon the city of Babylon, but upon the entire "land of the Chaldeans", Babylonia. The scale of sudden destruction implied didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. The prophetic scenario projected in these prophecies didn't fully happen, although it will do so ultimately in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear. The intention of the desolation of the land, both of Judah and Babylon, was to destroy the sinners and leave a repentant, righteous remnant. This wasn't the outcome; perhaps because God foresaw that, He didn't bring the full potential extent of these judgments, neither on Babylon nor on Judah.

Isaiah 13:10 For the stars of the sky and its constellations will not give their light, the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine- These words are applied in the Olivet prophecy to the situation in the last days (Mt. 24:29). For this didn't fully happen at the time, although in a symbolic sense the lights went out for Judah as well as Babylon - Assyria (Am. 8:9; Mic. 3:6). LXX has "the stars of heaven, and Orion". Orion was identified with Nimrod, founder of Assyria, and this constellation was much worshipped by the Babylonians. The prophetic potential was that Assyria and Babylon would be totally eclipsed, along perhaps with the extinguishing from sight of their favourite constellation. But this literal aspect didn't happen, just as the literal changes to the sun and moon spoken of in Is. 30:26 didn't happen, because the Kingdom of God was not reestablished at that time because Judah didn't fully repent.

Isaiah 13:11 I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their

iniquity. I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will humble the arrogance of the terrible- This humbling was surely in order to save them; see on :6. The idea was that judgment day would come there and then; the wicked would be destroyed, and those who repented and humbled themselves before Yahweh would be the only ones left. And again we see that humility is seen as the epitome of repentance and all spirituality.

Isaiah 13:12 I will make people more valuable than fine gold, even a person than the pure gold of Ophir- A repentant remnant is in view; LXX "And they that are left shall be more precious than gold tried in the fire; and a man shall be more precious than the stone that is in Suphir"; also see on :14. As explained on :11, the intention of the judgments, both on God's people and the Babylonians, was that a repentant remnant would be produced; and each one of those people would be of extraordinary value to God; this is the scene likewise of Is. 27:12. The same language is used of the latter day purifying of Israel in Zech. 13:9. Although we can also see in these words the simple truth that the value and meaning of persons will be elevated in God's Kingdom. "Gold tried in the fire" (LXX) is a phrase used in the New Testament of the refining of all God's true people today (1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 3:18).

Isaiah 13:13 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place in the wrath of Yahweh of Armies, and in the day of His fierce anger- Clearly heavens and earth are used symbolically, although a literal earthquake is likely in view. Babylon was to be destroyed with the same kind of miraculous Divine intervention as Sodom; but as noted on :19, this didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. But Rev. 18 alludes to all this and makes it clear that such Divine intervention will occur against latter Babylon in the last days.

Isaiah 13:14 It will happen that like a hunted gazelle, and like sheep that no one gathers- A repentant remnant is in view; LXX "And they that are left shall be as a fleeing fawn, and as a stray sheep". See on :12. Stray sheep is the language of men brought to repentance (Ps. 119:176; Lk. 15:6). The judgment of Babylon as later developed in Jeremiah uses the term about Judah (Jer. 50:6). The idea may be that no *man* gathers these lost sheep, as the Lord explains in His parable of the one lost sheep; but the Divine shepherd will.

They will each turn to their own people, and will each flee to their own land- This is developed in Jer. 50:16: "For fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn

each one to his people, and they shall flee each one to his own land". The various captive peoples taken to Babylon would each return to their own land, and Judah were to do likewise. But this isn't how things quite turned out. This was the prophetic ideal scenario, but it didn't happen because many Jews preferred to remain in Babylon and they didn't repent.

Isaiah 13:15 Everyone who is found will be thrust through. Everyone who is captured will fall by the sword- This isn't what happened when Darius the Mede took Babylon. This was the potential prophetic scenario which didn't come about, because Judah didn't repent, and their repentance was a condition for the total fulfilment of the prophecies of judgment upon Babylon (see on Jer. 50:3,4). These judgments were to be if Babylon refused to let Judah go (Jer. 50:33). But the reality was that the exiles by the end of 70 years were not asking to go, and when they were given the chance, many chose to remain in Babylon. The threat of a sword hanging over Babylon is an image used elsewhere about Jerusalem, and the idea is that there was therefore an appeal for repentance. This is what God wanted to see from Babylon.

Isaiah 13:16 Their infants also will be dashed in pieces before their eyes. Their houses will be ransacked, and their wives raped- This wasn't really the scene when the Medes took Babylon. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; the Nabonidus Chronicle records that the people of Babylon welcomed Cyrus by spreading green twigs before him (James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 306b). Both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. See on Jer. 51:4.

Isaiah 13:17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not value silver, and as for gold, they will not delight in it- There is historical evidence that the Medes didn't value gold and silver. Just as God stirred or raised up Babylon to invade Judah (Jer. 6:22), sharpening her arrows (Ez. 21:21), so He would stir up, or psychologically provoke, other nations to come and judge her (Jer. 50:9,41; 51:1,11 s.w.). This is greatly emphasized. The activity of God directly upon human hearts is a great theme of the Biblical revelation, and is to encourage us that He is eager to transform hearts, and to place desires within us

beyond our own unaided psychological ability. But the Medes didn't destroy Babylon; as explained on :20 and Jer. 51:3,8, there was no destruction of the city, and so much was left that it revived several times and asserted independence. He did not take full vengeance for what Babylon did in His temple because His own people were not eager to rebuild it and were not recognizant of their role in its destruction.

Isaiah 13:18 Their bows will dash the young men in pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb. Their eyes will not spare children- This is what was done to Jerusalem, as Jeremiah frequently expresses in his Lamentations. As people do to God's people, so it will be done to them at the day of judgment. This is a principle relevant to us all. But this isn't the scenario which happened when the Medes took Babylon; see on :16,20. As mentioned often in commentary on Jer. 50, the judgments here are not only upon the city of Babylon, but upon the entire "land of the Chaldeans", Babylonia. The scale of sudden destruction implied didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. The prophetic scenario projected in these prophecies didn't fully happen, although it will do so ultimately in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear. This was because Judah and Israel didn't repent and earnestly seek to restore Zion; see on Jer. 50:3,4,26. And this was intended to be connected with the realization of these prophecies upon Babylon.

Isaiah 13:19 Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride- Babylon is presented as being Yahweh's servant, doing what He commanded against both Israel and the nations, with Him putting the ideas into the king of Babylon's mind. God surely would not then turn around and condemn Babylon for their obedience. I suggest that Babylon is condemned because they overstepped the bounds of their commission, they were proud, and established themselves as Yahweh with their kingdom as His kingdom. We see the huge importance God attached to humility, and how pride is the worst of sins.

Will be like when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah- Such dramatic destruction of Babylon and the area around it didn't happen at the hands of the Medes (see on :20; Jer. 50:26). The image of Sodom's destruction suggests direct, miraculous Divine intervention. This didn't happen at the time, but Rev. 18 alludes to all this and makes it clear that such Divine intervention will occur against latter Babylon in the last days.

Isaiah 13:20 It will never be inhabited, neither will it be lived in from generation to generation. The Arabian will not pitch a tent there, neither will shepherds make their flocks lie down there- Eternal desolation may not be required by the text; LXX has "neither shall any enter into it for many generations". The impression given is that the attack upon Babylon would reduce the city to ruins immediately. But this didn't happen under the Medes; it was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Isaiah 13:21 But wild animals of the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of jackals- The language in Jer. 9:11 of Jerusalem's destruction into heaps haunted by jackals is applied to Babylon; and likewise the way Jerusalem was to become a hissing (Jer. 19:8) is also now to be true of Babylon. What latter day Babylon does to Jerusalem shall be done to her; and that is the theme of the book of Revelation, where the seals of judgment upon Israel become the vials of judgment upon the beast system.

Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will frolic there- Literally, "demons", half goat, half divine imaginary creatures, "satyrs". This is proof enough that demons refer to mythical creatures and beliefs of the time, and have no real cosmic existence; and that the language of these things is used, as the language of the day, without any Divinely added footnote to the effect that these things don't actually exist.

Isaiah 13:22 Wolves will cry in their castles, and jackals in the pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged- As noted on :20, much of Babylon did escape when the Medes attacked and conquered her, and the city continued being inhabited for some time. This projected scenario didn't

come about at the time, and yet will do in essence in its latter day fulfilment, as Rev. 18 explains. Her days as a city were in fact prolonged, because the various preconditions for this eternal destruction were not met at the time. What may be in view however is the power of the Babylonian empire; although that didn't fall for another 170 years from the time of this prophecy. It could be that Isaiah is as it were transported forward in time and speaks as if he is present at the end of Babylon's rule.

Isaiah Chapter 14

Isaiah 14:1 For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land- The time of this "compassion of Jacob" was to be when they returned from exile in repentance (Jer. 30:18; 33:26; Ez. 39:25 s.w.) and accepted the new covenant. But they refused to do this; their return to the land was not matched by a return to God. And so these things are rescheduled to the last days. "Set" is s.w. "rest" in :3,7.

The foreigner will join himself with them, and they will unite with the house of Jacob- As explained on Is. 13:6, it was the Divine intention that the judgments upon Babylon would result in a repentant remnant of the Babylonian confederacy turning to Yahweh. But Hezekiah's friendship with Babylon in Is. 39 precluded that happening; the Jews ended up worshipping the Babylonian gods rather than leading them to the God of Israel. The unity of the new covenant would be a result of Jews and Gentiles together experiencing conviction of sin, repentance and forgiveness by grace. That is to this day the basis for unity amongst God's people.

Isaiah 14:2 The peoples will take them, and bring them to their place- The Divine intention was that the peoples of their exile would return with them to Zion, bringing back home those they had taken captive; and this mass of Gentiles coming to Zion would therefore be the scene of various other visions of the Kingdom.

The house of Israel will possess them in Yahweh's land for servants and for handmaids. They will take as captives those whose captives they once were; and they shall rule over their oppressors- The Gentiles who returned with Israel to Zion would serve them there. But their ruling over them was not enforced, but because the Gentiles themselves chose to take the Jews with them and go to Zion and serve God's people there.

Isaiah 14:3 It will happen in the day that Yahweh will give you rest from your sorrow from your trouble and from the hard service in which you were made to serve- This presents Judah's time in Babylon as if it were like being in Egypt. "Hard service" is the same phrase in Ex. 1:14; 6:9. But there is no evidence that Judah were treated that badly in Babylon, and the books of Daniel and Esther suggest they were even in places of authority. The fall of Babylon / Assyria (see

on Is. 13:1) here envisaged didn't come about as fully planned at the time; although Rev. 18 applies it all to the last days. The day of rest is that of :1. The idea was that when Babylon fell, God's people would enter the rest of the restored Kingdom, But that didn't happen, and so because Judah weren't ready for Kingdom, Babylon didn't fall as planned; and that is why all is reapplied to the things of the last days.

Isaiah 14:4 that you will take up this parable against the king of Babylon and say, How the oppressor has ceased!- The initial "oppressor" in view was Assyria (s.w. Is. 9:4). But as the prophetic scenario changed and shifted in accordance with human response to it, it became transferred and reapplied to Babylon. And the prophecies may have been rewritten under inspiration to reflect this; see on Is. 1:1. J.W.Thirtle claims that the original manuscripts of most Old Testament books were sealed with Hezekiah's seal, as they had been re-written and edited during his time (J.W. Thirtle, *Old Testament Problems* (Printland Publishers reprint, 2004 facsimile of the 1914 edition) p. 301). Scripture itself testifies to him and his men re-organizing the writings of David. Isaiah, with its initial application to Hezekiah, and then its obvious reference to the captivity and restoration, is another example. Isaiah 14, an oracle against the King of Babylon, goes on to speak of him within the same chapter as the King of Assyria (Is. 14:4,22,25). What seems to have happened is that a prophecy relevant to the Assyrian invasion under Hezekiah has been re-written, under inspiration, with reference to the pomp of Babylon being cast down too.

The golden city has ceased!- Babylon was judged above all for her pride and exaltation of human strength and wisdom. Babylon is set up as a fake Christ and Kingdom of God. She had proselytes and prophets ["boasters"] (Jer. 50:36,37); a mountain (Jer. 51:25); "The golden city" (Is. 14:4) with a thick, embellished wall (Jer. 51:58); springs and rivers within her (Jer. 51:36); "The praise of the whole earth" (Jer. 51:41). Her sin was that she thought of herself in her own right as the kingdom of God, instead of humbling herself to become part of His Kingdom.

Isaiah 14:5 Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers- "The staff" is often used specifically of Assyria (Is. 9:4; 10:5,15,24 s.w.). But as explained on :4, the prophecies about Assyria were transferred to Babylon.

Isaiah 14:6 who struck the peoples in wrath with a continual stroke, who ruled the nations in anger, with a persecution that none restrained- The striker was

initially Assyria- see on :5. There was no restraint, because Judah had lived an unrestrained life (s.w. Jer. 14:10). Their judgment was but an extension of their own spirit of life.

Isaiah 14:7 The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet. They break out in song- The vision is of the whole *eretz* promised to Abraham now in the rest and quiet of God's Kingdom, praising Him. The "all nations" around Israel were to be annihilated until only a remnant remained, who were repentant and joined themselves to Yahweh (:1). The destruction of Babylon and the reestablishment of the Kingdom were to be at the same time. But this didn't happen because Judah were impenitent, and so the full destruction of Babylon didn't happen to the extent envisaged. Rev. 18 reapplies these things to the last days. This situation could have happened at the restoration from Babylon (s.w. Zech. 6:8) but was precluded by Judah's impenitence.

Isaiah 14:8 Yes, the fir trees rejoice with you, with the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since you are humbled, no lumberjack has come up against us- The cedars of Lebanon were iconic to the temple, and were intended to be cut down by the Assyrians (see on Is. 2:13; 10:34; 37:24). The 'cutter off' ("lumberjack") was initially Assyria (s.w. Is. 10:7). This was averted, but it was done by Babylon. The common fir trees may refer to other nations, or to the ordinary people of Judah, who had likewise suffered from Babylon's destruction; or to the fir trees used in the temple construction (1 Kings 5:8,10; 6:15,34), which the Assyrians had threatened to cut down (2 Kings 19:23). Perhaps also in view was the way the Babylonians cut down the trees around Jerusalem to make siege weapons and platforms (Jer. 6:6). No such feller would come against them or the Jerusalem temple ever again, now that Babylon was humbled. That didn't happen, because the fall of Babylon here prophesied didn't fully happen at the time, as noted throughout Is. 13. But it will happen at the latter day fall of Babylon, when the land will then be eternally secure from any threat of future invasion.

Is. 14:8 records the relief that now the "Lucifer" figure would no longer cut down cedars in Lebanon and hew mountains. This is exactly the language used by Nebuchadnezzar: "What no former king had done, I achieved: I cut through steep mountains, I split rocks, I opened passages and constructed a straight road for the transport of Cedars... to Marduk, my king, mighty cedars... the abundant yield of the Lebanon" (J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating*

To The Old Testament (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3rd ed., 1969) p. 307). Clearly the figure spoken of in Is. 14 was Nebuchadnezzar.

"Humbled" is literally to lay down. The Lucifer-king was to "lie down" in his destruction- and that Hebrew term occurs later in Isaiah with reference to the 'laying down' of Babylon's King and army in the grave (Is. 43:17).

Isaiah 14:9 Sheol from beneath has moved for you to meet you at your coming. It stirs up the dead for you, even all the rulers of the earth. It has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations- I noted on Is. 13:21 that the mythical creatures called satyrs were spoken of as if they existed; Babylon's judgment was described there in terms she would have understood, even if those terms reflected ideas which were not literally true. For satyrs don't exist in the form the Babylonians believed. And so here too, their concept of the underworld is used. But in any case, *sheol* is clearly personified here, and in practice it refers to the grave. There is no conscious survival of death; but the idea of dead kings still seated on their thrones in the underworld, rising to meet a new arrival, is used here. This is the kind of thing the Egyptians also believed in, as witnessed by the contents of the pyramids. But speaking to people in their own terms doesn't mean that those terms are actually correct. See on :15,16,18; Is. 27:11.

Isaiah 14:10 They all will answer and ask you, Have you also become as weak as we are? Have you become like us?- As explained on :9, the Babylonian concept of death and the underworld is being used against them, just as the Lord used the Jewish myths about Abraham's bosom to construct the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Those myths were incorrect, but He used them in order to get a point over to them. The Babylonians' worst fears about the underworld would, as it were, come upon them. Their condemnation was expressed in terms they could relate to; hence the huge emphasis that their bodies would be left as unburied corpses. This was designed to appeal to their greatest fears, and their deepest conceptions of shame. See on :11.

Isaiah 14:11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, with the sound of your stringed instruments. Maggots are spread out under you, and worms cover you- "Worms" refer to crimson grubs, the idea being that as they had once been covered in the scarlet of royalty, so they would in the grave be covered with scarlet grubs. Here we have the reality stated- that *sheol* is the grave, as the word is often translated elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. This is in sharp, consciously

juxtaposed contrast to the Babylonian conception of *sheol*, the underworld, as alluded to in :10,11. The sound of their instruments would no longer continue in *sheol*, contrary to their imagination.

Isaiah 14:12 How you have fallen from heaven, morning star [Lucifer], son of the dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low!- This could refer initially to the sudden loss of power experienced by Belshazzar in Dan. 5, or to the madness which came upon Nebuchadnezzar.

Note that the words “devil” , “satan” and “angel” never occur in this chapter. This is the only place in Scripture where the word “Lucifer” occurs. There is no evidence that Isaiah 14 is describing anything that happened in the garden of Eden; if it is, then why are we left 3,000 years from the time of Genesis before being told what really happened there? Lucifer is described as being covered in worms (:11) and a man mocked by men (:16) because he no longer has any power after his casting out of heaven; so there is no justification for thinking that Lucifer is now on earth leading believers astray. Believers in the 'Lucifer = satan at the beginning' idea must enquire why is Lucifer punished for saying, “I will ascend into heaven” (:13), if he was already there? Lucifer is to rot in the grave: “Thy pomp is brought down to the grave... and the worms cover thee” (:11 AV). Seeing angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36), Lucifer therefore cannot be an angel; the language is more suited to a man. Lucifer was a king like any other king (:9,10).

The idea of 'morning star' is translated 'Lucifer' in the Vulgate [Latin] translation of the Bible made by Jerome. Significantly, he uses 'Lucifer' as a description of Christ, as the 'morning star' mentioned in Revelation. Indeed, some early Christians took the name 'Lucifer' as a 'Christian name' in order to identify themselves with Jesus (Nick Lunn, *Alpha And Omega* (Sutton, UK: Willow, 1992) p. 254). It wasn't until Origen that the term 'Lucifer' took on any connotation of 'Satan' or a force of evil; and even then it was only popularized much later in Milton's *Paradise Lost* . 'Lucifer' in its strict meaning of 'bearer of the light' actually was applied in a positive sense to Christian communities, e.g. the followers of Lucifer of Cagliari were called 'Luciferians'. As an aside, it's worth pointing out that they were one of the groups who insisted that the devil was not a personal being and held to the original Biblical picture of sin and the devil.

Remember that this is a “proverb (parable) against the king of Babylon” (:4). “Lucifer” means “the morning star”, which is the brightest of the stars. In the

parable, this star proudly decides to “ascend (higher) into heaven... exalt my throne above the (other) stars of God” (:13). Because of this, the star is cast down to the earth. The star represents the king of Babylon. Daniel chapter 4 explains how Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, proudly surveyed the great kingdom he had built up, thinking that he had conquered other nations in his own strength, rather than recognizing that God had given him success. “Thy greatness (pride) is grown, and reacheth unto heaven” (:22). Because of this “he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws” (:33). This sudden humbling of one of the world’s most powerful men to a deranged lunatic was such a dramatic event as to call for the parable about the falling of the morning star from heaven to earth. Stars are symbolic of powerful people, e.g. Gen. 37: 9; Is. 13:10 (concerning the leaders of Babylon); Ez. 32: 7 (concerning the leaders of Egypt); Dan. 8:10, cp. v. 24. Ascending to heaven and falling from heaven are Biblical idioms often used for increasing in pride and being humbled respectively - see Job 20: 6; Jer. 51:53 (about Babylon); Lam. 2 :1; Mt 11:23 (about Capernaum): “Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell” (the grave). Adam Clarke's commentary rightly notes: "The truth is, the text speaks nothing at all concerning Satan nor his fall... but of the pride, arrogance and fall of Nebuchadnezzar".

Lucifer was to be “cut down to the ground” - implying he was a tree. This provides a further link with Daniel 4: 8-16, where Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are likened to a tree being cut down.

The passage about "Lucifer" is alluding to and deconstructing a contemporary myth, in a manner which is common to much Biblical literature. "An ancient myth told how Heylel, the morning star (Venus), tried to climb the walls of the northern city of the gods to make himself king of heaven, only to be driven from the sky by the rising sun. In Isaiah 14:12-20 this myth is given a historical application" (G.B. Caird, *The Revelation Of St. John The Divine* (London: Black, 1966) pp. 114,11). Isaiah is mocking the myth, and saying that the King of Babylon was acting like Heylel in the myth- but would be thrown down not by another planet, but by God Himself.

H.A. Kelly- one of the leading historians of religious ideas of recent times- observed from much research that "It was not until post-Biblical times that Lucifer was associated with Satan, or that Satan was thought to have been cast out of heaven before the creation of Adam and Eve, or that Satan had some

connection with Adam and Eve" (H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006) p. 1). The New Testament references to Jesus as the morning star, Venus, have been read by H.A. Kelly as a conscious allusion to the growing idea that Lucifer ['light-bringer', *heosphoros* in Greek, the dawn-bringer] / Venus, the morning star, was in fact something or someone evil (H.A. Kelly, *ibid* pp. 164,165). All the N.T. references to the morning star are positive, and all refer to Jesus (2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16). It's possible to read Jn. 1:8 in this context, too. Here John the Baptist is described as "bearing witness to the light", which was language understandable with reference to Venus, the Morning Star which is seen in the East just before the Sun rises in the West.

There's a good reason why the King of Babylon is described as "the morning star", or Venus. The Babylonians believed that their king was the child of their gods Bel and Ishtar, both of whom were associated with the planets- they thought that their King was the planet Venus.

Isaiah 14:13 You said in your heart- There is a juxtaposition here between a man thinking something in his heart, and the huge scale of his fall, like a star from heaven to earth (:12). This is the significance to God of the state of the heart. Nebuchadnezzar had been warned by Is. 14:13 that the King of Babylon would be brought down because he would say *in his heart* "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God". Yet the promised fall of Babylon's King only happened when he said out loud: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?". The record continues: "While the word was in the king's mouth (i.e. he spoke this out loud), there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken" (Dan. 4:30,31). What was the "it" that was spoken about him? Surely the prophecy of Isaiah 14, which was a prediction waiting for a king of Babylon to come along and fulfill it. So the king's self-talk was that he would rise up to Heaven; but his actual words were an admiration of *his* Kingdom as opposed to God's. And yet he was judged for the self-talk behind his words. And this is the kind of relentlessly analytical judgment which a loving Father applies to us too. The culture of nicespeak comes crashing down before His piercing eyes; for the world teaches us that it's all about *how we put it over*, the words we choose, the image we cut; and yet God looks upon the heart.

I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God!- see on Rev. 1:20. Verses 13 and 14 have connections with 2 Thess. 2: 3,4, which is

about the “man of sin” - thus Lucifer points forward to another man, perhaps another king of latter day Babylon- but not to an angel. Note that "the stars of God" can refer to the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9; Joel 3:15; Dan. 8:10), above whom the King of Babylon wished to arise. Any reference to the Angels would be because the people of God have their representatives in the court of Heaven.

The Ras Shamra texts include a section on the fall and death of Baal. Although written in Ugaritic, this section has amazing similarities with the poem of Isaiah 14 about the fall of Babylon – e.g. “The death of Baal” includes lines such as “From the throne on which he sits... how hath Baal come down, how hath the mighty been cast down!”. Isaiah’s message was therefore: ‘Forget those stories about Baal being cast down; what’s relevant for us is that mighty Babylon, which tempts us to trust in her rather than Yahweh God of Israel, is to be cast down, let’s apply the language of Baal’s fall to the kingdoms of this world which we know and live amongst’. Another such example is to be found in Is. 47:1: “Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne”. This is almost quoting [albeit through translation] from the ‘Death of Baal’ poem.

"Lucifer" wishes to ascend into Heaven. This is somewhat different from the scenario traditionally assumed- which is that Lucifer was in Heaven already, wanted to rise higher, and was therefore thrown down to earth because of his prideful intentions. But the text actually says that he wished to ascend into Heaven- so he was not there originally. The point has been made by that "heaven" was often how the capital city of a nation or people was perceived; for in that city the national god supposedly lived, thus making the city "heaven". The "Hymn to the City of Arbela" is an example in the Assyrian context- because of the gods who supposedly lived there, "Arbela is as lofty as heaven... O lofty sanctuary... gate of heaven!" (M. Nissinen, “City as lofty heaven: Arbela and other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy” in L. L. Grabbe and R. D. Haak, eds., *Every City shall be Forsaken* (JSOTSup 330) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) pp. 172-209). The desire to ascend into 'heaven' would therefore speak of the king of Babylon or Assyria's desire to capture Jerusalem and supplant her God- Yahweh- with their own gods. This idea of Jerusalem as "heaven" is continued in later Isaiah, where the Divine revival of Jerusalem is spoken of as the creation of a new or renewed 'heaven' (Is. 51:6,16; 65:17,18).

I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north!- AV "on the sides of the north", the very phrase used of Jerusalem in Ps. 48:2. The mount of assembly or "solemn feast" is clearly Zion. But "The mount of the congregation in the sides

of the north" is surely also an allusion to "the Babylonian Olympus, the [supposed] dwelling place of the gods, which was considered to be situated somewhere in the high Asiatic mountain range which forms the boundary or the Plain of Mesopotamia on the northern side, and is also the region of the source of the Euphrates and Tigris" (H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 206). This location was *on earth*- not in Heaven. The King of Babylon, the morning star, didn't aspire to greatness in Heaven, but rather to establishing mount Olympus on the temple mount in Jerusalem. The point of the prophecy is that it is Yahweh alone who is the ultimate and only God-King, reigning on *His* mount, the mountain of God, which is mount Zion, not Olympus. This idea of mount Zion being taken over by an apostate religious system of the neighbouring nations is repeated in the Olivet prophecy, Revelation and 2 Thess. 2 (about the "man of sin"). The final fulfilment will be in the last days.

Isaiah 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds! I will make myself like the Most High!- This was the root reason why Babylon and Assyria were condemned. They were Yahweh's servants, judging Judah as He commanded, but they went far beyond that commission; the axe boasted itself against the Divine hand that wielded it, and played God Himself. The clouds could be an intensive plural referring to the great cloud, the shekinah glory in the temple on mount Zion.

Isaiah 14:15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit- I noted on :9 that the Babylonian concept of *sheol* is alluded to there, but that doesn't mean that this is correct. Here *sheol* is defined as God and the Bible know it to be- "the pit", the grave.

Isaiah 14:16 Those who see you will stare at you. They will ponder you, saying, Is this the man who made the earth to tremble, who shook kingdoms- Clearly the person in view is a "man" and not an Angel or cosmic being; his corpse will be in full view of those he had abused. As noted on :9,15, the Babylonian concept of *sheol* is alluded to but it was incorrect; the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23) and not consciously surviving death in an underworld situation.

Isaiah 14:17 who made the world like a wilderness, and overthrew its cities;

who didn't release his prisoners to their home?- This accuses Lucifer of making the "world as a wilderness, (destroying) the cities thereof; that let not loose his prisoners to their home... (that did) fill the face of the world with cities... the exactress of gold" (:17 & 21 R.V.; :4 A.V. margin). These are all descriptions of Babylonian military policy - razing whole areas to the ground (as they did to Jerusalem), transporting captives to other areas and not letting them return to their homeland (as they did to the Jews), building new cities and taking tribute of gold from nations they oppressed. Thus there is emphasis on the fact that Lucifer was not even going to get the burial these other kings had (:18,19), implying that he was only a human king like them, seeing his body needed burying. The condemnation for not releasing prisoners would apply to Babylon and Assyria, who took God's people into captivity. The prophecies in later Isaiah about the opening of the prison house therefore had their primary fulfilment in the release of the exiles from Babylonian captivity, which was potentially possible through a Messiah figure.

Isaiah 14:18 All the kings of the nations sleep in glory, each one in his own house- This again shows that the reference in :9 to dead kings arising in the underworld to greet the king of Babylon is just alluding to their mythical beliefs. The reality was that for all their glory, they were asleep in their tombs ["houses"]; for death is unconsciousness.

Isaiah 14:19 But you are cast away from your tomb like a hated branch, clothed with the slain, who are thrust through with the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit; like a dead body trodden under foot- The corpse of the king of Babylon would be trodden under foot and displayed for all to see, especially those he had abused. There is no evidence that actually happened. Nebuchadnezzar repented, to a degree, according to the book of Daniel. So this outcome was precluded by that, in line with the principles of Jer. 18:8-10. It may be that there will be a latter day fulfilment of this, or perhaps this is simply a prophecy (like the destruction of Nineveh within 40 days) which didn't happen- because in the gap between the word and the fulfilment of it, there was repentance. See on :21.

Isaiah 14:20 You will not join them in burial, because you have destroyed your land. You have killed your people. The seed of evildoers will not be mentioned by name forever- This destruction of Babylon is connected to the impenitence of its

king. Likewise Zedekiah of Judah was told something similar; if he didn't repent, then his land, people and family would suffer. God set these men up with a deal- if they repented, then their equally sinful people and families could have had judgment averted. So it wasn't that the innocent suffered for the sake of the sin of one leader. Rather, those sinful people could have their judgment averted if one leader repented; just as many sinners are counted righteous by the obedience of the One, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 14:21 Prepare for slaughter of his children because of the iniquity of their fathers- Asking the king to "prepare" to have his children slain could suggest he was being invited to repent. I suggested on :19 that the king of Babylon did this. And so there is no evidence that he saw his children slain.

That they rise not up and possess the earth, and fill the surface of the world with cities- This alludes to Nimrod, the founder of Babylon, who is recorded as building cities. There is no strong evidence that Nebuchadnezzar was a great builder of multiple cities, so the point of this language is to direct us back to Nimrod.

Isaiah 14:22 I will rise up against them, says Yahweh of Armies, and cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and son and son's son, says Yahweh- "Cut off" is the same word translated "lumberjack" in :8. As Babylon cut off the cedars of the temple, so she would be cut off. What we do to God's people will decide the nature of our eternal judgment. Verse 20 says that Lucifer's seed will be destroyed. Verse 22 says that Babylon's seed will be destroyed, thus equating them. Dt. 28:7 uses the same language in saying that the judgment upon Israel's enemies, to have Yahweh "rise up against them... and cut [them] off", would come if Israel were obedient to the covenant. They were not. And that may account for not all of these judgments against the king of Babylon coming true at the time; although the essence of them will in the latter day judgment of Babylon.

Isaiah 14:23 I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and pools of water. I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, says Yahweh of Armies- This has been seen as a reference to the Medes diverting the water of the Euphrates into pools. But that at best was a limited fulfilment; for Babylon continued to be inhabited a long time after the Medes took it, and it didn't become "pools of water", as explained on Is. 13:20. As noted on :22, these judgments were partly

dependent upon Israel's obedience to the covenant; and that condition wasn't met. And there was some repentance by Nebuchadnezzar.

Isaiah 14:24 Yahweh of Armies has sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it happen; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand- As God thought, so it would happen. It is a common Bible teaching that how a man thinks is expressed in his actions (Prov. 23:7; Mt. 12:34); a little reflection upon our own actions will confirm this. We think of something and then we do it. Our 'spirit' or mind may reflect upon the fact that we are hungry and desire food. We see a banana going spare in the kitchen; that desire of the 'spirit' is then translated into action - we reach out for the banana, peel it and eat. This simple example shows why the Hebrew word for 'spirit' means both the breath or mind, and also power. Our spirit, the essential us, refers to our thoughts and therefore also to the actions which we take to express those thoughts or disposition within us. On a far more glorious scale, God's spirit is the same; it is the power by which He displays His essential being, His disposition and purpose. God thinks and therefore does things.

With Assyria at the height of her power, Isaiah proclaimed her downfall (Is. 14:24-26). The life of faith in God is simply the very opposite of what seems humanly sensible. To give money we'd surely be better saving; risk our lives and health for another; neglect our business or career for the sake of the Lord's work. These ought to be the *normal* decisions we make, if we are walking in step with the spirit; and yet it would appear that they are the exceptions to the rule of far too many of our lives. And the point is, God's heart broke because His people were and are like this.

Isaiah 14:25 That I will break the Assyrian in My land, and tread him under foot on My mountains. Then his yoke will leave them, and his burden leave their shoulders- The prophecy against Babylon now merges with that against Assyria. I have explained on :4 and on Is. 13:1 that the prophecy against Babylon was initially intended against Assyria. But it was reapplied and transferred to Babylon. But now in these verses we have a specific prophecy against Assyria, relevant to the time of Isaiah when Judah were under the Assyrian yoke, paying tribute to them. But the intended judgment of Assyria also didn't quite happen as envisaged. Assyria was not trodden down upon the mountains of Yahweh (the one great mountain- Zion). They didn't even take Jerusalem.

"The Assyrian" is mentioned whilst "the king of Babylon" in :4. The prophecy was initially about the Assyrians, but a different prophetic program worked out. So it was applied to the Babylonians, and yet finally will come true of a latter day Babylon / Assyria. And the prophecy was maybe rewritten under inspiration to reflect this; see on Is. 1:1. Babylon and Assyria are often interchangeable phrases in the prophets because the prophecies about Assyria were transferred to Babylon. Thus, having spoken of the demise of the king of Babylon, v. 25 says, “I will break the Assyrian...”. The prophecies about Babylon in Isaiah 47, are repeated concerning Assyria in Nahum 3:4, 5, 18, and Zephaniah 2 :13 & 15; and 2 Chronicles 33:11, says that the king of Assyria took Manasseh captive to Babylon - showing the interchangeability of the terms. Amos 5:27 says that Israel were to go into captivity “beyond Damascus”, i.e. in Assyria, but Stephen quotes this as “beyond Babylon” (Acts 7:43). Ezra 6:1 describes Darius the king of Babylon making a decree concerning the rebuilding of the temple. The Jews praised God for turning “the heart of the king of Assyria” (Ezra 6: 22), again showing that they are interchangeable terms. The prophecy of Isaiah 14, along with many others in Isaiah, fits in well to the context of the Assyrian invasion by Sennacherib in Hezekiah’s time, hence v. 25 describes the breaking of the Assyrian. Verse 13 is easier to understand if it is talking about the blasphemous Assyrians besieging Jerusalem, wanting to enter Jerusalem and capture the temple for their gods. Earlier the Assyrian king, Tilgath-Pilneser, had probably wanted to do the same (2 Chron. 28: 20-21). Isaiah 14:13: “For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven...(symbolic of the temple and ark - 1 Kings 8: 30; 2 Chron. 30: 27; Ps. 20: 2 & 6; 11: 4; Heb. 7:26) I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation (mount Zion where the temple was) in the sides of the north” (Jerusalem - Ps. 48:1-2).

The righteous remnant were to release Judah from the yoke and burden of domination by the overpowering Assyria (Is. 10:27). But they did not fully achieve this, nor did they accept God's new covenant which was to be the basis for them never again being under yoke (Jer. 30:8; Ez. 34:27). The burden of the Assyrians was to be removed by them being trodden down upon the mountains [an intensive plural for the one great mountain] of Zion (Is. 14:25). But they never got into Zion, and were not trodden down there. And so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the victory of the Lord Jesus over sin (see on Is. 10:4) and the latter day Assyrian. His offer of *His* yoke in place of the *heavy yoke* carried by God's people surely alludes here (Mt. 11:29).

The parallel prophecy is in Nahum 1:13: "Now will I break his yoke from off you, and will burst your bonds apart". This is a reference to the Assyrian's yoke

upon Judah (2 Kings 18:14; Is. 10:27). The implication of "Now..." is that Nahum may have been contemporary with the Sennacherib invasion of Judah at Hezekiah's time, having himself been one of those taken captive to Assyria from the ten tribes some years before. Some kind of Messianic kingdom could have been established then (Nah. 1:15), but Hezekiah didn't follow through on his potential, and the exiles didn't repent. The intended scenario was that Nineveh would be destroyed and the exiles return in repentance; but that didn't quite happen as it potentially could have done, although the prophetic word will ultimately come true in the last days.

Isaiah 14:26 This is the plan that is determined for the whole earth. This is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations- The idea of a "plan" is that this was a potential scenario; the hand of God was active to work out a plan whereby all the nations within the *eretz* promised to Abraham would be judged and a remnant amongst them repent, and join themselves with a repentant Israel and Judah in a reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. But that plan didn't work out fully at the time; it was reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 14:27 For Yahweh of Armies has planned, and who can stop it? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?- As explained on :26, this was the Divine plan for those times. It didn't fully come about then because various preconditions weren't met; not least that Israel and Judah didn't repent. But the ultimate plan and intention to reestablish Yahweh's Kingdom on earth was and is unstoppable.

Isaiah 14:28 This burden was in the year that king Ahaz died- This appears to apply to the subsequent prophecy against Philistia. The significance was in the fact that after Uzziah subdued the Philistines (2 Chron. 26:6,7), Ahaz had allowed them to take some cities in the southern part of Judah (2 Chron. 28:18). But Hezekiah was to crush them (2 Kings 18:8).

Isaiah 14:29 Don't rejoice, O Philistia, all of you, because the rod that struck you is broken; for out of the serpent's root an adder will emerge, and his fruit will be a fiery flying serpent- The rod that smote the nations in the context is clearly Assyria and Babylon, which was to be broken. But Philistia was not to relax because of that; after the fall of those powers, "an adder" was to emerge and crush them. The prophetic potential was that this fiery flying serpent was to

be Hezekiah, for he did attack them in 2 Kings 18:8. He was to be a Messiah figure; the serpent lifted up on a pole as an ensign (s.w. Num. 21:8), as if directly connected with the seraphim of Is. 6:2,6 (s.w. "fiery flying serpent"). The Jewish targum also understands the reference here to be to Messiah: "For, from the sons of Jesse shall come forth the Messiah; and his works among you shall be as the flying serpent". But Hezekiah messed up after the Assyrian threat was removed. And so the prophecies of the Messiah conquering the Philistine areas is to be reapplied to the last days.

Another alternative is to take the Assyrian rod as a reference to Sargon who "took Ashdod" (Is. 20:1), and took Khanun, King of Gaza, prisoner, putting "all Philistia", all its various local fiefdoms (1 Sam. 6:18), into subjection. The fiery serpent who punished them even more would then refer to Sennacherib. But in what sense was Sargon smitten? And how then to understand the kingdom passages which now follow? But see on :31.

Isaiah 14:30 The first-born of the poor will eat, and the needy will lie down in safety; and I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant will be killed- Adam Clarke: "I will kill “He will slay”". The idea is that when the Messiah figure arose at the fall of Babylon (:29), there would be the Kingdom of God reestablished; with plenty of food for the poor and needy of Judah, and the destruction of the remnants of the impenitent Philistines. The "remnant" would refer to those left over after their sufferings at the hands of Babylon and Assyria.

Isaiah 14:31 Howl, gate! Cry, city!- This could be read as an appeal for them to repent, and cry to Yahweh in order to avoid the destruction that was otherwise certain (see on Jer. 18:8-10).

You are melted away, Philistia, all of you; for smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks- This recalls the prophecies of the Assyrians and Babylonians advancing in perfect order "from the north"; and I suggested on :29 that Sennacherib might have been the flying fiery serpent. But the reference equally could be to Messiah's forces coming upon them "from the north" in that as noted on :28, what is in view is the Philistine capture of the cities in the southern part of Judah (2 Chron. 28:18).

Isaiah 14:32 What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That Yahweh

has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of His people will take refuge- The idea could be that the judged, desperate and repentant Philistines send messengers to Zion asking for help, and are told that the afflicted of God's people have found refuge in the reestablished Zion- implying that the Philistines could likewise. Zion will have been founded in that the foundation corner stone of the Messiah had been laid there (Is. 28:16). These things didn't fully happen at the time, but will come to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus at His return. They could have had more fulfilment in Hezekiah, when the messengers of the nations sent to congratulate him after the victory against Assyria and his recovery from terminal illness (2 Chron. 32:23). But he let the baton drop at that stage. Later on, the foundation of Zion was again laid (Ezra 3:10; Is. 44:28; Zech. 4:9 s.w.), but again the baton was dropped.

Isaiah Chapter 15

Isaiah 15:1 The burden of Moab: for in a night, Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to nothing- The idea is that Moab would be overthrown in a night. This didn't literally happen. I have noted on Is 13:1 and throughout the prophecies of the fall of Babylon that these prophecies against the nations didn't completely come to pass. The prophetic scenario was that judgment would come upon Israel, Judah and all the surrounding nations; Babylon would fall, and a repentant remnant of all the nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham would become part of the reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. And so likewise this overnight destruction of Moab didn't happen; the lay waste an entire nation overnight would require Divine intervention. It's rather like the language of Is. 13:13, suggesting there would be an earthquake and a Divine judgment on the scale of Sodom's destruction. This didn't happen. But it will in the last days, to where the prophecy has been rescheduled and reapplied. The significance of Ar is that according to Mesha's inscription on the Moabite Stone, it had been taken from Judah in the time of Ahab

For in a night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to nothing- LXX: "by night the wall of the land of Moab shall be destroyed". The great prophetic theme is that all human defences, be they the walls of Jerusalem, Babylon or Moab, would all prove powerless before the Divine judgment. And that principle applies today, where wealth, scheming and insurance policies can be felt to be a wall against Divine judgment.

Isaiah 15:2 They have gone up to Bayith, and to Dibon, to the high places, to weep. Moab wails over Nebo and over Medeba. Baldness is on all of their heads; every beard is cut off- LXX "Debon, where your altar is, shall be destroyed". The judgments were always against the idols of these nations, in the hope that a remnant would repent. Weeping over Nebo, a mountain, is strange unless we understand that there was a supernatural Divine judgment intended (see on :1) which would bring down the mountains. The order of the areas here is from south to north; the idea is that all Moab would be desolated. This didn't happen at the time; see on :1.

Isaiah 15:3 In their streets they clothe themselves in sackcloth. In their streets and on their housetops everyone wails, weeping abundantly- The LXX read this as a command: "Gird yourselves with sackcloth in her streets: and lament upon her roofs, and in her streets, and in her ways; howl all of you with weeping". In

this case, we would have here a call to repentance, just as Babylon had. Because God wished them to repentant, and the Divine intention was that a minority would. They were to weep on the streets and housetops because this was where their altars were (Is. 22:1 etc.). Jeremiah lamented that Jerusalem's streets and roofs were full of such idolatry.

Isaiah 15:4 Heshbon cries out with Elealeh. Their voice is heard even to Jahaz. Therefore the armed men of Moab cry aloud- Because the Moabites would cry out and their voice would be heard, "*my* heart shall cry out for Moab" (Is. 15:4,5,8). As the Lord Jesus is a representative Saviour, we too must feel the judgment that is to come upon others, and in that sense cry out for them as they will cry out. We too will appeal to men with conviction, as Isaiah's heart cried out for Moab like a young heifer about to be slaughtered, feeling for them in what would come upon them, and desperately appealing for their repentance. Jer. 48:41 defines the crying aloud as birth pangs: "the heart of the mighty men of Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs". Again the metaphor has hope of a new birth out of this calamity. The Divine hope was that Moab along with Israel would repent and form a reborn people in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel.

Their souls tremble within them- This could be a reference to their awareness that they had sinned against Yahweh; hence LXX "her soul shall know".

Isaiah 15:5 My heart cries out for Moab! Her nobles flee to Zoar, to Eglath Shelishiyah; for they go up by the ascent of Luhith with weeping; for in the way of Horonaim, they raise up a cry of destruction- As Moab cried out like a three year old heifer (Jer. 48:34), so did Isaiah for them (Is. 15:5). All this was done by Isaiah and Jeremiah, knowing that Moab hated Israel (Is. 25:10) and were evidently worthy of God's condemnation. But all the same they loved them, in the spirit of Noah witnessing to the mocking world around him. Our knowledge of this world's future means that as we walk the streets and mix with men and women, our heart should cry out for them, no matter how they behave towards us, and there should be a deep seated desire for at least some of them to come to repentance and thereby avoid the judgments to come. Passionate Christian living has such witness at its heart. Particularly is this true, surely, of the people and land of Israel. It ought to be impossible for us to walk its streets or meet its people without at least desiring to give them a leaflet or say at least something to try to help them see what lies ahead. See on Is. 16:7.

Isaiah 15:6 For the waters of Nimrim will be desolate; for the grass has withered away, the tender grass fails, there is no green thing- I suggested on :1,2 that what was in view was a supernatural Divine judgment upon Moab, rather than a drought which would produce this situation over an extended period. Again we note the destruction of physical features, such as the waters of Nimrim. This would have been due to direct Divine judgment; the destruction of all green things is likewise reflective of such supernatural judgment rather than the effects of invading armies. The desolation of the waters could have been from invaders putting stones in wells as in 2 Kings 3:25, but the impression is of a more widespread and supernatural destruction.

Isaiah 15:7 Therefore they will carry away the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have stored up, over the brook of the willows- LXX "Shall Moab even thus be delivered? for I will bring the Arabians upon the valley, and they shall take it". Whether or not Moab would be delivered was left an open question because they would be asked to repent, and accepted the deliverance of Yahweh who alone could save. The later prophecy of Jer. 48:40 says that Babylon would effect this judgment upon Moab. Just as Babylon came as an eagle against Judah, so it would against Moab (Jer. 4:13; Dt. 28:49). There was to be no avoiding Divine judgment. So we see here the reapplication of a prophecy about Moab to a later date; instead of bands of Bedouin Arab marauding over her Divinely judged wastelands, and her crossing the brook into Edom, the Babylonians were to judge her, because this earlier prophecy didn't come to its possible fulfilment at the time.

Isaiah 15:8 For the cry has gone around the borders of Moab; its wailing to Eglaim, and its wailing echoes back to Beer Elim- From the north to the south, the equivalent of the “Dan and Beersheba” of Israel.

Isaiah 15:9 For the waters of Dimon are full of blood; for I will bring yet more on Dimon, a lion on those of Moab who escape, and on the remnant of the land- LXX "I will bring Arabians upon Dimon, and I will take away the seed of Moab, and Ariel, and the remnant of Adama". As explained on :1, the prophetic scenario didn't completely work out at the time; but it will do in essence in the last days. For "Arabians", see on :7. There is an alliteration between "Dibon" and "blood". The idea is that their being full of blood was potentially possible; but

again, that depended upon their repentance as to whether the potential was realized.

Isaiah Chapter 16

Isaiah 16:1 Send the lambs for the ruler of the land from Selah to the wilderness, to the mountain of the daughter of Zion- Sela is Petra. This verse seems to be an appeal for Moab to repent and send an offering to Mount Zion, the temple, instead of sending lambs as a tribute to Israel as before (2 Kings 3:4). This was in order to avert the judgment coming upon them, which is spoken of as sure to come ("for it shall be...", :2). God's word was able to be fulfilled or not, according to human repentance. "The wilderness" would refer to the tract of desert between Sela and Jerusalem.

LXX "I will send as it were reptiles on the land: is not the mount of the daughter of Sion a desolate rock?". In this case the judgment of Moab and Judah, including the destruction of the temple, is envisaged as happening at the same time. This was part of the wide network of possible prophetic scenarios.

To the ruler of the land- Moab were to accept that they were living in the land promised to Abraham and were only allowed there in God's Kingdom by grace. Under David they had given him tribute (2 Sam. 8:2), and the tribute they paid to later kings of Israel was in lambs (2 Kings 3:4), so we can assume they sent their tribute to David in the form of lambs; they were being asked to accept that the throne of David had been re-established (see on :5). This tribute was to be given "from Selah to the wilderness", from the frontier city to the other side of the country. The whole of Moab was to accept from the heart that they were living by grace in the territory of God's Kingdom and to give tribute to the Messiah King of Israel, recognizing that Israel's God was ruler of the whole land / earth.

Isaiah 16:2 For it will be that as wandering birds, as a scattered nest, so will the daughters of Moab be at the fords of the Arnon- The daughters of Moab could refer to the provincial towns of Moab. The idea may be that the scattered Moabites would be restored if they repented by worshipping Yahweh (:1); and their remnant would then be restored to their land. All this of course was a prophetic scenario that depended upon the repentance of both Judah and Moab in response to the judgments to come upon them at the hands of the Assyrians or Babylonians. But they didn't respond.

Isaiah 16:3 Give counsel! Execute justice! Make your shade like the night in the

midst of the noonday! Hide the outcasts! Don't betray the fugitive!- This is an appeal for repentance, made clearer in the LXX: "take farther counsel, and continually make thou a shelter from grief: they flee in darkness at mid-day; they are amazed; be not thou led captive". As explained on :4, if they had accepted the refugees from Judah and turned to Yahweh, the intended judgment would have been averted, in line with the principles of Jer. 18:8-10. Or it could be that this verse is an exhortation to Judah to accept the repentant remnant of Moab into Zion; for the reestablished Kingdom was intended to be a place of refuge for the remnants of the surrounding nations (Is. 4:6).

Isaiah 16:4 Let My outcasts dwell with you! As for Moab, be a hiding place for him from the face of the destroyer. For the extortioner is brought to nothing. Destruction ceases, the oppressors are consumed out of the land- As explained on :3, if they had accepted the refugees from Judah and turned to Yahweh, the intended judgment would have been averted, in line with the principles of Jer. 18:8-10. The LXX have: "The fugitives of Moab shall sojourn with thee [the change of one accent reverses the sense]; they shall be to you a shelter from the face of the pursuer: for thine alliance has been taken away, and the oppressing ruler has perished from off the earth". This then would be an address to Judah. They were to accept refugees from Moab and Moab would accept their refugees; perhaps that idea is reflected in the ambiguity of the text here. The "alliance" with Egypt would end, and Babylon would fall. In God's restored Kingdom which would then be established (:5), the remnants of Moab and Judah would then have an equal place by grace. But the refusal to repent meant that this possibility didn't happen, and so in essence the scene has been reapplied to events of the last days.

But the Hebrew is obscure, and we note the term 'outcasts' occurs in :3 also. The NIV, ESV and other versions suggest the idea is that the Moabite outcasts should be allowed to dwell in Israel, as if in expectation that some (the Moabite 'remnant' of :14?) would respond to the call of Moab to repentance and would want to become part of the covenant people- and they were to be accepted: "Let the outcasts of Moab sojourn among you" (ESV). This certainly makes most sense in the context. The prophecy is about Moab and the possibility of Moab's repentance at the time of Judah's restoration; to suddenly start talking about the outcasts of Israel would be out of context in the chapter. It was David who was famed for letting the outcasts come and dwell with him (s.w. 2 Sam. 14:13,14), so this could be another hint that Moab were to accept the grace of a Davidic king in Israel (see on 16:1). The double appeal for Israel to let the outcasts of

Moab dwell amongst them was perhaps because God had earlier said that Moabites were not to enter into the Israelite congregation (Dt. 23:3). God emphasis that they are *His* outcasts. By grace, foreseeing Moab's awful judgment, He urges Israel to accept repentant Moab amongst them. This all goes to show that in wrath He remembers mercy, and at the time of judging others His dominant emotion is concern for them- and He truly has tried all possible ways to avert the tragedy.

"Let mine outcasts dwell with thee Moab", God pleads in Is. 16:4. But the rest of Is. 16 is about the awful judgment that will fall upon Moab (Is. 16:12,14). The text doesn't say so, but it's apparent enough- that if Moab was not merciful to the Jews fleeing the Assyrian invasion, then they would face a like judgment. But that judgment was conditional upon Moab's behaviour.

Isaiah 16:5 A throne will be established in grace, one will sit on it in truth, in the tent of David, judging, seeking justice, and swift to do righteousness- It was possible, and envisaged by Isaiah, that a Messianic King would sit upon the re-established throne of David and would provide safety and salvation to the Gentile world who wished to accept Him. See on :4. The same words are used for the eternal establishment of the Messianic throne in the promise to David in 2 Sam. 7:13,16; and Isaiah also uses the phrase in this connection (Is. 9:6). This didn't happen in his time, but the potential was there- in the same way as his son of chapter 9 could have been a Messiah King with an eternal Kingdom in Israel.

"Grace" is also translated "mercy". This would then be seen to have been God's intention through all the judgments. David's enthusiasm for the coming of judgment reflected his understanding that it will be a day of the display of Divine mercy. Is. 16:5 speaks of it as "a throne shall be established in mercy, and one [the Lord Jesus] shall sit thereon judging in truth". It will be the ultimate moment of truth, and yet it will be established in mercy.

Isaiah 16:6 We have heard of the pride of Moab, that he is very proud; even of his arrogance, his pride, and his wrath- This is juxtaposed next to the wonderful possibility of the restored Kingdom of God which they could have a part in (:5). It was their pride which precluded their repentance and the establishment of the Kingdom then.

His boastings are nothing- The ambiguity of the original is perhaps because we

are dealing with various possible scenarios; the fulfilment of the prophetic word was conditional upon various scenarios of repentance. Hence LXX here: "thy prophecy shall not be thus, no not thus".

Isaiah 16:7 Therefore Moab will wail for Moab, all of them will wail- It was Moab who would howl for Moab- but Isaiah, feeling for them so strongly, also howled for them; "*my* bowls shall sound like an harp for Moab" (Is. 16:11). And he felt the same for his own people, Israel. See on is. 15:4,5.

You will mourn for the raisin cakes of Kir Hareseth, utterly stricken- The mourning for the raisin cakes, part of the idol rituals (Hos. 3:1), may be mourning in repentance. Hence LXX: "but thou shalt care for them that dwell in Seth, and thou shalt not be ashamed". The ambiguity of the original is perhaps because we are dealing with various possible scenarios; the fulfilment of the prophetic word was conditional upon various scenarios of repentance.

Isaiah 16:8 For the fields of Heshbon languish like the vine of Sibmah. The lords of the nations have broken down its choice branches which reached even to Jazer, which wandered into the wilderness. Its shoots were spread abroad, they passed over the sea- The vines of Moab were famous, known even "over the sea" (although this could refer to the vineyards spreading to the Dead Sea). They stretched from Sibmah, in the outskirts of Heshbon, all the way to Jazer and even to the desert; and even to the Dead Sea. This again is a feature of Divine judgment; all that secular man boasts and rejoices in will be brought down.

Isaiah 16:9 Therefore I will weep with the weeping of Jazer for the vine of Sibmah. I will water you with my tears, Heshbon, and Elealeh: for on your summer fruits and on your harvest the battle shout has fallen- Isaiah was to weep for Moab, even though Moab wept for herself (:7). He so believed the prophecy about Moab and like God, took no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The same "I" who wept for Moab's judgment was to be the One who brought the judgments: "for I will trample on thy harvest and on thy vintages" (LXX), the classic language of Divine judgment. Through Isaiah, He wept for these Gentiles, so wishing their repentance.

Isaiah 16:10 Gladness is taken away, and joy out of the fruitful field; and in the

vineyards there will be no singing, neither joyful noise. Nobody will tread out wine in the presses; I have made the shouting stop- The context is of Isaiah speaking (:11). He realized the power of the words he was uttering. He was manifesting God here; as noted on :9, the same "I" who wept for Moab's judgment was to be the One who brought the judgments. "Shouting" is as AV "vintage shouting". Their joyful treading of the vintage was to be replaced by Yahweh treading them in the winepress of judgment; see on :9. The Hebrew noun is used for both the joyous shout of the grape-treaders and for a battle-cry (Jer. 25:30; 51:14).

Isaiah 16:11 Therefore my heart sounds like a harp for Moab, and my inward parts for Kir Heres- The very core of Isaiah's being wept for his national enemies, so sure was he that the words flowing from his tongue and pen were true. And yet Isaiah was speaking on God's behalf, for it was God ultimately who brought the judgments (:10), and so Isaiah's weeping over Moab's impenitence was in fact God's weeping. He is not indifferent to the billions who have refused His offer of repentance and salvation.

Isaiah's heart cried out for Moab like a young heifer about to be slaughtered, feeling for them in what would come upon them, and desperately appealing for their repentance. Because the Moabites would cry out and their voice would be heard, "*my* heart shall cry out for Moab" (Is. 15:4,5,8). As the Lord Jesus is a representative Saviour, we too must feel the judgment that is to come upon others, and in that sense cry out for them as they will cry out. "Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab" (Is. 16:7)- but Isaiah, feeling for them so strongly, also howled for them; "*my* bowls shall sound like an harp for Moab" (Is. 16:11).

Isaiah 16:12 It will happen that when Moab presents himself, when he wearies himself on the high place and comes to his sanctuary to pray, that he will not prevail- Moab was intended to have realized that the gods of their high places would not save them; but they refused to perceive that, wearying themselves in endlessly begging the gods for help as in 1 Kings 18:26; and then still went to their sanctuary to pray to their idols. They thereby refused the possibility of their judgment being averted. The sanctuary sounds like the sanctuary Mesha writes about on the Moabite stone, Beth-Bamah. However there is again an ambiguity in the text which could hint at the possibility of their repentance; Ewald translates it: "...and prevails nothing, then he shall be ashamed of Chemosh, and turn to Jehovah".

Isaiah 16:13 This is the word that Yahweh spoke concerning Moab in time past- AV "long ago". But surely not that long ago- the prophecy against Moab was in chapter 15. But the three years grace (:14), the gap between statement and fulfilment, was a relatively long time in the sense that God was allowing for repentance when repentance had already been refused by Moab. Or the 'long ago' prophecy could be Balaam's in Num. 24:17. All that time, Moab had had the opportunity to repent and make history work out a different way to that prophesied. But still they would not. But "in time past" can refer to the recent past (2 Sam. 15:34) and the distant past (Ps. 93:2).

Isaiah 16:14 But now Yahweh has spoken, saying, Within three years, as a worker bound by contract would count them, the glory of Moab shall be brought into contempt, with all his great multitude; and the remnant will be very small and feeble- Perhaps the sense is that as a hired hand counts the days of required service exactly, so this calamity would happen within exactly three years. I noted on the prophecies of Isaiah's children in Is. 7:16; 8:1,18 that there was the potential of a very speedy fulfilment of the prophecies, before the newborn child could even speak; and we have a similar period in Is. 21:16. And out of all those judgments, a repentant "remnant" were envisaged as emerging, who could join with Judah in the reestablished Kingdom of God. But the complex network of possibilities alluded to be Isaiah were precluded by the lack of repentance by both Judah and Moab.

Isaiah Chapter 17

Isaiah 17:1 The burden of Damascus: Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap- I have commented through Is. 13-16 upon the conditional nature of these prophecies. They envisage a situation in which Babylon and / or Assyria will judge Judah and the surrounding nations, and a repentant remnant from all of them will unite in a multi-ethnic, reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. But this scenario was precluded by various factors, not least the impenitence of all the peoples; and perhaps foreseeing this, God did not bring about all the judgments to the extent spoken of. The essence of the prophecies however will come true in the last days. Here we have an example- Damascus continued as a city and does to this day, being one of the oldest continually occupied cities on earth.

Isaiah 17:2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken. They will be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid- See on :1. The LXX make this read on as part of the burden upon Damascus in :1. There is no "Aroer" near Damascus.

Isaiah 17:3 The fortress shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria. They will be as the glory of the children of Israel, says Yahweh of Armies- And that glory was to be brought down (:4). Here there is envisaged the judgment together of Israel, Syria and Judah. This was the Divine perspective on Judah's fear of a confederacy against them by Israel and Syria- they were all to perish together (Is. 7:1-5). I explained on Is. 8:8 that it was one of the various prophetic potentials that Assyria would destroy these three nations together during the same campaign. This didn't come about; partly because there was enough response in Judah to Isaiah's prophecies that the Assyrians were stopped short and destroyed. Or it could be that the overweening pride of Assyria and their revolt against Yahweh was such that He destroyed to destroy them anyway and not allow them to destroy Jerusalem. Hence LXX: "And she shall no longer be a strong place for Ephraim to flee to, and there shall no longer be a kingdom in Damascus, or a remnant of Syrians; for thou art no better than the children of Israel". The Syrians did remain and the kingdom of Damascus did continue, because the potential scenario was precluded from happening. We also note that Israel are again presented as no better than the Gentiles, and therefore shared similar judgments.

It could be argued that this chapter is largely about the judgment of "Jacob", but

Damascus is mentioned because Syria would no longer be a fortress or "bulwark" / source of strength for them. The idea is that Damascus and the ten tribes were to be destroyed together in the same campaign by Babylon or Assyria. Whilst this scenario didn't quite work out as it could have done, the abiding reality is that all human sources of strength fade to nothing before Divine judgment. This is the same situation as in Is. 7, where Israel and Syria united against Judah and their judgment by Assyria / Babylon is prophesied. Syria was not so strong; Damascus had recently been ransacked by the Assyrians (2 Kings 16:9). But still they seemed to Israel such a relative source of strength.

Isaiah 17:4 It will happen in that day that the glory of Jacob will be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh will become lean- The fatness of the Assyrians was to become lean (Is. 10:16); but here, fatness becoming lean is the very language used of what was to happen to the glory of Jacob. By their arrogance they proclaimed themselves as no better than Gentiles, meriting the same judgment. See on :3.

Isaiah 17:5 It will be like when the harvester gathers the wheat, and his arm reaps the grain. Yes, it will be like when one gleans grain in the valley of Rephaim- This is the language of judgment day, a harvest in a valley. But from that judgment there was intended to be a gleaning, a remnant of good corn would emerge. This reflects the continual Divine hope that a remnant of Syria as well as of Ephraim and Judah would repent (:5). For the subject of the prophecy merges from Syria to Ephraim and now to Judah- the valley of Rephaim or giants was just south of Jerusalem in Judah (Josh. 15:8; 18:16). The idea was that remnants of all these peoples would unite in repentance in the reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah.

Isaiah 17:6 Yet gleanings will be left there, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outermost branches of a fruitful tree, says Yahweh, the God of Israel- The idea is that the tree was "fruitful" [potentially] but only a very few bits of fruit would be found. This finding of this tiny remnant "there", in a valley near Jerusalem (see on :5). This didn't happen at the time, Mic. 7:1 says that actually no gleanings of the vintage were found; but all this will be transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to the outcome of the final judgment in a similar valley near Jerusalem at the Lord's return. Olives were struck down from the higher branches with a stick, and that rod or stick which was to beat Judah and the nations is clearly defined as

Babylon / Assyria in Is. 10. Is. 24:13-15,21-23 clearly applies this scenario to the last days.

Isaiah 17:7 In that day, a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes shall perceive the Holy One of Israel- This envisages the remnant of the Syrians, Israel and Judah turning to Yahweh, God of Israel. At their nadir, like men today, they will reflect on the most basic fact of human existence- that they were created by God. Man cannot see God, and yet eyes can perceive Him- if they are penitent. The contrast is with how they had previously focused their mental attention on what they had 'made', their idols (:8); rather than upon their personal maker. This is the wonderful imperative of believing that we were made, created; the works of *our* hands become less appealing.

Isaiah 17:8 They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither shall they respect that which their fingers have made, neither the Asherim nor the incense altars- The Syrians, as well as God's people, would repent of their idolatry and turn to Yahweh alone (:7). And this shall come supremely true in the last days. When a man looks to his maker, "he shall not look to the altars [of] the work of *his* hands, neither shall he have respect to that which *his* fingers have made". God's fingers made the stars and all of creation (Ps. 8:3). By focusing upon *God's* works in creation, we will not be focused upon *our* works, but rather trust in God's creative grace.

Isaiah 17:9 In that day their strong cities will be like the forsaken places in the woods and on the mountain top, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel; and it will be a desolation- "Strong" is the same word used in :10 of how God was to be their strength. Instead, Israel had trusted in the strong cities of the Syrians such as Damascus. This is the trouble with trusting in human strength and even having access to it; our trust in God's strength is thereby so easily diminished.

Isaiah 17:10 For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not remembered the rock of your strength- They saw salvation in an alliance with Syria to destroy Judah with Egypt's help and thus form a united buffer against Assyria. All these kinds of petty politics and desperate dreams are just as much a part of our thinking today. And it is all a forgetting of Yahweh as the rock of our strength and salvation. Syria was not so strong; Damascus had recently been

ransacked by the Assyrians (2 Kings 16:9). But still they seemed to Israel such a relative source of strength.

Therefore you plant pleasant plants, and set out foreign seedlings- RVmg. "thou plantest plantings of Adonis". This was a Syrian god. The alliance between Israel and Syria against Judah (Is. 7) required Israel to accept Syrian gods. And therefore they had effectively resigned their belief in Yahweh although they would never have admitted that in so many words. We can not serve two masters.

Isaiah 17:11 In the day of your planting, you hedge it in; in the morning, you make your seed blossom, but the harvest flees away in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow- The idea is that no matter how successful the alliance with Syria appeared to be initially, it would not prosper when it came to term, and the harvest of it would be a day of terrible judgment. This is the end of all ways around problems which are anything less than a complete falling upon Yahweh in our hearts. "Desperate sorrow" and "grief" in Hebrew mean incurable illness; the tragedy was that the opportunity for healing had been given but they had refused it, and therefore so many potentials were thereby disallowed.

Isaiah 17:12 Ah, the uproar of many peoples, who roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of nations, that rush like the rushing of mighty waters!- The judgment upon Syria and Israel (and probably Judah is also in view here (see on :5), would be like the rushing of waters- representing the various nations in the Assyrian or Babylonian confederacy. But this strange rush of nations against them would be strangely stopped (:13), by grace. "The roaring of the seas" is the term used for the Babylonian invasion of Judah (Jer. 5:22; 6:23). What began as a prophecy of judgment against Syria and Israel at the hands of the Assyrians now morphs into judgment against Judah at the hands of the Babylonians; see on Is. 13:1. The phrase is also used of Yahweh's victory at the roaring Red Sea (Is. 51:15; Ps. 65:7), implying again that this invasion is going to be destroyed as the Egyptians were. This didn't happen at the Babylonian invasion, although potentially it could've done had Judah repented.

Isaiah 17:13 The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters: but He will rebuke them, and they will flee far off, and will be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm- LXX "as a storm whirling the dust of the wheel". This is the language of the cherubim,

implying God would intervene directly. The Assyrian invasion of Israel and Syria (see on :12) could have been averted, but it wasn't, because they didn't repent. But it was averted against Judah because a minority repented; the same word for "rush" is used of the tumult of that invasion (2 Kings 19:25; Is. 6:11). But the Babylonian invasion of them some time later wasn't, although it would've been had they repented. The chaff being blown before the wind recalls the vision of Dan. 2, whose primary potential fulfilment was in the fall of Babylon and the little stone of the repentant exiles returning to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land. See notes on Dan. 2. But that too was precluded by Judah's impenitence. And so it will come to fulfilment in the last days, when again the nations will "rush" to their judgment (Is. 13:4 s.w.).

Isaiah 17:14 At evening, behold, terror! Before the morning, they are no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us- LXX "that robbed you of your inheritance". The primary allusion is to the robbery of Judah by the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:13-16), resulting in the Angel smiting their army so that "before the morning" they were all dead corpses (Is. 37:36).

Isaiah Chapter 18

Isaiah 18:1 Ah, the land of the rustling of wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia- I have commented through Is. 13-17 upon the conditional nature of these prophecies. They envisage a situation in which Babylon and / or Assyria will judge Judah and the surrounding nations, and a repentant remnant from all of them will unite in a multi-ethnic, reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. But this scenario was precluded by various factors, not least the impenitence of all the peoples; and perhaps foreseeing this, God did not bring about all the judgments to the extent spoken of. The essence of the prophecies however will come true in the last days. Here we have an example- the people of Cush didn't respond to their judgment by coming to Zion in repentance (:7).

The land shadowed by wings may again be a cherubim allusion, suggesting that God's purpose was potentially with them too if only they would respond; for it was His intention that the reestablished Kingdom should include repentant remnants of all the surrounding nations. Or perhaps there is simply a reference to the swarms of buzzing flies, especially the tsetse, which Cush was famous for. Those swarms might also represent their hosts of warriors (cp. Is. 7:18).

Isaiah 18:2 That sends ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus on the waters, saying, Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people awesome from their beginning onward, a nation that measures out and treads down, whose land the rivers divide!- "The sea" is the Nile (Is. 19:5; Nah. 3:8). The reference is apparently to the huge power of the Ethiopian army (2 Chron. 14:9-13). The terms used here for this nation are legitimately translated otherwise by the AV: "That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!". The language here would be more appropriate to Judah. See on :7. The ambassadors in this case would then be representatives of Cush coming to the restored remnant of God's people in Zion, seeking Yahweh of Israel. See on :3,4. And if we read the verse as the modern versions, we appear to have Cush sending ambassadors to her own people which makes little sense.

Isaiah 18:3 All you inhabitants of the world and you dwellers on the land, when a banner is lifted up on the mountains, look! When the trumpet is blown, listen!-

The ensign or banner set up on mount Zion in Is. 13:2 would refer to the "pole" upon which the serpent was lifted up, representing the crucified Lord Jesus (Num. 21:8 s.w.). In the latter day application, this is to be the spiritual rallying point for the repentant remnant of both Judah ("the land") and the surrounding nations of the "world" (s.w. Is. 11:10,12; 18:3; 30:17; 31:9; 49:22; 62:10). Although this was precluded from happening at the time because those remnants didn't repent, it will become gloriously true in the last days. Cush at the time could have repented and come to Zion; see on :7.

Isaiah 18:4 For Yahweh said to me, I will be still, and I will be seen in My dwelling place, like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest- The reference may be to the cloud of glory which was to appear over Zion in the reestablished Kingdom when Yahweh would literally dwell in Zion (Ez. 48:35) and men would see His face (Rev. 22:4) after the final "harvest" of judgment; this was intended to be a place of refuge for the remnants of the surrounding nations (Is. 4:6). The "clear heat" would refer to the full reestablishment of David's Kingdom in the time off a Messianic descendant of his (2 Sam. 23:4). In Is. 16:3, Moab had been invited to come to this refuge, and the envisioned outcome here was that the repentant remnant of Cush would also respond to their judgment by coming to Zion in repentance (:7). So very much was precluded from fulfilment by their impenitence.

Isaiah 18:5 For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, He will cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and He will cut down and take away the spreading branches- Here and in :6 we are reading of how the situation of :3,4 will come about. Firstly there must be a gleaning of the potentially fruitful tree, and only after that the remnant would be harvested (both of Cush and Judah), after the rest of the branches are destroyed by the wild beasts of the earth / land (:6). The Lord may allude here when He taught that the blossom on the fig tree (Judah) and all the trees (such as Cush) would be the sure sign that the final harvest is about to begin (Lk. 21:29-31). The latter day application is to the "pruning hooks" of the surrounding nations ranged against Israel (Joel 3:10 s.w.). The cutting off of the twigs and branches implies they had been unfruitful (cp. Jn. 15:2; Rom. 11:18).

Isaiah 18:6 They will be left together for the ravenous birds of the mountains,

and for the animals of the earth. The ravenous birds will summer on them, and all the animals of the earth will winter on them- See on :5. This devastation was to be necessary so that the final harvest could come (:5). The ravenous birds would have been the Babylonian confederacy (s.w. Jer. 12:9), along with the beasts of the *eretz* promised to Abraham; but Judah weren't repentant and neither were the Cushites as a result of that. And so the fulfilment is in essence transferred to events of the last days. It would be a tiny harvest; but that small remnant would be enough for the reestablishment of the Kingdom of God in Judah. The reference to summer and winter could suggest that there is a one year period in view, after which Cush would repent (:7).

Isaiah 18:7 In that time, a present will be brought to Yahweh of Armies from a people tall and smooth, even from a people awesome from their beginning onward, a nation that measures out and treads down, whose land the rivers divide, to the place of the name of Yahweh of Armies, Mount Zion- The envisioned outcome here was that the repentant remnant of Cush would also respond to their judgment by coming to Zion in repentance (:4). This didn't happen at the time, but it has a deferred fulfilment in the last days, when repentant Jews are sent to call in to Zion these peoples; those who make tall the bow (Is. 66:19, s.w. "tall"). But I noted on :2 the alternative translation and interpretation of this nation as referring to Judah. In this case the "present" brought to Yahweh in Zion would be the Cushites / Ethiopians bringing their Jewish remnant back to Zion- the latter day fulfilment of this would then perhaps have a foretaste in the return of the Falasha Jews from this area to the state of Israel. Gentiles bringing presents to Zion is the language of the reestablished kingdom (Ps. 68:29 s.w.). It could have come about then, when the surrounding nations brought presents to Hezekiah; but human pride and impenitence precluded it. And Hezekiah and his descendants adopted the ways of those nations rather than ruling over them and helping them toward Israel's God.

Isaiah Chapter 19

Isaiah 19:1 The burden of Egypt: Behold, Yahweh rides on a swift cloud, and comes to Egypt- The Old Testament describes Yahweh, the one true God, as riding through the heavens on chariots to the help of His people Israel (Dt. 33:26; 2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10; 104:3; Is. 19:1; Hab. 3:8). But Baal was known as the *rkb 'rpt*, the one who rides upon the clouds. We noted on Is. 17:13; 18:1 that the language of the cherubim is used in these judgments upon the nations, because God was potentially at work with them to move them towards a position whereby His Kingdom would be reestablished, including the repentant remnants of Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations like Egypt. I have commented through Is. 13-18 upon the conditional nature of these prophecies. They envisage a situation in which Babylon and / or Assyria will judge Judah and the surrounding nations, and a repentant remnant from all of them will unite in a multi-ethnic, reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah. But this scenario was precluded by various factors, not least the impenitence of all the peoples; and perhaps foreseeing this, God did not bring about all the judgments to the extent spoken of. Here we have an example- Egypt didn't suffer all the things prophesied in this chapter. The essence of the prophecies however will come true in the last days.

The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence; and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst- "Even the demons believe and tremble" (James 2:19) may allude here**.** The idols of the first century Middle Eastern world were made to demons; and the ultimate non-existence of idols therefore proves the non-existence of demons. See on Is. 65:3.

Isaiah 19:2 I will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians, and they will fight each one against his brother, and each one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom- God prefers to use the wicked to punish themselves; the Lord maybe alludes here in speaking of how kingdoms divided against themselves will fall, whereas His Kingdom stands because it is ultimately undivided. This is a powerful exhortation to unity; disunity in the community makes us as Egypt. God worked directly on their hearts, causing fallout between them, as He did in Jud. 9:23. He can work directly on the human heart, even on the hearts of Gentiles like Egypt, to bring about His purpose. And He can work positively too, to create the unity of the Spirit. All these things are done by His Spirit working directly upon the human spirit.

Isaiah 19:3 The spirit of Egypt will fail in its midst; I will destroy its wisdom. They will seek the idols, the charmers, those who have familiar spirits, and the wizards- The allusion may be to how Pharaoh's spirit was troubled at the failure of his magicians to explain the dreams (Gen. 41:8); with the implication that if they accepted the Hebrew Joseph / Jesus as Saviour and source of wisdom, then far better times could come. See on :7.

Isaiah 19:4 I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord; a fierce king will rule over them, says the Lord Yahweh of Armies- Presumably a reference to the Assyrian domination of Egypt under Esarhaddon in BC 672 and again by Asshurbanipal in BC 662. He ravaged the country but only as far as Thebes; and in BC 645 Psammetichus succeeded in shaking off the Assyrian yoke and uniting Egypt under his rulership. The permanent nature of Egypt's destruction was not therefore fulfilled at the time, and Egypt survives as a nation to this day. As explained on :1, the potential prophetic scenario was that the Assyrian crushing of Egypt could have led to their repentance and participation in a restored kingdom of God in Judah. This was the same potential scenario for the other surrounding nations, as noted throughout Is. 13-18.

Isaiah 19:5 The waters will fail from the sea, and the river will be wasted and become dry- "The sea" may refer to the Nile as in Nah. 3:8; but the LXX has "And the Egyptians shall drink the water that is by the sea, but the river shall fail, and be dried up". This total drying up of the Nile suggests direct Divine intervention; see on :6. :

Isaiah 19:6 The rivers will become foul; the streams of Egypt will be diminished and dried up, the reeds and flags will wither away- There is no evidence that the Assyrian invasions produced this result (see on :4). The implication is that there would be direct supernatural judgment upon the physical land of Egypt as at the time of Joseph (see on :7). It was God who would directly dry up the Nile (Ez. 30:12). As explained on Is. 13:13, what was in view was judgments on the scale of Sodom's destruction coming upon the surrounding nations to bring them to Yahweh and to join with a repentant Judah in a restored Kingdom of God. But this didn't come about at the time, not only because the Gentiles were impenitent, but because Judah were too, and the Kingdom was not to be restored at the time. See on :16.

Isaiah 19:7 The meadows by the Nile, by the brink of the Nile, and all the sown fields of the Nile, will become dry, be driven away, and be no more- LXX "everything sown by the side of the river, shall be blasted with the wind and dried up". Blasting by the wind recalls Pharaoh's dreams of Egyptian corn blasted by the wind (Gen. 41:6); with the implication that if they accepted the Hebrew Joseph / Jesus, then far better times could come. See on :11,20.

Isaiah 19:8 The fishermen will lament, and all those who fish in the Nile will mourn, and those who spread nets on the waters will languish- A drought would damage the flood plains upon which Egyptian agriculture depended. But in drought, the Egyptians depended on fishing. It's not that there would simply be no fish in the river; there would be no river at all. That is the implication, implying major Divine intervention with supernatural judgments. This was the potential envisaged, but it didn't happen because various preconditions weren't fulfilled; see on :1.

Isaiah 19:9 Moreover those who work in combed flax and those who weave white cloth will be confounded- Egyptian linen was renowned (1 Kings 10:28; Ez. 27:7). But all her glory was to come to an end.

Isaiah 19:10 The pillars will be broken in pieces. All those who work for hire will be grieved in soul- "Pillars" alludes to the Egyptian idea that their nation was held up by special pillars. The judgments of the nations in Is. 13-19 are often expressed in terms understood by them; but the concepts they held are not necessarily correct. But no correction is offered in the text, because it is assumed we understand that God uses the language of the day in talking to people.

Isaiah 19:11 The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish, the counsel of the wisest counsellors of Pharaoh has become stupid. How do you say to Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?- This may continue the similarities with the situation in Joseph's time (see on :7), when the Egyptian wise men were unable to provide wisdom, and Joseph had to teach these wise counsellors Divine wisdom (Ps. 105:22. Always in these judgments there is the hope that spiritual reformation will come out of them, in this case that a Hebrew Joseph /

Jesus figure would be accepted by the Egyptians as their saviour; see on :16,20. They believed that wisdom was inherited, and they were the sons of the wise; and the priesthood and royal family were related. Hence Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife from the priesthood. The point is clearly made here, as it is in Matthew's genealogy of the Lord, that spirituality and wisdom is not inherited, but is a personal matter.

Isaiah 19:12 Where then are your wise men? Let them tell you now; and let them know what Yahweh of Armies has purposed concerning Egypt- These rhetorical questions can be read not as sarcasm but as an actual appeal for the Pharaoh to repent. For that was the intention of the judgments, as this prophecy later makes clear.

Isaiah 19:13 The princes of Zoan have become fools, the princes of Memphis are deceived. They have caused Egypt to go astray, they who are the cornerstone of her tribes- The "tribes" may refer to the ruling castes, or to the cantons of the empire. They were "deceived" by Yahweh. He confirms sinful people in the way they wish to go, and likewise opens the eyes of those who genuinely look towards Him. See on :14.

Isaiah 19:14 Yahweh has mixed a spirit of division in the midst of her; and they have caused Egypt to go astray in all of its works, like a drunken man staggers in his vomit- The princes of Zoan became fools because of the "perverse spirit" (LXX "spirit of error") the LORD had mingled in their hearts- presumably through the work of His Angels, seeing that God makes His Angels spirits. Through the work of the Angels or directly, God can work directly on men’s hearts, and sometimes he does send an "evil spirit" (an "Angel of evil"?) on men, like He did to Saul. See on Ez. 14:9. Intellectual confusion is therefore a judgment from God. God acted upon their minds and perceptions to confuse them. "The spirit of error" is a phrase used in 1 Jn. 4:6 as being given today. When we read that God gave His *good* spirit (Angel?) to instruct Israel, the implication perhaps is that He was and is just as capable of giving an evil or confusing spirit to others (Ex. 9:20). The same language of judgment is used about Judah in Is. 29:10; they acted and thought like Egypt, and so they received Egypt's judgment; just as the unfaithful of the new Israel will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

Isaiah 19:15 Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which head or tail, palm branch or rush, may do- The same words are used for God's judgment upon His people in Is. 9:14; as noted on :14, they acted and thought like Egypt, and so they received Egypt's judgment.

Isaiah 19:16 In that day the Egyptians will be like women, they will tremble and fear because of the shaking of the hand of Yahweh of Armies which He shakes over them- The trembling of women may imply they are about to give birth; always in these judgments there is the hope that spiritual reformation will come out of them; see on :7,11. The trembling suggests literal earthquakes, confirming my suggestion on :6 that what was in view was judgments on the scale of Sodom's destruction coming upon the surrounding nations to bring them to Yahweh and to join with a repentant Judah in a restored Kingdom of God. But this didn't come about at the time, not only because the Gentiles were impenitent, but because Judah were too, and the Kingdom was not to be restored at the time.

Isaiah 19:17 The land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt. Everyone to whom mention is made of it will be afraid, because of the plans of Yahweh of Armies which He determines against it- The allusion is to the effect of the plagues at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 10;7; 11:3; 12:33,36). There could have been supernatural divine judgments upon Egypt at this time, to result in the deliverance of Judah and the repentance of a remnant amongst the Egyptians as happened at that time. But there were not those supernatural judgments at the time because the repentance was not going to be forthcoming; see on :1,6,16.

Isaiah 19:18 In that day, there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan, and swear to Yahweh of Armies- Five is a number simply representing a remnant or small number (Is. 30:17; Lev. 26:8; 2 Kings 7:13). The great prophetic theme is that a remnant shall repent and turn to Israel's God. However what could also be in view is the repentance of the Jewish communities in Egypt (Jer. 44:1) who were starting to forget Hebrew and assimilate into Egypt. This would be the situation of :25 LXX "Blessed be my people that is in Egypt, and that is among the Assyrian".

The potential here would connect with that spoken of in Jer. 12:14-17: "Thus says Yahweh against all My evil neighbours, who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit: behold, I will pluck them up from off their land, and will pluck up the house of Judah from among them. It shall happen, after that I have plucked them up, I will return and have compassion on them; and I will bring them again, every man to his inheritance, and every man to his land. It shall happen, if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, As Yahweh lives; even as they taught My people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built up in the midst of My people. But if they will not hear, then will I pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying it, says Yahweh". Sadly this didn't happen at the time; for neither God's people nor the nations like Egypt repented. The Jews mixed with the people of the land of their exile, they didn't teach them the Name, and so the prophecy didn't come true- they weren't built up in the midst of Israel as intended. Prophecies like Is. 19:18,24 were thereby disabled from fulfilment at that time- "In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt that… swear to the Lord… in that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria". Is. 2:2-4, Zech. 8:21-23 etc. speak of how Gentile nations would desire to learn the ways of God and come up to a temple in Zion for this purpose. Could it not be that these passages are to be read in the context of Jer. 12:14-17- that all this was only possible if at the time of the restoration the nations had learnt God's ways from the Jews?

One will be called The city of destruction- Another reading is "the city of the Lion," i.e. Leontopolis, where a Jewish Temple was built in BC160. Perhaps at that time there was a potential for the fulfilment of the prophecy. But the LXX has "city of Righteousness".

Isaiah 19:19 In that day there will be an altar to Yahweh in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to Yahweh at its border- Josephus claims that this verse was used by the Egyptian Jews as justification for building a Jewish temple at Leontopolis in Egypt in BC160. But this would have merely been an attempt to force the fulfilment of a Kingdom prophecy, and as such it was irrelevant. As explained on :18, this was to happen when Judah was penitent and the Kingdom of God had been reestablished there. But that potential didn't work out as was possible. And so the detail of this prophecy wasn't fulfilled, although the essence of it will be in the last days. Under the Mosaic law, there was to be only one altar to Yahweh, in Jerusalem. And under that law, "pillars" were forbidden (Dt. 16:22). This therefore envisages a situation when Zion's temple would be rebuilt but the law of Moses would not be in force. The potential was that the temple

and worship system of Ez. 40-48 would have been built and operated by the Jews; and although that system included sacrificial worship, it is clearly not the law of Moses. It was all part of a new deal offered to Judah, a new covenant to replace the old which they had broken; and they refused that.

Isaiah 19:20 It will be for a sign and for a witness to Yahweh of Armies in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them- The historical saviour of Egypt had been Joseph, Zaphnath Paaneah, 'saviour of the world'. Their judgments were intended to lead them to accept him; see on :7,11. Egypt were intended to turn to Yahweh as saviour due to their oppression at the hands of the Assyrians (:4). But they didn't. In the latter day application this refers to the acceptance of the Lord Jesus by the nations around Israel after their experience of judgment.

Isaiah 19:21 Yahweh will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know Yahweh in that day. Yes, they will worship with sacrifice and offering, and will vow a vow to Yahweh, and will perform it- The process of Egypt's conversion is planned here in detail. The Jewish exiles in Egypt were to repent and make known the Yahweh Name to those around them in Egypt; then the Egyptians would respond to their oppression by quitting their idols and turning to Yahweh in prayer (:20), making animal and vegetable offerings to Him ("sacrifice and offering") as a result of His making Himself known to them (RVmg.), then undergo further discipline (:22), and then they would fully turn to Yahweh. Likewise God has prepared detailed potential scenarios for repentance in trillions of lives, and the tragedy is that as here, the majority of those scenarios never come about. He must watch with great joy as we at least show willingness to respond to those plans for us.

Isaiah 19:22 Yahweh will strike Egypt, striking and healing. They will return to Yahweh, and He will be entreated by them, and will heal them- See on :21. As in Hos. 6:1, the striking of them was in order to heal them. This was the intention of the Assyrian invasions of Egypt (see on :4); but Egypt didn't spiritually respond to the striking, and so the Divine healing didn't happen.

An indication that all men who hear the Gospel have the potential to respond to

it is perhaps seen in the parable of the prodigal son. His ‘coming home’ to the Father is just that- a coming home, a being received back, to all we were created to be from the very beginning. And perhaps this explains the odd reference to how ultimately, Egypt shall "return unto the Lord" (Is. 19:22). For Egypt were never 'with' the Lord. But in prospect, Egypt along with all humanity were redeemed, and they have to be brought by us to Him in actuality.

Isaiah 19:23 In that day there will be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians- A highway from Egypt to Assyria would have to pass through Judah, and Jerusalem in particular. This was the Divine potential at the time- that a remnant from Assyria and Egypt would repent, and would come to Zion to worship. The Jerusalem temple was to be the central point of their fellowship with each other. This highway is alluded to in Is. 40:3; the highway was to be prepared in a spiritual sense in that the people would repent and be spiritually levelled out, so that the glory of Yahweh in Messiah could come over it to Zion. That would then be reflected in a literal highway leading the nations and repentant exiled Jews to Zion (Is. 49:11; 62:10; Jer. 31:21).

This prophecy clearly connects with Is. 11:16: "There will be a highway for the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria [LXX "Egypt"], like there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt. Egypt was always attractive for the Jews; they trusted in Egypt and some even fled there, seeking help from Egypt rather than from their God. The significance of the highway is therefore that God would give the opportunity for spiritual repentance and return to Him; playing on the idea that the Hebrew word for "return" is also used for repentance. Just as He could dry up the Euphrates for the return to happen from there, so He could build a highway in the desert. But there was no literal highway built for Israel when they left Egypt. Yet they had God's guidance, and therefore the unchartered desert was in fact a direct highway- for those with faith to perceive it. And the apparent random twists and turns of our lives must be understood by us in that same way. It's all in fact a direct highway.

Isaiah 19:24 In that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth- The idea of each having a third is to demonstrate that ethnic differences will not be significant in the restored kingdom. Israel would have an equal part with the repentant remnants of Egypt

and Assyria. This would have been hard to swallow for nationalistic, xenophobic Jews who hated the Assyrians. See on :25. "The midst of the land" often refers to Jerusalem and the temple; this was the point at which there would be no Jew nor Gentile but all would be united in the Messiah. These things didn't happen at the time but look forward to their essential fulfilment in the things of the Lord Jesus Christ in future times.

Isaiah 19:25 because Yahweh of Armies has blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance- LXX "Blessed be my people that is in Egypt, and that is among the Assyrian". The idea is that the exiled people of God in Assyria and Egypt would repent and join with their captors in repentance and acceptance of Yahweh. This was the potential possible at the time, but as explained on :1, it didn't happen because they refused to repent. But in essence it will do so in the last days. The same possibility is alluded to in :18, where what could have been in view was the repentance of the Jewish communities in Egypt (Jer. 44:1) who were starting to forget Hebrew and assimilate into Egypt. It was Israel who are called the work of God's hands, but now the repentant remnant of the Egyptians and Assyrians were to be called that too. All this would have been hard to swallow for nationalistic, xenophobic Jews who hated the Assyrians. And perhaps that was one reason why they didn't preach to them. Jonah's refusal to preach to Nineveh is the parade example of their attitude.

Isaiah Chapter 20

Isaiah 20:1 In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it- Tartan took Ashdod just east of Judah on his way down to attack Egypt. This prophecy was therefore given when the power of Egypt was about to fall to the Assyrians. Judah were trusting in Egypt for help against the Assyrians, and so Isaiah's message is that Egypt were not to be trusted upon in any case, as they were about to fall. They were to trust in Him alone. Tartan was also sent against Judah, later; although "Tartan" may be a title rather than a personal name.

Isaiah 20:2 At that time Yahweh spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go, and loosen the sackcloth from off your waist, and take your shoes from off your feet. He did so, walking naked and barefoot- This extraordinary effort was not only to warn Judah that Egypt was going to fall and therefore should not be depended upon for help against Assyria (:1). It was also to appeal to Egypt to repent and turn to Israel's God; for it was the Divine intention that the reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah would include a repentant remnant from all the surrounding nations.

LXX "loose thy sandals from off thy feet" is what was spoken to Moses at the burning bush, because he was on holy ground. The implication could be that if Egypt repented and trusted in Israel's God, then their land too would be incorporated in the holy land of God's reestablished Kingdom, as envisaged at the end of the previous chapter.

God spoke “by Isaiah” when he walked naked and barefoot. Who he was, was to be their example and thereby God’s message. Receipt of God’s true revelation involved dialogue with God, even disagreement with Him for a moment, response, pleading, speech and counterspeech. It wasn’t a case of merely passively hearing a voice and writing it down. Part and parcel of hearing the word of God and being inspired with it was to react to it in daily life- hence Ezekiel couldn’t mourn for his wife, Hosea had to marry a whore as a reflection of God’s love for Israel, Isaiah had to walk naked, reflecting how Zion would be stripped naked, the punishment for a whore (see on Is. 3:17). Truly “The prophet threw his whole self into his prophecy, and made not his lips alone, but his whole personality, the vehicle of the divine ‘word’” (H.H. Rowley, *The Servant Of The Lord* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) p. 118.). The inner accord which the prophets had with the mind and word of God led to their personalities being like God’s. And mankind’s laughing them off as crazy, as mentally disturbed,

was effectively their rejection and mocking of God Himself. We're reminded of how the suffering Son of God in His time of dying, the highest and most intense expression of God's love, was "the song of the drunkards" (Ps. 69:12). The prophets "spoke from the mouth of Yahweh" Himself; and yet the people scoffed at them (2 Chron. 36:12,16 RV). The power of inspiration was and is so great; and to not heed God's word is therefore a personal affront to Him.

Isaiah 20:3 Yahweh said, As My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder concerning Egypt and concerning Ethiopia- LXX "As my servant Esaias has walked naked and barefoot three years, there shall be three years for signs and wonders to the Egyptians and Ethiopians". This would imply that they had a period of three years to repent. As explained on Is. 19:1, the prophetic scenario here with Egypt didn't exactly fulfill at the time. This three year period will perhaps have some fulfilment in the last days, when there appears to be a period of three and a half years testing before the Lord Jesus is revealed.

Isaiah 20:4 so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt- This predicted captivity of Egypt was that which would come upon Judah at the hand of the Assyrians. But a minority did repent and so this was averted; Isaiah's appeal therefore did achieve something. This mass captivity of Ethiopians and Egyptians didn't really happen at the hands of the Assyrians; as explained on Is. 19:1, the prophetic scenario here with Egypt didn't exactly fulfill at the time.

Isaiah 20:5 They will be dismayed and confounded, because of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory- The grammar is ambiguous. For how could Egypt and Ethiopia be ashamed of trusting in themselves? The ambiguity is because this is an appeal to Judah not to trust in those nations because they would fall, and Judah would be ashamed of their trust in them. The LXX has "And the Egyptians being defeated shall be ashamed of the Ethiopians, in whom they had trusted; for they were their glory". In this case the lesson would be that as Egypt had trusted in Ethiopia and been ashamed, so if Judah trusted in Egypt they would be ashamed.

Isaiah 20:6 The inhabitants of this coast land will say in that day, 'Behold, this is our expectation, where we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria. And we, how will we escape?'- The Philistines were the inhabitants of the coast land, and they had trusted in Egypt to save them from Assyria. But now Ashdod had fallen (:1). The men of Judah had likewise fled to Egypt and Ethiopia for help against Assyria (Is. 10:3)- rather than to their God. They had ignored 'Hezekiah', 'Yah is my help'. In other words, Judah gave in to the temptation which we acutely face today- to deal with our fears in the same way as the surrounding world does, rather than fall upon our God. For they had tried to meet their fears of Assyria in the same way as the Philistines had.

A desire to escape but having no place to run is a feature of all Divine condemnations (Heb. 2:3, quoting Is. 20:6 concerning the inability of men to escape from the approach of the invincible Assyrian army). The rejected will see that the Lord is coming against them with an army much stronger than theirs, and they have missed the chance to make peace (Lk. 14:31).

Isaiah Chapter 21

Isaiah 21:1 The burden of the wilderness of the sea- Babylon is clearly referred to; the plain of Babylon was as it were covered with the water of the Euphrates so that it could appear as a sea (Jer. 51:13,36). When the Euphrates was diverted to dry up the river protecting Babylon, the water flooded into the area, turning it into a huge "sea" of marshland.

As whirlwinds in the South sweep through, it comes from the wilderness, from an awesome land- A whirlwind coming from the desert, sweeping up sand before it, recalls the cherubim. I have noted that often the visions of judgment allude to the cherubim obliquely, whereas Ezekiel states their presence specifically. The idea is that God's Angelic chariots were at work preparing and moving the nations; in this case bringing the Medes across the desert area between Elam and Babylon. This whirlwind would be similar to those experienced in "the south" of Israel, the Negev (as in Zech. 9:14). So this prophecy of Babylon's fall was largely for the benefit of the Jews who could recall the whirlwinds in the Negev.

Isaiah 21:2 A grievous vision is declared to me. The treacherous man deals treacherously, and the destroyer destroys. Go up, Elam; attack!- The vision reads as if Isaiah is the sufferer, as if he feels the grief and tragedy of this judgment to come upon Babylon; he so identifies with the object of the prophecy, even though they are Gentiles being judged for their sin. Our identity with this world and the objects of judgment should be the same; for this was the essence of the cross, where the sinless Lord Jesus identified with every sinner, to the death. This is clear in :3, and in this verse 2 is clearer in the LXX: "The Elamites are upon me, and the ambassadors of the Persians come against me: now will I groan and comfort myself".

GNB has "a vision of betrayal". There is good evidence that when Darius took Babylon, this was as a result of betrayal from within. Layard reports inscriptions which report the pro-Darius supporters within Babylon opening the gates. The scenario here and throughout Jer. 50 concerning Babylon didn't come true as [potentially planned. Her judgment was partly dependent upon Judah's repentance. And there were various other factors which preclude the scenario being fulfilled at the time it could have been. The scale of devastation and "grief" intimated here, rather like Jer. 50:26 saying that the Medes would turn Babylon into "heaps", just didn't happen when the Medes took the city. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The

deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. Apart from the murder of Belshazaar and a few others, it seems that there was little bloodshed and many within Babylon welcomed the Medes. But the impression is given that all this grievous judgment happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

I have stopped all of Media's sighing- At the burden imposed by Babylon (Is. 14:7,8).

Isaiah 21:3 Therefore my thighs are filled with anguish, pains have taken hold on me, like the pains of a woman in labour. I am in so much pain that I can't hear; I so am dismayed that I can't see- In the same way as Moab would weep for their slain sons, so God says that *His* heart would cry out for Moab, "therefore I weep [along] with the weeping of Jazer... my soul moans like a lyre for Moab" (Is. 15:5; Is. 16:9,11). God "pitied" Nineveh- a Hebrew word meaning to pity with tears (Jonah 4:11). The mourning of the prophets over Tyre (Ez. 27:1) and Babylon (Is. 21:3,4) was an embodiment of God's grief even over those not in covenant with Him. And how much more does He weep and suffer with His people Israel in their sufferings (Jer. 12:12; 23:10; Hos. 4:2,3); "my heart yearns / moans for him" (Jer. 31:20). Perhaps there was indeed some remission of the full extent of Babylon's potential judgment at the time; see on :2. The image of a woman in labour again implies that new birth could still come out of the judgments; the hope was that a remnant of Babylon would repent, and that a reborn Judah would emerge. Neither of these things happened and so perhaps foreseeing that, God didn't bring the full extent of the judgments at the time.

Isaiah 21:4 My heart flutters. Horror has frightened me. The evening of my pleasure has been turned into trembling for me- The LXX speaks as if Isaiah totally identified with them to the point of feeling their sin as his; just as the Lord did supremely on the cross: "My heart wanders, and transgression overwhelms me; my soul is occupied with fear". In speaking of "the night of my pleasure" Isaiah is totally identified with Belshazzar, who was dethroned by Darius on the night of his pleasure, probably his birthday celebration.

Having prophesied the fall of hated, pagan Babylon, which was to happen well after his death, Isaiah responded: “Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me... I am pained so that I cannot hear [the message he had to tell]... my heart panteth, horror hath affrighted me” (Is. 21:3,4 RV). Such was his sensitivity for his enemies, and for things which would happen in the future. It would be rather like us grieving deeply for the fact that within 200 years, millions of human beings may die because of global warming.

Isaiah 21:5 They prepare the table, they set the watch; then they eat and drink! But ‘Rise up, you princes, oil the shield!’- The GNB seeks to clarify how Isaiah was as it were projected forward to the feast of Belshazzar in Dan. 5: "In the vision a banquet is ready; rugs are spread for the guests to sit on. They are eating and drinking. Suddenly the command rings out: "Officers! Prepare your shields!"".

Isaiah 21:6 For the Lord said to me, Go, set a watchman. Let him declare what he sees- LXX "declare whatever thou shalt see". Isaiah was the watchman, for the prophets are the watchmen.

Isaiah 21:7 When he sees a troop, horsemen in pairs, a troop of donkeys, a troop of camels, he shall listen diligently with great attentiveness- LXX "And I saw...". As noted on :6, Isaiah is as it were a watchman on the walls of Babylon; he the Hebrew prophet had a heart that bled even for the enemies of Judah, and he imagines himself on the walls of Babylon seeing the attack coming. The Medes apparently used donkeys and camels to transport their generals and military hardware.

Isaiah 21:8 He cried like a lion- This prophecy didn't come fully true at the time and so it has been reapplied to the last days; and so this phrase is quoted in Rev. 10:3 in a latter day context.

Lord, I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime, and every night I stay at my post- Crying on the watchtower is the language of prayer; perhaps Isaiah was as it were praying Babylon might repent so that this grievous

situation and the human tragedy of it all need not happen. This is the heart that bleeds for humanity. But the idea may be that the prophetic watchman feels that he has been carefully watching for the fall of Babylon, and it hasn't come. But then it does.

Isaiah 21:9 Behold, here comes a troop of men, horsemen in pairs. He answered, Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the engraved images of her gods are broken to the ground- The claim is made that the Persians apparently despised images and therefore broke them. But that is questionable. The Pulpit Commentary notes: "Cyrus was not an iconoclast; he did not break into pieces, or in any way destroy or insult the Babylonian idols. On the contrary, he maintained them in their several shrines, or restored them where they had been displaced; he professed himself a worshipper of the chief Babylonian gods—Bel, Nebo, and Merodach—he repaired the temple of Merodach; he prayed to Bel and Nebo to lengthen his days; he caused his son, Cambyses, to take part in the great religious ceremony wherewith the Babylonians opened the new year". So this is yet another aspect of the prophecy which was not literally fulfilled at the time. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Isaiah 21:10 You are My threshing, and the grain of My floor! That which I have heard from Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, I have declared to you- This could be addressed to the righteous remnant, those who had come through the threshing experience as grain. Hence LXX "Hear, ye that are left, and ye that are in pain". Or GNB "My people Israel, you have been threshed like wheat, but now I have announced to you the good news". The good news was the fall of Babylon; the Gospel is the good news of God's reestablished Kingdom, which could then have been established at the time Babylon fell. But most of the Jews preferred to remain in Babylon, and they didn't repent; so that possibility was precluded and delayed until the last days, as the descriptions of "Babylon" being judged and God's Kingdom being established in Rev. 18 makes clear. The language is applied to the repentant remnant of Jewry in Mt. 3:12.

Isaiah 21:11 The burden of Dumah. One calls to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?- The theme of the prophecies upon

the nations beginning in Is. 13 is that after the judgment they experienced from the Assyrians or Babylonians, a remnant of them would repent and join repentant Judah in a reestablished, multi ethnic Kingdom of God in Judah; see on Is. 13:1. So the LXX here reads simply "Call to me out of Seir", as if this is an invitation for Seir or Edom (GNB) to repent. "Turn back" in :12 would then also be an invitation to repentance. "Dumah" means "silence" and implies a total destruction of Edom; but this kind of total wiping out, presumably by supernatural Divine judgment such as came upon Sodom, didn't happen at the time. Again, the scenario presented here is a potential, but the various human preconditions didn't allow it to happen then.

Isaiah 21:12 The watchman said, The morning comes, and also the night- The idea may be that the morning for Judah was to be the night for her enemies like Edom; just as Yahweh was a light to Israel and darkness to the Egyptians. Or we could paraphrase with GNB "I answer, "Morning is coming, but night will come again. If you want to ask again, come back and ask"". The idea might be that Edom's judgment could have come, but it was deferred due to the various preconditions discussed on :10 and Is. 13:1 not being fulfilled. Judah's morning, in the sense of the light of Zion rising as the dawn, also didn't come at that time. When it does, in the last day, then "Edom" will be destroyed and have its "night".

What hour of the night will it come?- God's purposes at the time were open ended; see on Is. 13:1. Many human variables were preconditions for the various prophetic scenarios which could have come about. The hour of judgment, as in the last days, was therefore variable. So, appropriate to that, we could have here a reference to the meaning of time being collapsed around the time of the Lord's return, when these prophecies shall come to their final fulfilment. Depending how one reads the Hebrew text of Zech. 14:6,7, this idea of collapsed time at the Lord's return is Biblical: "It shall come to pass in that day, that it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world; but the day shall be one, in the knowledge of the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (AV mg.). The RVmg. speaks of "the planets shall contract"- the times and seasons they control would somehow contract. Is. 21:12 RV has a similar idea, again in the context of a judgment day: “The morning is come and also the night”. This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence. If indeed time is collapsed, this would enable all these prophecies to come true, but not in real time. Babylon is to be

punished with famine in one day; yet famine is a process (Rev. 18:8). In one day her judgments come, and yet also in one hour (18:10). Surely the lesson is that time is compressed.

Turn back again- I noted on :11 that this could be read as a call to Seir / Idumea to repent. Hence LXX "If thou wouldest enquire, enquire, and dwell by me", in the restored Zion; the same invitation to come dwell in Zion is made to the other nations in Is. 16:3; 18:4.

Isaiah 21:13 The burden on Arabia. In the forest in Arabia you will lodge, you caravans of Dedanites- There are no forests in Arabia so the reference may be to brushwood scrub. Sargon did make an incursion into Arabia, but probably as noted on :12, this was part of the potential scenario which didn't fully happen then, and will be fulfilled more completely in the last days.

Isaiah 21:14 They brought water to him who was thirsty. The inhabitants of the land of Tema met the fugitives with their bread- The LXX reads this as a command to meet the fugitives with bread and water. The remnant of the Arabians who survive are significant to God because it was that remnant of all the nations who are envisaged as repenting and turning to Yahweh.

Isaiah 21:15 For they fled away from the swords, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the heat of battle- But no trace of such a battle or war has been found on the Assyrian inscriptions. So probably as noted on :12, this was part of the potential scenario which didn't fully happen then, and will be fulfilled more completely in the last days.

Isaiah 21:16 For the Lord said to me, Within a year, as a worker bound by contract would count it, all the glory of Kedar will fail- Perhaps the sense is that as a hired hand counts the days of required service exactly, so this calamity would happen within exactly three years. I noted on the prophecies of Isaiah's children in Is. 7:16; 8:1,18 that there was the potential of a very speedy fulfilment of the prophecies, before the newborn child could even speak; and we have a similar period in Is. 16:14. But the complex network of possibilities alluded to be Isaiah were precluded by the lack of repentance by both Judah and the Gentiles

Isaiah 21:17 and the residue of the number of the archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, will be few; for Yahweh, the God of Israel, has spoken it-
Again we note the emphasis upon the remnant or "residue". The remnant of the people of Kedar who survive are significant to God because it was that remnant of all the nations who are envisaged as repenting and turning to Yahweh.

Isaiah Chapter 22

Isaiah 22:1 The burden of the valley of vision- LXX "the burden of the valley of Zion". Perhaps Isaiah gave this prophecy in one of the valleys around Jerusalem, perhaps the Kidron valley from where the water from the Gihon spring was brought into the city (alluded to in :9). But it could equally have been the valley of Hinnom, which became the symbolic place for the final judgment of the condemned. It was from a valley like this that Ezekiel saw the dry bones of Israel being revived from their condemnation (Ez. 37).

What ails you now, that you have all gone up to the housetops?- I suggest this could be Israel's question to Isaiah, as he went up on the flat roof to weep for them. And thus he replies in Is. 22:4: "Therefore said I, Look away from me, I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people". But this can also be read as being addressed to the people of the city. There is a strong association between their housetops and idolatry. As they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Hence LXX "that now ye are all gone up to the housetops which help you not?".

Isaiah 22:2 You that are full of shouting, a tumultuous city, a joyous town; your slain are not slain with the sword, neither are they dead in battle- This is the idea of Lam. 4:9, that the people of Zion died by famine and disease rather than the quick death of the battlefield. Isaiah is complaining that the people were feasting instead of fasting in repentance (as in Is. 32:13 and cp. Is. 23:7), and he juxtaposes their present feasting with the painful and slow death threatened. But it seems there was repentance amongst a minority and so the threatened destruction of Zion's population at the hands of the Assyrians was averted; but it was actually only deferred to the time of the Babylonians. This explains the connections between this prophecy and Jeremiah's lamentations, as he weeps for what was then done to Zion.

Isaiah 22:3 All your rulers fled away together. They were bound by the archers. All who were found by you were bound together. They fled far away-LXX "All thy princes have fled, and thy captives are tightly bound". This didn't happen at Isaiah's time because there was some repentance; and so the words were reapplied to the destruction by the Babylonians and the fleeing of Zedekiah and the rulers.

Isaiah 22:4 Therefore I said, Look away from me. I will weep bitterly. Don't labour to comfort me for the destruction of the daughter of my people- Jeremiah in his prophecy and Lamentations often uses this phrase "daughter of my people". The whole verse sounds like Jeremiah mourning the Babylonian destruction of Zion (Lam. 1:4 etc.). But it is actually Isaiah lamenting the threatened and envisaged destruction of Zion by the Assyrians. Due to the intercession and repentance of the remnant, the Assyrian destruction was averted; but it was actually deferred to the time of the Babylonians. So the feelings of the prophet Isaiah are transferred to the prophet Jeremiah; just as prophecies whose fulfilment was deferred or averted at the time were transferred to other persons, entities, times and contexts.

When it came to prophesying the doom of Jerusalem, people came to comfort Isaiah in his grief and breakdown, not perceiving the heart that bled within him. He wept, because of how they would weep in future (Is. 22:4,5). Such was his passionate identity with them. The prophets weren't merely informing men ahead of time that God's judgments were coming; rather were they sharing with the people the Divine pathos, His feelings and sense of tragic rejection; and they were deeply aware of His openness to changing His plans in response to human repentance (Jer. 18:8-10). The prophets were therefore not mere fax machines; their own feelings were involved in the act of transmission of God's feelings to men through words. Even despite the special psychological strengthening which they received, sometimes the whole prophetic experience seemed too much for them, as it does for us. The prophets believed their own message, to the point that it overcame them with grief that men wouldn't heed them. Is this how we feel at the rejection of our message? Is our testimony to Jesus really in the spirit of these prophets…?

Isaiah 22:5 For it is a day of confusion and of treading down and of perplexity from the Lord Yahweh of Armies, in the valley of vision; a breaking down of the walls, and a crying to the mountains- This clearly had application to the Assyrian invasion; Hezekiah may allude to this prophecy when he says that "This is a day of trouble... rebuke... and of blasphemy" (Is. 37:3). But he looked up from the valley where he was (:1) and foresaw the breaking down of the walls above him, and the valley echoing with the crying of the people to their gods of the high places. But all that was averted by some measure of repentance. The day of "treading down" was in order to humble their pride (as in Is. 2:12), but it seems there was some humbling before Isaiah's words and so humbling by

condemnation was therefore not seen as necessary at the time.

Isaiah 22:6 Elam carried his quiver, with chariots of men and horsemen; and Kir uncovered the shield- These were part of the Assyrian alliance which came against Jerusalem. But not an arrow was fired by these archers against Jerusalem (Is. 37:33); the catastrophe was averted. But it was deferred until these same nations came with the Babylonians against Jerusalem at a later date (Jer. 49:35). See on :7.

Isaiah 22:7 It happened- The idea may be that Isaiah is transported in vision to see these things happening.

That your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen set themselves in array at the gate- In reality, the Assyrians didn't "come before" the city (Is. 37:33). But it was deferred until the Babylonians against Jerusalem at a later date. It is all a great lesson in the power of the repentance and intercession of a minority.

Isaiah 22:8 He took away the covering of Judah- This idea is repeated in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who speak of Judah being stripped naked and judged as a whore, stoned to death by her lovers after gang raping her. This could have happened at the time of the Assyrian invasion, but it was averted by repentance and deferred to the Babylonian time.

And you looked in that day to the armour in the house of the forest- To trust in weapons, foreign powers etc. rather than on God alone was something about which Isaiah wailed and lamented (Is. 22:8,11). In our terms, this may translate into situations like what we do when we feel the first onset of an illness; when our car won't start… do we trust on human strength, on the pretensions of science, and turn to God if all else fails? There can scarcely be one of us who doesn't see this pattern of response in our lives. And yet, in prophetic terms, this is *awful*! That we don't first and totally turn to our God.

LXX "they shall look in that day on the choice houses of the city". Perhaps they looked to those wealthy families for help; or that they looked to break down those houses "to fortify the wall" (:10). But the same lesson emerges, of not trusting in human strength. The records stress that at the time of the Babylonian invasion, it was these great houses which were also destroyed along with the temple (Jer. 52:13).

Isaiah 22:9 You saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and you gathered together the waters of the lower pool- See on :1. LXX "And they shall uncover the secret places of the houses of the citadel of David: and they saw that they were many, and that one had turned the water of the old pool into the city". The person who did this was Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20). But here it appears to be criticized as a trusting in human strength. Perhaps this is why 2 Kings 20:20 says it was done in *his* might- not Yahweh's.

Isaiah 22:10 You numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall- This appears to be cited in the context of criticizing Hezekiah and Shebna for fortifying the city in human strength rather than in trust in God. See on :8. Numbering the houses recalls David's numbering of Israel rather than trusting in the Angelic armies. Jer. 33:4 likewise criticizes the breaking down of the houses to fortify the city wall. Jeremiah elsewhere criticized the building of these great houses on the walls of Jerusalem- for they were built on the back of abusing the poor for material and labour. They were finally torn down by the Babylonians (Jer. 52:13), but even before that, the owners themselves broke them down and the materials were used to shore up the breaches in the city walls. Likewise there are foretastes of judgment ahead of time in the lives of all God's people.

Isaiah 22:11 You also made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool- This would have been in the Kidron valley, perhaps the scene of this prophecy (:1). The person who did this was Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20). But here it appears to be criticized as a trusting in human strength. Perhaps this is why 2 Kings 20:20 says it was done in *his* might- not Yahweh's.

But you didn't look to Him who had done this- Perhaps the one they didn't "look to" who had done this was Hezekiah, who had made the pool / reservoir. They didn't accept his spiritual leadership and purge of idolatry. But of course it may be that the "Him who had done this" was God. They did not look to / regard Yahweh, and so He rejected them by no longer regarding or looking at them (s.w. Lam. 4:16). As so often in the prophets, condemnation was articulated in language which showed it to be but a continuation of attitudes and positions the condemned had already adopted in their lives.

Neither did you have respect for Him who purposed it long ago- The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and

it being executed- hence “The Lord has both planned and done what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon” (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14). This ‘gap’ is significant when we come to consider the idea of God’s ‘repentance’ or change of mind- stating something is going to happen, but then changing His mind because of human behaviour during the ‘time gap’ between the statement and its’ execution.

Isaiah 22:12 In that day, the Lord Yahweh of Armies called to weeping and to mourning and to baldness and to dressing in sackcloth- The call to repentance was apparently not being heard (:13). But the Assyrian destruction of Jerusalem was still averted. We can conclude that this therefore was due to God's extreme sensitivity to the intercession and repentance of a minority. And this is a challenge and encouragement to us today.

Isaiah 22:13 and behold, joy and gladness, killing cattle and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die- See on :12. Esau's desperate pleading for Jacob's pottage at the cost of his birthright seems to be the background for 1 Cor. 15:32 which quotes this verse; those without the hope of covenant resurrection are described as saying "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die", just as the faithless in Israel did in Hezekiah's time. Instead of weeping in repentance, their attitude was "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die". This category is associated with Esau, craving for the things of today at the cost of an eternal tomorrow. And it is the spirit of our age, although as Paul shows, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees ours and therefore this should not be our attitude.

Isaiah 22:14 Yahweh of Armies revealed Himself in my ears, Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies- The implication is that what Yahweh discreetly and intimately told Isaiah, he was preaching. It seems the Lord Jesus alludes to this in Mt. 10:27 and asks us each one to live in the spirit of prophets like Isaiah: "What I am telling you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight, and what you have heard in private you must announce from the housetops". The death of these sinners was required; and yet the Assyrian destruction was averted by the repentance of a minority. But although these sinners didn't die when and as potentially planned, they still died. The idea however may be as in 1 Sam. 3:14; their sin could not be purged by sacrifice. If they were truly penitent, then like David they would be drive to

throw themselves upon God's grace outside of the Mosaic system.

Isaiah 22:15 Thus says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, Go, get yourself to this treasurer, even to Shebna, who is over the house, and say- LXX "Go into the chamber" suggests Isaiah was sent to meet Shebna in the burial vault he was preparing for himself (:16). "Shebna" is an Egyptian name and may have been installed in office by Hezekiah as part of his deal with Egypt, upon whom he trusted rather than solely in Yahweh. He had the office of being "over the house" but by the time of the Assyrian invasion Shebna had been replaced in this office by Eliakim (:20; Is. 36:3; 37:2). However, Shebna had not been completely 'hurled away' as required by :17, because he is mentioned there as being the "scribe", a senior secretary, although Eliakim was "over the household". This seems typical of the partial response made to Isaiah's prophecies. But it seems Yahweh accepted that partial response and repentance of a remnant, and so the invaders were destroyed and the awful outcome threatened upon Jerusalem in this chapter was averted or at best deferred. For more condemnation of Shebna, see on Is. 32:5.

The idea of prophecies and scripture being re-written under inspiration shouldn't come as strange to us. Many of the Psalms are clearly relevant to David, and yet just as clearly relevant to Hezekiah and other Kings. Thus Ps. 41 is David's reflection on the situation of 2 Sam. 15- but evidently it's been re-written with reference to Hezekiah, also afflicted with an "evil disease"; and Ahithophel's part in David's life was perhaps played out in Hezekiah's life by Shebna (Is. 22:15).

Isaiah 22:16 'What are you doing here? Whom do you have here, that you have dug out a tomb here?'. Cutting himself out a tomb on high, chiselling a habitation for himself in the rock!- As explained on :15, Isaiah was sent to meet Shebna in the burial vault he was preparing for himself. To be buried in a specially dug tomb in Jerusalem was for the kings of Jerusalem; the force of "what are you doing *here*" [asked twice] may be that he was preparing a tomb for himself amongst those of the former kings; so perhaps by preparing his tomb there, Shebna was politically asserting himself as the effective king of Judah, although he was likely an Egyptian (see on :15,17). Perhaps he was planning on acting like this during Hezekiah's sickness. "On high" would then refer to the choice of the highest tombs- amongst the former kings.

The question "What are you doing here?" was that asked of Adam and Elijah in

their moments of weakness. In each case, the question was intended to elicit repentance; and the same here. See on :19. Presumably Shebna made no response, and so his condemnation is stated in :17. Shebna was happy to die in glory; he had the attitude explained on :13, that he was happy to live for today and then eternally die. Sadly despite the warning from the example of Shebna and the specific command not to just live for today and resign ourselves to an eternal death (:13), Hezekiah at the end of his life gave in to just this same mentality (Is. 39:8).

Isaiah 22:17 Behold, Yahweh will overcome you and hurl you away violently. Yes, He will grasp you firmly-This is effectively a command to hurl Shebna out of his position of power. As explained on :15, this was only partially obeyed. But at least there was some response, and even that partial response was so pleasing to God that the Assyrian invasion was averted. We too should not despise the partial response of others to God's word. The LXX offers: "And will take away thy robe and thy glorious crown". This would connect with the suggestion made on :16, that the Egyptian Shebna was pretending to the throne, and perhaps in Hezekiah's weakness and illness he was even wearing the crown; or a crown and robe which signalled his pretension to the throne.

Isaiah 22:18 He will surely wind you around and around, and throw you like a ball into a large country. There you will die, and there the chariots of your glory will be, you shame of your lord's house- LXX: "And he will bring thy fair chariot to shame, and the house of thy prince to be trodden down". Shebna was pretending to the throne (see on :15-17) and was acting as if he was the effective king; perhaps riding in the royal chariot whilst Hezekiah was indisposed. Shebna's prince would have been Pharaoh of Egypt as he was an Egyptian (see on :15). Perhaps part of the political deal for Egyptian support was that Shebna would come to Jerusalem and be the effective ruler on Egypt's behalf, and a "house", perhaps an idol temple, built on behalf of the Egyptians. There is no evidence however that Shebna was taken captive into Assyria. It could be that he was to thrown out by the leadership of Judah- and they didn't do this. The prophetic scenario here was however ameliorated by the repentance of a remnant in Judah.

Isaiah 22:19 I will thrust you from your office. You will be pulled down from your station- As explained on :17, this is effectively a command to hurl Shebna

out of his position of power. As explained on :15, this was only partially obeyed. There is no evidence however that Shebna was treated like this; the prophetic scenario here was however ameliorated by the repentance of a remnant in Judah. The LXX has "And thou shalt be removed from thy stewardship"- quoted by the Lord in His parable of the unjust steward (Lk. 16:4). It seems He saw Shebna as a bad man, who all the same could have repented. This would explain why "What are you doing here?" was a call for him to repent (:17).

Isaiah 22:20 It will happen in that day that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah- Eliakim is being set up as a potential Messiah figure according to the following verses. See on :15. He was to replace Shebna, and as noted on :15, this was obeyed by the leadership of Judah; although they did not expel Shebna as they were intended to. "My servant" may imply Eliakim was one of the school of prophets headed by Isaiah (Is. 20:3).

Isaiah 22:21 and I will clothe him with your robe, and strengthen him with your belt. I will commit your government into his hand; and he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah- During Hezekiah's indisposition and illness, Shebna angled to take over the kingship. But God wanted Eliakim to do so. The language here is exactly that of Is. 9:6. Eliakim could have become a Messiah figure at the time, but he failed (Is. 22:25). So the prophecies were reapplied to the Lord Jesus. "Belt" is the word for the High Priest's girdle (Ex. 39:29). Shebna had blasphemously set himself up as a king-priest; but this was to be the characteristic of Messiah, and God wanted Eliakim to be that figure.

Isaiah 22:22 I will lay the key of the house of David on his shoulder. He will open, and no one will shut. He will shut, and no one will open- Again, the Messianic language of Is. 9:6 is applied to Eliakim. In the same way as Solomon *could have been* the Messiah, so perhaps could men like Eliakim; for the language of Is. 22:20-25 is later transferred to the Lord Jesus. For all God’s foreknowledge otherwise, so the Messianic Kingdom *could have come* at the time of the restoration from Babylon. But Eliakim failed (:25), and so this verse is quoted about the Lord Jesus (Rev. 3:7) to whom the Messianic hope was reapplied. See on Is. 26:2.

Isaiah 22:23 I will fasten him like a nail in a sure place. He will be for a throne

of glory to his father's house- God would have established Eliakim, fastening him like a nail. He could have been the "pin" (s.w. "nail") of Ez. 15:3 who although weak was strengthened by God to be able to bear any weight. "Sure" is the word for faith or belief; the place of belief or faith was surely the Jerusalem temple. Eliakim as a descendant of David could have been the fulfilment of the prophecies that David's throne was to be made glorious. But he snapped (:25). But there were later possibilities too- who also likewise failed. I submit that the Messianic prophecies of the restoration prophets *could* have had their fulfilment in Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel, or some other Messianic figure at that time. Everything was made possible to enable this- Joshua, who couldn't prove his Levitical genealogy, was given "a place of access" amongst the priesthood, those who "stood" before the Lord (Zech. 3:7 RV). Ezra thanked God that they had returned and that they had "a nail in his holy place" (Ezra 9:8), a reference surely to a Messiah figure whom he felt to be among them, the "nail in a sure place" of Is. 22:23. According to Mt. 1:12 and Lk. 3:27, Zerubbabel was the Prince of Judah, and the rightful heir to David's throne. But due to his weakness, the fulfilment was deferred to Jesus.

Isaiah 22:24 They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, every small vessel, from the cups even to all the pitchers- The Hebrew word for "glory" is literally "weight", that which is heavy. He could have been the promised seed of David, "his father's house", who reigned on David's glorified throne. But the idea is that even the lightest small vessels caused him to snap (:25). He was fastened and strengthened by God to bear the glory; but he snapped at the slightest load.

Isaiah 22:25 In that day, says Yahweh of Armies, the nail that was fastened in a sure place will give way. It will be cut down, and fall. The burden that was on it will be cut off, for Yahweh has spoken it- LXX "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, The man that is fastened in the sure place shall be removed and be taken away, and shall fall; and the glory that is upon him shall be utterly destroyed". I suggest that the idea is that a potential Messiah figure would be raised up, but he would fail, and would not function as intended. This was what happened to Eliakim, Hezekiah, Zerubbabel and others who were set up as the potential Messiah figures. The impression is given that an awful lot 'hung' on that one individual; the reestablishment of the Kingdom was going to depend upon this one individual because the people generally were spiritually weak. But all would fall, because he would not be strong enough. And so this all will come to fulfilment

in Messiah Jesus. He would be cut down and would fall- the language of the invasion and destruction of Zion (Is. 9:10). But that was not how Eliakim came to his end; the idea may simply look forward to how the true Messiah would never be cut down or fall but would last eternally.

Isaiah Chapter 23

Isaiah 23:1 The burden of Tyre. Howl, you ships of Tarshish! For it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in. From the land of Kittim it is revealed to them- LXX has "Carthage" for "Tarshish". Carthage was a colony of Tyre, and so they would mourn the fall of their mother city; and therefore as LXX "men no longer arrive from the land of the Citians".

This chapter seems to imply that if Tyre had howled in repentance and then been silent and ashamed, she would be ‘forgotten’ 70 years and then become devoted to Yahweh. This never happened. Yet the 70 year period is of course analogous to Judah’s 70 years in captivity, also without repentance; see on :17.

It's impossible to choose which of the various sieges of Tyre this chapter may refer to. And the later references to a 70 year period don't fit anything [so far as we currently know]. Such prophecies as this could be an example of apocalyptic imaging, whereby a picture is presented of a panorama of events, although each element of the panorama may be fulfilled at a different time. This would mean that the entire prophetic picture presented here never happened all together at one time to Tyre. However I discern in many prophecies elements which simply were never fulfilled and by their nature, will not be. And so I prefer to consider these prophecies as conditional, and they present potential scenarios which factor in a whole range of human responses, both obedient and disobedient. Not all of them will therefore fulfill, according to the principle of Jer. 18:8-10, that God's stated intentions about the nations may not come about if there is repentance.

Isaiah 23:2 Be still, you inhabitants of the coast, you whom the merchants of Sidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished- Tyre was originally a colony of Sidon; the terms are at times interchangeable (:4). Ethbaal is called "king of Tyre" by Josephus (*Antiquities* 8.3.2), but "king of the Sidonians" in 1 Kings 16:31. Some of Tyre's coins celebrate it as "the metropolis of the Sidonians".

Isaiah 23:3 On great waters- Or, "by the great waters", the Mediterranean.

The seed of the Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her revenue. She was the market of nations- The seed in view is the grain of Egypt, transported to the mouth of the Nile [here called the Sihor] where the Phoenicians bought it and then sold it throughout the nations.

Isaiah 23:4 Be ashamed, Sidon- The reference is still to Tyre; see on :2.

For the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, I have not travailed, nor brought forth, neither have I nourished young men, nor brought up virgins- Their pride was in the claim that they were full of young men and women and wealth which they hadn't had to labour for. This is effectively a denial of the curse in Eden; but judgment would come for them all the same. And :10 LXX says that the collapse of trade would mean they would have to "till thy land", returning to working the land in the sweat of their face as prophesied in Genesis, rather than boasting that they had avoided that aspect of the curse. This is strangely relevant to our society, where again every effort is vainly made to try to overcome that ancient curse.

Isaiah 23:5 When the report comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish at the report of Tyre- Perhaps because there were colonies of Tyre there, or because the Egyptian merchandise of :3 was no longer being bought by the Tyrians. And the fall of Tyre would be a message to the Egyptians that the northern invader would soon reach them. In Isaiah's context he is teaching Judah the weakness of Egypt, upon whom they were always inclined to trust.

Isaiah 23:6 Pass over to Tarshish! Wail, you inhabitants of the coast!- LXX "Depart ye to Carthage". The people of Tyre fled to their colonies such as Carthage when the city was besieged. There is historical evidence for this. We see here that "Tarshish" referred to the colonies of Tyre, reached by the long distance ships called "ships of Tarshish" just as fast British merchant boats were known as "Indiamen"; and was where they fled to by ship when they were besieged. This ought to close down all speculation that "Tarshish is Britain". This fleeing of refugees by ship from Tyre is noted in history, especially when Alexander finally ruined Tyre. And Layard found representations of it on the monuments of Nineveh, suggesting this also happened when the Assyrians of Isaiah's time besieged the city. We see the prophecy having multiple fulfillments over time; see on :1.

Isaiah 23:7 Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days, whose feet carried her far away to travel?- The sense may be a mixture of the Hebrew and LXX, in that she was to flee into exile in her own ships, which had once been her pride: "Was not this your pride from the beginning, before she was given up?". The condemnation of Tyre as being a joyous city which would be

ruined is intended to connect with Isaiah's condemnations of Jerusalem for feasting rather than fasting (Is. 22:2; 32:13). He intends them to look at the fall of others for the same behaviour; and we too can look at the fall of others contemporary with us as well as in history, and take warning.

Isaiah 23:8 Who has planned this against Tyre, the giver of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth?- The answer of "Yahweh" is given in the next verse, but the question is perhaps posed in this way in order to elicit repentance. For in all the oracles against the nations which began in Is. 13, there is always an appeal for repentance. For it was God's hope that a remnant of repentant Gentiles would join a remnant of His repentant people in His reestablished Kingdom in Judah. She was to understand that her giving of crowns to her colonies and declaration of her merchants as royal princes was all just playing around at creating a kingdom. She needed to humble herself beneath the reality of Yahweh's Kingdom.

Isaiah 23:9 Yahweh of Armies has planned it, to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth- We note that the primary issue with the king of Tyre in Ez. 27,28 was not his idolatry, but his pride and playing God. This is what is so utterly abhorrent to God. And we must have that same perspective. Throughout Ez. 27 and Ez. 28 Tyre is portrayed as having a fake tabernacle and temple, an imitation Zion; and her prince was therefore enthroned there as if he were Yahweh. He consciously "set his heart" on this fantasy. The Ugaritic documents reveal that the kings of that time considered themselves to be Divine, the human reincarnation of a god who had died and was now rising again. But the king of Ez. 28, perhaps Itobaal II or Azemilcus, was consciously impersonating the Yahweh religion of Zion. Isaiah begins his prophecy with the statements that all pride in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was to be brought down- whether in Judah or in the Gentile nations such as Tyre within that territory. But this bringing down of pride was in the hope that they might repent.

Isaiah 23:10 Pass through your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish. There is no restraint any more- The text is very obscure here, and the LXX makes more sense: "Till thy land; for ships no more come out of Carthage". They could no longer rely upon trade between Tyre and her colonies, so they must till their own land, returning to agriculture for their basic needs. This would then connect with

my suggestion on :4 that the people of Tyre were boasting they need not "till their land" in the spirit of the curse in Eden, but rather considered they had rather cleverly got around that curse by their trading. It would also make sense why the fall of the king of Tyre in Ez. 28 is described with allusion to the fall of Adam in Eden; Tyre was to suffer the same judgment as Adam, for all their boasting that they had avoided it.

Isaiah 23:11 He has stretched out His hand over the sea, He has shaken the kingdoms. Yahweh has ordered the destruction of Canaan's strongholds- "Canaan" can be translated as AV "the merchant city", referring again to Tyre. Or it could be that Tyre is being likened to one of the cities of Canaan, all of which were to fall before Joshua-Jesus. Note that the "Syro-Phoenician woman" of Mk. 7:26 is "a woman of Canaan" in Mt. 15:22. The shaking of the kingdoms may have in view an earthquake from Yahweh which would destroy Tyre (rather than a protracted siege); and Yahweh's stretching out His hand over the sea recalls the Red Sea and His miraculous intervention to judge Egypt. This kind of thing features in all the prophecies against the nations from Is. 13 onwards. There was the potential that they would be destroyed by supernatural Divine judgment as Sodom was. This didn't happen, because the potential prophetic scenario didn't come about; not least because Judah didn't repent and the Kingdom of God was not reestablished there as potentially possible. Judgment still came upon Tyre but in a somewhat reduced and different form to that originally intended.

Isaiah 23:12 He said, You shall rejoice no more, you oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon. Arise, pass over to Kittim. Even there you will have no rest- As explained on :2, Tyre was the "daughter of Sidon" in that originally she had been a colony of Sidon. With the city besieged, the people of Tyre would flee by boat to their colonies in Kittim (Cyprus) and also Carthage (see on :6). But they had no rest on Cyprus because Sargon and Esarhaddon both conquered it; and when Abdi-Milkut, King of Sidon, fled there, Esarhaddon had him beheaded. There are inscriptions which call it "the usual refuge of the Phoenician kings". But Cyprus was included in the dominions of Asshurbanipal and so was never a stable place of rest for Tyrians.

Isaiah 23:13 Behold, the land of the Chaldeans. This people was not until the Assyrians founded it for those who dwell in the wilderness. They set up their

towers; they overthrew its palaces, they made it a ruin- Although Babylon later conquered Assyria, initially Assyria conquered Babylon. It was made 'not a people' by the Assyrians, and they made Babylon deserted, a place for the wilderness dwellers, i.e. the wild animals. This judgment of Babylon by Assyria was to be repeated when Babylon fell much later (Is. 13:21; 34:14). "They set up their towers" in the sense that they 'made them bare' (as in Hab. 3:9) and overthrew it until it was just a ruin. The implication is that the Assyrians were to do this to Tyre, and would move on from there to do the same to Jerusalem, who should likewise not trust in its apparently impregnable defences. But Assyria didn't destroy Tyre as envisaged here. This didn't happen, because the potential prophetic scenario didn't come about; not least because Judah didn't repent and the Kingdom of God was not reestablished there as potentially possible. Judgment still came upon Tyre but in a somewhat reduced and different form to that originally intended. Various Assyrians besieged Tyre at different times (Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal); as did the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar II, and then Alexander of Macedon. As explained on :1, elements of this prophecy came true in those various invasions, but the intended scenario was the direct destruction of Tyre by Yahweh. And this didn't happen. See on :14.

Isaiah 23:14 Howl, you ships of Tarshish, for your stronghold is laid waste!- The destruction of Tyre was tragic for the people in the ships of Tarshish, for they were the people of Tyre who had used their ships to flee into exile (:6,12). There is no way that these ships of Tarshish refer to the shipping of the British empire. The context here makes them clearly refer to the vessels belonging to Tyre. The language of ships and mourning is all used in Rev. 18 of the fall of latter day Babylon. My suggestion is that the judgments upon Tyre didn't fully come about at the time and was therefore transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to latter day Babylon.

Isaiah 23:15 It will come to pass in that day that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king. After the end of seventy years it will be to Tyre like in the song of the prostitute- As demonstrated on :17, the 70 years is meant to connect with the 70 years exile of Judah. But that 70 years was not a literal period because it was dependent upon Judah's repentance. It could be that during that same period, Tyre was to be "forgotten", also in exile in places like Carthage (:6,12). The 70 year period was also to be the length of Babylon's dominion; Judah's revival was to coincide with the fall of Babylon. "The days of

one king" may refer to one dynasty or kingdom, "king" being put for "kingdom" as in Dan. 7:17; 8:21. And this may have been the intention here too; that Babylon was to dominate Tyre for 70 years and then she would revive. Their revival and turning to Yahweh in covenant relationship was intended to coincide with Judah's acceptance of the new covenant at the restoration (:18). But this was the prophetic potential; none of the parties concerned repented.

Isaiah 23:16 Take a harp; go about the city, you prostitute that has been forgotten. Make sweet melody. Sing many songs, that you may be remembered- This may be a quotation from the song or ballad of the prostitute in :15. The song of the elderly prostitute may be a song of repentance, regretting a profligate life that now cannot serve her. She had been forgotten by God as Judah were during the 70 years of exile (s.w. Is. 49:14). And Judah like Tyre was forgotten of all her former lovers (s.w. Jer. 30:14). In response to singing this song, Yahweh visits Tyre in mercy and restoration (:17); we can therefore assume that this song is one of repentance. The songs make her "remembered"- before God. For that is how the word is generally used, many times. "Sweet melody" is used of singing to God in a way He finds sweet (Ps. 33:3).

Isaiah 23:17 It will happen after the end of seventy years that Yahweh will visit Tyre- God gave a prophecy about Tyre the generation before Judah went into exile for 70 years. He said that Tyre would be forgotten for 70 years and then would be visited by Yahweh and revived (Is. 23:17). Surely this was in order to prepare those who had ears to hear to the fact that if God could operate like this with Tyre, how much more could He revive and "visit" His beloved people after 70 years. For the same language of visiting after 70 years is used about them (Jer. 27:22; 29:10); divine visitation can be in mercy, grace and revival, and not always in judgment.

We note that the later prophecies about Tyre in Ezekiel state that Tyre is to be permanently destroyed and not revived. We can assume therefore that what we read here about Tyre's revival and entering covenant with Yahweh, donating her wealth to His people (:18 LXX) was command more than prediction. Or at best it was conditional prophecy, requiring Tyre's repentance. But this didn't happen, and the projected reestablishment of God's Kingdom in Judah under a Messianic ruler was precluded anyway by Judah's impenitence. Hence Ezekiel's later prophecies of total destruction of Tyre, with the implication in Ez. 47:20 that the

territory of Tyre would be incorporated within the borders of Israel's revived Kingdom.

And she shall return to her wages, and will play the prostitute with all the kingdoms of the world on the surface of the earth- LXX "And she shall be a mart for all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth". This makes more sense, seeing that her profits are to be devoted to Yahweh (:18).

Isaiah 23:18 Her merchandise and her wages will be holiness to Yahweh. It will not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise will be for those who dwell before Yahweh, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing- Unless we read with the LXX here and in :17, we have the situation of a prostitute's earnings being devoted to Yahweh, which was forbidden under the law. So LXX: "And her trade and her gain shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be gathered for them, but for those that dwell before the Lord, even all her trade, to eat and drink and be filled, and for a covenant and a memorial before the Lord". This would then be saying that the Divine intention would be fulfilled- Tyre would repent and enter the new covenant with Yahweh which His repentant people would also enter; and they would not keep their restored wealth for themselves, but rather donate it to "those who dwell before Yahweh" in Zion. This never happened after seventy years nor at any time, because Tyre didn't want to repent and neither did Judah; and so the barest essence of it will be fulfilled in the latter day repentance of all nations around Israel, and their entering covenant relationship with Yahweh.

Isaiah Chapter 24

Isaiah 24:1 Behold, Yahweh creates the earth empty, creates it waste, turns it upside down, and scatters its inhabitants- I have noted through Is. 13-23 that the judgments upon Judah and the surrounding nations all featured supernatural Divine intervention after the pattern of His judgment of Sodom; and also there is an appeal for repentance to all of them. The prophetic potential was that a remnant from all those nations including Judah was to repent, although the majority would be destroyed. Those remnants would then unite together in a multiethnic revived Kingdom of God in Judah led by a Messianic figure (see on Is. 26:15). That scenario was potentially possible, but didn't come about. Those prophecies are now brought together in what has been termed Isaiah's "little apocalypse" in Is. 24-26, a picture of judgment upon the entire *eretz* focusing upon Judah. Perhaps it was given just before Shalmaneser destroyed Moab (Is. 25:10), before Samaria and the ten tribes were taken into captivity, and perhaps therefore delivered soon after Hezekiah became king. There were primary fulfillments but all the prophecies remained unfulfilled *in toto*. They are to be reapplied to the last days.

The earth or land promised to Abraham was to be "created" empty; there was to be a return to the "without form and empty" state of that same *eretz* or land presented in Gen. 1. There was therefore the impression given that the destructions were to clear the land for a new creation. The envisioned wide scale destruction was in fact creative.

Isaiah 24:2 It will be as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the creditor, so with the debtor; as with the taker of interest, so with the giver of interest- The judgments were to affect all of society and not just the leadership. Isaiah began his prophecy by making this same point, in saying that both heavens and earth were to be judged.

Isaiah 24:3 The earth will be utterly emptied and utterly laid waste- This utter emptying is the word used of the judgment of Egypt in Is. 19:3, as well as about Judah . As explained on :1, the various scenes of judgment on the nations in Is. 13-23 are here presented as coming upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. Likewise "laid waster" is used of both Judah and the surrounding nations.

For Yahweh has spoken this word- This may appear axiomatic until we appreciate the allusion to the Genesis creation noted on :1. As creation was performed by a word, God said and it was done, so this uncreation was to be performed by a word, and likewise that same word would bring a new creation.

Isaiah 24:4 The earth mourns and fades away, the world languishes and fades away; the proud people of the earth languish- The intention of the large scale judgments upon the entire *eretz* were in order to humble pride. Out of all the sins present in that territory, it is pride which is repeatedly stated as the parade example of their sins. We too need to perceive that in all things humility is of the essence and pride is so abhorrent to God- and it will be judged. There is a conscious parallel between the earth and the world; the reference may be to the earth / land of Israel (see on :5), and to the "world" as the nations around Israel. Those nations have been mentioned so far in the judgments of Isaiah- Assyria, Babylon, Egypt (at least from the Nile northwards), Tyre etc. They were "the world" known and experienced by Isaiah and his audience. And yet this scenario could have come about at the time of the Assyrian invasion; for it was then that the earth / land mourned and languished (s.w. Is. 33:9; see note there).

Isaiah 24:5 The earth also is polluted under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant- "The earth" therefore seems to specifically refer to Israel, both the ten tribes and Judah. For it was they who had broken God's law and the eternal covenant. We note that the "everlasting covenant" could be broken; God was willing to eternally honour it, but Israel broke it. Any claim that the Jewish laws are eternal because the covenant was eternal must factor this in. That covenant is not now operative; it was broken. But the judgment here spoken was long delayed; for the same words are used in Jer. 3:2 about Judah's pollution of the land and the judgment that was to come through the Babylonians. So the judgment scenario presented here in Isaiah didn't fulfill at least until the Babylonian invasion; and indeed even then it didn't fully. It is all reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 24:6 Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell therein are found guilty. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left- I suggested on :1 that what is in view is supernatural Divine judgment upon the entire territory, and not simply one group within it invading other areas. The burning by fire didn't happen; but the vision was that it would,

and that very few would survive. And they would be the repentant remnant. This is the language of Revelation, where a series of judgments are poured out upon the earth / land, destroying everything and leaving a very small repentant remnant. The evident connections with Is. 24 suggest that what is primarily in view in Revelation is a situation in the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

Isaiah 24:7 The new wine mourns, the vine languishes. All the merry-hearted sigh- This is the language of Joel 1:10, which is in the context of Joel appealing for desperate repentance in order to avert this scenario. So it could be that the non-fulfilment of this prophecy of mass destruction of the *eretz* was not simply because Judah had failed to repent and so the reestablished Kingdom of God in Judah was not to come at that time; the suspension or delay of the judgments could also be because a minority did repent and intercede, and this led to the judgments being averted. Even if the potential of the Kingdom being restored was not then realized.

Isaiah 24:8 the mirth of tambourines ceases, the sound of those who rejoice ends, the joy of the harp ceases- Jeremiah foresaw the repentant remnant taking the tambourine again and going forth in the dance, when they enter the new covenant. But as explained on :1, this uncreation was required before that new creation could come.

Isaiah 24:9 They will not drink wine with a song, strong drink will be bitter to those who drink it- Babylon, Tyre and Judah are all condemned for feasting rather than fasting in repentance (Is. 22:2; 23:7; 32:13). And as noted on :1, they were all therefore to meet similar judgments. God's people acted as the world and were therefore "condemned with the world", as the rejected of the new Israel will be (1 Cor. 11:32).

Isaiah 24:10 The confused city is broken down, every house is shut up so that no man may come in- "Confused" is the word used in Gen. 1:2 for the *eretz* being "without form". As noted on :1, the land is being decreated, as it were, in preparation for a new creation, albeit from a very small seed which would abide the judgments. The assurance of Is. 45:18 was to be that God had not created the earth / land "in vain" (s.w. "confused"). His intention was that it would be eternally inhabited by His reformed people. But firstly it had to be made "without form" ("confused", s.w.) and this is what was to happen in the

Babylonian desolation of the city of Jerusalem (s.w. Jer. 4:23). Likewise the houses being shut up spoke of the Babylonian aftermath (s.w. Ez. 3:24). So the judgment scenario presented here in Isaiah didn't fulfill at least until the Babylonian invasion; and indeed even then it didn't fully. It is all reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 24:11 There is a crying in the streets because of the wine- all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone- Jerusalem was condemned for feasting rather than fasting in repentance (Is. 22:2; 32:13). It was the wine they had drunk and abused which had led to their "crying in the streets". This was the fruit of enjoying the good life of hedonism for the moment; there would be a terrible ending. "Darkened" continues the idea noted on :1- that the earth / land is returning to the darkness and formless (:10) state before creation began. The darkness had to come before Zion's light could arise and shine upon that darkness.

Isaiah 24:12 The city is left in desolation, and the gate is struck with destruction- Desolation of the city is the very term used often about Jerusalem (Jer. 19:8; 25:18) but also about Babylon (Jer. 51:43) and the cities of Edom (Jer. 49:13) and Moab (Jer. 48:9). Again we note that the judgment scenario presented here in Isaiah didn't fulfill at least until the Babylonian invasion; and indeed even then it didn't fully. It is all reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 24:13 For it will be so in the midst of the earth among the peoples, as the shaking of an olive tree, as the gleanings when the vintage is done- Jerusalem was to be desolate (:12), and a repentant remnant of Judah "among the peoples", perhaps implying there would be a repentant remnant amongst the peoples too. That repentant remnant is what would be left after the judgment was over. Olives were struck down from the higher branches with a stick, and that rod or stick which was to beat Judah and the nations is clearly defined as Babylon / Assyria in Is. 10. This is the scenario we have in Is. 17:6: "Yet gleanings will be left there, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outermost branches of a fruitful tree, says Yahweh, the God of Israel". The idea is that the tree was "fruitful" [potentially] but only a very few bits of fruit would be found. This finding of this tiny remnant "there", in a valley near Jerusalem (see on Is. 17:5). This didn't happen

at the time, Mic. 7:1 says that actually no gleanings of the vintage were found; but all this will be transferred, reapplied and rescheduled to the outcome of the final judgment in a similar valley near Jerusalem at the Lord's return. And this is the context here too (:21-23).

Isaiah 24:14 These shall lift up their voice, they will shout for the majesty of Yahweh, they cry aloud from the sea- This seems to speak of the joy of the repentant Jewish remnant as they see the majestic glory of Yahweh literally revealed. Their joy will be matched by that of the repentant Gentile remnant (:15). It will have arisen as a direct result of the judgment / vintage which will destroy the majority: "But when the vintage is done, these shall cry aloud; and they that are left on the land shall rejoice together in the glory of the Lord: the water of the sea shall be troubled" (LXX). But "the sea" is the same word translated "west", and this would match the glorification of Yahweh in the east of :15. A primary fulfilment could have come at the restoration from Babylon; the same words are used about the shouting for joy when Yahweh returned the people of Zion (Is. 52:8). But again the potential wasn't realized; the final fulfilment will be at the Lord's return."The majesty of Yahweh" will be revealed when the earth is riven with earthquakes in a theophany and 'coming down' of Yahweh greater than Sinai (s.w. Is. 2:10,19,21). This could have happened at Isaiah's time but it clearly didn't, and thus becomes the language of the last days.

Isaiah 24:15 Therefore glorify Yahweh in the east, even the name of Yahweh the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea!- The *eretz* Israel is sometimes presented as an island, surrounded by the "sea" of Gentiles, her immediate neighbours. It is they who are envisaged here as joining in with the repentant remnant of Judah in glorifying Israel's God. "The God of Israel" underlines this point. These people emerge from the judgment period on the whole *eretz*, having lost the majority of their compatriots. And it is they who turn to Israel's God.

Isaiah 24:16 From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs of glory to the righteous!- Songs of glory of Israel's God were to come from every corner of the Gentile nations within the *eretz* promised to Abraham. But this is juxtaposed against Isaiah's lamentation and complaint at 'treachery' later in this same verse. Perhaps we should understand these songs of glory to God as being hypocritical and insincere. When Isaiah grasps that, he is heartbroken that the Kingdom potential isn't going to happen. And there's in this case a lesson for us.

We tend to think that if others are hypocrites, well, I'd better ensure I'm not. But this indicates a lack of perception of the glory of God, and omits the factor of how *He* must feel at all those other peoples' hypocrisies; the glory that is intended to be given to Him, that isn't. Because of hypocritical "songs of praise" to God, Isaiah felt physically ill- "I pine away, I pine away" (Is. 24:16). The prophets felt for God, seeing things from His viewpoint.

But I said, I pine away! I pine away! Woe is me!- Isaiah speaks of "My leanness… I pine away" (RV), as he spoke about Israel's future glory and the inevitable judgments upon the enemies of his people. He didn't gloat over the prospect, as some Christians appear to gloat over any defeat suffered by their nations' enemies. Isaiah's heart bled for humanity, he so believed his message that he emotionally responded to it himself. He too bled for the people whose doom he had to foretell.

The treacherous have dealt treacherously, yes, the treacherous have dealt very treacherously- It could be that Isaiah perceived that things weren't going to work out as prophesied in his lifetime. He felt deeply, therefore, a sense of betrayal and treachery from his own "treacherous" people (s.w. Is. 48:8; Jer. 3:8). Or he could simply be distraught at the degree of treachery which was being practiced, against Jew (s.w. Is. 33:1) and Gentile (s.w. Is. 21:2) alike.

Isaiah 24:17 Fear, the pit and the snare are on you who inhabit the earth- I explained on :1 that the judgments here were intended to come upon Judah and all the surrounding nations. And so we note that this very verse is applied to Moab in Jer. 48:43- although this implies that the prophecy of Is. 24 wasn't fulfilled in Isaiah's lifetime. This language is clearly reapplied to the last days. For the day of the Lord will be a snare to the unsuspecting worldling, who will suddenly find that the Lord has come and destroyed him (Is. 8:14; 24:17,18; Jer. 50:24; Lk. 21:35). Yet the materialistic believer falls into the snare of riches here and now. Surely the point is that our attitude to riches is a preview of the judgment; the materialistic believer has condemned himself, right now. Is. 8:14 has used the same word for "snare" in describing how the rejected Messiah figure would be a snare who would catch most of God's people. This is going to be the case in the last days, and is already the case- for it is literally a case of "believe or perish".

Isaiah 24:18 It will happen that he who flees from the noise of the fear will fall into the pit; and he who comes up out of the midst of the pit will be taken in the

snare- Whilst the snare could refer to the Lord Jesus (see on :17), the same word for "snare" is applied to the priests (Hos. 5:1) and false prophets of Israel (Hos. 9:8).

For the windows on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble- As noted on :1, this is language which implies more than a military invasion of one people by another. It gives the impression of direct, Divine supernatural judgment and intervention. This scenario isn't what happened at the time; it was deferred or reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 24:19 The earth is utterly broken. The earth is torn apart, the earth is shaken violently- These Hebrew words and phrases are used about the Gentile nations (Mic. 5:6 re Assyria) as well as Judah (Jer. 25:29). As explained on :1, the envisaged scenario was the judgment of Judah, Israel and all the nations within the *eretz* at the same time, involving supernatural Divine judgments such as earthquakes shaking the land, resulting in the destruction of the majority and the repentance of a minority. "Torn apart" however is a term usually used about Israel's breaking the covenant with God. Their tearing apart was because of how they had torn apart the covenant.

Isaiah 24:20 the earth will stagger like a drunken man- The whole land was to tremble or stagger under judgment when it came; the same word is used of the trembling state of Judah's unbelieving hearts (Is. 7:2). Judgment was but the articulation of the state of their faithless hearts. They were judged for the state of their hearts. Spiritual mindedness is of paramount significance to God. It seems extreme literal earthquakes are also in view (see on :1).

And will sway back and forth like a hammock. Its disobedience will be heavy on it, and it will fall and not rise again- "Hammock" is "hut". The word is only used elsewhere in Is. 1:8: "The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field ... like a besieged city". This could refer to how the Assyrians would take the whole land apart from Jerusalem. The entire "vineyard" of God's work was to be destroyed, apart from a "shelter"- which was Zion. But it is the "daughter of Zion", the faithful remnant, and not the literal Zion which is in view here. They were to be a "shelter", a place of refuge, for others (Is. 4:6 s.w.). As explained on Is. 4:6, Zion was intended to become not only a place of spiritual refuge, but the capital of a revived Kingdom of God in Judah. That didn't happen, Zion was saved by grace alone from the Assyrians; and so the "hut" was destroyed.

Isaiah 24:21 It shall happen in that day that Yahweh will punish the army of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth on the earth- LXX "And God shall bring his hand upon the host of heaven, and upon the kings of the earth". The idea may be that the kings of the earth / land are the 'heavens', the rulers. And they will be particularly judged. All the rulers of the *eretz* were not judged together at any time, although this is required here. But it will happen in the last days. Revelation is full of information about how "the kings of the earth" / land are to be judged (Rev. 6:15; 16:14; 17:2,18; 18:3,9; 19:19; 21:24).

Isaiah 24:22 They shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison; and after many days shall they be visited- This didn't happen at the time, but is transferred to the last days. The whole book of Revelation is full of allusions to the Old Testament prophecies. Rev. 20:1–3 is surely based upon Is. 24:21,22, which prophesied that the kings of the earth will be gathered together, imprisoned in a pit and punished. It is these very human “kings of the earth” who are described in the more figurative language of Revelation as “Satan”.

Isaiah 24:23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for Yahweh of Armies will reign on Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem; and before His elders will be glory- The end result of the majority of the people being destroyed in the *eretz* was that the repentant remnants of the peoples, including Judah, would see the literal coming of Yahweh to Zion and His reigning from Zion, the temple mount. This is the Kingdom scenario of Is. 2 and many other passages. The existing 'heavens' of Judah would be confounded and ashamed, and replaced by a new set of "elders". And perhaps in a literal sense there will then be no need of sun and moon; for that is how things shall be in the Kingdom of God (Rev. 21:23).

Isaiah Chapter 25

Isaiah 25:1 Yahweh, You are My God. I will exalt You!- This is an allusion to the Song of Moses; and there are many others (Is. 12:2; 25:1 = Ex. 15:2; Is. 13:16 = Ex. 15:6; Is. 47:14 = Ex. 15:7; Is. 46:5 = Ex. 15:11; Is. 8:13 = Ex. 15:16; Is. 24:23 = Ex. 15:18). Following on from the vision of a radical supernatural Divine judgment of the entire *eretz* / land promised to Abraham, Isaiah feels it is as if the world (cp. Egypt) has been permanently judged and now Israel are free to inherit the land and kingdom; see on Is. 27:1. But as explained on Is. 24, that was a potential scenario which didn't then come about. The fall of Babylon or Assyria (cp. Egypt) was intended to coincide with the freedom of Judah / Israel from captivity; but most of them didn't even want to leave.

I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things, things planned long ago, in complete faithfulness and truth- Isaiah perceived that the destruction of both Judah and the surrounding nations was to bring about the Kingdom of God in Israel which He had long planned in the promises to the fathers ("faithfulness and truth" often alludes to these); he comes to a very mature understanding of the problem of evil. All those painful judgments were the "wonderful things" of the Song of Moses (Ex. 15:11). For the judgments of Is. 24 which lead up to this hymn of praise were major and would mean the destruction of all which Isaiah and his people had once held dear. But he can wholeheartedly praise the God who was to do this, because he perceives its place in His far greater plan. They were all for the sake of the eternal salvation of the remnant who wanted that great salvation.

Isaiah 25:2 For You have made a city into a heap, a fortified city into a ruin, a palace of strangers to be no city; it will never be built- Jer. 50:26 speaks of Babylon being turned into heaps, and "never be built" again is the language of the prophecies against Babylon too. The impression is given there that the famed storehouses of Babylon were to be opened at the same time as she was turned into heaps with nothing left. But this didn't happen when the Medes took the city. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystapses. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to

Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

Isaiah 25:3 Therefore a strong people will glorify You, a city of awesome nations will fear You- The LXX focuses upon the way that the humbled, poor remnant, even if they were injured from the judgments, would be the ones led to eternally glorify Yahweh: "Therefore shall the poor people bless thee, and cities of injured men shall bless thee". The city in view may be Babylon, which was the city of :2. What was envisaged was the repentance of a remnant from there, and this likewise was the prophetic vision of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But as Ezekiel demonstrates, the first generations of exiles were worshipping the idols of Babylon; they made no witness to Babylon. And so the potential scenario didn't work out.

Isaiah 25:4 For You have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat, when the blast of the dreaded ones is like a storm against the wall- This is the same scene as in Is. 4:6 about the restored Zion: "There will be a pavilion for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from storm and from rain". "Shade from the heat" is the same phrase. The "heat" in the last days could refer to some kind of localized nuclear holocaust. Zion will become the shelter for the repentant remnant of the Gentile nations in the *eretz*, even if they have themselves been damaged and injured during the terrible judgments poured out; hence LXX "a shelter of them that thirst, and a refreshing air to injured men". I noted on :3 the recurrence of this phrase "injured men" in the LXX. Salvation for the "poor [and] needy" was to be a feature of the Messianic Kingdom (Ps. 72:13 s.w.). This blessing of the poor and needy was to come about when Babylon fell (Is. 14:30), which was the time when the repentant exiles were supposed to leave Babylon and reestablish God's Kingdom in Judah. Babylon fell, but not as dramatically as prophetically envisaged; and Judah weren't repentant. And the Jewish leadership abused the "poor and needy" (Am. 4:1; 8:6). The storm or rivers of judgment was to that to come upon Israel at the hands of the Assyrians (Is. 28:2 s.w.). The Messianic figure of the time was to be a covert from this storm (Is. 32:2), and to bring forth a "storm" of judgment against the Assyrian (Is. 30:30,31 s.w.). The "blast of the terrible ones" uses the same word as in Is. 37:7 about the Angelic "blast" sent upon the Assyrians, outside "the wall" of

Jerusalem. The collateral damage of all this was to be huge. But the restored Zion was to be the place of safety from all this. The potential fulfillments all failed; Eliakim could have been the Messianic figure at the time of the Assyrian invasion but he failed (see on Is. 22:25); Hezekiah turned away from Yahweh in his later life. And so it shall all come to final fulfillment at the Lord's return.

Isaiah 25:5 As the heat in a dry place will You bring down the noise of strangers; as the heat by the shade of a cloud, the song of the dreaded ones will be brought low- This may refer to the cloud of glory to appear over the reestablished Zion (Is. 4:6), which was to be a refuge for the repentant remnants of the various nations of the land. The reference seems to be to a supernatural heat which would be so intense that the mocking noise and songs of the invaders would be brought to nothing. I have noted through Is. 13-23 that the judgments upon Judah and the surrounding nations all featured supernatural Divine intervention after the pattern of His judgment of Sodom; and also there is an appeal for repentance to all of them. The prophetic potential was that a remnant from all those nations including Judah was to repent, although the majority would be destroyed. Those remnants would then unite together in a multiethnic revived Kingdom of God in Judah led by a Messianic figure. That scenario was potentially possible, but didn't come about.

But the LXX has particular relevance to Isaiah and the faithful in a Jerusalem surrounded by the Assyrians: "We were as faint-hearted men thirsting in Sion, by reason of ungodly men to whom thou didst deliver us".

Isaiah 25:6 In this mountain- Sometimes the artificial chapter breaks (which were added by man) break up a parenthesis. Is. 24:23 speaks of how "the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem"; the following first five verses of Is. 25 are a parenthesis; and then Is. 25:6 continues: "in this mountain... He will destroy...". If we fail to realize the parenthesis, and if we only started reading at chapter 25:1, we would be thinking: "Which mountain?". But if we realize the parenthesis, and if we disregard the chapter division, all is plain: " ...in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem (Is. 24:23)... in this mountain... (Is. 25:6)".

Yahweh of Armies will make to all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines, of fat things full of marrow, of well refined choice wines- The future Kingdom of God was spoken of as a meal on a mountain, “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, for all peoples” (Is. 25:6-8). Then, death itself will be on the menu and God will swallow it up (:8). It is pictured as an eternal feast

which will last eternally. People from all nations of the earth are to be God's guests. No one is to be excluded. The records of the feeding miracles are presented in terms of this Messianic banquet. The Messianic banquet was "to all peoples"- the repentant remnants of all the Gentile nations around Judah, eating together in celebration of entry into the new covenant. This didn't happen at the time, but in essence is realized in the breaking of bread service today; and will come to literal fulfilment at the Lord's return.

One of the many ways to understand the breaking of bread meeting is as a victory celebration. The parables of Luke 14 and 15 speak of eating with Jesus as being a celebration of the salvation of the lost and as a celebration of marriage. Jesus spoke of how in the Kingdom, He would dine with the faithful (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 13:28,29); and He clearly had in mind the Kingdom prophecies of a Messianic banquet found in Is. 25:6-8 and Zech. 8:7-23; 9:16. I have elsewhere pointed out that the feeding miracles, with the crowds described strangely as "reclining" as if at a feast, also has this final banquet in mind. But that banquet is a victor's celebration; the breaking of bread clearly has elements of this within it.

Isaiah 25:7 He will destroy in this mountain the surface of the covering that covers all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations- This may be a reference to the vision for the restored temple and kingdom of God in Israel, described in more detail in Ez. 40-48. In Ezekiel's system there is no veil; as well as no Laver (see Ezekiel 36:24-27, John 15:3); no Table of Shewbread (see Micah 5:4, John 6:35); no Lampstand or Menorah (see Isaiah 49:6, John 8:12); no Golden Altar of Incense (Zechariah 8:20-23, John 14:6); and no Ark of the Covenant (Jer. 3:16, John 10:30-33). But the returned exiles didn't build that kind of temple as specified. They installed a veil- for it tore when the Lord died.

The veil and covering may be paralleled with death in :8. "Destroy" is the same word as "swallow up" in :8, and is another allusion to the Song of Moses (see on :1), as it is also the word used of how the Egyptians were 'devoured' or swallowed up at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12). And Zion will be the place where it is removed, finally because it is there the Lord Jesus will judge men and immortalize His people from all nations. The word for "destroy" or "swallow up" is also used of the 'covering' ['swallowing up' by hiding from vision] the things of the tabernacle (Num. 4:20). "Covering" is parallel with the "veil" which is "spread", a word also used for the covering of the tabernacle furniture (Ex. 37:16). The overall idea is that the swallowing up of death through the work of the Lord Jesus was the hidden message of the tabernacle, and this will then be

openly revealed. It will be revealed to the nations in that no longer will the tabernacle system be solely for the Jews and their priests. It was clearly demonstrated in the rending of the veil when the Lord Jesus died, opening up the Most Holy to all men of every nation.

The LXX reflects the obvious need for Isaiah and all of us to share this good news with the nations: "they shall anoint themselves with ointment in this mountain. Impart thou all these things to the nations; for this is God's counsel upon all the nations".

Isaiah 25:8 He has swallowed up death forever! The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces- These phrases are all interpreted in the New Testament as referring to the resurrection from the dead to immortality at the last day (1 Cor. 15:54; Rev. 7:17; 21:4). And this will be done by God through His work in His Son, the Lord Jesus. In some way, these things were all capable of fulfillment in Isaiah's time, had the judgments of Is. 24 come upon the earth. I noted on Is. 22:25 that Eliakim could have been the Messiah figure in Isaiah's day, but he failed; and his name means "God of raising / resurrection". Perhaps he could have been used for even this. Such huge potential was wasted. But God's saving plan is not to be ultimately frustrated; it will come true in the last days through the Lord Jesus.

He will take the reproach of His people away from off all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken it- This only has power if we read it as meaning that Israel's reproach was to be permanently removed. But that didn't happen in Isaiah's day. It will be fulfilled when Israel eternally enter a new covenant, and the nations who once mocked them are eternally converted to Israel's God.

Isaiah 25:9 It shall be said in that day, Behold, this is our God! We have waited for Him, and He will save us! This is Yahweh! We have waited for Him- The restored Zion would have Yahweh literally living there (Ez. 48:35), and Revelation states simply that the faithful will then see His face. "Our God" is a phrase sometimes used to contrast Yahweh with the idols of the nations (e.g. Jer. 3:23). This is the confident message of the redeemed remnants of Judah, Israel and the nations to whoever is left in the world who still hasn't accepted Yahweh. All idols of whatever kind will be declared eternally nothing compared to Yahweh. Twice they exult that they "have waited for Him", and this was exactly

the position of Isaiah's family and school of prophets (s.w. Is. 8:17). That righteous remnant would finally have their faith and expectation rewarded.

And we too by grace shall be there and feel these same things. Then our fuller mental comprehension of the Father will be reflected in our physical vision of Him. There is a parallel between physically seeing God and having the veil of our present incomprehension removed. The fuller understanding which we will then have will be reflected in our literal seeing of God.

We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation!- This situation could have arisen at the restoration (s.w. Ps. 14:7; 53:6; Is. 66:10). But the exiles returned in fear of what might meet them on the journey, and were soon disappointed and sad that there was a famine in the ruined land they had come to. Their impenitence and self-seeking precluded this joy. And so it will happen fully in the fuller salvation of the last day.

Isaiah 25:10 For in this mountain the hand of Yahweh will rest- Yahweh's hand speaks of His activity and protection; and it will "rest" permanently there, fulfilling the prophecy inherent in the Sabbath. Never again will God's people be in fear. His activity will be focused in Zion, His eternal dwelling place in the transfer of heaven to earth spoken of in the final chapters of Revelation.

But Moab will be trodden down in his place, even like straw is trodden down in the water of the dunghill- We wonder why Moab is singled out. Perhaps they were seen as the bitterest of all the enemies of the Jews (2 Kings 24:2; Ez. 25:8-11). The dunghill connects with the prophecy of Ps. 83:10 concerning the destruction of the latter day invaders of Israel, including Moab as one of the "children of Lot". The Hebrew for “dunghill” is a play on the Moabite name Madmen (Jer. 48:2); and also resembles the word for “straw”.

Isaiah’s love for the Gentiles whom he condemned (see on Is. 16:7) is remarkable. For as Moab cried out like a three year old heifer (Jer. 48:34), so did Isaiah for them (Is. 15:5). All this was done by Isaiah (and later by Jeremiah), knowing that Moab hated Israel and is singled out for His specific condemnation here. But all the same they loved them, in the spirit of Noah witnessing to the mocking world around him. Our knowledge of this world’s future means that as we walk the streets and mix with men and women, our heart should cry out for them, no matter how they behave towards us, and there should be a deep seated desire for at least some of them to come to repentance and thereby avoid the

judgments to come. Particularly is this true, surely, of the people and land of Israel. It ought to be impossible for us to walk its streets or meet its people without at least desiring to give them a leaflet or say at least something to try to help them see what lies ahead.

Isaiah 25:11 He will spread out his hands in its midst, like one who swims spreads out hands to swim, but his pride will be humbled together with the craft of his hands- The idea is that Moab will desperately seek to swim to survive the lethal water of the dung-pit (:10); but in vain. All attempts to avoid Divine condemnation will fail.

Isaiah 25:12 He has brought down the high fortress of your walls, laid them low and brought them to the ground, even to the dust- The language of Jerusalem's humiliation is here applied to Moab (e.g. Is. 26:5). Finally, what was done to Zion and Israel shall be done to those who did it, and Moab is singled out as representative of them all. This is the extended message of Revelation; the seals of judgment upon the land brought about by her invaders are then poured out upon those invaders, as the vials.

Isaiah Chapter 26

Isaiah 26:1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city. God appoints salvation for walls and defences- The day in view is the time after the projected judgments on the entire *eretz* in Is. 24 which have left most dead, but the repentant remnants of the Gentiles and Jews will have come to Zion for salvation. The restored Kingdom of God is likewise described in Revelation in terms of a city, the new Zion with walls and defences which are not so much literal as spiritual. The Jews are condemned in the prophets for trusting in the physical defences of Jerusalem; Yahweh's salvation will then be perceived as their defence and strength. The physical "walls and defences" will have been destroyed, as they were by the Babylonians (s.w. Lam. 2:8)- so that they might now trust in Yahweh's salvation. This could have happened at the restoration; but the walls were rebuilt in human strength and without this faith in Yahweh. The final fulfilment therefore will be in latter day faith in Jesus, 'Yah's salvation'.

Isaiah 26:2 Open the gates, that the righteous nation may enter: the one which keeps faith- The idea is that although the physical walls and defences are destroyed (see on :1), the gates of salvation of the city will open to the returning exiles, who are described as "righteous... [keeping] faith"; see on :7. The exiles would only be described like that because their faith had led to righteousness being imputed to them (Is. 60:21) through the work of the suffering servant (Is. 53:11), "the righteous branch" (Jer. 23:5). The gates are opened by the same Messianic figure who opens and nobody shuts (see on Is. 22:22 for a possible primary application in Eliakim). "Keeps faith" is literally "keeps truth" and may be a reference to how they have held on to their faith in the covenant based upon the promises to Abraham, which imply this imputed righteousness.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You- The LXX understands this to be a description of the "righteous nation" of :2. They are saved from their traumas by the state of their mind. And Yahweh will respond to this through the work of His Spirit on the human spirit, to keep their mind in perfect peace. This is the peace which comes from knowing sin is forgiven. "Mind" here is literally 'imagination'. We must ask what are our fantasies, our hopes, according to which we live, think and feel day by day. If they are above all for the Kingdom, then we will be 'kept' in this. "Steadfast" is literally to lean, and in Isaiah's immediate context this was in contrast to leaning upon Egypt for salvation (s.w. Is. 36:6). The great salvation of

the restored Kingdom could have come apart at that time, but it was precluded by a lack of real faith and focus on the Kingdom in the majority of Israel.

Isaiah 26:4 Trust in Yahweh forever; for in Yah, Yahweh, is an everlasting Rock- The "eternal / forever age" of the Kingdom of peace could have come at that time, with the Messianic son of Isaiah as the father of that eternal age (see on Is. 9:6). But it didn't. An eternal Messianic kingdom could then have been established; here, Judah were urged to repent and believe / trust in order to allow it to happen. And the same potential was there for the exiles who returned from Babylon (Is. 45:17; 65:18). And the "father" of that could have been a Messianic figure who arose in Jerusalem. But they preferred to look to Egypt as their rock (see on :3). But these potentials have been reapplied and rescheduled to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus to be established in Zion in the last days.

Isaiah 26:5 For He has brought down those who dwell on high, the lofty city. He lays it low, He lays it low even to the ground, He brings it even to the dust- This refers to the city dominating Jerusalem; it had short term reference to Nineveh (Assyria) and Babylon. The Jews in Zion surrounded by the Assyrians were to imagine Nineveh as already ruined, and downtrodden by themselves (:6). This was the significance of Nahum's prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh, and Isaiah's earlier prophecies of the fall of Babylon. The language here and in :6 repeats the grand prophetic theme with which Isaiah began his prophecies- that the purpose of judgment is to bring down human pride and to exalt the humble.

Isaiah 26:6 The foot shall tread it down; even the feet of the poor, and the footsteps of the needy- See on :5. As Zion had been trodden down by Babylon and others (s.w. Is. 16:4; Dan. 8:10), so the righteous remnant would tread down Babylon and the nations (s.w. Mic. 5:8). It was the poor and needy who were trodden down by the Jewish leadership; and they finally were to be exalted.

Isaiah 26:7 The way of the just is uprightness; You who are upright make the path of the righteous level- LXX "The way of the godly is made straight: the way of the godly is also prepared". This is the language of Is. 40. The way was open for the exiles to return as righteous, justified by faith, to a restored Zion; and if they made that journey, Zion's gates were open to them (see on :2). That way was potentially prepared at the restoration, but the exiles chose to remain in

Babylon and Assyria, and those who did return did so without accepting the call to repentance which is part of the making straight of the path to Zion. But it was all potentially prepared. It is for us now to walk in that path likewise to Zion. In the future it seems there may be literal highways prepared leading to Zion for the repentant remnants of the nations (see on Is. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 62:10; Jer. 31:21).

Isaiah 26:8 Yes, in the way of Your judgement, Yahweh, have we waited for You. Your name and Your renown are the desire of our soul- The faithful live now according to the principles which will be openly articulated at judgment day; hence LXX "For the way of the Lord is judgment". In the final glory of salvation revealed upon Zion, they exult that they "have waited for Him" (see on Is. 25:9), and this was exactly the position of Isaiah's family and school of prophets (s.w. Is. 8:17). That righteous remnant would finally have their faith and expectation rewarded.

Isaiah 26:9 With my soul have I desired You in the night. Yes, with my spirit within me will I seek You earnestly; for when Your judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness- Isaiah personally is speaking here. As noted on :8, Isaiah and his family were the parade examples of waiting for the Lord. Continually we see the importance of spiritual mindedness, where the imagination of our innermost heart is set; see on :3.

The Kingdom, 99.99% of our future, will be purely spiritual, and therefore the Hope of the Kingdom must be the center of our present existence. Isaiah realized this when he said that the total devotion of the righteous *now* is because ultimately, devotion to God's ways will be what eternity is all about. We must come to appreciate this; that in real terms, the Lord *can't* be only part of our lives. And as we do, He will become, quite artlessly and naturally, the master passion of our souls.

God's judgments lead to the nations learning righteousness, or 'being taught righteousness'. The practical outcome of that judgment will be that therefore they will beat their swords into plough shares; and devote themselves to learning of God (Is. 2:2-4) rather than of war. His judgments are always ultimately creative in spiritual terms. But the LXX sees this as an appeal to the nations: "for thy commandments are a light on the earth: learn righteousness, ye that dwell upon the earth".

Isaiah 26:10 Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal wrongfully, and will not perceive Yahweh's majesty- LXX offers: "For the ungodly one is put down: no one who will not learn righteousness on the earth, shall be able to do the truth: let the ungodly be taken away, that he see not the glory of the Lord".

To know God is to love Him, and to want to be like Him; there is something compulsive and magnetic about who He is. The knowledge of God elicits quite naturally a merciful spirit (Hos. 6:6). To "learn righteousness" is the result of beholding [after the pattern of Moses] the majesty of the Name (Is. 26:10). And so Is. 46:5-9 appeals for Israel to repent simply because God really is God; they were to "remember this" that they already knew, and "bring it again to mind" that God is really the great eternal, and His Name is as it is. And they that know His Name will put their trust in Him, day by day, as we cough and hack our way through these few years towards His eternal Kingdom.

To commit violence to others' persons is to live a lie (Hos. 12:1). Truth is not therefore merely a set of doctrines; it refers to an obedient life. The LXX uses the phrase 'to do truth', which John uses, in passages like 2 Chron. 31:20 (about Hezekiah's obedience to commandments), or in Gen. 47:29; Is. 26:10 to describe simply doing and living what is right. The fact truth must be *done* indicates it is *not* merely correct academic interpretation of doctrine.

"Yahweh's majesty" uses the same word as in Is. 12:5, where the repentant people of Israel, Judah and their attackers would behold these things and see Yahweh in their midst (Is. 12:6). The prophetic vision was of Yahweh Himself dwelling in Zion, so that the city would be called "the Lord is there" (Ez. 48:35). But the exiles failed to rebuild Zion and operate the services there as commanded in Ez. 40-48, and so this literal dwelling of God amongst His redeemed people is alluded to in Rev. 21,22 as being only fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus to earth. This would all be the result of grace being shown; but the wicked turn down even such an amazing offer. This is the power of entrenched sinful thinking.

Isaiah 26:11 Yahweh, Your hand is lifted up, yet they don't see; but they will see Your zeal for the people, and be disappointed; yes, fire will consume Your adversaries- The idea is that they don't see / know it when they could, so they will see / know it too late, in the day of condemnation. Yahweh's lifted up hand could refer to His offer of a new covenant, by grace (:10; Dt. 32:40) which was

also offered to the Gentiles at the restoration (Is. 49:22), and His offer of the Kingdom (Ez. 20:6,28; Neh. 9:15 s.w.). This uplifted hand of Yahweh in offering covenant relationship was seen but not seen; only too late will it be perceived. The Lord Jesus died with uplifted hands, beckoning all men to accept the new covenant offered; but it is seen but not seen.

Isaiah 26:12 Yahweh, You will ordain peace for us, for You have also worked all our works for us- This is a significant statement of humility. For trust in human works is the epitome of pride. Idols are so often called the work of men's' hands, and this is the abiding idolatry of our age. Only a complete trust in Yahweh's peace which comes by grace will empower us to never trust our own works. And we will realize that any works we do are His working through us. But "the works" in view here are of salvation and the gift of eternal peace.

Isaiah 26:13 Yahweh our God, other lords besides You have had dominion over us, but by You only will we make mention of Your name- This could be read as a statement and admission of their historical submission to other gods. Or it could mean that despite the remnant's domination by others, the remnant had refused to accept their gods but had retained Yahweh as "our God" and unlike the majority of God's people, they had only made mention of Yahweh's Name.

Isaiah 26:14 Their dead shall not live, their deceased shall not rise. Therefore have You visited and destroyed them, and caused all memory of them to perish- "Deceased" is the word used in Is. 14:9 of the dead people of the nations within the *eretz*. The context is their praising the God who has resurrected the faithful dead (Is. 25:7,8). At that glorious day it will be so apparent that Yahweh alone is the God of life and resurrection. "Memory" is the word just used in :8 of how God's Name has been the memory or "renown" of the faithful. And likewise they abide in His memory. The perishing of their memory may refer to the memory of God, as well as their being left without any human memorial on the earth.

Isaiah 26:15 You have increased the nation, O Yahweh, You have increased the nation! You are glorified! You have enlarged all the borders of the land- As explained on Is. 24:1, this section of Isaiah envisages supernatural Divine judgments upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham; and then the repentant remnants of the Gentile nations there would join with those of God's people in a reestablished Kingdom of God based in Zion. God's nation would no longer live

just in the coastal strip of that *eretz;* rather the nation would be enlarged to its original borders, so that Yahweh's multiethnic people were to live in the entire *eretz.*

Earlier, God had redefined the boundaries of the land in accordance to what Israel had the strength to subdue; He made account for their weakness. Thus Ephraim were given some cities within the inheritance of Manasseh (Josh. 16:9), presumably because Manasseh wouldn't drive out the tribes living there. And the Lord seems to have alluded to this by saying that *we* will be given cities, the number of which depends upon our zeal to possess them. God had clearly promised: "Your God, he shall expel them from before you… and ye *shall* possess their land, as the Lord your God hath promised unto you" (Josh. 23:5). But this promise was conditional upon them making the effort, even though that condition is not specifically mentioned. Ultimately, God will "enlarge all the borders of the land" because Israel will finally rise up to the spiritual ambition He desires of them.

Isaiah 26:16 Yahweh, in trouble they have come to You; they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was on them- The terrible judgments upon the *eretz* of Is. 24 are this "trouble" which brought a remnant of the Gentiles, as well as of God's people, to pray to Him and come to Him; "trouble" is the same word used in Is. 25:4 of how the remnants find refuge from "trouble" in Zion alone. The time of Jacob's trouble which will lead them back to Him is going to be experienced by all the nations around them. This could have come true at the time of the Assyrians, but only a minority poured out their prayers; and these resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem being averted, but the Kingdom was still not then reestablished because the remnant was so tiny. Nehemiah grasped the spirit of all this when he pours out a prayer to God in response to all the "trouble" of the Babylonian invasion (Neh. 9:27,32). But again, the majority of Judah didn't have that spirit. And so these things are reapplied to the holocaust to come upon the *eretz* in the last days.

The LXX applies this to Isaiah personally; see on :8,9 : "Lord, in affliction I remembered thee; thy chastening was to us with small affliction". The last phrase was perhaps perceived by Ezra when he acknowledged that the sufferings in Babylon had been less than their iniquities deserved.

Isaiah 26:17 Like as a woman with child who draws near the time of her delivery and is in pain and cries out in her pangs; so we have been before You,

Yahweh- Again we see the creative power and intention in all the judgments. They were to bring forth new life. This was "before You", in the sense that all the travail was under His control and direction, and the fruit brought forth was "to Him". The "we" may refer to Isaiah and his family; see on :18.

Isaiah 26:18 We have been with child, we have been in pain, we gave birth, it seems, only to wind. We have not worked any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen- In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. Isaiah and his personal family may also be in view here (see on :8,9,16). They perhaps felt that the child of sign born had not in fact been the signal that Judah's sufferings were over, and didn't come to be the expected Messianic seed (see on Is. 8:1,18; 9:6). Isaiah has used the same words of his own personal travail in pain in his ministry (Is. 21:3). Judah generally were to conceive in vain due to their impenitence (Is. 33:11; 59:4); and so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24).

The LXX however changes the sense entirely, as if the righteous remnant have brought forth in pain but not in vain, in that their tribulation has achieved spiritual rebirth: " We have conceived, O Lord, because of thy fear, and have been in pain, and have brought forth the breath of thy salvation, which we have wrought upon the earth: we shall not fall, but all that dwell upon the land shall fall".

Isaiah 26:19 Your dead shall live; my dead body also shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the

earth will cast forth her dead- "My dead body" suggests Isaiah and his personal family may also be in view here (see on :8,9,16,19). He sees himself as representative of the remnant which will eventually be resurrected; his resurrection is paralleled with theirs. "Cast forth" is the language of child birth; all the pain of travail at the hands of the invaders (:17,18) would come to term in resurrection from the dead of those who perished in the *eretz* under their domination. There are similar teachings in Revelation. The idea is that dew would descend upon their graves and cause new life to come forth from the grave; and this is the picture of the Messianic Kingdom in 2 Sam. 23:4; Ps. 110:3. But it would come about because of their faith and endurance. However LXX has "but the land of the ungodly shall perish".

Isaiah 26:20 Come, My people, enter into your rooms, and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation is past- The majority of the population of Judah and Jerusalem were intended to perish (Is. 10:20). But God urges the faithful remnant in Zion (Is. 10:24) to be assured of their own safety; the destruction of the majority was to happen suddenly, in only "a very little while". This is the situation of Is. 26:20, when the faithful minority would somehow be miraculously preserved in Zion, whilst the majority of the Jewish population were destroyed. This didn't happen as planned, and the Assyrians never took Jerusalem. Likewise the "little moment" is reinterpreted in Is. 54:7,8 as referring to the time of Judah's exile in Babylon. The "rooms" could have been opened had Judah repented and Messiah Himself would have emerged from them (s.w. Joel 2:16). But that scenario likewise didn't work out, in that the people didn't repent and many never returned, they remained in their "rooms".

But the essence of it will be fulfilled in the last days. And this passage therefore has been given a spiritual application by the Lord in Mt. 6:6. He taught the intensity of the life He required by taking Old Testament passages which refer to the crisis of the last days, and applying them to the daily life of His people. And so He took Is. 26:20, which speaks of how in the final tribulation, God's people will shut the doors around them and pray. The Lord applies this to the daily, regular prayer of His people- we are to pray in secret, in our room, with doors closed (Mt. 6:6)- clearly an allusion to the Isaiah passage.

Isaiah 26:21 For behold, Yahweh comes forth out of His place- This is the coming forth of the bride in response to Judah's repentance (Joel 2:16). This didn't happen, and so it comes to be reapplied to the emergence of the Lord Jesus in the last days. "His place" may refer to Zion rather than Heaven, in that He

returns to Zion. However the similar language in Mic. 1:3 seems to have Heaven in view. The Lord's visible return from Heaven to earth would fulfill this.

To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The earth also will disclose her blood, and will no longer cover her slain- The blood of the faithful who would now be resurrected (:19) was not only shed by the Gentiles; but also by Manasseh and other Jewish leaders (Is. 1:27). The earth would disclose that blood in the sense that vengeance will now be taken for it (as in Gen. 4:10). This didn't happen at the time, but is the time when the blood under the altar calls for judgment in the last days at the Lord's return (Rev. 6:9,10). If they are to be punished at this final judgment, then they will be resurrected to this judgment. The final destruction of all those left alive in the *eretz* along with this large class of people will take place whilst the faithful resurrected ones are somehow screened from it (:20); for they like God will have no pleasure in seeing the death of the wicked.

Isaiah Chapter 27

Isaiah 27:1 In that day, Yahweh with His hard and great and strong sword- The sword of Yahweh will come down in judgment upon the peoples of the *eretz* and perhaps on the resurrected former abusers of His people (see on Is. 26:21). But His sword comes down as part of His 'pleading with all flesh' (Is. 66:16). This can be read as an allusion to judgment; but there is still the idea of pleading. The threat of the sword descending is His appeal, His pleading for repentance.

Will punish leviathan, the fleeing serpent, and leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon that is in the sea- Is. 24-27 has rightly been described as the little apocalypse. The total destruction of all on the *eretz* in Is. 24 leads to the repentance of remnants of the various Gentile nations as well as God's people. Is. 26 speaks clearly of the resurrection of the dead, and these remnants unite in a multiethnic Kingdom of God in Israel. All the persecutors of God's people are judged, presumably requiring their resurrection to judgment. Now Isaiah speaks of them as three beasts, one of which is a beast of the sea. There likewise appear to be three types of beasts in Revelation (Rev. 20:10). These ideas are developed in more detail in Daniel and Revelation. The identity of the beasts therefore morphs over time, as potential possibilities for human response to God's claims on men rise and fall. The dragon in the sea was originally Egypt (Ps. 74:13; Ez. 29:3; 32:2; Is. 51:9). What God did to Egypt in the Red Sea is to be the prototype of what He will do to all future persecutors of His people; hence Isaiah's fondness for allusions to the Song of Moses, putting his words of triumph in the mouths of God's finally triumphant people; see on Is. 25:1.

The initial application was to the Assyrians slain outside the walls of Jerusalem, and the three beasts here would then be different snapshots as it were of that power. In a restoration context, Isaiah comforted Judah that God would destroy “Leviathan the gliding serpent; He will slay the monster of the sea” (Is. 27:1). The real ‘monster’ faced by Judah in exile wasn’t a supernatural being; it was a concrete kingdom of men on earth, namely Babylon. And Job 26:13 uses the phrase for "fleeing serpent" and states that Yahweh has created this. He is in complete control. The language is intended to deconstruct pagan myths to the effect that Judah's misfortunes had been at the hands of the deities of their invaders. Baal was temporarily conquered by Mot, and the Ugaritic poem about their conflict which was found in the Ras Shamra texts speaks of how Baal was made a “slave forever”. This very language is picked up in Job 41:4, where God mocks that in no way would He become a “slave forever”. The allusion shows that the one true God is in no way Baal. He is greater than Baal. Unlike Baal, He

is in no conflict with Mot nor anyone. The poem challenges Baal to “Pierce through Lotan the serpent, destroy the serpent the seven headed tyrant”. Yet this is exactly the language picked up in Is. 27:1. Yahweh’s utter supremacy over any other god is so great that it makes all ideas of cosmic conflict simply laughable.

Isaiah 27:2 In that day, sing to her, A pleasant vineyard!- The "day" in view is that of :13, the last day. Is. 5 has presented Judah as a vineyard that didn't work out and failed in its potential. But "in that day" she will be a fruitful vineyard, now that the "briers and thorns" have been removed and burnt (:4). I would therefore take :3 to be retrospective upon God's continual care for that vineyard to bring it to that point of fruitfulness. To become fruitful, Judah had taken hold of God's covenant of peace (:5), and then :6 concludes the song by repeating the thought of this opening verse. She will be "a pleasant vineyard" because she has blossomed and filled the face of the earth / land with fruit. This means that the song of Is. 27:2-6 follows a chiastic structure typical of Hebrew poetry.

The LXX of :2-6 is quite different, presenting this as a repetition of the lament over the failed vineyard which was to be besieged and taken, although starting and closing with the sure hope that eventually the vineyard will function perfectly after the judgments poured out: "In that day there shall be a fair vineyard, and a desire to commence a song concerning it. I am a strong city, a city in a siege: in vain shall I water it; for it shall be taken by night, and by day the wall shall fall. There is no woman that has not taken hold of it; who will set me to watch stubble in the field? because of this enemy I have set her aside; therefore on this account the Lord has done all that he appointed. I am burnt up; they that dwell in her shall cry, Let us make peace with him, let us make peace, they that are coming are the children of Jacob. Israel shall bud and blossom, and the world shall be filled with his fruit".

Isaiah 27:3 I, Yahweh, am its keeper- In the sense that He "kept" (s.w.) covenant and mercy (Ex. 34:7), keeping His covenant people in perfect peace (s.w. Is. 26:3). The same word however carries the idea of a watchman guarding, as is translated "besieged" (Is. 1:8). Yahweh besieged them with protection even as they were being besieged- a great encouragement in Isaiah's time, when Jerusalem was besieged by the Syria-Ephraim confederacy and then by Assyria.

I will water it every moment- The contrast with the vineyard song of Is. 5 is that there, God withheld water from it (Is. 5:6). That time of judgment and exile was now over. Or perhaps this is recalling how prior to that judgment, God had

watered them so carefully. He is involved "every moment" in the life of His people, even if for some moments He hides His face (s.w. Is. 54:8); Job, presented as the suffering exiles, came to realize this (Job 7:18 s.w.). And yet the prophecy here is of the eternal state of the vineyard "in that day" (:2), when Yahweh will eternally "water" His people who once were in the dry desert of exile (Is. 43:20 s.w.).

Lest anyone damage it, I will keep it night and day- "Damage" is the term usually used for 'punish' (s.w. :1 "punish"). God's people would not be further punished for their sins- God's wrath was over (:4).

Isaiah 27:4 Wrath is not in Me- I take this as meaning that God has no pleasure in the death and judgment of the wicked, but all the same He has to destroy the wicked out of the earth / land in order to save the righteous remnant and transform them and the earth into His Kingdom. At this stage He has trampled the nations in His "wrath" (Is. 63:6), but that wrath is not eternal. All ideas of "hell" as a place of God's eternally burning wrath are totally out of step with the consistent revelation of God's character- that His anger is but for a moment and does not last eternally.

Hosea dreamt or fantasized about the day when, he hoped, Gomer [cp. Israel] would return to him. And we find God through the prophets doing this often, as an expression of His love for them. He dreamt of how Israel as His vineyard would again be fruitful: “In that day: A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!... I [will] guard it day and night; I have no wrath” (Is. 27:2,3). He had wrath, and yet at the thought of Israel’s blessed future with Him, He could say “I have no wrath”. The God who spoke of slaying Israel with thirst in Hosea could then comment: “I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man… and I will *not* come to destroy” (Hos. 11:9).

But if I should find briers and thorns, I would do battle! I would march on them and I would burn them together- Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. "Briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (Is. 9:18; 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them (Is. 5:6; 7:23-25); and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour. Sin was its own judgment. Although God's wrath has passed from Him concerning His people at this stage, this doesn't mean He has lost all moral compass. If there were to be

sin in the land as there had been previously, then He would judge it.

Isaiah 27:5 Or else let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he will make peace with Me- As noted throughout Is. 13 onwards, the judgments upon the Gentiles in the land are only because they have refused to repent. God's desire was that the Gentile and Jewish "briers and thorns" upon whom He would march (:4) would "take hold" of Him and make peace with Him, entering into covenant with Him as He offered. Is. 56:6 likewise speaks of this latter day 'taking hold' (s.w.) of Yahweh by the remnant of the judged Gentiles. In the last days, this making peace with God is only through accepting His Son as Messiah (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14), although potentially it had been possible through some Messianic figure who could have appeared at the time of the Assyrian invasion (Mic. 5:5).

Isaiah 27:6 In days to come, Jacob will take root- Or as AV "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root". The returned, repent exiles would be caused by God to take root; whereas previously they had been sown but hadn't flourished to harvest (Is. 17:11). But now God as it were will force through His plan with any who come to Him.

Israel will blossom and bud; they will fill the face of the world with fruit- Isaiah foretold that when Israel know their forgiveness and salvation, they will therefore quite naturally “declare his doings among the people” (Is. 12:1-5). This will be the motivation for Israel’s witness to the world. They will fill the face of the world with spiritual fruit – and this will be the fruit of the taking away of their sin, and their experience of repentance (Is. 27:6,9 RV). This is the 'budding' of the waste places of the land foreseen in the Kingdom prophecies of Is. 35:1,2; 66:14.

Sometimes God speaks as if He has rejected Israel, and other times as if they will eternally be His people. Such is the extent of His passionate feelings for them. And the Son of God entered into this- He said that no man would eat fruit of the tree of Israel for ever (Mk. 11:14), when in fact Israel one day will fill the face of the earth with fruit. We too, in the spirit of the prophets, are to enter into these feelings of God. God’s threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don’t somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. He cries out through Hosea of how His many ‘repentings’ are “kindled together” as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened (Hos. 11:8). And this struggle was

reflected within the emotions and through the speeches / writings / poetry of Hosea. Hosea's speeches have an air of turbulence and struggle about them, which reflected the spirit / mind of the God who inspired him.

Isaiah 27:7 Has He struck them as He struck those who struck them? Or are they killed like those who killed them were killed?- The "them" I suggest refers to God's people. He did not strike Israel as hard as He struck those who abused them. The death of God's people was not such a hard death as that of the Gentiles who had attacked them. So it was not 'measure for measure'; Judah were punished less than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13), although God counted it as if they had been punished double for their sins (Is. 40:2). The balance of things was weighted in Israel's favour because of God's grace.

Isaiah 27:8 In measure, when You send them away, You contend with them. He has removed them with His rough blast in the day of the east wind- God's people had been judged, Yahweh had contended with them in judgment; that was to be the point in God's summary conclusions at the last day. He had "sent them away... removed them" into exile, He corrected them "in measure" but didn't leave them "altogether unpunished" (Jer. 30:11; 46:28).

Isaiah 27:9 Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be forgiven, and this is all the fruit of taking away his sin: that he makes all the stones of the altar as chalk stones that are beaten in pieces, so that the Asherim and the incense altars shall rise no more- The very terms iniquity taken away and sin forgiven are found in Is. 6:7; Isaiah is set up as representative of Judah. His cleansing could have been theirs. These things would happen if Judah were repentant and destroyed their idols. But they didn't, and so the vision of glory and of the glorified suffering servant couldn't save them.

Israel are often called 'Jacob' in passages concerning idolatry. The historical Jacob and idolatry go together. Jacob's destruction of his idol altars, pounding them back to the surrounding chalk stone from which they were constructed, permanently destroying the Asherim so that they would never be revived... this was the fruit of Jacob's sin being taken away. Note the sequence. Forgiveness of sin doesn't come after repentance and the bearing of fruit. It comes first, by grace, and then the fruit of destroying idols in response comes as a result of that gracious forgiveness. Repentance and not just forgiveness is therefore "given" by grace (Acts 5:31; 11:18). This is the grace of the new covenant God will offer to

Israel and the world in the last days, and it is offered to us today.

Isaiah 27:10 For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness. The calf will feed there and there he will lie down and consume its branches- This continues the theme stressed in :8. God had not allowed His people to escape judgment. Justice was in that sense done. It seems the desolation of Jerusalem is in view here, with so few people that there weren't even shepherds for the animals, and the flocks would be left to wander freely over the desolated city. LXX: "The flock that dwelt there shall be left, as a deserted flock; and the ground shall be for a long time for pasture, and there shall flocks lie down to rest". But this didn't happen at the time of the Assyrian invasion; for Jerusalem didn't fall. And at the time of the Babylonian invasion there was not this level of absolute desolation. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. We could say that this prophecy of total destruction looks forward to a latter day fulfilment; or in terms of Jer. 18:8-10 it could be that there was enough repentance and intercession for God to as it were change the extent of His intended judgments.

Isaiah 27:11 When its boughs are withered, they will be broken off. The women will come and set them on fire, for they are a people of no understanding- As noted on :10, the people of Judah were indeed judged. The breaking off of the branches of the tree is clearly alluded to in Rom. 11:17-20, applying it to the Divine rejection of an unbelieving Israel in favour of a new Israel, comprised of the minority of Israel who accepted Jesus as Christ, and the Gentiles who also did so. The rejected majority had "no understanding", not in the sense of simply

intellectual failure, but in the Hebraic sense of relationship. All other wisdom and understanding is as nothing compared to the ultimate and surpassing "understanding", which is of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their burning by "women" would be an example of their condemnation being expressed in terms which they could relate to, even if they were not literally true. Thus I noted on Is. 13:21 that the mythical creatures called satyrs were spoken of as if they existed, and would judge Babylon; Babylon's judgment was described there in terms she would have understood, even if those terms reflected ideas which were not literally true. For satyrs don't exist in the form the Babylonians believed. And as explained on Is. 14:9 too, their concept of the underworld is used in describing their condemnation.

Therefore He who made them will not have compassion on them, and He who formed them will show them no grace- But the very fact that God did form and make Israel is the reason God gives for appealing to them to receive His ever-available mercy (Is. 43:1; 44:2; 49:15). And the paradox of this grace when there was to be no grace highlights the grace of it all.

Isaiah 27:12 It will happen in that day, that Yahweh will thresh from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, you children of Israel- Euphrates to the brook of Egypt is exactly the definition of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. I explain on Is. 35:2 how the deserts and dry areas of that *eretz* were in the areas inhabited by Israel's Gentile enemies. A remnant of these peoples was to repent, and then they and their territory would be incorporated into the Kingdom of God in Israel, covering the full extent of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. Those territories will be materially transformed, those desert areas will be like Israel "proper", as fruitful as Carmel and Sharon. The complete fulfilment of the Divine promises about the *eretz* would only be achieved by 'threshing' in judgment. And the repentant remnant would be gathered "one by one", each one would be so significant to God. And likewise true Christianity places a remarkable value on the worth of the individual person. This gathering every single individual and valuing them is that spoken of in Is. 13:12: "I will make people more valuable than fine gold, even a person than the pure gold of Ophir". The repentant remnant is in view; the intention of the judgments, both on God's people and the Babylonians, was that a repentant remnant would be produced; and each one of those people would therefore be of extraordinary value to God, representing the ultimate success of

His lengthy plan.

Isaiah 27:13 It will happen in that day that a great trumpet will be blown; and those who were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and those who were outcasts in the land of Egypt, shall come; and they will worship Yahweh in the holy mount at Jerusalem- Some Jews had taken refuge in Egypt at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. In the Babylonian context, they did this in conscious disobedience to Jeremiah's command not to go there; they were as LXX "the lost ones". So the idea was that they could have repented and returned to Zion and the reestablished Kingdom there. This didn't happen, there was no such repentance; and so it will come true in the repentance of the Jewish diaspora in the last days. The trumpet blast in the last days would be that of Mt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16. The allusion is to the trumpet blast announcing the day of atonement (Lev. 25:9). Those who respond to it are therefore those who are repentant and seek forgiveness. Again we see that the repentance of Israel is connected with the establishment of the Kingdom and resurrection.

Isaiah Chapter 28

Isaiah 28:1 Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim- Israel had lost their hold on true doctrine, many scarcely knew the Law (Is. 57:4,5; 59:3). They got drunk at the temple feasts (Is. 36:10-12; 58:3,4), like Corinth they had an "eat, drink, for tomorrow we die" mentality (Is. 22:12,13); they committed all manner of sexual perversions, along with almost every other form of doctrinal and moral apostasy (Is. 5:11-13,24; 8:19; 9:15; 22:12,13; 24:5; 27:11; 28:7; 30:10; 31:6; 44:8-20; consider the similarities with Corinth). This list is worth reading through. And consider the terrible implications of their perversion in Is. 66:17. But the earlier chapters of Isaiah sternly rebuke Israel for their *pride*- there is not a whisper of all these other things until later (Is. 2:11-22; 3:16-20; 5:15; 9:9). And even throughout the later rebukes, there is the repeated criticism of their pride (Is. 13:11; 16:6; 23:9; 24:4; 25:11; 26:5; 28:1,3,14; 29:4; 30:25; 50:33; 57:15). This is why Isaiah's prophecies of Christ stress His humility (Acts 8:33), and the "lofty", "high", "exaltation" of God. These words, common in Isaiah, are those translated “pride" in Isaiah's condemnations of Israel's arrogance; as if to say that *God* was the only one who could be 'proud'. "The crown of pride" may refer to Samaria, the capital which Ephraim was so proud of.

And to the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fertile valley of those who are overcome with wine!- Is. 40:6-8 describe all of humanity with the very same language of fading flowers. In spiritual terms, alcoholics are the epitome of us all in our unredeemed state. Tragically, fertile valleys and much wine were part of the blessings of the covenant if Israel were obedient. Despite their disobedience, God by grace gave them the blessings for obedience, as He did as it were to the prodigal son. And that grace was abused.

Isaiah 28:2 Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one; like a storm of hail, a destroying storm- The reference is to the Assyrian (Is. 8:7,8), personified and epitomized in a singular individual (Shalmaneser, in Ephraim's context), the equivalent of the "antichrist" individual of the last days. There was however a refuge available from that storm in Zion (s.w. Is. 4:6; 25:4). The repentant remnant amongst the ten tribes were to flee to Zion, and they did this; although it seems they fled more for material safety than from a motive of repentance.

And like a storm of mighty waters overflowing, He will cast them down to the earth with His hand- The "waters" refer to the Assyrians, coming in judgment

upon the ten tribes. Yet this is part of Isaiah's burden to Judah and Jerusalem. Like us, they were intended to learn from the condemnation of others and yet they did not. The humbling of men as it were from heaven to earth is a major theme of the prophets, Isaiah especially.

Isaiah 28:3 The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden under foot- Their alcohol inspired arrogance would be trodden down. LXX has "the hirelings of Ephraim", alluding to their prostituting themselves to the Syrians and Egyptians, accepting their gods in return for protection against Assyria.

Isaiah 28:4 The fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fertile valley, shall be like the first-ripe fig before the summer, which someone picks and eats as soon as he sees it- LXX "And the fading flower of the glorious hope on the top of the high mountain shall be as the early fig; he that sees it, before he takes it into his hand, will desire to swallow it down". The idea may be that the promise of glory and beauty was fading, the potential wasn't reached; but despite that the repentant remnant of Israel of :5 would be as the first-ripe fig, the sign of the Summer of the Kingdom of God arriving. The Lord applies this language to the repentance of a latter day Israelite remnant, along with and at the same time as that of the various "trees" of the Gentiles (Lk. 21:29-31).

Isaiah 28:5 In that day- This term is used about widely different events; the judgment of the ten tribes in :3, the latter day repentance of Israel in :4. This is because the prophetic potential was that they could all have happened at the same time at Isaiah's time. But Israel didn't repent, the Kingdom of God wasn't reestablished in Judah. And so the various elements of these prophecies are left fulfilled at different times. Another approach is to argue that because God is beyond time, His prophecies appear to jump around in time. They only appear disjointed to us who read them with a background insistence that everything must be chronological. Thus the tenses change freely throughout Isaiah 53. And throughout Isaiah, prophecies of the Kingdom are often introduced by the rubric "in that day"; and yet the preceding context is often quite different (e.g. Is. 3:7,18; 4:1; 5:30; 7:18,21; 10:20,22; 11:10; 12:1; 17:9; 19:6; 22:20,25; 25:9; 27:13; 28:5; 29:18). It makes an interesting exercise to go through Isaiah 9 and decide to which time each verse applies. Some of the verses are quoted in the NT and given specific fulfillments. They refer to Isaiah's day, the Assyrian invasion,

the birth of Jesus, the beginning of His ministry at age 30, and to His future Kingdom. And yet the verses aren't presented in this order; they move from one to the other at ease, with no linking rubric or explanation. Likewise Daniel's prophecies seem to have a big hiatus in their fulfillment (Dan. 2:34; 8:23; 9:24; 11:39); and Zechariah is another good example. Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfillment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then v. 12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (Is. 21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples).

Yahweh of Armies will become a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remains of His people- It was envisaged that there would be a remnant amongst the ten tribes who would accept Yahweh's kingship over them and would thus become His people in His reestablished Kingdom. Glory and beauty recalls the High Priest's garments; the crown of glory would be the High Priestly mitre, LXX "the woven crown of glory". But this priest also had a diadem; the idea is of a king-priest, a Messianic figure who would arise to save the repentant remnant of the ten tribes.

Isaiah 28:6 And a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgement- The idea is as GNB "He will give a sense of justice to those who serve as judges". This was never fulfilled in any leader of Israel and so it will come to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus (Is. 11:3); although that prophecy too could have come true in a child of Isaiah or in Hezekiah. Thus the prophecy about Israel's potential was transferred to Judah; but they too failed to fulfill it, and so it was reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

And strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate- The idea is that they repulse an enemy, and drive him back to his own city's gate. This was the possibility for Ephraim (the ten tribes) if they had repented; they could have repelled the Assyrians. But they didn't repent nor have faith as required, and so

the prophecy was reapplied or transferred to how Hezekiah of Judah did this when "He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza " (2 Kings 18:8)..

Isaiah 28:7 They also- This appears to be saying that Judah "also" was just as bad as Ephraim.

Reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink. They are swallowed up by wine, they stagger with strong drink. They err in vision, they stumble in judgement- The priests were of course not allowed to drink alcohol when on duty. We get the impression here of chronic alcoholism, even amongst those who did receive genuine prophetic messages from Yahweh; hence GNB "The prophets are too drunk to understand the visions that God sends, and the priests are too drunk to decide the cases that are brought to them". The reference may be of course to the messages sent through Isaiah, but the criticism is specifically applied to the prophets who received the visions and the priests whose duty it was to faithfully teach and distribute that word.

Isaiah 28:8 For all tables are completely full of filthy vomit and filthiness- These tables were presumably the altars within the Jerusalem temple, or at best the tables used by the priests for preparation of the sacrifices. The priests were so drunk in the temple that they were vomiting on them. This sad state of things was how things were in Isaiah's time, when Hezekiah had apparently made sweeping reforms. Clearly those reforms failed to affect the vast majority. That such behaviour could be tolerated by the masses and others in leadership says a lot about them.

Isaiah 28:9 Whom will He teach knowledge? To whom will He explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?- This can be read as the drunk priests and prophets of :7 drunkenly talking about Isaiah, scoffing as if "Whom *will* he (does *Isaiah* presume to) teach knowledge? And whom will he (Isaiah) make to understand *instruction?* Is it those (that is, does he take us to be) just weaned from the milk".

Isaiah 28:10 For it is precept on precept, precept on precept; line on line, line on line; here a little, there a little- See on :9. They complain Isaiah keeps repeating his message as if teaching very small children. The repetition of sounds in

the Hebrew reflects their scorn of Isaiah, perhaps because he stammered (:11): *tzav latzav, tzav latzav, qav laqav, qav laquav,* as if they were imitation his stammering. We recall how God used Moses as His prophet and mouthpiece, when it seems he too had some speech impediment. This is typical of Yahweh's work with men; to choose the weakest and most humanly inappropriate for His mighty work.

Isaiah 28:11 But He will speak to this nation with stammering lips and in another language- As explained on :10, God chose Isaiah's stammering lips to witness to Israel and Judah, and in addition, He would even use Gentiles who didn't even speak Hebrew. 1 Cor. 14 is a list of commands concerning the use of the gift of tongues; 1 Cor. 14:21 quotes Is. 28:11 concerning how this gift would be used to witness against the Jews: “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people...”. Is. 28:11 primarily refers to Israel’s invaders speaking to the Jews in languages (“tongues”) they would not have known. The parallel between “tongues” and “lips” indicates that “tongues” were foreign languages. If the Corinthians spoke to each other in foreign languages which they didn't understand, then they were actually living out condemnation; they were acting just as would happen to Israel in their condemnation. There are many other indications in 1 Cor. 14 that “tongues” refers to foreign languages. This chapter is Paul’s inspired criticism of the abuses of the gifts which were taking place in the early church, and as such it gives many insights into the nature of the gifts of tongues and prophecy.

Isaiah 28:12 to whom He said, This is the resting place. Give rest to the weary; and This is the refreshing; yet they would not hear- Is. 11:10 had spoken of how the Messianic figure possible at Isaiah's time could have restored the Kingdom, "And his resting place will be glorious". This could simply refer to a literal appearance of glory upon mount Zion, as hinted at in several prophecies. But this was precluded at the time by Judah refusing this "rest" (Is. 28:12 s.w.). Or His resting place could be the hearts of those who "trust" in Him (Is. 11:10), a resting place chosen by Him because the temple on Zion had not been rebuilt as required and therefore God chose to dwell in the hearts of individuals instead (Is. 66:1,2 s.w.). Hence GNB "He offered rest and comfort to all of you, but you refused to listen to him". The appeal of Is. 40 was that comfort was again available to the people at the time of the restoration. But again, the vast potential was wasted. Likewise Israel could’ve had honey out of the rock; but they got only water (Ps. 81:16). They could have had peace and serenity when under

attack- “but you would not”(Is. 28:12; 30:15). There may be people in your neighbourhood, in your life, who would come to the life eternal if you engaged them about the Gospel. There may be specific victories over personal failures which have been potentially enabled by God, in great detail.

Isaiah 28:13 Therefore the word of Yahweh will be to them precept after precept, precept after precept; line on line, line on line; here a little, there a little; that they may go, fall backward, be broken, be snared, and be taken- Their judgment was to be appropriate to their mocking. They would not be able to "hear the word of Yahweh" (:14) because they saw it as just disconnected sound bites, line upon line, concept after concept, but not tied together in their minds as the living word of God. We must ask if this is our perception of God's word; just disconnected bits of truth and abstract concepts, without hearing the word of Yahweh as a living dialogue with us personally. The more textual analytic tools we have, and the more we think we are on the way to totally 'true' interpretation of verse after verse, the greater our tendency to fall into this "line on line" attitude.

Isaiah 28:14 Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, you scoffers, that rule this people in Jerusalem- See on :13. Instead of just hearing the isolated words and concepts of God's revelation, they were to hear His word as a living word and conversation with themselves personally. Even those awful scoffers who mocked Isaiah's inspired preaching (:10) were still Isaiah's concern, as they were Yahweh's. We note that the Jerusalem rulership was the group addressed; evidence enough that Hezekiah's apparent reforms were not far reaching.

Isaiah 28:15 Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol are we in agreement; when the overflowing scourge passes through, it won’t come to us- As explained on :18, the covenant in view may be the agreements with Egypt for help against Assyria and then later Babylon. These nations were angry that Judah had made covenants with Egypt when they had a covenant with them. Jeremiah and Ezekiel describe this as adultery, resulting in the wrath of the lovers. And so the covenant was really sure to lead to death. The connection with Egypt is deepened when we realize that the Hebrew for "death" is *mut,* and this was the name of an Egyptian idol. However, it could be that the covenant referred to was with Assyria, who is likened to *sheol* in Is. 5:14; Hos. 13:14; and because they broke that covenant, the overflowing scourge of Assyria (Is. 8:8) invaded them and destroyed them. It was Assyria who was going to kill

them, and so their making a covenant with Assyria was effectively making a covenant with death. The reasoning of the leaders of Judah (:14) was that because they had made a treaty with Assyria, when the Assyrian invasion came, it would take away Israel (:2), but not Judah, because they had made a covenant with Assyria. This gives deeper insight into Hezekiah's bravery in breaking the covenant with Assyria; the others in the leadership were trusting deeply in that which he was breaking. We too at times have to stand with our backs to the world in order to do what is right, no matter how many friends we lose.

For we have made lies our refuge, and we have hidden ourselves under falsehood'- They likely never said this, but God perceives their attitudes and what they were effectively 'saying'. These attitudes of "lies" were to be swept away by the hailstorm and waters of the Assyrian and later Babylonian invasions. But actually this didn't happen in Isaiah's time, because the waters of Assyria were not allowed to drown Zion. The Assyrians did indeed "overflow and pass over" (Is. 8:8), but not all their refuges of lies (:17) were swept away. The repentance of a minority affected the outcomes of judgment even for these sinners in Zion. The ways of Yahweh are indeed complex because He so respects the freewill of every man. Their confident claim that the overflowing rivers of the Assyrians wouldn't come near them is stated to be false in :17 LXX: "for the storm shall by no means pass by you".

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone- This could have had various primary fulfillments. Zerubbabel and the restored exiles did "lay... a foundation stone" in Zion (Zech. 4:9), but some wept when it was laid- because clearly the rebuilt temple was not that commanded in Ez. 40-48 (Ezra 3:10-12). This was to happen when Babylon fell (Is. 14:32 s.w.) and Cyrus ordered the laying (s.w.) of the foundation of Zion (Is. 44:28). Zerubbabel failed to be the Messiah figure. And so these things were transferred to the Lord Jesus and reapplied.

The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place" . That rock represents Christ and Him crucified, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted Biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its

ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle.

A tried stone- Literally a stone of trial. Reactions to this stone would effectively be the judgment of those who encountered him. This passage is quoted about the Lord Jesus in 1 Pet. 2:4-6, and Peter goes on to comment in 1 Pet. 2:8 that He is "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence". He was and is the stone which tests; according to our attitude to Him, we reveal ourselves. And the Jews stumbled at Him. When Peter comments that this stone had been "rejected" by the Jews, he may have in mind not only their rejection of the Lord Jesus, but also of the previous potential fulfillments of the "foundation stone" prophecy in the time of Zerubbabel and others.

A precious cornerstone of a sure foundation. He who believes shall not be ashamed- There is a clear element of unreality here- the huge corner stone of the new temple was to be a "precious stone", something resembling a massive diamond. And this, Peter says, is a matter of our perceiving the Lord Jesus is indeed a precious stone. But this precious stone was rejected by the Jewish builders- the world's largest diamond, as it were, as big as a huge granite cornerstone, was rejected and went unperceived.

Isaiah 28:17 I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plumb line- This could imply that the new temple would be built on the basis of justice and righteousness. This is stated several times in the commands concerning the building of the new temple in Ez. 40-48. But the returned exiles didn't do this.

The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the hiding place- see on :15. Their confident claim in :15 that the overflowing rivers of the Assyrians wouldn't come near them is stated to be false in :17 LXX: "for the storm shall by no means pass by you". And yet by grace, as explained on :15, the storm didn't sweep all of the away.

These things were ultimately reapplied to the things of the Lord Jesus and the last days. The Lord's parable of the builders on sand and rock was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of

real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side.

Isaiah 28:18 Your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol shall not stand- See on :15. This very phrase is used of how the fleshly plans of Israel and Syria did "not stand" (Is. 8:18). Now Judah are warned not to make plans according to the flesh, because they too would not stand nor happen. They should have learnt from how the covenant of Israel and Syria had not stood. Circumstances repeat in our experiences, so that we might learn, and see the same Divine hand at work. And so the emphasis is upon "*your* covenant". As Israel had made a covenant with Syria, so Judah had made a covenant with Egypt, for help against Assyria and then later for help against Babylon. This came to nothing, as explained in Is. 33:7-9: “The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly... He has broken the covenant, He has despised the cities He regards no man". But the sense of the original could be that unless they annulled those covenants, then they would be trampled down to death by the Assyrian invaders. They didn't annul them and so they were trampled down.

When the overflowing scourge passes through, then you will be trampled down by it- The initial application is to the Assyrian invasion (Is. 8:8). Those in Jerusalem (:14) who had made agreements with Egypt were to be destroyed by the Assyrians. But in fact they weren't, as Jerusalem didn't fall. So the prophecy didn't come about because of the faith and repentance of third parties, and this lead to collateral blessings even for sinners. God's every action is so multi dimensional and carefully weighed. However I suggested on :15 that the covenant with death might refer to a covenant with Assyria, leading the eldership of Judah (:14) to the assumption that when the Assyrian invasion came, it would affect only Ephraim and not Judah. But here we have envisaged the destruction of Judah along with Ephraim by the Assyrians, as part of the same campaign. But again, by grace that was averted. And those who had wrongly thought they would escape Assyrian judgment did actually escape it. But the final tally of faith is all kept by God and will come to full term in the judgment of the last day.

Isaiah 28:19 As often as it passes through, it will seize you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be nothing but terror to understand the message- The sense may be as GNB "It will strike you again and again, morning after morning. You will have to bear it day and night.

Each new message from God will bring new terror!". The reference may be to the various times that the Assyrian waters came through Judah- once under Sargon, twice under Sennacherib, three or four times under Esarhaddon, and twice under Asshur-bani-pal. Or we could also see a hint here that they were to experience the truth of these prophecies at multiple times and in various contexts; Assyria, Babylon, Rome and the last days situation would all be fulfillments of Isaiah's message.

Isaiah 28:20 For the bed is too short to stretch out on, and the blanket is too narrow to wrap oneself in- The covenant with Assyria or Egypt (:15) would not actually bring the relief expected and promised. And yet as noted on :18, in the Assyrian context, there was in fact that relief- but because of the faith and repentance of a remnant.

Isaiah 28:21 For Yahweh will rise up as on Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the valley of Gibeon- These two locations are combined when David was given special Angelic assistance to defeat the Philistines there (1 Chron. 14:11,16).

That He may do His work, His unusual work, and bring to pass His act, His extraordinary act- The "unusual" work was in that now, what God had helped Israel do to the Gentiles, would now be done by God to Israel at the hand of the Gentiles. He was to treat His people as Gentiles, for that was how they were in their hearts. "Unusual" is AV "strange", and nearly always refers to Gentiles. Yahweh was to do a 'Gentile work' upon Israel. See on Is. 29:1.

Isaiah 28:22 Now therefore don't be scoffers, lest your bonds be made strong; for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord Yahweh of Armies, upon the whole earth- see on Rom. 9:28,29. The frequent predictions of judgment upon Israel were effectively calls to repentance, so that the predicted judgment need not actually happen. Intended outcomes could be "cut short", the time periods changed accordance to human behaviour. Hence LXX: "I have heard of works finished and cut short by the Lord of hosts, which he will execute upon all the earth". The more Israel resisted the call, the more they were as it were tightening the bands which the prophetic word had laid around them; they would be confirmed in their way and their bands would be strengthened.

Isaiah 28:23 Give ear, and hear my voice! Listen, and hear my speech!- This reflects Isaiah's appreciation that outcomes could really be changed by response to the word he was preaching. We ought to be encouraged in our witness likewise.

Isaiah 28:24 Does he who ploughs to sow plough continually? Does he keep turning the soil and breaking the clods?- The idea is as GNB "Farmers don't constantly plow their fields and keep getting them ready for planting". God's patience in preparing the fields of the *eretz* to receive His message would not continue forever. This parallels the point made in :27, that the harvest of Yahweh's judgments would likewise not endure eternally. He has a purpose in His judgments, and they were to make the *eretz* a fertile ground for the seed of His word. And He likewise works in our lives too.

Isaiah 28:25 When he has levelled its surface, doesn't he plant the dill, and scatter the cumin seed, and put in the wheat in rows, the barley in the appointed place, and the spelt in its place?- "Place" is really "border". GNB: "Once they have prepared the soil, they plant the seeds of herbs such as dill and cumin. They plant rows of wheat and barley, and at the edges of their fields they plant other grain". The borders or edges of the field were also planted, but with different crops than in the main field. I suggest that as explained on Is. 35:2 we have the vision of the Gentiles living in the desert areas on the borders of the *eretz* also bringing forth fruit to God. But God's intention from His fields was that they would not all bear the same seed; dill and wheat aren't planted together in the same part of the field, and they are tended and harvested differently. We have here an anticipation of how unity is not uniformity, and all manner of different fruit is envisaged. The levelling of the surface in the judgments is the image of Is. 40, where an even surface is to be prepared before the coming of the Kingdom.

Isaiah 28:26 For his God instructs him in right judgement, and teaches him- LXX "So thou shalt be chastened by the judgment of thy God, and shalt rejoice". The man who ploughs in :24 appears to be God; so the LXX makes more sense here. The end result of all the judgments was going to be joy for the righteous who allowed themselves to be instructed by the judgments.

Isaiah 28:27 For the dill are not threshed with a sharp instrument, neither is a

cart wheel turned over the cumin; but the dill is beaten out with a stick, and the cumin with a rod- The idea is that the threshing of judgment was not done in a blundering, insensitive way. It was designed to bring forth a refined product which would then be of some use. The judgments are likened to a stick used to beat out dill, a plant grown on windowsills. This is how precise and relatively gentle were God's judgments; they were not broad scale and disproportionate, as is the case with human judgments.

Isaiah 28:28 Bread flour must be ground; so he will not always be threshing it. Although he drives the wheel of his threshing cart over it, his horses don't grind it- Because Divine judgment has end results in view and is not merely punishment, they will not be eternal. Nor will they be in such a form as to preclude a harvest. GNB: "They do not ruin the wheat by threshing it endlessly". LXX "I will not be wroth with you for ever, neither shall the voice of my anger crush you". Eternal threshing, like an eternal hell fire, is just not what God is about.

Isaiah 28:29 This also comes forth from Yahweh of Armies, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom- "Wonderful in counsel" uses the same words as in Is. 9:6, where Messiah is to be the Wonderful Counsellor. The idea is that the fruit of all the judgments was going to be seen in the events of the last days, when that Messiah figure would stand on earth and be the means of resolving all the judgments into a wonderful harvest. Then we will finally resolve the problem of evil; we will see that the judgments were indeed necessary and were used in the wisdom of God.

Isaiah Chapter 29

Isaiah 29:1 Woe to Ariel! Ariel, the city where David encamped!- This is the theme of Is. 28:21; what David had done to Gentiles was to be done to Israel by Gentiles. God's people were to be treated as Gentiles because that was who they were in their hearts. Ariel, God's lion, was to be devoured by the Assyrians or Babylonians, who are also presented as God's lion. See on :3.

Add year to year; let the feasts come around- The idea may be that very soon, Jerusalem was to fall. Hence GNB: "Let another year or two come and go, with its feasts and festivals". But this didn't happen; Jerusalem's doom was averted by the repentance and intercession of a small minority*;* in accordance with the principle of Jer. 18:8-10. Perhaps the idea is that the distress of Ariel (:2) was to be at the time of a Jewish feast. And this seems to have been the case at the time of the Assyrian attack upon Jerusalem at Passover. Or the point may simply be that the feasts and sacrifices (AV) would not save Jerusalem.

Isaiah 29:2 Then I will distress Ariel- A pagan god looked after his own people against their enemies. But Yahweh of Israel sent and empowered Israel's enemies against them, and gave them victory against His own people; He encamped against His very own people (Is. 29:2-4), God 'distressed' Ariel, 'the lion of God'. The archenemy of Israel, Assyria, was revealed as a rod in the God of Israel's hand (Is. 10:5 etc.), and the King of Babylon was Yahweh's servant who would come against Yahweh's own people (Jer. 25:9; 27:6 etc.). The will of Israel's God was that the capital city, seen by the people as the symbol and nerve center of a god's power and control, was to be destroyed by Israel's enemies (Jer. 34:1-5; 21:3-7). In the surrounding culture of Israel, capital cities were portrayed as women, the wives of the gods. They are always presented as pure and wonderful. But the prophets represent cities like Jerusalem and Samaria as fallen women, whores. It was all *so* counter-cultural. Yahweh's prophet even appealed for Israel to surrender when under siege (Jer. 21:8-10). Try to enter into how radical and counter-cultural all this was. The prophets were trying to share the feelings and positions of a God *so* vastly different to the imaginations and understandings of His very own people. The nervous stress of this, the psychological pressure, can't be underestimated. And we are asked to share the spirit / mind / disposition of those prophets. Not only was God on the side of Israel's enemies; yet through all that, He somehow *was* with Israel; quite simply, "God is with us", even though it is He who encamps against them too (Is. 8:9,10;

18:4). The God of Auschwitz is somehow still the God of Israel. The very torment, even torture, of understanding that was etched clearly in the prophets, and it will be in us too.

And there will be mourning and lamentation. She shall be to Me as an altar hearth- Another meaning of Ariel is 'God's altar'. Hence GNB "God will bring disaster on the city that is called "God's altar." There will be weeping and wailing, and the whole city will be like an altar covered with blood". This was the huge picture of potential destruction which was averted when the Assyrians were destroyed thanks to the prayer of the minority.

Isaiah 29:3 I will encamp against you all around you, and will lay siege against you with a mount; I will raise siege works against you- The LXX "And I will compass thee about like David" connects with our observation on :1, that as David had fought against Zion so now God was going to fight against it. See on :2. Yet even these clear statements were conditional; because finally, God did not allow the Assyrians to build a mount or siege works against Jerusalem (Is. 37:33). God is continually open to changing the outcomes He has specified.

Isaiah 29:4 You will be brought down, and will speak out of the ground. Your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will be as of one who has a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and your speech will whisper out of the dust- This is a common theme of Isaiah, that judgment brings down. Because humility is so critical to God and is the basis for salvation. The LXX doesn't see any allusion to witches: "And thy words shall be brought down to the earth, and thy words shall sink down to the earth, and thy voice shall be as they that speak out of the earth, and thy voice shall be lowered to the ground". Even if there is allusion to ghosts or witches, the idea would be that their words had been brought down as low as those witches were known as talking, in the same muffled way, out of the earth. And it would be a tacit reflection of the state of society that people all knew what wizards and witches sounded like- they were so common. The humbling of words suggests this category would be refined by the judgments and repent; unlike the "foes" of :5 who will be destroyed completely.

Isaiah 29:5 But the multitude of your foes will be like fine dust, and the multitude of the ruthless ones like chaff that blows away. Yes, it will be in an instant, suddenly- This sounds like the instant destruction of the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem. But then the allusion to being blown away like chaff is the language of Dan. 2:44. The final destruction of Zion's enemies could have come at different times; there is an open ended nature to God's purposes which is reflected in His prophecies, and which makes them hard to interpret.

Isaiah 29:6 She will be visited by Yahweh of Armies with thunder, with earthquake, with great noise, with whirlwind and storm, and with the flame of a devouring fire- This sounds like a major theophany; "Yahweh of Armies" suggests Angelic involvement. It was indeed a single Angel who destroyed the Assyrian army, but it would seem that this level of Divine manifestation didn't then occur. This chapter goes on to speak of the sins of Judah, and so it would seem that the full potential of deliverance wasn't realized; because only a minority of them were spiritual. And so these prophecies are transferred to the last days.

Isaiah 29:7 The multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all who fight against her and her stronghold and who distress her, will be like a dream, a vision of the night- This could refer to the mercenaries of various nations who comprised the Assyrian army. But the language seems to imply a multiethnic attack against Jerusalem which has more relevance to the last days. We note that the attack is specifically against "her stronghold", the temple of Zion. This particular focus upon the temple area is clearly going to characterize the latter day invasion. Both LXX and GNB stress that all the military strength of the invaders will come to nothing, continuing the great prophetic theme that human strength is to be brought down eternally: "then all the armies of the nations attacking the city of God's altar, all their weapons and equipment—everything—will vanish like a dream, like something imagined in the night" (GNB).

Isaiah 29:8 It will be like when a hungry man dreams, and behold, he eats; but he awakes, and his hunger isn't satisfied; or like when a thirsty man dreams, and behold, he drinks; but he awakes, and behold, he is faint, and he is still thirsty. The multitude of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion will be like that- What seemed so concrete and solid was in fact but the fantasy of dreams. And this is how we are to perceive things today. The language here suggests that the

motivation for the attack on Jerusalem was material, imagining how they would feast on the spoil. This is only really relevant to the situation in Hezekiah's time; and it was the foreign mercenaries in the Assyrian army rather than Assyria who would have had these dreams and motivations. And so this verse is addressed to them, the "all nations that fight against Mount Zion". 2 Chron. 32:27 records how Hezekiah "had exceeding much riches", with store cities for gold, silver and jewels. The latter day Assyrian of Ez. 38 likewise wishes to attack Jerusalem in order to take great spoil.

Isaiah 29:9 Pause and wonder, take your pleasure and be blind. They are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink- Despite the destruction of Judah's enemies described in :7,8, they too were to be judged for their blindness. The implication would therefore be that they were saved from the Assyrians by grace and thanks to the intercession and repentance of a small remnant. “Blind yourselves and be blind” (RVmg.); yet God had closed their eyes, confirming them in the decision for blindness which they had taken themselves. The drunkenness of these people was because God had mentally confused them in response to their desire to be blind. He waits to confirm men positively (through the Holy Spirit working on the human mind) and also negatively. In the end, we get where we really want to go.

Isaiah 29:10 For Yahweh has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, O prophets; and He has covered your heads, O seers- The language here recalls the judgment upon Egypt in Is. 19:14. They acted and thought like Egypt, and so they received Egypt's judgment; just as the unfaithful of the new Israel will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). The prophets didn't want to 'see' or 'be seers'. And so their eyes were blinded (:9). Remember that they and the priests were so drunk in the temple that they vomited on the altars (Is. 28:8).

Isaiah 29:11 All vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is educated, saying, Read this, please; and he says, I can't, for it is sealed- This is all in exemplification of how God had closed their eyes to His word (:9,10). Even the words they received were like a sealed book to them. And the sin of their own blindness was because they were unable to teach that word to others. Potentially they could read it; but it was sealed now. This appears to be God confirming Isaiah's personal attitude in Is.

8:16, where he seals the revelation just for his disciples to understand.

The Lord spoke in parables so that Israel would be deceived (unless they made specific search of the meaning of the parable) and therefore would not come to salvation. This fact is hard to get round for those who feel God *isn't* responsible for deception. Isaiah spoke likewise (Is. 6:9,10; 29:10,11). See on Is. 66:4. Thus men are confirmed psychologically in the way they wish to go.

Isaiah 29:12 And the book is delivered to one who is not educated, saying, Read this, please; and he says, I can't read- As explained on :11, the prophets were not able to understand the word given to them, it was as it were sealed. And it was their duty to teach others; even those "educated" (:11) couldn't break the seal now; and the masses of the people were illiterate anyway. So much depended upon the teachers.

Isaiah 29:13 The Lord said, Because this people draws near with their mouth and with their lips to honour Me, but they have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear of Me is a commandment of men which has been taught- The Lord quotes these words in Mt. 15:8. They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they externally kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27). The Lord perceived that "your tradition… the commandments of men… your doctrines" resulted in the hearts of Israel being "far from [God]". Doctrine was intended to affect the heart; and false doctrine resulted in the heart being far from God. True doctrine, on the other hand, was and is intended to bring the heart close to God. Doctrine / teaching is therefore to affect the heart; it is not just the intellectual basis for unity in a community of believers. And the Lord goes on in this very context to talk of how "every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up" (Mt. 15:13). The Greek for "planted" is interpreted by James Strong as meaning "Figuratively, to instill doctrine". The planting of the believer is through the instillation of Godly doctrine, rather than the doctrines of men. Note how the Lord speaks of doctrine as a command in Mt. 15:6,9: "Thus have you made the *commandment* of God of none effect by your tradition... in vain they do worship Me, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments of men". And He taught earlier that the doctrine of one God was in fact a command to action. Doctrine, *didache*, is teaching, not just theory; it is commandment towards action. For doctrine and

practice are linked. In this we are helped to assess whether any idea or interpretation is indeed a 'first principle doctrine' or not. What does it inspire in practice? Or is it merely the academic interpretation of the human brain cells?

Like Israel we can seek God daily, taking delight in approaching unto Him; and yet need the exhortation to urgently seek Him (Is. 55:6 cp. 58:2). We can appear to seek unto Him in prayer and attendance at our meetings, and yet not seek Him in the real sense at all. Likewise men came to Jesus physically, at quite some effort to themselves, and yet He tells them that they have not truly come to Him at all (Jn. 6:24 cp. 35-37). We can draw near with our mouth, honour Him with our lips, “but have removed [our] heart far from me” (Is. 29:13).

Isaiah 29:14 therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the understanding of their prudent men will be hidden- The Jewish opposition to the prophets were insistent that wisdom would not perish from them (Jer. 18:18). This is stated in the context of God sealing up His word from those who blinded themselves to it (:9-13). But He would remove from them also their own wisdom so that they would as it were be left alone, without God's word and without their own word. This is the kind of psychological pain which will arise from the condemnation process- to be left both without God and without secular support.

Isaiah 29:15 Woe to those who deeply hide their counsel from Yahweh, and whose works are in the dark, and who say, Who sees us? and Who knows us?- The counsel in view was their seeking help from Egypt against Assyria and later against Babylon (Is. 30:1,2). But they thought they could somehow hide this "in the dark" from Yahweh, whom they still believed in and would have assented in theory to the truth that He sees and knows all things. It's doubtful that they said in so many words that God could not see or know. But as often in the prophets, the implication of their positions are perceived and stated as God sees them.

Isaiah 29:16 You turn things upside down! Should the potter be thought to be like clay; that the thing made should say about him who made it, He didn’t make me; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, He has no understanding?- See on :15. Their trust in Egypt (:15) and refusal to accept His condemnation of their trust in Egypt (Is. 20:5,6) was effectively accusing Him of having "no

understanding". They were forgetting that He was their creator; rather they considered that God, the potter, was in fact like the clay. They considered God to exist but to have the same mentality and limitations of men; they had created God in their own image and likeness rather than the other way around. And this is a temptation for us all.

A living faith in God as our creator leads to an acceptance that He sees and knows all our ways, that life is lived utterly open before Him- and we should live it accordingly. Hence Isaiah uses the fact of God as creator to reason with those who argued (in their hearts at least) that they could hide their ways from the Lord, saying "Who sees us, and who knows?". Isaiah's answer to this was that "Shall the thing framed (i.e. us) say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?" and therefore doesn't know nor understand what we do... (Is. 29:15,16).

Isaiah 29:17 Isn't it yet a very little while, and Lebanon will be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be regarded as a forest?- In a "very little while" from when these words were spoken, the Kingdom could have been reestablished, as described in the next verses. But this was conditional upon Judah seeing and hearing God's word (:18). But they didn't want to do this, and so these possibilities didn't then happen; but the essence of them will come true in the last days. The revived "fruitful field" situation would only come when the Spirit was poured upon them (Is. 32:15,16) and this would only be if they accepted the new covenant, which promised this gift of the Spirit. See on :18; Is. 32:1. Perhaps Rabshakeh was aware of this prophecy, and he swore to negate it by destroying "Lebanon" [a reference to the cedars of Lebanon in the temple] and "Carmel" (s.w. "fruitful field"; Is. 37:24). The promised revival could therefore have come "a very little while" after the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem was miraculously ended. But Hezekiah's weakness and the peoples' impenitence precluded that, resulting in the Babylonian invasion turning the fruitful field into a wilderness (s.w. Jer. 4:26).

Isaiah 29:18 In that day, the deaf will hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind will see out of obscurity and out of darkness- The blind are those just spoken of in :9- the Jews who had blinded themselves and been blinded. The deaf who will now hear the words of the book contrast with those for whom the book had been sealed (:11). Those who were so hardened, even hardened by God. would experience the psychological miracle of being again sensitized to

God's word. This is the work of the Spirit on Jewish hearts promised in the new covenant of Jer. 31 and Ez. 20. See on :17,24.

The repentance of Israel must be associated with an opening of their eyes to God's word. There is no other way men can come to repentance. Jer. 30:24 prophecies Jacob's final homecoming, and then comments: "In the latter days (not now) ye shall consider (understand) it". *Then* Israel will consider and understand the words of their prophets. "The Lord hath poured out upon (Israel) the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes (quoted in Rom. 11:8 concerning Israel's blindness to Christ)... the vision of all (God's word) is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed... (but) in that day shall the (spiritually) deaf hear the words of the book" (Is. 29:10,11,17,18). This will be when the book is *un*sealed at "the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). Thus Israel's minority repentance must occur prior to the Lord's return. Therefore there must be an upsurge in Biblical activity amongst those who will become the faithful remnant in latter day Israel. This will be brought about by the Elijah prophet-remembering that the Elijah prophet is framed in Malachi as a teacher of God's word, not just an imparter of it. Likewise John, in the spirit of Elijah, *taught* the people about the Lord's advent.

The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:4,5. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God’s grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah’s message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life.

Ultimately, we will only truly see in the Kingdom (Is. 29:18; 42:6; 1 Cor. 13:12). Then we will know (see) face to face. We will see God face to face, i.e. understand Him. It follows therefore that in some ways we are blind, or partially sighted, now. This is indicated by the Lord's symbolic healing of the blind man in two stages (Mk. 8:23-26). Firstly, the man saw men as if they were walking trees. Probably he scarcely knew what a tree or man looked like. Yet he is

described as receiving his sight at this stage (Mk. 8:24 Gk.). And then the Lord touched his eyes again, and again he is described (in the Greek) as receiving his sight (Mk. 8:25- same phrase as in v.24). This time he saw all things (Gk.) clearly. This surely represents the full spiritual vision of the Kingdom. According to this type, we are at the stage of seeing men as if they are walking trees, perhaps wildly guessing about some things, lacking the most basic sense of proportion

Isaiah 29:19 The humble also will increase their joy in Yahweh, and the poor among men will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel- Again we note that the righteous remnant are characterized above all by their humility; this is so utterly critical to God. The humble are those who will hear and see God's word (:17,18), and this category will be the materially poor and needy.

Isaiah 29:20 For the ruthless is brought to nothing, and the scoffer ceases, and all those who are alert to do evil are cut off- I noted on :17 the allusion to the scoffing of the ruthless Assyrians (s.w. Is. 13:11 about Assyria - Babylon) in Is. 37:24. Clearly in view here are the Assyrians and their destruction outside Jerusalem. But :21 speaks of these persons as if they are the Jews scoffing at Isaiah and his 'Don't trust in Egypt' message (see on :16). Again the point is made that generally the Jews were no better than their Gentile enemies.

Isaiah 29:21 who cause a person to be indicted by a word, and lay a snare for the arbiter in the gate, and who deprive the innocent of justice with false testimony- As noted on :20, the context is a condemnation of the Assyrians, who were to be destroyed outside Jerusalem. But the language is just as relevant to the Jewish leadership, the same words being used of their treatment of the poor Jews in Is. 10:2; Am. 2:7; 5:12; they too were worthy of destruction outside Jerusalem, in Gehenna. Again the point is made that generally the Jews were no better than their Gentile enemies. The salvation from the Assyrians was an example of God's great sensitivity to the faith, repentance and intercession of a minority.

Isaiah 29:22 Therefore thus says Yahweh who redeemed Abraham concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall no longer be ashamed, neither shall his face grow pale- The context is of a spiritually weak Judah being reformed and recreated by God's Spirit. This was what God did to their fathers Abraham and

Jacob. Those men are not so much examples of faith, but of men willing to let God work in them to redeem them from their own unspirituality. The pale face of Jacob was surely in the "time of Jacob's trouble" when he faced apparent annihilation by the superior forces of Esau- but the situation was reversed by God's grace and his night of repentant wrestling with God. Although God would save His people as He had Jacob, they still needed to repent in order to be like Jacob at that point. And they refused to generally be like this at Isaiah's time; they were saved therefore by grace and because a minority repented. However the potentials then possible for the reestablishment of the Kingdom were thereby precluded.

Isaiah 29:23 But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in the midst of him, they will sanctify My name. Yes, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel- The significance of "the work of My hands" is that the children referred to here are new creations of people whose blind eyes have been opened (see on :17). The Jews had mocked the idea of their being the clay and God the potter (:16); they effectively reduced Him to the clay like them. But now they would fully accept His sovereign, creative power through the Spirit. The only time when Jacob saw his children with joy was when he met the [as it were] resurrected Joseph and his children. The equivalent in the last days is when the people of Jacob see / perceive the spiritual children created through the work of the resurrected Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 29:24 They also who err in spirit will come to understanding, and those who grumble will receive instruction- This is saying the same thing as :17. Through the gift of the Spirit, those who had blinded themselves to understanding would be made to understand. Is. 29:13,24 speaks of repentance as 'learning doctrine' or being instructed; Israel went astray morally because they allowed themselves to be wrongly instructed.

Isaiah Chapter 30

Isaiah 30:1 Woe to the rebellious children, says Yahweh, who take counsel, but not from Me- This follows on from the condemnation of this "counsel" in Is. 29:15: "Woe to those who deeply hide their counsel from Yahweh, and whose works are in the dark, and who say, Who sees us? and Who knows us?". The counsel in view was their seeking help from Egypt against Assyria and later against Babylon, 'counseled' by the false prophets. But they thought they could somehow hide this "in the dark" from Yahweh, whom they still believed in and would have assented in theory to the truth that He sees and knows all things. It's doubtful that they said in so many words that God could not see or know. But as often in the prophets, the implication of their positions are perceived and stated as God sees them.

And who make an alliance, but not with My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin- Through repentance, they could have entered into a new covenant or alliance which would have resulted in the gift of the Spirit working powerfully in their hearts; as also offered in Is. 29:17,18 (see notes there). By refusing the covenant, they instead would be confirmed in their sin, from "sin to sin".

Isaiah 30:2 Who set out to go down into Egypt, and have not asked My advice- The Divine cameraman as it were zooms in on them as they set out for Egypt, noting they didn't begin that journey with a prayer to Yahweh; see on :6. They had taken counsel / advice from the false prophets before the trip (:1).

To strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt!- 'Hezekiah' means 'Yah strengthens'. They had ignored him and were seeking strength not in Yahweh but in Egypt; and were ignoring the frequent encouragement to take refuge beneath the shadow of Yahweh's cherubim; see on :4. Their trust in Egypt was more than surface level weakness, it was a studied rejection of God. And the challenge comes through powerfully to us who are tempted in myriad ways to trust 'Egypt' rather than our God.

Isaiah 30:3 Therefore the strength of Pharaoh will be your shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt your confusion- Shame and confusion is the language of condemnation. Accepting God's existence but not trusting Him was the ticket to condemnation. This comes over as a piercing challenge to us in our generation, whereby about every human eventuality apart from death is apparently covered by some secular device. But even from that shame they could be saved, just as the eyes blinded for their own wilful blindness could be opened

(Is. 29:9,18). For "Jacob shall no longer be ashamed, neither shall his face grow pale" (Is. 29:22). The context is of a spiritually weak Judah being reformed and recreated by God's Spirit. This was what God did to Jacob. The pale face of Jacob was surely in the "time of Jacob's trouble" when he faced apparent annihilation by the superior forces of Esau- but the situation was reversed by God's grace and his night of repentant wrestling with God. Although God would save His people from their shame as He had Jacob, they still needed to repent in order to be like Jacob at that point. And they refused to generally be like this at Isaiah's time; they were saved therefore by grace and because a minority repented. However the potentials then possible for the reestablishment of the Kingdom were thereby precluded.

Isaiah 30:4 For their princes are at Zoan, and their ambassadors have come to Hanes- The Egyptian representatives came to meet those from Judah at the border towns. "Ambassadors" is *malak*, the word for "Angel". Judah had spurned to take refuge beneath the wings of the Angel-cherubim (see on :2); the Egyptians were offering a fake system of Angelic protection. Princes and ambassadors were later sent to Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:31) from Babylon, and he ought to have learnt not to trust in them, seeing that trust in the "princes and ambassadors" of Egypt had been proven so false just in recent history. God likewise brings situations into our lives whereby situations repeat- to test our faith and understanding. See on Is. 39:1.

Isaiah 30:5 They shall all be ashamed because of a people that can't profit them, that are not a help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach- But as explained on :5, they could be saved even from this shame. Their trust in Egypt became a reproach with which the Assyrians mocked them (2 Kings 18:21,24). But the Assyrians were destroyed by Yahweh. There was not therefore the shame afterwards which there would have been if Assyria had conquered Jerusalem. We see here how God's purposes adjust and recalculate in accordance with the changes made by the repentance even of a remnant. That minority repentance led to the Assyrians being destroyed. Therefore the faithless were not ashamed and reproached for their trust in Egypt to the degree intended. But this shall ultimately come true at the last day; that final judgment at the Lord's return will as it were balance all the prophetic books and recalculations. The sum of them will then be attained with perfect integrity.

Isaiah 30:6 The burden of the animals of the South. Through the land of trouble and anguish, of the lioness and the lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their rich gifts on the shoulders of young donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to an unprofitable people- The Divine cameraman as it were zooms in on them as they fix their packages of presents on the shoulders of donkeys and humps of camels. The focus on detail is impressive. The animals were burdened down with it all, and this is played upon by this prophetic "burden". They risked much- the way was full of lions, snakes and also the mythical creatures they believed inhabited the desert, i.e. "fiery flying serpents". But we notice that the record doesn't as it were add a footnote informing us that "these beings don't exist in reality". The people were spoken to in terms they understood and according to their own perceptions, even if they were inaccurate. And this explains the language of demons in the New Testament. They had been led through this same dangerous desert by God at the exodus (Dt. 8:15; Jer. 2:6); now they were returning through it to Egypt without His direction and protection.

Isaiah 30:7 For Egypt helps in vain, and to no purpose; therefore have I called her Rahab who sits still- GNB "The harmless dragon". The apparently impressive power of Egypt was in fact vain. And that is true of all secular power, advantage and insurance, which are the equivalent of "Egypt" to us. "Rahab", 'pride' or 'strength', was an old name for Egypt (Job 26:12; Ps. 87:4; 89:10; Is. 51:9). But the historical Rahab did repent and become part of God's people; and God always entertained that hope for Egypt (e.g. Is. 19:18-20). His hopefulness is wonderful and also inspirational in our own dealings with people.

Isaiah 30:8 Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever- The purpose of this particular written record was because God foresaw that He would deliver Judah from the Assyrians despite the rebellion of the majority. He didn't want them to therefore assume that their sinful attitudes were insignificant because He had saved them anyway. See on :13.

Isaiah 30:9 For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of Yahweh- LXX "false children". True sonship is predicated upon our attitude to our Father's word. The majority had listened to the false prophets

rather than the word of Yahweh (:1,2).

Isaiah 30:10 who tell the seers, Don't see! and to the prophets, Don't prophesy to us right things. Tell us pleasant things, prophesy deceits- This was therefore how Isaiah was treated. God's grace in still saving Jerusalem from the Assyrians was the more remarkable; and it highlights therefore His sensitivity to the prayer and repentance of a minority. We wonder if they actually said these words; but these are what we are effectively saying every time we place secular advice about that of God's word.

Isaiah 30:11 get out of the way, turn aside from the path; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us- LXX adds "the oracle of the Holy One of Israel". Their attitudes to God's word were their attitudes to Him; in that sense "the word was God" as it still is. It is unlikely they actually said these words; but God read their rejection of His counsel in favour of that of the false prophets (:1,2) as being tantamount to saying this.

Isaiah 30:12 Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness and rely on it- As the context makes clear, they had despised Yahweh's word for the word of the false prophets. To not trust God is therefore understood as despising Him. This is typical of the prophets, to show into stark relief the implications of unbelief and unspirituality. We may need to read in an ellipsis: "Trust not in the results of oppression" or the wealth gained by it; for this is a quotation from Ps. 62:8 where the construction means just that. The rulers of Judah had oppressed the poor; and stood to benefit materially from an alliance with Egypt, or so they imagined. To reject Isaiah's "no alliance with Egypt" message was perceived as not to their material benefit. And so they preferred to trust the words of the false prophets, because this allowed them to continue their oppressive ways. There is always a subconscious personal advantage to believing a false message or interpretation. It's why "false doctrine" is popular and attractive.

Isaiah 30:13 therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly in an instant- LXX "of which the fall is very near at hand". The sin of those who trusted in Egypt at Isaiah's time was to result in major judgment, and very soon. The next verse speaks of total breakage, as if the Divine potter was displeased with Judah as His

vessel and was to break it and start again with another vessel. But this didn't happen, because the Assyrian destruction of the walls of Jerusalem didn't actually happen as envisaged because of the repentance of a minority. And this led to the unspiritual majority apparently 'getting away with it'. This is why their condemnation was to be written in a book (:8) as witness that ultimately they would meet their judgment.

Isaiah 30:14 He will break it as a potter's vessel is broken, breaking it in pieces without sparing, so that there won't be found among the broken pieces one piece good enough to take fire from the hearth, or to dip up water out of the cistern- See on :13. This is the language of Jer. 18:6; 19:11; the Divine potter was going to break Judah and not one piece of them would be any use for anything. He would do so "without sparing". But He did spare, and the remnant of the judged people were to again be used by Him. We have here an example of the sort of thing that goes on in Hosea; God threatens total and irreversible rejection of His people in His anger, but His core love for them means it doesn't totally happen. The pole of His love and pity is in the last analysis stronger than the pole of His anger and judgment. Or we can conclude that the final judgment has been deferred until their resurrection at the last day. Dan. 2:44 describes how the kingdoms of this world will be broken and scattered as the chaff before the wind. Yet this is exactly the language here and in Jer. 13:24 concerning Israel's latter day destruction. They will be "dashed" (Jer. 13:14) as the nations of the world will be (Ps. 2:9). Jer. 13:14 says they will be destroyed by brother being dashed against brother- again, the picture of the world's final destruction (Zech. 14:13). Rev. 2:27 speaks of the unfaithful in the ecclesia likewise being dashed to pieces. The Lord's coming will be a stone that grinds them to powder (Mt. 21:44), but perhaps in that they will destroy each other.

Isaiah 30:15 For thus said the Lord Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, You will be saved by returning and rest; your strength will be in quietness and in confidence. You refused- Their destruction was to be because they had been given the chance to repent ['returning' to God] but had refused it. As discussed on :14, they were therefore threatened with total and permanent rejection without a single survivor. But even that was changed by God's pity and grace. There was to be "quietness" after the Babylonian / Assyrian invaders were destroyed (s.w. Is. 14:7); and they were to act as if what they believed in had come about. For this is faith, believing that what we hope for and trust in has already come.

LXX "When thou shalt turn and mourn, then thou shalt be saved; and thou shalt

know where thou wast, when thou didst trust in vanities: then your strength became vain, yet ye would not hearken". As noted on :20 LXX, the repentant remnant would come to understand where they had gone wrong, they would have the ability to see themselves from outside themselves.

The reference in the primary context may be to how Ahaz had been called upon to repent of his faithlessness, and to find "calm", s.w. "quietness" (see on Is. 7:4); but he had "refused", madly trusting upon Egyptian horses for salvation (:16). But the appeal to repent was still there, for a later generation.

Isaiah 30:16 But you said, No, for we will flee on horses; therefore you will flee; and, We will ride on the swift; therefore those who pursue you will be swift- As noted on :15, this may be a reference to Ahaz trusting in Egyptian horses against Syria and Israel, as noted on Is. 7:4. Perhaps part of the package deal with Egypt was that they would provide swift horses (for which Egypt was famed even in Solomon's time) for the leadership to flee away on. We see here the selfishness and short termism of the Jerusalem leadership in making this deal with Egypt.

Isaiah 30:17 One thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five- This is the curse for breaking the covenant. Covenant relationship with God is not merely a knowing of correct things about Him; it is *trust* in Him. To not trust in Him means that we break the covenant, whether or not we maintain intellectual purity of understanding in theological terms.

You will flee until you are left like a beacon on the top of a mountain, and like a banner on a hill- The idea is as GNB "Nothing will be left of your army except a lonely flagpole on the top of a hill". But this is the very picture of how an ensign is to be lifted up on Zion, to which the nations shall come. The curse here is as always pregnant with promise in the longer term. The tiny remnant left in Zion were to become a banner or ensign for the world; and the idea is later developed in terms of the "ensign" or "pole" being applied to the Lord Jesus on the cross, who is to become the rallying point for the faithful remnant from all nations. But the Jewish remnant were to be brought to that point by the experience of their own faithlessness and repentance.

Isaiah 30:18 Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a

God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him- Having lambasted Israel for their sins and described in detail their coming judgment, God then makes a strange comment, apparently out of context with what He has just been saying. God appears to be saying that He delays His actions, that He brings judgment, that He sets Himself *so* far above us- just so that He can get to show yet more mercy to us. Perhaps Joseph was manifesting God in the way he worked out that slow and detailed scheme of dealing with his sinful brethren... it has always seemed to me that he drew out the process just so that he could lead up to a climax of pouring out his maximum grace to them. Whilst the way seems long, "blessed are all they that wait for him". God is even spoken of as concluding (Gk. 'shutting up the eyes') of Israel in the sin of unbelief, "that he might have mercy" upon both them and the Gentiles (Rom. 11:32). Likewise God delays the second coming because He waits and hopes for repentance and spiritual growth from us. But He praises the faithful for patiently waiting for Him (Is. 30:18; Ps. 37:7). Here we see the humility of God's grace.

The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will crush Judah so that not one of them is left, He will not spare (:14); He would cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8).

Isaiah 30:19 For the people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry; when He hears you, He will answer you- These dwelling in Zion are the tiny remnant who remain on mount Zion after the rest have been destroyed or have fled (see on :17). But they will be there because they cry to God in repentance. The salvation of Zion in Isaiah's time didn't exactly fit this pattern; the human variables worked out to preclude this entire picture coming about, but it will in essence in the last days.

Isaiah 30:20 Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water

of affliction- The language of minimum rations, in prison or during a siege (1 Kings 22:27). It was the 'Plan A' that Jerusalem would fall to the Assyrians and Judah join Israel in captivity in Assyria, but out of that exile, a remnant would repent. Due to the minority repentance, that scenario was deferred to the effects of the Babylonian captivity; although as Jeremiah and Ezekiel make clear in their appeals for repentance, that too could have been averted. The simple truth is that if they had responded to the prophetic appeals and repented, the whole captivity scenario wouldn't have been required. I suppose that was the ideal 'Plan A'.

Yet your teachers won't be hidden any more, but your eyes will see your teachers- This could be read as an intensive plural; their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me... and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7).

LXX offers a different slant: "They that cause thee to err shall no more at all draw nigh to thee; for thine eyes shall see those that cause thee to err". As noted on :15 LXX, the repentant remnant would come to understand where they had

gone wrong, they would have the ability to see themselves from outside themselves.

Isaiah 30:21 and when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, This is the way, walk in it- see on Gen. 18:19. The new covenant they were to enter according to Jer. 30 and Ez. 20 involved the gift of the Spirit working in their hearts to give them a heart which remained in the covenant. It is that same new covenant which we accept by baptism into the Lord Jesus today. The work of the Spirit in practice would be to keep them in the path, recalling them from any straying to the right hand or left. This could have been for Judah the time of Is. 29:18, when the deaf heard the words of the book. But for Judah this was not to mean they were mere puppets of the Spirit. Josiah (in their revent history) is described as experiencing this blessing, not turning to the right nor left (2 Chron. 34:2); but at the end of his life it seems he did turn aside.

Isaiah 30:22 You shall defile the overlaying of your engraved images of silver, and the plating of your molten images of gold. You shall cast them away as an unclean thing. You shall tell it, Go away!- Overlaying wooden idols with precious metals recalls the construction of the tabernacle. This was how idolatry was justified at the same time as a claim to Yahweh worship- as we are tempted to, they claimed to worship Yahweh through worshipping the idols, whose paraphernalia became as it were another tabernacle (as in Acts 7:43). Idolatry was clearly a problem at the time of both the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. Repentance involved the destruction of those idols.

Isaiah 30:23 He will give the rain for your seed, with which you will sow the ground; and the bread from the increase of the ground will be rich and plentiful. In that day, your livestock will feed in large pastures- The Kingdom blessings were to come once Judah repented (:22) and accepted the new covenant (:20,21). Yet when the exiles returned, they met famine and pests ate their harvests. They returned externally, but not to God.

Isaiah 30:24 the oxen likewise and the young donkeys that till the ground will eat savoury provender, which has been winnowed with the shovel and with the fork- The idea is as GNB "The oxen and donkeys that plow your fields will eat the finest and best fodder".

Isaiah 30:25 There shall be brooks and streams of water on every lofty mountain and on every high hill in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall- Streams bursting forth from mountain tops suggest great supernatural blessing (as streams run in valleys not on mountain tops), provided in the very "high places" where they had worshipped idols which they had now destroyed (:22). This is grace indeed. The idea seems to be that the high places of men ("towers") will fall in the final "great slaughter" of Armageddon; but God's people will be safe on their "high places", which were formally the site of their sins and idolatry which is now forgiven. All that is elevated in secular terms ("towers") will be brought down in the last day, as in Is. 2:12. And this is indeed a principle truth to live by.

Isaiah 30:26 Moreover the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days, in the day that Yahweh binds up the fracture of His people, and heals the wound they were struck with- This is part of the same potential prophetic scenario as in Is. 13:10: "For the stars of the sky and its constellations will not give their light, the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine", in relation to Babylon; but the opposite will be true for God's people. Darkness for Babylon would mean light for Judah, just as there was darkness for the Egyptians and light for Israel at the time of the exodus deliverance. These words are applied in the Olivet prophecy to the situation in the last days (Mt. 24:29). For this didn't fully happen at the time.

LXX has "the stars of heaven, and Orion". Orion was identified with Nimrod, founder of Assyria, and this constellation was much worshipped by the Babylonians. The prophetic potential was that Assyria and Babylon would be totally eclipsed, along perhaps with the extinguishing from sight of their favourite constellation. But this literal aspect didn't happen, just as the literal changes to the sun and moon spoken of in Is. 30:26 didn't happen at the time, with a week's worth of sunlight given in one day, because the Kingdom of God was not reestablished at that time because Judah didn't fully repent. The coming of Zion's supernaturally bright light is to come therefore when Babylon falls; and this has therefore been deferred to the latter day fall of Babylon.

Isaiah 30:27 Behold, the name of Yahweh comes from far away, burning with His anger, and in thick rising smoke. His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is as a devouring fire- It comes "after a long time" (LXX). And yet there are

indications in Isaiah that this time od judgment for the nations and deliverance for Zion was to come shortly. The ambiguity is because of the open ended nature of the prophecies. It could have come soon, but the human preconditions weren't fulfilled and so it is delayed until the last days. "Thick rising smoke" suggests that supernatural Divine judgment would come upon Assyria or Babylon akin to the destruction of Sodom. There is no mention of this kind of destruction being used when the Angel smote the Assyrian army. 2 Pet. 3:7 and other latter day prophecies (especially Ez. 39) suggest that such fire will be used in the last days. God's Name is parallel with His glory (Is. 59:19; Ps. 102:15 and often). The literal, visible coming of God's glory to Zion in the form of supernaturally bright light has just been spoken of (:26). But the intensity of that light will bring burning heat upon His enemies and the darkness they will experience (Is. 13:10 etc.) is presented as being because of the thick smoke which arises from their subsequent burning.

Isaiah 30:28 His breath is as an overflowing stream that reaches even to the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction- As the Assyrian invasion reached to the neck of Judah, right up to Jerusalem (Is. 8:8), so God's response would be likewise. What they did to Jerusalem would be done to them; which is the great theme of Revelation, where the seals of judgment on Israel become the vials of judgment upon her abusers. All these things were to be done by the breath and tongue (:27) of God- through the word which Isaiah was speaking. Like Jeremiah, he was set up to speaks words which could destroy nations and resurrect them. This is the power of the prophetic word.

And a bridle that leads to ruin will be in the jaws of the peoples- It is God who makes the Gentile nations labour in "vanity: and a bridle that causeth to err shall be in the jaws of the peoples" (Is. 30:28 RV). Clearly enough, God causes people to err by putting a bridle in the jaws to pull them in a certain direction. The latter day Assyrian will likewise have a hook in his jaws to lead him to destruction (Ez. 38:4), just as the Assyrians of Isaiah's time did (Is. 37:29).

Isaiah 30:29 You will have a song, as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goes with a flute to come to Yahweh's mountain, to Israel's Rock- The song sung at night recalls the Passover feast (see on Is. 31:5); Judah's deliverance was to be as if Israel had been redeemed from Egypt. Perhaps the deliverance from Assyria also happened at Passover time, and perhaps Passover will be a significant time of deliverance for Israel from the

latter day Assyrian or Egyptians. But going with a flute to keep the feast at Zion also sounds like the joy of the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:40). The symbolism of all the feasts spoke of Israel's final redemption, and this was to come gloriously true in the end.

Isaiah 30:30 Yahweh will cause His glorious voice to be heard, and will show the descent of His arm, with the indignation of His anger, and the flame of a devouring fire, with a blast, storm, and hailstones- The literal and final descent of God's arm will be in the descent of His Son from Heaven with the Angels. But this 'coming down' was achieved in a limited sense when the Assyrians were destroyed by an Angel (:31); a "blast" was sent upon them (Is. 37:7), but not the full outpouring of wrath spoken of here. But what happened then could have been the full reestablishment of the Kingdom in glory, as spoken of in the preceding verses. But this didn't happen at the time. The invasion was averted by the faith of a few, but there was still not strength to bring forth a spiritually reborn nation (Is. 37:3).

Isaiah 30:31 For through the voice of Yahweh - All these things were to be done by the breath and tongue (:27,28) of God- through the word which Isaiah was speaking. Like Jeremiah, he was set up to speaks words which could destroy nations and resurrect them. This is the power of the prophetic word.

The Assyrian will be dismayed- see on 2 Chron. 32:21. This is the dismaying or breaking of the Assyrians in Isaiah's time of Is. 9:4 (s.w.). But this is in the context of the Kingdom being established. It could have come; but it didn't. Hezekiah failed to be the Messiah figure as did Eliakim, and the people generally were impenitent. The latter day Assyrian, therefore, is to be “broken in pieces” (Is. 30:31 RV), just as the whole image of Daniel 2 is to be, by the return of Christ as the little stone. The Assyrian confederacy which came against Jerusalem is described as being the foes of Israel who will be swept away as chaff (Is. 29:5 RV). This was fulfilled in Sennacherib’s destruction outside Jerusalem. And yet the language of being swept away as chaff refers without doubt to the image of Dan. 2 being swept away as chaff. The conclusion surely is that the Assyrian attack against Jerusalem, comprised as it was of a confederacy of local nations from within the land promised to Abraham, is typical of the final destruction of a similar confederacy by the Lord’s return.

He will strike him with His rod- As Assyria had smitten Judah with the rod. The LXX brings out the parallel between the word / voice of God through Isaiah, and the rod striking Assyria: "For by the voice of the Lord the Assyrians shall be overcome, even by the stroke wherewith he shall smite them".

Isaiah 30:32 Every stroke of the rod of punishment which Yahweh will lay on him will be with the sound of tambourines and harps. He will fight with them in battles, brandishing weapons- GNB suggests "As the LORD strikes them again and again, his people will keep time with the music of drums and harps". LXX: "And it shall happen to him from every side, that they from whom their hope of assistance was, in which he trusted, themselves shall war against him in turn with drums and with harp". "Brandishing" is literally 'shaking', the language of earthquake. But it is the technical term for the “wave offering” in the Law (e.g. Lev. 7:30); in all this, Yahweh will be glorified, and the judgment of the nations will be as a sacrifice to Him, with Israel worshipping in the background now that His judgments are in the earth.

Isaiah 30:33 For his burning place has long been ready. Yes, for the king it is prepared; He has made its pyre deep and large with fire and much wood- The Assyrian army is personalized as "the king". But their king was not then killed. The destruction of the Assyrian army by an Angel was but a partial fulfilment of these words. The latter day leader of Assyria, the antichrist figure called Gog, will be destroyed in the same coming down of Divine judgment. And that has been long prepared- in these words of Isaiah.

Yahweh’s breath, like a stream of sulphur, kindles it- Sulphur suggests the judgment of Sodom. There is no evidence this happened when the Assyrians were destroyed outside Jerusalem, nor was literal fire apparently used. These things will come true in the last days.

Isaiah Chapter 31

Isaiah 31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they don't look to the Holy One of Israel, and they don't seek Yahweh!- The Jews of Isaiah's day turned to political alliances with the Egyptians to save them from the threat of Assyria. Isaiah insisted that "the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit" (Is. 31:3). Egypt and Assyria are likened to mere tiny insects, a fly and a bee. Yet Judah were doing what was humanly sensible and smart. To trust in politics, in what seems the usual human response to an issue rather than trust in God, is in fact something which breaks God's heart. The horses and chariots they ought to have trusted in were the Angel cherubim. This is the lesson of Ezekiel's usage of the cherubim visions. The grace and eagerness of God to work with men comes through, however; in that although just a minority trusted in Him, He used one Angel to smite the Assyrian army. Perhaps the impression is left that if the entire cherubim had been involved, not only would the Assyrians have been destroyed but the Kingdom established as discussed on Is. 30:28-30.

Isaiah 31:2 Yet He also is wise, and will bring disaster- The idea was that to trust in Egypt was the "wise" thing to do, the secular choice of wisdom. We face the same choice. Yet we are to be fools for Christ's sake. And God's wisdom was to "bring disaster" upon those who trusted in Egypt. But how it worked out was that the faith of the minority led to the Assyrians being destroyed, despite the majority trusting in Egypt. Were they therefore not punished or had "disaster"? They appear to have got away with it. But the judgment of the last day, to which they will be resurrected, will finally resolve all these issues.

And will not call back His words- The destruction of the Assyrian army could be read as God indeed relenting. He speaks His word of judgment, but in the gap between the statement and the execution of it there is the possibility of repentance and intercession which can call back those words; see on Jer. 18:8-10. God's calling back is the same word used in the frequent appeals for Judah to "turn away" from their sin (Is. 1:16). We could conclude that they didn't, and so God didn't turn back His words; and they will be punished at the last day. Or, we can marvel that God did call back His words for the sake of a minority repenting and interceding, just as He did regarding the destiny of Israel because of Moses' intercession.

But will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the helpers of those who work iniquity- God would "arise against" Assyria and Babylon to destroy them (s.w. Is. 14:22). But the context here is of His 'arising against' the evildoers amongst His people (s.w. Jer. 44:29). For they were a family of evildoers (s.w. Is. 1:4; 9:17) just as Babylon were (s.w. Is. 14:20). His arising in judgment was therefore to be against Babylon and the sinners within Judah at the same time; they were to be "condemned with the world" as the unworthy of the new Israel will be at the last day (1 Cor. 11:32); hence the appeal to come out of Babylon so as not to share her condemnation. But when the Assyrian army was destroyed, the sinful "house of the evildoers" in Judah wasn't destroyed. Perhaps judgment was averted for the sake of the repentance of the minority, just as we who are sinners are counted righteous thanks to the work of the Lord Jesus, the one man. But it could be they are raised to condemnation at the last day, and that condemnation will be articulated at the same time as Babylon is destroyed. Likewise the 'workers of iniquity' is a phrase used of the Jews at this time (Mic. 2:1 cp. Hos. 6:8). Their "helpers" could refer to the Egyptians whose help they sought (s.w. Is. 20:6; 31:1; Jer. 37:7), just as Ahaz had sought "help" (s.w.) from the Assyrians earlier (2 Chron. 28:21). Or we can read this as meaning that those who were "helpers" of the leading sinners in Judah would be likewise punished. And here again we see a principle of contemporary relevance; for we can so easily think we are not the "workers of iniquity", but by our support of them we become vicarious sinners. And even our silence can also be 'helping' them. This concern is raised again in :3.

Isaiah 31:3 Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit- As explained on :1, the contrast was with the Angel cherubim.

When Yahweh stretches out His hand- The simple fact we are created by God means that we are responsible to God in some sense, and therefore liable to His judgment. The stretched out hand of God is used as a figure both for His judgment of man (Is. 31:3) and also for His creation of man (Is. 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13). The knowledge that we are created by Him makes us responsible to His judgment, and we have to look at our bodies, our lives which He has created … and act accordingly.

Both he who helps shall stumble, and he who is helped shall fall, and they all shall be consumed together- As explained on :2, vicarious 'helping' of sinners is judged the same as the high profile sinners themselves. But we can read "he who helps" as referring to the Egyptians (:1 s.w.; Is. 20:6; Jer. 37:7). The idea is that

the Egyptians would be destroyed together with the Jews who trusted in them. But this didn't happen at Isaiah's time. The Assyrians were destroyed by God, and neither Judah nor Egypt fell together. And the Assyrians then left Egypt and Judah alone. All these things will come to full term in the last days, when the latter day Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and impenitent Judah will be destroyed together, apart from a small repentant remnant from all of them.

Isaiah 31:4 For thus says Yahweh to me, As the lion and the young lion growling over his prey who will not be dismayed if a multitude of shepherds is called together against him, nor will he abase himself for their noise, so Yahweh of Armies will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its mount- In the context of condemning trust in Egypt, this would mean that the expected help from Egypt would be like shepherds being "called" (by Judah 'calling' to Egypt for help, Hos. 7:11) but being unable to make enough noise to stop the lions of Assyria / Babylon devouring the prey of Judah. This could only be achieved by the direct intervention of Yahweh's Angelic armies coming down to Zion. This descent of Yahweh to Zion didn't happen in Isaiah's time when the Assyrians were destroyed by an Angel. It will come finally true when the latter day lions surrounding Zion are destroyed by the return of the Lord Jesus to Zion (Obad. 21).

The LXX again offers a different slant: "For thus said the Lord to me, As a lion would roar, or a lion's whelp over prey which he has taken, and cry over it, until the mountains are filled with his voice, and the animals are awe-struck and tremble at the fierceness of his wrath: so the Lord of hosts shall descend to fight upon the mount Sion, even upon her mountains". This would mean that trust in Egypt for help against the lions of Assyria and Babylon is nothing compared to the help of Yahweh, who would act as a far greater lion, in the person of His Son as the lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5; Gen. 49:9) coming down on Zion.

Isaiah 31:5 As birds hovering, so Yahweh of Armies will protect Jerusalem- The idea is as GNB "Just as a bird hovers over its nest to protect its young". Hovering over would suggest a Passover style deliverance, as would "He will pass over and preserve it", perhaps at the very time of that feast; see on Is. 30:29.

Many of the descriptions of the Lord Jesus Christ in His own parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the

chicks of Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37) is based on Is. 31:5: " As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" Heb.). Yet Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be!

He will protect and deliver it, He will pass over and preserve it- This is what God did at the time of the destruction of the Assyrians in Isaiah's time, even though the majority were impenitent of their trust in Egypt. It is this act of pure love and grace which leads to the appeal for repentance in :6. It wasn't that Yahweh would only act if the people all repented, although that indeed was His stated position. Rather He, like a parent, decided to all the same show them grace- in the hope they would be moved to repentance by the goodness and grace shown. Indeed the grace / goodness of God, the gift ahead of time, is intended to elicit repentance (Rom. 2:4)

Isaiah 31:6 Return to Him from whom you have deeply revolted, children of Israel!- As explained on :5, this appeal to repentance was made after God has promised to save them by grace from the Assyrians. Their deep revolt was in seeking the help and solutions of the world, leaving their supposed faith in Yahweh as merely a cultural, theoretical matter. This, to God, was deep revolt. The plans they carefully devised were this deep revolt- hence LXX "Turn, ye children of Israel, who devise a deep and sinful counsel". The 'deep revolt' is the language of turning to idols (Dt. 13:5; Is. 1:5). And despite the grace of deliverance from Assyria, like their king Hezekiah, Judah continued to revolt and did not respond to grace (s.w. Is. 59:13).

Isaiah 31:7 For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold- There is a logic to wholehearted, unreserved conversion. Now, we must *turn unto* [s.w. 'convert to'] God (:6), "for in that day everyone shall *cast away* [turn back, 'convert'] his idols of silver and his idols of gold". In the day of final judgment, the rejected will go through the conversion scenario- of throwing away the things of this world, the pomp and the power and the pride of this petty life, and turning unto the things of God. But then, in the finest and

acutest tragedy of the whole human experience, it will be all too late. *We must all go through the conversion process*: either now, or in the rejection experience of the judgment.

The sin which your own hands have made for you- Idols are so often called the works of human hands. And this is the abiding nature of idolatry in our age- to worship works, human achievements.

Isaiah 31:8 The Assyrian will fall by the sword, not of man; and the sword, not of mankind, shall devour him. He will flee from the sword, and his young men will become subject to forced labour- The LXX has "neither shall he flee from the face of the sword". The idea being that they would not die by the sword; the Angel destroyed them in a moment. And the judgments against them in Is. 30 stress flaming fire and sulphur being used, not literal weapons. Perhaps the allusion is again to the cherubim (see on :1) who were associated in Genesis with the flaming sword.

Isaiah 31:9 His rock will pass away by reason of terror, and his princes will be afraid of the banner, says Yahweh, whose fire is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem- Yahweh was to be the rock of Israel. That meant, and means today, that we can have no other rock. The intention was that there would be a literal descent of Yahweh, perhaps through the cherubim, to Zion. The fire from this would destroy the surrounding enemies, as described in Is. 30, and yet that Divine fire would remain in Zion as the sign of God's presence and would form the "fire [which] burns there for sacrifices" (GNB) in the revived temple system. Yahweh's banner or ensign would be placed there, and the repentant remnants of the nations would rally to it, according to previous prophecies in Isaiah. Then the situation of Is. 4:5,6 would have come about. But all that didn't work out at the time because Judah weren't receptive to it. And so these things have been reinterpreted and reapplied; the ensign becomes the pole or cross of the Lord Jesus, to whom all true believers in Him will come, in their acceptance of the Hope of Israel. And these things shall have some literal fulfilment at the Lord's return.

Isaiah Chapter 32

Isaiah 32:1 Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in justice- This king in the context of the Assyrian destruction spoken of in Is. 31 would have been Hezekiah. But he failed to do this, as did his sons, his "princes". And so these things are reinterpreted and reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 32:2 A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the storm, as streams of water in a dry place, as the shade of a large rock in a weary land- We noted on Is. 31:9 that the situation of Is. 4:5,6 could potentially have come about in Isaiah's time, but Judah's general impenitence meant that it was deferred to the last days and is meanwhile reinterpreted with reference to the Lord Jesus, the "man" who is a covert from the storm of Divine judgment. All the "coverts" of human strength would be destroyed (Is. 28:17 s.w.) leaving only "a man" as a place of defence. That "man" was to be the "king" of :1; and it now clearly refers to the Lord Jesus. To trust in an invisible Man rather than visible human strength is a big challenge to us today. In the future application, we have here the picture of the entire *eretz* being turned into a desolate wilderness with the heat of Divine judgment making it unbearable (see on Is. 24), and with the rock which will represent the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 10:4) alone offering shade. LXX "and shall appear in Sion as a rushing river, glorious in a thirsty land" confirms that this is the scene which could have developed in the redeemed Zion, but which has currently been reinterpreted to the gushing streams of the Spirit coming out of the smitten rock of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 32:3 The eyes of those who see will not be dim, and the ears of those who hear will listen- LXX "And they shall no more trust in men" would continue the theme of Is. 31, of not trusting any more in Egypt nor in idols, but in Yahweh alone. The blind in Is. 29:9 were those mentally and spiritually blinded by God because they didn't want to see. But that psychological work of God will now work in reverse, through the work of the Holy Spirit which is part of the gift of the new covenant. This was what God envisioned His repentant people accepting at Isaiah's time, and then again on their return from Babylon- and part of that covenant was that God would work on their hearts to give them spiritual vision. We are confirmed mentally and spiritually, by the Spirit's operation directly on our hearts, in the way we wish to go.

Isaiah 32:4 The heart of the rash will understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak plainly- The GNB interpretation is worth considering: "They will not be impatient any longer, but they will act with understanding and will say what they mean". But these rash stammerers are those of :3 who once had blinded eyes and deaf ears, who now have them opened by the Spirit. And with those opened eyes and ears they will "understand". The "rash" or impatient were those who wished God to "make speed" His work and because of His apparent silence turned to Egypt (Is. 5:19 s.w.). So this prophecy of the Kingdom situation could have come about in Isaiah's time; those hardened disbelievers in Judah could have been converted from their blindness and superficial judgments. Such is the power of the Spirit; those who appear totally unspiritual and short termist in their judgments can be converted by the Spirit. See on Is. 35:4. The stammerers are likewise those who spoke for God unclearly, in bursts of enthusiasm, but not in full communicative relationship with Him. His Spirit would change even those.

Isaiah 32:5 The fool will no longer be called noble, nor the scoundrel be highly respected- The LXX would refer to the way that Isaiah and the prophets had been told to cease prophesying by the fools who were in power: "And they shall no more at all tell a fool to rule, and thy servants shall no more at all say, Be silent". The same word is used of the foolishness of the false prophets (Ez. 13:3). Perhaps there was one particular Judas like figure amongst the Jerusalem leadership who was the singular "vile person" (AV). I suggested on Is. 22:15-20 that this individual in the immediate context may have been Shebna, who is described here as "noble" in that he pretended to the royal family although he was an Egyptian (see on Is. 22:15,16). He had obtained 'high respect' within the Jerusalem leadership. He was apparently "liberal" (:8 AV) offering material gifts to those who supported him, whilst advocating the evil policy of trust in Egypt (:7). But he was a "scoundrel".

Isaiah 32:6 For the fool will speak folly, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice profanity, and to utter error against Yahweh, to make empty the soul of the hungry and to cause the drink of the thirsty to fail- If Shebna's counsel was followed, he would lead to the destruction of the people. His pretension to the royal family when he was an Egyptian agent (see on :5) was profanity and folly. His pro-Egypt policy was effectively an anti-Yahweh policy. The blasphemy of Rabshakeh may also be in view. Perhaps this figure will have an equivalent in the last days within Jewish society.

Isaiah 32:7 The ways of the scoundrel are evil- LXX "For the counsel of the wicked will devise iniquity" would connect with the immediate context of condemning the Jews for trusting in the counsel of the false prophets to seek help from Egypt, resulting in huge sin against God (see on Is. 30:1). I suggested on :5 that the work of Shebna is in view.

He devises wicked devices to destroy the humble with lying words, even when the needy speaks right- Shebna's work (see on :5; Is. 22:15-18) involved lies and destroying the humble faithful who spoke against his pro-Egypt policies.

Isaiah 32:8 But the noble devises noble things; and he will continue in noble things- I suggested on :5 that the work of Shebna is in view; he was not truly noble nor liberal / generous (AV) although he pretended to be this. He was giving gifts to buy favours. But only the genuinely liberal or generous would finally stand: ""The liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand" (Is. 32:8 AV) may suggest that the generous will "stand" in the last day because of their generous spirit. Indeed, being in covenant with God may even depend upon our recognition of the fact that all human wealth is from God: "Thou shalt remember… it is [God] that giveth thee power to get wealth, *that* he may establish his covenant" (Dt. 8:18).

Isaiah 32:9 Rise up, you women who are at ease!- In society of that time, women weren't considered the significant decision makers, and were never seen as guilty or praiseworthy for any political decisions or outcomes. But the prophets, Jeremiah particularly, focus upon the guilt of the women of the times. They perceived the value of all persons, and how the women were as much ultimately a part of the decision making as the men because of the significant background factor played by wives in the behaviour of their husbands and sons. And so here Isaiah appeals to them over several verses. The request to hear him was effectively an appeal for their repentance- at a time when religion and politics were the sphere of men and not women. The same word for "at ease" is used about the future, restored Kingdom (:18; Is. 33:20). This was the true "ease" or quietness. But this 'quietness' of the restored Kingdom was claimed to be experienced by the disbelieving wealthy women of Jerusalem who lived "at ease" (:9,11 s.w.). They believed their false prophets, imaging they had their Kingdom right then in their luxurious lives.

Hear My voice, you careless daughters, give ear to My speech!- "Careless" or 'confident' is the word used of 'trusting' in Egypt (Is. 31:1; 36:4-6,9); 'trusting' in the idols of Egypt too (Is. 42:17 s.w.). The political decisions of the men were equally those of the women in their society. That they were "careless" or confidently trusting in Egypt is three times mentioned here (:9-11).

Isaiah 32:10 For days beyond a year you will be troubled, you careless women; for the vintage shall fail. The harvest won't come- LXX "Remember for a full year in pain, yet with hope: the vintage has been cut off; it has ceased, it shall by no means come again". This would be another of those passages in Isaiah which suggest that the tribulation of Judah was going to last for a short period, here "a full year", and conclude with the Lord's coming in judgment and thereby redemption of Zion. But these short term possibilities were precluded by the lack of repentance in Judah and so the prophecies have been given other and longer term references.

Isaiah 32:11 Tremble, you women who are at ease! Be troubled, you careless ones!- See on :9. This is a twice repeated appeal.

Strip yourselves, make yourselves naked and put sackcloth on your waist- This was to happen to them anyway in their captivity. They were to act as if they realized they were worthy of such condemnation. Likewise if we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). There's something alive and passionate to the words of the prophets. They're not just droning on. Although they largely wrote in poetry, let not this delude us from feeling the cutting edge of their passion. Their poetry wasn't what Wordsworth thought poetry is- "emotion recollected in tranquility". The attack on complacency and passionlessness was full frontal: "Tremble, you women who are at ease [as you stroll the supermarkets of today], shudder, you complacent ones [as you hang out with your friends, lost in small talk]; strip and make yourselves bare" (Is. 32:11 RSV- the RSV seems to me to capture the passion of the prophetic words best of all the English translations).

Isaiah 32:12 Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine- The beating of breasts suggests this is still addressed to the women of the previous verses. But "beat" can also be translated "pluck off". And the only other two

occurrences of "fruitful vine" refer to a woman and her children (Ps. 128:3; Ez. 19:10). Ez. 23:34 speaks of the women of rejected Judah plucking off their own breasts in their mental agony of condemnation. I suggest we have a similar idea here. All that they stood for as women, their deepest self-identity, they wished to destroy. The mental agony of the condemned is the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" which the Lord speaks of.

Isaiah 32:13 Thorns and briers will come up on My people's land- This was because their potentially fruitful vineyard of :12 had not brought forth fruit and so it was to be left desolate and bring forth the curse of Genesis, thorns and briers (Is. 5:9). This and the similar prophecy of desolation in Is. 5:6 didn't happen at the Assyrian invasion; it was reapplied to the situation after the Babylonian invasion, when the land was intended to rest (Lev. 26:34,43) until Judah repented. But even that program didn't work out, and so the Lord's parable of the vineyard explained that therefore the vineyard was given to a new Israel. Briers and thorns is an allusion to the curse upon the garden of Eden- another reason for understanding Eden as *eretz* Israel, from whom likewise Israel were to be exiled to the east. Yet "briers and thorns" is a term used by Isaiah about the aggressive, thorny nature of Judah (Is. 9:18; 10:17). Their whole land was to become like them; and so their judgment was but an extension of their own behaviour.

Yes, on all the houses of joy in the joyous city- Isaiah is complaining that the people were feasting instead of fasting in repentance (as in Is. 22:2), and he juxtaposes their present feasting with the desolation threatened. But it seems there was repentance amongst a minority and so the threatened destruction of Zion's population at the hands of the Assyrians was averted; but it was actually only deferred to the time of the Babylonians.

Isaiah 32:14 For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city will be deserted- The palace wasn't forsaken in that Hezekiah and his descendants continued to reign; Jerusalem wasn't deserted, and the hill of Zion didn't become grazing for donkeys. This however was the Divine intention; and we can conclude that for all his bursts of external goodness, there were problems with Hezekiah, or at least with the ruling family- and they came to full term in his loss of faith in Is. 39.

The hill and the watchtower will be for dens forever, a delight for wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks- The hill and watchtower may allude to the figure of the

vineyard discussed on :13. The Hebrew and Greek phrases which are translated "for ever" mean strictly, "for the age". Sometimes this refers to literal infinity, for example the age of the kingdom, but not always. Here we have an example: "The forts and towers will become lairs for ever... until the spirit is poured upon us" (:15). This is one way of understanding the 'eternity' of 'eternal fire'.

Isaiah 32:15 Until the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is considered a forest- Seeing as noted on :14 that Zion wasn't totally destroyed at the time, this promise of the Spirit will ultimately apply to the last days when Jerusalem falls to her enemies, and the Lord's return to redeem her will be associated with the pouring out of the Spirit. Is. 32:14-16 RV has a similar scenario to that in Joel 2:20 and the pouring out of the Spirit on Israel in Zech. 12- Jerusalem was to be depopulated, wild animals would live there, Ophel [i.e. Zion, the temple mount] would be desolate- and then the Holy Spirit would be poured out and the Kingdom conditions established in Israel. But these things didn't happen at the restoration, because Israel didn't want the Spirit "to be poured upon us from on high". Even though the gift of the Spirit, a new heart, was part of the new covenant offered to them in Ez. 20,36 and Jer. 30,31.

Isaiah 32:16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness; and righteousness will remain in the fruitful field- "Fruitful field" is literally "Carmel" here and in :15, as in LXX. The focus upon Carmel may be to recall Elijah's triumph there over the idolatry of Israel, and God's manifestation in fire. These things point forward to the latter day work of Elijah and the final repentance of Israel; but unlike then, the justice and righteousness would "remain" eternally.

Isaiah 32:17 The work of righteousness will be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever- This alludes to how Ahaz had been called upon to repent of his faithlessness, and to find "calm", s.w. "quietness" (see on Is. 7:4); but he had "refused" (Is. 30:15), madly trusting upon Egyptian horses for salvation (Is. 30:16). But the appeal to repent was still there, for a later generation. The work of righteousness was therefore repentance. It is this alone which gives peace with God.

Isaiah 32:18 My people will live in a peaceful habitation, in safe dwellings and in quiet resting places- LXX "And his people shall inhabit a city of peace", a

reference to 'Jerusalem'. The 'quietness' of the restored Kingdom was claimed to be experienced by the disbelieving wealthy women of Jerusalem who lived "at ease" (:9,11 s.w.). They believed their false prophets, imaging they had their Kingdom right then in their luxurious lives.

Isaiah 32:19 Though for now hail flattens the forest, and the city is levelled completely- The LXX alludes to how hail came on the Egyptians but not on Israel; because the narrative of the exodus deliverance is always to be found in Isaiah as the template for their latter day deliverance: "And if the hail should come down, it shall not come upon you". But if we read with the Hebrew text, the flattening of the forest is parallel to the levelling of the city of Jerusalem; and there is the implication in Zech. 11:1 that we are to understand the temple as the forest, perhaps because of the extensive usage of cedars of Lebanon and other wood within it. As explained on :15, Jerusalem was not levelled completely, at least not at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions which were primarily in view here. In Jeremiah's time, Israelites still came to offer offerings on the site of the temple. Nor really was this the case after AD70. It looks forward therefore to the last days, when it seems a new and blasphemous entity will be built in Jerusalem, to be soon destroyed by the Lord's return and the new Jerusalem coming down from Heaven upon whatever is built there.

Isaiah 32:20 Blessed are you who sow beside all waters, who send out the feet of the ox and the donkey- Maybe the sense is as in GNB "How happy everyone will be with plenty of water for the crops and safe pasture everywhere for the donkeys and cattle". But earlier the Assyrian / Babylonian invasion has been likened to a flood of waters coming upon the land. Now this has receded, seed is to be sown on the rich flood plain left behind; and ox and donkey used to cultivate it. But oxen and donkeys were not to be used together under the law of Moses. Perhaps this is a hint at a change in that law; that old covenant had been broken by Israel, and they were to now be under a new covenant which didn't have this regulation.

Isaiah Chapter 33

Isaiah 33:1 Woe to you who destroy, but you weren't destroyed; and who betray, but nobody betrayed you- This could imply that God understands that abusers abuse because they were abused. And He factors this in to His final judgment of them. And we marvel at such sensitivity, and assurance of righteous judgment at the end. But Assyria was not able to claim that as an excuse; this was bloodlust.

When you have finished destroying, you will be destroyed; and when you have made an end of betrayal, you will be betrayed- AV "they shall deal treacherously with thee". The idea was that Assyria would be destroyed by those she had destroyed and deceived, i.e. Judah. But this didn't happen; Sennacherib lived many years after the destruction of his army at Jerusalem, and it was an Angel and not Judah who destroyed his army. The Divinely set up potentials weren't realized at the time of Isaiah and Hezekiah. "Betrayal" is a word often used about Judah (s.w. "treachery"). This was how they had treated Yahweh, and so they were treated the same way by the Assyrians. And yet from this God still intended to save them, by such great grace. "Destroy" is the word for "spoil" and what initially was in view was the spoiling of the tents of the destroyed Assyrians by the people of Jerusalem (:4).

Isaiah 33:2 Yahweh, be gracious to us- The faithful remnant centered around Isaiah realized that Judah in general had not repented, and the salvation from Assyria was to be by Divine grace alone.

We have waited for You- In the final glory of salvation revealed to Zion, they exult that they "have waited for Him" (Is. 25:9), and this was exactly the position of Isaiah's family and school of prophets (s.w. Is. 8:17). That righteous remnant would finally have their faith and expectation rewarded.

Be our strength every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble- The time of Jacob's trouble of Jeremiah and Daniel refers to the last days; it could have come at the time of the Assyrian invasion, but Judah weren't spiritually ready for this. So Isaiah prays that God would be the strength of His people "every morning" and not just that morning when they awoke to find the Assyrian army destroyed. We too are to daily live in the same spirit of total trust which we show in extreme situations.

Isaiah 33:3 At the noise of the thunder, the peoples have fled. When You lift Yourself up, the nations are scattered- "The nations" in the first instance were the various nations represented in the Assyrian army which was destroyed by an Angel, perhaps with "the noise of thunder". They were to be scattered as they had intended to scatter Judah (Is. 11:12; Dan. 12:7 s.w.). The same words for God lifting Himself up are used of the cherubim mounting up (Ez. 10:15,17,19), and in Hezekiah's time it was an Angel (associated with the cherubim) who slew the Assyrians.

Isaiah 33:4 Your spoil will be gathered as the caterpillar gathers. Men will leap on it as locusts leap- See on :1. This envisages the people of Jerusalem crawling back and forth from the city to the scene of the destruction of the Assyrians by the Angel, gathering their spoil. Caterpillars and locusts are used as symbols of Israel's invaders in Joel. They were doing to others as had been done to them. But Hezekiah wrongly boasted of this spoil, and therefore the Kingdom potential envisaged here didn't fully come about.

Isaiah 33:5 Yahweh is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness- Zion wasn't full of righteousness of itself; God saved Zion because He imputed righteousness to them on the basis of the faith of the righteous remnant within it. This was the day when Zion could have been redeemed by "justice and righteousness" (s.w. Is. 1:27). And by doing such things to us He likewise is exalted and seen to dwell on high, as He was at the exodus in Ps. 68:18, thereby dwelling even amongst "the rebellious". The day of Yahweh's exaltation was to be the day of His Kingdom, when Judah were humbled (s.w. Is. 2:11,17; 12:4); this could potentially have come when the Assyrians were destroyed. But Judah's pride and impenitence precluded it.

Isaiah 33:6 There will be stability in your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. The fear of Yahweh is your treasure- This was what could have happened; but instead, Hezekiah made material treasures his wealth, rather than having fear of Yahweh as his greatest treasure. Hezekiah had "peace and truth" in his days or times (Is. 39:8). But that was but a surface level fulfilment of the far greater reality that was then possible. "Wisdom and knowledge" are associated with the Messiah figure which could then have arisen, associated with "salvation" (Is. 11:2 s.w.); and "Jesus" means 'Yah's salvation'.

But Eliakim, Hezekiah and other potential such figures all failed, and so these words are reapplied to the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 33:7 Behold, their valiant ones cry outside; the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly- As GNB "The brave are calling for help. The ambassadors who tried to bring about peace are crying bitterly". Verses 7-9 appear to be Isaiah reflecting how things were to be at the time of the Assyrian invasion. The ambassadors of peace were perhaps those sent from him to the Assyrians begging for peace in return for paying tribute. They now realized their work was in vain because the agreed covenant with Assyria had been broken by the Assyrian invasion (:8).

Isaiah 33:8 The highways are desolate, the travelling man ceases- Now the road toward Assyria is deserted; nobody any longer is travelling there seeking peace deals.

The covenant is broken; He has despised the cities- Judah had made a covenant with Assyria, paying tribute and accepting Assyrian idols in return for a promise they wouldn't be attacked. But Assyria broke the covenant and now the cities of Judah were in ruins. All had fallen apart from Jerusalem. This was an appropriate response to the way they had "despised" their covenant with Yahweh (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43; Is. 5:24; 30:12).

He doesn't respect man- "There is no regard for man" was the complaint of Is. 33:8- the value and meaning of the human person was disregarded. Perhaps we could say that the prophets are characterized by taking the individual seriously. We seem to have a hard enough job maintaining a sense of the value of persons ourselves, quite apart from weeping that others don't have such values. This level of sensitivity to human sin is quite something; and yet this is the spirit of prophecy. In the ancient world it was felt that , as Cicero put it, "the gods attend to great matters; they neglect small ones" (*De Natura Deorum* Vol. 2, 167). The God of Israel was and is quite different; for as the prophets show, what men may regard as small issues are to Him all and vitally important. That slightly unkind communication, that less than truthful passing comment on a brother, that exaggeration… these aren't trivialities to God. What to us are trivialities are crucial to Him; that's the message of the prophets. The spirit of the prophets cried out in pain and anguish because of that kind of thing; and their spirit is to

be ours.

Isaiah 33:9 The land mourns and languishes, Lebanon is confounded and withers away, Sharon is like a desert, and Bashan and Carmel are stripped bare- The initial reference would be to the scorched earth policy of Assyria in northern Palestine. The 'little apocalypse' of Is. 24:4 (see note there) had used the same words "mourns and languishes" for the situation in the land immediately preceding the establishing of God's Kingdom there. Joel 1:10 likewise. So the situation with the Assyrians could have given rise to the coming of the Kingdom and a Messianic figure. But such great spiritual potentials were wasted by Judah and Hezekiah. The potential could again have come true at the time of the Babylonian desolation (s.w. Jer. 14:2; Lam. 2:8). But again it was precluded by Judah's refusal to truly hear the prophetic call for repentance. And so it is all reapplied to the last days.

Isaiah 33:10 Now I will arise, says Yahweh- This is the rising up of Yahweh at the last day when Babylon / Assyria would fall and all the land be judged (Is. 2:21; 14:22; 28:21 s.w.). This is what could have happened at the time of Hezekiah; but although the Assyrian army was destroyed, Assyria continued at the time, and a Messianic Kingdom wasn't established.

Now I will lift Myself up. Now I will be exalted- This is the language of the cherubim being lifted up (Ez. 1:19,20 s.w.). Clearly we have in view here the potential visible manifestation of Yahweh in His Kingdom at the time of the Assyrian invasion; and this didn't happen. It is deferred and reapplied. "Lift up" is the same word translated "forgiven" in :24. The lifting up of Yahweh in all His glory is through His forgiveness of His sinful people. This is what He exalts in; our humble repentance is His exaltation. And this will be particularly true at the last day. But Judah didn't really repent, and so His exaltation couldn't happen at the time of the Assyrian crisis as was potentially possible.

Isaiah 33:11 You will conceive chaff, you will bring forth stubble- There is a theme in Isaiah of conceiving, suffering pain in labour- but bringing forth in vain (Is. 26:18; 33:11; 59:4). And so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for

the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24).

Your breath is a fire that will devour you- Wrongly gained wealth is the fire that will burn those who have it at the last day (James 5:3). James is picking up a figure from Is. 33:11, again concerning the final judgment: “Your [own] breath [i.e. words], as fire, shall devour you”. Their breath, their words, were as fire which would in the end be the basis of their condemnation. Nadab and Abihu kindled strange fire, and it was with that fire that God burnt them up, in symbol of His destruction of all the wicked at judgment day (Lev. 10:2). The "sinners in Zion" (:14) would realize too late that they had destroyed themselves; hence LXX "Now shall ye see, now shall ye perceive; the strength of your breath, shall be vain; fire shall devour you".

Isaiah 33:12 The peoples will be like the burning of lime, like thorns that are cut down and burned in the fire- Land bearing thorns speaks of the condemnation of the last day; the same process of destruction was to destroy "the peoples" and also the "thorns" brought forth within the land, the "sinners in Zion" of :14. This didn't happen at the time; the "sinners in Zion" weren't consumed at the same time as the Assyrian army, and there is no evidence that they were "burnt". This destruction by fire of both Israel's enemies and the "sinners in Zion" has been reapplied to the last days. So much potential was missed, partly because of God's grace to the "sinners in Zion" at the time.

Isaiah 33:13 Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and, you who are near, acknowledge My might- LXX "they that draw nigh shall know my strength". This is the picture presented throughout the prophets; the Jews, those who are near, repent and acknowledge Yahweh's might instead of trusting in their own might or that of "Egypt". And at the same time, a repentant remnant of the Gentile attackers "who are far off" will also repent. On the basis of this common

experience of conviction of sin, repentance and forgiveness they will then form a new, multiethnic people of God in His restored Kingdom. There was the potential for this to happen at the time, but there was not the required repentance.

Isaiah 33:14 The sinners in Zion are afraid. Trembling has seized the godless ones. Who among us can live with the devouring fire? Who among us can live with everlasting burning?- Isaiah prophesied of the fire of Divine judgment. But it was that fire which touched his lips and purged him (Is. 6:7). The message was that contact with that fire was not necessarily destructive even to man. It is possible to “dwell with devouring fire”; that is part of relationship with God. Perhaps what is in view is the burning fire of the Divine presence prophesied in Is. 4:5. The spiritual will be able to dwell with this, but it will consume the sinners.

In the Hezekiah context, the sinners in Zion did indeed tremble but were not destroyed. There is no evidence that fire literally appeared to judge them, nor that it remained as the visible symbol of Yahweh's presence as foreseen in Is. 4:5. All this is reapplied to the future destruction of a latter day Assyrian and the "sinners in Zion". At the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ the responsible will be gathered to judgement at Jerusalem. The plain Biblical evidence for this is too hard to go against. With Hezekiah in Jerusalem were "the sinners in Zion", who would equate with the unworthy who are also gathered into Jerusalem. It is largely through the Angels that the judgement is ministered; and so it was in Hezekiah's time. In the context of describing the punishment of these "sinners in Zion" we read: "The Lord will come with fire, and with His (Angel) chariots like a whirlwind (Angelic language), to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire". This is alluded to (quoted?) in 2 Thess. 1:7,8 concerning the Angelic punishment of the unworthy at the judgement: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty Angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance... ". That those punished are renegade saints who "know not God (any longer), and that obey not the Gospel" is evident from the fact that they are punished "from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power". In common with much of Thessalonians, Paul is alluding back to Matthew 24 and 25, here to the passage in Mt. 25:31-34 regarding the responsible being gathered to the judgement before "the throne of His glory". Only the responsible come into the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The description of the judgement in Jude 24 chimes in too: "The presence of His glory".

Isaiah 33:15 He who walks righteously, and speaks blamelessly; he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands- Literally, 'shakes his hands' on refusing to take bribes. The same word is used in :9 of Carmel shaking off her fruits (AV). The ways of the righteous and the wicked are opposite and cannot be compromised.

Refusing to take a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from looking at evil- The righteous don't even want to hear plans to shed blood. We get the impression that despite all the pressure from Assyria, their consciences weren't exercised; the leadership continued plotting against others and taking bribes.

Isaiah 33:16 he will dwell on high. His place of defence will be the fortress of rocks. His bread will be supplied, his waters will be sure- The same words are used of Yahweh dwelling on high in :5. The righteous will be identified with Him. GNB "you will be as secure as if in a strong fortress". Isaiah foresees lack of bread and water as a result of the Assyrian siege. He doesn't see Hezekiah's conduit as solving the water problem within Jerusalem under siege, as elsewhere he has presented this as a work of dependence upon the flesh. But the righteous are to survive this. But by grace, all Jerusalem did at that time, including "the sinners in Zion" (:14).

Isaiah 33:17 Your eyes will see the king in His beauty, they will see the land that is distant- The idea may be that they would see to the full distant extent of the land; the entire promised land from Nile to Euphrates would now be reigned over by the new Messianic king. Hence GNB "Once again you will see a king ruling in splendor over a land that stretches in all directions". But that didn't happen in Hezekiah's time; he was content to live in Jerusalem with a few years of peace. He refused the wider vision and potential that was possible.

Our eyes too shall “behold the land that is [currently] very far off” just as Moses had been given the vision of the promised land far off. See on Jn. 3:3,5. You and me personally will be in God’s Kingdom, with our arms around each other in the rubble of Jerusalem. We will personally be there. We will see Abraham there (Lk. 13:28); as Job says, with our own eyes we will behold our Lord, and not through anyone else’s eyes (Job 19:27). Our eyes shall behold the King in the beauty which we personally perceive in Him.

Isaiah 33:18 Your heart will meditate on the terror- The idea is that the righteous remnant would look back on the trauma of the Assyrian siege and perceive God's hand.

Where is he who counted? Where is he who weighed? Where is he who counted the towers?- Assyrian inscriptions and bas reliefs show men counting and weighing the spoil and carefully counting the towers of cities under attack. Those men would be out of work or destroyed themselves. Or we could go with GNB "Your old fears of foreign tax collectors and spies will be only a memory".

Isaiah 33:19 You will no longer see the fierce people, a people of a deep speech that you can't comprehend, with a strange language that you can't understand- The language difference is made apparent by Rabshakeh speaking unexpectedly in Hebrew, implying that this was unusual as the Assyrian language or dialect couldn't be understood by ordinary Jewish people. The description of the Assyrians, and other future invaders to whom this prophecy was reapplied, is framed in terms of the curses for breaking the covenant in Dt. 28:49. The results of their covenant breaking would be removed. But historically, Judah did see the Assyrians again; Manasseh was "taken with hooks by the captains of the King of Assyria, and carried to Babylon" (2 Chron. 33:11). This was avoidable, for the victory implied here sounds to be permanent. But it only applied to that generation, because the potential victory and establishment of Yahweh's Kingdom was precluded by Hezekiah's weakness and Judah's lack of repentance.

Isaiah 33:20 Look toward Zion, the city of our appointed festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tent that won't be removed; her stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of her cords be broken- It must have seemed impossible to believe that the eyes of Isaiah's generation would ever see this, as Zion was surrounded and besieged and the rest of Judah in ruins. But the Assyrians were destroyed in a moment and they did see this. The implication was that again the people of Judah would look to Jerusalem as the place where they could keep the feasts.

The same word for "at ease" or "quiet" is used about the future, restored Kingdom (also Is. 32:18) as about the "ease" or quietness of the disbelieving wealthy women of Jerusalem who lived "at ease" (Is. 32:9,11 s.w.). They believed their false prophets, imaging they had their Kingdom 'ease' right then in their luxurious lives. But this was not the true "ease" or quietness. Luxurious

living is but a fake Kingdom of God. And the stakes and tent ropes ("cords") of Zion were removed. Again, the potential didn't come about; see on :19.

Isaiah 33:21 But there Yahweh will be with us in majesty- Here as in Is. 4:5,6 there is the implication that Yahweh Himself would be "with us", perhaps literally coming to dwell in Zion so that the name of the city would be called "Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35). Or perhaps the earlier prophecy of Is. 7:14; 8:8 is in view, where the Messiah who would appear at the time of salvation from Assyria would be called "God with us". These possibilities were all precluded and therefore transferred to events of the last days concerning the Lord Jesus.

A place of broad rivers and streams, in which no galley with oars will go, neither will any gallant ship pass by there- The reference is to military vessels propelled by oarsmen as well as sails. Although there is no protective river around Jerusalem as there was around Nineveh and Babylon, yet Yahweh would be the equivalent of that defensive river; and no aggressive military boats of any enemy would be able to cross it.

Isaiah 33:22 For Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our lawgiver, Yahweh is our king; He will save us- As in :21, again the earlier prophecy of Is. 7:14; 8:8 is in view, where the Messiah who would appear at the time of salvation from Assyria would be called "God with us". These possibilities were all precluded and therefore transferred to events of the last days concerning the Lord Jesus, whose name means "Yah will save us". That great salvation would be predicated upon Yahweh being the judge and lawgiver. His salvation is by grace but as explained in Rom. 1-8, it is still given justly, with righteousness imputed rather than Divine law being winked at or injustice shown by God in achieving the salvation of sinners.

Isaiah 33:23 Your rigging is untied; they couldn't strengthen the foot of their mast, they failed to spread the sail. Then the prey of a great spoil was divided, the lame took the prey- This continues the analogy in :21 to the invaders as using military warships. They arrived as it were on the waters of the great invasion predicted in Is. 8 which would smother Judah but leave Jerusalem. The idea was that the Assyrians would be slain and the people go out of Jerusalem to gather it, even the lame. But all Judah are likened to the lame, repentant Jacob, hobbling into salvation by grace at the last day (Jer. 31:8). There is no record of the spoil of the Assyrians being taken in Is. 37:36. And we doubt whether the Assyrian soldiers had huge amounts of valuables with them whilst outside Jerusalem.

Clearly these things look forward to the day when Judah shall indeed be the repentant Jacob.

Isaiah 33:24 The inhabitant won't say, I am sick because the people who dwell therein will be forgiven their iniquity- In the immediate context, the sick inhabitant of Jerusalem was Hezekiah who was cured. The implication would therefore be that he was sick because he had sinned- and his sin was clearly in ripping off the gold of the temple to try to buy off the Assyrians rather than trusting in Yahweh. But the application may also be to Gentiles: "And the people dwelling among them" (LXX), "No one who lives in our land" (GNB); these proselytes, the repentant remnant of the attackers, would be forgiven and healed of all sickness.

"Forgiven" is the same word translated "lift up" in :10. The lifting up of Yahweh in all His glory is through His forgiveness of His sinful people. This is what He exalts in; our humble repentance is His exaltation. And this will be particularly true at the last day. But Judah didn't really repent, and so His exaltation couldn't happen at the time of the Assyrian crisis as was potentially possible.

Isaiah Chapter 34

Isaiah 34:1 Come near, you nations, to hear! Listen, you peoples. Let the earth and all it contains hear; the world, and everything that comes from it- The idea is, all the people born in the world, which is parallel with the earth / land of Israel. The envisaged destruction of the Assyrians in Is. 33 was potentially to be part of the destruction of all enemies of God's people in the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. But this didn't happen at the time because Hezekiah and his sons befriended the nations and followed their ways, rather than separating from them spiritually and leading them to Yahweh worship. And the people of Judah continued to act as the Gentiles.

Isaiah 34:2 For Yahweh is enraged against all the nations and angry with all their armies. He has utterly destroyed them- We have a return here to the scene in the 'little apocalypse' in Is.24. The destruction of the earth / land along with many of God's people leads to the repentance of a remnant of both Jews, Israelites and Gentiles who form a new multiethnic people of God under a Messiah figure in a reestablished Kingdom of God on earth. That is the scene in Is. 34 too, although the Gentiles are personified as Idumea / Edom, the nation against whom all the prophets record God's particular wrath. God's being "enraged" was because He had sent "all nations" to punish Judah but they had fallen into bloodlust and pride (Zech. 1:15 s.w.). The 'utter destruction' of the "all nations" supposes that this prophecy speaks of a final destruction; this could have happened in Isaiah's time, but has been deferred to the last days. But the same word for "utter destruction" is translated 'consecrate' or 'devote [unto Yahweh]'. It is used in Mic. 4:13, which states that a repentant Judah will be the means by which this happens: "Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs brass; and you will beat in pieces many peoples: and I will devote their gain [s.w. "utterly destroy"] to Yahweh, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth". This never really happened in previous judgments upon the "all nations" around Jerusalem. Always something positive is envisaged as coming out of Divine judgment.

He has given them over for slaughter- God states His intentions, and in the gap between statement and fulfilment there is the opportunity for repentance in order to change the stated outcome (Jer. 18:8-10). The implication is therefore that this scenario need not happen if the nations repented. We too live in that gap.

Isaiah 34:3 Their slain will also be cast out, and the stench of their dead bodies

will come up; and the mountains will melt in their blood- This suggests a massive scale of destruction, unknown in previous judgments upon the "all nations" of the land promised to Abraham. The bodies would not be buried, and the smell of the bodies would be terrible. This is the scene presented in the prophecy of the destruction of Gog and his armies, the latter day Assyrian, in Ez. 39. It's not simply that both prophecies have the same event in view. The prophecy wasn't fulfilled as it might have been in the time of Isaiah, so it was been transferred, rescheduled and reapplied to the last day scene of Ez. 39.

Isaiah 34:4 All of the army of the sky will be dissolved, the sky will be rolled up like a scroll- Here we have a clear parallel between the armies and controlling powers of the earth, and the stars of the heavens. "Heavens" are indeed used in the Bible symbolically, referring to the leading or controlling powers in a situation. The armies of the sky refer to how the armies of soldiers on earth had their heavenly representation before the throne of God in the heavenly courtroom. The Angels there represented situations upon earth. "Dissolved" is s.w. "consume away"; on earth, this will amount to the scene in Zech. 14:12, where the same word is thrice used: "This will be the plague with which Yahweh will strike all the peoples who have warred against Jerusalem: their flesh will consume away while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will consume away in their sockets, and their tongue will consume away in their mouth". Rolling up like a scroll could speak of how the entire prophetic word is to come to its climactic fulfilment.

And all its armies will fade away, as a leaf fades from off a vine or a fig tree- The fading leaf has been used of the judgment of God's people for their lack of spiritual fruit (s.w. Is. 1:30; 24:4; 28:1,4; 40:7; 64:6; Jer. 8:13). That catena of passages impressively applies this to Israel and Judah. The idea is that the armies of the nations will be judged at the same time as the "sinners in Zion", as in Is. 33:14. Their judgment will be in that they partake in the judgments of the world which they loved, having failed to come out of Babylon they share in her judgments. And this will be true of the unfaithful within spiritual Israel (1 Cor. 11:32).

Isaiah 34:5 For My sword has drunk its fill in the sky. Behold, it will come down on Edom and on the people of My curse for judgement- I suggested on :1 that the judgments here are upon all the nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, but they are personified as Edom as the epitome of them all. Edom is Esau, and

God's especial wrath was against them because they were the brother of Jacob / Israel who couldn't and wouldn't forgive him, and who joined in with the nations in destroying Zion right down to the foundation (Ps. 137:7). They judged their brother far too harshly for his wrongdoing (see on Jer. 49:9). Jer. 49:11 is a clear invitation to Edom to repent, which they refused. Edom or Esau was singled out for such special condemnation because he was Jacob's brother (Obad. 10). This was not the case for the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines etc. Jacob and Esau were admittedly somewhat separated, and Jacob hadn't been the best brother to Esau. But they were still brothers, and God expected much better of Esau / Edom than He did of the others. And here we find a penetrating challenge. Our brethren whom we may view askance, from whom we may be separated by the way life has gone for us, are still our brothers. And we are judged very sensitively according to our attitudes toward them, especially in the time of their distress, however justified we may feel that distress to be.

Isaiah 34:6 Yahweh's sword is filled with blood, it is covered with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Edom- The allusion is how the blood, fat and kidneys were separated in the sacrifices to Yahweh. Lambs, goats and rams were all sacrificial animals. The implication could be that through their heavy judgment, they would become an acceptable sacrifice to Him, just as the idea of "utter destruction" also applies to being consecrated to Yahweh; see on :2.

Isaiah 34:7 The wild oxen will come down with them and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; and their land will be drunken with blood and their dust made greasy with fat- The huge amount of blood shedding (in :3 also) is not because God revels in it, but because as noted on :6, this is all the imagery of sacrifice. And the blood was to be poured out to Yahweh and the fat given to Him. Oxen and bulls were also sacrificial animals; in fact they along with the lambs, goats and rams of :6 comprise all the sacrificial animals. Hence GNB "The people will fall like wild oxen and young bulls". So as it were silhouetted over this scene of bloodshed is the impression of a huge sacrifice to God, and from this we may be justified in thinking that ultimately good comes out of the scene, and possibly the people of Esau / Edom do turn to Yahweh the God of their difficult brother Jacob.

Isaiah 34:8 For Yahweh has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion- The "cause" of Zion can be read as the judicial pleading, the pleading for legal justice made in a law case, and the Hebrew word is elsewhere translated like that. The repentant Zion will plead for justice and her prayers will be heard by God as a plea for legal action against her abusers; and so the day of recompense upon her enemies will come, but it is predicated upon her cry of repentance.

Isaiah 34:9 Her streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into sulphur, and her land will become burning pitch- The allusion is clearly to the destruction of Sodom with fire and sulphur; which was likewise threatened upon Judah and Jerusalem at multiple points in the prophetic condemnation of them. Esau is not therefore being singled out for some special punishment, as if God is taking Jacob's side; the wicked amongst Jacob / Israel are to be punished along with the impenitent amongst Esau. There may be a literal element to all this if oil reserves or the oil beneath the deserts ignites.

Isaiah 34:10 it won't be quenched night nor day, the smoke will go up forever; from generation to generation, it will lie waste. Nobody will pass through it forever and ever- God punished the land of Idumea with fire that would "not be quenched night nor day; its smoke shall ascend for ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste... the owl and the raven shall dwell in it... thorns shall come up in its palaces" (Is. 34:9-15). Seeing that animals and plants were to exist in the ruined land of Idumea, the language of eternal fire must refer to God's anger and His total destruction of the place, rather than being taken literally. I suggest that this was the potential judgment which could have come upon Edom, and did to some extent. In its latter day application we are left wondering how there could remain some parts of the earth which will be eternally desolate and empty (:11), covered in "nettles and thistles" (13) which means that the curse of Genesis is still to be seen there- and eternally possessed by wild animals (:16). This doesn't sound like the scene in the kingdom of God on earth, anywhere on the planet. For the mountain of God's Kingdom is to spread to fill the whole earth, and the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea. So I conclude that this was a scenario which didn't fully come upon Eden and will not be literally fulfilled in the last day either; just as the temple system of Ez. 40-48 was never literally built at the time as it could have been, and by its nature will not be totally realized in the last day either.

Isaiah 34:11 but the pelican and the porcupine will possess it, the owl and the raven will dwell in it. He will stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plumb line of emptiness- "Confusion" is s.w. "thing of nothing" (Is. 29:21). The measuring line would build nothingness, "emptiness". LXX "satyrs shall dwell in it". The animals in view are all unclean. The idea is that ritually unclean animals will be there; it is a picture of condemnation of the unclean to nothingness.

Isaiah 34:12 They shall call its nobles to the kingdom, but none shall be there; and all its princes shall be nothing- The idea may be that this kingdom, unlike Judah's kingdom, shall never be revived: "and there is no kingdom there which they may proclaim". "Nothing" continues the theme of :11; see note there. The emptiness of condemnation, the nothingness when life could otherwise be so "full", is a major theme. We in this life can waste our lives on things of nothing, and by doing so we are living out our condemnation.

Isaiah 34:13 Thorns will come up in its palaces, nettles and thistles in its fortresses; and it will be a habitation of jackals, a court for ostriches- "Jackals" is LXX "monsters", as "satyrs" in :11. These mythical beings were what they believed were the ultimate signs of condemnation. Their wrong concepts are used without correction, as is the language of demons in the New Testament, in order to speak to them in their own terms. But realizing this, we are not to look for literal fulfillments of these words.

But note Is. 35:7, which speaks of this 'eternal' desolation being revived: "The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. Grass with reeds and rushes will be in the habitation of jackals, where they used to lay". These "jackals" are those here envisaged living for 'ever', for generation after generation, in the judged cities of Edom. But it seems those areas will be revived. Areas so heavily condemned and judged will in due course be brought under God's glory. The water source in Is. 35:7 is the stream envisaged as flowing from Zion in Ezekiel and Revelation. This could have happened literally had Judah built the temple system as commanded in Ez. 40-48. Hence LXX "a fountain of water shall be poured into the thirsty land; there shall there be a joy of birds, ready habitations and marshes". See on :15.

Isaiah 34:14 The wild animals of the desert will meet with the wolves, and the wild goat will cry to his fellow. Yes, the night creature shall settle there and shall

find herself a place of rest- LXX "And devils shall meet with satyrs, and they shall cry one to the other: there shall satyrs rest, having found for themselves a place of rest"; GNB "The night monster will come there looking for a place to rest". These mythical beings were what they believed were the ultimate signs of condemnation. Their wrong concepts are used without correction, as is the language of demons in the New Testament, in order to speak to them in their own terms. But realizing this, we are not to look for literal fulfillments of these words.

Isaiah 34:15 The arrow snake will make her nest there, and lay, hatch, and gather under her shade. Yes, the kites will be gathered there, every one with her mate- I noted on :13 that the "jackals" also feature in Kingdom prophecies. And here too, the nesting of snakes is encountered in Is. 11:8, where the child shall safely play around the snake's nest. The overall impression, putting the scriptures together, is that the historical judgments and condemnation of Edom will be somehow incorporated into the scene of God's Kingdom. The terrible judgments upon Edom described earlier are to prepare her for a place in God's Kingdom. Never do we find God's judgments as only punitive; there is always the creative element in them, forging a better future.

Isaiah 34:16 Search in the book of Yahweh, and read: not one of these will be missing; none will lack her mate. For My mouth has commanded, and His Spirit has gathered them- GNB "Search in the LORD's book of living creatures and read what it says. Not one of these creatures will be missing, and not one will be without its mate. The LORD has commanded it to be so; he himself will bring them together". We note the role of God's Spirit in gathering together the animals, and the parallel between God's book / words, His mouth and His Spirit. What He has stated will come about, and it did happen to Edom for a period. But it is not simply a case of Him stating things and they happen; His Spirit is reflected in His purpose and in its fulfilment.

Isaiah 34:17 He has cast the lot for them, and His hand has divided it to them with a measuring line. They shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation they will dwell in it- I have suggested in the above verses that the places where the jackals lay and the snakes nest (:13,15) are to be revived and brought into God's Kingdom. So this "from generation to generation" doesn't

mean an infinite period of eternal condemnation. There is the continual hope of revival ultimately; perhaps in that Edom does finally respond to the invitation to repent which will be given her in the last days (Jer. 49: 11). See on Is. 35:1.

Isaiah Chapter 35

Isaiah 35:1 The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose- I noted that the preceding pictures of desolation concerning Edom have within them the hint that even the most heavily judged and condemned areas will be revived in God's Kingdom (see on Is. 34:13,15,17). In this case, this prophecy would flow on seamlessly from that.

Isaiah 35 is an evident prophecy of the future Kingdom of God on earth. But it is replete with connections with the prophecies of Judah's restoration from Babylon in Isaiah 40-55: Water in the wilderness = Is. 41:18,19; Is. 43:19,20; Is. 44:3; Is. 50:2; Is. 51:3; God's glory revealed (Is. 35:2) = Is. 40:5,9; Time of judgment and recompense (Is. 35:4) = Is. 40:10; Strength to the faint-hearted (Is. 35:3,4) = Is. 40:9, 29-31; A highway for the return to Zion (Is. 35:8) = Is. 40:3. The conclusion from this is surely that the way home from Babylon to Judah was to be seen as the entrance into the Kingdom age. Which is why I suggest that a Messianic Kingdom could've come at the restoration. Isaiah's predictions about the return from exile in Babylon (Is. 49:6), the freedom of the land from foreign dominance (Is. 53:8,11), the repopulation of Jerusalem (Is. 54:1), rebuilding the temple (Is. 53:5) etc. all came true at the return of the exiles; but those same prophecies speak of the resurrection of the dead (Is. 42:11; Is. 45:8; Is. 49:8), Messiah teaching the Law to Israel, all the world coming to accept Israel's God and coming to worship in the new temple etc. The prophecies of the restoration of the exiles from Babylon are inextricably connected with these things. And yet they didn't happen; and even those aspects which did, only came true to a very limited extent- solely because of Israel's indolence, and the fact the majority of the Jews remained in Babylon.

Isaiah 35:2 It will blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. Lebanon's glory will be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon; they will see Yahweh's glory, the excellence of our God- The blossoming here and in :1 is surely to be understood in the context of Is. 27:6. Israel will fill the face of the world with spiritual fruit – and this will be the fruit of the taking away of their sin, and their experience of repentance (Is. 27:6,9 RV). This is the 'budding' of the waste places of the land foreseen in these Kingdom prophecies. Is. 66:14 uses the word for the flourishing of the hearts of the repentant peoples. And here, the blossoming is related to their perception of the excellency of Israel's God, further implying that the blossoming is of Gentiles who have been converted by the witness of the repentant, forgiven remnant of Israel. There were no real

deserts and dry lands in Israel; it was to be a "good land", fertile and unlike Egypt; "good land, a land of brooks of water, of springs and underground water gushing into valleys and hills" (Dt. 8:7). The deserts and dry areas were in the areas inhabited by Israel's Gentile enemies. A remnant of these peoples was to repent, and then they and their territory would be incorporated into the Kingdom of God in Israel, covering the full extent of the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. Those territories will be materially transformed, those desert areas will be like Israel "proper", as fruitful as Carmel and Sharon. See on Is. 27:12.

Isaiah 35:3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees- see on Job 4:3-5. "Palsied knees" (LXX); "knees that tremble with weakness" (GNB). The wonder of the Kingdom situation is that the spiritually weak will be strengthened. But we can live the spirit of the Kingdom life now; for these words are quoted in Heb. 12:12,13 about life lived in Christ and His Spirit right now. "Feeble" is s.w. "stumbled" (Is. 59:10); it generally refers to spiritual stumbling, not least for those who stumble over the rock of Christ (s.w. Is. 8:15; 28:13). The strengthening of the week or even those who have been condemned for their sins but want to repent... is one of the most wonderful experiences to behold. We will see on :3 that the same category is there in view. The good news of the Kingdom is far from just the change of earth's physical environment; more essentially is it about the change of human hearts. And this was the good news of the Kingdom which the Lord taught in His parables, which are largely about this rather than what the future Kingdom will physically be like. The good news for those in the new covenant is that they will no longer "stumble", s.w. "feeble" (Jer. 31:9). "Weak hands" carries the idea of those who are "idle" (s.w. Ex. 5:17), and the phrase "weak hands" is also translated "slack hands" (Josh. 10:6; 2 Sam. 4:1). The idea is that the spiritually weak minded, directionless and uncommitted will be mentally transformed. This is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit working upon the human spirit; and that is exactly what the new covenant promised Judah, in Ez. 20, 36 and Jer. 31. This is what could have happened to Judah in captivity, but they refused the potential strengthening. And Hezekiah, the 'strengthener of Yah', didn't do this work of strengthening in Isaiah's time (s.w. Is. 51:18), even though he was the parade example of physical 'weakness' being 'strengthened' (s.w. Is. 39:1). The weak hands could have been strengthened at the restoration (s.w. Zech. 8:9,13), but again, the huge potential strengthening was not made use of.

Isaiah 35:4 Tell those who have a fearful heart, Be strong, don't be afraid-

"Fearful" is the word for "rash" and as noted on that word on Is. 32:4 these are those who were impatient with God's apparent lack of response (Is. 5:19 s.w.). One of the greatest joys of the Kingdom will be the power of God's Spirit to transform the hearts of those who appear totally unspiritual and short termist in their judgments. See on :3. They now do not need to fear condemnation; they have been transformed by the gift of the new heart and new eyes which is part of the new covenant.

We're familiar with the references to God hardening the heart of Pharaoh (Ex. 14:8 etc.). However, the same Hebrew words occur in a positive context- for God also hardens or strengthens the hearts of the righteous (Ps. 27:14; Is. 35:4). Indeed, Is. 35:4 speaks of how the righteous shouldn't have a fearful / weak or [Heb.] 'fluid' heart, but rather a hardened one. Clearly enough, God solidifies human attitudes, one way or the other. This is a sobering thought- for He is prepared to confirm a person in their weak thinking. But on the other hand, even the weakest basic intention towards righteousness is solidified by Him too.

Behold, your God will come with vengeance, God's retribution. He will come and save you- This is the final "day of vengeance" (Is. 59:17; 61:2; 63:4; Mic. 5:15), both on the "sinners in Zion" of Is. 33:14 (s.w. Lev. 26:25), and upon the abusers of Israel (Dt. 32:41,43). The final coming of God will be in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus, at the last day. "Retribution" is s.w. "benefit in 2 Chron. 32:25; in the immediate context, Hezekiah did not render back according to the benefit or retribution given in healing him, and so the possibility of the Kingdom then didn't transpire and is deferred to the last day.

Isaiah 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped- As noted on :3,4,6, we have here language relevant to the spiritual healing of God's people, although that will be physically articulated in the healing of the physically impaired. The blind and deaf in Isaiah are the spiritually blind and deaf whose eyes will be opened so that they may "hear the words of the book" (Is. 29:18; 42:16,18; 43:8).

The teaching of the Lord Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:4,5. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how

Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life.

Isaiah 35:6 Then the lame man will leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute will sing; for waters will break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert- As explained on :3-5, the deaf and lame are spiritually deaf, and they shall be spiritually cured; and that will be reflected in the healing of the physical environment. The waters and streams may be literal, but they essentially refer to the water of healing coming from Messiah, as mentioned in Rev. 22:2; Jn. 7:38. The lame men primarily in view are those of Is. 33:23 who went out to gather the prey of the Assyrians. But they refer also to the latter day lame of Jer. 31:8, who like Jacob bear the marks of their spiritual weakness and are repentant, throwing themselves upon Yahweh's grace. The Lord's healing of the lame who then jumped indicates that this Kingdom language started to have a foretaste in His work (Mt. 21:14; Acts 3:2-10). As noted on Is. 33:23, Judah were not then the lame repentant Jacob as they were intended to have been. And so these possible fulfillments are delayed until the last days.

The Babylonian Account of Creation claims (Tablet 4, line 137) that Marduk cleft Teammate, the ocean goddess, with his sword. The Biblical idea of Yahweh cleaving the waters clearly picks up this idea (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 74:15; 78:13,15; Ex. 14:16,21; Jud. 15:19; Is. 35:6; 48:21; 63:12; Neh. 9:11). But these passages largely refer to the miracle God did at the Red Sea, bringing about the creation of His people out of the cleft waters of the Sea. Again, pagan creation is reinterpreted with reference to a historical, actual event in the experience of God's people.

Isaiah 35:7 The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. Grass with reeds and rushes will be in the habitation of jackals, where they used to lay- These "jackals" are those envisaged living for 'ever', for generation after generation, in the judged cities of Edom. But it seems those areas will be revived. Areas so heavily condemned and judged will in due course be brought under God's glory. The water source is the stream envisaged as

flowing from Zion in Ezekiel and Revelation. This could have happened literally had Judah built the temple system as commanded in Ez. 40-48. Hence LXX "a fountain of water shall be poured into the thirsty land; there shall there be a joy of birds, ready habitations and marshes".

Isaiah 35:8 A highway will be there, a road, and it will be called The Holy Way. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it will be for those who walk in the Way. Wicked fools will not go there- I noted on :3-6 that what is primarily in view is the spiritual healing of people; this highway may be literal, but it is essentially spiritual. This prepared highway is a major theme of Isaiah, e.g. Is. 26:7 "The way of the just is uprightness; You who are upright make the path of the righteous level". This is the language of Is. 40. The way was open for the exiles to return as righteous, justified by faith, to a restored Zion; and if they made that journey, Zion's gates were open to them (see on Is. 26:2). That way was potentially prepared at the restoration, as LXX clarifies: "the dispersed shall walk on it, and they shall not go astray". But the exiles chose to remain in Babylon and Assyria, and those who did return did so without accepting the call to repentance which is part of the making straight of the path to Zion. But it was all potentially prepared. It is for us now to walk in that path likewise to Zion. In the future it seems there may be literal highways prepared leading to Zion for the repentant remnants of the nations (see on Is. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 62:10; Jer. 31:21).

Isaiah 35:9 no lion will be there, nor will any ravenous animal go up on it. They will not be found there; but the redeemed will walk there- LXX "the redeemed and gathered on the Lord's behalf, shall walk in it"; GNB "Those whom the LORD has rescued will travel home by that road". The return of the exiles is clearly in view. But despite such a highway with such protection being potentially available, they chose not to make the journey, and to act as if they had not in fact been "redeemed" from the lands of their exile. The lions and wild beasts clearly refer to the aggressive nations, who will be no more; and this will be reflected in the Kingdom by the animals also being at peace with each other and with man.

Isaiah 35:10 Yahweh's ransomed ones will return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away- There was great joy at the time of the

first Purim in Esther's time when sorrow was turned to joy (s.w. Esther 9:22), but the people did not return. The restoration was intended to be the time when sorrow was turned to joy (Jer. 31:13 s.w.). But as we can, they forgot the price aid for their ransom and remained in slavery. And those who did return didn't do so with the voice of joy, but with nervousness and then complaining about the famine, bad harvests and diseases they and their crops were smitten with on returning. The eternal joy spoken of here will come true only at the return of the Lord Jesus. Joy by its nature is temporal in this life, because of our emotional structure; we cannot maintain such experiences of joy in a permanent sense. But this is the wonderful nature of salvation. "Sorrow and sighing" is the same phrase used about David's feelings because of his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 31:10). As noted throughout Is. 35, the essential theme is of internal spiritual transformation, and no longer experiencing the effects of sin; for that is the greatest "joy".

Isaiah Chapter 36

Isaiah 36:1 Now it happened in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all of the fortified cities of Judah, and captured them- Hezekiah reigned 29 years (2 Kings 18:2), and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year or his reign- the very same time that Assyria invaded (Is. 38:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence.

Isaiah 36:2 The king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem to king Hezekiah with a large army; he came and stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool in the fuller's field highway- The washer or fuller uses the same word for 'washing' as used in the context of cleansing from sin (Ps. 51:2,7; Jer. 2:2; 4:14; Mal. 3:2). The suggestion was that they could repent and be cleansed of their sin. This location was significant, because it was there that Hezekiah's father Ahaz had been met by Isaiah and his son Shearjashub [a man of sign, 'a remnant shall return / repent'], with their demand for Jerusalem to surrender to God (Is. 7:3). So Hezekiah was intended to recall how Ahaz had been faced with Isaiah at that same spot; and the call was to repent, to be washed, to become the remnant which would triumph. Circumstances repeat in our lives and between our lives and those of others; in this case, the experience of Ahaz repeated in the life of his son Hezekiah. And we are intended to join the dots and learn the lesson.

Isaiah 36:3 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder came out to him- "Shebna" is an Egyptian name and may have been installed in office by Hezekiah as part of his deal with Egypt, upon whom he trusted rather than solely in Yahweh. He had the office of being "over the house" but by the time of the Assyrian invasion Shebna had been replaced in this office by Eliakim (Is. 22:15,20; 37:2). However, Shebna had not been completely 'hurled away' for his immorality of Is. 22:15-19 as required by Is. 22:17, because he is mentioned here as being the "scribe", a senior secretary, although Eliakim was "over the household". This seems typical of the partial response made to Isaiah's prophecies. But it seems Yahweh accepted that partial response and repentance of a remnant, and so the invaders were destroyed and the awful outcome threatened upon Jerusalem in this chapter was averted or at best deferred.

Isaiah 36:4 Rabshakeh said to them, Now tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this in which you trust?- LXX "Why are you secure". GNB "the emperor wanted to know what made King Hezekiah so confident". Clearly Hezekiah did have some faith; and real faith is always evident to others. Rabshakeh's words are a tacit admission that Hezekiah did indeed trust in Yahweh.

Isaiah 36:5 I say that your counsel and strength for the war are only vain words- GNB "Do you think that words can take the place of military skill and might?". This is the essence of our temptations today- to think that the ideas of God's word are merely abstract and philosophical, and have no cash value in reality. But God's word is active and powerful, once spoken, it is done. The "counsel" in view is primarily the prophecies of Isaiah (s.w. Is. 5:19; 28:29), and in the last day application, the "counsel and strength" of the Messiah of Israel (Is. 11:2 s.w.). But Rabshakeh may have been mocking the "counsel" of the false prophets (see :6), which had been to trust in Egypt rather than Yahweh (s.w. Is. 19:3,11; 29:15; 30:1; Jer. 19:7). The "counsel" or prophetic word of Yahweh, however, was what could save Israel; it was that which would bring them back from captivity and reestablish Yahweh's Kingdom in the land (s.w. Is. 44:26; 46:10). Although most in Judah still refused to trust in Yahweh's "strength for the war" (s.w. Is. 30:15), yet by grace and in respect to the faith of the remnant, He still saved them from Assyria at this time.

Now in whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me?- That Hezekiah was trusting in someone or something else apart from his own strength was so obvious; and there may have been a genuine element of curiosity in the question, as well as it being a rhetorical question. Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria was because of his trust in Yahweh; Zedekiah rebelled later against Babylon and yet Jerusalem fell (s.w. Jer. 52:3). Zedekiah attempted to copy the external behaviour of Hezekiah but without trust in Yahweh, and so it didn't work out. And so there abides a lesson for all of us who are tempted to imitate the external faith and action of others without having the same internal faith and trust.

Isaiah 36:6 Behold, you trust in the staff of this bruised reed, even in Egypt-

"Bruised reed" in Is. 36:6 is better "broken reed", and this is the very phrase used about how the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, would *not* break a "bruised / broken reed" (Is. 42:3). Egypt were a broken reed, recently broken in battle and now useless to save Israel. They were too weak to uphold the weight of Judah if they were to lean upon it for strength. God turns the figure around- He as it were is in need of man, He wishes to trust upon us; and although we are broken reeds, we will not be crushed nor will He be disappointed. He so wishes to work with us.

Which if a man leans on it, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him- "Lean" here is the same word for "steadfast" in Is. 26:3 "You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You". The LXX understands this to be a description of the "righteous nation" of Is. 26:2. They are saved from their traumas by the state of their mind. And Yahweh will respond to this through the work of His Spirit on the human spirit, to keep their mind in perfect peace. This is the peace which comes from knowing sin is forgiven. "Mind" here is literally 'imagination'. We must ask what are our fantasies, our hopes, according to which we live, think and feel day by day. If they are above all for the Kingdom, then we will be 'kept' in this. In Isaiah's immediate context this was in contrast to leaning upon Egypt for salvation (s.w. Is. 36:6 "lean"). The great salvation of the restored Kingdom could have come apart at that time, but it was precluded by a lack of real faith and focus on the Kingdom in the majority of Israel.

Judah did as it were trust in Egypt, and so were left with pierced hands. But that was exactly what the Lord Jesus experienced on the cross. Here we have one of many examples of where although He did not personally sin, He on the cross experienced the sufferings for sin which were due to God's people.

Isaiah 36:7 But if you tell me, 'We trust in Yahweh our God', isn't that He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar?'- Rabshakeh argues as if the high places and altars to the idols were actually used for Yahweh worship. And that was true. Judah justified their idol worship by claiming it was a form of Yahweh worship; and that is an abiding temptation for God's people of all ages. Rabshakeh mocked at the idea of a religion which had only one altar and high place; although that was indeed appropriate to the worship of the one true God who had given one specific way of approach to Him.

Isaiah 36:8 Now therefore, please make a pledge to my master the king of

Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them- Although many in Judah had fled into Jerusalem, the siege conditions and battle losses meant that there were not even 2000 fighting men within the city. But the Assyrians were destroyed by just one Angel, a member of the Angel cherubim, the heavenly horses and riders who stood for Israel. They were left with no human horses nor army, so that they might trust in Yahweh of Hosts of Angelic armies and the cherubim chariot. And this is why we too at times are stripped of all human strength.

"Make a pledge" is literally to be sweet or pleasing, and it appears to be sarcastic. But it is the word used by Hezekiah when he asks Yahweh to "undertake" or be sweet to him in the oppression of his sickness, which came at the same time as the siege of Jerusalem (Is. 38:14).See on Is. 36:1.

Isaiah 36:9 How then can you turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?- There are various translation options here. LXX "And how can ye then turn to the face of the satraps? They that trust on the Egyptians for horse and rider, are our servants"; GNB "You are no match for even the lowest ranking Assyrian official, and yet you expect the Egyptians to send you chariots and horsemen". 2 Chron. 32:21 uses the same phrase to describe the king of Assyria turning away his face in shame from Jerusalem after the Angelic destruction of his army; all was to be dramatically reversed overnight. Just as Joseph was elevated from prison rags to royal glory in a few hours, so God can work very quickly to save us from otherwise humanly impossible situations.

Isaiah 36:10 Have I come up now without Yahweh against this land to destroy it? Yahweh said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it'- Rabshakeh appears to have been an apostate Jew, speaking fluent Hebrew, fully aware of the situation within Judah (:7,8) and of the prophetic message that Yahweh would be behind their invaders; and quoting Isaiah's prophecies in :12,16. We can look to some possible equivalent in the events concerning the latter day Assyrian.

Isaiah 36:11 Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to Rabshakeh, Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and don't speak to us in the Jews' language in the hearing of the people who are on the wall- As suggested on :10, Rabshakeh knew Hebrew and was likely a renegade Jew. The fact the Jewish leadership knew the Assyrian language is a tacit reflection of the way

they had made it their business to communicate with them in the past, in seeking ways around the Assyrian threat other than through trust in Yahweh.

Isaiah 36:12 But Rabshakeh said, Has my master sent me only to your master and to you, to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat their own dung and drink their own urine with you?- As noted on :10, Rabshakeh was aware of the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah. He was fully aware that Isaiah had opened his prophecies by insisting that his message of judgment was against both the heavens and the earth, the leadership and the ordinary people; for they were alike guilty.

Isaiah 36:13 Then Rabshakeh stood, and called out with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria!- This very loud voice becomes the prototype for the great voice of Babylon (Jer. 51:55), akin to the great voice of Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian, which is to be answered by the far greater voice of Yahweh in the last days commanding the Angels to unleash judgment upon the latter day Assyrian confederacy (Joel 2:11; Rev. 16:1; 18:2). But in the immediate context, this "loud voice" is that of Is. 29:6 bringing destruction and judgment upon Jerusalem; they were condemned, but were saved by grace and God's respect of the prayers and repentance of a small minority. The loud voice of the "great king" of Assyria is being set up as a parody of that of Yahweh, who is the supreme "great king" (s.w. Ps. 47:2; 95:3; Mal. 1:14).

Isaiah 36:14 Thus says the king, 'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to deliver you- This was part of his narrative, that the gods of the nations were "not able to deliver" them from the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:15). He encouraged them to see the one true God as just another god, another source of secular strength as good as anything else. Yahweh the one true God is not, however, just another religious system. There is something awesomely and radically different. Rabshakeh's words recognize that Hezekiah alone was seeking to lead the people to totally trust in Yahweh. His influence was considered hugely significant. As we noted on Is. 1:1, the reforms of Hezekiah were largely ineffective in encouraging the general populace towards spirituality. In accordance with that, Rabshakeh perceived Hezekiah as effectively seeking alone to persuade the people to trust Yahweh.

Isaiah 36:15 Don't let Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh, saying, Yahweh will surely deliver us. This city won't be given into the hand of the king of Assyria'- Rabshakeh appears to know the very words of Hezekiah within Jerusalem, supporting the suggestion made on :10 that he was a renegade Jew. Hezekiah's faith that the city wouldn't fall was presumably based upon Isaiah's prophetic words; and yet Isaiah also speaks as if the city would fall, unless there was repentance in Judah. Perhaps Hezekiah really believed that the repentance of a minority would be counted by God as enough, and that their prayers would ensure the salvation of Zion. And this huge faith in Divine grace was rewarded.

Isaiah 36:16 Don't listen to Hezekiah- As noted on :14, it seems Hezekiah was singlehandedly seeking to persuade the people to totally trust in Yahweh.

For thus says the king of Assyria, 'Make your peace with me, and come out to me- LXX "If ye wish to be blessed, come out to me". Receiving peace or 'blessing' (LXX) was what comes from Yahweh; Judah were being offered covenant relationship with a false pretender to Yahweh. All this is the stuff of the latter day antiChrist; for an anti-Christ is strictly not someone against Christ but rather posing as the Christ, a fake, imitation Christ.

And each of you eat from his vine, and each one from his fig tree, and each one of you drink the waters of his own cistern- Rabshakeh promised the Jews an Assyrian Kingdom where everyone sat under their own vine and fig tree- consciously parodying Micah's contemporary prophecies of God's future Kingdom (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic. 4:4). The Assyrian Kingdom was set up as a parody of Solomon's, which was the Kingdom of God (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Chron. 9:8). A glance through the descriptions of the beasts- the Kingdoms of this world- reveals that they are all set up in terms of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. Rabshakeh was aware of Isaiah's prophecies as he quotes from them here; see on :10. And in essence the world today offers a fake, imitation Kingdom of God.

Isaiah 36:17 Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards- As noted on :16, Assyria was presented as an imitation kingdom of God. The 2 Kings record adds: "a land of oil olive and of honey". The language all alludes to God's descriptions of the promised land, which were familiar to Rabshakeh (see on :10). The allusions are to Num. 14:7; Dt. 8:7-9; 11:11,12.

Isaiah 36:18 Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Yahweh will deliver us. Have any of the gods of the nations delivered their lands from the hand of the king of Assyria?- "Persuade" is 'seduce', as if the Assyrians had the one true religion and Hezekiah was seducing Judah away from it. The Assyrian inscriptions describe and portray their wars as religious wars between their god Asshur and the gods of the nations they conquered. It was perhaps this very aspect to the Assyrian boasts which as it were provoked Yahweh to action. His unique victory against Asshur when all other gods and religious systems had failed was intended to help the Gentile nations see the utter supremacy of Yahweh- and to turn to Him.

Isaiah 36:19 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand?- Rabshakeh, knowing the prophecies of Isaiah (see on :10), may be alluding to the common prophetic theme that Judah were in fact no better than Israel, and would face the same judgment. And he knew that Samaria, the ten tribes, had trusted in the gods of the surrounding nations. Hamath and Arpad were in Syria, and so probably Sepharvaim was likewise. Is. 8 and Is. 10:9-11 had condemned Israel for their trust in Syria against Assyria, and clearly their covenant with Syria had involved taking on the worship of their gods.

Isaiah 36:20 Who are they among all the gods of these countries that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?- The point of course was made: Who or what indeed were any of those gods compared to Yahweh.

Isaiah 36:21 But they remained silent and said nothing in reply, for the king's commandment was, Don't answer him- The "they" appears to refer to 'the people on the wall' (2 Kings 18:36). Again we get the impression as on :14 that Hezekiah was in direct contact with the common people- despite being terminally ill at the time (see on Is. 36:1). It was unexpected that Rabshakeh should address the common people (:11,12), so perhaps the king urged them immediately to silence, whilst Rabshakeh was speaking.

Isaiah 36:22 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of Rabshakeh- This sign of

sorrow was to be turned into joy. But for now, there was sorrow. Their deep grief however suggests they didn't believe Hezekiah's assurances of Divine salvation; see on :3,11.

Isaiah Chapter 37

Isaiah 37:1 *It happened, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into Yahweh's house*- Instead of devising human schemes of salvation, he does as we should, turning to God's house, His presence, and His people. He could have prayed anywhere, but he felt that God's presence was there in particular. Judah's leadership had torn their clothes but not dressed in sackcloth (Is. 36:22). Sackcloth was a sign of repentance, as witnessed by the response of Nineveh. Nineveh had repented the generation before; and it seems Hezekiah is now seeking to imitate their repentance. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria; if their repentance had been permanent, they would not have invaded Judah. Hezekiah was seeking to imitate Nineveh but make it permanent, although after the crisis passed, it seems his repentance likewise didn't hold. God knew all this from the start, and yet still so respected the repentance of Hezekiah and Nineveh in their extremity that He still changed His threatened judgment of them. Hezekiah was aware that he had sinned by trying to buy off the Assyrians with the gold of the temple, representing faith sacrificed to human expedient; and Judah had definitely trusted in Egypt for help rather than God. His words of :3 are a recognition that the invasion was a Divine rebuke and rejection of him. But a man may be rejected by God in this life, having a foretaste of condemnation ahead of time; but still change the verdict. Hence Peter went out from the Lord's presence and wept and gnashed his teeth, the very language of the rejected; but changed the verdict. This is the intensity of our situation, as Paul in Romans emphasizes; we stand condemned, and yet in this life we can change the verdict, by God's grace.

Isaiah 37:2 *He sent Eliakim who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz*- See on Is. 36:3. Humanly speaking, sending your right hand men to a prophet was not the way out of the situation. But he realized as should we, that the only ultimate recourse is to God's word. The covering of the leadership with sackcloth as noted on :1 was a sign of repentance, again imitating how the leadership of Nineveh repented in sackcloth and achieved a change of the Divinely promised judgment.

Isaiah 37:3 *They said to him, Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of rejection*- As noted on :1, Hezekiah understood he had sinned, hence his sackcloth and desperate repentance. Isaiah has repeatedly condemned Judah for trusting in Egypt for help from the Assyrians (Is. 20:5, 6;

30:1-4; 36:6,9). Those passages all say that if Judah did this, they would be rejected by God, as they were rejecting His help. And Hezekiah realizes that now those prophecies were going to come true. But the depth of his repentance meant that they didn't; just as the destruction of Nineveh in 40 days didn't happen, all because of human repentance. See on :1,4; Is. 22:5, which prophecy Hezekiah appears to allude to here.

For the children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth- The birth of a remnant is spoken of in Isaiah in spiritual terms; "the children" here are "the remnant" of :4. The sense may be that Hezekiah sensed there had been some spiritual reformation, which he himself had done so much to bring about through his banishing of idolatry in Judah, but the final strength for the birth was lacking; they had indeed trusted in Egypt and in gold rather than in God, despite all the purging of idolatry. This was the tragedy which Hezekiah felt, as we do; that there was some genuine spirituality, but not enough. That may be the idea in Hos. 13:13 where the imagery is used again.

Is. 66:9 can be read as an implicit criticism of the words of Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion, who lamented that the children had come to be born but there was no strength to bring them forth: "Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? says Yahweh: shall I who cause to bring forth shut the womb? says your God". God is saying that He will certainly bring forth the new nation of Zion out of their trauma at the hands of their invaders. He is not powerless, and therefore Hezekiah was wrong to imply this. Why the children were not brought forth at Hezekiah's time was because of the lack of spirituality in the daughter of Zion, rather than because of God's limited ability.

Isaiah 37:4 *It may be Yahweh your God*- This continues the connection with Nineveh's repentance (see on :1,3); in this case, to Jon. 3:9 "Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?". However "your God" is a recognition by Hezekiah that Isaiah stood closer to God than he did.

Will hear the words of Rabshakeh- "Hear" is used at times to mean 'hear and respond to', as God in that sense 'hears' all things and there is no need to ask Him to hear anything.

Whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to defy the living God- This is not just Hezekiah trying to get God to see the situation from the viewpoint of His

own glory; rather was there a real and actual spiritual dimension to the invasion. The idea of 'defying' Israel's God is stressed so much (Is. 37:4,17,23,24); although Isaiah concludes by using this word about what Judah had effectively done to their own God (Is. 65:7). Sennacherib really did despise Yahweh and wanted to impose his gods upon Judah, and this will be the dominant feature of the latter day Assyrian invasion of the land. Radical Islam would appear the obvious latter day equivalent.

And will rebuke the words which Yahweh your God has heard- "Rebuke" here is a legal word, used of legal reasoning against an accuser in court (as in Is. 1:18; 11:3,4; 29:21; Mic. 6:2). Hezekiah had a strong sense of the court of Heaven; and so the answer is expressed in terms of an Angel 'coming out' from that court room and articulating the agreed judgment (:36). This is a huge comfort; that all situations on earth are reflected in Heaven, and judged there.

Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left'- The remnant would refer not only to the fact that Jerusalem alone remained, but to the righteous remnant within the city who were now repentant. The desire to get others to pray for issues is found throughout the Bible. But we should not draw the implication that God is as it were hard of hearing and only responds if enough of us offer enough prayers. But on the other hand, the combined prayerful requests of many of God's children are not unnoticed by God.

Isaiah 37:5 *So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah*- The servants of king Hezekiah are contrasted with those of the king of Assyria (:6). The situation is set up as a conflict between two kings, and in the last days the scenario will be the same- King Jesus in Jerusalem facing off against the latter day Antichrist, "the king of the north", the *rosh* of Ez. 38, the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2, the little horn speaking great things of Dan. 7.

Isaiah 37:6 *Isaiah said to them, Tell your master, 'Thus says Yahweh, Don't be afraid of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me*- We too can fear words, forgetting that the only ultimate reality in all things is God. "Servants" here translates a word which is almost colloquial, the idea being "lackeys". Just as the risen Lord referred to the disciples as "guys, fellas" (see on Jn. 21:5), so His Father is able to relate to people on their language level too.

Isaiah 37:7 *Behold, I will put a spirit in him*- Sennacherib retreated because God "put a spirit in him". The AV has: "I will send a blast / spirit upon him". Was it not that the Angel who later destroyed his army came upon him and put a spirit / disposition of mind within him that made him want to retreat? We see how God can directly affect the human spirit / mind. He can give a holy spirit, or an evil spirit. The Old Testament sets us up to understand that God can work directly on the human spirit, and then the New Testament says that He can give us a holy spirit, working again directly on the human mind and perception.

And he will hear news, and will return to his own land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land'- The "news" could have been of the destruction of Rabshakeh's army; or of the approach of Tirhakah, or some other threat to his empire. The situation points ahead to how the latter day "king of the north" will likewise hear "news" (s.w. Dan. 11:44 "tidings"). The Lord 'caused' Sennacherib to fall by the sword in that He put a spirit of jealousy in his sons, resulting in the murder of :38.

Isaiah 37:8 *So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish*- Sennacherib was aiming for Egypt and was attacking the fortresses on the route there; and Libnah was just south of Lachish, which he had destroyed. This is the scene we have in Dan. 11, where the "king of the north" attacks "the king of the south", Egypt, ransacking Palestine along the way, but then had to return to his own land after hearing the "tidings" of Dan. 11:44. The historical invasions of Israel and Judah therefore follow a pattern; and this will be repeated in the final latter day invasion which all the previous invasions point forward to. The image of Dan. 2 stands complete in the last days, and all the beasts of Dan. 7 are incorporated into the mega beast of the last days. This is to say that the final destructive entity oppressing Israel in the last days will combine features of all her historical oppressors, including the Assyrians. We note too the difference between Rabshakeh and Sennacherib, and wonder how far this points forward to the "false prophet" of Revelation who appears to be an agent of the beast.

Isaiah 37:9 *He heard news concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He has come out to fight against you. When he heard it he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying*- Tirhakah was the dominant king in Egypt at the time. We wonder if the much criticized efforts of Judah to get "Egypt" to help them were actually directed towards Tirhakah. But we wonder why therefore God still used this person to play a part in His plan to destroy Sennacherib. Or it could be that

Tirhakah was the one who had destroyed the Egyptians upon whom Judah had hoped [rather than upon their God], and so it was appropriate that he and not Egypt played a part in the Divine plan to destroy "the king of the north".

Isaiah 37:10 *Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, 'Don't let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, Jerusalem won't be given into the hand of the king of Assyria*- The king recognizes that Hezekiah does indeed trust in God, and that Yahweh was indeed his God. This may have comforted him, as we noted on :4 that Hezekiah speaks of God as Isaiah's God rather than his God.

Isaiah 37:11 *Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly. Shall you be delivered?*- This is the classic challenge to faith; no other god achieved anything, therefore, the one true God can't either. But the point is that the gods of this world didn't achieve anything precisely because they are not God. The 'utter destruction' of conquered lands by Assyria is historically well attested. But the word has the sense of 'sanctified' in a religious sense; like the latter day "king of the north", the invader thought that they were serving their God by destroying people, and the barbarity of the destruction was a sign of how far they had devoted people and lands to their God. Jihadist Islam exactly fits this scenario.

Isaiah 37:12 *Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the children of Eden who were in Telassar?*- These were the very cities to which the Assyrians had deported the ten tribe Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:6; 18:11). The implication is that Judah would be taken there likewise.

Isaiah 37:13 *Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivvah?'*- The kings of these cities are paralleled with their gods (:12). The parallel Is. 36:19 asks "Where are *the gods*" of these same cities. Truly we become like that which we worship; football fans become like their idols, in spirit. And if we worship the one true God of Israel, Yahweh, then we will become like Him.

Isaiah 37:14 *Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and*

read it. Then Hezekiah went up to Yahweh's house, and spread it before Yahweh- "Spread" translates the same Hebrew word used about spreading abroad the hands in prayer (Ex. 9:29,33 etc.). It was as if the letter was the prayer. Our situation is read by God as our prayer. There are times especially in serious illness when we are too weak or mentally unclear to be able to verbalize prayer; or where the situation is so complex that we do not know what to pray for in terms of our desired outcome. And some are simply better at verbalizing than others. But the essence is our faith that God sees the situation and will respond. It was in this sense that Hezekiah spread the letter before Yahweh, as we might place an unpleasant hospital diagnosis on the kitchen table and attempt to pray, but what we are doing is bringing the situation before God and asking for His wise and powerful response.

Isaiah 37:15 *Hezekiah prayed to Yahweh, saying*- As noted on :14, the situation itself was the prayer; but Hezekiah, like us, does his best to articulate things in words.

Isaiah 37:16 *Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, who is enthroned among the cherubim*- Hezekiah has just "spread" the letter before Yahweh (:14), using the same word for how the cherubim 'stretched forth their wings' (Ex. 25:20; 1 Kings 8:7 etc.). He knows that God is in Heaven with the cherubim as it were around Him, and also in the Most Holy place of the temple where Hezekiah was. And he imagined that letter as being with God, spread out as the cherubic wings were spread out. Those wings were spread out over the mercy seat, the cover over the ark, which was sprinkled with the blood of atonement each year. This is a profound insight into prayer. Our situations are not unnoticed. They are placed as it were upon the blood of the Lord Jesus, in the very presence of God, with the cherubim overshadowing them, peering down into them. And we can understand the cherubim in this context as representing God's Angelic might. And appropriately enough, an Angel was sent to bring about the great deliverance sought. There over our kitchen table with the troubling letter placed upon it, as with Hezekiah, there are the cherubim and the presence of Almighty God Himself.

You are the God, even You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made heaven and earth- Reflection upon God's power in creation should inspire our faith too; the God who could do that has made all men and their kingdoms, and is unlimited in what He can do for us. To let 'science' diminish our faith in

God as creator is to remove such inspiration from us. Hezekiah states that God alone is the God of all kings or kingdoms of the earth; and yet we have just learnt that those kings were identified with their idols and were no more. Perhaps Hezekiah was using the present tense as God does, speaking of the reality of the final Messianic Kingdom as being so sure of ultimately coming about.

Isaiah 37:17 *Turn Your ear Yahweh and hear; open Your eyes Yahweh and behold; hear all of the words of Sennacherib, who has sent to defy the living God-* This is not to say that God is deaf and blind usually. Seeing and hearing are being used with the sense 'See, hear and respond'. God sees and hears but doesn't respond immediately, usually; He waits until judgment day. Hezekiah is asking for an immediate response in the here and now, for the essence of judgment day to come now, just as we noted on :16 that he was in expectation of the Messianic Kingdom being established.

Isaiah 37:18 *Truly Yahweh, the kings of Assyria have destroyed all the countries and their land-* "Destroyed" is again the word for sanctifying and devoting in a religious sense. The king of Assyria, like his latter day equivalent, was deeply religious, and saw the cruel destruction of other lands and peoples as part of his service to God, and a sign that his god was triumphant over their gods and belief systems. This exactly fits the spirit of jihadist Islam, which I suggest is the latter day equivalent.

Isaiah 37:19 *And have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them-* Here we have an example of the Bible using language from the viewpoint of men on earth. They thought their gods were indeed "gods", but they were "no gods". Likewise the language of demons is used in the New Testament, but this doesn't mean demons exist or have power in reality.

Passages like Is. 37:19 almost define God by reason of His being uncreate. Whatever is created, is not God. And it follows that if we think that we have truly created anything, or that we are anything that God didn't create, then we are in fact playing God. Understanding God as creator, in its true, deep and thought-through sense, leads to an understanding of grace. That all we have, are, were, shall ever be, is purely His gift. Likewise, to take for ourselves what is God's is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God

Isaiah 37:20 *Now therefore, Yahweh our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are Yahweh, even You only-* The day when all earth's kingdoms shall know Yahweh is the Kingdom age, as Isaiah points out elsewhere with the same Hebrew phrase (Is. 12:5; 49:26; 61:9). Hezekiah envisaged salvation from the "king of the north" as leading directly to the establishment of the Kingdom; and that is the scenario in Dan. 11:40-12:3. Perhaps it was potentially possible; but Judah's general lack of repentance and Hezekiah's apostacy meant it was deferred in fulfilment. The desire for salvation was therefore not simply for the sake of personal safety, but for the wider glory of God in the earth.

There will come a day when all the world realizes that God is one (Is. 37:20 Heb.)- in that they will realize that He alone is God and all else is pure vanity. Because God alone is holy, only He will be worshipped then (Rev. 15:4). "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:11,17).

Isaiah 37:21 *Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria-* Answers to prayer don't often come through bolts of revelation; in this case it was through another believer, Isaiah. And we note the power of one man's prayer- because of this prayer, God's word of :22 was uttered. See in Mk. 2:5.

Isaiah 37:22 *This is the word which Yahweh has spoken concerning him. The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and ridiculed you. The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you-* The remnant within the closed city of Jerusalem, likened to a protected virgin who had not been 'opened', had hardly despised and ridiculed the Assyrians. They were terrified of them. But their faith was counted to them for more than it was; according to Ps. 2, it was God within Zion who despised and ridiculed the armies outside the walls. But His characteristics were counted to them. This is exactly the reasoning of Paul in Romans about imputed righteousness.

Isaiah 37:23 *Whom have you defied and blasphemed? Against whom have you exalted your voice and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of*

Israel- Sennacherib was fully aware that he had done all these things against Yahweh; the motivation for his rage against Jerusalem was his particular hatred of Yahweh. And so it shall be in the latter day invasion, which will also be strongly motivated by religion. This verse is simply restating the truth about Sennacherib. It is addressed to him, so presumably Isaiah's duty was to get the message to him. We wonder why God would, as it were, bother. But there are many points of contact with Pharaoh. God even tried to bring him to repentance, and perhaps this address to Sennacherib was to likewise give even him a chance. This is great encouragement to us, to never consider anyone not even worth trying with.

Isaiah 37:24 *By your servants have you defied the Lord and have said, With the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the innermost parts of Lebanon*- The intensive plurals here refer to the great mountain, of Zion. Sennacherib spoke in the present tense because he was certain he would achieve it. His intention was to desecrate the innermost parts of the cedar-of-Lebanon decorated temple.

I will cut down its tall cedars and its choice fir trees. I will enter into its farthest height, the forest of its fruitful field- This could continue the allusion to the cedar-of-Lebanon covered temple. Or the whole verse may be simply as GNB: "You sent your servants to boast to me that with all your chariots you had conquered the highest mountains of Lebanon. You boasted that there you cut down the tallest cedars and the finest cypress trees, and that you reached the deepest parts of the forests". However, an obsession with destroying the temple would fit the theme of Sennacherib's rage against Yahweh and particular desire to destroy the temple and gain the temple mount. This would match the similar motivations of the latter day Assyrian.

Isaiah 37:25 *I have dug and drunk water, and with the sole of my feet I will dry up all the rivers of Egypt*- Rabshakeh tried to cut off water from Jerusalem (hence Hezekiah's tunnel of 2 Kings 20:20). Sennacherib considered victory against Egypt as just as certain; although he was clearly fazed by Tirhakah's approach.

Isaiah 37:26 *Have you not heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it in ancient times? Now I have brought it to pass, that it should be yours to destroy fortified cities, turning them into ruinous heaps*- This is the Divine response.

Understanding predestination helps us see the frailty of all human strength and device; and Paul introduces it into his argument in Romans to likewise demonstrate that salvation is of grace and not by works. "Destroy" is literally to rush upon, and the word is used of how the rushing of the nations against God's people would be turned back (see on Is. 17:13).

Isaiah 37:27 *Therefore their inhabitants had little power; they were dismayed and confounded, they were like the grass of the field and like the green herb, like the grass on the housetops, and like a field before its crop has grown*- Similar language is used in Is. 40:6 of how "all flesh" is like this. The reference is to the "all flesh" of the nations around Israel whom the Assyrians had conquered, who trusted in their own human strength.

Isaiah 37:28 *But I know your sitting down, your going out, your coming in, and your raging against Me*- This reflects David's awareness that God knows our every physical movement, standing or sitting. God knew Sennacherib's going out from his homeland and how he would return there. Sennacherib's rage was against Yahweh; he intended to utterly subvert the true faith; see on :29.

Isaiah 37:29 *Because of your raging against Me*- There was a specifically religious, spiritual aspect to the invasion; the idea was that the claims of this Yahweh were to be shown false. The motivation of the latter day Assyrian will be the same. Dan. 11:40 [see note there] envisages the "king of the north" likewise raging against the God of the fortress of Zion.

And because your arrogance has come up into My ears, therefore will I put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came- This is the language of the latter day invasion by Gog (Ez. 38:4), which has this Assyrian invasion as its prototype. The Gog confederacy, of 10 nations headed by a *rosh*, a charismatic leader, will likewise be unsuccessful.

Isaiah 37:30 *This shall be the sign to you. You will eat this year that which grows of itself, and in the second year that which springs from the same; and in the third year sow and reap and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit*- They were besieged in Jerusalem. This sign was a medium term sign, not the short term indication of salvation they perhaps wanted. The sign was that there was the

potential for the house of Judah to bear fruit "upward", to God (:31); the fruit of repentance. But there are hints later in Isaiah that this sign was not believed; they did not respect the Jubilee year, they did sow instead of trusting that the land around Jerusalem would miraculously bring forth its own fruit. And this reflects how they did not bring forth the fruit of the Spirit "upward" to God but rather of their own strength (:31). See on :32. The language here seems to suggest that the events of the Assyrian invasion and deliverance happened around a year of Jubilee, which later in Isaiah is alluded to as a type of the time of the Lord's return and the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come then; but Is. 58 and other hints in later Isaiah are that the Jubilee year was not respected, they did plant instead of trusting in the Lord's provision, and so the Kingdom was precluded from coming then. The idea of planting vineyards and eating their fruit is used in Is. 65 of the Messianic Kingdom; it is kingdom language.

The verse has been translated: 'Ye did eat (the first year) such as groweth of itself, and in the second year that which springeth of the same, but in this third year sow ye'. This would mean that they were now in the third year of the Assyrian invasion. Perhaps there was a three and a half year domination of Judah by the Assyrians, just as there shall be in the last days.

Isaiah 37:31 *The remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah will again take root downward, and bear fruit upward*- See on :30,32. Apart from Jerusalem, Judah had been overrun by the Assyrians, so this remnant who escaped could refer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; or it could be that "the remnant" refers to the spiritually faithful minority.

Is. 4:2 had spoken of how this "remnant" (s.w.) would be the basis of a revived kingdom of God in Judah, based around a Messianic "Branch", "in that day"- the day of Is. 4:1, when Jerusalem would be overcome and left in ruins with hardly any men left. These "survivors" are those saved from the ruins of a desolated Jerusalem, those who "escaped" the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 10:20); the same word is used in Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17, the "remnant" of Ez. 14:22 (s.w.). The destruction of Jerusalem was intended to elicit repentance and to lead seamlessly into a revived Zion and reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel, when again all things would be "glorious" (s.w. Is. 24:23; 35:2). But this didn't happen. Jerusalem was saved by grace, and yet Hezekiah failed to act as "Yahweh's branch", and Judah were impenitent, unmoved by their salvation by grace.

Isaiah 37:32 *For out of Jerusalem a remnant will go forth, and survivors will*

escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will perform this'- This is the language of Obadiah about the final establishment of Messiah's Kingdom. As noted on :30, this could have happened then, if Judah had kept the year of Jubilee as intended and brought forth spiritual fruit "upward" to God.

Isaiah 37:33 *Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither will he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it*- This is in contrast to Sennacherib's first approach to Jerusalem, when according to his own inscriptions he did cast up a mound: 'Because Hezekiah, king of Judah, would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms, and by the might of my power, I took 46 of his fenced cities, and of smaller towns scattered about I took a countless number. And I carried off as spoil 200,150 people. And Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city to hem him in. Then upon this Hezekiah there fell the fear of the power of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs of Jerusalem, with 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver'. The fact not an arrow would be fired must be compared with how Is. 22:6 had predicted the presence of the archers of Elam around Jerusalem at the invasion, who would overthrow her. It was deferred until this same nation came with the Babylonians against Jerusalem at a later date (Jer. 49:35). Likewise Is. 22:7 foresaw the Assyrians 'coming before' the city; but this too was averted by the repentance and intercession of a minority. It is all a great lesson in the power of the repentance and intercession of a minority.

Isaiah 37:34 *By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come to this city', says Yahweh*- This unsuccessful invasion is like that of Ez. 38 and Ps. 2; the nations surround Jerusalem but fail to capture it because of the Lord's presence there. Jerusalem will indeed fall in the last days and be desecrated, but the Lord will return and save Israel, establish Himself in Zion- and then there will be this unsuccessful invasion which He crushes.

Isaiah 37:35 *'For I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake'*- The implication could be 'not for the sake of your righteousness, but by grace alone; for My sake, and because I respect the covenant of grace I gave David'.

Isaiah 37:36 *The angel of Yahweh went out*- He went out from the throne room

of heaven, where the case had been as it were considered; see on :4. Isaiah 37 is shot through with allusions to the Angel cherubim destroying the Assyrian host. The Angel went out- perhaps referring to Him physically going forth out of the temple where He dwelt to slay the Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem. This phrase 'went out' is nearly always used about literal physical movement, which we have seen is what Angels literally do. Thus in the Ezekiel visions of the cherubim, they and the lightnings "went forth", physically and literally, in performing God's work. "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence (Angelic language); let Thine eyes (Angels) behold the things that are equal", seeing they are involved with the 'coming forth', according to the parallelism of this verse. Similarly Job's satan Angel "went forth" from the presence of the Lord (Job 1:12). And so it happened that there were Angels on earth, as it were. Zech. 2:3 also has an Angel going forth to answer the prayers concerning restoring the fortunes of Jerusalem (see Zech. 5:5 too). Ps. 81:5 describes the Angel going out through the land of Egypt in order to "remove (Israel's) shoulder from the burden". Ps. 81 is 'Angelic', following Ps. 80, which is another such Psalm. Heb. 1:14 also offers support: the Angels are "sent forth" to minister to us- by answering prayers offered in the spirit of Hezekiah's prayer here?

And struck one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the camp of the Assyrians. When men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies- The bodies were spoiled by the Jerusalem Jews (Is. 33:4). The agent of destruction appears to have been fire and hail (Is. 29:6; 30:30), both of which may be used in the last days too.

Isaiah 37:37 *So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, went away, returned to Nineveh, and stayed there*- This was due to the "tidings" he received (:7), presumably of the destruction of his army outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 37:38 *It happened that as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons struck him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Esar Haddon his son reigned in his place*- As noted on :7, this was caused by God putting a spirit / attitude of mind in these sons to do this. His Spirit, as today, confirmed the human spirit.

Isaiah Chapter 38

Isaiah 38:1 In those days was Hezekiah sick and near death. Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, came to him, and said to him- Hezekiah reigned 29 years (2 Kings 18:2), and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year or his reign- the very same time that Assyria invaded (Is. 36:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence. The full title of Isaiah is given perhaps because the theme is that Hezekiah was to live because of the prophetic word.

Thus says Yahweh, 'Set your house in order, for you will die, and not live'- we should not assume too quickly that Hezekiah had no family at this stage; for he is commanded here to put in order his household ("house" is so often 'family' rather than the bricks of a house). Indeed the very same phrase is used of how Abraham would "command his household" to keep God's laws (Gen. 18:19). Perhaps that was the idea. He was to urgently teach his household more of God's ways as he was to soon die.

Isaiah 38:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh- The divans, which were also beds, were arranged next to the walls. We are left with the impression of a man utterly alone with God, turning his face away from Isaiah when he had delivered the message, facing the wall- and praying to Yahweh.

Isaiah 38:3 And said, Remember now, Yahweh, I beg You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Your sight- Hezekiah claimed to have lived with a good conscience but was at the same time aware of his sins (Is. 38:3 cp. 17); and his cutting off the gold of the temple to try to buy peace was surely a failure. Yet the conscience can be cleansed of sin, through the depth of the power of God's forgiveness. This is not the same as forgetfulness, self-righteousness or minimization of personal failings. Paul must surely have had twinges of guilt over his behaviour at times (not least over the bust up with Brethren Barnabas and Mark, Acts 15:39 cp. 2 Tim. 4:11); and yet he insists that he always had a good conscience. Paul likewise claims that the Jewish forefathers served God with a pure conscience (2 Tim. 1:3 NIV). Yet the Jewish fathers, dear Jacob particularly, must have had plenty of twinges of guilt over their years.

Walking in truth is the term used to characterize the seed of David (1 Kings 2:4; 3:6), as David personally walked in truth (Ps. 26:3; 86:11), and may not of itself mean that Hezekiah is saying he has not sinned; it's as if Hezekiah assumed that because he was the seed of David, he therefore ought not to die. As will be explained on :5, the adding of days to his life was a way of saying that he was being accepted as the seed of David; and yet he failed to use those years to save his people. It could be argued that by refusing to die when asked to, Hezekiah was disallowing his being the fulfilment of the Messianic suffering servant who was to die for his people.

Hezekiah wept bitterly- Perhaps in prayer, asking God to change the outcome. For as with Nineveh, in the gap between Divine statement and its fulfilment, we can repent and change the word which otherwise would have come true (Jer. 18:8-10).

Isaiah 38:4 Then the word of Yahweh came to Isaiah, saying- It seems from 2 Kings 20:4 that once he reached the middle court of the palace, he was told by God to "turn again" and give Hezekiah assurance of healing. The whole incident shows the speed with which God responds to prayers, and His sensitivity to human prayer and repentance.

Isaiah 38:5 Go, and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says Yahweh the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life- Kings adds more detail, denoted here in italics: "*Behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord.* And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the King of Assyria; and I will defend this city *for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake*" (2 Kings 20:5,6 AV). The defence of Zion at this time was predicated upon God's grace; judgment was intended to come unless they repented, and most of them hadn't. And so God stresses He will save Zion by grace, for His own sake and not that of His peoples' prayer or repentance. The cure was not instant, it took three days; for the same reason as there will be the process of judgment between our resurrection and entrance to the Kingdom. The period between God's pronouncement of blessing and the realization of it is for our benefit, that we might grow in appreciation. The healing enabled Hezekiah to enter the temple; from God's perspective, the most significant aspect of his illness was that its uncleanness precluded him from entering the temple. We notice the parallel between Hezekiah's prayer and his

tears; God reads situations as prayers. Prayer is understood by Him far wider than simply words as lexical items. Otherwise those more able to verbalize would pray 'better'; and acceptable prayer is not related to our ability to verbalize.

The years 'added' to the king's life are expressed in the words of Ps. 61:6, where David felt that God would "prolong [s.w. "add to"] the king's life [s. w. "days"]. The clear allusion to David's words was perhaps to show that God considered Hezekiah to be the Davidic king who could have been the Messianic Son of David. But Hezekiah despised that and wasted those years in self-satisfaction. There is also a theme in Solomon's teaching that his son would have 'days added' (the same Hebrew phrase) to his life, because of his obedience to wisdom (Prov. 3:2; 9:11; 10:27). Again, the idea is that the adding of days to Hezekiah's life was confirming him as the seed of David.

Isaiah 38:6 I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city- Yahweh had earlier stated that He would not "deliver" (s.w.) Jerusalem from the Assyrian lion (Is. 5:29). But as in Hosea, God speaks in wrath but then His grace is such that He doesn't carry out what He threatens. He has emotion and speaks and acts in that fire of passion. That was normal in the Middle East; it is the western obsession with nicespeak and measured responses which make outburst behaviour and language appear inappropriate. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and he spoke of the 'deliverance' (s.w.) of the city from the Assyrians as being due to the appearance of a Messianic figure (Mic. 5:6). Here in Is 38:6, the deliverance of Hezekiah personally from inevitable death is tied up with the deliverance of Jerusalem from inevitable judgment. He surely could have been one of the possible fulfillments of the Messianic figure, which makes his failure to rise up to it all the more tragic.

Isaiah 38:7 This shall be the sign to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do this thing that He has spoken- It seems that unlike his father Ahaz, Hezekiah had asked for this sign (:22). It is apparent that the experiences of believers are often suggestive of those of other believers. Insofar as we appreciate this, we will find strength to go the right way. Consider how Hezekiah was intended to see the similarities between himself and the earlier king Ahaz his father, and learn the lessons. They were both threatened by invasion and tempted to turn to human help (Is. 7:2; 37:1); Visited by Isaiah and told to not fear (Is. 7:4-9; 37:6,7). Ahaz was unfaithful by “the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller’s

field” (Is. 7:3); and in just the same place Hezekiah’s faith was tested and he learnt the lessons of Ahaz’ failure (Is. 36:2). Both were given a sign by God and promised deliverance (Is. 7:14; 37:30). Ahaz refused to ask for a sign when offered one (Is. 7:11); whereas Hezekiah learnt, and asked for a sign (Is. 38:7,22). Thus his asking for a sign was not a sign of faithlessness but rather his seeking to not be like Ahaz. “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it” was spoken to both Ahaz (Is. 9:6) and Hezekiah (Is. 37:32).

Isaiah 38:8 Behold, I will cause the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down on the sundial of Ahaz with the sun, to return backward ten steps. ’ So the sun returned ten steps on the sundial on which it had gone down- "The stairway built by King Ahaz", Hezekiah's father, was part of his idolatrous sun worship which Hezekiah ought to have destroyed. It was a kind of small ziggurat. It was the Babylonians who had begun telling the time in this way; there is no mention of "hours" of the day in the Hebrew Bible until the time of Daniel. Here we have another hint at the incomplete spirituality and reformation of Hezekiah. The "songs of degrees" were written or rewritten to apply to this experience of the sun returning ten degrees or steps. There are 15 of them, matching the 15 extra years of life given to Hezekiah.

"Gone down" is the word used by Hezekiah in speaking of how he feels he had "gone down" into the grave (:18). It is as if Hezekiah has died, the sun gone down those degrees, and then resurrected, brought up the same amount. He could have been a Messianic figure in a reestablished kingdom of God in Judah. The "return backward" of the sun is a phrase often used of the return of the exiles from Babylon to be part of that reestablished Kingdom. Hezekiah's revival / resurrection was to be seen as that of his people. How the miracle happened is not the essential question; but it could have been caused by the glory of Yahweh bursting forth so that the shadow was chased back.

Isaiah 38:9 The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and had recovered of his sickness- LXX "The prayer of Hezekiah". "Recovered" here translates a common word for 'to make to live'. If recovery or healing was in view, another word would have been used- that used in Is. 39:1. Hezekiah uses the word in :16 "cause me to live". The idea is that he had effectively died. Whether he literally did or not is not the ultimate issue; his sickness is framed as a living death, from which he resurrected. The same word is used in :1; Hezekiah would "not live" or "not recover". But he does, such is God's openness to change

His plans in response to human prayer. The recovery was clearly a Divine 'Plan B' and not necessarily what God had ideally wanted. Perhaps He wanted Hezekiah to die and be resurrected. Or perhaps indeed Hezekiah did not recover; he died, but was resurrected, and in that sense he recovered. The word is definitely used about resurrection in Is. 26:19 and elsewhere.

Isaiah 38:10 I said, In the middle of my life I go into the gates of Sheol. I am deprived of the residue of my years- Hezekiah understood *sheol* as the place where there is no "living" (:11); the grave. "The middle" is literally 'the meridian', an allusion to the sundial which he perhaps viewed from his bed of sickness, and which was the appropriate sign to give him seeing as he watched the sun climb and decline on the steps. If it indeed was an idolatrous import from Assyria as suggested earlier, he would have had time to reflect on the incomplete nature of his purges and perhaps his own repentance. Hezekiah's reasoning seems based around the supposition that this life is all he had to enjoy, and at 39 he felt he was in the midst of it. The perspective of eternity doesn't seem to figure. The language of 'deprivation' likewise seems to presume that he has a right to life, whereas sinners deserve only death. Like Job, Hezekiah is made self-centered by the reality of pain, depression and illness; and yet is saved at the same time. Those things are understood by God and seen through as surface level issues.

Isaiah 38:11 I said, I won't see Yah, Yah in the land of the living. I will see man no more with the inhabitants of the world- This may be a lament that he would not live to see Yahweh destroying the Assyrians and establishing His Kingdom; hence LXX "I shall no more at all see the salvation of God in the land of the living: I shall no more at all see the salvation of Israel on the earth". Several of Isaiah's prophecies had suggested the literal coming of Yahweh to Zion in the restored kingdom (Is. 4:5,6).

Isaiah 38:12 My dwelling is removed, and is carried away from me like a shepherd's tent- LXX " I have parted with the remainder of my life: it has gone forth and departed from me, as one that having pitched a tent takes it down again: my breath was with me as a weaver's web, when she that weaves draws nigh to cut off the thread". AV "Mine age is departed"; the Hebrew for "age" is strictly 'a revolution', again reflecting how he had been watching the revolution of time on the sundial from his bed of sickness. The reference to a tent being

taken down connects with the descriptions of the permanence of the restored Zion, as a tabernacle which would not again be taken down (Is. 33:20). He believed that he would not see this; he felt his destiny was that of the "tabernacle" in Zion. We could argue that he thereby failed to perceive the role of bodily resurrection, so that he would ultimately see this. Or that he doubted that Is. 33:20 was to come true. On the other hand, it could be that his identification of himself with the fortunes of Zion was positive, and was resolved by the message that he would be healed at the same time as the tabernacle would be permanently established through the destruction of the Assyrians. But he failed to live according to this faith in the final 15 years of his life.

I have rolled up, like a weaver, my life. He will cut me off from the loom- The same word for 'weaving' is used in Isaiah of those who weaved unspiritual plans to try to avoid the Assyrian judgment (Is. 19:9; 59:5). Perhaps he reflected upon his agreements with the Assyrians and cutting off the gold from the temple to pay for them. And he felt he was to be judged for that.

From day even to night You will make an end of me- He was at the gates of the grave (:10), feeling that he would die by the end of that night, in the morning (:13). "Make an end" is more strictly 'recompense' (s.w. Is. 59:18; 65:6; Jer. 16:18). Perhaps he felt he was being judged for sin and was to receive the recompense for iniquity, in death. And yet he protests he has not sinned. We could read this as self-righteousness; or see him as the representative of God's sinful people, the just suffering for the unjust in the spirit of the Lord Jesus, the ultimate "suffering servant2/

Isaiah 38:13 I waited patiently until morning. He breaks all my bones like a lion. From now until tonight You will make an end of me- See on :12. Assyria was the lion, and yet Yahweh was behind that lion. He feels his destiny is tied up with that of Judah. He suffered as their representative. Therefore he is assured that his healing is tied up with the salvation of Zion from Assyria. LXX gives the sense: "I was given up as to a lion until the morning: so has he broken all my bones: for I was so given up from day even to night". The Assyrians were the lion, and Hezekiah feels that his death is as it were giving Assyria the victory. He fails to see the glory and purpose of God in wider terms, seeing his own living as indispensible to the purpose of God. See on :15.

Isaiah 38:14 I am chattering like a swallow or a crane, moaning like a dove. My

eyes weaken looking upward- He admits that his faith in the God above is weakening as he faces death. "Chatter" is the word used in Is. 29:4 of how Judah are to be brought down in condemnation and chatter out of the dust; he feels condemned although he is not, bearing Judah's sins and condemnation, exactly as the Lord Jesus did. But there is no mention of faith in resurrection, as there is with Job when he feels the same, and also is presented as the suffering servant. Perhaps he alludes to Ps. 84:3, where the Psalmist is also excluded from the temple, and is jealous of the swallows who can fly in there despite their uncleanness.

Lord, I am oppressed- This is the word used in Is. 30:12; 59:13 of Judah's trust in Egypt and clever political alliances. Hezekiah is bearing Judah's sins, but he is also aware of his own sin in cutting off the gold of the temple and allowing those sinful alliances to go ahead in his name.

Be my salvation- "Be my salvation" or AV "undertake for me" is the word used by Rabshakeh when he sarcastically asks Hezekiah to surrender to the Assyrians (see on Is. 36:8). His sickness came at the same time as the siege of Jerusalem; see on Is. 36:1.

Isaiah 38:15 What will I say?- As the seed of David, he feels like David did when the great promises of the Messianic seed were given to him.

He has both spoken to me, and Himself has done it- The word of Isaiah promising healing was God's word, and had been done. It is the language of new creation, common in later Isaiah; God spoke and it was done. But Hezekiah was to later waste that wonderful potential.

I will walk carefully all my years because of that anguished experience of my soul- Hezekiah saw Jacob's watershed experience that night of wrestling as analogous to his own experience during his sickness: "I reckoned till morning, that as a lion he would break all my bones (cp. Esau's approach)... I shall go softly (cp. "I will lead on softly", Gen. 33:14)... for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Is. 38:13,15). Tragically, Hezekiah didn't keep Jacob as his hero. He succumbed to the very materialism which Jacob permanently rejected that night.

Isaiah 38:16 Lord, men live by these things; and my spirit finds life in all of

them: You restore me, and cause me to live- The revival he felt was not simply of physical healing, but in spiritual restoration. This again suggests he was not in fact a stellar example of spirituality beforehand. But he didn't render again according to the grace given, and he didn't keep this natural undertaking to live spiritually "by these things", as a result of the healing and national deliverance given. LXX "Yea, O Lord, for it was told thee concerning this; and thou hast revived my breath; and I am comforted, and live"; GNB " Lord, I will live for you, for you alone; Heal me and let me live".

When we are seriously ill or in great calamity, we focus upon very simple ideas. God truly loves me and cares for me. My Lord Jesus will come again. He will raise me. Judgment lies ahead, but He wants me in His Kingdom. He died for me. He has a plan for me. He loves me and wishes only my eternal good. Hezekiah was driven to this when he was terminally ill. Afterwards he felt as a little child, and concluded: “by these things men live...”. Yet we are all terminally ill, if only we would know it. Paul quotes from the experience of Hezekiah at this time and says that this should be the keynote of our witness (2 Cor. 4:13 cp. Ps. 116:10). He was “delivered from death” and therefore promised to walk before the Lord “in the lands of the living”, believing in salvation and therefore speaking to those lands of it (RV). We all face the day when we shall be as water spilt on the ground, that cannot be gathered up; when the delicate, beautiful chandelier of human life will come crashing to the ground, when the rope holding the bucket snaps, and it falls into the well. In all these Biblical images of death, we face the tragic irreversibility of it all. Our bodies are already riddled with the cancer of inevitable decay. *Today*, while it is still today, we must focus ourselves upon the vital and essential realities of our faith, and away from all the peripheral issues upon which our flesh would far rather dwell.

Isaiah 38:17 Behold, for peace I had great anguish, but You have in love for my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for You have cast all my sins behind Your back- This again suggests that Hezekiah's previous life had not been of totally stellar obedience. Hezekiah didn't have "peace" before his suffering, so we must go with other translations. LXX "For thou hast chosen my soul, that it should not perish: and thou hast cast all my sins behind me"; GNB "My bitterness will turn into peace. You save my life from all danger; You forgive all my sins".

Isaiah 38:18 For Sheol can't praise You. Death can't celebrate You. Those who go down into the pit can't hope for Your truth- That death is truly unconsciousness, even for the righteous, is demonstrated by the repeated pleas of God's servants to allow their lives to be lengthened, because they knew that after death they would be unable to praise and glorify God, seeing that death was a state of unconsciousness. Hezekiah (Is. 38:17-19) and David (Ps. 6:4,5; 30:9; 39:13; 115:17) are good examples of this. Death is repeatedly referred to as a sleep or rest, both for the righteous and the wicked (Job 3:11,13,17; Dan. 12:13). And yet Hezekiah reasons as if he has no hope of future resurrection; in the grave he could have hoped for God's truth, the fulfilment of the promises to David which were clearly in his mind at this time. It was the lack of this future perspective which led him to his final failure, of considering that "peace and truth" in his last years was a good enough reward (see on Is. 39:8).

Isaiah 38:19 The living, the living, he shall praise You, as I do this day. The father shall make known Your truth to the children- LXX "for from this day shall I beget children, who shall declare thy righteousness". This is not to say that at 39 he had no children, for he was commanded to arrange the affairs of his household / family (:1). And yet he vows to teach the "truth" of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant to his children in future. Is. 39:7 suggests he would now have [more?] children. His children were a remarkable failure. He apparently didn't do this. His having children after his recovery and figurative resurrection would look forward to the Lord's spiritual achievement. But again he is focused upon the life that now is, and assumes he will have children who will take forward God's truth- rather than any mention or implication of a faith in resurrection and a future Kingdom. David had such a faith and understanding, as did Job; Hezekiah clearly didn't.

Isaiah 38:20 Yahweh will save me- This is the idea of the Hebrew word for "Jesus", 'Yehoshua'.

Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of Yahweh- The "songs of degrees" were written or rewritten to apply to this experience of the sun returning ten degrees or steps. There are 15 of them, matching the 15 extra years of life given to Hezekiah. "Our life" may refer to his children (:19). But as discussed on Is. 39:8, he still sees service to God as limited to his lifetime.

Isaiah 38:21 Now Isaiah had said, Let them take a cake of figs, and lay it for a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover- There was no need for this, because his salvation was by a miracle. But it was perhaps given in reflection of his weak faith and needing something visible; hence :22 begins "Hezekiah *also* had" asked for a sign, as if the cake of figs was likewise associated with his needing visible assurances. We note it was done on Isaiah's initiative, who perhaps perceived Hezekiah's need for something visible.

Isaiah 38:22 Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I will go up to the house of Yahweh?- Or as LXX "This is a sign to Ezekias, that I shall go up to the house of God". The request for this sign could be read as a lack of faith; or an attempt to learn the lesson of his father Ahaz, who was condemned for not asking for a sign. See on :7.

Isaiah Chapter 39

Isaiah 39:1 At that time, Merodach Baladan the son of Baladan king of Babylon sent letters and a present to Hezekiah; for he heard that he had been sick, and had recovered- Gentiles bringing presents to Zion is the language of the reestablished kingdom (Ps. 68:29). It could have come about then, when the surrounding nations brought presents to Hezekiah; but human pride and impenitence precluded it. See on Is. 18:7. And Hezekiah and his descendants adopted the ways of those nations rather than ruling over them and helping them toward Israel's God. 2 Chron. 32:31 describes these people as "the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon", but an unusual word is used there for "ambassadors"; it is the word usually translated "scorner" or "mocker". The idea is clearly that these men had an agenda and were not sincere. And Hezekiah was willfully duped by them, falling for their agenda and being blinded by their gifts, rather than seeking to share the ways of Yahweh with them. Hezekiah ought to have learnt not to trust in them, seeing that trust in the "princes and ambassadors" of Egypt had been proven so false just in recent history (Is. 30:4). God likewise brings situations into our lives whereby situations repeat- to test our faith and understanding.

The "letters" and 'ambassadors' recall the 'letter' from the ambassadors of Assyria in Is. 37:14. He didn't respond spiritually to this 'trial by prosperity'. Hence: "However concerning the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31). "The wonder" could refer to the miracle on the sundial, or to the miraculous revival of the land physically in line with Isaiah's prophecies.

*Isaiah 39:2 Hezekiah was pleased with them- "*Pleased" is s.w. "joy", "to rejoice". It is used of how Hezekiah previously had rejoiced in spiritual things (2 Chron. 29:36; 30:25). Now he rejoices in material things, and being respected by Gentiles rather than God. His "joy" or 'pleasure' ought to have been solely in Yahweh's salvation (Is. 25:9 s.w.). Hezekiah rejoiced "with them"; the Hebrew text is emphatic about this joy "with them". But the whole land had been charged not to rejoice at the fall of Assyria because it would revive in another form (s.w. Is. 14:29). Hezekiah is presented as totally ignorant of all this.

And showed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, the spices, and the precious oil, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion

that Hezekiah didn't show them- LXX "the houses of his treasures". This sounds as if his kingdom had become like that of Egypt and Solomon, where treasure cities were associated with gross materialism and refusal of the things of God's Kingdom. The Babylonians had revolted against Assyria, and they wanted help from Judah to form a political alliance against Assyria. But Hezekiah was taken in by the presents and attention paid to him, responding in pride rather than telling them he had nearly died because of his alliances; he ought to have told Babylon to accept Yahweh as their God, and thus be saved from Assyria as Judah had been. Presumably he agreed to the alliance; hence the judgment given, that his people would go into captivity in Babylon. He had recently been so lacking in gold that he had stripped the temple's gold and given it to the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:16). This sudden abundance of wealth may well have come from nations such as Babylon, who were eager to have Judah onside with them as a now significant and respected ally against Assyria. The wealth of the Gentiles flowed in to the liberated Zion, but only as a very weak foreshadowing of the things of the Kingdom. Human "armour" ought not to have been gloried in; for the entire message of Zion's deliverance was that it was achieved by God's power and grace and not at all by human strength. But the same Hebrew word is used repeatedly of the temple vessels which Hezekiah had earlier sanctified for usage (2 Chron. 29:19,26,27; 30:21). But now he had removed them out of temple service in Yahweh's house into his *own* house. His focus was upon *his* kingdom ["dominion"], rather than the things of Yahweh's Kingdom. It was these very vessels which were to be carried to Babylon (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:7).

Isaiah 39:3 Then Isaiah the prophet came to king Hezekiah and asked him, What did these men say? Where did they come from to you? Hezekiah said, They have come from a country far from me, even from Babylon- Surely these were rhetorical questions aimed at rebuking Hezekiah. His reply was made in pride (2 Chron. 32:25). The prophetic intention had been that the Gentiles would come from far countries to Israel's God with offerings to Yahweh, but Hezekiah sees it in terms of them coming to *him* with presents and respect for *him*. He uses the very phrase of Dt. 28:49, of how a nation "from a far country" was to come and destroy Israel.

Isaiah 39:4 Then he asked, What have they seen in your house? Hezekiah answered, They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing among my

treasures that I have not shown them- As in :3, these are rhetorical questions; and rather like those given to Adam in Eden, they were intended to elicit repentance. LXX "yea, also the possessions in my treasuries". Note the emphasis on "my... my.. I". The focus on his possessions and treasuries suggests the Lord quarried the parable of the rich fool from Hezekiah, who thought he had wealth to enjoy for the remainder of his days; see on :6. "My house... your house" stands in contrast to the temple / house of Yahweh which ought to have been Hezekiah's focus. All that was in his house was to be taken to Babylon (:6). The intention was that the Gentiles "from a far country" (s.w. Is. 5:26) would come to Zion and "see" or "be shown" (s.w.) God's glory (Is. 49:7; 52:15; 60:5; 61:9; 62:2; 66:18 s.w.). But instead Hezekiah showed them his own glory. He precluded the fulfilment of these prophecies in terms of his kingdom being the reestablished kingdom of Yahweh.

Isaiah 39:5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Yahweh of Armies- "Hear" may be an appeal to repent and stop the prophesied outcome from happening in accordance with Jer. 18:8-10.

Isaiah 39:6 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried to Babylon. Nothing will be left', says Yahweh- This would have seemed impossible; for Babylon was one of many apparently irrelevant small powers whom both Sargon and Sennacherib had overrun, destroyed her towns, and enforced direct Assyrian rule. That in 160 years' time Babylon would be the dominant power and would take Judah captive... appeared laughable. But God had just demonstrated that He could destroy the Assyrian army in a moment; and indeed it happened (2 Kings 24:13). 'Storing up' is surely alluded to by the Lord in the parable of the rich fool; he stored up riches only to lose them in a moment of Divine judgment, and was not rich toward God. See on :4.

Isaiah 39:7 'They will take away your sons who will issue from you, whom you shall father, and they will be eunuchs in the king of Babylon's palace'- There is a theme in Isaiah of conceiving, suffering pain in labour- but bringing forth in vain (Is. 26:18; 33:11; 59:4). And so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was

no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24). Hezekiah's immediate sons "who will issue from you, whom you shall father" weren't permanently taken to Babylon. Manasseh was taken there but repented and returned to Judah (2 Chron. 33:11-13); but it was in Dan. 1:3 that "the king's seed" were all deported there permanently. Again we have an example of a prophecy being delayed and suspended in fulfilment. This could have been because of the prayer and repentance of a minority, not least Manasseh; the spirituality of Josiah; or God's constant pity towards His people.

Isaiah 39:8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, Yahweh's word which you have spoken is good. He said moreover, For there will be peace and truth in my days- Sadly despite the warning from the example of Shebna (see on Is. 22:15) and the specific command not to just live for today and resign ourselves to an eternal death (Is. 22:13), Hezekiah at the end of his life gave in to just this same mentality. The sense is as GNB "King Hezekiah understood this to mean that there would be peace and security during his lifetime, so he replied, "The message you have given me from the LORD is good". "Peace and truth" is the language of the restored kingdom of God (Jer. 33:6); and it is the same term used by Hezekiah when he failed to grasp the potential of the Kingdom being reestablished in his times; he was content with peace and truth in his times alone (see on Is. 38:18,20). Likewise the Jews of Esther's time were content with "peace and truth" in their times, rather than seeing that what had happened was to lead them towards the eternal peace and truth with God of His Kingdom and not their own (see on Esther 8:13-16; 9:30). And this is the abiding temptation for all believers; to be satisfied with some degree of "peace and truth" emotionally and intellectually in their lives now, but resign the far greater realities of the Kingdom to come when "peace and truth" shall be in eternal reality.

Isaiah Chapter 40

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort you, comfort My people, says your God- The historical interlude has demonstrated that the prophecies in Is. 1-36 of judgment at the hands of Assyria were ameliorated and deferred by the intense repentance and intercession of Isaiah's school of prophets. But the interlude concludes with the bad news that the reformation was not thorough, and that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon; and therefore the earlier prophecies of judgment by Assyria would be reapplied to judgment by Babylon. But out of that there was to come a wonderful restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel, explained in the so called 'second Isaiah' (Is. 40-55). But sadly, the Jews who returned failed to allow that amazing potential to come true; the burden of the so called 'third Isaiah' (Is. 56-66). This message of restoration and yet lack of human response to it is what the rest of Isaiah is about.

For "Comfort", see on Zech. 1:13. This comfort is that spoken of in Ez. 14:22,23, where we read that the exiles would be comforted when they recognized the evil of Judah's ways and recognized that the judgment upon her had been just. But Is. 40 appears to be a message of unconditional comfort to the exiles- without specifically demanding their repentance. But even then, they still failed to accept it and respond; they preferred to stay in Babylon. Is. 40:1,2 speaks a message of comfort to the exiles: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”. But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachael who refused to be comforted over her loss (Jer. 31:15); they claimed they found “none to comfort” (Lam. 1:2,16,17,21). But they were willfully refusing the comfort of God’s repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn’t grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn’t want to- it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: “I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?”. And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up?

According to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah’s real name was Zerubbabel, the branch (*Sanhedrin* 38a)- perhaps the same Zerubbabel as mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah. The Hippolytus Chronicle 7:3:37 even claims Nehemiah was a direct descendant of David and in the direct kingly line. His name, ‘comfort of Yahweh’, invites us to see him as the potential fulfilment of the Is. 40:1,2 prophecy about a Messiah figure arising to the exiles, giving them God’s comfort. At the time of Judah's redemption, while the temple had been trodden down by her enemies, the promised Messiah figure of Is. 63:1-3,18 was to come

from Edom and Bozrah - both code names for Babylon. The words "Bozrah" and "Babylon" have similar root meanings ('high / fortified place'). And he was to lament how the people of Judah were not with him- "of the people there was none with me". But this is the very spirit of Nehemiah, when he returns to Jerusalem from Babylon and looks around the 'trodden down' city at night, not telling the people of the Jews about his inspection- i.e. the people were not with him (Neh. 2:11-16).

Isaiah 40:2 Speak comfortably to Jerusalem- "I shall speak to her heart" (Hos. 2:16; s.w. "speak comfortably") is an idiom elsewhere used about seeking to win the heart of a woman by persuasive words (Gen. 34:3; Ruth 2:13; Jud. 19:3); Hosea dreamt of winning Gomer back to him by his words. This has a direct equivalent in the restoration context- for the same term is used in Is. 40:2, where God through the prophets seeks to speak to the heart of Zion and persuade her to return from Babylon to Him in Jerusalem and enjoy the married life of His Kingdom. And yet like Gomer, they either didn't want to hear, or responded on a merely surface level.

And call out to her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins- see on Job 7:1.

The grace of God to the exiles is a foretaste of His grace to us. Time and again God speaks of the exiles in such positive language. For all that they had willingly adopted the gods of the captors, God still fondly describes them as 'Zion who dwells in Babylon' (Zech. 6:10,11). They were the Kingdom in embryo, waiting to just be transplanted from Babylon to Judah, just as we are the temple of God prepared symbolically in Heaven and waiting to be revealed on earth. Putting that grace another way, God proclaimed that despite all their idolatry and weakness in Babylon, Judah had 'paid off' their guilt for former sins by their service there (Is. 40:2). We can only marvel at God's grace, and the tragedy was that it was wasted and unperceived by them. May we do somewhat better.

Some prophecies were delayed / rescheduled in their fulfilment. Others have their intended fulfilment changed into another form. Is. 40:2 speaks of how Jerusalem's "punishment is accepted" (RVmg.), referring to how Lev. 26:43 had said that the land would lie desolate until her punishment was fulfilled. This passage could have come true when Judah returned from captivity. But it didn't. It is applied to the preaching of John the Baptist in the 1st century; but again, Judah would not hear. And so once again the land lay desolate again, until now the time has arrived for the final Elijah prophet. God is seeking to fulfill His word, but He will not force the hand and hearts of men and women. Therefore prophecies are delayed in their fulfilment, as mankind is given yet more opportunities. The briefest attention to context will show that Isaiah 40 follows straight on from the account of Zion's salvation from the Assyrian in Hezekiah's time. The command to cry unto Jerusalem that her warfare is finished (Is. 40:2) is clearly following on from the historical account of Jerusalem's salvation from Sennacherib's invasion which we have just read in Is. 37-39. The voice in the wilderness [potentially Isaiah?] preached that all flesh was grass, referring back to how the nations around Jerusalem had been "as the grass of the field" during Sennacherib's invasion (Is. 37:27 cp. 40:6). The voice crying in the wilderness to prepare Messiah's way therefore was intended to occur after the defeat of Sennacherib. But Hezekiah messed up, and his people turned to materialism and idols. And thus the prophecy was rescheduled to fulfillment in John the Baptist; but again, Israel would not hearken. If Israel would have received it, John would have been the Elijah prophet; but overall they didn't, and so the whole prophecy is again rescheduled to be fulfilled in the Elijah prophet of our last days. Micah 5 speaks of Messiah being born and being smitten upon the cheek at the same time as Jerusalem is besieged and Judah has been invaded by the Assyrians. Whatever minor fulfilment this may have had in Hezekiah, it was pathetically incomplete- he wasn't born in Bethlehem, and he wasn't smitten upon the cheek with a rod. I read all this as meaning that Messiah could have been born and then suffered in such circumstances- but it didn't happen. The prophecy was fulfilled in essence, although in a different context and in a different way, in the Lord Jesus. Likewise Is. 9:6 speaks as if the birth of Messiah would be at a time of deliverance from Israel's invaders; yet Is. 9:13 RV implies this would only happen if they were obedient: "Yet the people hath not turned / repented".

God would punish Israel at the hand of the Babylonians according to their sins, proportionate to them (Ez. 7:4,9; 5:11; 8:19; 9:10). Yet when Israel *were* punished by the Babylonians, Ezra (Ezra 9:13) realized that they had *not* been punished proportionate to their sins. But here Isaiah says that their judgment had

been double what it ought to have been; and yet Ezra says it was *less* than the promised proportionate recompense for their sins. Here we have the utter, inconsistent grace of God; almost taking guilt for punishing them (cp. how God likewise takes the blame in Is. 54:6-8, as if He had forsaken Israel as a sweet innocent young wife). The way God restored double to Job at the end has echoes of how a thief had to restore double (Ex. 22:2-4)- as if God in His love for Job wished to show Himself as having been somehow 'guilty' for taking away from Job what He had?

God had outlined a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would "cause them to know mine hand… and they shall now that my name is The Lord" (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah's sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn't much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended.

Isaiah 40:3 The voice of one who calls out, Prepare you the way of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God- Isaiah begins his section on the restoration with a bold prophecy that the restoration of Zion was to be associated with a way being prepared for Israel's God to come to them (Is. 40:1-3). These words are repeated in Mal. 3:1-3, where the messenger was to prepare the way of Yahweh's coming. It seems that in some sense they could have come true in the first return of the exiles along the wilderness way back to Zion, under Ezra. But over 100 years later, in Malachi's time, the prophecy was still capable of fulfilment, if the priesthood would be purged. But finally it was all deferred in fulfilment until the coming of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus.

Is. 40:3, which is quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25). We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25).

The message of Is. 40:3 is that before the final coming of the Lord, there will be a proclamation of this by His people: "Prepare ye [plural] the way of the Lord".

As the King's servants went ahead of him to make the path he had to travel smooth and plain [remember there were no motorways then!], so we go ahead of the returning Lord of all the earth, to prepare the way / road for Him. And yet within Isaiah, there is ample evidence that God prepares His own way: "I will do a new thing…I will even make a way in the wilderness" (Is. 43:19). Perhaps the element of unreality here, the 'new thing', is that the King Himself prepares His own way or road. Or again: "I will make all my mountains a way" (Is. 49:11). The connection with Is. 40:3 is that in the work of preparing the Lord's way, in the last great preaching appeal of all time in the lead up to the second coming, the Lord Himself will work with us to make that way plain and clear. In all the challenges of the latter day fulfilment of the great commission, the Lord Himself will work with us.

The whole restoration program appears to be predicated upon preachers calling out to Zion to return, both to their God and to their land. This will also be true in the last day fulfilment. The Isaiah 40 passage is therefore a command for our latter day witness to all the world, Israel especially, to prepare their way for the Lord's coming. We are to "cry" unto Zion that "her iniquity is pardoned", but we are also to 'cry' for her to repent, to be "made straight", for the rough places to be 'made plain'; to "cry aloud…lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression (Is. 40:2-4; 58:1). It's exactly because we have in prospect been forgiven that we are called to repent. The forgiveness has already been granted; iniquity has been pardoned. We are to 'cry' out this fact; and also to 'cry out' for repentance. But we have to respond to that. It's similar to how Saul/Paul was called 'brother' even before his conversion and baptism. The world's redemption was achieved through the cross; but we have to appeal to the world to accept it. And in our own lives we must live out what we are preaching to others; exactly because we have already been forgiven, we need to repent of what we've been forgiven of, to as it were claim that forgiveness as our very own. And the same Hebrew word translated 'cry' occurs in the same context in Is. 40:26; 43:1; 45:3,4; 48:12; 54:6, where we read that it is God Himself who calls every one of Israel back to Him, just as He calls every star by its own personal name. And so in our personal calling of men and women, in our crying out to them in these last days to be prepared for the Lord's coming, we are workers together with God. He is crying out to them, through our feeble, shy, embarrassed, uncertain words of witness. Likewise it is God Himself who makes the crooked places straight in Is. 42:16 and 45:2- whereas in Is. 40:3, it is we the preachers who are to do this.

Isaiah 40:4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plain- The whole purpose of the Gospel is to bring down the mountains of human pride and lift up the valleys of those who lack any self-respect (Is. 40:4), thereby making an equality of attitude amongst God's people. The vision of the Kingdom in Is. 2:2-4 was used as an appeal for *humility* amongst Israel (Is. 2:10-12). See on Is. 2:11. If we don't humble *ourselves* now, then God will do this to us through the process of condemnation at the judgment. In this lies the insistent logic of humility. The theme of 'bringing down' pride is a major one in the first half of Isaiah (Is. 2:17; 13:11; 25:5,12; 29:4; 32:19). These passages pave the way for the announcement that in man's response to the Gospel of Christ, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Is. 40:4). By the hills of human pride being brought down, and the giving of confidence to those so low in the valleys of hopelessness and lack of self respect, there is a levelling of all those who respond to Christ. But more than this; in this lifting up of the hopeless and bringing down of the proud, there is a foretaste of what will happen in the future day of judgment. In essence, "we make the answer now" by whether or not we bring down our pride, or whether we summon the faith in God's grace and imputed righteousness to believe that we, who are nothing, are lifted up in His sight. "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low" (James 1:9-10).

"Prepare ye the way… make straight in the desert a highway... the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" is similar to Is. 45:1,2,13 "Thus saith the Lord to Cyrus... I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight... I will make straight all his ways... he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives". The preparation for the restoration in Is. 45 becomes a type of the preparation of the way to Christ.

The primary reference of the Isaiah 40 passage is to the Jews. But even more specifically, it is to be cried out "to Jerusalem". I submit that the most specific fulfilment of the prophecy will be in our latter day preaching resulting in a remnant of Jews repenting in Jerusalem, so that the Lord's return will be to a faithful Jewish remnant in literal Jerusalem. The 'making straight' is to be done in "the desert" (:3)- a description elsewhere of Jerusalem (Is. 51:3). "Every [Heb. 'the whole, complete'] mountain and hill" (:4) which is to respond to the

Gospel may refer to people on the temple mount, upon which the Lord shall "come down, to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof" (Is. 31:4; 10:32). The Hebrew words used here for 'mount' and 'hill' are identical in the passages. The Lord will return to Zion to find a repentant remnant there, converted by our preaching. Mal. 3:1, a clearly related passage, says that when the way has been prepared, then "the Lord… shall suddenly [Heb. 'immediately'] come to his temple". It seems that He comes as soon as, almost to the moment, that the way is prepared. Is it going too far to imagine that when the last Jews are baptized in Jerusalem, perhaps literally on the Temple Mount, then the Lord will immediately return there, "to his temple"? Then the Lord shall "come down to fight for mount Zion and for the hill thereof".

"Made low" in Is. 40:4 is surely in the spirit of Is. 2:11, which predicts that in the day of judgment, "the lofty looks of man shall be *humbled* [s.w. 'made low'], and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down". The experience of condemnation in the coming day of the Lord will mean that "the proud and lofty" will be "brought low" (Is. 2:12,17; 5:15). In fact, Isaiah is full of references to the proud being 'made low' by judgment- the same Hebrew word is common: Is. 10:33; 13:11; 25:11; 26:5. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he said that our preaching is a bringing down of every high thing that is exalted against God (2 Cor. 10:5). Our message is basically that we must be humbled one way or the other- either by our repentance and acceptance of the Gospel today, or through the experience of condemnation at the day of judgment. We're calling people to humility. And we must ask whether the content and style of our preaching really does that. But when John the Baptist quoted and preached this passage, he interpreted it beyond a call to humility. He said that in order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food (Lk. 3:11). So the 'equality' and levelling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don't have… for this is all part of preparing for the Lord's coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls "an equality" amongst the community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

Isaiah 40 is a prophecy which didn't come true as it might have done at the restoration, and so it now essentially concerns the time of the Lord's second coming. Verses 4 and 6 contain several references to Is. 2:10-12, which concerns this time; v. 5 = Rev. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:13; v.10 = Rev. 22:12. Before the Kingdom comes, there must be a witness to Israel of the blessed time that is coming,

comforting her (v.2) that her time of punishment for sin has now ended (this can only really have a latter day application): " O thou that tellest *good tidings* to *Zion*, get thee up into the high *mountain*; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength...say unto the cities of Judah, Behold *your God*! behold, the Lord God will come..." . This is the language of Is. 52:7: " How beautiful upon *the mountains* are the feet of him that bringeth *good tidings*...that saith unto *Zion, Thy God* reigneth" . We know these words of Is. 52:7 apply to *our* preaching, according to Paul's use of them in Rom. 10; and yet they specifically refer to the latter day witness to Israel, according to Is. 40. Therefore it is us who should be making this witness in the last days. Not only Isaiah 40 but also Is. 57:14 teach that a level way must be made amongst the Jewish people, i.e. the stumbling blocks and 'valleys' must be removed from their path.

Isaiah 40:5 The glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it- John the Baptist perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord's coming, then "all flesh shall see the salvation of God". But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in. Is. 40:5 had called out to a Zion about to be restored that "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed". In other words, the temple ought to have been a re-establishment of Solomon's, with God's attendant acceptance of it also. However, this didn't happen. Ezekiel saw a vision of the glory of Yahweh filling the temple (Ez. 43:5), as if to show that this, in line with Haggai's words, was what *could* have happened at the restoration. However, it's fulfilment must now await the future.

Isaiah 40:6 The voice of one saying, Cry! Another one said, What shall I cry? All flesh is like grass, and all its glory is like the flower of the field- This is like a radio play for voices. The Divine command to cry out is met by the question from the preachers as to what should be the burden of the message. Initially, it was of the mortality of humanity and that all human glory would fade. This follows on from the way Hezekiah was duped by human glory and thus disallowed the Kingdom purpose of God in his time. We shouldn't see the mortality of man and the true meaning of the Hebrew word *nephesh* as a negative thing that we unfortunately have to tell people who believe their loved ones are alive in Heaven. "The voice" tells Isaiah to cry. "And I said, What shall

I cry?" (Is. 40:6 LXX; RVmg.). What was to be the message of Isaiah's Gospel? The voice addresses Isaiah as "O thou that tellest good tidings", and tells him the good news he is to preach. It is that "All flesh is grass… the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever". The reality of man's mortality is the backdrop against which we can see the eternity of God and the offer made to us through His abiding word that we really can escape from our condition. Christian preaching about "man is mortal" need not be bad news. The message can be turned into good news! For it was this message of mortality which prepared the way for men to accept Christ (Is. 40:3-5); the mountains of human pride are made low by this message so that we can accept salvation in Christ. 1 Pet. 1:24 RVmg. quotes these verses and concludes that we are being offered salvation through "the word of the God who liveth for ever" - the Gospel that is prefaced by the message of human mortality. God's eternity and man's mortality are placed side by side- and thus the way is prepared for the wonder of the fact that through "the word" of Jesus, of the Gospel, we the mortal are invited to share in that immortality.

"The flower of the field" is one of a number of connections with Ps. 103, here to Ps. 103:15. That Psalm of David was clearly rewritten with reference to what could have been the experience of Hezekiah. God took pity upon him, a fading, mortal man; and he was intended thereby to grasp fully God's eternal plan with His people. But he didn't. It is for us, along with latter day Israel, to do so.

Isaiah 40:7 The grass withers, the flower fades, because Yahweh's breath blows on it; surely the people are like grass- see on Mt. 6:26. The blowing of breath alludes to Hezekiah's experience in Is. 38:16 (see note there). His mortality ought to have lead him to devotion to the things of God's eternal kingdom; but it didn't. The withering grass is spoken of in Ps. 129:5,6, one of the songs of degrees written or rewritten by Hezekiah. There, it describes the Assyrian attackers who were blown upon Yahweh's breath / spirit / Angel. But "the people" of Judah were no better in that they too were mortal. Unless they repented, they would likewise perish. They too were to be as withered / dried up bones and foliage (s.w. Ez. 17:10,24; 37:11 and often).

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God stands forever- See on :7. The phrase for 'fading flower' is only elsewhere used about the people of Israel fading under judgment (Is. 28:1). Only the long term prophetic purpose of God with Israel would be eternal, and it was that word of

Kingdom promise uttered through Isaiah that the people were asked to identify with.

Isaiah 40:9 You who tell good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who tell good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength- lift it up, don't be afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold, your God!- "The high mountain" (AV) is Zion. "Go up" is the same word about Judah 'going up' from Babylon to Israel. But the majority of Judah remained in Babylon. And the majority of those who did return, only did so in order for purely personal benefit- of having their own house and land. They 'went up' to the land, but not to Zion. With reference to Isaiah 40:9, Hag 1:7-9 exhorted them: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. *Go up to the mountain*, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much [i.e. they expected the promised Kingdom blessings], and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house". Their focus was on their own lands and farms rather than the glory of Zion (as Nehemiah 13:10,11). They stood related to the things of God's kingdom, but never ventured beyond their own personal self-interest. They would not accept that God manifestation rather than human salvation and pleasure was the essential purpose of their God.

The returnees were to lift up their voice with joy at Zion's restoration. But at the very humble dedication of the temple, the younger people lifted up their voice with joy (Ezra 3:12 same words), but the older men wept, as the temple was not even as great as Solomon's, and certainly not that commanded in Ezekiel and Isaiah. "Behold your God" will finally come to literal truth in the last days, when God shall dwell in Zion (Ez. 48:35), and in the person of His Son, He will "come" to Zion. But the same words for lifting up the voice are used of the need to show Jacob their sins (Is. 58:1). The call is joyful, advertising the Lord's coming, but it is also a call to repentance; as it is today.

Isaiah 40:10 Behold, the Lord Yahweh will come as a mighty one and His arm will rule for him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before him- When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10). he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then.

The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7). But the whole prophecy is delayed and deferred until the coming of the Lord Jesus to Zion. The "reward" of God will be in the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham (Gen. 15:1 s.w.) in salvation (Is. 62:11), at the time when Judah were restored from captivity and accepted the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:16). This huge potential is all deferred to the last days, when the Abrahamic covenant will be finally fulfilled in the return of the Lord Jesus to earth.

Isaiah 40:11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead those who have their young- The primary possible fulfillment was in Cyrus as Yahweh's shepherd (Is. 44:28); but he failed in this role and Judah failed to be obedient sheep. So the prophecy is reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Is. 11:12), the good shepherd, operating on behalf of Yahweh Himself, who was to shepherd the scattered flock of Israel when they are gathered into the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:10; Ez. 34:12). It is God who gathers His people (Is. 11:12; 40:11; Jer. 31:10; Ez. 34:12), whereas the Gentiles gather themselves to Him (Is. 49:18). His grace therefore appears the greater to His people, somehow forcing through His purpose with obstinate sheep. It was the responsibility of the priests and religious leaders to "gently lead" the exiles back to their God and their land, but they failed in this (Is. 51:18 s.w.); and so because their was none to guide / gently lead (s.w.), God Himself had to intervene and do this through His Son (Is. 40:11; 49:10).

Isaiah 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and marked off the sky with His span, and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?- The evident and immense power of Yahweh in the natural creation is often cited in Isaiah as a guarantee that His plans for a spiritual 'new creation' were just as capable of fulfilment. He was not to be seen as lacking in any possibility. The language of calculation, measuring, marking off and weighing is all that of building. He would rebuild Zion and rebuild His Kingdom. He would build according to plans, and those plans had now been released through Isaiah and the prophets. The same word for "measured" is used multiple times in Ezekiel 40-42, where Israel are commanded to measure the new temple system and build according to that measure. God had "measured" Jerusalem (s.w. Zech. 2:2) and

Zion; but the returned exiles refused to build according to those dimensions. So God Himself would do so, although in a different way than building a literal temple in Zion. See on Is. 44:13.

Isaiah 40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of Yahweh, or has taught Him as His counsellor?- "Directed" is the same word translated "marked off" in :12. Yahweh's Spirit was available without measure, without being marked off or defined by anyone. This idea is surely behind the statement in Jn. 3:34 that the Lord Jesus had the Spirit "without measure", without limit, not just a portion marked off for Him. There was huge, unlimited Spiritual potential to enable the restoration of God's people, both physically and psychologically. But they didn't make use of it, and so it was all reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

LXX "Who has known the mind of the Lord? and who has been his counsellor, to instruct him?" is twice quoted about how those with the spirit of the Lord Jesus do in fact know "the mind of the Lord" (Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). This is the answer to the rhetorical question. The answer is not 'Nobody', but rather 'Not idolaters, but those who worship Yahweh in spirit and truth'. As the Spirit could have been given "without measure" to the exiles, so it was given to the Lord Jesus, and shall be given to all in Him.

We can note here that the Hebrew (Masoretic) text and the Septuagint (LXX) differ significantly here, as they often do; and yet both variants are quoted or alluded to in the inspired New Testament.

Isaiah 40:14 Who did He take counsel with, and who instructed Him and taught Him in the path of justice, and taught Him knowledge and showed Him the way of understanding?- The fact God is uncreate is cited as an example of how God's grace toward His people was purely and totally of His own initiative. Our initiatives are never totally our "own" because they are subconscious responses to previous experience and stimuli. But God's initiative in saving His people is quite literally, purely, solely, His very own initiative.

There are a number of passages which associate Job with Israel in general terms. It has been suggested that the book of Job was re-written and compiled by Hezekiah's men who at the same time produced the Psalter (all under inspiration, of course). The copious connections between the suffering servant prophecies of Isaiah and the book of Job (take a glance down the A.V. margins of Job) are therefore more easily understandable- the account of Job's sufferings and

vindication amidst opposition was framed in language that pointed forward to the similar suffering (through the same disease?) and vindication of Hezekiah. The suffering servant of Isaiah refers to both Israel and the Lord Jesus, exactly as the parable of Job also does. The connections between Isaiah 40 and the book of Job are especially marked. Is. 40:14 = Job 21:22; 40:17 = Job 6:18; :22 = Job 9:8; :23 = Job 12:21; :24 = Job 14:8; :26 = Job 25:3; :27 = Job 3:23; :31 = Job 29:20.

Isaiah 40:15 Behold, the nations are like a drop in a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on a balance. Behold, He lifts up the islands like a very little thing- This is not to say that God doesn't care for people; rather is it saying that in the balance alluded to in :12, it is Israel who weigh heavily in God's balances far more than other people. It is another way of expressing His supreme passion for His people. "The islands" may simply mean the dry land, the land upon which the nations are located (Is. 42:15 understands "islands" as simply 'dry land').

Isaiah 40:16 Lebanon's forest is not sufficient to burn, nor its animals sufficient for a burnt offering- The context is of God protesting His especial and unique love for His people; and He may be implying that no amount of animal sacrifice would buy that love or deserve it.

Isaiah 40:17 All the nations are like nothing before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than nothing, and vanity- As explained on :15, this is not to say that God doesn't care for people; rather is it saying that in the balance alluded to in :12,15, it is Israel who weigh heavily in God's balances far more than other people. It is another way of expressing His supreme passion for His people. All the might of Assyria or Babylon would not tip the scale against Israel.

Isaiah 40:18 To whom then will you liken God?- The context implies: 'In loving His people so very much?'. But the Jews had in fact made God in the likeness of their idols, justifying idolatry as a worshipping of Yahweh. Hence LXX "To whom have ye compared the Lord?". Those who worship idols forsake that great love of Yahweh, and thereby forsake their own mercy (Jonah 2:8).

Or what likeness will you compare to Him?- "Likeness" is used in the LXX in the frequent warnings not to make an image or likeness of any god, let alone

Yahweh (Ex. 20:4; Dt. 4:16-25; Ps. 106:20; Is. 40:18,19). The reason for this prohibition becomes clearer in the New Testament; the ultimate likeness of God is in His Son, and we are to create the likeness of His Son not as a mere physical icon, but within the very structure of our human personality and character. This sets the scene for God's following condemnation of idolatry (Acts 17:29), which initially was the reason why Judah preferred to remain in Babylon.

Isaiah 40:19 A workman has cast an image, and the goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts silver chains for it- Similar language is used in Is. 30:22 of the idols which Judah were to throw away when they repented; and this is now an appeal for them to do so and leave Babylon.

Isaiah 40:20 He who is too impoverished for such an offering chooses a tree that will not rot. He seeks a skilful workman to set up an engraved image for him that will not be moved- The idea is that it will not totter, unlike the idol of 1 Sam. 5:3,4.

Isaiah 40:21 Haven't you known? Haven't you heard, yet? Haven't you been told from the beginning? Haven't you understood from the foundations of the earth?- We sense here the frustration of God in Isaiah. The call to repent and return to the land had been made by all the prophets, but still Judah had not heard it. They had heard, but not 'heard' in the sense that God wants us to hear His word.

Isaiah 40:22 It is He who sits above the circle of the earth- This may simply refer to the horizon, where earth and heaven meet, and is not to be pushed as evidence that the Bible taught a curved earth at a time when generally there was belief in a flat earth. The idea would perhaps rather be that Yahweh is enthroned at the limit of human vision and understanding; a principle ever true, no matter how advanced is human science.

And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in- As explained on :15, the idea is not that the inhabitants of the planet are irrelevant to God. Their smallness is mentioned in contrast to Yahweh's purpose with His people, His tabernacle, which was to be eternally established in Zion. Israel in their faithlessness had considered themselves to be tiny grasshoppers compared to Gentile power (Num. 13:33). Now, Yahweh puts it the other way around. It is the

Gentiles who are as grasshoppers compared to the 'weight' and significance of Israel before Him (:15).

Isaiah 40:23 Who brings princes to nothing; who makes the judges of the earth meaningless- Both Gentile princes, such as those who accompanied the Assyrian army to Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time, along with the rulers of the land (who are often condemned as corrupt and unspiritual) would be brought to nothing at the reestablishment of God's Kingdom. The theme of vanity or "meaninglessness" is common in later Isaiah. In contrast to the things of the Kingdom, all else is to be seen as vain and without ultimate meaning. This was hard to accept for the Jews in exile who were now becoming prosperous in the lands of their captivity, as the book of Esther witnesses.

Isaiah 40:24 They are planted scarcely, they are sown scarcely, their stock has scarcely taken root in the ground. He merely blows on them, and they wither, and the whirlwind takes them away as stubble- This is all in contrast to the Messianic root out of the stock of David, who would be eternal (s.w. Is. 11:1). Eternity and permanent meaning was and is only to be found by association with Him.

Isaiah 40:25 To whom then will you liken Me? Who is My equal? says the Holy One- This is another appeal for the exiles to repent of their idolatry. So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about the overthrow of Babylon. The situation is analogous to how the New Testament is full of references to the Roman imperial cult of empire worship. So much of the Bible is like Isaiah and the New Testament- a radical, counter-cultural call to see our present world for what it is, and to perceive that the ways of God simply can’t be mixed in, watered down or compromised with the way of this world. Alexander Heidel analyzed the recovered Babylonian poem to Marduk *Enuma Elish*, discovering phrase after phrase in it which recurs in Isaiah- with reference to Yahweh exclusively (Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). The similarities are exact, and impressive. Without doubt, Isaiah was developing a major theme in his later writings- that the true Israel of God

must not have any part in the Marduk cult, and must understand all the claims made for Marduk as being untrue, and solely appropriate to Yahweh God of Israel. Consider some of the claims made for Marduk (exact references given in Heidel):

- “Marduk is King alone” (cp. “*Your* [Israel’s] God reigns as King!”, Is. 52:7)

- “None among the gods can equal him”

- Marduk killed Tiamat in the waters and cut him in pieces [applied to Yahweh in Is. 51:9,10]

- Creator of the stars (cp. Is. 40:26; Is. 45:12).

- Marduk is without comparison (cp. Is. 40:18,25 etc.)

- Marduk was, and no other (cp. Is. 45:5,6 etc.)

There are also mocking allusions to Marduk, showing Yahweh’s supremacy over him. Marduk was formed- but Yahweh had no god before Him and will have none after Him (Is. 43:10). Marduk had a counsellor, Ea, called in the inscriptions “the all-wise one”. But Yahweh has all wisdom and has no such counsellor (Is. 40:13,14; Is. 41:28). All this reference to the Marduk cult was in my opinion not merely a pointless mockery and poking of fun at the Persian culture. It was a very real appeal to the Jewish exiles to quit it, to come out and be separate; remember again and again that Mordecai [and perhaps Esther too] had adopted names reflective of the Marduk cult.

Isaiah 40:26 Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these, who brings out their army by number. He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power, not one is lacking- This language alludes to the Babylonian god Marduk; the point being that Yahweh and not the god of Babylon is supreme. See on Is. 40:25. The Jews only totally quit idolatry some time later; they liked to think, as we also tend to, that we can serve the gods of our world in the name of Yahweh worship. But Yahweh is presented as supreme, and Marduk as nothing. God knew His exiled people; just as He knew every star, so He knew every exile; "nothing has escaped thee" (LXX). They were not forgotten, and neither are we. His purpose shall work out, even if it is delayed by the refusal of the majority of His people to accept and progress it.

Ezra 2:62 records Judah being ‘reckoned by genealogies’, using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chron.

4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God's 'bringing out' of Judah from Babylon with His 'bringing out' the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion's fortunes: "The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there". The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel's Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come.

Isaiah 40:27 Why do you say, Jacob, and speak, Israel, My way is hidden from Yahweh, and the justice due me is disregarded by my God?- Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14). See on Is. 49:24. Ezekiel had to argue with the exiles in Ez. 18, insisting that God's ways were just and it was their ways which were unjust. They were not suffering wrongly, there was no injustice in their exile. The link between Is. 40:27 and Job 3:23 is most significant. These are the words of Job in 3:23: "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?". Thus Job represents Israel; and because "Israel" in Isaiah also refers to our Lord, we can make the equation Job=Israel=Jesus. The distancing between himself and God which Christ felt on the cross (Mt. 27:46) is thus foreshadowed by Job feeling the same- and like Christ, it was a trial from God, not a specific punishment for sin, and related to His identification with a sinful Israel who were separated from God by their sins. See on Is. 30:20.

Reasoning back from the addresses to the captives in later Isaiah, it appears they thought that Yahweh was a God who just operated in the land of Israel. The captives felt they couldn't sing the songs of Yahweh in a Gentile land (Ps. 137). They thought that now they were outside His land and far from His temple, they were forgotten by Him (Is. 49:14,15), their cause ignored by Him (Is. 40:27) and they were "cast off" from relationship with Him (Is. 41:9). Hence Isaiah emphasizes that Yahweh is the creator and the God of the whole planet, and His presence is literally planet-wide. Likewise there is much stress in those addresses on the fact that Yahweh's word of prophecy will come true. Remember that there had been many false prophets of Yahweh just prior to the captivity who predicted victory against Babylon and prosperity (Lam. 2:9,14; Jer. 44:15-19). And the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah appeared to not be coming true, or at best was delayed or re-scheduled in fulfilment [even Daniel felt this, according to his desperate plea for fulfilment in Daniel 9]. And so there was a crisis of

confidence in the concept of prophecy, and Yahweh's word and prophets generally. Isaiah addressed this by stressing the nature and power of that word, and urging faith in its fulfilment and relevance.

Isaiah 40:28 Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint. He isn't weary, His understanding is unsearchable- Because of their many years in exile, the Jews were effectively considering Yahweh to be weary, and to have made a mistake in His planning. But His power and understanding were not to be questioned. The apparent delays were due to their weakness and weariness (:30), lack of understanding and impenitence- rather than to God's. They were in exile at the ends of the earth / land promised to Abraham; but God had created those ends of the land and was not oblivious to His people there.

Isaiah 40:29 He gives power to the weak, He increases the strength of him who has no might- Very relevant to the great physical effort that had to be made by the handful who first set about the rebuilding. But the idea was that the weak exiles, especially in their spiritual weakness, could be empowered if they accepted the gift of God's Spirit implicit in the new covenant.

Isaiah 40:30 Even the youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall- This can be read as a criticism. As explained on :28, the exiles considered Yahweh to be weary and limited in power, but Isaiah's point is that it is Judah who are like that. The apparent inactivity and delay in the progression of His purpose was due to their weariness and not His. These youths, the generation born in exile who ought to have been returning to the land, are contrasted negatively against those who *did* wait faithfully for Yahweh's action (:31).

Isaiah 40:31 But those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run, and not be weary, they will walk, and not faint- See on :30. Those who waited in faith for Yahweh's action whilst in exile would be empowered both physically and spiritually to 'return' to God and their land. As God doesn't faint or weary, so somehow those who identify their lives with His will also keep on keeping on- even now (Is. 40:31 cp. 29). Just as eagles renew the feathers of their wings, so David felt that his youth was

renewed like the eagle's in his repeated experience of God's grace (Ps. 103:5), that his soul was restored (Ps. 23:5), and that a right spirit could be renewed by God within him (Ps. 51:10).

Those who truly waited upon Yahweh would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Is. 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the 'going up' to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Nehemiah 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: "And Judah said, The *strength* of the bearers of burdens is *decayed*, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness. This is in contrast to how for the idolater, "his *strength fails*" (Is. 44:12). But the same word is used also in Ezra 10:13: "But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and *we are not able to stand* [lit. 'not strong enough to be'] without". Both Ezra and Nehemiah encouraged the people not to make such excuses but to get on with achieving what was truly possible.

Isaiah Chapter 41

Isaiah 41:1 Keep silent before Me, islands, and let the peoples renew their strength. Let them come near, then let them speak. Let's meet together for judgement- The "islands" may refer simply to the dry land inhabited by Gentiles within the *eretz* promised to Abraham (Is. 42:15). They are invited to accept the God of Israel, to come to Zion and realize they have no legal case against God, to accept their judgment and throw themselves upon Him. Hence LXX "Hold a feast to me, ye islands".

Isaiah 41:2 Who has raised up one from the east? Who called him to His foot in righteousness? He hands over nations to him, and makes him rule over kings. He gives them like the dust to his sword, like the driven stubble to his bow- The servant songs or poems of Isaiah clearly have reference to a Messiah figure who was to appear at the time of the restoration from Babylon. The early songs have potential reference to Cyrus- he is named as such. Expositors such as Harry Whittaker and J.W. Thirtle have sought to prove the naming of Cyrus as an interpolation, claiming that Isaiah has sole primary reference to the days of Hezekiah. This seems to me to be desperate. The naming of Cyrus, and the specific references to his military campaigns in the prophecies, simply can't be gotten around. To brush all this off as uninspired interpolation and fiddling with the text of holy Scripture just won't do. The references to Cyrus aren't merely the mention of his name. Is. 41:1-5 alludes unquestionably to the dramatic conquest of Sardis by Cyrus in 547 BC. The 'servant' is described as swooping down first from the east and then from the north, trampling local rulers beneath him (Is. 41:2-5,25; Is. 45:1; Is. 46:11). This 'servant' was to end the Babylonian empire (Is. 43:14; Is. 48:14,15), enable the captive Jews in Babylon to return to their land (Is. 42:6,7; Is. 43:5-7; Is. 45:13), restore Jerusalem and the ruined cities of Judah (Is. 44:26-28; 45:13). There can be no serious doubt that it was Cyrus who fulfilled these things. The servant is a "bird of prey from the east" (Is. 46:11)- according to Xenophon, the eagle was the emblem of Cyrus. The servant "victorious at every step" with lightning speed (Is. 41:2) surely refers to how Cyrus conquered the Medes, the former Assyrian empire, and the Lydians before taking Babylon in 539 BC. We should have no problem with a pagan king being described as God's "servant", for that very term is used of Nebuchadnezzar in Jer. 25:9.

When Cyrus failed to "know" or have relationship with Yahweh, other possible fulfillments came into view. Another possible fulfilment was in Zerubbabel or Joshua. Isaiah 41 describes the Messianic saviour as coming to the land from

Babylon, from the north and from the east. Babylon was east of Judah, and yet the approach road came down from the north. This was the way Zerubbabel and Joshua would have come; but the prophecies suffered a massive deferment to the coming of the Lord Jesus in a more figurative sense from the north and east. Zech. 4 contained a vision of Joshua and Zerubbabel, likened to two olive trees which emptied their oil into the seven branched candlestick, representing the ecclesia of Judah. They represented the kingly and priestly offices. The whole 'lightstand' depended upon these two anointed ones, these providers of oil, and the fact they both in various ways failed to deliver true faith and spirituality meant that the victory over the world which the vision also prophesied could not come about; the final fulfilment had to come through the Lord Jesus, who was the ultimate Priest (cp. Joshua-Jesus) and Prince of Judah (cp. Zerubbabel).

Isaiah 41:3 He pursues them, and passes by safely, even by a way that he had not gone with his feet- The sense is as GNB "He follows in pursuit and marches safely on, so fast that he hardly touches the ground!".

Isaiah 41:4 Who has worked and done it, calling the generations from the beginning?- The idea of calling things which don't exist into existence (Rom. 4:17) has suggestions of creation (Is. 41:4; 48:13). The new, spiritual creation is indeed a creation *ex nihilo*, an act of grace. Incomprehensible to the modern mind, the natural creation involved the creation of matter from out of God, and not out of any visible, concrete matter which already existed. The physical creation therefore looked forward to the grace of the new creation- creating people spiritually out of nothing, counting righteousness to them which they didn't have, treating them as persons whom they were not.

I Yahweh, the first and with the last, I am He- First and last are terms used by the Lord Jesus of those who shall be in His Kingdom (Mt. 20:16). "The last" would then refer to the last generation of God's people. Yahweh would save the exiles along with the "first" of His people such as Abraham; for at the time of the restoration of that last generation, there would be a resurrection of all God's true people, to form a new people would eternally inherit the reestablished Kingdom.

Isaiah 41:5 The islands have seen and fear. The ends of the earth tremble; they approach, and come- They have been called to judgment in Zion (:1), and all they can do is try to make idols (:6,7). But these verses can also be understood quite differently. For "idols" aren't specifically named in the Hebrew text. The

idea equally could be that here we have the Divine hope that the exiles would return from the ends of the earth / land, in the territories of Assyria, Babylon and Persia, and work together in building Zion. These different interpretations are because these were the various potential possibilities or scenarios which could have come about.

Isaiah 41:6 Everyone helps his neighbour, they say to their brothers, Be strong!- This could be read as a condemnation of entire Gentile society, stressing how they together encouraged each other in making idols (:7). Or as noted on :5, it could also be the Divine vision for the returned exiles working together in rebuilding the things of His Kingdom in Zion. "Be strong!" is the word used multiple times in the records of the restoration of Zion (Ezra 1:6; 6:22; 7:28; 9:12; 10:4; Neh. 2:18; 3:4 and often, rendered "repair").

Isaiah 41:7 So the carpenter encourages the goldsmith. He who smoothes with the hammer encourages him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, It is good; and he fastens it with nails- This refers to the different types of people working together to build Jerusalem; the goldsmiths are mentioned specifically in Neh. 3:8,32; "carpenter" is s.w. Ezra 3:7. Yet as explained on :5, the whole passage here also has reference to those who made idols (s.w. Is. 45:16). Instead of fulfilling the possibilities in rebuilding the temple, they instead used their skills building idols and encouraging one another in that.

That it might not totter- Used about the idols made in Is. 40:20; but also of the reestablished Zion which would not move / totter (Ps. 125:1 s.w.). See on :5.

Isaiah 41:8 But you, Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend- The servant here is clearly the people of Israel. It is significant that Paul takes a passage from one of Isaiah's servant songs and applies it to us. The servant who suffered and witnessed to the world was evidently the Lord Jesus. And yet Isaiah is also explicit that the servant is the whole seed of Abraham, "Jacob", the slowly-developing people of God (Is. 41:8; 44:1), who now refer to all those in Christ. There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite "to let the

oppressed go free...loose the bonds", and to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6) as Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory.

Isaiah's restoration prophecies are shot through with references to Abraham, directly or indirectly. Israel / Judah are called by Isaiah to be Yahweh's chosen (Is. 41:8), fetched from the end of the land (Is. 41:9), to act like the seed of Abraham (Is. 41:8)... just like Abraham. But Abraham left Babylonia and journeyed to the promised land- and Judah likewise are bidden make that journey (Is. 44:2). By refusing to do so, they were showing themselves to *not* be the seed of Abraham- they were rejecting themselves from the covenant people. I've shown at length elsewhere that Abraham initially resisted the call to leave Ur, he struggled with the challenge, it took him years actually to truly leave Babylonia behind and head out in faith to the promised land. So the relevance to the Jews in exile was pertinent. It's the same with Isaiah's allusions to Israel's leaving Egypt. The Jews in Babylon were intended to live out the type by leaving Babylon and making the wilderness journey to the land- and God helped them in it. For example, Ezra 6:4 records how God moved the local authorities to pronounce that the residents around the returning exiles should give them silver, gold and goods. This was an exact re-living of how Israel left Egypt with Egypt's gold and silver (Ex. 12:35). Yet most of the Jews didn't want to return, they didn't want to live out the type.

Isaiah 41:9 You whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth and called from its corners and said to you- The exiles were located in the very borders and corners of the land promised to Abraham, but from there they would be regathered. If they were willing to participate in the Divine plan, which sadly most of them weren't. They preferred to remain in exile from Him.

'You are My servant, I have chosen you- Because the exiles refused to be Yahweh's servant, the words were reapplied to the Lord Jesus. And so this is quoted in Heb. 2:10,14 about God taking hold of Jesus, His servant. Is. 41:10 continues concerning Jesus, therefore, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee (the

Angels' words to Joshua); be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (an Angel). The right hand Angel of God strengthened, upheld and helped Jesus spiritually as it could have done the exiles and their potential Messianic leaders like Zerubbabel. His dismay which the verse implies He had was therefore at His feeling of being spiritually inadequate to fulfill His great calling- exactly like Joshua. But as with Joshua, the Angel strengthened Him.

Reasoning back from the addresses to the captives in later Isaiah, it appears they thought that Yahweh was a God who just operated in the land of Israel. The captives felt they couldn't sing the songs of Yahweh in a Gentile land (Ps. 137). They thought that now they were outside His land and far from His temple, they were forgotten by Him (Is. 49:14,15), their cause ignored by Him (Is. 40:27) and they were "cast off" from relationship with Him (Is. 41:9). Hence Isaiah emphasizes that Yahweh is the creator and the God of the whole planet, and His presence is literally planet-wide. Likewise there is much stress in those addresses on the fact that Yahweh's word of prophecy will come true. Remember that there had been many false prophets of Yahweh just prior to the captivity who predicted victory against Babylon and prosperity (Lam. 2:9,14; Jer. 44:15-19). And the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah appeared to not be coming true, or at best was delayed or re-scheduled in fulfilment [even Daniel felt this, according to his desperate plea for fulfilment in Daniel 9]. And so there was a crisis of confidence in the concept of prophecy, and Yahweh's word and prophets generally. Isaiah addressed this by stressing the nature and power of that word, and urging faith in its fulfilment and relevance.

And not cast you away'- The exiles needed assurance of this. But it could be that as with many today in the new Israel, their conclusion that God had cast them away was an excuse for remaining in a society where they were prosperous. 'Cast away' here is the same word as 'despise'. Judah had 'despised' God's laws (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43), casting them away (Is. 5:24) and yet God had 'cast them away' (Lev. 26:44 s.w.). He did not treat them as they treated Him. And yet God did cast them away temporarily (s.w. Is. 54:6; Jer. 7:29; Hos. 4:6); but His message was that now they were not cast away.

Isaiah 41:10 Don't you be afraid, for I am with you- Time and again, Isaiah's restoration prophecies told Judah that they should not fear, as Yahweh would mightily be with them in their work (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8,11; 54:7,14;

59:19). But Judah feared the surrounding nations- Ezra and Nehemiah are full of this theme (Ezra 3:3), and in exile they feared condemnation. Nehemiah refused to be put in fear by the Samaritan opposition because of his faith in Isaiah's promises (Neh. 6:14). And Isaiah further spoke to Judah's heart in Is. 51:12,13: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations [s.w. re. the foundation of the temple being laid] of the earth ['heaven and earth' often refers to the temple]; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?". The fact they did fear meant that they had forgotten Yahweh who was so eager to re-establish their Kingdom.

Don't be dismayed, for I am your God- The command not to be dismayed may be a command to not look to idols but to Yahweh as their God (s.w. :23; Is. 17:8).

I will strengthen you- Yahweh would strengthen His servant people, in contrast to the idols, which had to be strengthened by their makers (s.w. Is. 44:14). This phrase is used several times about Joshua being strengthened to enter the land and possess it; which was relevant to the exiles being encouraged to possess the same land (Dt. 31:6,7,23).

Yes, I will help you- Ezra was ashamed to ask for *help* against Judah's enemies (Ezra 8:22), the implication being that he wanted that human help but was ashamed to ask for it from the King. He had initially believed those words of Isaiah, but found it hard to maintain that level of faith. But they should have had faith in the restoration prophecy's promise: "Fear not ... I will *help* you" (Is. 41:10).

Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness- The servant, be it Israel the nation or an individual Messianic figure, would be upheld by Yahweh in order to achieve the restoration; and in the case of the likes of Cyrus and Zerubbabel, would have had righteousness imputed to them had they wished to go along with God's program.

Isaiah 41:11 Behold, all those who are incensed against you will be disappointed and confounded. Those who strive with you will be like nothing, and shall perish- The Samaritans could have provided a fulfilment of all this, just as the prideful Assyrians were before. And yet Sanballat, Tobiah, the Ammonites and

Ashdodites were “wroth” [s.w. ‘incensed’] against Judah (Neh. 4:1,7). But they didn’t come to nothing, nor to shame, in that those very groups were the ones who married into Jewry, to the extent that Tobiah even shifted the tithes out of one of the chambers of the temple and set up his office there. But it was to be the makers of idols who were "confounded" (s.w. Is. 45:16) and only the true Israel would not be "confounded" (Is. 45:17; 54:4). The sinners in Israel had refused to be confounded or ashamed of their sins (Jer. 3:3 s.w.) and so they would be shamed in condemnation. Repentance involves an imagination of ourselves coming to judgment day and being condemned, and feeling shame for that; that is how we shall not be ashamed. And it is the servant alone who shall not be ashamed / confounded because of His righteousness (Is. 50:7). Our identity with Him removes that shame. If we condemn ourselves, we shall not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The enemies of Israel would perish alongside the apostate within Israel, in the same judgment.

Isaiah 41:12 You will seek them, and won’t find them, even those who contend with you. Those who war against you will be as nothing, as a non-existent thing- LXX "thou shalt not find the men who shall insolently rage against thee". Just as the Assyrians had raged against Yahweh and then be slain in a moment, so would all Judah's enemies. "Contend" is the word used for how Assyria and Babylon 'laid waste' Judah (Is. 37:26; Jer. 4:7). "War against" is s.w. "the controversy of Zion" (Is. 34:8). World geopolitics has moved to a state where in our day as never before, Jerusalem / Zion is a key issue which will bring about the war against Israel and Jewish people. But this is going to be resolved finally and in a moment, at the return of the Lord Jesus. The idea is really of bringing a case or legal "cause" in court- s.w. :21. And Yahweh Himself will plead that cause or "war" with latter day Babylon when it falls (s.w. Jer. 50:34). The Gentile opposition will be as nothing in that they will weigh as nothing on the scales of final judgment concerning Zion (s.w. Is. 40:17). The idea is not at all that people do not matter to God.

Isaiah 41:13 For I, Yahweh your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Don’t be afraid. I will help you’- This Fatherly image of help offered to a nervous child was to encourage the weak minded exiles to return to Zion and accept Yahweh's helping hand, just as His hand had 'helped' Hezekiah against the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:8). At the restoration, Ezra believed this "help" would enable the restoration to the extent that they didn't need any human soldiers to help them (Ezra 8:22 s.w.).

Isaiah 41:14 Don't be afraid, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel- The sense of "you worm Jacob" may be as LXX "Israel few in number". But the idea can also be of absolute smallness and weakness (Is. 14:11; Job 25:6). The Lord as the suffering servant on the cross felt like a worm in that He totally bore Israel's feelings and sufferings (Ps. 22:6).

I will help you, says Yahweh, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel- see on Is. 44:2. As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren

Isaiah 41:15 Behold, I have made you into a new sharp threshing instrument with teeth. You will thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and will make the hills like chaff- This and :16 is full of reference to Daniel 2. It was as if the prophecy of Dan. 2 could have been fulfilled by Judah and their 'Messiah' as the stone- right then. As explained on Dan. 2:44, the stone from the mountain of Babylon returning to the *eretz* could have had application to the returned exiles. LXX "I have made thee as new saw-shaped threshing wheels of a wagon" alludes to the cherubim; faithful Judah would become identified with Yahweh's Angel chariot and would become the vehicle for His operations against the Gentiles. This threshing will come ultimately true in the last days (s.w. Mic. 4:13).

Isaiah 41:16 You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away, and the whirlwind will scatter them. You will rejoice in Yahweh, you will glory in the Holy One of Israel- See on :15. This joy is presented as the joy of harvest; and

the harvest will have been the judging of the nations of the *eretz* who refuse to accept Yahweh. The winnowing figure implies however that the wind would indeed take away the chaff, but the wheat would fall to the ground and be saved. Always in these figures of judgment there is an ultimately positive outcome somehow in view. Israel's joy of harvest would therefore be in that some wheat has come out of the judgment process; some will repent amongst their enemies, and they will have learnt the lesson of Jonah, and this shall be their great joy.

Isaiah 41:17 The poor and needy seek water, and there is none, their tongue fails for thirst. I Yahweh, will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them- As the book of Esther makes clear, the exiles were prosperous in their various societies. Their spiritual thirst would be met. And as food and water were provided for Israel in their wilderness journey, so everything physically necessary would be provided for their return.

Isaiah 41:18 I will open rivers on the bare heights and springs in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water- Like Hosea with Gomer (see on Is. 1:26), Yahweh wanted to repeat the wilderness romance with which He had started His relationship with them. He wanted to again provide water in the desert (Is. 41:18); He wanted their return from Babylon across the desert to be like their exodus from Egypt and passage through the desert to the land. Hosea talks of starting a relationship again with his wife, a re-marriage; Ez. 37 expresses this same reality in another figure in speaking of how Israel would be resurrected, and this new person would return to Zion. Is. 41:19 speaks of how God would even line their route from Babylon to Zion with trees. In the wilderness, the place where God told Moses that Israel were not His people, there God intended to again tell them that they were His people (Hos. 2:1); God’s judgment against His people involved taking them into the wilderness and slaying them with thirst (Hos. 2:5); and yet there, through that judgment, they would again become His people. God’s plan therefore was to bring Judah out of Babylon / Persia, and reveal Himself to them as their God on their wilderness journey home, and then return together with joy to Zion.

Isaiah 41:19 I will put cedar, acacia, myrtle, and oil trees in the wilderness. I will set fir trees, pine, and box trees together in the desert- See on :18. God would even line their route from Babylon to Zion with trees. The myrtle was a native of Persia, the land of their exile. But it was as it were to be transplanted to

Judah; it is the language of return from exile.

Isaiah 41:20 that they may see, know, consider, and understand together, that the hand of Yahweh has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it- They would perceive that their return to the land was part of a new creation. But they didn't at the time of the restoration, they returned seeking their own personal benefit from it, and were met by droughts, pests, opposition from the locals- and prophetic condemnation. And so the new creation became reapplied to the work of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17) and the latter day reestablishment of the Kingdom at the Lord's return.

Isaiah 41:21 Produce your cause, says Yahweh. Bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob- GNB ""You gods of the nations, present your case. Bring the best arguments you have!". The following section concludes in :29 with a round condemnation of idols. The gods of the nations are arrayed in court against Yahweh. This continual polemic against idolatry is surely a tacit reflection upon the fact that idolatry continued to be a problem for the exiles in the initial generations, as the messages of Ezekiel make clear enough. It was only later that the exiles quit idolatry. The truth is that many Jews and Israelites assimilated into the areas of their captivity and accepted the gods and culture of their surrounding society.

Isaiah 41:22 Let them announce and declare to us what shall happen. Declare the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or show us things to come- Statements like these in Isaiah are often interpreted as meaning that God's prophecies of the future are the ultimate proof that He is God. But I have noted throughout Isaiah and all the prophets that God's prophecies are largely conditional; in the spirit of Jer. 18:8-10, they are statements of outcomes which will happen if there is no repentance. Human repentance and intercession can change the stated outcomes; either completely precluding them, or resulting in their reapplication, amelioration, rescheduling or reinterpretation. So Bible prophecy would not be automatically fulfilled as stated, and therefore it would not be that compelling an argument. It would also require evidence that the original manuscripts existed from the required date, and the originals don't exist. In the course of my missionary work, I have been involved in literally thousands of people from atheistic or Islamist backgrounds coming to faith in the Bible and the Lord Jesus. Not one of these was persuaded

by "Bible prophecy". The path from unbelief to belief is, I suggest and observe, along different tracks to that. And there is in any case no Euclidean evidence for God's existence, as faith is not based upon "seen" evidence (Heb. 11:1). There may be confirmations for faith, but faith is ultimately a step taken without these things as a safety net or motivator. It is "the word of God", the message of His love in His Son, which is in our age of itself the basis for faith.

The first half of the verse about future things matches the second half about past things- "Explain to the court the events of the past, and tell us what they mean" (GNB). The emphasis and flavour of the words used is not upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

Isaiah 41:23 Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and see it together- LXX "declare ye to us the things that are coming on at the last time". See on :22. It could be inferred from this that what is unique about the one true God, Yahweh of Israel, is that He is responsible for both good *and* evil, as stated in Is. 45:5-7. As today, false and mistaken religious systems suggest a good God or gods, and an evil one or demons. The idea of "good and evil" being created by God goes back to the simple statement in Gen. 2:9 that it was *God* who created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The synthesis of all experience, positive and negative, as coming from one God... is what makes Him so unique amongst all religions and belief systems. The popular belief in Satan as a cosmic being separate from God, and of God as only interested in giving us prosperity... is sadly missing out fundamentally in understanding the unique nature of Yahweh.

Isaiah 41:24 Behold, you are of nothing, and your work is of nothing. He who chooses you is an abomination- The idols and their supporters have been charged in :23 and asked to "declare" their answer. But there is silence; see on :26. And so this is the judgment pronounced, and the conclusion that any who chooses them is like them, "an abomination". Their silence is connected with

their judgment- they are nothing. Nothingness and vanity is a major theme in later Isaiah. As explained on Is. 40:17, the idea is not that any persons are irrelevant to God; but that their weight is insignificant in the scale of judgment. They have no argument, and so nothing to add to the scale. "Of nothing" is the phrase translated "without man" in describing the utter desolation to come upon idolatrous Judah (Is. 6:11; Jer. 4:7).

Isaiah 41:25 I have raised up one from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun, one who calls on My name; and he shall come on rulers as on mortar, and as the potter treads clay- As explained on :2, Cyrus came from both the north and the east. But evidently the intended, possible fulfilment just didn't happen; for although he was indeed used by God, he did not "call on My name". He, along with the revived, repentant community of exiles, could have come upon the feet of iron and clay of the Dan. 2 vision and destroyed it. For that image had a fulfilment as the Babylonian empire, headed up by Nebuchadnezzar. But the fulfilment has been deferred until the return of the Lord Jesus. He will come from Heaven, the figurative "north", rather than literal Persia / Babylon; the essence will be gloriously fulfilled, but not every literality. And so it may well be with the prophecies of the temple and worship system which was to be restored. "I have raised up... he has come" is an example of the prophetic perfect; Cyrus was still 150 years in the future, and the Lord Jesus yet further in the future.

Isaiah 41:26 Who has declared it from the beginning, that we may know? And before, that we may say, 'He is right?'. Surely, there is no one who declares like this. Surely, there is no one who shows, surely, there is no one who hears your words- LXX "there is no one that speaks beforehand, nor anyone that hears your words". As explained on :22, the idea is not simply that God foretold Cyrus (:25) in advance and was thereby justified as God because His prophecies came true. Rather is the force of "declared" that He had explained and given meaning to events of history, rather than simply meaning 'He has predicted this'. It is that metanarrative built into history by Yahweh which is "right" or 'righteous'. "Nor anyone that hears your words" may be a reference to the silence of the idols and their supporters in court as suggested on :24. Hence GNB "None of you said a word about it; no one heard you say a thing!".

Isaiah 41:27 I am the first to say to Zion, 'Behold, look at them;' and I will give

one who brings good news to Jerusalem- LXX "I will give dominion to Sion, and will comfort Jerusalem". This is the scene of Is. 40:9; 52:7, where Zion is comforted with the message that now she can return and the Kingdom of God will be reestablished. The initial possibilities of fulfilment failed, and so it is the Lord Jesus and perhaps the latter day Elijah ministry announcing Him which is in view. But His message would only be "good news" for the humble and penitent (Is. 61:1 s.w.). "I am the first to say to Zion" may be a reference, in the context, to how God had conceived this plan "at the first". Hence GNB "I, the LORD, was the first to tell Zion the news; I sent a messenger to Jerusalem to say, 'Your people are coming! They are coming home!'".

Isaiah 41:28 When I look, there is no man; even among them there is no counsellor who, when I ask of them, can answer a word- There are many mocking allusions to Marduk, showing Yahweh's supremacy over him. Marduk was formed- but Yahweh had no god before Him and will have none after Him (Is. 43:10). Marduk had a counsellor, Ea, called in the inscriptions "the all-wise one". But Yahweh has all wisdom and has no such counsellor (Is. 40:13,14; Is. 41:28). All this reference to the Marduk cult was in my opinion not merely a pointless mockery and poking of fun at the Persian culture. It was a very real appeal to the Jewish exiles to quit it, to come out and be separate; remember again and again that Mordecai [and perhaps Esther too] had adopted names reflective of the Marduk cult. See on Is. 40:25.

In the context of this section, the gods / idols are being asked to answer up, and they are silent; see on :23,26. The "no man" who can answer anything may simply mean 'there was none', i.e. none of the gods who are being questioned in court. Hence GNB "When I looked among the gods, none of them had a thing to say; not one could answer the questions I asked".

And yet another take is possible. God sent His prophets to appeal to Israel for repentance. They *could have lead to repentance*. But Israel would not. The marriage feast was totally ready and waiting for the Jewish people; they could have had it. But they didn't want it, and so the course of human history was extended. Therefore finally God sent His Son. The Lord Jesus Himself was amazed that no other man had achieved the work which He had to; and therefore He clad Himself with zeal and performed it (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16 cp. Rev. 5:3,4). God knew that salvation in the end would have to be through the death of His Son. But there were other possible scenarios for the repentance and salvation of mankind, which no man achieved. And so, as in the parable of the servants

sent to get fruit from the vineyard, there was left no other way but the death of God’s only Son.

Isaiah 41:29 Behold, all of them, their works are vanity and nothing. Their molten images are wind and confusion- LXX "For these are your makers, as ye think, and they that cause you to err in vain". The idols and their supporters have been charged in :23 and asked to "declare" their answer. But there is silence; see on :26. And so this is the final judgment pronounced. Their silence is connected with their judgment- they are nothing. As explained on Is. 40:17, the idea is not that any persons are irrelevant to God; but that their weight is insignificant in the scale of judgment. They have no argument, and so nothing to add to the scale. "Confusion" is *tohu*, the word used in Gen. 1:2 of how the earth / land was "without form", and then the Spirit / wind (s.w.) moved upon it. Here we have again the presence of "wind" (s.w.). Now the idols have been declared vain and non-existent, a new creation can begin. There is always this positive hint in the Divine judgments pronounced.

Isaiah Chapter 42

Isaiah 42:1 Behold, My servant, whom I uphold- The servant, be it Israel the nation or an individual Messianic figure, would be upheld by Yahweh in order to achieve the restoration; and in the case of the likes of Cyrus and Zerubbabel, would have had righteousness imputed to them had they wished to go along with God's program (Is. 41:10 s.w.).

My chosen, in whom My soul delights- The reason why there are no accusers against us, not even our own sins, is because we are “God’s elect” (Rom. 8:33). The supreme chosen one of God was of course the Lord Jesus, “mine elect, in whom my soul delights” (Is. 42:1). And yet later on in the servant songs of Isaiah, “mine elect” clearly refers to the people of Israel (Is. 45:4; 65:9,22). The true Israel of God are therefore those counted as somehow “in” the elect one, the singular servant of God, Messiah Jesus. Those baptized into Him are therefore His elect. And how do we know we are “God’s elect”? If we are baptized into Christ, “mine elect”, then for sure we are. And further, we have heard the call of the Gospel, we have been called- so, we are God’s elect, His chosen ones. Of course the objection can be raised that the whole idea of calling or election may appear unfair. Indeed, the Greek word for “elect” can carry the idea of ‘the favoured / favourite one’. There is no ultimate injustice here. The chosen One is the Lord Jesus, beloved for the sake of His righteousness, His spirit of life. Those who respond to the call to be “in Him” are counted likewise. And all this is the way, the method used, in order for God to be the one who counts us as right in the ultimate judgment- for “It is God that justifies”.

I have put My Spirit on him- The Is. 42 passage concerning Jesus as preaching to the Gentiles is quoted in the Gospels from the LXX. But this reads: “Jacob is my servant, I will help him: Israel, is my chosen, my soul has accepted him... he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up his voice... but... He shall shine out, and not be discouraged” (Is. 42:1-4 LXX). The passages primarily exhorts Israel at the time of their living in Babylon to live up to their role as a missionary nation; they didn’t need to cry or lift up the voice in preaching, because their own example and being would be the witness. They would “shine out” as the light of the Gentile world in which they had to live. But they failed in this; and yet the prophecy came true in the Lord Jesus, the true servant of Yahweh. But the prophecy still has to be fulfilled in us, the servants of the Lord, as those in Christ, as we live through our Babylon years. See on :5.

He will bring justice to the nations- This bringing forth of justice, or declaration of the sentence (s.w. Ps. 17:2), will be "unto truth" (:3). The result of the

judgment will be "truth". Mercy and truth are associated with the Abrahamic covenant. The idea may be that through their condemnation and judgment, they will learn Yahweh's ways and accept covenant relationship with Him. That was the prophetic vision for a remnant of all the nations in the *eretz*; they were to join a repentant Israel and Judah in returning to the land to form a multiethnic people of God in the restored Kingdom. But they didn't repent and so this has been deferred to the last days.

Isaiah 42:2 He will not shout, nor raise his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street- When Paul wrote that “the servant of the Lord must not strive” in his preaching ministry (2 Tim. 2:24), he was alluding back to how the servant song described the Lord Jesus in His preaching as not striving or lifting up His voice in proud argument (Is. 42:2 cp. Mt. 12:19). We are the servant in that we are "in Christ". All that is true of Him is to be true of us. "Shout" is always used in Isaiah of shouting or crying in distress, condemnation or disappointment in human strength (Is. 19:20; Is. 33:7; 46:7; 65:14). The idea may be that *He* will not cry like this, but rather be heard by Yahweh and bring blessing to others. Yet the verse is quoted in Mt. 12:19 about the teaching style of the Lord Jesus. The Lord didn’t shout out in the streets who He was. He wished His followers to follow His example in *showing* the message to the world just as He did- in who He was (Mt. 12:18). Christ's instruction to His recent converts not to spread the Gospel in an unseemly way, because it was written about *Him personally that* “he shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear *His* voice in the streets". In other words, the true preacher of Christ is solidly identified with Him by the very act of preaching. Truly "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) in our witnessing. His voice is our voice.

Isaiah 42:3 He won’t break a bruised reed. He won’t quench a dimly burning wick. He will faithfully bring justice- "Bruised reed" in Is. 36:6 is better "broken reed", and this is the very phrase used here about how the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, would *not* break a "bruised / broken reed" (Is. 42:3). Egypt were a broken reed, recently broken in battle and now useless to save Israel. They were too weak to uphold the weight of Judah if they were to lean upon it for strength. God turns the figure around- He as it were is in need of man, He wishes to trust upon us; and although we are broken reeds, we will not be crushed nor will He be disappointed. He so wishes to work with us.

The events of the crucifixion were so packed with fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and shadows that the Lord's discernment of them must have given Him a wonderful boost of strength, in knowing who He was and where He was destined. For example, when they put a broken reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, His mind would have flown to the Messianic Is. 42:3: "A bruised reed shall he not break...he *shall* bring forth judgment", as they mocked him for his apparent inability to do.

The Hebrew words used in Is. 42:3 suggest this is a reference to the candlestick; the words respectively mean a shaft / stem, and a wick. Little strength, little light (if the reference is to the reed which took oil to the lamps of the candlestick), little heat- but all the same, the Lord Jesus seeks to fan it into life rather than walk away in disappointment; and by doing so, sets a challenging example to many of us, whose most frequent complaint is the weak state of the brotherhood's members. If the reference is to a damaged and smoky candlestick, this becomes the more poignant- for the candlestick was a clear symbol of Israel and then of the ecclesias (Rev. 1:12,13,20; 2:1).

When judgment is finally cast out by mercy at the last day, then the dysfunctional candlestick will be quenched or destroyed in condemnation. Note how the metaphor of quenching a fire is used here for condemnation; but in another metaphor, condemnation is spoken of as the very opposite- unquenchable fire. This is sure proof that we are not to read 'unquenchable fire' as literal.

Isaiah 42:4 He will not fail nor be discouraged until he has set justice in the earth, and the islands will wait for his law- LXX "He shall shine out". The Lord's patience with the useless candlestick of Israel and the weakness of the ecclesia (see on :3) will be "until" His final victory over judgment. That happened in one sense on the cross, but in another sense it will only happen when death is swallowed up in victory at the day of judgment. Until then, both He and us are to patiently bear with the damaged and dysfunctional ecclesial candlestick. But in that day, those elements of the candlestick which refuse to give light to the house will be "broken", the Greek in Mt. 12:20 meaning 'broken in pieces'- the language of condemnation (Mt. 21:44).

Ezra, Nehemiah, Joshua, Zerubbabel... all overlooked the encouragement of Is. 42:4 concerning the servant-Messiah: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged". Of course, the Lord Jesus Himself, along with these earlier potential Messiahs, *could* have failed and been discouraged. This was a conditional prophecy, if ever

there was one. But the Lord Jesus made it real and live in His own experience; the others assumed, as we so often do, that these kind of scriptures are meant for someone other than us. Just as so many in the world assume that the good news of the Kingdom applies to us who preach it, and it must be very nice for us...but refuse to let the personal reality of it sink in for *them*.

Isaiah 42:5 Thus says God Yahweh, He who created the heavens and stretched them out, He who spread out the earth and that which comes out of it- The simple fact we are created by God means that we are responsible to God in some sense, and therefore liable to His judgment. The stretched out hand of God is used as a figure both for His judgment of man (Is. 31:3) and also for His creation of man (Is. 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13). The knowledge that we are created by Him makes us responsible to His judgment, and we have to look at our bodies, our lives which He has created… and act accordingly.

He who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk in it- This is the same phrase regarding how God's Spirit is given or "put" (s.w.) in the Messianic Saviour figure of :1. The idea is that all the people in this new system will also have the Spirit put within them; and the same phrase is used of the Spirit being potentially "put" or "given" in the restored exiles (Ez. 37:6,14). They were to all have the Spirit of the servant saviour. This has now come to fulfilment in the spirit of Christ being the sustaining force in the new creation, and will be more literally manifest in the reestablishment of the Kingdom at the last day.

But the reference is also to the simple fact that God created the heavens, earth and man upon it. And this means we should use our lives to come into covenant relationship with our creator (:6). God "wrought us" as He did in order to enable us to have this longing. According to the Bible, the spirit of man is God's. He gave us that life force, and at death "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecc. 12:7). If we seriously believe this, then we will see death as an opportunity to give back to God what He gave us, namely our very life force. If in our lives we followed this principle, realizing nothing we 'have' is really ours but His, and therefore we were open handed with our possessions and knowledge of Him, freely giving it out as it were to Him, then giving back our life force to Him will be but a natural progression from this way of living. And thus we will see immortality not as something we personally crave for our own benefit, but rather a further opportunity to reflect back to Him, to His glory. Thus understanding Bible truth about death affects how we face death and eternity, and therefore radically influences our lives now.

Isaiah 42:6 I, Yahweh, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand and will keep you, and make you a covenant for the people, as a light for the nations- The hands of God's servants were held or [s.w.] strengthened at the return from exile (s.w. Ezra 1:6; 6:22; 7:28; Neh. 2:18; 6:9). They could then have fulfilled the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:3 that the weak hands would be strengthened (s.w. "hold"). This taking by the hand would supremely have been through entering the new covenant; to give the hand was to enter covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:32). But these potentials were refused by the exiles. And so they became fulfilled in the Lord Jesus personally, who became the essence of the covenant and the light of the world.

Isaiah 42:7 to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out of the dungeon, and those who sit in darkness out of the prison- There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The Saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite “to let the oppressed go free... loose the bonds”, and to “undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke” (Is. 58:6) as the Lord Jesus Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah’s first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as ‘in’ him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. Significantly, Isaiah 40-53 speak of the one servant, whereas Isaiah 54-66 speak of the plural “servants” who fulfill in principle the work of the singular servant.

Those who are thankfully redeemed in Christ, now lovingly reconciled to Him, are described as blind, starving prisoners, bound in the darkness, awaiting execution (Ps. 107:14; Is. 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Zech. 9:11). Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are “the poor” (Gk. ‘the crouchers’), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3).

Isaiah 42:8 I am Yahweh; that is My name. I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to engraved images- The implication is that the Jews had tried to praise Yahweh through praising their images. They never rejected Him, and yet they accepted idol worship. They achieved this in their conscience, as we can be tempted to do, by reasoning that idol worship was done in the name of Yahweh

worship. But praise of Yahweh is because of His unique characteristics or Name, which no other idol has. Therefore as His Name is, so is His praise world-wide (Ps. 48:10); beyond the barriers of distance and language, those who know the Name are united in praise. Is. 42:8 speaks as if God's Name is itself His praise, so strong and inevitable is the link between knowing His Name and praising it. Therefore "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name" (Ps. 29:2) suggests that the Name of Yahweh demands praise from us. To simply declare the Name is of itself to praise (Heb. 2:12). This explains why at least 15 times in the Psalms and often elsewhere, praise is to be given to God's Name (Ps. 7:17; 9:2; 44:8; 54:6; 61:8; 69:30; 74:21; 99:3; 113:1; 135:1; 138:2; 142:7; 145:2; 148:5,13; 149:3).

Isaiah 42:9 Behold, the former things have happened, and I declare new things. I tell you about them before they come up- As explained on Is. 41:22, the emphasis and flavour of the words used is not upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

Isaiah 42:10 Sing to Yahweh a new song- We sing the “new song” now, because we sing / meditate of the “new things” which will be in the Kingdom. In that day, we will “sing a new song” (Rev. 5:9; 14:3). And yet this is undoubtedly picking up on the way in which we can *now* sing the ‘new song’, every morning (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Likewise, all things will be made new at the Lord’s coming (Rev. 21:5), and yet those in whom the new creation is worked out already have all things made new in their spiritual experience (2 Cor. 5:17,18). The life that He had and now lives is the essence of the Kingdom life. Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It’s why one of His titles is “the kingdom of God” (Lk. 17:21). And it’s why it can be said that we ‘have’ eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now.

And His praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all

that is therein, the islands and their inhabitants- The frequent mention of the ends of the earth / land is understandable, because the exiles were located, both those of Israel and Judah. They along with the repentant remnant of the Gentiles were intended to unite together as a new multiethnic people of God in a restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 42:11 Let the wilderness and its cities raise their voices, with the villages that Kedar inhabits- Is. 21:13-16 mentions these areas as those who will have remnants who survive and are envisaged as repenting and turning to Yahweh. Even remote Bedouin villages will accept Israel's God.

Let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains!- "The inhabitants of the rock"; the reference is probably to Petra, which like "Sela" means "rock". Even Edom, the sworn enemy of Israel and Yahweh, would ultimately have a remnant who turn to Yahweh; although this and :12 may be an invitation for them to do so, a call for their repentance.

Isaiah 42:12 Let them give glory to Yahweh- Connecting with Is. 42:8, the "them" is those who have now quit idolatry.

And declare His praise in the islands- The same phrase only in Ps. 51:15 about David's praise of Yahweh after his repentance; and it again is repentance which is in view here.

Isaiah 42:13 Yahweh will go out like a mighty man, He will stir up- Yet Yahweh would "stir up" Cyrus (s.w. Is. 41:2,25; 45:13), so this could have been fulfilled through that "mighty man". But he failed. The "mighty man", the *gibbor*, therefore became reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Is. 9:6 s.w.). But He will act through the stirring up of a repentant Judah (s.w. Is. 51:9,17; 52:1), seeing that no man would be 'stirred up' (s.w. Is. 64:7). All the potential candidates had refused the Divine nudges to be stirred up.

Zeal like a man of war, He will raise a war cry. Yes, He will shout aloud, He will triumph over His enemies- The Hebrew word translated " zeal" in the context of God's zeal for us (Is. 9:8) really means the jealousy which flares up in a man for a woman (the same word is in Num. 5:14,15; Prov. 6:34; Song 8:6 etc.). That jealousy burning like fire (Ps. 79:5) is His passion for us His people. He is a jealous God in His zeal for us; and therefore any other relationships with the things of this world cannot be contemplated by us. That zeal of God will be

poured out upon us at the second coming, resulting in a consummation with Him as the wife of His covenant (Is. 42:13,14; 64:1). This is a figure which would be unseemly for a man to devise. But this is His passion for us, which the humility of God drives Him to use; and surely it will one day be revealed. To use this very figure of a man in love and consummating his relationship in marriage is so apparently inappropriate that it reflects the humility of God in even considering the use of it. We are God's heritage, His reward / wages (Heb.), His recompense for all His labour for us (Ps. 127:3 Heb.).

Isaiah 42:14 I have been silent a long time, I have been quiet and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a travailing woman, I will both gasp and pant- Insofar as we realize that God is not passive, but has feelings toward us far more deep and passionate than we can ever know, so far we will realize that life with Him is a daily, passionate experience. It cannot be 'the same old scene'. Consider the passion of God: "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant" (Is. 42). "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? My heart is changed within me; All my compassion is aroused" (Hosea). The prophets are full of such passionate intensity. The prophets are not just predictions of the future. They reveal the passion of God's feelings for His people. At the very time when He condemns them for their adultery against Him, their ingratitude, their worthlessness, He cries out His belief in the blessedness He will one day grace them with.

God's long term 'holding His peace' at Israel's sins resulted in a build up of internal forces within God: "For a long time have I held my peace... restrained myself, now will I cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant" (Is. 42:14; 63:15; 64:12). God crying out, gasping, panting... leads straight on, in the context, to the suffering servant. This is the same idea as God's heart growing warm and being kindled in internal struggle about His people in Hos. 11:8,9. And all this went on supremely at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. We note His eagerness to compare Himself to a woman in labour, who stereotypically was veiled from male observation and identity with.

Isaiah 42:15 I will destroy mountains and hills and dry up all their herbs. I will make the rivers islands and will dry up the pools- This looks forward to the literal changes in the *eretz* promised to Abraham spoken of in Isaiah's 'little apocalypse' in Is. 24. Politically this will mean the collapse of all mountains or nations within that territory. God's mountain of the Dan. 2 vision is to be over

all. We note that "islands", a common word in Isaiah, here simply means the dry land where non-Israelite people live within the *eretz*.

Isaiah 42:16 I will bring the blind by a way that they don't know, I will lead them in paths that they don't know. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. I will do these things, and I will not forsake them- This is the message of Is. 40; that a way would be made for the exiles to return. This is the scene of Jer. 31:8, where the blind and limping Jacob and his family are brought back to the land from exile in the east. The literal way or path was also to be a spiritual path which they had not then yet known; for the blindness here is essentially spiritual (:18). It was all by grace; they would be returned despite their unbelief and impenitence. Their crooked ways would be made straight in that God would as it were make their ways straight.

But this huge spiritual potential was unused by the few exiles who did return. And so these things are reapplied to the way of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus warned that the blind cannot lead the blind- and explained what He meant by adding that "The disciple is not above his master: but every one when he is perfected shall be as his master" (Lk. 6:39.40). We are all learners of the one Master, and not leaders. Only if we are perfect can we be leaders of the blind- for it is Jesus personally who was prophesied as leading the blind (Is. 42:16). Hence we read in Mt. 23:10: "Nor should you be called 'Leader,' because your one and only leader is the Messiah".

Isaiah 42:17 Those who trust in engraved images, who tell molten images, 'You are our gods' will be turned back. They will be utterly disappointed- "Turned back" is the phrase used in Ps. 129:5 of the Assyrians who hated Zion being turned back to their own land. But it also applies to those within Judah who were idolaters. Their judgment will be at the same time as that of their national enemies. For they worshipped the same idols as their enemies. But the term essentially means 'to backslide' in moral apostasy (Is. 50:5 s.w.). How they lived in their lives will be how they are at judgment day. They will not suddenly appear as different people. "Utterly disappointed" is better 'greatly shamed', the shame of condemnation, of realizing that all human political help has come to nothing (s.w. Is. 30:5; Jer. 2:26); that the way and trust of a lifetime has come to nothing.

Isaiah 42:18 Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see- LXX "Look

up, ye blind, to see"; if there was a desire to see, shown by looking up; then they would see. These are the spiritually blind of :16, the exiles who by grace were to experience the psychological transformation of the Spirit which is part of accepting the new covenant. But they must have the desire to see and hear; and the exiles didn't even have that (see on Is. 48:8). And so this becomes true of a new, repentant Israel in our days and the last day.

Isaiah 42:19 Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?- see on Is. 44:2. The spiritual transformation of the blind and deaf was to be on account of their identification with the servant of Yahweh who was representative of them in their blindness. This may have had potential fulfilment in Isaiah, but Judah refused this. The sending forth of Isaiah was the sending forth of God's word to His people (s.w. Is. 6:8; 9:8). Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh. The man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached. In the immediate context, Isaiah himself was the servant messenger sent forth (s.w. Is. 42:19; 48:16; 61:1); but he was largely rejected, and Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh (Heb. 11:37). And so the messenger came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

The servant-Messiah is described as being blind and deaf (Is. 42:19)- just as those who returned from Babylon were called blind, yet having eyes; deaf, yet having ears (Is. 43:8). They had the potential to see and hear; and the servant-Messiah likewise was at that time deaf and blind, but had the potential to see and hear with the vision and words of Messiah. It is hard to understand these words otherwise. So we conclude that another reason why the restoration didn't turn into the promised Messianic Kingdom was simply due to poor leadership. Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah returned from Babylon and were intended to be leaders who would crown Joshua / Jesus as the Messiah-Priest-Branch who would rebuild Jerusalem. But nothing is heard of them further. Perhaps it is to them that Zech. 11:8 refers: "Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them…then said I [on God's behalf], I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die". They had gone into captivity because of poor shepherds, and now at their return they again lacked men willing to be their Saviours; and God is saying that He would not do the shepherding job which He had delegated to others. It could be that Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah all died in one month as a result of Zechariah's prophecy at the time of Ezra 5:1. Or it could be that the three potential shepherds who failed were Zerubbabel, Joshua and Nehemiah.

And so the blind and deaf servant came to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Because the Lord on the cross truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see.

Jeremiah mourned Israel's lack of spiritual sensitivity and failure to live up to their potential- they had eyes, but didn't see (Jer. 5:23), they were God's servant, but a blind one; His messenger, but unable to hear any message (Is. 42:19). So the prophets weren't satisfied just because a minority responded to their message of God's love. They were heartbroken because the majority rejected it. I suspect we tend to think that 1 response in 1000 is good, 1 in 10,000 isn't bad. But what about the other 999, or 9,999, who receive our tracts, hit our websites, hear our witness- and don't respond? Is our witness in the spirit of the prophets? Are we happy that the tiny minority respond, and don't spare a thought for the tragedy of the majority who don't? Not only their tragedy, but the tragedy for God?

There is a real paradox here: a blind servant, or slave. What master would keep a blind servant? Only a master who truly loved him, and kept him on as his servant by pure grace. Yet this useless blind servant was God's servant and messenger- even though the blind were not acceptable as servants or sacrifices of God under the Law (Lev. 21:18,22)! God uses His spiritually blind servant people to proclaim His message to the world. The disciples, still blind to the call of the Gentiles, were sent out to preach to the whole world! And we too, blind as we are, are turning men from blindness to light. Paul points out the humility which we should therefore have in our preaching: there are none that truly understand, that really see; we are all blind. And yet we are "a guide of the blind, a light to them that sit in darkness" (Rom. 2:19). Therefore we ought to help the blind with an appropriate sense of our own blindness. The first century Jewish Christians failed utterly in this. And sadly much of our earlier Christian preaching was not accompanied by an awareness of our own limited spiritual horizons and vision.

Isaiah 42:20 You see many things, but don't observe. His ears are open, but he doesn't listen- LXX "Ye have often seen, and have not taken heed; your ears have been opened, and ye have not heard". If they desired to see and hear, then the gift of the Spirit would have opened their eyes and ears (see on :18). But they didn't show any desire to be spiritually perceptive. And so the opening of eyes didn't happen. The gift of the Spirit works likewise today. The Corinthians were given the Spirit, but were not "spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) because they refused its operation. And this can be true of all who have been baptized and potentially received the gift of the Spirit.

Isaiah 42:21 It pleases Yahweh, for His righteousness' sake, to magnify the law, and make it honourable- GNB "The LORD is a God who is eager to save, so he exalted his laws and teachings, and he wanted his people to honor them. But now his people have been plundered; they are locked up in dungeons and hidden away in prisons". The context speaks of God's attempt to open the eyes of His people to His law; we could read this with GNB as meaning that God tried to make them obedient, but they refused. But we can read with AV that Yahweh "is well pleased for his righteousness' sake", and the referent would be the blind and deaf righteous servant of :19, the representative Lord Jesus, who identified with their blindness but Himself was righteous. "He will magnify the law" (AV) would then refer to His perfect obedience to the law and honouring it in His own person, whilst also representative of sinful Judah.

Isaiah 42:22 But this is a robbed and plundered people. All of them are snared in holes, and they are hidden in prisons. They have become a prey, and no one delivers; and a spoil, and no one says, 'Restore them!'- See on :21. They need not have remained in the holes and prisons of captivity, but they refused the saving work of the representative servant. And the exiles in Persia, as the book of Esther makes clear, didn't perceive their prosperity as actually being in holes and prisons, spiritually snared by their own materialism. See on Is. 49:24. Israel as a nation are often spoken of as being in prison in a Gentile world (Ps. 79:11; 102:20; Is. 42:7,22; 49:9); just as Joseph was. Prison and death are often associated because a spell in prison was effectively a death sentence, so bad were the conditions. Israel being in prison is therefore a symbol of a living death.

Isaiah 42:23 Who is there among you who will give ear to this? Who will listen and hear bearing in mind the time to come?- In the first instance, this is an appeal to the exiles to repent. "The time to come" could refer to their further

suffering, or to the wonderful Kingdom which potentially they could have a part in if they repented (s.w. Is. 41:23). But they retained their deaf ears (see on :18), refusing to have them opened. And so the appeal becomes a timeless one, for all who would seek to have a part in the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 42:24 Who gave Jacob as plunder, and Israel to the robbers? Didn't Yahweh, He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, and they disobeyed His law- LXX "For what did he give to Jacob up to spoil, and Israel to them that plundered him? Did not God do it against whom they sinned? and they would not walk in his ways, nor hearken to his law". This is in answer to the skepticism of the exiles encountered by Ezekiel, who considered they were suffering unjustly and the entire deportation had been unfair.

Isaiah 42:25 Therefore He poured the fierceness of His anger on him, and the strength of battle; and it set him on fire all around, but he didn't know; and it burned him, but he didn't take it to heart- See on :24. The tragedy was that those taken into captivity weren't reformed by their sufferings, and now their children likewise refused to "take it to heart" and repent. Here we have another connection with Job, the book which appears to have been rewritten for the exiles with Job as representative of both the exiles and the righteous servant. "Have you considered My servant..." (Job 1:8) is the same phrase here "take it to heart". The book of Job was therefore written as a way of appealing for the repentance of the exiles and for them to contextualize their own sufferings.

Isaiah Chapter 43

Isaiah 43:1 But now thus says Yahweh who created you, Jacob, and He who formed you, Israel: Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you- The exiles feared they were not good enough to be redeemed. But Yahweh desperately wanted them; He had in prospect redeemed them, but it was now for them to respond. And this is how it is with His appeal to people today. He not only created us but "formed" us for the moment at which we accept His redemption. Our entire biography and genetic prehistory, even including our own sins, was all part of that formation of a person to come to an optimal point at which they can say "Yes" to Him. By saying "Yes" we realize that nothing was random, meaning was attached to every event, leading to that moment of Divine-human encounter.

I have called you by your name. You are Mine- God's Name is over His people (Dt. 28:10). So to bear God's Name is to recognize His complete ownership and even conquest of us. And yet there's a significant twist to all this in Is. 43:1: "I have called you by *your* name, because you are mine". It seems like a slip- we expect God to say that He has called us by *His* Name, because we are His. But no- He wishes us to bear both His Name and our own name, He doesn't wish to subsume us beneath His ownership and manifestation to the point that we are not significant as persons. We expect the creator, owner and redeemer of someone or something to name it with *His* name. But God dashes that expectation- He says instead that we are called by *our* name. In this we see the extent to which God has created us so that *we* might have real, personal existence and salvation, not merely to as it were extend Himself. In this we see a profound insight into the utter depth of God's outgiving grace.

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and flame will not scorch you- Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel "found grace in the wilderness" before, and they would do again, "When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest" (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would "cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". This is why Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with

allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11). Daniel's friends were not burnt by the flames, and they were intended to be understood as representative of all the exiles.

Isaiah 43:3 For I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel your Saviour. I have given Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Sheba in your place- Sheba is LXX Syene, confining the geographical areas to what we know as Egypt. Isaiah 40-66 is full of encouragement to Judah in Babylon to “fear not” and make the move back to the land. They are encouraged that “I have redeemed thee…thou art mine…for I am the Lord thy God… thy saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee” (Is. 43:1,3 AV). As a reward for allowing the Jews to return, the kings of Persia were given Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba. The Jews were doubtful as to whether God would really accept them now, after all their sin; and they were trapped in the good life, and the difficulty of uprooting from the world they were in. *They were just like us!* They had to be reminded that their Saviour had paid the ransom to redeem them, and therefore they must do their part and leave. And the blood of Jesus should work a like inspiration for us, all too loaded down with our burden of sin, unworthiness, spiritual dysfunction…

Isaiah 43:4 Since you have been precious and honoured in My sight and I have loved you; therefore I will give people in your place, and nations instead of your life- As a reward for allowing the Jews to return, the kings of Persia were given Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba (:3). All this was by grace, for the exiles were not responsive. God's grace is prevenient in the sense that He takes the initiative, as all true lovers do. Their preciousness was "in My sight", in the eyes of the lover, imputing righteousness to them which of themselves they didn't have. To be 'precious in the sight' of someone means to save them by grace (s.w. 1 Sam. 26:21; 2 Kings 1:13; Ps. 72:14).

Isaiah 43:5 Don’t be afraid; for I am with you- This is said so often, in allusion to Joshua and Israel being encouraged to re-enter the land and possess it. It was primarily relevant to the exiles in Babylon / Persia who feared to return and doubted Yahweh's abiding presence with them. But it now is encouragement to all who wish to enter the Kingdom.

I will bring your seed from the east, and gather you from the west- The 'bringing' and 'gathering' of the exiles (Is. 43:5) would have been primarily fulfilled at the restoration (same words in Neh. 1:9). But most of the exiles remained in the

lands of their captivity, just as people resist the Gospel's call today. They had to themselves bring and gather themselves (Is. 45:20; 49:18; 60:4), so that God would confirm this by bringing and gathering them (Is. 43:5; Jer. 31:8; Ez. 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech. 10:10). And so today with all who wish to be in God's Kingdom; our desire to be there and first moves towards it will be confirmed many times over by God's work through His Spirit.

Isaiah 43:6 I will tell the north, 'Give them up!' and tell the south, 'Don't hold them back! Bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth- The points of the compass may just give the impression of a general regathering from all around. But we note the promise to regather the Jews from "the south", Egypt, to where they fled in faithless fear. And in Jeremiah's time, against the specific commandment of God not to go there. We have here, therefore, an example of God saving people from holes which they themselves have dug.

Isaiah 43:7 each one who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, yes, whom I have made'- Yahweh speaks of the returnees as if they were a new creation, created by Him along with the heavens and earth of the temple which He had stretched out in Zion (Isaiah 43:7; 44:2). He did not form this new land / heavens of the kingdom and temple of Israel in vain- He created it to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). But the Jews acted like the old creation. And the promise of new creation was deferred until the time of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). Judah for the most part declined to inhabit / dwell in the new heavens and earth [the same word in Isaiah 45:18 is frequently used re. how the returnees *dwelt* in the cities of Judah]. Every one of the exiles was formed personally to return to the land; Gods formative hand likewise has been at work in the biography and genetic prehistory of everyone who encounters the Gospel.

Paul saw more potential in the Jewish mind for Christ than other races; thus he speaks in Rom. 11 of how the natural branch which has been cut off [Israel] will be more effectively grafted back into the olive tree than the wild Gentile branches. This of course has similarities with the Lord's teaching about Himself as the vine, whose unfruitful branches had been cut off (Jn. 15:2). Israel "much more" than the Gentiles can be grafted back in, whereas Gentile converts do this "against nature" (Rom. 11:24). In the context of Israel's final repentance, God speaks of how every one of the Jewish people has been potentially created for His glory, because they carry His Name (Is. 43:7). Although Israel have been

“quenched as a wick” for their sins (Is. 43:17 RVmg.), we are to realize that the wick is still smouldering, and are to follow the Lord’s example of never totally quenching it but instead seek to fan the wick of Israel back into life (Is. 42:3).

Isaiah 43:8 Bring out the blind people who have eyes, and the deaf who have ears- See on Is. 42:19. The servant-Messiah is described as being blind and deaf (Is. 42:19)- just as those who returned from Babylon were called blind, yet having eyes; deaf, yet having ears (Is. 43:8). They had the potential to see and hear; and the servant-Messiah likewise was at that time deaf and blind, but had the potential to see and hear with the vision and words of Messiah. It is hard to understand these words otherwise. They refused to allow the spiritual potential available to be unleashed upon them; see on Is. 42:18. "Bring out" is the same word in Is. 42:7, and putting the passages together we get the idea that the exiles were as blind people, who were to be both freed from prison and also given their sight.

Isaiah 43:9 Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the peoples be assembled. Who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear, and say, That is true- Isaiah especially is full of restoration prophecies; but Isaiah especially carries repeated statements that God can predict the future, and that His prophetic word will surely come to pass. These repeated statements are surely to encourage Judah to believe the restoration prophecies, and to see that what was prophesied really would and could come to pass- but it required their response! And yet as discussed on Is. 41:22, the emphasis and flavour of the words used is not simply upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

The wonder of Israel’s God was not so much that He declared future things in a way that could be understood before they happened, but rather that He ‘declared’ the meaning of past events. There is a certain enigma to Israel’s history, both as history, and also sociologically, psychologically, indeed in every way. It is that enigma which is declared in God’s word, enabling Israel to make sense of what

happens to them by their reflection, *after the event*, upon God's word. Likewise it seems that only once the events have happened can we look back with true understanding into God's word and understand. This was in fact the case with a number of the predictions of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 2:19; 3:14; 11:50; 21:18). They would have remained enigmas, until after the event. And then, all would have been so clear.

Isaiah 43:10 You are My witnesses, says Yahweh, With My servant whom I have chosen; that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, neither will there be after Me- This language alludes to the Babylonian god Marduk; the point being that Yahweh and not the god of Babylon is supreme. See on Is. 40:25. The Jews only totally quit idolatry some time later; they liked to think, as we also tend to, that we can serve the gods of our world in the name of Yahweh worship. But Yahweh is presented as supreme, and Marduk as nothing. God's people are here asked to believe very basic things about Yahweh; but those things would preclude belief in any other god. Their conversion was to be used to bring others to incorporation in God's new, multiethnic people. Hence LXX "Be ye my witnesses, and I too am a witness, saith the Lord God". The invitation is to be witnesses.

Isaiah 43:11 I Myself am Yahweh; and besides Me there is no saviour- This continues the appeal noted on :10 to quit belief in any other god. Yahweh's Name is declared as His character- merciful, truthful, judging sin, patient etc. (Ex. 34:5-7); but above all, in being a personal saviour. This is why "Jesus", 'Yah saves', is the quintessence of what God is all about. He who will be who He will be, manifesting His characteristics as He does so, must have His way in us too. Babylon and Nineveh were condemned for having the attitude that "I am, and there is none beside me" (Is. 47:8; Zeph. 2:15). Their self-perception was a parody on the Name and being of Yahweh: He alone can say "I am, and there is none else" (Is. 43:11; 44:6; 45:6,21) and seek to be who He is. He alone can seek to articulate the characteristics that make up His Name onto the lives of others, and onto the things that comprise His Kingdom. We are not to be who we are; to 'just be yourself'; to 'just do it', as foolish slogans and adverts encourage us. We are here to show forth His mercy, truth, judgment of sin, patient saving of the weak etc., not our own personality. We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our imitation of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 43:12 I have declared, I have saved, and I have shown; and there was no strange god among you. Therefore you are My witnesses, says Yahweh, That I am God- See on Is. 44:26. The allusion is to Israel's earlier salvation from Egypt. Although there were 'strange gods' carried by them, clearly it was Yahweh alone who saved and who declared / showed the meaning of their entire history; see on :9.

Isaiah 43:13 Yes, since the day was I am He- The idea may be that "from this time forth I am he", i.e. they were to repent and never again have idols, but accept "Yahweh", 'I am who I am', 'I am that I am', for who He was and is; and not just in Name only.

And there is no one who can deliver out of My hand. I will work, and who can hinder it?- Even the rumours the exiles must have heard of Samaritan opposition were to be discounted. Every conceivable encouragement was given to the people, to go up and be part of the Kingdom work; nothing could stand in their way, if only they would go forward in joyful faith. They had been redeemed, they simply had to believe this and act as if they had been saved from Babylon and translated into the Kingdom which was to be established. The similarities with us are *exact.* The dramatic story of Job thrice uses the same phrase as in Is. 43:13, concluding that "who can hinder...?" God's way (Job 9:12; 11:10; 23:13). The exiles were to understand that no human opposition or discouragement can turn back or hinder God's purpose to save His people, even if they are as Job in suffering. His saving and restorative purpose will not be hindered, if we wish to identify with it.

Isaiah 43:14 Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring all of them down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships of their rejoicing- The fall of Babylon was envisioned as happening so that the Jewish exiles might return to Judah. All in world geopolitics was to be for their sakes. But many of them remained there and prospered in the Persian administration which took over after Babylon's fall. LXX "and I will stir up all that flee, and the Chaldeans shall be bound in ships". Babylon fell so that Persia would take over the administration of the 127 provinces where the Jews were scattered, and would allow them to return to Judah (Isaiah 43:14). The cup of judgment which Judah drunk for 70 years was passed to Babylon (Isaiah 51:22). This accounts for Isaiah’s repeated and detailed emphasis on the coming fall of Babylon for Judah / Israel’s sake (e.g.

Isaiah 47). Although they had sinned, Yahweh showed His gracious love for His people by bringing down Babylon (Isaiah 48:14). “For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee [Cyrus] by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me “ (Isaiah 45:4). Likewise the iron curtain came down to allow preachers of God’s Truth to take it to those once in darkness. And English has become the lingua-franca of the world, enabling Christian preaching to now penetrate societies literally world-wide. See on Ezra 2:1.

Isaiah 43:15 I am Yahweh your Holy One, the Creator of Israel- your King- Because Yahweh God was Israel’s creator, therefore He ought to have been their King. They should not have remained in the lands of their exile under a human king. If we really believe His creative authority over us, then He will rule in every aspect of our lives. Realizing that God is a "faithful creator" should inspire us to commit the keeping of our lives to Him in time of suffering (1 Pet. 4:19).

Isaiah 43:16 Thus says Yahweh, who makes a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters- Again, the salvation of Israel from Egypt was to be believed in as a real prototype of their deliverance from exile; and when Israel refused that, of our deliverance from this world and into God's Kingdom. What seems uncharted waters and an impossible, confusing journey will in fact become pain; a path and way appears, which we are to enthusiastically follow. The impression that the path to the Kingdom is hopelessly complex and hard to discern is only because of human lack of faith.

Isaiah 43:17 who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the mighty man (they lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinct, they are quenched like a wick)- This recalls the glorying of the Song of Moses over the Egyptians. And so it could have been for God's people in exile. No political nor military power could stand between them and restoration in God's Kingdom. And likewise in our path towards that same Kingdom which they refused.

Isaiah 43:18 Don’t remember the former things, and don’t consider the things of old- The returned exiles are encouraged to forget their former sins as God also has done. This was the basis for their lack of faith and need for constant assurance not to be afraid but to believe in God's desire to restore them.

Isaiah 43:19 Behold, I will do a new thing. It springs forth now; don't you perceive it?- Is. 40:1,2 speaks a message of comfort to the exiles: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God". But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachael who refused to be comforted over her loss (Jer. 31:15); they claimed they found "none to comfort" (Lam. 1:2,16,17,21). But they were willfully refusing the comfort of God's repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn't grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn't want to- it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: "I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?". And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up, and His desire to save us?

I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert- See on Is. 40:3. The exiles' fears about the way back were allayed: "I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (43:19). They were constantly encouraged that as God had redeemed His people from Egypt through the water, fire and desert, so He would and could redeem them from their Egypt. Water could have followed Judah through the desert journey from Babylon to Zion. But they hankered after a human army to protect them, and most of them wouldn't even begin the journey.

Isaiah 43:20 The animals of the field shall honour Me, the jackals and the ostriches; because I give water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen- The water that came from that one rock tasted as if God had opened up fresh springs and torrents in the desert (Ps. 74:15 NAS). It always tasted as if it was just gushing out of the spring; and this wonder is commented upon by both David and Isaiah (Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21). It was as if the rock had just been struck, and the water was flowing out fresh for the first time. In this miracle, God clave the rock and there came out rivers (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 78:16,20; Is. 43:20). Each part of Israel's encampment had the water as it were brought to their door. And so it is in our experience of Christ, and the blessing enabled by His sacrifice. The blessings that come to us are deeply personal, and directed to us individually. He died once, long ago, and yet the effect of His sacrifice is ever new.

This amazing redemption of Israel from exile was intended to elicit repentance

from the areas of the Gentiles within the *eretz* promised to Abraham, whose cities were now inhabited by jackals. The intention was that they would return with God's people. This didn't happen, but will at the last day.

Isaiah 43:21 The people which I formed for Myself, that they might show forth My praise- Both as individuals and collectively, the whole biography and even genetic prehistory of God's people has been prepared by God in their formation, so that they might encounter God's salvation at an optimal point for them to give the maximum glory to Him (Is. 43:21). "Formed" is the word for the potter working on clay, used of how God fashions human hearts or psychologies, working on the deeply internal fabric of the human being (Ps. 33:15). The 'forming' in view is not only "in the womb" (Is. 44:2,24) but throughout their whole psychological and genetic formation. It is possible to strive with our former or "maker" (Is. 45:9), to be unresponsive to His touch of us the clay. The Messiah figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus, was the ultimate case of being "formed" by Yahweh's hand (Is. 49:5 s.w.), implying He too was clay, of human and not Divine nature.

Isaiah 43:22 Yet you have not called on Me, Jacob; but you have been weary of Me, Israel- Despite all the formative handling of the Divine potter, all the stimuli and potential granted by grace (:21), Jacob had refused to respond. They were weary of God, and God was wearied with their sins and insincere worship (s.w. :23,24). We have here the language of God and Israel falling out of love, despite such love on His side, and such wonderful potentials.

Isaiah 43:23 You have not brought Me of your sheep for burnt offerings; neither have you honoured Me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, nor wearied you with frankincense- God had not given His people wearisome laws and regulations; but they were "weary of Me" (:22 s.w.). They perhaps made the complaint many do today- that God is boring, ritualistic, imposing of unreasonable demands and ceremonies. But actually that is but an excuse for personal unbelief and lack of commitment; for He insists here that His laws and principles are not like that. And if He says they are not, then it is not for us to claim otherwise. The exiles would have justified not sacrificing by saying there was no temple. But although God did not specifically command them ['burden them'] to keep the feasts in exile, He would have accepted their

offerings. And there is evidence that there was a "little sanctuary" in Babylon where they could have offered sacrifice (see on Ez. 11:16). But they didn't offer them.

Isaiah 43:24 You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, nor have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices- God didn't demand incense nor offerings (:23), and yet He notes that they didn't bring them to Him. "Sweet cane" is what was burnt to create incense. It's as if God still hoped they would thus express their love for Him, even in exile and away from the temple system. But they didn't, and instead burdened Him with their sins.

But you have burdened Me with your sins- God speaks of being burdened by Israel's sins- and yet this is a prelude to the passages which speak of the Lord Jesus bearing our sins on the cross (Is. 53:4,11,12). We even read of God being wearied by Israel's sins (Is. 7:13; Jer. 15:6; Ez. 24:12; Mal. 2:17). Even though God does not "grow weary" (Is. 40:28) by nature, it seems to me that in His full entering into His people's situation, He does allow Himself to grow weary with the sins of those with whom He is in covenant relationship. It was this kind of capacity which God has which was supremely revealed in His 'sharing in' the crucifixion of His Son.

You have wearied Me with your iniquities- When Israel were weary of God, He wearied them (Is. 43:22,24). Because they turned their back on Him (Jer. 2:27), He turned His back on them (Jer. 18:17). At the very time Israel put God to the test at Marah (Dt. 6:16), God responded by testing *them* (Ex. 15:25).

Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions- Yahweh here prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: “I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions” (Is. 43:25 LXX). "I am" alludes to the Yahweh Name. He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord’s cross. We read in Mic. 6:9 that when the Lord’s voice calls to the city demanding repentance, “the man of wisdom shall see [perceive] thy name”- i.e. repent. We come to know God's Name in practice through the cycles of sin-repentance-forgiveness by God which we all pass through. It is through this process that we come to know the very essence of God's Name. Thus Is. 43:25 LXX: "I am '"I AM", who erases your iniquities". We come to know His Name, that it really *is* ("I am") all about

forgiveness and salvation of sinners. Forgetting the Name of Yahweh was associated in David's inspired thinking with a wrong attitude in "the secrets of the heart" (Ps. 44:20,21). By contrast, remembering / being aware of the Name affects our innermost being, the secrets of our heart, the hidden self which others don't see.

For My own sake- The idea may be that He would forgive them by grace alone, and not because they had repented or somehow compensated for their sins. He was so zealous to almost force through His saving purpose with them that He would forgive them anyway. This kind of one sided forgiveness and outpouring of love is commonly seen in relationships where one party is far more deeply committed and loving than the other one.

And I will not remember your sins- God imputed His righteousness to them, because He had unconditionally forgiven them. Instead of calling upon them to mourn, as in first Isaiah, second Isaiah calls upon them to rejoice and accept His grace. They are to repent because God had forgiven them- not repent so that He might forgive them: "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake [i.e. not for the sake of your repentance or righteousness]… I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud [therefore] return [repent] to me, for I have [already] redeemed you" (Is. 43:25; 44:22). This is God's grace in its essence. As they sat by the rivers of Babylon, even as they later became caught up in the politics and business of Babylon, God's heart broke for His people. And He announced this utter grace- that He had forgiven them, even though they'd not really repented, and counted them as righteous. And therefore He begged them to "return", not only to return to Him in repentance in their hearts, but to show this by 'returning' to the land. And, *so* tragically, they preferred to stay in Babylon, for the most part. His grace was poured out to them… and Israel would not. All we can resolve in our hearts is to feel for God in this tragedy, and to realize that these very same prophecies of grace have been applied to us. And it's for us to respond to them.

We read of God 'remembering' His covenant (Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:42; Jer. 14:10,21); and of God 'not remembering' or forgetting the sins of His covenant people (Is. 43:25; Jer. 31:34). If words mean anything, this surely implies that sins which God once remembered, He then stops remembering and 'forgets'. Such language seems on one hand inappropriate to the God who by nature doesn't have to forget and can recall all things. But He has willingly entered into the meaning of time which is experienced by those with whom He is in covenant

relationship. He allows Himself to genuinely feel it like it is. The 'gap' between God stating His plan and its actual fulfillment is the opportunity for men and women to plead with Him, as Moses did, as Abraham did regarding Sodom (Gen. 18:17-22), as so many have done... and He is most definitely open to human persuasion.

Isaiah 43:26 Put Me in remembrance, let us plead together. Set forth your case, that you may be justified- LXX continues the connection with God not remembering their sins in :25: "But do thou remember, and let us plead together: do thou first confess thy transgressions, that thou mayest be justified". The stress would be on the idea that although God had forgotten their sins, they were not to forget them but to remain ever aware of His gracious forgiveness. God wants them to accept His forgiveness and justification of them; but for them to do so, they needed to first of all be convicted of their own lack of justification. And so He invites them to put forth a legal case that they are not sinners and don't need justification by grace.

Is. 62:6,7 speaks of watchmen [= the prophets, Ezekiel 3:17; Jer. 6:17; Hab. 2:1] set upon Jerusalem's walls as watchmen 'putting God in remembrance', keeping no silence [in their prophesying] until Jerusalem was established. For the link between the prophets and standing on a watchtower, see Hab. 2:1. Is this not a reference to Malachi, Haggai and Zechariah prophesying as the basis upon which the newly built walls of Jerusalem would be preserved, and the city develop into the Messianic Kingdom hoped for? Note that the rebuilt Jerusalem of Ezra's time and the latter day Jerusalem are the same thing in Isaiah; the Kingdom could've come then. Watchmen upon the walls were looking for something- for the approach of the Messianic messenger with good tidings of Judah's full return from captivity, of which Isaiah had spoken in Is. 52:7,8. But most of Judah preferred to stay in Babylon, took up a collection for the few who did return… and no Messiah could appear with that news. God had promised this- but He here asked to be put in remembrance of His promises (Is. 43:26), i.e. He asked for those watchmen to be His 'rememberancers', even though He cannot in that sense forget them (Ps. 119:49; Jer. 14:21). In all this we see an exquisite picture of how God works with men, how His promised faithfulness and omnipotence all the same has built into it a requirement for human prayerfulness and response. The reality was that the watchmen / prophets of Israel were blind, ignorant and sleepy (Is. 56:10).

Isaiah 43:27 Your first father sinned, and your teachers have transgressed against Me- This is in the context of God desperately appealing to Israel to accept His forgiveness and justification. He forgives them for His own sake (see on :25), He would forgive them by grace alone, and not because they had repented or somehow compensated for their sins. He was so zealous to almost force through His saving purpose with them that He would forgive them anyway. This kind of one sided forgiveness and outpouring of love is commonly seen in relationships where one party is far more deeply committed and loving than the other one. And so in line with this, God tries to help them as it were feel less bad about their sins, blaming the situation partly upon Adam their first father, and upon their bad teachers, and then in :28 upon their princes. This is desperate argument, but God comes over as that desperate for them to accept His love.

Isaiah 43:28 Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse, and Israel an insult- "I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary"- put forth "as polluted from the priesthood" (Ezra 2:62). This is tacit proof enough that the restoration from Babylon failed to be the potential restoration prophesied. Indeed, the behaviour of the Jews at that time attracted further curses and judgment. LXX "And the princes have defiled my sanctuaries: so I gave Jacob to enemies to destroy, and Israel to reproach". As explained on :27, this blame of the princes is an almost desperate attempt to help Israel feel not quite so shamed for their sins and to get them by all means to accept God's forgiveness.

Isaiah Chapter 44

Isaiah 44:1 Yet listen now, Jacob My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen- The appeal for Jacob to "listen" is asking for the exiles to repent. They had been chosen, but only their repentance would make that calling actual. It's the same with those who hear the Gospel today, having been chosen from the beginning.

It is significant that Paul takes a passage from one of Isaiah's servant songs here and applies it to us. The servant who suffered and witnessed to the world was evidently the Lord Jesus. And yet Isaiah is also explicit that the servant is the whole seed of Abraham, "Jacob", the slowly-developing people of God (Is. 41:8; 44:1). There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite "to let the oppressed go free... loose the bonds", and to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6) as Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory.

Isaiah 44:2 This is what Yahweh who made you and formed you from the womb, who will save you, says- Yahweh speaks of the returnees as if they were a new creation, created by Him along with the heavens and earth of the temple which He had stretched out in Zion (Is. 43:7; 44:2). He did not form this new land / heavens of the kingdom and temple of Israel in vain- He created it to be inhabited (Is. 45:18). But the Jews acted like the old creation. And the promise of new creation was deferred until the time of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). Judah for the most part declined to inhabit / dwell in the new heavens and earth [the same word in Isaiah 45:18 is frequently used re. how the returnees *dwelt* in the cities of Judah].

"Save" is more often translated "help". This Fatherly image of help offered to a nervous child was to encourage the weak minded exiles to return to Zion and accept Yahweh's helping hand, just as His hand had 'helped' Hezekiah against the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:8). At the restoration, Ezra believed this "help" would enable the restoration to the extent that they didn't need any human

soldiers to help them (Ezra 8:22 s.w.).

Don't be afraid, Jacob My servant- The way God showed grace and imputed righteousness to Jacob even before his birth is shown here. From the womb, Jacob was chosen to be God's servant; and yet Jacob coolly said that only if God did what He promised, would he agree to serve Yahweh, and have Him as his master. Earlier in the same servant prophecies, the servant Jacob is described as a useless servant: "Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect (Jacob was a perfect / plain man, Gen. 25:27), and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:19). Although the servant is worse than useless (a deaf messenger), he is seen as perfect by his Divine Master. And the servant prophecies are primarily based on Jacob (note, in passing, how often they associate the servant Jacob with idol worship, which seems to have been an earlier characteristic of Jacob). Consider too the allusions to Jacob in Is. 53; a man of sorrow and grief, despised of men, who would see his seed. As Christ felt a worm on the cross (Ps. 22:6), so Jacob is described (Is. 41:14). That even in his weakness, Jacob prefigured the Lord in his time of ultimate spiritual victory, shows in itself the way God imputed righteousness to him at the time.

And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen- The uncommon title "Jeshurun", 'the upright one', is used for Israel because they were being asked to repent and thereby live up to who they were intended to be; to realize their potential to which they have been chosen or called at the beginning.

Isaiah 44:3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour My Spirit on your seed, and My blessing on your offspring- Ez. 20 and Jer. 31 make it clear that the exiles were intended to accept a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. That new covenant involved the gift of the Spirit, a heart of flesh rather than of stone, the psychological working of God within them. This is symbolized here as water and streams. They were the "dry ground", and out of that dry ground there could have arisen the Messiah figure of Is. 53:1. In the end, they refused the operation of that gift and Zerubbabel, the branch from Babylon (out of the dry ground) let the ball drop. And so these things were applied to the Lord Jesus and the gift of the Spirit in Him (Jn. 7:38,39). "My Spirit" and "My blessing" are parallel. The blessing promised to Abraham was of Yahweh being their God, and not only an eternal inheritance of the land. That "blessing" is understood in Acts 3:25,26 and Gal. 3 as the gift of the Spirit, the transformation of the hearts of the seed of Abraham

so that they might become like the singular seed, the Lord Jesus, and thereby be prepared and made appropriate for the blessing of eternal inheritance of the land.

Isaiah 44:4 And they will spring up among the grass, as willows by the watercourses- LXX "And they shall spring up as grass between brooks, and as willows on the banks of running water". The returned exiles, or [later] all who wished to become part of God's restored Kingdom, would be empowered by the water of the Spirit (see on Is. 44:3) to "spring up" on what had previously been dry ground (Is. 44:4). That Spirit would be articulated partly through the prophetic word (Is. 55:10 s.w. "bud" AV). This will be the restored Eden, where Yahweh had caused the vegetation to "spring up" (s.w. Gen. 2:5). This springing up or growing would be in the fulfilment of the promises to David of the establishment of the Kingdom of his seed (s.w. 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 132:17). But the springing up would be of a community of people, the plural seed who were "in" the singular Messianic seed. And this is now experienced through baptism into the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:27-29). It is "righteousness" which would "spring up" (s.w. Is. 61:11); the work of the Spirit would result in the seed becoming righteous through their spiritual transformation. And yet it will also be on account of their status as "in" the "branch of righteousness" which will "spring up" (Jer. 33:15). The work of the Spirit will be, and is, to transform the plural seed in practice into what they are by status in the Messiah- righteous. And it is this power, this gift, this Divine 'causing' us to be righteous, which every spiritual person so thirsts for.

Isaiah 44:5 One will say, 'I am Yahweh's' and another will be called by the name of Jacob- And another will write with his hand 'to Yahweh', and honour the name of Israel- Although at the time of the restoration not all knew their genealogy, they were accepted in any case, being surnamed with the Name of Jehovah and that of Jacob. And this has been applied to us in that "The Lord knows them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). See on Is. 48:1.

It would be thanks to Cyrus that the seed of Abraham would be redefined- Gentiles could become part of the covenant seed by saying "I belong to Yahweh" or writing Yahweh's Name on their hand (Is. 44:3,5). See on Is. 45:1. This didn't actually happen- but the prophecy was reapplied to the way that Gentiles became part of Abraham's seed through baptism into the Name (Gal. 3:27-29). The later servant poems / songs in Isaiah appear irrelevant to Cyrus, but applicable to the nation of Israel as God's "servant", or to one particular "servant". Perhaps this is

reflective of the way that Cyrus didn't live up to his potential, and the 'servant' prophecies became capable of other potential fulfillments? And yet Is. 44:28 states: "Of Cyrus he says, 'He is my shepherd; he will fulfill all my purpose'". This is typical of prophecy which is conditional, even though the conditions aren't stated. It is observable that all the servant songs / poems have language and terms which repeat throughout them- it's as if one person *could* have fulfilled them all, they could've been relevant to one person, but in reality this didn't work out.

The Name of Jacob / Israel is here paralleled with Yahweh. Remember how Jacob in his doubt promised God: "If God will be with me... then shall Yahweh be my God" (Gen. 28:20,21); and at the end, Yahweh was Jacob's God. God seems to recognize this by describing Himself as the God of Jacob / Israel so very often. His joy, His sheer delight at Jacob's spiritual achievement is recorded throughout the Bible. The way God describes Himself as "the God of Israel" (201 times) or "the God of Jacob" (25 times) infinitely more times than anyone else's God is proof enough that God saw His relationship with Jacob as very special. "God of Abraham" occurs 17 times; "God of Isaac" 8 times; "God of David" 4 times. Remember that whenever we read "Israel", we are reading of the man Jacob and his children. That God was the God of mixed-up, struggling Jacob is a sure comfort to every one of us. God is not ashamed to be surnamed the God of Jacob (Heb. 11:16 Gk.).

Isaiah 44:6 This is what Yahweh the King of Israel and His Redeemer, Yahweh of Armies, says- As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

I am the first, and I am the last; and besides Me there is no God- The sense may be as in Is. 41:4: "I Yahweh, the first and with the last, I am He". First and last are terms used by the Lord Jesus of those who shall be in His Kingdom (Mt. 20:16). "The last" would then refer to the last generation of God's people. Yahweh would save the exiles along with the "first" of His people such as Abraham; for at the time of the restoration of that last generation, there would be a resurrection of all God's true people, to form a new people would eternally inherit the reestablished Kingdom.

Isaiah 44:7 Who is like Me? Who will call, and will declare it, and set it in order for Me, since I established the ancient people? Let them declare the things that are coming, and that will happen- The emphasis and flavour of the words used for "call... declare... set in order" is not upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

Isaiah 44:8 Don't fear, neither be afraid. Haven't I declared it to you long ago, and shown it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is not. I don't know any other Rock- LXX "ye are witnesses if there is a God beside me". The experiences with the Assyrian destruction ought to have demonstrated this. The gods of Assyria couldn't save them, neither could the local deities whom Judah had trusted in at the time. Yahweh alone is the God of salvation. As developed on :9, this is the imagery of the courtroom. Israel are called as witnesses to Yahweh, and the idols are called as witnesses for the idolaters. We note the balance of the equation. Yahweh is not parallel with the idols, with the idolaters. Israel are called as Yahweh's witnesses, and the idols are called as witnesses for the idolaters. Those idolaters were therefore making themselves God, by creating gods (:9).

Isaiah 44:9 Everyone who makes an engraved image is vain. The things that they delight in will not profit. Their own witnesses don't see nor know, that they may be disappointed- In the imagery of the court case, Israel are witnesses to

Yahweh, and the idols are witnesses to themselves. See on :8.

Isaiah 44:10 Who has fashioned a god or moulds an image that is profitable for nothing?- The verse runs on from :9; they are disappointed who fashion their own gods. In the context, the idols have been called as witnesses, but they are silent in the witness box. They are not profitable, they can give no helpful testimony to the case. See on :8. Yahweh is continually presented as the former, creator and moulder of His people; and Israel are thereby witnesses to Him and His work (:8). This is the problem with playing God, which is the modern form of idolatry. We set ourselves up as creator, rather than allowing His hand to form and mould us in His image and likeness rather than us creating things in our own likeness.

Isaiah 44:11 Behold, all his fellows will be disappointed; and the workmen are mere men- LXX "and all by whom they were made are withered". The reference is to the idol makers of the previous verse. There is an emphasis upon the idol maker having "fellows" and their being shamed "together", twice emphasized. The idea is that idolatry is because people group together, it is a group function; idolatry arises out of groups of people together.

Let them all be gathered together. Let them stand up. They will fear. They will be put to shame together- This continues the courtroom analogy discussed on :8. They are to stand up to receive their judgment, and then go to the shame of condemnation together.

Isaiah 44:12 The blacksmith takes an axe, works in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with his strong arm. He is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water, and is faint- "Works" is the same word as "makes [a god]" (:15). In our days, the works of our hands are the equivalent of making gods and idols. The picture is of a man working hard to make, work, mould, shape and plan an idol. Isaiah has used all these ideas about God's formative work with His people. Their strength failed in the work, whereas God's power in working with us is limitless. His strength in working for us doesn't fail.

Isaiah 44:13 The carpenter stretches out a line. He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes. He marks it out with compasses, and shapes it like the

figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to reside in a house- The contrast is with the description of Yahweh as having planned as a workman the entire cosmos, and then made it. See on Is. 40:12. Instead of allowing Him to work on them to make them after His mental image, they were creating gods in their own image and likeness. As they stretched out a line to plan an idol, Yahweh worked on a far grander scale, stretching out His line over the entire cosmos (Job 38:5 s.w.). But the phrase 'stretching out a line' is nearly always used about Yahweh's condemnation of people (2 Kings 21:13; Is. 34:11; Lam. 2:8; Zech. 1:16). As we will also see on :14, the idolaters were in fact measuring out condemnation to themselves.

Isaiah 44:14 He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak- I noted on :13 that the language of idol construction is also that of condemnation; their behaviour was their own condemnation. And here too, the Assyrians had threatened to cut down the cedars of the temple (Is. 37:24; 2:13; 10:34). And the Babylonians actually did this (Is. 14:8). For the Jews now to cut down cedars and make idols from them was therefore acting like the Babylonians, and ignoring the great grace shown in Yahweh's averting of the threatened Assyrian destruction of the temple by cutting down its cedars. See on Is. 48:9.

And strengthens for himself one among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir tree, and the rain nourishes it- Yahweh would strengthen His servant people, in contrast to the idols, which had to be strengthened by their makers (s.w. Is. 41:10). The tree used for idolatry had been nourished by rain from Yahweh.

Isaiah 44:15 Then it will be for a man to burn; and he takes some of it, and warms himself. Yes, he burns it, and bakes bread. Yes, he makes a god, and worships it; he makes it an engraved image, and falls down to it- This whole account of idolatry seems to be poking fun at the foolishness of the worshipper. But this is all to lead up to the statements in :19,20, that the mind of the idolater refuses to perceive the obvious. And this is because they "did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate (or, undistinguishing) mind" (Rom. 1:28; cp. Is. 29:10). This is in contrast to how the Spirit of God works to give a spiritually perceptive mind; and the promise of that Spirit has been offered earlier in this chapter. Now we are being shown the opposite process; how God works to confirm men in their blindness.

Isaiah 44:16 He burns part of it in the fire. With part of it, he eats meat. He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. Yes, he warms himself and says, Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire- The idea is that he uses part to make an idol (:17), and of the other part, he uses part of that for firewood for warmth and part for roasting a meal for himself. Or as ESV "Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat". See on Is. 46:6.

Isaiah 44:17 The rest of it he makes into a god, even his engraved image. He bows down to it and worships and prays to it and says, Deliver me; for you are my god!- See on :16. This is the word used by Rabshakeh in saying that no god could "deliver" from the Assyrians (2 Chron. 32:13). And yet the unfaithful Jews had trusted in those very gods for deliverance. It is therefore Jewish idolaters who are in view here. They were so self deceived that they could not deliver themselves (:20 s.w.) because those who worship idols become like unto them; dumb and unable to engage with the issues of eternity.

Isaiah 44:18 They don't know neither do they consider: for He has shut their eyes that they can't see; and their hearts that they can't understand- This is the situation in Is. 6:9,10. This is in contrast to how the Spirit of God works to give a spiritually perceptive mind; and the promise of that Spirit has been offered earlier in this chapter. Now we are being shown the opposite process; how God works to confirm men in their blindness. Such people are receiving now the essence of their condemnation, alluding to the Eastern custom of sealing up the eyes of offenders.

Isaiah 44:19 No one thinks neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire- We are programmed to shy away from the ultimate realities, in the same way as men hid their faces from the terror and dastardly horror of the crucifixion of God's Son (Is. 53:3), and as "none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding" to realize the idiocy of worshipping a piece of wood as an idol (Is. 44:19).

Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals. I have roasted meat and eaten it. Shall I make the rest of it into an abomination? Shall I bow down to a tree trunk?- The idolater failed to look at himself from outside of himself. This is an important ability to have, and it is the Biblical record which serves as a mirror, that we might see ourselves for who we really are (James 1:23). Yet the majority are so caught up in the narrative of their own lives which they spin in their own minds

that they fail to achieve self-examination and self-awareness before God.

Isaiah 44:20 He feeds on ashes- From a distance, the visual impression may have been of the man apparently eating the ashes from the coals upon which his bread was baked (:19).

A deceived heart has turned him aside; and he can't deliver his soul, nor say, Isn't there a lie in my right hand?- The deceived heart can't recognize that they are self-deceived. That seems to be the idea of "a lie in my right hand". See on :17.

Isaiah 44:21 Remember these things, Jacob and Israel; for you are My servant. I have formed you; you are My servant. Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me- Because God has not forgotten His people, they should remember Him. The fact He is so consciously aware of us ought to bring Him back to our consciousness in the course of the day. As explained on :19, Jacob was asked to "remember" the picture of the idolater, to see himself from outside of himself.

There is perhaps a purposeful ambiguity in the Hebrew text of Is. 44:21: "O Israel thou shalt not be forgotten of me" is rendered in the RVmg and LXX: "thou shouldest not forget me". The fact God never forgets us should be inspiration to not forget Him in the daily round of life. To act as if God doesn't see all our ways is to effectively deny His existence. Babylon acted as she did because she reasoned that "None seeth me... I am, and there is none else beside me" (Is. 47:10 RV). They appropriated the language of God to themselves, they played God in that they thought their ways were unseen by any higher power. And we all have a terrible, frightening tendency to do this.

Isaiah 44:22 I have blotted out as a thick cloud your iniquities, and, as a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you- God imputed His righteousness to them, because He had unconditionally forgiven them. Instead of calling upon them to mourn, as in first Isaiah, second Isaiah calls upon them to rejoice and accept His grace. They are to repent because God had forgiven them (as in Acts 3:18,19)- not repent so that He might forgive them: "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake [i.e. not for the sake of your repentance or righteousness]… I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud [therefore] return [repent] to me, for I have [already] redeemed you" (Is.

43:25; 44:22). This is God's grace in its essence. Repentance and not just forgiveness is given by the Spirit (Acts 5:31). As they sat by the rivers of Babylon, even as they later became caught up in the politics and business of Babylon, God's heart broke for His people. And He announced this utter grace- that He had forgiven them, even though they'd not really repented, and counted them as righteous. And therefore He begged them to "return", not only to return to Him in repentance in their hearts, but to show this by 'returning' to the land. And, *so* tragically, they preferred to stay in Babylon, for the most part. His grace was poured out to them… and Israel would not. All we can resolve in our hearts is to feel for God in this tragedy, and to realize that these very same prophecies of grace have been applied to us. And it's for us to respond to them.

It is our knowledge of God's mercy to us which empowers us to confidently seek to share with others our knowledge, our relationship, our experience with God. Forgiveness inspires the preacher; and yet the offer of forgiveness is what inspires the listener to respond. God appeals for Israel to respond by pointing out that in prospect, He has already forgiven them: "I have [already] blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions... [therefore] return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Is. 44:22 AV). Likewise Elijah wanted Israel to know that God had already in prospect turned their hearts back to Him (1 Kings 18:37). We preach the cross of Christ, and that through that forgiveness has been enabled for all men; but they need to respond by repentance in order to access it. Hence the tragedy of human lack of response; so much has been enabled, the world has been reconciled, but all this is in vain if they will not respond.

The prophets appeal for their people to repent to avert God's judgments; and yet they proclaim a message of grace, that because "I *have* swept away your transgressions [therefore] Return [repent] to me, for I *have* redeemed you" (Is. 44:22). The fact of God's forgiveness leads to repentance- by grace. And yet the prophets also appeal for Israel to repent *so that* they might be forgiven.

And so Isaiah urged the Jewish exiles to return to the land by saying that God had forgiven them, and on this basis He appealed for them to both 'repent' and 'return' to the land. The two terms are related. Thus He showed His grace; forgiveness preceded, not followed, repentance. Is. 44:22 is clear about this: "I have swept away your transgressions like clouds [therefore] return to me, for I have [already] redeemed you". God was angry with their sins, but kept no record of them- hence He could comfort Judah that there was actually no documentary evidence for their divorce (Is. 50:1) and therefore she could return to Him. As Paul put it, the goodness of God leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). And we are

asked to show that same “goodness” of God to others, being “kind [s.w. ‘goodness’] one to another… forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). We too are to show this grace of forgiveness-before-repentance; but perhaps in no other area has formalized, institutionalized Christianity failed worse. *If* XYZ shows *us* she’s repented of her divorce, *then* we’ll forgive her and accept her in fellowship [as if, in any case, we are the ones who need to forgive her]. These are graceless and yet terribly common attitudes. The Greek word translated “goodness” is rendered “gracious” in 1 Pet. 2:3- newly converted babes in Christ taste of this gracious goodness, and it leads to repentance.

Isaiah 44:23 Sing you heavens, for Yahweh has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth! Break out into singing, you mountains, O forest, all of your trees, for Yahweh has redeemed Jacob, and will glorify Himself in Israel- The same Hebrew words are used about the shout of joy which went up when the foundation of the temple was laid (Ezra 3:11-13). But at that same time, there was a loud sound of weeping from those who realized that what was being built was simply not the temple which Ezekiel had prophesied, and was not even as glorious as Solomon’s. The shout of joy was there, but wasn’t discernible (Ezra 3:13).

As the whole creation would share the joy of Hosea and Gomer’s remarriage (see on Is. 1:26), so Is. 44:23 and Is. 49:13 use similar terms to describe how all creation could have rejoiced in the reuniting of Yahweh with His people on their return from Babylon.

Isaiah 44:24 Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: I am Yahweh who makes all things, who alone stretches out the heavens; who spreads out the earth by Myself- This is in contrast to how the idol maker stretches out and spreads out his plans and materials to make his idol. Both as individuals and collectively, the whole biography and even genetic prehistory of God's people has been prepared by God in their formation, so that they might encounter God's salvation at an optimal point for them to give the maximum glory to Him (Is. 43:21). "Formed" is the word for the potter working on clay, used of how God fashions human hearts or psychologies, working on the deeply internal fabric of the human being (Ps. 33:15). The 'forming' in view is not only "in the womb" (Is. 44:2,24) but throughout their whole psychological and genetic formation. It is possible to strive with our former or "maker" (Is. 45:9),

to be unresponsive to His touch of us the clay. The Messiah figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus, was the ultimate case of being "formed" by Yahweh's hand (Is. 49:5 s.w.), implying He too was clay, of human and not Divine nature.

Isaiah 44:25 Who frustrates the signs of the liars- This is s.w. Nehemiah 4:15 about God frustrating the Samaritan opposition. But still the exiles didn't make full use of all this help, in order to reestablish God's Kingdom.

And makes diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish- it is the idolater who has just been portrayed as foolish and mad. But the wise men of the nations of those days were all idolaters.

Isaiah 44:26 Who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; who says of Jerusalem, 'She will be inhabited;' and of the cities of Judah, 'They will be built', and 'I will raise up its waste places'- The word of His servant could refer to Isaiah or Jeremiah. Yahweh portrays Himself as open to the counsel or advice of His messengers. Perhaps the *malak* in view are the Angels, and those they represented. God is open to persuasion from both Angels and even men. Confirming and performing are parallel, as are "the word" and "the counsel". "His servant" (singular) is parallel with the plural "His messengers". The singular servant is equated with His "messengers", whose "counsel" to others is the word which is Jesus, the true servant. This theme of declaring the word occurs repeatedly in this part of Isaiah. Because "I have declared… and I have shewed… *therefore ye* are my witnesses" (Is. 43:12). We are to witness / declare / shew, just as the Father has done. Our unity with the Father and Son is thus reflected in our witnessing in the way they witness; and thus their witness is through us. The unity between the preacher and his Lord is therefore wonderful. Truly He is with us in our life of witness, in our obedience to His command to preach world-wide, unto the end of the age.

Or the servant could refer to Cyrus and his will to rebuild Jerusalem. Yahweh "performs the *counsel*" of rebuilding Jerusalem. But the Samaritan opposition sought to frustrate Judah's "purpose" / counsel (Ezra 4:5 s.w.), and succeeded. Yahweh allowed Himself to be limited within how His people performed His purpose. His 'purpose' is therefore conditional upon those whom He allows to fulfill it. Many passages in the latter half of Isaiah exult how God has fulfilled prophecy in the decree of Cyrus and the return of the Jews (e.g. Is. 44:7,26-28).

But this fulfilment of prophecy turned out to be limited by the Jews' lack of obedience to the prophecies.

Isaiah 44:27 who says to the deep, 'Be dry', and 'I will dry up your rivers;'- The reference is *t*o the artificial irrigation canals from the Euphrates which were dried up by Cyrus, forming a lake forty miles square, in order for him to take Babylon. The prophets present the fall of Babylon as necessary for the return of the exiles. Babylon fell, but as the book of Esther makes clear, the bulk of the exiles chose to remain in exile.

Isaiah 44:28 who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'- See on :5. Ez. 34 had predicted that at the restoration, God Himself would be a shepherd to His scattered flock and through the shepherd He would use, He would "deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day" (Ez. 34:12). The cloudy and dark day was the day of judgment which came upon Judah, and which resulted in them being scattered into Babylon and Persia. The shepherd who was to deliver them and get them to return from the various places of their scattering was intended to be Cyrus. Is. 44:28 is crystal clear about this. God "says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'". It was God's intention that Cyrus repent and become a proselyte, and Yahweh would then use him to save His people "out of all places where they have been scattered". The decree of Cyrus was addressed to "Whoever is left [of the Jews], in any place where he lives" (Ezra 1:4). "Cyrus" literally means "sun" and so contrasts with the cloudy and dark day. But Cyrus let the ball drop and didn't carry through the Divine purpose as he might have done and neither did the Jews respond as they should have done. Cyrus was Yahweh's anointed (Is. 45:1), and so the essence of these prophecies is to come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. We could say that the prophecies are transferred from Cyrus to the Lord Jesus. LXX "Who bids Cyrus be wise, and he shall perform all my will" suggests Cyrus had a choice; he was commanded, and it seems he partially obeyed, but not enough to the Messiah figure envisaged.

Isaiah Chapter 45

Isaiah 45:1 Thus says Yahweh to His anointed, to Cyrus- Is. 45:1-7 concern Cyrus and really should be read as part of Is. 44.

Whose right hand I have held- There is a juxtaposition of impressions here. Holding the right hand of a person suggests they are feeble (Is. 42:6). And so Cyrus for all his might was but a feeble person empowered by Israel's God.

To subdue nations before him, and strip kings of their armour; to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut- see on Is. 40:3,4. Isaiah 40-55 is packed full with allusion to the Marduk cult. All that Marduk claimed to do and be, Isaiah explained as actually true, and solely true, of Yahweh God of Israel. The descriptions of Cyrus as having been anointed etc. are allusions to the way Cyrus was held to have been anointed and raised up by Marduk. Yahweh is saying that actually He, and not Marduk, had done this. The Abu-Habba collection in the British museum actually has an inscription that claims Nabonidus dreamt that Marduk raised up Cyrus (See P.A. Beaulieu, *The Reign Of Nabonidus King Of Babylon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 108). Isaiah's point is that actually it was the God of Israel who had done this. The references to Yahweh taking Cyrus by the hand, anointing him, pronouncing his name and giving him a throne (Is. 45:1,8) are almost word-for-word what Cyrus claimed about Marduk in his 'Cyrus Cylinder'.

Cyrus was a potential Messiah figure. Cyrus was the anointed one, the 'Christ' of God. Anointing is especially associated with being anointed as a king in the Davidic line (1 Sam. 2:10,35; 2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Sam. 23:1; Ps. 2:2). Could it be that God was willing for Cyrus to become Israel's King? Whilst the chronology is admittedly difficult, it would appear that Daniel and his group of faithful friends, possibly Ezekiel, maybe Esther, and some other prophets were in close contact with Cyrus. The enigmatic reference to Cyrus making the decision to allow Nehemiah's mission for the Jews to return *with his queen sitting near him* may suggest Jewish influence upon him (Neh. 2:6). Could it be that potentially, he was enabled to convert to the God of Israel and fulfill the 'servant' prophecies? See on :9; Is. 44:5.

Isaiah 45:2 I will go before you, and make the rough places smooth- This is the language of Is. 40 concerning the preparation for the coming of the Messianic saviour and reestablishment of the Kingdom in Zion. But Cyrus failed to fulfill

this.

I will break the doors of brass in pieces, and cut apart the bars of iron- Herodotus (1.179) claims Babylon had 100 massive gates, 25 on each of the four sides of the city, all, as well as their posts, of brass.

Isaiah 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that it is I, Yahweh, who call you by your name, even the God of Israel- The location of hidden treasure in conquered cities was typically attributed to magicians and wise men. But here, to Yahweh. God's mention of Cyrus' name 150 years beforehand was intended to be the clear proof to all that His prophetic word would really come true. But :4 seems to see his 'naming' as not so much a case of predicting his name, but giving him a name in the sense of a purpose and intended path of character and behaviour. But he ultimately failed in fulfilling this.

Isaiah 45:4 For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel My chosen, I have called you by your name. I have surnamed you, though you have not known Me- LXX suggests that despite all this Divine intention, Cyrus refused relationship with God by refusing to 'know' Him: "For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel mine elect, I will call thee by thy name, and accept thee: but thou hast not known me".

The reason why there are no accusers against us, not even our own sins, is because we are "God's elect" (Rom. 8:33). The supreme chosen one of God was of course the Lord Jesus, "mine elect / chosen, in whom my soul delights" (Is. 42:1). And yet here later on in the servant songs of Isaiah, "mine elect" or "My chosen" clearly refers to the people of Israel (Is. 45:4; 65:9,22). The true Israel of God are therefore those counted as somehow "in" the elect one, the singular servant of God, Messiah Jesus. Those baptized into Him are therefore His elect. And how do we know we are "God's elect"? If we are baptized into Christ, "mine elect", then for sure we are. And further, we have heard the call of the Gospel, we have been called- so, we are God's elect, His chosen ones. Of course the objection can be raised that the whole idea of calling or election may appear unfair. Indeed, the Greek word for "elect" can carry the idea of 'the favoured / favourite one'. There is no ultimate injustice here. The chosen One is the Lord Jesus, beloved for the sake of His righteousness, His spirit of life. Those who respond to the call to be "in Him" are counted likewise. And all this is the way, the method used, in order for God to be the one who counts us as right in the

ultimate judgment- for “It is God that justifies”.

Isaiah 45:5 I am Yahweh, and there is none else. Besides Me, there is no God- The preceding verse has spoken of Cyrus' failure. It could be that this was related to his refusal to jettison his belief in the Persian gods of good and evil, refusing to accept that Yahweh could really be in control of all.

This language (and in :6,12) alludes to the Babylonian god Marduk; the point being that Yahweh and not the god of Babylon is supreme. See on Is. 40:25. The Jews only totally quit idolatry some time later; they liked to think, as we also tend to, that we can serve the gods of our world in the name of Yahweh worship. But Yahweh is presented as supreme, and Marduk as nothing.

I will strengthen you, though you have not known Me- LXX "I strengthened thee, and thou hast not known me" continues the theme of lamenting that Cyrus refused relationship ['knowing'] with God, even though he was Divinely strengthened to do His will in restoring Judah.

Isaiah 45:6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides Me. I am Yahweh, and there is no one else- See on :5. This was the intended outcome of the restoration which Cyrus was used to effect. But the returned exiles didn't make Yahweh known; instead they mixed with the surrounding nations, as Ezra, Nehemiah and the restoration prophets make clear. And so these things are all reapplied to the final work of the Lord Jesus. As will be developed on :7, Yahweh's existence as the sole God means there is no room for the idea of a personal cosmic Satan being, nor for the equivalent ideas amongst the Persians, which the Jews were accepting.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create calamity. I am Yahweh, who does all these things- *Yatzar,* to give "form" to previously existing matter, and *bara,* to "create" from nothing the chaotic darkness, were all from God. Yahweh alone had given light and success to Cyrus, and darkness, "evil" or calamity to Babylon. There seems significant evidence for believing that the idea of a personal devil first entered Judaism through their contact with the Persian religions whilst in captivity there. Rabbinic writings don't mention a personal satan until the Jews were in Babylon, and the references become more frequent as Persian influence upon Judaism deepened. This is why the monumental passages in Isaiah [e.g. Is. 45:5-7],

addressed to the captive Jews, point out the error of the Persian idea that there is a good God in tension with an evil god. Classically, the devil is understood to be a being with horns and a pitchfork. If we research *why* this should be the case, we soon find that the Bible itself is absolutely without any such images of satan or the devil. But we do find these images in pagan mythology- Pan, Dionysius and other pagan gods were depicted as having horns, long tails etc. In the British isles, let alone ancient Rome and Greece, there were traditions of 'horned gods' being the source of evil- e.g. the Cernunnos amongst the Celts, Caerwiden in Wales, etc. In so many ways, apostate Christianity adopted pagan ideas and brought them into its theology. These horned gods, with forks and long tails, became adopted into a false Christianity as 'the devil'. But the Bible itself is absolutely silent about this- nowhere is there any indication that satan or the devil is a personal being with horns etc.

Isaiah's statement that Yahweh creates both good and evil / disaster, light and darkness, is not only aimed at criticizing the Babylonian dualistic view of the cosmos. It also has relevance to the false ideas which were developing amongst the Jews in Babylon, which would later come to term in the false view of Satan which most of Christendom later adopted. According to the Jewish Apocryphal writing *The Visions of Amram*, human beings choose to live under the control of one of two angels. Amram has a vision of the two opposing angels who have been given control over humanity (4Q544 frg. 1, col. 2.10–14 [Visions of Amram-b] = 4Q547 frgs. 1–2, col. 3.9–13). The good angel supposedly has power "over all the light", whereas the evil angel has authority "over all the darkness". Thus the idea of dualism – which is so attractive to all people – was alive and well amongst the Jews; and thus Is. 45:5–7 was also aimed at the developing Jewish belief in Babylon in a dualistic cosmos.

Of especially significant influence upon Judaism were the Persian views of Zoroastrianism. This was a philosophy which began in Persia about 600 B.C., and was growing in popularity when Judah went to Babylon / Persia in captivity. This philosophy posited that there was a good god of light (Mazda) and an evil god of darkness (Ahriman). The well known passage in Is. 45:5–7 is a clear warning to the Jews in captivity not to buy into this – Israel's God *alone* made the light and the darkness, the good and the "evil". He alone had the power to give "the treasures of darkness" to a man (Is. 45:3), even though such "treasures" were thought to be under the control of the supposed 'Lord of darkness'. But Isaiah is in fact full of other allusions to Zoroastrian ideas, seeking to teach Judah the true position on these things. See on Is. 9:6.

Apart from seeking to justify themselves, the uninspired Jewish authors were struggling with the issue we all do- how can a good and kind God do negative things? But they took the easy way out, presuming to rewrite His word in order to pass blame into a Satan figure of their own imaginations. These uninspired Jewish writings from between the Testaments repeatedly seek to rewrite Biblical history and statements in order to accommodate the Persian ideas. Is. 45:5-7 is clear: "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things". But 4 Ezra 2:14 changes this to: "I have left out evil and created good, because I live, says the Lord". We have a stark choice- the inspired text of the Bible, or uninspired Jewish interpretations seeking to justify the adoption of pagan myths about Satan.

Isaiah 45:8 Distil, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness. Let the earth open, that it may bring forth salvation, and let it cause righteousness to spring up with it. I, Yahweh, have created it- Is. 45:1-7 concern Cyrus and really should be read as part of Is. 44. Because of the decree of Cyrus, the land of Israel could have opened and brought forth the Lord Jesus ("Yah's salvation"). The LXX gives the picture of cosmic joy meeting the joy of the earth beneath, resulting in the gift of the Spirit, part of the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31 and Ez. 20, resulting in righteousness and spirituality within the people left on the earth / land of Israel: "Let the heaven rejoice from above, and let the clouds rain righteousness: let the earth bring forth, and blossom with mercy, and bring forth righteousness likewise: I am the Lord that created thee". The new creation envisioned was to be of spiritual characteristics. Judah refused all this, and it has been applied to those in Christ today (2 Cor. 5:17).

Isaiah 45:9 Woe to him who strives with his Maker- a clay pot among the clay pots of the earth! Shall the clay ask Him who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or your work, 'He has no hands?'- The Jews of Isaiah's day would have had big problems with the idea of a pagan king like Cyrus becoming the King of Israel and being Yahweh's special "servant" and even Messiah; see on Is. 45:1. Folk have the same problem and resistance to the idea today. But passages like Is. 45:9-13, Is. 48:14-16 and much of the material that follows the servant songs, are in fact seeking to answer objections to this- e.g. by saying that God is the potter and men are mere clay, and He will raise up precisely *whom He wishes*- even pagan Cyrus- to be His man, the arm of His salvation, at least

potentially. We all struggle with God's hand in our lives, seeking ways to escape this or that touch of the Divine potter. But we are but striving with our maker. He wishes our salvation, and every touch of His hand is directed toward that glorious end. On one hand we are "a pot that is like all the others" (GNB); our appearances, life experiences and path can appear more or less identical to those of the unbeliever next door. But for us, there is meaning attached to event; even if those events are not dissimilar to those of our unbelieving neighbours.

Both as individuals and collectively, the whole biography and even genetic prehistory of God's people has been prepared by God in their formation, so that they might encounter God's salvation at an optimal point for them to give the maximum glory to Him (Is. 43:21). And this was potentially true for Cyrus. "Formed" is the word for the potter working on clay, used of how God fashions human hearts or psychologies, working on the deeply internal fabric of the human being (Ps. 33:15). The 'forming' in view is not only "in the womb" (Is. 44:2,24) but throughout their whole psychological and genetic formation. It is possible to strive with our former or "maker" (Is. 45:9), to be unresponsive to His touch of us the clay. The Messiah figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus, was the ultimate case of being "formed" by Yahweh's hand (Is. 49:5 s.w.), implying He too was clay, of human and not Divine nature.

Isaiah 45:10 Woe to him who says to a father, 'What have you become the father of?' or to a mother, 'To what have you given birth?'- We note how God likens Himself to both father and mother. I noted on :9 that the context here is the Jewish objection to God raising up a 'son' like Gentile Cyrus to be the deliverer. And this challenge echoes down to our day, where we may have a gut level dislike to those clearly raised up to be Yahweh's servants. It is not for us to thus speak to God about His children and servants.

Isaiah 45:11 Thus says Yahweh the Maker and Holy One of Israel: You can ask Me about the things that are to come, concerning My sons, and you command Me concerning the work of My hands!- In the context of God lowering Himself to plead with a proud and apostate Israel, God invites them to "command Me": "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel... concerning the work of my hands *command ye me*. I have made the earth and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have *I commanded*" (Is. 45:11,12 AV). Note the two uses of "command" and "hands". God commands the stars, His hands created them; but *command ye me* concerning my works, and I

will answer you. We can *command* God and His *hands* will answer. The humility of the creator shows He is the creator. But we can perhaps more easily interpret this in the context of :10 along with GNB: "he LORD, the holy God of Israel, the one who shapes the future, says: "You have no right to question me about my children or to tell me what I ought to do!".

Isaiah 45:12 I have made the earth, and created man on it. I, even My hands, have stretched out the heavens; and I have commanded all their army- See on :5,11. The creation of the earth / land in view is specifically the new creation of His Kingdom restored in the land of Israel, the *eretz* promised to Abraham. He had created that land and had returned "man", His people, upon it. The same power which commands the stars (LXX) commanded each of the exiles to return. They were moved around from captivity to Judah just as the stars are moved. We see here again how "stars" represent Israel, a theme seen early on in Joseph's dreams.

Isaiah 45:13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways- LXX suggests this was more of a command, which he failed to obey fully: " I have raised him up to be a king with righteousness". He was to be the king of righteousness but wasn't. And it was a prophecy reapplied to the Lord Jesus. For the picture of ways being made straight is that of Is. 40 about the preparation of Messiah's path to the restored Zion.

He shall build My city, and he shall let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward, says Yahweh of Armies- For no human benefit at all to Cyrus. This is as clear a prophecy as any could wish. God categorically stated that Cyrus would be raised up by Him in order to release the captives in Babylon, and to enable the building of Jerusalem (Is. 45:12); all because God had formed the land [AV “earth”] of Israel to be inhabited and not to be left without His people dwelling upon it. And this happened; the captives were released (although most preferred to stay put in Babylon), and the building of Jerusalem was enabled (although the work was not done very enthusiastically by Judah, and they preferred to build their own houses rather than Yahweh’s).

Cyrus operated "not for price nor reward", for no personal advantage. This helps explain Is. 52:3: "You were sold for nothing; and you shall be redeemed without money". They were "sold for nothing" in that God had no personal benefit from the exile of His people; He did this to them for their spiritual benefit, not for any gain for Himself. Their redemption likewise would be according to His grace,

and not because of any transaction between God and man. This was reflected in the way Cyrus commanded the Jews to return and provided all that was materially required to rebuild the temple, but "not for reward", for no personal benefit.

Isaiah 45:14 Thus says Yahweh: The labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you, and they shall be yours. They will go after you. They shall come over in chains and they will bow down to you. They will make supplication to you: 'Surely God is in you; and there is none else. There is no other god- But the Egyptians and Ethiopians didn't come and fall down before Judah, as the Queen of Sheba had before Solomon. Nor did they accept Yahweh as the only God, and ditch their idols. The idea was that the Jewish exiles in the lands of the South would return, and their captors would come with them, wishing to invert what had happened by showing themselves to now be servile to the Jews and their God. But instead, the returned Jews worshipped the idols of Egypt, and married their women (Ezra 9:1). And thus Israel *were* ashamed and confounded in the future (cp. :17). So the essence of these things is reapplied to the conversion of the Gentiles in the last day.

Isaiah 45:15 Most certainly You are a God who has hidden Yourself, God of Israel, the Saviour'- Is. 30:20 describes the reestablished Kingdom as a time when Judah's repentant eyes would "see" the God who had taught them through the sufferings of defeat and exile (see note there). Their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him

(s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me... and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7). See on :19.

Isaiah 45:16 They will be disappointed, yes, confounded, all of them. Those who are makers of idols will go into confusion together- LXX "All that are opposed to him shall be ashamed and confounded, and shall walk in shame: ye isles, keep a feast to me". This walking in shame is applied to the rejection at the last day of those who have refused the things of the Lord Jesus and trusted in the equivalent of "idols" in their generation (Rev. 16:15). It was to be the makers of idols who were "confounded" (s.w. Is. 41:11; 45:16) and only the true Israel would not be "confounded" (Is. 45:17; 54:4). The sinners in Israel had refused to be confounded or ashamed of their sins (Jer. 3:3 s.w.) and so they would be shamed in condemnation. Repentance involves an imagination of ourselves coming to judgment day and being condemned, and feeling shame for that; that is how we shall not be ashamed. And it is the servant alone who shall not be ashamed / confounded because of His righteousness (Is. 50:7). Our identity with Him removes that shame. If we condemn ourselves, we shall not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The enemies of Israel would perish alongside the apostate within Israel, in the same judgment. See on :14.

Isaiah 45:17 Israel will be saved by Yahweh with an everlasting salvation- The "eternal age" of the Kingdom of peace could have come at that time, with the Messianic son of Isaiah as the father of that eternal age (see on Is. 9:6). But it didn't. An eternal Messianic kingdom could then have been established; Judah were urged to repent and allow it to happen in Is. 26:4. And the same potential

was there for the exiles who returned from Babylon (Is. 45:17; 65:18). And the "father" of that could have been a Messianic figure who arose in Jerusalem. But these potentials have been reapplied and rescheduled to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus to be established in Zion in the last days.

You will not be disappointed nor confounded to ages everlasting- Or, "ashamed". See on :14,16. Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. Consider Is. 50:10: “Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice [s.w. Ezra 1:1 re the proclamation of Cyrus] of his servant [i.e. Cyrus, Is. 45:1], that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God”. Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah’s prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9).

The same Hebrew words for “ashamed [and] confounded” in :16,17 occur in Ezra 9:6, where as a result of Ezra realizing that Judah had married the local women and broken covenant with Yahweh, he admits: “I am *ashamed* and *blush* [s.w. ‘confounded’] to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased....”. The words of Is. 45 could have had their fulfilment in the time of Cyrus; the surrounding nations could have come and worshipped before Judah, and the whole earth quit their idols and look unto Yahweh as a just God and a saviour. But Judah would not. Judah in the new temple would not “defile” Yahweh’s Name any more (Ez. 43:7,8); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodied and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices (Ez. 43:7); but now, Judah thought they were above God’s law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies (Ez. 43:9); but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration.

Isaiah 45:18 For thus says Yahweh who created the heavens, the God who formed the earth and made it, who established it and didn’t create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: I am Yahweh; and there is no other- Yahweh speaks of

the returnees as if they were a new creation, created by Him along with the heavens and earth of the temple which He had stretched out in Zion (Is. 43:7; 44:2). He did not form this new land / heavens of the kingdom and temple of Israel in vain- He created it to be inhabited (Is. 45:18). But the Jews acted like the old creation. And the promise of new creation was deferred until the time of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). Judah for the most part declined to inhabit / dwell in the new heavens and earth [the same word in Is. 45:18 is frequently used re. how the returnees *dwelt* in the cities of Judah]. And we too can take the simple encouragement- that God has created His Kingdom, with all the careful planning involved, so that it should be inhabited. He is not playing hard to get, nor indifferent to the progress of His plans. He wants us to be there.

If "the earth" is 'the land' of Israel and "the Heavens" refer to the temple (see 1 Kings 8:30; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 20:2,6; 11:4; Heb. 7:26; 2 Sam. 15:15 etc.) then God is saying that if the temple and land remained uninhabited, His creation of them would be in vain- hence His plan of restoration. The references in Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration to God being the creator of Heaven and earth would therefore be reminders that it was equally in His power to create the new Heavens and earth of the people of Israel/the temple.

Isaiah 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, in a place of the land of darkness. I didn't say to the seed of Jacob, 'Seek Me in vain'. I, Yahweh, speak righteousness. I declare things that are right- The idea of the first sentence may be that He had not spoken this word to the exiles in "the land of darkness", Babylon or ruined Judah, just for the sake of it. It was not "in vain", the prospect of the Kingdom was attainable. Perhaps this is God's response to the complaint in :15 that He was hiding Himself. He is urging the exiles as He urges us- that His promise of eternal salvation is for real, He has promised it to us in "truth" ["right"] and for all our sin and dysfunction and separation from His ultimate perfection of holiness, His righteousness is not impugned by His wonderful offer to us.

Isaiah 45:20 Assemble yourselves and come. Draw near together, you who have escaped from the nations- The 'bringing / assembling' and 'drawing near / gathering' of the exiles (s.w. Is. 43:5) would have been primarily fulfilled at the restoration (same words in Neh. 1:9). But most of the exiles remained in the lands of their captivity, just as people resist the Gospel's call today. They had to themselves bring and gather themselves (Is. 45:20; 49:18; 60:4), so that God

would confirm this by bringing and gathering them (Is. 43:5; Jer. 31:8; Ez. 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech. 10:10). And so today with all who wish to be in God's Kingdom; our desire to be there and first moves towards it will be confirmed many times over by God's work through His Spirit. The LXX and GNB suggest that the group in view are the minority of the peoples of the Babylonian empire who were to repent and turn to Yahweh: "people of the nations, all who survive the fall of the empire" (GNB). They were intended to join the repentant exiles in a restored, multiethnic Kingdom of God in Judah. This possibility of course didn't happen, human impenitence was to such an extent, and so it looks forward to the final establishment of the Kingdom in the last days.

Those have no knowledge who carry the wood of their engraved image, and pray to a god that can't save- Again idols are characterized by being unable to save; Yahweh's ultimate salvation of man from death is what makes Him God.

Isaiah 45:21 Declare and present it. Yes, let them take counsel together- This is legal language, inviting any opposed to God's purpose with Jacob to present their hard evidence in court. But Isaiah's lengthy prophecies of the restoration must be compared against the sad reality of what actually happened. The prophecies exude a wonderfully positive and joyful spirit, which contrasts with the defeatism of the returnees. And one cannot help but wonder whether we as individuals and therefore as a community have really lived the life of joy which the NT promises for those who truly believe. Is. 45:20-21 is an example: "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations [i.e. Babylon and all the 127 provinces of Persia]...Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them *take counsel together*". These are the very words used to describe how the local opposition 'took counsel together' to frustrate the work of the Jews (Neh. 6:7). Yahweh is exultantly saying: 'Let them do it... let them get on with it, nothing can prosper against you and your work!'. But instead, the Jews took the opposition so seriously.

Who has shown this from ancient time? Who has declared it of old? Haven't I, Yahweh? There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour; There is no one besides Me- Justice and salvation were not part of the idol worship systems or theologies. And those idols had no histories of prophetic statements and intentions.

Isaiah 45:22 Look to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other- LXX "ye that come from the end of the earth", as if referring to the exiles returning from the boundaries of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. They were to look to Yahweh in repentance, "turn to Me" (LXX) in repentance; and if they looked, then the blindness of their eyes would be removed by God's Spirit acting in their hearts, according to the promise of the new covenant. But they continued to look / turn to other gods, and so Yahweh's face remained hidden from them because they were not looking to Him (s.w. Dt. 31:18), turning or 'looking' to Yahweh the back and not the face, so that He would remain hidden from them (:15; Jer. 32:33 s.w.).

The altar "Jehovah-Nissi" connected Yahweh personally with the pole / standard / ensign of Israel (Ex. 17:15). Yet *nissi* is the Hebrew word used for the pole on which the brass serpent was lifted up, and for the standard pole which would lift up Christ. Somehow Yahweh Himself was essentially connected with the cross of Christ. “There is no God else beside; a just God and a Saviour (Jesus)... look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Is. 45:21,22) is evident allusion to the snake on the pole to which all Israel were bidden look and be saved. And yet that saving symbol of the crucified Jesus is in fact God Himself held up to all men.

Isaiah 45:23 I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness and will not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath- The Divine hope was that the repentant exiles would enter the new covenant, and take an oath to Him. But they didn't, and so these things are reinterpreted with reference to the work of the Lord Jesus, and believers bowing before Him. Rom. 14 quotes these words about how the new Israel will come from all nations to the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus at the last day. There's one thing which the sheer *height* of the Lord's exaltation leads us to. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him... that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord... wherefore... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:9-12). These words are alluding to Is. 45:23,24: "...unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". We all find humility difficult. But before the height of His exaltation, a height which came as a result of the depth of the degradation of the cross, we should bow our knees in an unfeigned humility and realization of our sinfulness, and thankful recognition of the fact that through Him we are counted righteous.

We will be prostrated in the day of judgment before Him, and yet will be made to stand. We therefore ought not to judge our brother who will likewise be made to stand in that day- to his Master he stands or falls, not to us.

In Phil. 2:10, the Lord Jesus is said to have been given power over all beings in heaven, earth and the nether-world. The Romans understood the world to be divided into these three spheres of the cosmos. But this passage is based upon Is. 45:23, which says that God has total supremacy (see on :5-7)- and this has been granted to His Son. As I understand it, Paul is reasoning that if God is all powerful, and if that power has been given to the Lord Jesus, then whatever cosmology there is around, e.g. belief in a nether-world, well, in that case, Jesus has all power over that as well. The same argument applies to demons. If they exist, well the essence is that they are well and truly under the Lord's control and aren't essentially powerful. Paul doesn't so much ridicule the idea of a nether-world, rather he takes the view, as Jesus did in His dealings with the demon issue, that God's power is so great that their existence is effectively not an issue.

Isaiah 45:24 They will say of Me, 'There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh'. Even to Him shall men come- These will be the thoughts of us each as we are bow before the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus, which is in view in :24. Then we shall appreciate as never before the meaning of imputed righteousness.

And all those who were incensed against Him shall be disappointed- The Samaritans could have provided a fulfilment of all this, just as the prideful Assyrians were before. And yet Sanballat, Tobiah, the Ammonites and Ashdodites were "wroth" [s.w. 'incensed'] against Judah (Neh. 4:1,7). But they didn't come to nothing, nor to shame, in that those very groups were the ones who married into Jewry, to the extent that Tobiah even shifted the tithes out of one of the chambers of the temple and set up his office there. But at the last day, all the Lord's enemies shall be ashamed ["disappointed"] in the shame of condemnation.

Isaiah 45:25 In Yahweh shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory- Is. 45:20-25 calls for the Jews to return from Babylon and come unto Him in Zion; but the majority remained in Babylon, and so these words were delayed in fulfilment; Rom. 14 quotes them about how the new Israel will come from all nations to the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus at the last day. But had Jewry returned from Babylon as they had been asked, they would have come to their Messiah there and then. "All the seed of Israel" suggests the ten tribes also were

intended to return; but they too preferred their exile to restoring the Kingdom in Zion.

Isaiah Chapter 46

Isaiah 46:1 Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; their idols are on the animals, and on the livestock: the things that you carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary- This appears to be a vision of the gods of Babylon being removed from the city as the Persians advanced. Just as Merodach-Baladan packed his idols on boats, at the approach of Sennacherib. But as I have noted elsewhere, the fall of Babylon didn't happen quite as predicted. Darius the Mede actually maintained the Babylonian gods; of whom Bel and Nebo were the popular ones; although "Bel" is the equivalent of Hebrew 'Baal' and may be a generic name. And so the potential scenario presented elsewhere, of Babylon falling, being destroyed by the fire of Divine judgment Sodom-style, and the exiles returning to Judah- just didn't come about. The various preconditions involving Judah's repentance weren't in place. And so the 'fall of Babylon' prophecies will in essence, although maybe not in every detail, be fulfilled in the fall of latter day Babylon. And this is how we are to understand this picture of the gods of Babylon being put on animals, after being carried about in the various processions earlier. The weary burdened with idols are reapplied to all heavy burdened who can come to the Lord Jesus and be relieved (Mt. 11:28).

So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about the overthrow of Babylon. The situation is analogous to how the New Testament is full of references to the Roman imperial cult of empire worship. So much of the Bible is like Isaiah and the New Testament- a radical, counter-cultural call to see our present world for what it is, and to perceive that the ways of God simply can’t be mixed in, watered down or compromised with the way of this world. Naturally such criticisms of Babylon and its gods would have been a very risky thing- for Babylon had shown grace to many Jews and they were doing well in rising up the social and economic ladder there. To speak of Babylon in the hostile way the prophets do was a brave and unpopular thing (Is. 13,14,21,46; Jer. 50,51; often in Zechariah). We know from Ez. 8, Jer. 44 and Zech. 5 that many Jews had accepted the idols of their Babylonian conquerors, rather like Ahaz did after his defeat by Assyria (2 Kings 16:10). The spirit of ridiculing the idolatry of Babylon whilst living in it, waiting the call to leave, is so relevant to modern Christians working, living and waiting in latter day Babylon.

Isaiah 46:2 They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves have been carried away into captivity- The idea as noted on :1 is that the idols were to be carried away out of danger; but now there is the picture of the idols having been captured and being now taken off into captivity. But as explained on :1, this isn't what happened when Babylon fell to the Medes.

Isaiah 46:3 Listen to Me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been carried from their birth, that have been carried from the womb- The remnant of the whole house of Israel refers to the repentant remnant of both Judah and the ten tribes, who were intended to repent and return to Zion together, united by their experience of repentance, grace and forgiveness. The contrast is with how the idols / false gods had to be carried by their people and beasts (:1,2), but Yahweh the true God has carried His people. This is where mere religion and true spirituality are shown to be so different; religion often involves making ourselves feel good by supposedly doing something for God, whereas salvation by grace through faith is about accepting His carrying of us.

Isaiah 46:4 And even to old age I am He, and even to grey hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; yes, I will carry, and will deliver- An oft overlooked component of the promises to Abraham which are the core of the Gospel is that "I will be your God". Land and eternal life in the future, blessings... these are indeed wonderful. But the King of the Cosmos is *my* God. Oh how rich the promise. So often we read that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I take this to mean that He was there for them, through every moment, He was their God, He alone is without beginning and has immortality in Himself. This continuity in God over history is therefore an encouragement to us that He likewise is the continuous One in our lives too. Israel in captivity felt God had forgotten them; and so they are comforted that they are individuals "which have been borne by me from the belly, which have been carried from the womb: and even to old age I am he, and even to grey hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry, and will deliver" (Is. 46:3,4). Note how God, who is presented as male, likens Himself to a woman here. As He carried us in the womb, so He will carry us when we are old and grey haired. True to human parenting experience, the baby is always the father's little baby, even in grey hairs. And this wonderful comfort is so simply because "I am he". This is an evident reference to God's Name, YHWH. The mystery of the Name

is partly because the declaration of it in Ex. 3:6 implies grammatically that He is, was, and shall be. This was intended to be a great comfort to Israel in Egypt, who again had felt that God was somehow distant, looking the other way, leaving them in their aloneness. The same Name, the promise of God's abiding presence and purpose with us, provides comfort to every one of His people.

God is likening Himself to a woman who carries a child in her womb, then bears it, and then carries it as a baby, but *still* carries it when the child is an old man. Incidentally, this simile is proof enough that God is not somehow 'anti-women'. The God of all knowledge is aware of a fundamental psychological phenomena in all men; the fear, however passive and buried, of being without their mother; the fear of loneliness, the fear of eternal separation from the woman who bore and carried them. From the president to the happy village grandfather, this sense is there. Perhaps David appreciated this when he referred to a man weeping at his mother's funeral (not his *father's*) as the ultimate cameo of grieving and desolation of soul (Ps. 35:14). And yet God says that He is in some ways the eternal mother, the one who bore and carried us in babyhood, but the One who will yet carry us when we are gray headed and once again unable to walk. Yet He is also the everlasting Father, through His Son (Is. 9:6). It's a picture of exquisite beauty. Our relationship with God as the One who will *never* leave us is the *only* answer to what philosophers call 'the existential problem'; the awareness that has come to every thoughtful soul, the terror of being so alone as we get older, the dread of being without our human roots, of becoming the one to whom others (e.g. our children) look to as their background and root, whilst we ourselves have no tangible link with *our* past. This problem is defined by C.S. Lewis in *The Inner Ring*: "I believe that in all men's lives at certain periods...one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local Ring and the terror of being left outside". This horror of existential loneliness can *only* be met by our sure knowledge that we have a very personal relationship in the Kingdom of God with our Heavenly Father, who will never ever leave us, and will preserve us unto His eternal Kingdom.

Isaiah 46:5 To whom will you liken Me and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?- This seems addressed to the idolaters within Judah, who were not denying Yahweh but making Him "equal" to the idols by claiming to worship Him through worshipping them.

Isaiah 46:6 Some pour out gold from the bag, and weigh silver in the balance.

They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god. They fall down- yes, they worship- The idea is that people pay in gold to a goldsmith, and he then makes that gold into a god, after keeping part of it for himself as wages. This explains the Divine cameraman zooming in on the handover of the gold pieces to the goldsmith. This recalls the picture in Is. 44:15-17, of a man cutting down a tree, using half for an idol and the other half for firewood. The purpose of presenting this bizarre picture was to enable the audience to perceive the utter foolishness of idolatry, although the person caught up in it can't perceive it. And that is a feature of idolatry to this day.

Isaiah 46:7 They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it, and set it in its place, and it stands, from its place it shall not move: yes, one may cry to it, yet it can not answer, nor save him out of his trouble- This sounds like the processions in Babylon where the idols were carried through the streets on the shoulders of men, and then placed in high places and worshipped. Clearly Is. 40-66 was addressed directly to the returning exiles who would've been familiar with this scene; Isaiah was prophesying all this after Hezekiah had sinned and the captivity had been prophesied in Is. 39. Isaiah has so many detailed allusions to Babylonian life and beliefs that it's impossible to think that it was all written in Hezekiah's time, with no reference to the Babylonians. We find the specific names of Babylonian idols (Is. 46:1,2), ceremonies and processions known only in Babylon (Is. 46:7), omens (Is. 44:25), magic and astrology (Is. 47:1,2,12,13). Time and again there is specific reference to leaving Babylon and returning to Judah (Is. 40:3-11; Is. 42:15,16; Is. 48:20-22; 49:9-12; 52:11,12).

Isaiah 46:8 Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, you transgressors- LXX has this as a call to repentance from idolatry by the exiles in Babylon: "Remember ye these things, and groan: repent, ye that have gone astray, return in your heart". They were to "remember this" that they already knew, and "bring it again to mind" that God is really the great eternal, and His Name is as it is, and they should have had no part in the idol processions spoken of in :7.

Isaiah 46:9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me- The exiled Jews ought to have had no part in the idol worship of Babylon spoken of in :7. They should have perceived that the magnitude of Yahweh made all other gods and idols of no significance.

Our strength against idolatry in its modern forms is likewise found from appreciating the greatness of our God.

Isaiah 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure- The emphasis on this (e.g. also Is. 41:26) is understandable seeing that such a specific prophecy regarding the 70 years captivity was to be given and fulfilled. But the emphasis and flavour of the words used is not upon prediction but rather explanation, of attaching meaning to event. God alone can provide such explanation of both past and future events according to the far reaching narrative found in the prophets. The idol religions explained just a few isolated incidents. This is what is unique about the one true God- that He alone attaches meaning to event, both in personal and collective life, and indeed to all human history. Whether we correctly perceive it is another question, but He alone does this and holds the masterplan.

Isaiah 46:11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of My counsel from a far country; yes, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it- The servant songs or poems of Isaiah clearly have reference to a Messiah figure who was to appear at the time of the restoration from Babylon. The early songs clearly have reference to Cyrus- he is named as such. Expositors such as Harry Whittaker and J.W. Thirtle have sought to prove the naming of Cyrus as an interpolation, claiming that Isaiah has sole primary reference to the days of Hezekiah. This seems to me to be desperate. The naming of Cyrus, and the specific references to his military campaigns in the prophecies, simply can't be gotten around. To brush all this off as uninspired interpolation and fiddling with the text of holy Scripture just won't do. The references to Cyrus aren't merely the mention of his name. Is. 41:1-5 alludes unquestionably to the dramatic conquest of Sardis by Cyrus in 547 BC. The 'servant' is described as swooping down first from the east and then from the north, trampling local rulers beneath him (Is. 41:2-5,25; Is. 45:1; Is. 46:11). This 'servant' was to end the Babylonian empire (Is. 43:14; Is. 48:14,15), enable the captive Jews in Babylon to return to their land (Is. 42:6,7; Is. 43:5-7; Is. 45:13), restore Jerusalem and the ruined cities of Judah (Is. 44:26-28; 45:13). There can be no serious doubt that it was Cyrus who fulfilled these things. The servant is a "bird of prey from the east" (Is. 46:11)- according to Xenophon, the eagle was the emblem of Cyrus. The servant "victorious at every step" with lightning speed (Is. 41:2) surely

refers to how Cyrus conquered the Medes, the former Assyrian empire, and the Lydians before taking Babylon in 539 BC. We should have no problem with a pagan king being described as God's "servant", for that very term is used of Nebuchadnezzar in Jer. 25:9. See on :7. Cyrus failed to live up to his potential (see on Is. 45:4,5) and so the prophecies came to be applied to the Lord Jesus, who was far more fully "the word made flesh" (Jn. 1:14), which is perhaps the idea of "the man of My counsel", the man who would fulfill God's purposes and prophetic word in totality.

Isaiah 46:12 Listen to Me, you stout-hearted, who are far from righteousness- Despite this laboured and repeated assurance, the exiles were stout hearted, which is how they are described in Ez. 2:4. Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14). See on Is. 49:24. It was the invaders of Zion who were the stout-hearted who were to be destroyed (s.w. Ps. 76:5); the hard hearted amongst God's people were and are to be destroyed at the same time as them, facing the same judgment for having the same heart.

Isaiah 46:13 I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not wait; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel My glory- This connects back to Is. 5:19, where we read that the Jews mocked Isaiah and his God, saying "Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it!". There was clearly opposition to Isaiah's prophecies. The idea of judgment coming would have been mocked in these kinds of words. But we wonder whether this is really a verbatim quotation from these people; or whether God read their thoughts as effectively saying this, and as being the real implication of their positions. For there is no evidence that Judah abandoned Yahweh; rather did they claim obedience and loyalty to Him, although they claimed the same about their idols whom they worshipped in His Name. But God was not deaf to their words, or the implications of their thoughts and actions. He in fact heard their mocking 'prayer', because He here says that He will "come near" (s.w.) in fulfilment of His counsel or words.

But, perhaps intentionally, these words can be read another way. This idea of bringing salvation near is in the context of the hard hearted Jews being "far" from Yahweh's righteousness. It's as if God wishes to somehow force through

His plan of saving them, bringing near the salvation which they pushed far from them. But even then, they refused it. He has the same enthusiasm for human salvation today.

Isaiah Chapter 47

Isaiah 47:1 Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of the Chaldeans: for you shall no more be called tender and delicate- The Ras Shamra texts include a section on the fall and death of Baal, another form of the Babylonian "Bel" of Is. 46:1. Although written in Ugaritic, this section has amazing similarities with the poem of Isaiah 14 about the fall of Babylon – e.g. “The death of Baal” includes lines such as “From the throne on which he sits... how hath Baal come down, how hath the mighty been cast down!”. Isaiah’s message was therefore: ‘Forget those stories about Baal being cast down; what’s relevant for us is that mighty Babylon, which tempts us to trust in her rather than Yahweh God of Israel, is to be cast down, let’s apply the language of Baal’s fall to the kingdoms of this world which we know and live amongst’. Another such example is to be found in Is. 47:1: “Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne”. This is almost quoting [albeit through translation] from the ‘Death of Baal’ poem.

Isaiah 47:2 Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove your veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers- As I have noted elsewhere (see on Is. 46:1), the fall of Babylon didn't happen quite as predicted. Darius the Mede actually maintained the Babylonian gods; of whom Bel and Nebo were the popular ones; although "Bel" is the equivalent of Hebrew 'Baal' and may be a generic name. Many within Babylon supported him, and the Babylonians didn't go into captivity across "the rivers", having to lift up their skirts and bare their legs to cross them. And so the potential scenario presented elsewhere, of Babylon falling, being destroyed by the fire of Divine judgment Sodom-style, and the exiles returning to Judah- just didn't come about. The various preconditions involving Judah's repentance weren't in place. And so the 'fall of Babylon' prophecies will in essence, although maybe not in every detail, be fulfilled in the fall of latter day Babylon. And this is how we are to understand this picture of Babylon being led into captivity.

Isaiah 47:3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and will spare no man- See on :2. This scenario didn't totally come about when Babylon fell to the Medes. The population wasn't destroyed, there was very little bloodshed. But the language of Babylon's judgment here and in :2 is very similar to that of Israel's judgment. The idea is that what Babylon did to Judah was to be done to them, finally. This is the theme

of Revelation, where the judgments upon Israel are related to the final judgments upon the beast system which has judged her.

Isaiah 47:4 Our Redeemer, Yahweh of Armies is His name, is the Holy One of Israel- The sad thing is that the redemption of Israel made possible through the fall of Babylon wasn't accepted by them; and they remained in exile, for the most part. As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

LXX "Thy deliverer is the Lord of hosts, the Holy One of Israel is his name" would suggest that Yahweh was ready to deliver Babylon- this therefore could be read as a call for her to repent, which is also in view in Jer. 51:9.

Isaiah 47:5 Sit in silence, and go into darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms- Darkness is the imagery of condemnation. "Mistress" implies she is a whore awaiting judgment. Again, the language of Judah's judgment, 'sitting in silence', is applied now to Babylon (Lam. 2:10; 3:28). But the mistress of kingdoms was to be destroyed as Sodom was (Is. 13:19); and that didn't happen at the fall of Babylon to the Medes. This, as noted on Is. 46:1, was a potential scenario that was delayed until the latter day fall of Babylon the whore as described in Revelation.

Isaiah 47:6 I was angry with My people, I profaned My inheritance, and gave them into your hand: you showed them no mercy; on the aged you have very heavily laid your yoke- Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant. Babylon were not condemned for executing God's judgments upon Judah; but for their subsequent

bloodlust and showing no mercy, and abusing those such as the elderly who were not the primary objects of the Divine judgment. This abuse of the elderly was particularly noted by God (Lam. 4:16; 5:12). It was their subsequent pride and pretending to Yahweh (:7) which were the reasons for judgment falling upon them.

Isaiah 47:7 You said, 'I shall be a mistress forever;' so that you did not lay these things to your heart, nor did you remember the latter end of it- This also is the criticism made of Judah (Mal. 2:2). Babylon was intended to reflect and repent; Jer. 51:9 suggests Babylon was only judged because she was offered a chance to repent which she refused. I noted on Is. 46:1 that her fall to the Medes was not executed with the full extent of the judgments then pronounced upon her; and maybe that was because some of them did repent.

Isaiah 47:8 Now therefore hear this, you who are given to pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is none else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children:'- The implication is that Babylon would hear the prophecies of her destruction and mock them; and apply the very language of Isaiah about Yahweh "I am, and there is none else" to themselves (Is. 45:6).

We bear the Name of Yahweh / Jehovah, by reason of our baptism into it. His Name is declared as His character- merciful, truthful, judging sin, patient etc. (Ex. 34:5-7). He who will be who He will be, manifesting His characteristics as He does so, must have His way in us too. Babylon and Nineveh were condemned for having the attitude that "I am, and there is none beside me" (Is. 47:8; Zeph. 2:15). Their self-perception was a parody on the Name and being of Yahweh: He alone can say "I am, and there is none else" (Is. 43:11; 44:6; 45:6,21) and seek to be who He is. He alone can seek to articulate the characteristics that make up His Name onto the lives of others, and onto the things that comprise His Kingdom. We are not to be who we are; to 'just be yourself'; to 'just do it', as foolish slogans and adverts encourage us. We are here to show forth His mercy, truth, judgment of sin, patient saving of the weak etc., not our own personality. We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our imitation of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 47:9 but these two things shall come to you in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood; in their full measure shall they come on you, in

the multitude of your sorceries, and the great abundance of your enchantments- It could be argued that because the level of destruction spoken of here didn't happen to the people and city of Babylon when the Medes took it, therefore the prophecies apply to the king and royal family of Babylon, who were slain by Darius the Mede. The queen was therefore left literally a widow. But even that was but a primary fulfilment; the final fulfilment would be in the destruction of the sorceries of latter day Babylon (Rev. 18:23). But even that will only be because she refuses the invitation to repent of them (Rev. 9:21).

Isaiah 47:10 For you have trusted in your wickedness; you have said, 'No one sees me'; your wisdom and your knowledge, it has perverted you, and you have said in your heart- The condemnation of Babylon's wisdom and knowledge alludes to the contrast between the wisdom of Daniel in the court of Babylon compared to the false knowledge of Babylon's wise men. God could have condemned Babylon for a whole host of sinful actions; but His essential, repeated reason was because of how they spoke in their hearts (Is. 47:10; Zeph. 2:15; Rev. 18:17). And He gave the same reason for His condemnation of Tyre (Ez. 28:2) and Edom (Obadiah 3).

I am, and there is none else besides me'- Babylon acted as she did because she reasoned that "None seeth me...I am, and there is none else beside me" (Is. 47:10 RV). They appropriated the language of God to themselves, they played God in that they thought their ways were unseen by any higher power. And we all have a terrible, frightening tendency to do this.

Isaiah 47:11 Therefore evil will come on you; you won't know when it dawns: and mischief will fall on you; you will not be able to put it away: and desolation shall come on you suddenly, which you don't know- This sudden desolation refers only primarily to the sudden fall of Babylon to Darius as described in Dan. 5. As explained on Is. 46:1, the city and people of Babylon weren't suddenly destroyed. According to Jer. 51:43, the king was already deeply concerned at the advance of the Medes and was feeble at the news of the enemy advance. Hence we should give due weight to the discovery by Layard of inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future.

"Mischief" is literally 'wretchedness'. Paul in Rom. 7:24 felt "wretched" (s.w.

LXX). The Greek word is elsewhere used about the feelings of the rejected before God's judgment (James 5:1; Rev. 3:17), likewise in the LXX (Is. 47:11; Mic. 2:4; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:15). Paul feels as if he is even now standing before the judgment seat of God, and is condemned- yet suddenly he rejoices that he is in fact amazingly saved by Christ. This is the very theme of the earlier sections of Romans- that we are suddenly declared right, justified, as we stand condemned in the dock before God. This lends weight to the suggestion that Romans 7 is indeed autobiographical of Paul, declaring the process of his own conversion, yet telling the story, as it were, in terms which present him as personifying every Jew under the Law.

Isaiah 47:12 Stand now with your enchantments, and with the multitude of your sorceries in which you have laboured from your youth; if so be you shall be able to profit, if so be you may prevail!- See on :13. "Laboured" is literally "wearied", as AV. The way of the flesh is a weariness, both for Babylon and the unfaithful within Judah (Is. 43:22).

Isaiah 47:13 You are wearied in the multitude of your counsellors: let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save you from the things that shall come on you- Babylon ought to have learnt from the humiliation of her sorceries and wise men before the Divine wisdom of Daniel. We too see God working in the same way today; lessons are taught to people which they don't learn, and therefore harder judgment comes.

Isaiah 47:14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: it shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before- The fire would burn so totally that not a live coal would be left (as in Is. 30:14). This suggests a supernatural cataclysm bursting upon Babylon, after the pattern of Sodom's destruction (Is. 13:19). But as explained on :1, this didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. The prophecy was reapplied to the final fall of Babylon described in Revelation.

Isaiah 47:15 Thus shall the things be to you in which you have laboured: those who have trafficked with you from your youth shall wander each one to his place; there shall be none to save you- The idea is that the people from the nations within the Babylonian empire would leave Babylon and return home- including the Jews. But this didn't happen; see on Is. 46:1. The Jews were

intended to flee Babylon before she fell (Is. 48:20), but they didn't; and so God put another plan into operation, whereby the fall of Babylon was to lead to all the foreigners there, including the Jews, thereby being freed to return to their ancestral homelands. But still the Jews remained, as the book of Esther testifies. God tried then and tries now, by all means, to bring His chosen people to His Kingdom. Human resistance to His efforts is tragic. He must have pleasure in we weak sinners who have at least said "Yes" to His plans.

Isaiah Chapter 48

Isaiah 48:1 Hear this, house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth out of the waters of Judah; who swear by the name of Yahweh, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness- The exiles did not reject Yahweh, but as explained on :5, they were heavily involved in idolatry as well, apparently justifying this as a form of Yahweh worship. They called themselves by the name of Israel and swore by the name of Yahweh, and identified themselves as the people of Zion (:2). The emphasis is upon their naming of themselves, whereas God had wanted to place His Name upon them; see on Is. 44:5. And so we have here a powerful warning to nominal Christians, who use the culture and nomenclature of the true faith and yet whose hearts may be far from it.

Isaiah 48:2 (for they call themselves of the holy city, and rest themselves on the God of Israel; Yahweh of Armies is His name)- As so often, form had dominated over content. As explained on :1, the exiles were very culturally loyal to Zion and proclaimed their "rest" or trust in Israel's God; and yet as explained on :5, they were heavily involved in idolatry as well, apparently justifying this as a form of Yahweh worship. And they didn't want to return to Zion and reestablish Yahweh's Kingdom. And so He reminds them that He, the God of Israel, is Yahweh of Armies. His unlimited power articulated through His Angelic hosts could actually bring about in practice the restoration of the Kingdom.

Isaiah 48:3 I have declared the former things from of old; yes, they went forth out of My mouth, and I showed them: suddenly I did them, and they happened- This sudden action of God may refer to the sudden fall of Babylon described in Is. 47. See on :5. This is being cited as an encouragement to the exiles to see the powerful hand of their God in human history, to realize this was in fulfilment of His prophetic program, and they could take it further. His prophetic words had come out of His mouth; this was the intimacy achieved in the Divine-human encounter through the words of inspired prophets. "The words of the prophets are written on the subway wall", read *en passant*, heard, treated as ordinary and incidental... but the wonder of Divine inspiration, the fact these words and ideas dropped from the mouth of God was overlooked then as it is now.

Isaiah 48:4 Because I knew that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew, and your brow brass- This hard hearted attitude of the Jews is commented

upon by Ezekiel, who lived amongst these Jewish exiles in Babylon. God took into account their skepticism and hard hearts, and had therefore made amazing prophecies ahead of time, predicting Cyrus by name 150 years before (:5). We see here God's earnest desire to convince even the hard hearted, and not to just turn away from them if they rejected Him, but to construct His purpose ("project" may be a better word) in order to somehow still incorporate them within His salvation purpose. It's similar to how He mapped out the path of Israel through the wilderness lest they see war and be discouraged (Ex. 13:17). He could have justifiably reasoned that what they had seen in the plagues and at the Red Sea ought to have been enough to motivate anyone to follow Him for the rest of their lives. But He was and is sensitive to our sins and unjustifiable weaknesses; and we should be likewise to others.

Isaiah 48:5 Therefore I have declared it in advance to you from of old; before it came to pass I showed it to you; lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my engraved image, and my molten image, has commanded them'- See on :4. This is a tragic reflection of the deep seated belief in idols amongst the exiles. It took some generations for them to quit idolatry, and I have noted throughout the book of Esther the extent of idolatry amongst the Jewish exiles. Ezekiel's ministry was to the exiles already in Babylon, and he frequently condemns their idolatry. It seems that the decree of Cyrus for the restoration and the "sudden" fall of Babylon (:3) were ascribed by the Jews to their idols. Hence the repeated emphasis that God had predicted these things, and even named Cyrus, well in advance. He and His prophetic word were to be given the credit, and not the idols.

Isaiah 48:6 You have heard it; see all this; and you, will you not declare it? I have shown you new things from this time, even hidden things, which you have not known- LXX "Ye have heard all this, but ye have not known: yet I have made known to thee the new things from henceforth, which are coming to pass". As explained on :5, the exiles knew the prophetic words of Isaiah about the fall of Babylon and the decree of Cyrus and the restoration; but they attributed these events to their idols. They had heard but not known God's word in their hearts. And this is the challenge to all Bible readers; as to whether we are just hearing or reading God's word on a surface level, or whether we really know these things in the Hebraic sense of 'knowing'.

Isaiah 48:7 They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day you didn't hear them; lest you should say, 'Behold, I knew them'- see on Eph. 1:9,10. LXX "say not thou, Yea, I know them". Their attitude to the prophecies was that 'Sure, we know all that stuff'. But it was surface level reading and hearing; they refused to perceive the wonderful reality, that the events connected with Cyrus, the fall of Babylon and the decree for restoration had all been foretold and were all part of Yahweh's saving purpose. As noted on :3, "The words of the prophets are written on the subway wall", read *en passant*, heard, treated as ordinary and incidental... but the wonder of Divine inspiration, the fact these words and ideas dropped from the mouth of God was overlooked then as it is now.

Isaiah 48:8 Yes, you didn't hear; yes, you didn't know; yes, from of old your ear was not opened- Their deafness to the real import of the prophetic word (see on :5-7) was their own fault, but they were confirmed in this by not having their ears and eyes opened by God. And yet He was willing and eager to open their ears (see on Is. 42:18; 43:8). But they didn't hear or know as intended because they didn't want to; they were unwilling for their narrative of life and self-identity in the prosperity of Babylon and Persia to be so radically interrupted.

For I knew that you dealt very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb- The allusion is to the naming of Jacob from the womb. He was a heel-catcher, and treacherous. Their treachery is described in the word used of Babylon and Assyria's treachery against them (Is. 33:1; Lam. 1:2). And it is used of their marital unfaithfulness against Yahweh (Jer. 3:11,20; 5:11). Knowing that this is how they would be, Yahweh had still entered a relationship with them, exactly as Hosea did with the unfaithful Gomer. Hosea's relationship with her reflected that of God with an Israel who likewise were "treacherous" to Him (Hos. 5:7; 6:7 s.w.). His foreknowledge of their sins was thereby an even greater display of His passionate love, hope and grace toward His people.

Isaiah 48:9 For My name's sake will I defer My anger, and for the sake of My praise will I refrain for you, that I not cut you off- "Cut off" is the word used of how the Assyrians had threatened to cut down the cedars of the temple (Is. 37:24; 2:13; 10:34). And the Babylonians actually did this (Is. 14:8). But the Jews then cut down cedars and made idols from them (Is. 44:14 s.w.), acting like the Babylonians, and ignoring the great grace shown in Yahweh's averting or deferring the threatened Assyrian destruction of the temple by cutting down its cedars. See on Is. 48:9. But by not immediately judging His people for their

unfaithfulness to Him (see on :8), God's grace as it were earns yet more praise for Him; from us, the spiritually discerning.

Even though so classically undeserving, Israel were saved "for His Name's sake" (Ps. 106:8; Ez. 20:9; 36:22 etc.)- and the same applies to the New Israel, baptized into the same saving Name of grace. They were not punished according to their sins for the Name's sake which they carried, and so will it be with us (Is. 48:9)- but we have to treat others baptized into the same covering Name in this same way as we are treated!

The usage of the idea of restraining anger, like the use of the terms 'remembering' and 'forgetting', suggests that God is so fully willing to enter into our kind of time; for a Being cannot forget and remember simultaneously, an element of time is involved. Likewise at times we read of God being slow to anger (Ex. 34:6), at others, of Him not restraining His anger, or restraining it (Ps. 78:38; Is. 48:9; Lam. 2:8; Ez. 20:22), and holding His peace (Is. 57:11; Ps. 50:21), and being provoked to anger by the bad behaviour of His covenant people (Dt. 32:21; Ps. 78:58; Is. 65:3; Jer. 8:19). God clearly has emotions of a kind which are not unrelated to the emotions we experience, as beings made in His image. But those emotions involve a time factor in order to be emotions. We read of the anger of God "for a moment" (Ps. 30:5; Is. 54:7,8), and of His wrath coming and going, leaving Him "calm" and no longer angry (Ez. 16:42). When we sin, we provoke God to anger- i.e. at a point in time, God sees our sin, and becomes angry. This is attested many times in Scripture. But it's meaningless if God is somehow outside of our time and emotions.

Isaiah 48:10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction- LXX "I have rescued thee from the furnace of affliction", just as Daniel's friends had been. They were representative of all the exiles. But despite that 'rescue', they refused to leave Persia. Nor would they perceive their prosperity in Babylon / Persia as in fact a furnace, a living out of condemnation. They chose for the most part to remain in it. The idea may be that despite the refining fire of the affliction of exile, they had still not become as silver; the dross was not removed. This is the tragedy of Israel's long history; so much fire, but the dross still held on to, and not removed. And it is so in the lives of so many associated with the new Israel.

Isaiah 48:11 For My own sake, for My own sake, will I do it; for how should My name be profaned? I will not give My glory to another- We sense here the struggle within God, which we see too throughout Hosea, especially in Hos. 11:8. They had been unfaithful and treacherous to Him, and His anger was kindled (:8,9); they needed to be judged. But He had refrained the expression of that anger (:9). On one hand, He cannot let His Name be profaned; but on the other, He will not give His glory to another. This conflict is at the very heart of His being, for His "own sake". The fact the pole of His grace and mercy emerges stronger than the pole of His anger and judgment is not to say that He is simply soft hearted. That triumph of mercy over judgment is the result of real conflict and tension within the heart of God Himself, at the very core of His character.

God will not let His Name be polluted by His people (Is. 48:11; Ez. 20:9). But God polluted His people (Is. 47:6). They did pollute His Name (Jer. 34:16; Mal. 1:7). God invites us to see His efforts to stop His Name being polluted as somehow defeated by the extent of Israel's pollutions. This theme comes out clearly in Ezekiel: they polluted Him, but He strove lest His Name should be polluted. Here is the extent of freewill which God gives man to sin- and also the extent of the hopefulness of God. It's as if He didn't imagine they would pollute Him as much as they did.

Isaiah 48:12 Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel My called: I am He; I am the first, I also am the last- The sense may be as in Is. 41:4: "I Yahweh, the first and with the last, I am He". First and last are terms used by the Lord Jesus of those who shall be in His Kingdom (Mt. 20:16). "The last" would then refer to the last generation of God's people. Yahweh would save the exiles along with the "first" of His people such as Abraham; for at the time of the restoration of that last generation, there would be a resurrection of all God's true people, to form a new people would eternally inherit the reestablished Kingdom.

Isaiah 48:13 Yes, My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has spread out the heavens: when I call to them, they stand up together- The idea of calling things which don't exist into existence (Rom. 4:17) has suggestions of creation (Is. 41:4; 48:13). The new, spiritual creation is indeed a creation *ex nihilo*, an act of grace. Incomprehensible to the modern mind, the natural creation involved the creation of matter from out of God, and not out of any visible, concrete matter which already existed. The physical creation therefore looked forward to the grace of the new creation- creating people

spiritually out of nothing, counting righteousness to them which they didn't have, treating them as persons whom they were not.

In the same context of Babylon's apparent might being brought down by God's hand, God reasoned that He would perform His will against Babylon, and this should be believed because His hand had created the heavens and earth (Is. 48:13,14). Likewise He taught Job the futility of having such metaphysical doubts about Him, of the joy there is all around us in creation regardless of our personal suffering…through an exposition of His power as creator. All this is why the disciples were inspired to faith that their prayers for deliverance would be answered by the recollection of the fact that God has created all things and therefore nothing is too hard for Him (Acts 4:24 RV).

Isaiah 48:14 Assemble yourselves all of you, and hear; who among them has declared these things? He whom Yahweh loves shall perform His will on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans- Babylon fell so that Persia would take over the administration of the 127 provinces where the Jews were scattered, and would allow them to return to Judah. The cup of judgment which Judah drunk for 70 years was passed to Babylon (Is. 51:22). This accounts for Isaiah's repeated and detailed emphasis on the coming fall of Babylon for Judah / Israel's sake (e.g. Is. 47). Although they had sinned, Yahweh showed His gracious love for His people by bringing down Babylon. "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee [Cyrus] by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me " (Is. 45:4). World geopolitics are manipulated for the sake of God's people. And yet we can refuse to participate in the program, as the exiles did. Likewise the iron curtain came down to allow preachers of God's Truth to take it to those once in darkness. And English has become the lingua-franca of the world, enabling Christian preaching to now penetrate societies literally world-wide. See on Ezra 2:1. But "Israel would not". I explained on Is. 46:1 and Is. 47:11 that Cyrus did not particularly destroy "the Chaldeans" as envisaged in these prophecies. He did not respond to Yahweh's love and refused to "know Him". And so these things are more fully to be realized in the fall of latter day Babylon at the hand of the Son of God's love, the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 48:15 I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him; I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous- The Jews of Isaiah's day would have had big problems with the idea of a pagan king like Cyrus becoming the King of

Israel and being Yahweh's special "servant" and even Messiah; see on Is. 45:1. Folk have the same problem and resistance to the idea today. But passages like Is. 45:9-13, Is. 48:14-16 and much of the material that follows the servant songs, are in fact seeking to answer objections to this- e.g. by saying that God is the potter and men are mere clay, and He will raise up precisely *whom He wishes*- even pagan Cyrus- to be His man, the arm of His salvation, at least potentially. His way was made prosperous, potentially; the "way" to the restored Zion of Is. 40 had been potentially prepared.

Isaiah 48:16 Come near to Me and hear this: 'From the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time that it was, there am I'. Now the Lord Yahweh has sent me, with His Spirit- The sending forth of Isaiah was the sending forth of God's word to His people (s.w. Is. 6:8; 9:8). Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh; his prophetic word about Cyrus and the restoration was published and not spoken in secret, and he was sent in the power of the Spirit to authenticate his message. And in Isaiah, the man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached. In the immediate context, Isaiah himself was the servant messenger sent forth (s.w. Is. 42:19; 48:16; 61:1); hence GNB "Now the Sovereign LORD has given me his power and sent me". But he was largely rejected, and Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh (Heb. 11:37). And so the messenger came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 48:17 Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel- As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

I am Yahweh your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way that you should go- LXX "I have shewn thee how thou shouldest find the way wherein thou shouldest walk". The way to Zion had been prepared (see on Is. 40), but they had to walk in it. They were being led in that way, potentially, just as many are today- but they refused to walk in it. The idols and the Gentile nations amongst whom they lived would not "profit" them (s.w. Is. 30:5,6; 44:9,10); but as the book of Esther makes clear, they were profiting well, apparently, from remaining amongst them. But the only real "profit" would be if they quit all that and returned to Zion. But they saw no "profit" in being forgiven and restored as God's people (s.w. Job 35:3).

Isaiah 48:18 Oh that you had listened to My commandments! then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea- This was the potential possible if they had repented and returned to Judah. The promises to Abraham (:19) and the coming of the Messianic seed of Abraham could have been fulfilled; but because Israel chose to be wicked, there was no such peace: “There is no peace… unto the wicked” (:22).

Because of His capacity to imagine, to see possible futures, God feels rejected both by His children and by His wife at the same time. Hence the poignancy behind His words of regret here, seeing what could have been. Likewise "Oh that they would have a mind such as this always" (Dt. 5:29), "O Israel, if you would but listen to Me" (Ps. 81:8,13). It's as if He could see the potentially happy future which they could've had stretching out before Him.

Isaiah 48:19 your seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of your body like its grains: his name would not be cut off nor destroyed from before Me- The promises to Abraham and the coming of the Messianic seed of Abraham could have been fulfilled then, had they repented (:18). The offspring of *their* body could have been as sand grains; they really could have personally been as Abraham. Likewise for us, the receipt of the promises to Abraham means that we stand absolutely with him (Gal. 3:27-29). But the LXX reads as if despite their refusal of these things, all the same God would not totally reject them: "Neither now shalt thou by any means be utterly destroyed, neither shall thy name perish before me".

Isaiah 48:20 Go forth from Babylon, flee from the Chaldeans; with a voice of singing declare, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth: say, 'Yahweh has redeemed His servant Jacob'- The idea in Is. 47:15 was that the people from the nations within the Babylonian empire would leave Babylon and return home- including the Jews. But this didn't happen; see on Is. 46:1. The idea here is that the Jews were intended to flee Babylon before she fell, but they didn't; and so God put another plan into operation, whereby the fall of Babylon was to lead to all the foreigners there, including the Jews, thereby being freed to return to their ancestral homelands. But still the Jews remained, as the book of Esther testifies. God tried then and tries now, by all means, to bring His chosen people to His Kingdom. Human resistance to His efforts is tragic. He must have pleasure in we weak sinners who have at least said "Yes" to His plans.

"Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) is picking up the language of Is. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7 concerning the return of the exiles from Babylon. The edict of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the land was reapplied to God's command to us to leave the spirit of Babylon, the Gentile world, and go up to do His work. The returned exiles are us. God told His people to flee from Babylon, to come out of her and return to His land and Kingdom (Is. 48:20; 52:7; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7). Babylon offered them a secure life, wealth, a society which accepted them (Esther 8:17; 10:3), houses which they had built for themselves (Jer. 29:5). And they were asked to leave all this, and travel the uncertain wilderness road to the ruins of Israel. They are cited in the NT as types of us in our exit from this world (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4). Those who decided to obey God's command and leave Babylon were confirmed in this by God: He raised up their spirit to want to return and re-build Jerusalem, and He touched the heart of Cyrus to make decrees which greatly helped them to do this (Ezra 1:2-5). And so the same Lord God of Israel is waiting to confirm us in our every act of separation from the kingdoms of this world, great or small; and He waits not only to receive us, but to be a Father unto us, and to make us His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18).

The command to flee Babylon must be compared with Is. 52:12: "For you shall not go out in haste, neither shall you go by flight: for Yahweh will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your vanguard". Although the exodus from Egypt was in many ways a pattern for the exiles to leave Babylon, in distinction from then, they would not "go out in haste" (s.w. Dt. 16:3). They would not be persecuted in Babylon, leading them to flee. Rather they were to "flee" from Babylon spiritually (Is. 48:20) of their own volition and desire.

Isaiah 48:21 They didn't thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock also, and the waters gushed out- Just as everything had been provided for them when they left Egypt, so they need not worry about the logistics of returning to Judah. The practical issues which loom in the minds of those confronted with the Gospel of the Kingdom will all likewise be dealt with by the God who desperately wants us to say "yes". But the exiles generally said "no", and so these things are reapplied and reinterpreted to new Israel who say "Yes" to the invitation to participate in the restored Kingdom of God in Judah. The Lord Jesus spoke of how out of Him would come "living water", not still well water, but bubbling water fresh from a fountain (Jn. 4:11; 7:38). And He invites His people to drink of it. It was this kind of water that bubbled out of the smitten rock. Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21 describe it with a variety of words: gushing, bursting, water running down like a high mountain stream, "flowed abundantly"... as if the fountains of deep hidden water had burst to the surface ("as out of the great depths", Ps. 78:15). So the Lord was saying that He was like the rock, and we like Israel drinking of what came out of Him.

We note here that the rock gave water throughout the wilderness journey (Is. 48:21). This would surely necessitate that the giving of water at Horeb was not a one-off solution to a crisis. There is a word play in the Hebrew text of Is. 48:21: "He led them through the Horebs [AV 'desert places']" by making water flow from the rock. The Horeb experience was repeated for 40 years; as if the rock went on being smitten. Somehow the water from that smitten rock went with them, fresh and bubbling as it was the first moment the rock was smitten, right through the wilderness. It was living, spring water- not lying around in puddles.

Isaiah 48:22 There is no peace, says Yahweh, for the wicked- "The wicked" are the Jewish exiles of :18 who refused the potential peace with God which was offered if they repented and returned to Judah to reestablish His Kingdom of peace.

Isaiah Chapter 49

Isaiah 49:1 Listen, islands, to me; and listen, you peoples, from far: Yahweh has called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has He made mention of my name- The previous chapter has concluded with a lament over the Jewish exiles' refusal of the Gospel of the reestablished Kingdom in Judah. Now, "the servant" addresses the Gentiles. Cyrus had failed to "know Yahweh". And so the invitation to participate in the Kingdom is made to "your peoples", "the Gentiles" (LXX). The servant now takes on a different identity; it is "Israel" (:3), but this is clearly a title for a Messianic figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus. His personal preexistence is clearly ruled out here: "Before I was born, the LORD chose me and appointed me to be his servant" (GNB).

But all those of the new Israel who are "in" Israel-the-Messiah also have the words of the servant songs relevant to them. For all true of Him becomes true of us. And so there are a number of instances of where these Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ. The servant known from birth (Is. 49:1,5)= Gal. 1:15,16 [choice from birth, calling, ministry to the Gentiles]; “I have laboured in vain…” (Is. 49:3) = “That I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain” (Phil. 2:16; 1 Cor. 15:58); “Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord” (Is. 49:4) = “He that judgeth me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:4); “Him whom man despiseth” (Is. 49:7) = “We are despised” (1 Cor. 4:9,10; 2 Cor. 4:9,10); “The Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you” (Is. 49:7 RSV) = “A chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15); Is. 52:15 = Rom. 15:21 [here Paul appropriates a prophecy of how the news of the crucified Christ would spread to those who had never heard it. He didn’t just read those verses as prophecy; he saw in them an imperative to fulfill them. This is an example of where prophecy depends to some extent upon us to fulfill it. The 19th century brethren understood the prophecies of Israel’s return to the land like this- they collected funds to enable it; Is. 49:8 “In an acceptable time have I heard thee” = 2 Cor. 6:2; Is. 53:1 = Rom. 10:16; Is. 49:6 = Acts 13:47; Is. 43:5 = Acts 18:9,10.

At times, the prophets are paralleled with Israel- Jeremiah was a “prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5), and yet this was Israel’s role, as stated here in Is. 49:1. Both the prophets and Israel are described as “the servant of the Lord”. But God and Israel were in the process of divorce, as they knew. The prophets were both on God’s side, and Israel’s. They were torn men. Just as God Himself was. He appeared “like a man confused” (Jer. 14:9).

Isaiah 49:2 And He has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of

His hand has He hidden me: and He has made me a polished shaft; in His quiver has He kept me close- Is. 51:16 uses the same language about an individual who would restore Zion. Whatever primary application this may have had to Cyrus, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah etc., they clearly failed. And so the words are reapplied to the Lord Jesus. It would appear from these statements that the Lord Jesus was protected and specially guided by the Angel in the first thirty years of his life: "In the shadow of His hand (an Angelic phrase) hath He hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in His quiver hath He hid me". The word 'quiver' comes from the word for an astrologer, in the sense of being something that conceals knowledge. Thus the Angel hid the true identity of Jesus, so that "flesh and blood" alone could not recognize that He was God's Son (Mt. 16:13-17). "The Lord" that passed by Moses and hid him with his hand in the cleft of the rock was an Angel.

But as explained on :1, the Messianic Servant, ultimately the Lord Jesus, includes all who are "in" Him. Thus Paul’s description of each of us as the warrior of the Gospel in Ephesians 6 composites together various descriptions of Messiah’s clothing in the servant songs (Is. 11:5 = “loins girded with truth”; Is. 49:2 “mouth like a sharp sword”; Is. 52:7 “bring good tidings / publish salvation” = “the preparation of the Gospel of peace”; Is. 59:17 “breastplate of righteousness”; Is. 59:17 “helmet of salvation”). We are to be Christ to the world.

The idea of Messiah being "hidden" connects with other similar prophecies. The restoration prophecies continually refer to an individual called "the righteous one"- the references are somewhat masked in the English translations which speak simply of "righteousness", but it is evidently 'the righteous one' who is being addressed rather than abstract righteousness. Consider the statements of intent about this Person: The righteous one would be prepared and kept hidden by Yahweh (Is. 42:6); he was to be raised up to rebuild Zion and release the captives from Babylon (Is. 45:13); he is pictured as near / approaching (Is. 51:5), called to Yahweh's footstool in Zion (Is. 41:2); he was to be "brought in" to the temple at the end of the 70 weeks prophecy (Dan. 9:24); then, Jerusalem would be known as the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 50:7 and often- AV "habitation of justice"), the intention of Ez. 48:35 would be fulfilled, in that Jerusalem would be known as the city where Yahweh dwells; the righteous one of Yahweh would then "go out" in blessing to the surrounding nations. Hence Jer. 33:16; 23:6 etc. outline God's intention that after the restoration, the rebuilt Zion would be named "The Lord our righteous one" because Jerusalem would be

the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 31:23; 50:7). This is similar language to the restoration prophecies of Isaiah- the surrounding Gentile world would see / perceive / believe in "the righteous one" who would reign in the rebuilt Zion (Is. 62:2). The impression seems inescapable that at the time of the restoration, God had prepared a Messiah-figure, hidden (as it were) in Yahweh's quiver (Is. 49:2), not revealed to Israel, who could have restored Judah, rebuilt Zion and converted the surrounding Gentiles. It could be that this person was Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah or some other known historical figure. Or it could be that this person was prepared, waited in the wings, but was never used by God. He could have been revealed to Judah by the anonymous messenger of Isaiah 40. But all these prophecies had to be reapplied- to the Lord Jesus, with John the Baptist and later the latter day Elijah as the announcing messenger.

Isaiah 49:3 And He said to me, You are My servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified- As noted on :1, the servant is now no longer Cyrus, who had failed to "know Yahweh" and live up to his potential. And Israel had refused the potentials of responding to the Gospel. So now Yahweh was to be glorified in an individual servant, in whom "Israel" could be comprehended if they became in Him. It all looks forward to the entrance into the Lord Jesus of all baptized into Him, thereby becoming the true Israel of God and Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:27-29).

Isaiah 49:4 But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity- The LXX makes the allusion to idolatry clearer: "I have given my strength for vanity and for nothing". The Messiah, "Israel", was totally representative of His people, even in their sinfulness. This representative identification with them was to be the basis of their ultimate salvation.

Yet surely the justice due to me is with Yahweh, and my reward with my God- The idea may be "my work should be my recompence". Even if we feel our work for God has not been successful, we were the ones rewarded by doing it, it was itself our blessing. "My reward is with my God" recalls the feelings of Nehemiah, who perhaps could have been this Messianic figure in an initial sense: "Remember me, O my God, for good" (Neh. 13:31; "my God" is a common theme in Ezra and Nehemiah). Is. 49:4-6 seems to foresee how the returnees would be discouraged in their work of rebuilding, and at the fact that not all God’s people had been gathered back. And yet even then, provided they had the right spirit,

the Kingdom blessings could still come. Isaiah 49 goes on to comfort the servant that the remainder of Israel would be regathered, and that the broken down walls of Zion were continually before Yahweh (Is. 49:16).

Isaiah 49:5 Now says Yahweh who formed me from the womb to be His servant- The application of these words to the Lord Jesus precludes any idea of His personal preexistence. Is. 49:5,6 contains a prophecy concerning Christ as the light of the world, which he fulfilled (Jn. 8:12). He is described as meditating on "the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant". Christ was therefore "formed" by God in Mary's womb, through the power of His Holy Spirit. Mary's womb was evidently the place of Christ's physical origin.

Both as individuals and collectively, the whole biography and even genetic prehistory of God's people has been prepared by God in their formation, so that they might encounter God's salvation at an optimal point for them to give the maximum glory to Him (Is. 43:21). "Formed" is the word for the potter working on clay, used of how God fashions human hearts or psychologies, working on the deeply internal fabric of the human being (Ps. 33:15). The 'forming' in view is not only "in the womb" (Is. 44:2,24) but throughout their whole psychological and genetic formation. It is possible to strive with our former or "maker" (Is. 45:9), to be unresponsive to His touch of us the clay. The Messiah figure, ultimately the Lord Jesus, was the ultimate case of being "formed" by Yahweh's hand (Is. 49:5 s.w.), implying He too was clay, of human and not Divine nature.

To bring Jacob again to Him, and that Israel be gathered to Him (for I am honourable in the eyes of Yahweh, and my God has become my strength)- LXX "I shall be gathered and glorified before the Lord". Israel had refused to be regathered to the land, they had not obeyed the command to be gathered (s.w. Is. 43:9; Joel 2:16); but this individual servant would be, and thereby the true Israel "in Him" would be regathered. The verb for "gather" can be used in two senses, either "to gather in" or "to take away," "gather off" (e.g. Ez. 4:29). Response to the Messiah figure would lead to one of these two gatherings- to salvation, or condemnation.

Isaiah 49:6 Yes, He says, It is too light a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel- This could

have come true at the restoration. Is. 49:6 speaks of the reestablishment of the tribes of Israel and the 'establishing' of the land (Is. 49:8). The intended boundaries of the tribal cantons are given in Ezekiel 48. There was perhaps a renewed awareness of which tribe each captive was from, after the genealogical records were burnt at the fall of Jerusalem. Note the references to Judah (Ezra 10:23), Benjamin (Neh. 3:23), Manasseh Ezra 10:33) and Joseph (Ezra 10:42; Neh. 12:14). But the land wasn't laid out again according to tribal boundaries as envisaged in the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel. The few who returned were content with their little farms, and didn't rise up to a wider vision. And how much potential achievement for us as a community is disabled by our parochial, selfish, self-satisficing attitudes…?

The servant was encouraged that although His mission was primarily to Israel and they had refused His work (:5), He was not to be discouraged because the project of salvation was to be extended to the Gentiles. The idea seems to suggest that the extent of this purpose had to be revealed to the Lord Jesus in order to save Him from disappointment with His mission to Israel, as if His conception of His work had to be enlarged. This would be appropriate for someone with human nature.

I will also give you for a light to the nations, that you may be My salvation to the end of the earth- The Lord was to save the Gentiles, even "the ends of the earth / land" promised to Abraham, where the exiles were located. And yet He died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was "a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), "the consolation *of Israel*", unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

I explained earlier in this chapter that the Messiah as "Israel" was an individual in whom the true Israel of God would be found, through mutual identification of Him with them and they with Him. And so Paul takes this prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world, and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although Acts 26:23 applies it to Jesus personally). Paul even says that this prophecy of Christ as the light of the world was a

commandment to him; all that is true of the Lord Jesus likewise becomes binding upon us, because we are *in* Him. Note that Paul says that God has commanded *us* to witness; it wasn't that Paul was a special case, and God especially applied Isaiah's words concerning Christ as light of the Gentiles to Paul. They apply to *us* , to all who are in Christ.

Isaiah 49:7 Thus says Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One- As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

To him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to a servant of rulers- LXX "Sanctify him that despises his life, him that is abhorred by the nations that are the servants of princes". This Messianic servant would sacrifice His life and be abhorred by the nations; so that the nations would come to worship Him. This is exactly what was and shall be achieved through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall worship; because of Yahweh who is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you- The leadership who had despised the suffering Servant would arise from their thrones and bow in homage before Him.

Isaiah 49:8 Thus says Yahweh, In an acceptable time have I answered you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you; and I will preserve you, and give you for a covenant of the people, to raise up the land, to make them inherit the desolate

heritage- "The people" is "the nations", the Gentiles. Gentile salvation is however connected with restoring the land (of Israel; Is. 49:6), and allotting (Dt. 21:16) the desolate heritages. The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to “inherit” the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to “inherit” the land again after their return from “the north country” (Zech. 2:12; 8:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the “north country”, then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized “throne of the Lord” (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn’t even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

The vision is of a multiethnic people of God; the restoration of the Kingdom in Israel is connected with the salvation of Gentiles. The 'help' and 'preservation' of the Servant was ultimately through the strengthening and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. But all that is true of the Messianic Servant is true of those in Him; hence His Name is "Israel". And so this verse is quoted about us in 2 Cor. 6:2 in the context of our being preachers, labouring with God. This is the language of the Lord’s preaching, which freed men from the prison house (Is. 61:1,2). Yet because we are in Him, we too have His ministry; our words too can *make men inherit* the Kingdom, and free men from their bondage. “We are witnesses [through being] in him” (Acts 5:32 RVmg.). As the Lord in Isaiah’s servant songs was the suffering, saving, atoning servant, lifted up to give salvation world-wide- so are we. For we are in Him.

*Isaiah 49:9 Saying to those who are bound, ‘Come out!’- T*his is the same word as in Is. 48:20 "Go forth of Babylon". But they chose to remain there.

To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves!’- They could have had a deliverance similar to that of Israel from the darkness of Egypt (Ps. 107:10,14), but they preferred darkness to light. Just as they did before the captivity, they put darkness for light (Is. 5:20). Thus they refused the work of the saving Servant, who wanted to bring them out of that darkness (Is. 42:7), and preferred to remain

in the darkness of condemnation (Is. 47:5).

And so these things have been reapplied to the work of the Lord Jesus. Those who are thankfully redeemed in Christ, now lovingly reconciled to Him, are described as blind, starving prisoners, bound in the darkness, awaiting execution (Ps. 107:14; Is. 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Zech. 9:11). Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are “the poor” (Gk. ‘the crouchers’), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). The Lord in the Sermon on the Mount clearly understood this deliverance of the prisoners to refer to His work with a new Israel; since the Jews in Babylon had preferred to stay in their comfortable prison of exile, and didn't perceive it as a place of spiritual darkness.

They shall feed in the ways, and on all bare heights shall be their pasture- The idea is that there would be abundant provision for them, with pasture even on the beaten paths and bare heights where usually there wouldn't be. The idea here and in :10 was and is that absolutely all their needs would be abundantly provided for on the physical and spiritual journey to the restored Kingdom.

Isaiah 49:10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun strike them: for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by springs of water He will guide them- It was the responsibility of the priests and religious leaders to "gently lead" the exiles back to their God and their land, but they failed in this (Is. 51:18 s.w.); and so because their was none to guide / gently lead (s.w.), God Himself had to intervene and do this through His Son (Is. 40:11; 49:10).

This repeats the assurance of Is. 48:21. Just as everything had been provided for them when they left Egypt, so they need not worry about the logistics or "the way" of returning to Judah. The practical issues which loom in the minds of those confronted with the Gospel of the Kingdom will all likewise be dealt with by the God who desperately wants us to say "yes". These words are repeated about the faithful of the new Israel in Rev. 7:16.

Isaiah 49:11 I will make all My mountains a way, and My highways shall be exalted- This repeats the message of the highway to the restored Zion being prepared in Is. 40:4.

Isaiah 49:12 Behold, these shall come from far; and behold, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim- "Sinim" my simply refer to the uttermost border of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, "Sin" being on the southern border with Egypt (cp. Gen. 10:17). LXX "And others from the land of the Persians", GNB "and from Aswan in the south". The tragedy of the book of Esther is that at its conclusion, the Jews were established in Persia in prosperity. They refused to use all this potential. The refusal of the exiles to respond led to the reapplication of this to the worldwide gathering in of Gentiles from all over the globe.

Isaiah 49:13 Sing, heavens; and be joyful, earth; and break forth into singing, mountains: for Yahweh has comforted His people, and will have compassion on His afflicted- The ‘singing’ of the heavens refers to Judah’s intended joy at the restoration (cp. Is. 48:20). See on Is. 54:2. As the whole creation would share the joy of Hosea and Gomer’s remarriage (see on Is. 1:26), so Is. 44:23 and Is. 49:13 use similar terms to describe how all creation could have rejoiced in the reuniting of Yahweh with His people on their return from Babylon.

The temple still lay “waste” (Hag. 1:4,9) just as it had lain “desolate” [s.w. Jer. 33:10,12] after the Babylonian destruction. The ‘restoration’ was in fact not really a restoration at all, in God’s eyes. Thus Ezra sat down desolate [AV “astonied”] at the news of Judah’s apostasy in marrying the surrounding women; using the very same word as frequently used to describe the ‘desolate’ Jerusalem that was to be rebuilt (Ezra 9:3 cp. Is. 49:8,19; 54:3; 61:4). He tore his priestly garment (Ezra 9:3), as if he realized that all Ezekiel’s prophesies about those priestly garments now couldn’t come true (s.w. Ez. 42:14; 44:17,19). Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah’s record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfill the Messianic prophecies about them which existed.

Comfort and compassion from God can be given by Him, and yet refused. And again we have an abiding warning to us, as the new Israel, not to waste or disregard all the potential comfort there is from God, not least in our day through the ministry of "the comforter, which is the Holy Spirit".

Isaiah 49:14 But Zion said, Yahweh has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me- See on :25. AV "my Lord", as if referring to Yahweh as her husband (Is. 50:1; 54:6 cp. Gen. 18:12). But as explained on :13, Yahweh had not forsaken them; it was they who refused to avail themselves of the comfort of His love.

Reasoning back from the addresses to the captives in later Isaiah, it appears they thought that Yahweh was a God who just operated in the land of Israel. The captives felt they couldn't sing the songs of Yahweh in a Gentile land (Ps. 137). They thought that now they were outside His land and far from His temple, they were forgotten by Him (Is. 49:14,15), their cause ignored by Him (Is. 40:27) and they were "cast off" from relationship with Him (Is. 41:9). Hence Isaiah emphasizes that Yahweh is the creator and the God of the whole planet, and His presence is literally planet-wide. Likewise there is much stress in those addresses on the fact that Yahweh's word of prophecy will come true. Remember that there had been many false prophets of Yahweh just prior to the captivity who predicted victory against Babylon and prosperity (Lam. 2:9,14; Jer. 44:15-19). And the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah appeared to not be coming true, or at best was delayed or re-scheduled in fulfilment [even Daniel felt this, according to his desperate plea for fulfilment in Daniel 9]. And so there was a crisis of confidence in the concept of prophecy, and Yahweh's word and prophets generally. Isaiah addressed this by stressing the nature and power of that word, and urging faith in its fulfilment and relevance.

The sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross.

Isaiah 49:15 Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet I will not forget you!- And yet in anger God said He would destroy Israel's children and walk away from them and forget them (Hos. 9:12). Unlike the stone faced gods of the Gentiles, Yahweh had emotion and passion, and internal conflicts. And His word reveals them to us. This "compassion" was only to be shown when Israel repented (s.w. Dt. 30:3) and would not be shown if they were impenitent (s.w. Is. 9:17; 27:11; 55:7). But although they had not repented, Yahweh still felt that fatherly "compassion" toward them (Is. 49:15 s.w.). He is unafraid of appearing

to contradict His word, such is the passion of His love.

Isaiah 49:16 Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands- The idea may be that Israel were as the lines graven on a man's palm, with which he was born. Thus from absolute eternity, we were the great "all things" to Almighty God, intimately connected with Him, part of His very own person- He the God of all, all past and future creations. But God's hands are His creative members; on those hands were the walls of Zion, and so all His actions were geared towards the final salvation of Israel. Their rejection of such great Divine passion and interest was and is the tragedy of the cosmos. And the marks in the palms of His Son will apparently remain eternally, He still appears looking like a lamb with the wounds of His slaughter upon Him (Rev. 5:6).

Your walls are continually before Me- The broken down state of the walls was continually in God's mind throughout the exile, as they were in Nehemiah's mind too. Or perhaps the walls of a restored Zion, those spoken of in Rev. 21, are in view. The ultimate hope of Israel, of their restoration, was ever before God. But at the time of the restoration, very few of His people cared about the state of the walls; such was the distraction of materialism.

Isaiah 49:17 Your children make haste; your destroyers and those who made you waste shall go forth from you- LXX "And thou shalt soon be built by those by whom thou were destroyed, and they that made thee desolate shall go forth of thee". The idea was that a repentant remnant of Gentiles would return with the repentant exiles and work in the rebuilding of Zion. But this didn't happen. And so it is all given a reapplication to Gentiles building in Zion, the new Jerusalem.

Isaiah 49:18 Lift up your eyes all around, and see: all these gather themselves together, and come to you- All these prophecies of Isaiah were because when the Gentiles came to Zion after the Assyrians were destroyed, they were supposed to gather together to Judah's God. But Hezekiah became influenced them, and therefore Judah went into captivity in Babylon and only after repentance were to be restored. Now the situation was to be repeated; and the Gentiles would again be gathered to Zion, but now they would permanently join themselves to Israel's God.

It is God who gathers His people (Is. 11:12; 40:11; Jer. 31:10; Ez. 34:12),

whereas the Gentiles gather themselves to Him (Is. 49:18). His grace therefore appears the greater to His people, somehow forcing through His purpose with obstinate sheep. The 'bringing / coming' and 'drawing near / gathering' of the exiles (s.w. Is. 43:5) would have been primarily fulfilled at the restoration (same words in Neh. 1:9). But most of the exiles remained in the lands of their captivity, just as people resist the Gospel's call today. They had to themselves bring and gather themselves (Is. 45:20; 49:18; 60:4), so that God would confirm this by bringing and gathering them (Is. 43:5; Jer. 31:8; Ez. 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech. 10:10). And so today with all who wish to be in God's Kingdom; our desire to be there and first moves towards it will be confirmed many times over by God's work through His Spirit.

As I live, says Yahweh, you shall surely clothe yourself with them all as with an ornament, and dress yourself with them, like a bride- As if they were the girdle worn by a bride- which Judah had forgotten to wear, so slack were they in their attitude to their Heavenly husband (Jer. 2:32). The conversion of the Gentiles was to be to the glory of God's people.

Isaiah 49:19 For, as for your waste and your desolate places, and your land that has been destroyed, surely now you shall be too small for the inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up shall be far away- This is exactly relevant to the situation in Judah after the first break in the rebuilding; the walls were broken down by the Samaritans, but Nehemiah was raised up to lead more back with him from Babylon and rebuild them. And yet sadly, this too failed, for Judah were still unwilling to completely forsake Babylon. “Thy walls are continually before me [even during the 70 years captivity]… [even while in captivity they were thinking that Yahweh had forgotten them, :14]…thy builders (RVmg.) make haste…thy land that hath been destroyed [by the Babylonian scorched earth policy] shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants…then shalt thou say, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I am barren, an exile…?” (Is. 49:16,19,21 RV). This all implies there would be a population explosion at the time of the restoration. But there is no evidence this was the case. All this was potentially true; but it didn’t come to pass in reality.

Isaiah 49:20 The children of your bereavement shall yet say in your ears- LXX "For thy sons whom thou hast lost shall say in thine ears". The idea of receiving back children who had been once slain is clearly alluded to in Job's experience (Job 42:13), who is set up as representative of the Jews in exile.

'The place is too small for me; give more space to me that I may dwell!'- The implication is that *eretz* Israel will be too small for the restored people of God; and they will therefore have to go and live with the Gentiles. The implication is that the boundaries of the promised land will expand to encompass the entire planet.

Isaiah 49:21 Then you will say in your heart, 'Who has conceived these for me, since I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile, and wandering back and forth? Who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?'- see on Gen. 33:5. Children born through another were still reckoned as the wife's children (Gen. 16:1; 30:1). The children of Zion were therefore suckled by the Gentiles (Is. 60:16). The implication is that just as the *eretz* Israel will be expanded to include Gentile territories (see on :20), so ethnic Gentiles will be genuinely considered by the Jews to be their people.

Isaiah 49:22 Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and set up My banner to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders- This banner or ensign lifted up in Zion is ultimately the pole of the cross of the Lord Jesus. Upon this will be predicated Yahweh's extension of His covenant to the Gentile nations; for to 'lift up the hand' is to enter into solemn covenant.

Isaiah 49:23 Kings shall be your nursing fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers: they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick the dust of your feet; and you shall know that I am Yahweh; and those who wait for Me shall not be disappointed- Or "ashamed". Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. Consider Is. 50:10: "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice [s.w. Ezra 1:1 re the proclamation of Cyrus] of his servant [i.e. Cyrus, Is. 45:1], that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God". Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah's prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9). And so these things are reapplied to the coming of Gentiles to the

hope of Israel in Christ. Former enemies worshipping at the feet of repentant Jews becomes reapplied to all believers in Christ (Rev. 3:9).

Isaiah 49:24 Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued?- LXX "Will any one take spoils from a giant? and if one should take a man captive unjustly, shall he be delivered?". The Lord Jesus alludes here in saying that through His work, the house of the strong man has been taken and his spoils looted (Mk. 3:27).

Or this can be read as the Jews remonstrating against God's message of deliverance from captivity: "Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued?". They thought their salvation was too hard even for God. They made the same mistake as all who reason that their situation or personality is too far gone for God to redeem. For the 'salvation' of the exiles in Babylon is alluded to in the New Testament as a prototype of our salvation in Christ. The good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21). Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14). Passages like Ezekiel 18 and Is. 59:9 imply a certain bitterness of Israel towards their God, considering that He had dealt with them unfairly, and inappropriately punished them for the sins of their fathers. Despite having enabled their exit from Babylon, they complained: "Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us" (Is. 59:9). This was an awful spurning of the great salvation enabled for them.

Isaiah 49:25 But thus says Yahweh, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children- LXX "If one should take a giant captive, he shall take spoils, and he who takes them from a mighty man shall be delivered". But when Babylon fell, the captives didn't want to leave and preferred prosperity under the Persians, as the book of Esther makes clear. And so these things were reapplied and fulfilled in more abstract, spiritual terms. Thus the Lord Jesus alludes here in saying that through His work, the house of the strong man has been taken and his spoils looted (Mk. 3:27).

Isaiah 49:26 I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh; and they

shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine- The idea is as in GNB "I will make your oppressors kill each other", which will come true in the last days (Ez. 38:21; Hag. 2:22; Zech. 14:13).

And all flesh shall know that I, Yahweh, am your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob- The final triumph of God's project of saving His people will be the parade witness to "all flesh" which finally brings about the spread of His Kingdom worldwide. The lovely story of Ruth speaks of our redemption. Her “kinsman redeemer” [Heb. *Go’el*] was the “mighty one”, Boaz. We find this word especially used in Isaiah’s prophecies to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, urging them to return from that Gentile land to Judah, and take the Gentiles with them. They had the impression there in Babylon that God had somehow forgotten them. The book of Ruth appears to have been written up [perhaps in Babylon] in order to encourage them to return- after the pattern of Naomi and Ruth returning to the land and being redeemed by their *Go’el*. But this *Go’el* is none less than God Himself. So many passages in Isaiah allude to the Ruth story: “I Yahweh am your Saviour and your redeemer [*Go’el*], the *mighty one* of Jacob” (Is. 49:26). Judah were urged in Is. 55:6 to call upon God “While He is *near*”- the same Hebrew word translated “kinsman”. The servant songs go on to explain how Yahweh could become our kinsman through His Son, our representative, of our nature. Judah in captivity were likewise encouraged by Jeremiah to return to the land- with full allusion to Ruth: “Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities... for the Lord has created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:21,22). This refers to the way in which Ruth summed up the courage to ‘go after’ Boaz, to present herself to him for marriage- reflecting the spiritual ambition of all those who seek redemption and restoration in Christ.

Isaiah Chapter 50

Isaiah 50:1 Thus says Yahweh, Where is the bill of your mother's divorce, for which I have put her away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities were you sold, and for your transgressions was your mother put away- This can be read as God's answer to the Jewish objection that God had as it were gotten rid of them as His wife for His own ends, such as getting cash benefit. And so He invites them to look again at the bill of divorce and remind themselves of the reasons for the divorce; LXX " Of what kind is your mother's bill of divorcement?". It was because of their gross unfaithfulness. Ezekiel had to reason with the exiles in a similar way, arguing against their idea that God had been unreasonable to them.

But further, here Isaiah urged the Jews to return to the land by saying that God had forgiven them, and on this basis He appealed for them to both 'repent' and 'return' to the land. The two terms are related. Thus He showed His grace; forgiveness preceded, not followed, repentance. Is. 44:22 is clear about this: "I have swept away your transgressions like clouds [therefore] return to me, for I have [already] redeemed you". Perhaps the question as to where the bill of divorce was could imply that it didn't exist; God was angry with their sins, but kept no record of them- hence He could comfort Judah that there was actually no documentary evidence for their divorce and therefore she could return to Him. As Paul put it, the goodness of God leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). And we are asked to show that same "goodness" of God to others, being "kind [s.w. 'goodness'] one to another… forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). We too are to show this grace of forgiveness-before-repentance; but perhaps in no other area has formalized, institutionalized Christianity failed worse. *If* XYZ shows *us* she's repented of her divorce, *then* we'll forgive her and accept her in fellowship [as if, in any case, we are the ones who need to forgive her]. These are graceless and yet terribly common attitudes. The Greek word translated "goodness" is rendered "gracious" in 1 Pet. 2:3- newly converted babes in Christ taste of this gracious goodness, and it leads to repentance.

Isaiah 50:2 Why, when I came, was there no man?- The Messiah figure was to

appear at a time when the cities of Israel were desolate and needed rebuilding, and when the people had been told “Go forth” of Babylon, and Zion’s “builders” would hastily work, despite feeling themselves to be “exiles” (Isaiah 49:6,9,17 RVmg.,21 RV). There could have been a Messiah figure at the restoration. “But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me” (Is. 49:14). They didn’t have the faith to believe that God’s grace was enough to really forgive them for the sins that had led them into captivity, and for their apostasy in Babylon, where they had been spiritually “marred” (Jer. 13:7). And so the planned Messiah figure and Kingdom never fully happened. And God laments this: “Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer?” (Is. 50:2). Nobody responded to the Divine call for a Messiah. No Messiah figure appeared; or the reference may also be to the paucity of response when Cyrus announced the possibility of returning to the land.

There even seems at times a difficulty on God's part to understand why the people He had loved could hate Him so much: "Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, We will no more come to thee?" (Jer. 2:31); "Why then has this people turned away?" (Jer. 8:5); "Why have they provoked me to anger?" (Jer. 8:19; Jer. 2:14; Jer. 30:6; Is. 5:4; Is. 50:2). "What more could I have done for my vineyard... why did it yield wild grapes?" (Is. 5:1-7). This is so much the anguished cry of bewildered middle age parents as they reflect upon a wayward child. This Divine struggle to understand reflects the extraordinary depth of His love for them; and it warns us in chilling terms as to the pain we can cause God if we spurn His amazing love.

When I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all, that it can’t redeem?- Here and in Is. 59:1 the idea of Yahweh's hand being shortened is used as an excuse not to repond to God's call to quit Babylon for Zion. The idea was that His ability to act, His hand, was somehow limited or 'reaped down'. They assumed the fact they had been reaped in the harvest of judgment meant that their God had been (Is. 17:5; Jer. 9:22; Hos. 8:7; 10:13). They simply refused to accept the repeated prophetic message that it was the God of Israel who brought judgment upon Israel. They treated Him as the surrounding peoples treated their gods- always saving them in trouble, and if they didn't, then the god had died with them.

Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stink, because there is no water, and die for thirst- God sent His prophets to appeal to Israel for repentance. They *could have lead to repentance*. But Israel would not. The word they heard was powerful, so

powerful it could dry up the Red Sea in a moment (hence the dead fish; or a reference to Ex. 7:21); but despite that power, the Jews didn't respond to it, considering that God was unable to redeem from exile. So they didn't return / repent, both to their God and to His land. Their impenitence was related to their disbelief that the Kingdom was really possible, even though they accepted Yahweh's existence and were loyal to the culture of being His people. The marriage feast was totally ready and waiting for the Jewish people; they could have had it. But they didn't want it, and so the course of human history was extended. Therefore finally God sent His Son. The Lord Jesus Himself was amazed that no other man had achieved the work which He had to; and therefore He clad Himself with zeal and performed it (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16 cp. Rev. 5:3,4). God knew that salvation in the end would have to be through the death of His Son. But there were other possible scenarios for the repentance and salvation of mankind, which no man achieved. And so, as in the parable of the servants sent to get fruit from the vineyard, there was left no other way but the death of God's only Son.

Isaiah 50:3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering- This could refer to God's deep mourning for all the wasted potential; He had empowered the people to return (:2), but they didn't, and no Messiah figure arose as had been potentially possible. For the degree of unrealized or wasted potential is fundamentally connected to our depth of mourning.

Isaiah's constant references back to the Exodus deliverance are to make the point that what God had done then, He could just as easily do for the exiles as they left Babylon / Egypt. Is. 50:2,3 could be read as a statement of God's possibilities, bringing out the huge potential power which God *could* wield for the exiles: "*If I were* to rebuke the sea it would dry up! I *could* turn rivers into a wilderness... I *could* clothe the heavens with blackness". All this conditional language and grammar shows the great potential which Israel could have tapped into had they wished.

The reference may be to the plague of darkness coming upon Babylon or the Jews in judgment, just as it did upon Egypt. The final fulfilment of this will be in the last days, for it is alluded to in Rev. 6:12, "The sun became black as sackcloth of hair".

Isaiah 50:4 The Lord Yahweh has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him who is weary- The previous

verses have lamented Judah's refusal to hear the call to repentance. But now the Saviour Servant speaks of how He was trained by Yahweh to teach people, Israel especially, the true way; and then to exemplify and embody that teaching in His own suffering and death (:6,7). Clearly these things refer to the Lord Jesus. The LXX speaks of His ability to teach and instruct us His people: "The Lord even God gives me the tongue of instruction, to know when it is fit to speak a word". But "those who are taught" is literally 'the disciples', the taught ones. He spoke to them in their own tongue, in their own terms and language; and He was taught to do this. This would explain why the Lord used the language of demon possession rather than correcting those wrong ideas.

He wakens me morning by morning, He wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught- "Those who are taught" are literally 'the disciples'. He was taught by God, morning by morning, to hear as the disciples heard. He was progressively led to appreciate the perspective of those far less spiritual than Himself. He was taught the ability to hear as we hear, although as God's Son He Himself heard with far quicker and deeper perception than we do.

The Lord Jesus “morning by morning” heard God’s word “as the learned” (Is. 50:4 AV); but the Hebrew words for “accustomed” in Jer. 13:23 and “learned” in Is. 50:4 are the same. God teaches by repetition- which may be out of vogue in the experience / problem based learning philosophy of current education, but it’s God’s way. Once habit solidifies, it becomes effectively part of our nature and almost impossible to change, at least in human strength- so Jer. 13:23 teaches us: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil”. The Hebrew translated “accustomed” carries the idea of repeated habit. The Hebrew idea of ‘teaching’ is connected to the words for ‘habit’ or ‘custom’; because teaching was by repetition.

The Lord was noted for rising up early and praying (Mk. 1:35). Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of all disciples. How we start our days is really so important. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning. The unbelieving world is repeatedly characterized as walking in a crooked path (Lk. 3:5; Acts

2:40; Phil. 2:15 and often in Proverbs). Quietly starting every day right is part of our walking in a *straight* path, following the way of the cherubim; and by walking in that straight daily path we will not have opportunity to stumble (Heb. 12:13).

Isaiah 50:5 The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward- The early morning teaching sessions between Father and Son resulted in His ear being opened to perceive the death of the cross. And He was not rebellious. He as "Israel" was representative of sinful Israel (see on Is. 49:1-3); it was the exiles who were to have their ears opened. But they refused, preferring to remain deaf (see on Is. 42:20; 43:8; 48:8). But His ears were opened because He wanted to hear; unlike them He was not rebellious (s.w. Is. 1:20; 63:10); He did not "turn away backward" as the idolaters of Judah did (s.w. Is. 42:17; Jer. 38:22). He triumphed at every point where we as Israel fail. To be right with God, Israel had to identify with Him. We become in Him by baptism, and thus His righteousness is imputed to us (Gal. 3:27-29).

Isaiah 50:6 I gave my back to the strikers, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair; I didn't hide my face from shame and spitting- Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14). See on Is. 49:24. The servant was called to sustain the "dispirited" by the prophetic word (Is. 50:4). And yet passages like Is. 50:4-11 and even Is. 53 speak of how the servant met even physical abuse as well as rejection in his ministry to his fellow Jews. Indeed the servant feels that his mission to them has been a failure (Is. 49:1-6), a complaint met by God's promise that his mission would be in some way reapplied to the Gentiles in their captivity to sin. The way the servant is beaten and has his hair pulled out (Is. 50:4-11) reminds us of how the prophet Jeremiah was treated the same way by the Jews when his message was rejected (Jer. 20:2; Jer. 37:15). The servant was spat at by his fellow Jews- an expression of utter contempt (Job 30:10). Whilst the servant prophecies find their later fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, it seems to me that in their first context, they speak of how a prophet or prophets at the time of the exile were rejected and even beaten up by their fellow Jews. Indeed, Isaiah ends on a negative note, describing the judgments to come upon the Jews who had rejected the message of deliverance from Babylon (Is. 66:24).

As explained on :5, the cross was the end point of the Lord's early morning teaching sessions with His Father. And so He unlike every other victim of crucifixion and torture willingly gave His body parts to His torturers.

Jesus commanded us not to physically resist the forces of evil: “But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also” (Mt. 5:39,40). Christ is the example in this: “I *gave* My back to those who struck Me ...” (Is. 50:6). The Lord gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6).

The Lord would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26).

Isaiah 50:7 For the Lord Yahweh will help me; therefore I have not been confounded- It was to be the makers of idols who were "confounded" (s.w. Is. 41:11; 45:16) and only the true Israel would not be "confounded" (Is. 45:17; 54:4). The sinners in Israel had refused to be confounded or ashamed of their sins (Jer. 3:3 s.w.) and so they would be shamed in condemnation. Repentance involves an imagination of ourselves coming to judgment day and being condemned, and feeling shame for that; that is how we shall not be ashamed. And it is the servant alone who shall not be ashamed / confounded because of His righteousness (Is. 50:7). Our identity with Him removes that shame. If we condemn ourselves, we shall not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The enemies of Israel would perish alongside the apostate within Israel, in the same judgment.

Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be disappointed- This again is understandable in the context of the cross. The Lord set His face to go to Jerusalem, and the final sacrifice which would be there (Lk. 9:51). He hardened His face like a rock; and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30).

His whole life and heart direction was "set" in the way of the cross, and that eternity which He knew was beyond it. Perhaps His lack of destructive anger was because He didn't let Himself be shamed by men, instead taking His self-worth and values from God's acceptance of Him. To avoid "anger" in the wrong sense, we need to avoid being wrongly shamed. And we can do this by ensuring we ourselves aren't led into shame, due to placing too great a value upon the opinions of men. Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God (Jer. 6:15). Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness.

Isaiah 50:8 He is near who justifies me; who will bring charges against me? Let us stand up together: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me- As explored on :7, those who feel the real justification of the Spirit, the real power of imputed righteousness, will not be unsettled by human criticism or "charges" brought. For the nearness of God's justification in Christ is more than sufficient. Is. 56:1 is a parallel passage, speaking of how Yahweh's righteousness (imputed to us by His justification of us in Christ) is "near to come", and His salvation soon to be revealed. As Paul develops in Rom. 1-8, we are saved by the imputation of righteousness, justification by faith. But that is yet to be revealed, although it could have been "near" even in time for the exiles. They refused these wonderful things, but they are true for us too, as we await the soon revelation of the Lord Jesus at judgment day. Keeping this hope in view means we shall ultimately have nobody and nothing charged against us, there will be no legal adversary in court with us at the last day. And this means that we handle accusation, both justified and false, in that perspective. And yet it is criticism and the shame which arises from it which can psychologically and spiritually destroy people in this life.

The songs of the suffering Servant are applied to us in Rom. 8:31, where Paul exalts that "if God be for us, who is against us?"- alluding to Is. 50:8 "The Lord God is helping me- who is he that would convict me?". If we are in Christ, we like Him cannot be condemned. In the legal context, if the judge of all is legally “for us”, then there effectively is no accuser, nothing and nobody standing against us. It’s as if Paul has rightly guessed his readers’ response: ‘OK Paul, I have nothing to say against your argument, but all the same you don’t know what a sinner I am, what a line of sins I have waiting there to condemn me’. And Paul’s exultant answer is that if God is “for us”- and he has demonstrated this

time and again, that God quite simply wants to save us- then nothing and nobody, not even our own sins, can ultimately stand against us.

Isaiah 50:9 Behold, the Lord Yahweh will help me; who is he who shall condemn me?- As explained on :8, with God on our side in the final judgment, as both judge and advocate, there are no charges against us nor legal adversaries left in the court room. Yahweh had repeatedly offered the "servant" His "help" in order to encourage the weak minded exiles to return to Zion, just as His hand had 'helped' Hezekiah against the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:8). At the restoration, Ezra believed this "help" would enable the restoration to the extent that they didn't need any human soldiers to help them (Ezra 8:22 s.w.).

Behold, all they shall wax old as a garment, the moth shall eat them up- The "they" are any possible adversaries who might bring charges against us. This had particular relevance to all the adversaries to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. With Yahweh justifying the returned exiles, the court room was effectively empty of adversaries, all charges were to be seen in the perspective of God's ultimate justification of His people (see on :8). These words are also found in Job 13:28, where it is God who consumes them, as it were manifesting Himself in a tiny moth. We find the same ideas in Is. 51:6, where the "they" is the 'heavens and earth' of any system, be it Persia / Babylon or an unbelieving Jewish system, which is adversarial to God's people and purpose. The contrast is with how the clothing of Israel in the wilderness did not "wax old" (s.w. Dt. 8:4; 29:5; Neh. 9:21). The exodus and journey to the promised land is repeatedly alluded to in Isaiah as a pattern for the exiles to follow in returning to Judah, and for us in our exodus from this world and journey towards the Kingdom.

Isaiah 50:10 Who is among you who fears Yahweh, who obeys the voice of His servant? He who walks in darkness, and has no light, let him trust in the name of Yahweh, and rely on his God- See on :11. The "darkness" initially was that of exile in Babylon; see on Is. 49:9. A Messianic figure was to arise, whose voice they were to obey, and thereby trust in their God. This didn't happen at the time, and so it is all reapplied to the Lord Jesus as the servant. But the servant whose voice was to be obeyed was intended to be Cyrus. "Who is among you who fears Yahweh... his God?" is the language of Ezra 1:3. Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. "Voice" is s.w. Ezra 1:1 about the proclamation of Cyrus, the servant (Is. 45:1). Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey

only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah's prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9).

The Yahweh Name is the most essential challenge to faith. "I *will* be" is a challenge to believe that what is not yet seen *will be* on the basis of what has been and what is. We must trust / believe in the Name of Yahweh (Is. 50:10).

Isaiah 50:11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who adorn yourselves with torches around yourselves; walk in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that you have kindled. You shall have this of My hand; you shall lie down in sorrow- Why this reference to paganism and idolatry immediately after the call to obey the voice of God's servant Cyrus and leave Babylon (:10)? Isaiah frequently shows the folly of worshipping Babylonian idols. And yet it seems that it was Judah's worship of these idols that kept them in Babylon. Those who feared Yahweh had none of the light provided by the Babylonian idols; but the majority preferred Babylon's light to Zion's.

Isaiah Chapter 51

Isaiah 51:1 Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek Yahweh- Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: “Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord… hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness”. To know God’s righteousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seek to attain it. The Messianic servant addresses the exiles again, specifically those who were seeking Yahweh rather than seeking idols . God was willing to push forward His salvation plan even with a remnant, but there is no evidence there was even a remnant of repentant, faithful ones at the time of the restoration.

Look to the rock you were cut from, and to the hold of the pit you were dug from- The rock and pit were the feeble Abraham and Sarah (:2). The returning, repentant exiles could potentially have been the little stone cut out of the rocky mountain of Dan. 2, which would come to the *eretz* / land promised to Abraham and form the reestablished Kingdom of God. But they failed in this, and so Dan. 2 had a longer fulfilment. To liken Abraham and Sarah to a "pit" is strange, but GNB offers "quarry". The extra information of Dan. 2 is that they were cut out "without hands".

Isaiah 51:2 Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him, and made him many- Abraham was called before he had children, and his wife barren; but from that feeble beginning God made a new nation. The tiny remnant of exiles who were faithful should not therefore consider that they were too few to become the revived Kingdom of God in Judah. All the time we sense they had so many fears and such weak faith, and God through Isaiah is patiently addressing them and encouraging them. Ez. 33:24 records how the exiles turned this reasoning on its head; they argued that they were many, and so seeing Abraham was few and received the land, so they ought moreso to be given it. They missed the point, that the repentant remnant would be very small indeed. But even if they were just two people like Abraham and Sarah, who also lived far away from Judah to the east, they could still be multiplied and have the Abrahamic blessing fulfilled in them.

Isaiah 51:3 For Yahweh has comforted Zion; He has comforted all her waste places, and has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of

Yahweh; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody- The past tense is used to bring out how this potential was so certain of fulfilment- if they wanted it. The appeal of Is. 40 to "comfort" God's people was being repeated- but they had to accept it. I argued on Gen. 1,2 that the garden of Eden was the *eretz* promised to Abraham; Eden could have been restored in the reestablished Kingdom of God which was now possible if they listened in obedience and repentance (:4). Adam like Judah had been exiled eastward, but was now being recalled. Instead of the sadness associated with the curse and moral failure, there would instead have been joy.

Isaiah 51:4 Listen to Me, My people; and give ear to Me, My nation: for a law shall go forth from Me, and I will establish My justice for a light of the peoples- The LXX better brings out the parallel between God's people and the Gentiles. A remnant from both groups were being invited to repent and join in with a new, multiethnic people of God in the restored Kingdom: "Hear me, hear me, my people; and ye kings, hearken to me: for a law shall proceed from me, and my judgment shall be for a light of the nations". This is the envisaged "law" going forth from Zion in the reestablished Kingdom (Is. 2:2-4), not *the* law of Moses, but *a* law which was to be "a light to the peoples". Ultimately this is the message of the Lord Jesus, the light of the world, the word / law made flesh.

Isaiah 51:5 My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth, and My arms shall judge the peoples; the islands shall wait for Me, and on My arm shall they trust- The Kingdom could have come very quickly had the exiles repented. God was so eager to fulfill His saving plan. Hence LXX "My righteousness speedily draws nigh". His enthusiasm and almost impatience to save His people reflects an eternal aspect of His character, which encourages us that He is far from indifferent as to the outcome of His saving purpose with us. See on :14.

Note the parallel between righteousness and salvation. As Paul develops in Rom. 1-8, we are saved by the imputation of righteousness, justification by faith. But that is yet to be revealed, although it could have been "near" even in time for the exiles. They refused these wonderful things, but they are true for us too, as we await the soon revelation of the Lord Jesus at judgment day.

Isaiah 51:6 Lift up your eyes to the skies, and look on the land beneath; for the skies shall vanish away like smoke, and the land shall wax old like a garment; and those who dwell therein shall die in the same way: but My salvation shall be

eternal, and My righteousness shall not be abolished- This is parallel in reference to Is. 50:9: "Behold, all they shall wax old as a garment, the moth shall eat them up". The "they" are any possible adversaries who might bring charges against us. This had particular relevance to all the adversaries to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. With Yahweh justifying the returned exiles, the court room was effectively empty of adversaries, all charges were to be seen in the perspective of God's ultimate justification of His people (see on Is. 50:8). These words are also found in Job 13:28, where it is God who consumes them, as it were manifesting Himself in a tiny moth. We find the same ideas here in Is. 51:6, where the "they" is the 'heavens and earth' of any system, be it Persia / Babylon or an unbelieving Jewish system, which is adversarial to God's people and purpose. The contrast is with how the clothing of Israel in the wilderness did not "wax old" (s.w. Dt. 8:4; 29:5; Neh. 9:21). The exodus and journey to the promised land is repeatedly alluded to in Isaiah as a pattern for the exiles to follow in returning to Judah, and for us in our exodus from this world and journey towards the Kingdom.

Isaiah 51:7 Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law- This is addressed to the righteous minority amongst the exiles, who although they couldn't fully obey the law in exile, still had it in their hearts. And if they entered the new covenant, the Spirit would write that law in their hearts (Jer. 31:33). But instead, the returned exiles refused to have the law in their hearts (Zech. 7:12), and so these things are reapplied to Gentiles who are willing to have the essence of Divine law in their hearts (Rom. 2:15).

Don't fear the reproach of men, neither be dismayed at their insults- See on :1,6. As explained on Is. 50:8, we need not fear insults nor false accusation from men because we shall ultimately be justified, and even now have righteousness imputed to us. This had particular relevance to the returned exiles. "Reproach" is s.w. Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 4:4; 5:9 about the reproach of the Gentiles against the partially rebuilt Jerusalem. Is. 51:3-11 is clearly in a restoration context. This passage seems to have foreseen the lagging of spirit in Zerubbabel and the builders, and the need to encourage them that a second group of exiles ought to have come with Nehemiah with great joy. A few came, but this yet further opportunity was again not realized by the returnees. See on :11.

Isaiah 51:8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool- These words are also found in Job 13:28, where it is God who consumes them, as it were manifesting Himself in a tiny moth, and also as a

"worm". See on :6.

But My righteousness shall be forever, and My salvation to all generations- Note the parallel between righteousness and salvation. As Paul develops in Rom. 1-8, we are saved by the imputation of righteousness, justification by faith. But that is yet to be revealed, although it could have been "near" even in time for the exiles. They refused these wonderful things, but they are true for us too, as we await the soon revelation of the Lord Jesus at judgment day. Keeping this hope in view means we shall ultimately have nobody and nothing charged against us, there will be no legal adversary in court with us at the last day. And this means that we handle accusation, both justified and false, "the reproach of men" (:7) in that perspective. And yet it is criticism and the shame which arises from it which can psychologically and spiritually destroy people in this life.

Isaiah 51:9 Awake, awake, put on strength, arm of Yahweh- This and :10 are perhaps God's hopeful imagination of how the exiles would pray to Him; the kind of Divine fantasy which Hosea had about the repentance of Gomer and her return to him which he imagined to the point of fantasizing about. LXX "Awake, awake, O Jerusalem, and put on the strength of thine arm", repeated in :17. The exiles are called "Jerusalem". They called themselves this (Is. 48:2); but they needed to do more than such merely external, legalistic, ritualistic identification of themselves with a name and culture. And that is an abiding challenge for God's people today. They had to "awake", to allow God's Spirit to act upon their hearts to "stir up" their spirits (s.w. 1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16), just as He had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to let them return (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:22). The spirit of the exiles was likewise awoken or stirred up to return (s.w. Ezra 1:5). Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond.

Awake, as in the days of old, the generations of ancient times. Isn't it You who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the monster?- If they allowed themselves to be 'awoken' or 'stirred up', then Yahweh would likewise awake for them and act miraculously as He had at the time of the exodus from Egypt. But they would not be stirred up, and so the stirring up or awaking of Yahweh's arm had a longer term application. The arm of the Lord- a title of Christ- is described as awaking (cp. Christ's resurrection), and as being "It which hath dried the (Red) Sea, the

waters of the great deep; that hath made a way for the ransomed to pass over" (Is. 51:9,10). This is describing the work of Christ in language applicable to the Angel of the Exodus who brought Israel through the Red Sea.

Marduk killed Tiamat in the waters and cut him in pieces. This is one of many mocking allusions to Marduk, showing Yahweh's supremacy over him. See on Is. 40:25. Marduk was formed- but Yahweh had no god before Him and will have none after Him (Is. 43:10). Marduk had a counsellor, Ea, called in the inscriptions "the all-wise one". But Yahweh has all wisdom and has no such counsellor (Is. 40:13,14; Is. 41:28). All this reference to the Marduk cult was in my opinion not merely a pointless mockery and poking of fun at the Persian culture. It was a very real appeal to the Jewish exiles to quit it, to come out and be separate; remember again and again that Mordecai [and perhaps Esther too] had adopted names reflective of the Marduk cult.

Yahweh "Trod on the back of Sea", i.e. the supposed Satan figure called "Sea" (Job 9:8; Dt. 33:29; Amos 4:13; Mic. 1:3; Is. 63:3). Even if such a being existed, he had been destroyed for good by Yahweh at the Red Sea. "You split Sea... cut Rahab in pieces... didst pierce the dragon" (Ps. 78:13; Neh. 9:11;Is. 51:9-11). Thus the splitting of the Red Sea was understood as a splitting of the Satan figure or god known as "Sea". All this was what Moses had in mind when he sought to explain to his people what had happened at the Red Sea- even if there were such a being as the "Sea" god of evil, Yahweh their God had totally destroyed him and split him into pieces. And the real 'satan' was Egypt, real men on a real earth who posed a danger to Israel.

Isaiah 51:10 Isn't it You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?- Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel "found grace in the wilderness" before, and they would do again, "When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest" (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would "cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". This is why Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11).

The allusion is not only to the exodus, but to creation itself. The present world

was created by a re-organization of things which existed in some form before. This means that when our own lives, or the collective life of God's people, appears to be in chaos- then we can in faith reflect that God has brought beautiful order out of chaos, and He can likewise powerfully bring order to what seems hopeless. This is the context of the creation allusions in the laments of Ps. 74:12-17; 89:10-15; Is. 51:9 etc.

Isaiah 51:11 The ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy shall be on their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy; sorrow and weeping shall flee away- Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied that Judah would come with joy to Zion, and would continue there with an everlasting joy. But the records give little indication that they were joyful; Neh. 8:9,10 shows Nehemiah encouraging them to be joyful, because "the joy of the Lord is your strength". They didn't want to have all joy and peace through believing; and so the Kingdom of joy didn't come. They didn't live the Kingdom life of joy, and so they didn't possess or experience the Kingdom. The lowness of their petty concerns deprived them of it.

There was great joy at the time of the first Purim in Esther's time when sorrow was turned to joy (s.w. Esther 9:22), but the people did not return. The restoration was intended to be the time when sorrow was turned to joy (Jer. 31:13 s.w.). But as we can, they forgot the price aid for their ransom and remained in slavery. And those who did return didn't do so with the voice of joy, but with nervousness and then complaining about the famine, bad harvests and diseases they and their crops were smitten with on returning. The eternal joy spoken of here will come true only at the return of the Lord Jesus. Joy by its nature is temporal in this life, because of our emotional structure; we cannot maintain such experiences of joy in a permanent sense. But this is the wonderful nature of salvation. "Sorrow and sighing" is the same phrase used about David's feelings because of his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 31:10). As noted throughout Is. 35, the essential theme is of internal spiritual transformation, and no longer experiencing the effects of sin; for that is the greatest "joy". The exiles refused all these things, and so they are reapplied to the final removal of sorrow and sighing at the return of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 21:3,4).

Isaiah 51:12 I, even I, am He who comforts you- God is not distant; the God of the cosmos was eager to personally draw near to the hearts ("comfort") of the exiles. But they refused.

Who are you, that you are afraid of man who shall die- Is. 40:6-8 has the same basic message of *comfort* through the message of human mortality and weakness. For it is our fear of others, of their opinions and judgments, which causes so much *dis*comfort to so many. And so here too, the mortality of humanity is used as a comfort to the downtrodden people of God. Because man is mortal... don't fear man, but rather God. And this is to be a *comfort* to us. God chose His message of comfort to be simply: "Man is mortal!". But the exiles and the potential "servant" figure feared men, perhaps one particular ruler of Persia or Babylon, whom he thought would not allow their restoration; see on :16; Is. 52:13. They feared him rather than God, and so they didn't flee Babylon as asked. But then God removed Belshazzar and Cyrus gave the decree for them to return. And they refused even that. But all their possible excuses for not responding to the call of the Gospel are dealt with in Isaiah's prophecies; and mankind today is likewise without excuse for not responding.

And of the son of man who shall be made as grass- In Hebrew thought, “the Son of man” meant an ordinary, mortal man (Is. 51:12). Several times we are reminded that “God is not a man” (Num. 23:19; Hos. 11:9); yet Christ was clearly “the Son of man” or, as he is often called in the New Testament, “the *man* Christ Jesus”. The Greek text calls him “son of *anthropos*”, i.e. of mankind, rather than “son of *aner*” [husband, man].

Isaiah 51:13 And have forgotten Yahweh your Maker, who stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and fear continually all the day because of the fury of the oppressor, when he makes ready to destroy; and where is the fury of the oppressor?- LXX "because of the wrath of him that afflicted thee: for whereas he counseled to take thee away, yet now where is the wrath of him that afflicted thee?". In the Isaiah context, this is clearly a reflection upon the boast of the Assyrians that they would take Zion into captivity in their land. The exiles were intended to remember this and to realize that the apparent strength of Babylon and its leadership was not going to hinder their restoration (see on :12).

Time and again, Isaiah’s restoration prophecies told Judah that they should not fear, as Yahweh would mightily be with them in their work (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8,11; 54:7,14; 59:19). But Judah feared the surrounding nations- Ezra and Nehemiah are full of this theme (Ezra 3:3). Nehemiah refused to be put in fear by the Samaritan opposition because of his faith in Isaiah’s promises (Nehemiah 6:14). And Isaiah further spoke to Judah’s heart in Isaiah 51:12,13:

“I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations [s.w. re. the foundation of the temple being laid] of the earth [‘heaven and earth’ often refers to the temple]; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?” (AV). The fact they did fear meant that they had forgotten Yahweh who was so eager to re-establish their Kingdom.

Isaiah 51:14 The captive exile shall speedily be freed- Again we note how "speedily" the deliverance and reestablishment of the Kingdom could have happened. The Kingdom was indeed very "near"; see on :5.

And he shall not die and go down into the pit, neither shall his bread fail- See on Is. 52:2. The exiles failed to discern that in spiritual terms Babylon was a prison cell from which the righteous should seek to hasten out of, to flee from; to shake off the yoke it put upon their necks (Is. 51:14; 52:2). Yet all they saw was a nice, comfy life, and they thought they were doing their bit by giving some silver and gold to those who wanted to return and build the temple, a desire which they would all have soberly nodded in agreement with as being ‘a great work’ (what similarities with ourselves?). Those who did return satisfied themselves with a small temple, disregarding the instructions which Ezekiel had given them in Babylon, they lacked the faith to believe that Yahweh would be a wall of fire around them and instead built their own wall, and got on with building their own ceiled houses (as Haggai lamented) rather than Yahweh’s house, marrying the local women, extorting wealth even from each other and enslaving their less fortunate brethren, trading on the Sabbath, allowing the local Arab leaders chambers even in the temple...and so the Kingdom prophecies were deferred. The process that could have brought about Yahweh’s establishment of His Kingdom seems to have been centered around an attack from the surrounding nations, aimed against the wonderful new temple Judah were supposed to have built, which would be destroyed by Yahweh who dwelt in that temple [‘Zion’].

Is. 51:14, speaking of the call to Judah to leave Babylon, sounds as if they were willing and eager to leave that spiritually dreadful place. But the reality was that Judah didn’t hasten to be loosed, they preferred the Babylon life, and didn’t perceive it for the spiritual pit that was killing them which it was. Most of them chose to remain there. So this passage is therefore a prophecy, a command, about how God *wanted* Judah to respond.

Isaiah 51:15 For I am Yahweh your God, who stirs up the sea, so that its waves roar: Yahweh of Armies is His name- The roaring of the waves is applied here to Yahweh's victory at the roaring Red Sea, implying that this invasion is going to be destroyed as the Egyptians were. This didn't happen at the Babylonian invasion, although potentially it could've done had Judah repented. Is. 17:12 uses the phrase about the judgment upon Syria and Israel (and probably Judah is also in view here (see on Is. 17:5), with the rushing of waters representing the various nations in the Assyrian or Babylonian confederacy. But this strange rush of nations against them would be strangely stopped (Is. 17:13), by grace. "The roaring of the seas" is the term used for the Babylonian invasion of Judah (Jer. 5:22; 6:23). What began in Is. 17 as a prophecy of judgment against Syria and Israel at the hands of the Assyrians now morphs into judgment against Judah at the hands of the Babylonians; see on Is. 13:1.

There is Angelic reference here: "The Lord of Hosts (of Angels) is His Name... I have put My words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand (an Angelic phrase- for the Angel hid Moses in the shadow of His hand), that I may... say unto Zion, Thou art My people" (Is. 51:15,16).

Isaiah 51:16 I have put My words in your mouth, and have covered you in the shadow of My hand- This would be achieved if they accepted the Spirit, part of the package offered in the new covenant (Is. 59:21). His words would be written in their hearts too. Having Divine words put in the mouth meant they were to be as Aaron and Moses before Pharaoh (s.w. Ex. 4:15); for it was also Moses who was covered in the shadow of Yahweh's hand as He passed by. See on Is. 52:13. Remember that they were bidden flee Babylon before she fell to the Medes. The servant figure need not have feared the king of Babylon, he was intended to go to him and plead as Moses "let My people go". But the exiles feared men, perhaps one particular ruler of Persia or Babylon, whom they thought would not allow their restoration; see on :12. They feared him rather than God, and so they didn't flee Babylon as asked.

That I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and tell Zion, 'You are My people'- LXX renders this in the future tense: "I will put my words into thy mouth, and I will shelter thee under the shadow of mine hand, with which I fixed the sky, and founded the earth: and the Lord shall say to Sion, Thou art my people". But the confusion of tenses is because this is what Yahweh

had already done for His people; He was about to make a new creation, with all the excitement of the creator; but they didn't want to be recreated. They had to realize that potential. And it's the same for us, called to leave Babylon and participate in the reestablished Kingdom of God.

As God longed to pronounce the words “You are my people” to them (Hos. 2:25), so here Isaiah speaks of how at the restoration God wished to use that very phrase to returned Judah; see on Is. 1:26. Hosea / God speak in the most shocking terms- “I will sow her… in the land” (Hos. 2:25). This means, bluntly, they would have sex, in the land of God. *But the Jews in Babylon just plain weren’t interested in returning to the land*. They preferred to remain there where they were, and ‘worship’ God, criticizing others for their apostasy, but not really come back to Him with any passion. God wished that once again He would be with them in the wilderness as He was at the beginning of their national relationship, and then enter a new covenant with them, the joy of which would result in the physical transformation of the planet.

Isaiah 51:17 Awake, awake, stand up, Jerusalem- The exiles are called "Jerusalem". They called themselves this (Is. 48:2); but they needed to do more than such merely external, legalistic, ritualistic identification of themselves with a name and culture. And that is an abiding challenge for God's people today. They had to "awake", to allow God's Spirit to act upon their hearts to "stir up" their spirits (s.w. 1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16), just as He had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to let them return (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:22). The spirit of the exiles was likewise awoken or stirred up to return (s.w. Ezra 1:5).

God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through.

Yahweh would "stir up" Cyrus (s.w. Is. 41:2,25; 45:13), so this could have been fulfilled through that stirred up "mighty man" of Is. 42:13. But he failed. The "mighty man", the *gibbor*, therefore became reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Is. 9:6

s.w.). But He will act through the stirring up of a repentant Judah (s.w. Is. 51:9,17; 52:1), seeing that no man would be 'stirred up' (s.w. Is. 64:7). All the potential candidates had refused the Divine nudges to be stirred up.

That has drunk at the hand of Yahweh the cup of His wrath; you have drunken the bowl of the cup of staggering, and drained it- Taking the cup of wine is a double symbol: of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), and of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. Paul realized this in pleading with the Corinthians to examine themselves before taking the emblems. He saw the ceremony and our self-examination there as a kind of foretaste of the judgment (1 Cor. 11:29-32). If they wanted to accept it, judgment was over and done. But they didn't, and so they were to many times more drink it.

Isaiah 51:18 There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she has brought forth; neither is there any who takes her by the hand among all the sons whom she has brought up- The LXX renders this in the past tense: "and there was none to comfort thee of all the children whom thou borest; and there was none to take hold of thine hand, not even of all the children whom thou has reared". Now Isaiah returns to the reality- that they would not respond to the call, and would have no servant figure who could in the spirit of Moses ask the king of Babylon to let them go; see on :16.

Zerubbabel, the ‘shoot out of Babylon’ as his name means, *could have been* the promised Messianic shoot out of the withered stem of Jesse. He could have been the Messianic shoot out of the dry ground of Babylon (Is. 53:2) who would accompany the return of the temple vessels from Babylon (Is. 52:11). But he disappears strangely out of the record. Thus the events of Nehemiah 8, where the Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles as well as the dedication of the wall are all recorded, make no mention of the High Priest or Zerubbabel officiating. He, Joshua and indeed anyone who could have taken their place somehow didn’t rise to the occasion. And so Is. 51:17,18 lamented, prophetically: “Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury [at the end of the 70 years captivity]... [but] There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath

brought up". It was the responsibility of the priests and religious leaders to "gently lead" the exiles back to their God and their land, but they failed in this (Is. 59:18 s.w.); and so because their was none to guide / gently lead (s.w.), God Himself had to intervene and do this through His Son (Is. 40:11; 49:10).

Isaiah 51:19 These two things have happened to you; who will bemoan you? Desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword; how shall I comfort you?- God was eager to personally comfort them, but they refused. Hence this rhetorical question. The primary reference is to God seeking to comfort them over the desolation of Judah by the Babylonians. But also in view may be the withholding of agricultural blessing after the restoration which occurred several times- in Neh. 5:2,3 (as prophesied here in Is. 51:19), in Haggai's time, and later in Malachi 3:10,12; when the restored Zion could have been as the garden of Eden, i.e. paradise restored on earth (Is. 51:3). Here we see frightening similarities with ourselves. We know, but often don't do. We sense this cycle of failure, crying out for mercy, receiving it, failing again, crying for mercy, receiving it, failing again...we see it in Israel, in our brethren and those around us, and in ourselves. We can expound it, lament it, feel the shame and tragedy of it all...and yet continue to have a part in it. Eventually, the people stayed in this groove so long that they degenerated into how they were at the time of Malachi- self-righteous, with no sense of failure any more, living self-centered lives of petty materialism, earning wages as they did in Haggai's time, to put into pockets with holes in, life without satisfaction, achieving nothing, passively angry. This is what Malachi clearly portrays. It's a terrible picture, and one which we can sail dangerously close to identifying with.

Isaiah 51:20 Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of Yahweh, the rebuke of your God- God recognizes here that He is not unaware of the desolation of Jerusalem. He uses the language of Lamentations to describe the scenes. He is not the judge who hands out judgments and sentences with no personal comprehension of what they involve. But these judgments had been legitimate; but they were now over, if they wanted them to be (:21,22).

Isaiah 51:21 Therefore hear now this, you afflicted and drunken, but not with wine- They had drunk the cup of judgment (:17,20), but not the wine of final condemnation. Isaiah's prophecies continually emphasize that God is fully aware

of their "affliction", and would have mercy upon them in it (Is. 49:13; 54:11; 66:2 s.w.).

Isaiah 51:22 Thus says your Lord Yahweh, and your God who pleads the cause of His people, Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of staggering, even the bowl of the cup of My wrath; you shall no more drink it again- Babylon fell so that Persia would take over the administration of the 127 provinces where the Jews were scattered, and would allow them to return to Judah (Is. 43:14). The cup of judgment which Judah drunk for 70 years was passed to Babylon. This accounts for Isaiah's repeated and detailed emphasis on the coming fall of Babylon for Judah / Israel's sake (e.g. Isaiah 47). They had been asked to flee Babylon before that, but when they didn't, God still worked with them; now reasoning as if their cup of judgment had passed to Babylon (:23), and they were now free to leave Babylon. Although they had sinned, Yahweh showed His gracious love for His people by bringing down Babylon so that they might leave (Is. 48:14). "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee [Cyrus] by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me " (Is. 45:4). Likewise the iron curtain came down to allow preachers of God's Truth to take it to those once in darkness. And English has become the lingua-franca of the world, enabling Christian preaching to now penetrate societies literally world-wide. See on Ezra 2:1.

Isaiah 51:23 And I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you, who have said to your soul, 'Bow down, that we may walk over you;' and you have laid your back as the ground, and as the street, to those who walk over- See on :22. There were yet to be many times when the Gentiles would trample Zion underfoot. Here and in :22 is envisioned a time when this would never happen again. The Babylonian treading down of Jerusalem could have been the last time. But that potential was spurned by the exiles. And so there shall come one final time in the last days when Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24), when these prophecies will come to their final term.

Isaiah Chapter 52

Isaiah 52:1 Awake, awake, put on your strength, Zion- God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through.

Put on your beautiful garments, Jerusalem, the holy city- The implication is that she was about to be married to Yahweh.

For henceforth there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean- But the uncircumcised did come and live in the temple and marry the Jews. And Ezra and Nehemiah covered themselves with sackcloth in mourning because of these things. And thus they showed that this prophecy could not be fulfilled at their time. Tobiah the Ammonite was given a chamber in the temple for him to use as an office for undermining God’s people (Neh. 13:7). This precluded the fulfilment of the restoration prophecies. There were to be “holy chambers” in the temple for the Levites (Ez. 46:19 and very often in Ezekiel 40-48). The uncircumcised Gentiles were not to be brought into the sanctuary (Ez. 44:7). It was God’s intention that when Judah returned from Babylon, the uncircumcised would not come into Zion (the temple), and the Kingdom would be established (Is. 52:1,11). There was to be no Canaanite in the house of Yahweh (Zech. 14:21).

Isaiah 52:2 Shake yourself from the dust! Arise, sit up, Jerusalem!- God's psychological stirring up of the exiles (:1) depended upon them being open to this- hence the verbs here suggest proactive action by the exiles themselves- shaking themselves, arising and sitting up. "Arise" is the word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only

external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. The word for "sit up" is in fact used of how both Ezra and Nehemiah "sat down" in grief at the apostasy of the Jews (Ezra 9:3; Neh. 1:4).

Release yourself from the bonds of your neck, captive daughter of Zion!- The Jews didn't perceive the soft life of Babylon as chains around their necks, and so they didn't loose themselves and leave. See on Is. 51:14. The same words are used in Is. 58:6 of how the exiles refused to release the bonds they had placed upon their brethren. And yet they were themselves in bondage, needing release, if only they would realize their true position. But God was simply so positive about His people- Is. 51:14 appears to be a descriptive statement about the Jews, but in reality it wasn't true: "The bound down one hastens to be loosed". Sadly, they didn't respond to the exhortation to loose themselves from the bands upon them (Is. 52:2). They preferred to stay in bondage, as so many do today, despite God willing them to seek release as He did with the exiles.

Isaiah 52:3 For thus says Yahweh, You were sold for nothing; and you shall be redeemed without money- They were "sold for nothing" in that God had no personal benefit from the exile of His people; He did this to them for their spiritual benefit, not for any gain for Himself. Their redemption likewise would be according to His grace, and not because of any transaction between God and man. This was reflected in the way Cyrus commanded the Jews to return and provided all that was materially required to rebuild the temple, but "not for reward", for no personal benefit (Is. 45:13).

Isaiah 52:4 For thus says the Lord Yahweh, My people went down at the first into Egypt to live there: and the Assyrian has oppressed them without cause- If we take this translation, then this is amazing grace; for the prophets are full of reasons / causes as to why Israel were oppressed by Assyria. But God is prepared to impute righteousness to them to such an extent that this is seen as having been "without cause". But GNB is worth considering: "When you went to live in Egypt as foreigners [in disobedience, at the time of Jeremiah, with him pleading with them not to], you did so of your own free will; Assyria, however, took you away by force and paid nothing for you. And now in Babylonia the same thing has happened: you are captives, and nothing was paid for you".

Isaiah 52:5 Now therefore, what do I do here, says Yahweh, seeing that My people are taken away for nothing? Those who rule over them mock, says

Yahweh, and My name continually all the day is blasphemed- See on :4. LXX "And now why are ye here?" would suggest that the Jews ought to have already returned. The Babylonians didn't so much mock them, as their God. They were not unpopular in Babylon, and they were popular under Persian rule, as the book of Esther makes clear. They should not only have left Babylon, but quit worshipping the local idols and shown what Yahweh worship was really about; and He would have acted in a wondrous way to restore His Kingdom. But their impenitence precluded that from happening, and so the restoration project of Yahweh didn't work out as planned, and so His Name was blasphemed. This verse seems to be behind the mention in Rom. 2:24 that God's Name was blasphemed amongst the Gentiles because of Jewish impenitence and refusal to accept Messiah. Hence this prophesy continues to state that He would reveal His Name to His people as it is in His Son, and then they would ultimately accept Him and thus the blasphemy of God's Name would cease.

Isaiah 52:6 Therefore My people shall know My name. Therefore they shall know in that day that I am He who speaks; behold, it is I- See on :5. The lament in :5 that God's Name was blasphemed may refer to blasphemy by the exiles, in that they bore His Name but worshipped idols. In the day of restoration, they would "know" the Name in truth which they had before blasphemed or caused to be blasphemed, and not just as a word or culture they adhered to. Knowing God's Name is paralleled to knowing that He really speaks and His saving purpose expressed in that word is Him. "It is I", "the word was God", that word which for the exiles was all about their certain salvation in His Kingdom, was the essence of God. He is all about saving, and so His Son was rightly named 'Yah's salvation'.

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains- This may refer as an intensive plural to the great mountain, of Zion. For it is Zion, the temple mount, which is addressed with the news that "Your God reigns".

Are the feet of him who brings good news- The future reestablished Kingdom is called "good things" in Is. 52:7 (quoted in Rom. 10:15) and Jer. 8:15. *All things work together for good* (Rom. 8:28) doesn't mean that somehow everything will work out OK for us in this life- for so often they don't. We are asked to carry the Lord's cross, to suffer now and be redeemed in glory later at His return, in the "good things" of the Kingdom.

Who publishes peace, who brings good news of good, who publishes salvation-

The "peace" in view is peace with God after all Israel's conflict with Him.

Who says to Zion, Your God reigns!- The enthronement of Yahweh in Zion could have happened at the time of the restoration. So much potential was disallowed by Judah's lack of faith, vision and repentance. And so these things are applied to the Lord Jesus, who is presented here as both the herald of the king and also the king. But all that is true of Him, the servant named "Israel", is true of all those in Him. Isaiah's description of the beauty of Christ's heralding or preaching in Is. 52:7 is quoted by Paul concerning every preacher of the Gospel (Rom. 10:15); the "he" of Is. 52 is changed to "them" in Rom. 10. And Paul is quoting this Old Testament prophecy about Jesus to prove that we are all "sent" to preach the Gospel. The validity of our commission to preach is quite simply that Jesus Himself preached; in this way we are all personally "sent" to preach, simply because He was sent to preach. As the Father sent Him, so He sends us.

The whole latter part of Isaiah is full of descriptions of this preaching to Israel, appealing to them to repent, humble themselves, quit their materialism and idolatry, and accept the Lord Jesus as Messiah (e.g. 55:1-5). The preaching of Is. 52:7 is the "report" concerning Christ's cross of Is. 53:1; the message of "peace" of Is. 52:7 is the Gospel of peace with God through the sacrifice of Christ (Is. 53:5). And Isaiah 40 expands this message to include the mortality of man and the primacy of God's word. All these things are distinctive Bible doctrines; it is surely *we* who ought to be making this witness!

In Rom 15:21, Paul justifies his preaching by quoting from part of the suffering servant prophecy in Is. 52 / 53. That whole passage is set in a context of explaining "how beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings… all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Is. 52:7,10 AV). The preaching of good tidings and the declaration of God's salvation was through the crucifixion. Paul quotes Is. 52:15: "To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand". This was Paul's justification for taking the Gospel to where Christ has not been named. Note in passing how the Lord Jesus sees us as "beautiful" in our witness to Him (as in Song 7:1). Yet further into Is. 53, so much else jumps out at us as appropriate to Paul's preaching: "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high [cp. Paul knowing how to be exalted and abased, themes that occur in Is. 53 about Jesus' death]. As many were astonied at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man [cp. Paul's thorn in the flesh?], and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings

shall shut their mouths at him: for [that] which had not been told them shall they see; and [that] which they had not heard shall they consider". Paul appeared before Agrippa, Festus, and one or two Caesars, with a visage marred by his evangelistic sufferings.

Isaiah 52:8 The voice of your watchmen! They lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see eye to eye- GNB perhaps gives the sense: "Those who guard the city are shouting, shouting together for joy. They can see with their own eyes the return of the LORD to Zion". Is. 4:5,6, Ez. 48:35 and other passages suggest the literal dwelling of Yahweh in Zion, such as will happen at the establishment of the Kingdom when we shall see His face, and God Himself shall dwell amongst us (Rev. 22:4). Such wonderful potentials were wasted by the exiles. For this could have happened then in some sense. This is a prophecy embedded between verses which speak of the command for Judah to leave Babylon: "Loose thyself from the bands… depart ye, go ye out from thence" (Is. 52:2,11). But most of them preferred to remain. Who are the watchmen? Surely they are the Angels, who potentially prepared the way for Judah to leave Babylon. Had the people of Judah followed the cherubim Angels above them and all returned to Zion, they would have as it were seen the Angels eye to eye, sung together with the Angels at the new creation of Zion… and God's eyes are the Angels, so in that sense Judah would have seen eye to eye with God. But they didn't utilize what God had prepared; they lazily preferred to stay within their comfort zones by remaining in Babylon. In our experience in Christ, the same is all true, day by day. The way is set up for us, and if we bravely and boldly go in the way which the Angels have prepared, the way God intends, then we will have the experience of truly walking with the Lord, singing with His Angels, seeing eye to eye, in foretaste of the final day when we shall finally see Him face to face. See on Ezra 8:21.

When Yahweh brings Zion back- Time and again, Jeremiah had prophesied how Yahweh would *bring again* His people and the vessels of the temple back to the land (Jer. 28:3,4,6; 30:3,18; 31:23); and this all had a fulfilment in the return from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. It was then that in some sense Yahweh 'brought again Zion' (Is. 52:8). The same word is to be found in Ez. 38:8 and Ez. 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they

returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. ‘bring again’], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16). Joel 3, however, speaks from the perspective that Judah would be ‘brought again’ from Babylon under Ezra; and then Joel 3:2 “I will also gather all nations... and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land”. This applies therefore to the last days.

Isaiah 52:9 Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem; for Yahweh has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem- The broken down wastes of Jerusalem suddenly bursting into joy suggests an immediate, in a moment transformation; rather than slow and partial rebuilding with many obstacles and difficulty shifting the rubble, as was experienced at the restoration. Such a rebuilding of the waste places as envisioned here would suggest miraculous Divine intervention and activity. It will finally come true when the heavenly Jerusalem and Zion descend from above, ready built, onto the site of Zion; as seen in the final visions of Revelation.

Isaiah 52:10 Yahweh has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God- The past tense is used because this outcome was so certain- but it still depended upon the repentance and faith of the exiles. Had they returned, supported with the same kind of miraculous manifestations as seen at the exodus, then "the nations" amongst whom they were scattered, the 127 provinces of Persia, would have seen God's arm revealed. The ends of the *eretz* were specifically those areas on the borders of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, which is where they had been taken into captivity.

But this didn't happen. And so the arm of Yahweh which brings salvation is revealed now to the nations through the work of the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:1). We can reflect how an omnipotent God could have achieved salvation in a less painful way than He did- but He made bare His arm in the death of the cross (Is. 52:10), i.e. He expended Himself greatly. The same idea is present when we read of Yahweh paying a price for the redemption of His people from Egypt. He didn’t pay the Egyptians anything, but the figure is used to express the extensive effort He was involved in for His people.

Isaiah 52:11 Depart, depart, go out from there, touch no unclean thing! Go out of the midst of her! Cleanse yourselves, you who bear the temple vessels of Yahweh- See on :1. “Come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17) is picking up the language of Is. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7 concerning the return of the exiles from Babylon. The edict of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the land was reapplied to God’s command to us to leave the spirit of Babylon, the Gentile world, and go up to do His work. The returned exiles are us. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV “instruments”] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah’s ‘Kingdom’ passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The restoration of the kingdom could potentially have happened at the time of Ezra. LXX "separate yourselves, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord" was not really obeyed by the Levites and priests at the time of the restoration, because Malachi as well as Ezra and Nehemiah often mention their lack of separation from the peoples of the land, even intermarrying with them.

Isaiah 52:12 For you shall not go out in haste, neither shall you go by flight: for Yahweh will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your vanguard- Although the exodus from Egypt was in many ways a pattern for the exiles to leave Babylon, in distinction from then, they would not "go out in haste" (s.w. Dt. 16:3). They would not be persecuted in Babylon, leading them to flee. Rather they were to "flee" from Babylon spiritually (Is. 48:20) of their own volition and desire. After the decree of Cyrus, they went with the King's blessing and not in panic. The promise that Yahweh would go before and behind them suggests that He would be even more present with them than He was with the Israelites who left Egypt, for He went before them but not also behind them. Such a visible accompaniment of the exiles back to Zion was potentially possible.

Isaiah 52:13 Behold, My servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high- This continues the allusions to the exodus in :12 and throughout the servant songs. Moses was the great servant of Yahweh, and he "was very great" in the eyes of the Egyptians and their leaders (Ex. 11:3). The servant figure had been intended to come before the king of Babylon as Moses came before Pharaoh, to demand freedom for God's people, and then to lead them out of Babylon back to Judah, accompanied by Divine miracles, signs and logistical provision just as Israel had on their wilderness journey (Is. 51:12,16). The potential servant figures at the time of the restoration failed in this, and so

the prophecies are reapplied to the Lord Jesus and His mediation for us on the cross, leading His people thereby out of Babylon into the restored Kingdom.

Clearly a Messiah figure could have arisen at the restoration: "And their leader shall be one of them, and their ruler shall come forth from their midst; and I will bring him near, and he shall approach me; for who would dare to risk his life to approach me?' declares the LORD" (Jer. 30:18-21 NAS). This leader who would come close to God in mediation would be willing to give his life to enable this. This must be connected with how Is. 53, describing Messiah's death, is actually in a restoration context (beginning in Is. 52). Could it not be that a Messiah figure could have arisen and died a sacrificial death to bring his people to God? Daniel 9 likewise associates the rebuilding of Zion with the death of "Messiah the prince" to reconcile Israel to God- perhaps potentially possible within a literal 70 week period from Cyrus' decree? Ezra's prayer of Ezra 9 is full of reference to Daniel 9, as if he saw it as capable of fulfilment then.

The glory "high and lifted up" which Isaiah saw in Is. 6:1 is more specifically defined here in Is. 52:13 where "high and lifted up" is used of the exaltation of the suffering servant, the Messiah figure who could have been Hezekiah, had he responded rightly to his sufferings. But after God's attempts to reapply it to Zerubbabel and others, it came to full term in the suffering of the Lord Jesus. Is. 6:10 is quoted in John 12, with the information that "these things said Isaiah, because he foresaw his glory, and he spoke about him" (Jn. 12:41). The hour of glory was the hour of crucifixion. The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle... was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for Christ's sake, then we know His glory. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet Isaiah saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. What was the nadir of shame in the eyes of men was the acme of exaltation in God's eyes. So John links the visions of Is.

6 and Is. 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Jn. 12:38-41 draws a parallel between being converted, and understanding the prophecies of the glory of the crucified Christ. To know Him in His time of dying, to see the arm of Yahweh revealed in Him there, is to be converted.

Isaiah 52:14 Just as many were astonished at you (his appearance was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men)- see on Gen. 39:6; Job 17:7,8. We are to be “conformed to the image of [God’s] son" (Rom. 8:29)- to share His *morphe*, which was so marred beyond recognition that men turned away in disgust (Is. 52:14 cp. Phil. 2:7). The mind that was in Him then must be in us now (Phil. 2:5). This is proof enough that His "form" was not His essential nature. It is a form which we can share and reflect. The mixture of the Divine and human in the Lord Jesus is what makes Him so compelling and motivational. He was like us in that He had our nature and temptations; and yet despite that, He was different from us in that He didn't sin. Phil. 2 explains how on the cross, the Lord Jesus was so supremely "in the likeness of men"; and yet the same 'suffering servant' prophecy which Phil. 2 alludes to also makes the point that on the cross, "his appearance was so unlike the sons of Adam" (Is. 52:14). There was something both human and non-human in His manifestation of the Father upon the cross. Never before nor since has such supreme God-likeness, 'Divinity' , if you like, been displayed in such an extremely human form- a naked, weak, mortal man in His final death throes.

There, on the cross, the Lord Jesus was the form of God, equal with God in that sense, the only begotten Son. And yet on the cross His form was marred more than that of any man, He finally had no form that could be desired (Is. 52:14; 53:2). And yet this was the form of God. *He* was contorted and marred more than ever, there was no beauty in *Him* that men should desire Him, in those hours in which His Son suffered there. The Lord Jesus then had the form of God, although in His mind He had taken the form of a servant. The Lord made Himself a servant in His mind; He looked not on His own things, but on those of others (Phil. 2:4,7). This is the context of Philippians 2; that we should have the *mind* of Christ, who disregarded His own status as Son of God and humbled Himself, even to death on the cross, so that we might share His status. His example really is ours, Paul is saying.

He was ‘lifted up’ in crucifixion and shame; and yet ‘lifted up’ in ‘glory’ in

God’s eyes through that act. We read in Is. 52:14 that His face was more marred, more brutally transmogrified, than that of any man. And yet reflecting upon 2 Cor. 4:4,6, we find that His face was the face of God; His glory was and is the Father’s glory: “The glory of Christ, who is the image of God… the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred even more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14 AV). This prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more.

Isaiah 52:15 So shall he sprinkle many nations- Perhaps alluding to the ritual of sprinkling blood upon the leper to pronounce him clean (s.w. Lev. 14:7). Men from all nations were in prospect sprinkled by His blood; and therefore we must extend the knowledge of this to all men, both in our collective and personal witness. Lk. 24:48 simply comments that the disciples were witnesses to the resurrection and the fact that forgiveness and salvation was therefore potentially available to all men. The parallel records in Mt. and Mk. say that they were told to go out and witness to the resurrection world-wide. Putting them together it is apparent that if we are truly witnesses of the resurrection in our own faith, then part and parcel of this is to take this witness out into our own little worlds. If we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, we will preach it world-wide. He died and rose as the representative of all men; and therefore this good news should be preached to all kinds and all races of people.

Kings shall shut their mouths at him- As explained on :13, the servant was to witness before kings, and stun them into silence if they had any objection to the idea of the salvation of God's people. But "shut their mouths" may also imply repentance by these "kings". I suggest this because the whole reason for the Law of Moses was “so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). Paul is quoting here from Ps. 63:11: “the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped”. He’s reasoning that because we’re all sinners, we’re all liars- for untruth is the essence of sin. We are not being true to ourselves, to God, to His word, to our brethren… we profess covenant relationship with God, to be His people, and yet we fail to keep the

terms of that covenant. And the Law of Moses convicted all God's people of this, and in this way led them to the need for Christ. Yet Is. 52:15 prophesied that the crucified Jesus would result in men shutting their mouths. The righteousness and perfection displayed there in one Man, the very human Lord Jesus, has the same effect upon us as the Law of Moses- we shut our mouths, convicted of sin.

For that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand- Paul read "…for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider" (Is. 52:15) as a prophecy which required him to fulfill it, by taking Christ to those who had not heard (Rom. 15:21). It was because they of themselves would not "consider" / 'understand' (s.w. Is. 1:3) that they were psychologically confirmed in their attitudes and blinded so that they would not understand / consider (Is. 6:9,10). And so God operates to this day. It was the suffering of the servant, the Lord Jesus upon the cross, which was designed to as it were jolt them into considering / understanding (s.w. Is. 52:15). So GNB "They will see and understand something they had never known".

Isaiah Chapter 53

Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed our message? To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?- The context of this arm of Yahweh is found in Is. 52:10 "Yahweh has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God". The past tense was used because this outcome was so certain- but it still depended upon the repentance and faith of the exiles. Had they returned, supported with the same kind of miraculous manifestations as seen at the exodus, then "the nations" amongst whom they were scattered, the 127 provinces of Persia, would have seen God's arm revealed; the revelation (s.w.) of His salvation (Is. 56:1). The ends of the *eretz* were specifically those areas on the borders of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, which is where they had been taken into captivity. But this didn't happen. The message of these things was not generally believed by the exiles, despite all the appeals to them to believe it (e.g. Is. 43:10 s.w.). And so the arm of Yahweh which brings salvation is revealed now to the nations through the work of the Lord Jesus.

Note the pronouns in Is. 53. The “we” who preach the Gospel of the cross are the “we” who rejected and condemned the Saviour, and the “we” whose sins are forgiven and who are reconciled to God. *These* are the reasons why we preach the crucified Christ in zeal and humility (Is. 53:1,2,3,5,6). Grace is the motive power for witness; we preach the word of His grace as it has been to *us*. We *aren't* little sinners. It was our race who crucified the Lord of glory, and we have some part in their behaviour.

Isaiah 53:2 For he grew up before Him as a tender plant- Isaiah 53 is prefaced in chapter 52 by the command to return from Babylon and to proclaim the good news of the Messianic Kingdom which Cyrus’ decree could have brought in; as if it *could* have come true then. He shall “grow up” as a root from a dry land (Is. 53:2) uses the word frequently used about the ‘going up’ from Babylon to Jerusalem.

When Zedekiah was taken into captivity (Ez. 17:20), it was prophesied that “a tender one” (Messiah- Is. 11:1; 53:2) would be planted “upon an high mountain”, and grow into a tree in whose shadows all animals would live (Ez. 17:21,22). This is clearly the Messianic Kingdom (Lk. 13:19). This young twig at the time of the captivity was surely Zerubabbel, and the “high mountain” upon which his Kingdom could have been established is surely the “high mountain” of Ez. 40:2 where the temple could have been built. Yet the prophecy had to suffer

a massive deferment until its fulfilment in Christ. See on Is. 51:18.

And as a root out of dry ground. He has no good looks or majesty; when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him- This is possibly a window onto the question of whether the Lord was handsome, or otherwise. But the essential point is that He grew up tender and sensitive in a hard environment. We cannot therefore blame our dry, unspiritual environments for our lack of spirituality. The Lord arose from such dry ground, green and tender, ultimately sensitive in an insensitive world. The thirsty land surrounding Him represented spiritually barren Israel (Ps. 42:1-3); but the Lord Jesus so took His people upon Him, into His very soul, that His soul became a thirsty land (Ps. 143:6); He felt as spiritually barren as they were, so close was His representation of us, so close was He to sinful man, so fully did He enter into the feelings of the sinner. In the same way as the Lord really did feel forsaken as Israel were because of their sins, so He suffered thirst, both literally and spiritually, which was a punishment for Israel's sins.

Is. 53:2 speaks of Messiah, in a restoration context beginning in Is. 52, as ‘growing up’, the same word used to describe the ‘coming up’ from the dry ground of Babylon. This potential Messiah could have been Zerubbabel, but when he failed to fulfill the prophecies, there was the possibility that another man could have fulfilled his role. Nehemiah ‘came up’ from Babylon, and was “the servant” who ‘prospered’ Yahweh’s work (Neh. 1:11; 2:20), just as the servant prophecies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren (Neh. 5:8). He encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfill the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion’s gates in Messiah’s Kingdom would be praise. He was “despised” as Messiah would be (Neh. 2:19; Is. 53:3 s.w.). He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as Messiah would (Neh. 2:12 cp. Zech. 9:9); and Neh. 2:16 sounds very much like “of the people there was none with me” (Is. 63:3). The Gentiles round about came to sit at Nehemiah’s table to eat and drink (Neh. 5:17), just as Isaiah had prophesied could happen on a grander scale at the restoration of the Kingdom. One wonders if the potential fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies was transferred to him? And yet Nehemiah returned to Babylon at least once, and there is no record that on his second visit he stayed on, but rather, the implication seems to be, he returned again to the service of Babylon. The total lack of Biblical information about his later life may reflect this disappointing decision. This train of thought enables us to appreciate the joy and pleasure which the Father had when finally His beloved Son lived up to all that He sought and expected.

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised- The same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). He desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

And rejected by men; a man of suffering, and acquainted with disease. He was despised as one from whom men hide their face- LXX "for his face is turned from us" would connect with how Hezekiah turned his face to the wall during his illness (Is. 38:2). His whole life was a being acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3 AV); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. “Who hath believed our report?" (Is. 53:1) was fulfilled by the Jewish rejection of Him in His life, as well as in His death (Jn. 12:38)."He bore the sin of many" (Is. 53:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, the Lord Jesus bore the sin of the world.

Isaiah laments that despite the wonder of the atonement God would work out on the cross, scarcely any would believe it, and men would turn away their faces from the crucified Christ (Is. 53:1,3). And so it happened. Men and women went out that Friday afternoon to behold it, they saw it for a few moments, beat their breasts and returned to their homes (Lk. 23:48). My sense is that most of that crowd still died in unbelief, untouched by what they saw that day. And so it is with us. We break bread, and we rise up and go on our way, we return to the pettiness of our lives, to a spirituality which often amounts (at its best) to little more than a scratching about on the surface of our natures. But let's not look away, and change the subject; let's see the love of Christ, behold it, and by this very act be changed into that same image, from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

And we didn’t respect him- We are programmed to shy away from the ultimate realities, in the same way as men hid their faces from the terror and dastardly horror of the crucifixion of God's Son (Is. 53:3), and as "none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding" to realize the idiocy of

worshipping a piece of wood as an idol (Is. 44:19).

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering- God speaks of being burdened by Israel's sins (Is. 43:24)- and yet this is a prelude to the passages which speak of the Lord Jesus bearing our sins on the cross (Is. 53:4,11,12). We even read of God being wearied by Israel's sins (Is. 7:13; Jer. 15:6; Ez. 24:12; Mal. 2:17). Even though God does not "grow weary" (Is. 40:28) by nature, it seems to me that in His full entering into His people's situation, He does allow Himself to grow weary with the sins of those with whom He is in covenant relationship. It was this kind of capacity which God has which was supremely revealed in His 'sharing in' the crucifixion of His Son.

The Lord Jesus during His ministry fulfilled the prophecy of Is. 53:4 that on the cross He would ‘take our infirmities’ (Mt. 8:17). These “infirmities” according to Is. 53:4 were our sins, but sin’s effect is manifested through sickness. The moral dimension to these “infirmities” is established by Paul in Romans, for in Rom. 5:6 he uses the word to describe how “when we were yet *weak* [s.w. ‘infirm’], Christ died for the ungodly; and he explains his sense here as being that “when we were yet *sinners*” (Rom. 5:8). Jesus as the Lord the Spirit engages with our infirmities, on the plane of the spirit, the deep human mind and psyche. What He did on the cross in engaging with our moral infirmity He did in His life, and He continues to do for us in essence.

Yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted- "We esteemed him [as He hung on the cross] smitten of God" (Is. 53:4 AV). It was in a sense God who "clave the rock" so that the waters gushed out (Ps. 78:15; Is. 48:21). "Clave" or "struck" / "smitten" implies that the rock was literally broken open; and in this we see a dim foreshadowing of the gaping hole in the Lord's side after the spear thrust, as well as a more figurative image of how His life and mind were broken apart in His final sacrifice. See on Is. 48:21.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions- We are to reconstruct in our own minds the process of the crucifixion. As the nails pierced His skin and flood flowed... this was for my transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities- AV "bruised". Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us

to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). The Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He was bruised "and by his bruises we are healed" (LXX). The Lord Jesus was “wounded in the heel” through his death. Is. 53:4,5 describes Him as being ‘bruised’ by God through his death on the cross. This plainly alludes to the prophecy of Gen. 3:15 that the serpent would bruise Christ. However, ultimately God worked through the evil which Christ faced, *He* is described here as doing the bruising (Is. 53:10), through controlling the forces of evil which bruised His Son. And so God also works through the evil experiences of each of His children.

The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed- Many have pointed out the connections between the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 about Jesus, and the later commentary upon them in Psalm 89 and Isaiah 53, with reference to the crucifixion.

If he [Jesus] commit iniquity = *If his children* [us] forsake my law… = The Lord hath laid on *him* the iniquity of *us* all

I will chasten *him* with the rod of men = Then will I visit *their* transgression with the rod = For the transgression of *my people* was *he* stricken

And with the stripes of the children of men = And *their* iniquity with stripes = With *his* stripes *we* are healed.

The point of all this is to show how our sins were somehow carried by the Lord Jesus, to the extent that He suffered for them. But *how* was this actually achieved? It is one thing to say it, but we must put meaning into the words. I suggest it was in that the Lord so identified with us, His heart so bled for us, that He *felt* a sinner even though He of course never sinned. The final cry “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” clearly refers back to all the many passages which speak of God forsaking the wicked, but never forsaking the righteous. The Lord, it seems to me, *felt* a sinner, although He was not one, and thus entered into this sense of crisis and fear He had sinned. He *so* identified with us. In the bearing of His cross, we likewise must identify with others, with their needs and with the desperation of their human condition… and this is what will convert them, as the Lord’s identification with *us* saved *us*.

The Lord was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet the Lord Jesus received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of

theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; each one has turned to his own way- The Bible is in one sense a very long history book, recording human behaviour over time from God's perspective. One thing at least is clear from that history- the majority are usually wrong. People go astray "like sheep", in that they follow each other into sin. Time and again we see that the minority position was the right and Godly one, and the majority position was wrong. We each sin in our own unique and personal ways; but we do so because we follow the flock. And the context of Isaiah 53 is that the crucifixion of the Lord was necessary exactly because of this. He was the ultimate strong man psychologically, who ultimately went the Father's way when no other human ever did.

In the short term, the sheep were scattered by the wolf, even though the Lord died so this wouldn't happen. And He knew in advance that this would happen (Is. 53:6; Mk. 14:27; Jn. 16:32). The Lord faced His final agony with the knowledge that in the short term, what He was dying in order to stop (i.e. the scattering of the sheep) wouldn't work. The sheep would still be scattered, and He knew that throughout the history of His church they would still keep wandering off and getting lost (according to Lk. 15:3-6). Yet He died for us from the motive of ultimately saving us from the effect of doing this. He had clearly thought through the sheep / shepherd symbolism. Unity and holding on to the faith were therefore what He died to achieve (cp. Jn. 17:21-23); our disunity and apostasy, each turning to his own, is a denial of the Lord's sufferings. And this is why it causes Him such pain.

And Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all- see on Lk. 15:4-6. That piece of wood that was laid upon the Lord by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him; your laziness to do your readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. It was Yahweh who laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is.

53:6).

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed- Before the cross, we are convicted of our sinfulness. And yet we are assured there of our ultimate salvation. Isaiah 53 predicted that there, “He was oppressed”- Heb. ‘exaction was made’ (s.w. Is. 58:3). He bore our punishment / condemnation on the cross. We each ought to be crucified to death- this is the exaction for sin. And yet, Jesus died for us. The exaction was made from Him. The rejected will have to bear their own sin, and therefore their feelings will be akin to His in the time of crucifixion. Yet we are to bear the cross with Him. We must either crucify ourselves now, or go through it in rejection. This is a gripping logic.

"Oppressed" is the word for "taskmaster" and has been used by Isaiah of Judah's dominators and abusers (Is. 9:4; 14:2,4). The Lord Jesus was "oppressed" as Israel's representative and thus became the basis for righteousness to be imputed to all who had been oppressed and had oppressed others. See on Is. 60:17.

Yet when he was afflicted he didn’t open his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is mute, so he didn’t open his mouth- John the Baptist looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the “Lamb of God”, a phrase the Jews would’ve understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

Is. 53:7 speaks of the Lord at this time as being uncannily silent: "as a sheep before *her* shearers is silent" . The LXX has: “Because of his affliction he opens not his mouth", as if the silence was from pure fear as well as a reflection of an internal pain that was unspeakable. Job’s experience had foretold that the cross would be what the Lord had always “greatly feared". The Passover Lamb, so evidently typical of the Lord as He approached death, was to be *male*. And yet Is. 53:7 conspicuously speaks of a female sheep. Why such an obvious contradiction? Was it not because the prophet foresaw that in the extraordinary breadth of experience the Lord was passing through, He was made to empathize with both men *and* women? He felt then, as He as the seed of the woman stood silent before those abusive men, as a woman would feel. This is not the only place where both the Father and Son are described in feminine terms. It doesn't

mean, of course, that the Father is a woman; what it means is that He has the ability to appreciate and manifest feelings which a male would not normally be able to. Through His experience and zeal for our redemption, the Lord Jesus came to the same ability as His Father in these areas. Those who have suffered most are the most able to empathize. And yet somehow the Lord exceeded this principle; it was true of Him, but *such* were His sufferings and such His final empathy that this isn't a fully adequate explanation as to *how* He got to that point of supreme empathy and identity with us that He did. *Exactly* how He did it must surely remain a mystery; for God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself by that fully and totally representative sacrifice.

The female element in Old Testament sacrifice pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice, as a sheep before her shearers. His identity with both male and female, as the ultimate representative of all humanity, meant that He took upon Himself things that were perceived as specifically feminine. The mother was the story teller of the family; when people heard the Lord tell parables and teach wisdom, it would have struck them that He was doing the work of the matriarch of a family (V.C. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *The Social World Of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) pp. 28-29). "Typical female behaviour included taking the last place at the table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds", strife and arguments (B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights From Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993) p. 54). All this was done by the Lord Jesus- especially in His time of dying and the lead up to it. He was in many ways the idealized mother / matriarch. His sacrifice for us was very much seen as woman's work. And this is why the example of his mother Mary would have been a particular inspiration for Him in going through the final process of self-surrender and sacrifice for others, to bring about forgiveness and healing of strife between God and men. In a fascinating study, Diane Jacobs-Malina develops the thesis that a psychological analysis of the Gospels shows that the Lord Jesus played his roles like "the wife of the absent husband" (Diane Jacobs-Malina, *Beyond Patriarchy: The Images Of Family In Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1993) p.2.). And assuming that Joseph disappeared from the scene early in life, His own mother would have been His role model here- for she was indeed the wife of an absent husband. You'd have to read Jacobs-Malina's study to be able to judge whether or not you think it's all valid. But if she's right, then it would be yet another tribute to the abiding influence of Mary upon the character of the Son of God.

This idiom of being a lamb dumb and not knowing the outcome of events is used

about Jeremiah to describe his wilful naivety about Israel's desire to slay him: "I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me" (Jer. 11:19). In this Jeremiah was indeed a type of Christ. On one hand, the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray Him; and yet He went through the pain, shock and surprise of realizing that Judas, his own familiar friend in whom He trusted, had done this to Him (Ps. 41:9; Jn. 6:64; 13:11). He knew, and yet He chose to limit that foreknowledge from love. This is in fact what all human beings are capable of, seeing we are made in the image of God. Thus Samson surely knew Delilah would betray him, and yet his love for her made him trust her. And we as observers see women marrying alcoholic men, wincing as we do at the way their love makes them limit their foreknowledge. There is an element of this in God, as there was in His Son as He faced the cross.

The Greek for “delivered Him” (Rom. 8:32) is three times used in Is. 53 LXX about the handing over to Jesus to His death [NEV "that is led"]. The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "*How*", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: "Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. Notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him.

We are in Christ, connected every moment with the life and living out of His cross. We *are* dying with Him, our old man *is* crucified with Him because His death is an ongoing one. “It is Christ that died... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom 8:34-36). According to Isaiah 53, He on the cross was the sheep for the slaughter; but all in Him are *all day long*

counted as sharing His death, as we live out the same self-control, the same spirit of love and self-giving for others, regardless of their response...

Isaiah 53:8 He was taken away- Much study has been done of the crisis many males go through around the age of 30, the desire to stop experimenting and settle down, to cease being cared for and instead seeking to build up something permanent, the sense that life is passing by...it has all been very well summed up by Daniel Levinson in his study of the "age thirty transition". All this energy was released by the Lord into His three year ministry which changed human destiny, so intense and far reaching and successful was it. "I go to prepare a place for you...." is surely an allusion to the Palestinian tradition that the wife came to live with the new husband after a year and a day, whilst He 'prepared the place' for her. The cross was His purchase of us as His bride. The bridegroom was “taken away” from the wedding guests (Mk. 2:20)- the same word used in the LXX of Is. 53:8 for the ‘taking away’ of the Lord Jesus in His crucifixion death. But the groom is ‘taken away’ from the guests- because he is going off to marry his bride. The cross, in all its tears, blood and pain, was the Lord’s wedding to us.

By oppression and judgement- LXX "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away". But if as the MT, in what sense did the oppression and lack of justice take away His life? The Lord poured out His soul unto death; "he was taken away by distress" (Is. 53:12,8 AVmg.) suggests that it was the mental crisis in the brain of Christ on the cross which resulted in His death. This is why Pilate marvelled that He died so quickly. It is evident from this that the physical process of crucifixion did not kill Christ, but rather the heart burst (both figurative and literal) which it brought upon Him. Do we not sense that striving in our minds as we fellowship His sufferings? Surely we do, but from a great distance. Yet we should sense it more and more, it should make us get out of this sense of drifting which we all too often have, day by day drifting along with very little stirring up our minds.

And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living- “Cut off" is Heb. ‘excluded’, "from the land of the living” (s.w. ‘the congregation’- of Israel). And this was for the transgression of His people. This is undoubtedly reference to the self-sacrificial exclusion of Moses from the land, that Israel might enter. The Lord died the death of a sinner, He chose like Moses to suffer affliction with us, that we might be saved.

And stricken for the disobedience of My people?- see on Ex. 32:32. The darkness

that came down at the crucifixion would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

Isaiah 53:9 They made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth- see on Dt. 34:6. Sin is likened to violence in Is. 53:9 cp. 1 Pet. 2:22. There is a clear fulfilment in the Lord's burial in the graveyard belonging to the rich man Joseph of Arimathea. But this obvious fulfilment of prophecy isn't noted in the New Testament. A hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfillments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples.

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it was Yahweh's will to bruise him- It was *God* who 'bruised' the Lord on the cross. Gen. 3:15 says it was the seed of the serpent who bruised Him. Conclusion: God worked through the seed of the serpent, God was [and is] totally in control. The serpent is therefore not a symbol of radical, free flying evil which is somehow outside of God's control, and which 'bruised' God's Son whilst God was powerless to stop His Son being bruised. Not at all. God was in control, even of the seed of the serpent. However we finally wish to interpret "the seed of the serpent", the simple fact is that God was in powerful control of it / him.

He has caused him to suffer. When You make his soul an offering for sin- Is. 53:10 NIV describes the Lord's death as a "guilt offering". Ignorance is no atonement for sin, as the Law taught. "Forgive them *for* they know not what they do" sounds as if the Lord felt that He was the offering for ignorance, which was required for both rulers and ordinary Israelites (cp. how Peter and Paul describe both the rulers and ordinary people as "ignorant", implying they had a need for the ignorance offering of Christ, Acts 3:17; 13:27). And significantly, Heb. 5:2 describes Christ as a good priest who can have compassion on those (i.e. us) who have sinned through ignorance and want reconciliation. As we come, progressively, to realize our sinfulness, we need to make a guilt offering. But that guilt offering has already been made, with the plea "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do". All our sin, false guilt and real guilt, has been dealt with. We perhaps cannot ultimately decide, at least not by any intellectual process, what parts of our sense of "guilt" are false guilt, and which are legitimate and needful guilt. Whatever, the Lord's guilt offering has removed all this.

The Lord's soul was sorrowful unto death in Gethsemane, as if the stress alone nearly killed Him (Mk. 14:34). "My soul is full of troubles, and my life (therefore) draweth nigh unto the grave" (Ps. 88:3). Is. 53:10-12 speaks of the fact that the Lord's *soul* suffered as being the basis of our redemption; the mind contained within that spat upon head, as it hung on that tortured body; this was where our salvation was won. Death is the ultimately intense experience, and living a life dedicated to death would have had an intensifying effect upon the Lord's character and personality.

The LXX is very relevant to Hezekiah: "The Lord also is pleased to purge him from his stroke. If ye can give an offering for sin, your soul shall see a long-lived seed".

He shall see his seed- It seems to me that in some sense the Lord Jesus had a vision of us in the Kingdom just before his death (Is. 53:10; Heb. 12:2; Ps. 22:17,20 cp. Eph. 5:30). "*When* thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. 53:10,11 AV). "*When*" would suggest that the Lord had some kind of vision of those He was offering Himself for, especially in their future, forgiven state.

Another take is that when God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to

perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to ‘see’, to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being “in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He “his own self…in his own body" bore our sins “upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord’s moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His ‘nature’.

He shall prolong his days- The victory of the Lord Jesus is described as Him 'prolonging his days', in allusion back to the way Dt. 17:20 teaches that the King of Israel must study the word all the days of his life, with the result that he would "prolong his days". The almost unbelievable victory of the man Christ Jesus against every aspect of the flesh was due to His saturation with the spirit of God's word.

And the will of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand- The pleasure or will of our loving Father is that we should share His Kingdom (Lk. 12:32), and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross of Jesus (Is. 53:10). God isn’t indifferent. He wants us to be there. That’s why He gave His Son to die. It’s as simple as that. The deepest longings we feel in our earthly lives, as parents, as lovers, are mere flickers of the hungering desire God feels for us. It is a desire that cost Him His very own crucified son. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruisings') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross.

Isaiah 53:11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light and be satisfied- I prefer AV "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied". He will and does now see in us the [result of] the travail of His soul. We note that

His travail was so much internal, "of his soul". The term "travail / suffering of [the] soul" effectively means 'His life's work' (Ecc. 2:24; 4:8; 6:7 s.w.). As we die, one by one, and He knows that for sure He will resurrect and save us at the last day... this verse comes true, time and again. He sees the result of His life's work and His final death... and is "satisfied".

My righteous servant will justify many by the knowledge of himself- "Raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25) is an allusion to the LXX of Is. 53:11, which speaks of "the righteous servant" (Jesus) "justifying the righteous". The repetition of the word "righteous" suggests that on account of the Lord's death, and resurrection, His righteousness becomes ours, through this process of justification. But how and why, exactly, does Christ's death and resurrection enable our justification? Paul has explained that faith in God brings justification before Him. Now Paul is explaining how and why this process operates. Jesus died and rose again to eternal life as our representative. If we believe into Him (which Romans 6 defines as involving our identification with His death and resurrection by baptism), then we too will live for ever as He does, as we will participate in His resurrection to eternal life. Our final justification, being declared in the right, will be at the day of judgment. We will be resurrected, judged, and declared righteous- and given eternal life, never again to sin and die. This is the end result of the status of 'justified' which we have now, as we stand in the dock facing God's judgment.

Through the cross, the Lord Jesus would "justify the many". Yet this phrase is picked up in Dan. 12:3 and applied to those who preach the Gospel- and thereby become "*those* who justify the many". The implication is plain enough. Through preaching, we live out the Lord's death for others in practice, we placard Him crucified before the world's eyes. We are not simply "Him" to them; we are Him crucified to them. The honour of this is surpassing.

And he will bear their iniquities- He was a sin bearer; and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. As He bore away our iniquities (Is. 53:11), so "we then that are strong ought to bear the iniquities of the weak" (Rom. 15:1). The Lord Jesus didn't sin Himself but He took upon Himself our sins- to the extent that He *felt* a sinner, even though He wasn't. Our response to this utter and saving grace is to likewise take upon ourselves the infirmities and sins of our brethren. If one is offended,

we burn too; if one is weak, we are weak; we bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1). But in the context of that passage, Paul is quoting from Is. 53:11, about how the Lord Jesus bore our sins on the cross. We live out the spirit of His cross, not in just bearing with our difficulties in isolation, but in feeling for our weak brethren. The description of the believer as a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1) alludes to the scapegoat, the only living sacrifice, which was a type of the risen Lord (Lev. 16:10 LXX = Acts 1:3). As the Lord ran free in His resurrection, bearing away the sins of men, so we who are in Him and preach that salvation can do the same. As He bore away our iniquities (Is. 53:11), so “we then that are strong ought to bear the iniquities of the weak” (Rom. 15:1). We live out the spirit of His cross, not in just bearing with our difficulties in isolation, but in feeling for our weak brethren.

Isaiah 53:12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong- The idea of the Lord binding Satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that the Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb. 'those that are bound')". This dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided all His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of all the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12). We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe.

Because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors- There would have been a loss of lymph and body fluid to the point that Christ felt as if He had been "poured out like water" (Ps. 22:14); He "poured out his soul to death", as if His sense of dehydration was an act He consciously performed; He felt that the loss of moisture was because He was pouring it out Himself. This loss of moisture was therefore due to the mental processes within the Lord Jesus, it was a result of His act of the will in so mentally and emotionally giving Himself for us, rather than just the physical

result of crucifixion.

In the Lord's death we see the heart that bleeds, bared before our eyes in the cross. It is written of Him in His time of dying that He "poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12). The Hebrew translated "poured out" means to make naked- it is rendered as "make thyself naked" in Lam. 4:21 (see too Lev. 20:18,19; Is. 3:17). The Lord' sensitivity was what led Him to His death- He made His soul naked, bare and sensitive, until the stress almost killed Him quite apart from the physical torture. To be sensitive to others makes us open and at risk ourselves. A heart that bleeds really bleeds and hurts within itself. And this was the essence of the cross.

The Lord poured out His soul unto death as a conscious act performed to enable our redemption (Is. 53:12). Materially, this may refer to the way in which every respiration of the Lord would have scraped His sensitive skin against the rough wood, so that there would have been constant blood flow from His back. This was sometimes a cause of death through crucifixion: blood loss through repeated agitation of the wounds by lifting up the body to breathe and exhale. In this sense He poured out His soul unto death. Muscle cramps would have tended to fix the muscles and make respiration difficult without a wilful yanking of the body weight upwards on the wounded nerves.

The Lord Jesus Christ “made himself of no reputation”, or “emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7 R.V.), alluding to the prophecy of his crucifixion in Is. 53:12: “He poured out his soul unto death”. He “took upon himself the form (demeanour) of a servant” by his servant-like attitude to his followers (Jn. 13:14), demonstrated supremely by his death on the cross (Mt. 20:28). Is. 52:14 prophesied concerning Christ’s sufferings that on the cross “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men”. This progressive humbling of himself “unto death, even the death of the cross” was something which occurred during his life and death, not at his birth. The context of Phil. 2 relates to the mind of Jesus, the humility of which is being held up to us as an example to copy. These verses must therefore speak of Jesus’ life on earth, in our human nature, and how he humbled himself, despite having a mind totally in tune with God, to consider our needs.

Yet he bore the sin of many- The Lord knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel ‘bore their iniquities’ by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin,

and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: “Lay not the sin upon us… wherein we have sinned”. The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel.

And made intercession for the transgressors- On the cross, the Lord prayed for men to be forgiven. This was a fulfilment of this prophecy that He would "justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities", be wounded for our transgressions, be bruised for our iniquities, make a sin offering for His seed, heal us through His stripes, achieve our peace with God through His chastisement, bear the sin of many, be numbered with the transgressors, be stricken "for the transgression of my people", and make "intercession for the transgressors". These are all broadly parallel statements. "The transgressors" are primarily "my people", Israel, who despised and rejected him. And yet they also refer to us, insofar as we become identified with Israel in order to be saved. The prophesy that Christ would make "intercession for the transgressors" in His time of dying was surely fulfilled when He prayed "Father forgive them".

The risen and exalted Lord is spoken of as being shamed, being crucified afresh, as agonizing in prayer for us just as He did on the cross (Rom. 8:24 cp. Heb. 5:7-9). On the cross, He made intercession for us; but now He ever lives to make such intercession (Heb. 7:25). There He bore our sins; and yet now He still bears our sins (Is. 53:4-6,11). Somehow, the cross is still there. The blood of Jesus cleanses us, in the present tense, from all our sins; the Lord Jesus loves us and frees us from our sins by His blood (1 Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). We are cleansed by an ever 'freshly slain' sacrifice (Heb. 10:20 Gk.).

LXX "and was delivered because of their iniquities" is alluded to in Rom. 4:25: “Handed over because of our trespasses”. The Gospel accounts of the crucifixion give special emphasis to the moment of the Lord being handed over to those who would crucify Him. Paul is going on to show the mechanics, as it were, of how God has chosen to operate. His scheme of justifying us isn’t merely a case of Him saying ‘So you are declared right by Me’. He can do as He wishes, but He prefers to work through some kind of mechanism. We are declared right by God although we are sinners; which raises the obvious question: So what becomes of our sins? And so Paul explains that by talking about the crucial role of the death of Christ. Because He was of our nature, He is our representative. Although He never sinned, He died, yet He rose again to eternal life. Through connection with Him, we therefore can be counted as in Him, and thereby be given that eternal

life through resurrection, regardless of our sins. In this sense, Jesus had to die and resurrect because of our sins.

Isaiah Chapter 54

Isaiah 54:1 Sing, barren, you who didn't bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who did not travail with child- The allusion is to Sarah, to whom the exiles had earlier been bidden to "look" for inspiration (Is. 51:2). Sarah in her time of child-birth is likened to us all as we enter the Kingdom, full of joy (Is. 54:1-4); and yet at that time she was eaten up with pride and joy that she could now triumph over her rival; see on Gen. 21:10. And yet Sarah at that time is seen from a righteous perspective, counted as righteous, in that she is a type of us as we enter the Kingdom. God's mercy to Sarah and Abraham is repeated to us daily.

It could also be that what is in view here are spiritual children. The Divine hope was that the lack of spiritual 'children' amongst the exiles, repentant converts to the prophetic message, was going to be replaced by such "children" from among the Gentiles.

For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, says Yahweh- The two women represent Zion past and present. When she had been married to Yahweh she was barren; but the paradox is that now she was "desolate" she was going to have children, and she would do so without going through "travail" for them (Gal. 4:27). Gal. 4:27 confirms this interpretation and develops it, connecting unbelieving Israel with the barren woman and the largely Gentile church with the fruitful one.

The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people (see on Jer. 6:26) may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (Lam. 1:1; Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question- if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of God is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God's feelings at His peoples' destruction.

Isaiah 54:2 Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitations; don't spare: lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes- They would need more space for all the children- the Gentile converts who would be made seeing that the Jews were unresponsive (:1). This extension of her tents meant enlarging the boundaries of the land (:3). The implication could even be that the further they lengthened their tent cords, the more Gentile converts would come in. "The place" of the tent, the territory where it was

pitched, had to be expanded. God's redeemed family was to be extended beyond the limits of the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

Isaiah so often uses the idea of 'stretching out' the Heavens with reference to His creation of His new Kingdom (Isaiah 40:22; Is. 42:5; 44:24; 45:15; 51:13; 65:17,18). Zechariah 1:6 cp. 12:1 show that to stretch out Jerusalem is parallel with stretching out the 'heavens'. The 'singing' of the heavens refers to Judah's intended joy at the restoration (Isaiah 49:13 cp. 48:20). Israel were being told to peg out their tent as wide and far as they could; because this would be the extent of their Kingdom. The Kingdom would be as 'large' for them as they had vision for in this life.

Isaiah 54:3 For you shall spread out on the right hand and on the left; and your seed shall possess the nations- See on :2. GNB "You will extend your boundaries on all sides; your people will get back the land that the other nations now occupy". The idea is that Israel would possess all the nations within the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and yet expand those borders. The Abrahamic promise was that the seed would possess the gate of their enemies- the nations on the edges of and bordering on the *eretz* (Gen. 22:17; 24:60).

And make the desolate cities to be inhabited- At the restoration the temple still lay "waste" (Hag. 1:4,9) just as it had lain "desolate" [s.w. Jer. 33:10,12] after the Babylonian destruction. The 'restoration' was in fact not really a restoration at all, in God's eyes. Thus Ezra sat down desolate [AV "astonied"] at the news of Judah's apostasy in marrying the surrounding women; using the very same word as frequently used to describe the 'desolate' Jerusalem that was to be rebuilt (Ezra 9:3 cp. Is. 49:8,19; 54:3; 61:4). He tore his priestly garment (Ezra 9:3), as if he realized that all Ezekiel's prophesies about those priestly garments now couldn't come true (s.w. Ez. 42:14; 44:17,19). Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfill the Messianic prophecies about them which existed.

Isaiah 54:4 Don't be afraid; for you shall not be ashamed: neither be confounded; for you shall not be disappointed- Harmonizing with the second half of the verse, LXX has "Fear not, because thou has been put to shame, neither be confounded, because thou was reproached". The shame of the

Babylonian captivity was strong in their reasoning; they feared leaving Babylon lest such shame be repeated. It was to be the makers of idols who were "confounded" (s.w. Is. 41:11; 45:16) and only the true Israel would not be "confounded" (Is. 45:17; 54:4). The sinners in Israel had refused to be confounded or ashamed of their sins (Jer. 3:3 s.w.) and so they would be shamed in condemnation. Repentance involves an imagination of ourselves coming to judgment day and being condemned, and feeling shame for that; that is how we shall not be ashamed. And it is the servant alone who shall not be ashamed / confounded because of His righteousness (Is. 50:7). Our identity with Him removes that shame. If we condemn ourselves, we shall not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The enemies of Israel would perish alongside the apostate within Israel, in the same judgment.

Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. Consider Is. 50:10: “Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice [s.w. Ezra 1:1 re the proclamation of Cyrus] of his servant [i.e. Cyrus, Is. 45:1], that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God”. Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah’s prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9).

For you shall forget the shame of your youth; and the reproach of your widowhood you shall remember no more- Their widowhood implied their husband Yahweh had as it were died; see on :1.

Isaiah 54:5 For your Maker is your husband; Yahweh of Armies is His name: and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; the God of the whole earth shall He be called- As explained on :2,3, the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham would convert to Yahweh. LXX "He that delivered thee, He is the God of Israel, and shall be called so by the whole earth". And this could have potentially happened had the exiles returned in faith and repentance. "The Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth"- a phrase used in Zechariah regarding the Angel co-ordinating the restoration.

Israel is so often set up as the bride of God (Is. 54:5; 61:10; 62:4,5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; Hos. 2:19,20). This is why any infidelity of theirs to God is spoken of as

adultery (Mal. 2:11; Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Dt. 31:16; Jud. 2:17; 8:27,33; Hos. 9:1). The very language of Israel 'selling themselves to do iniquity' uses the image of prostitution. This is how God feels our even temporary and fleeting acts and thoughts of unfaithfulness. This is why God is jealous for Israel (Ex. 20:15; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15)- because His undivided love for them is so exclusive. He expects them to be totally *His*.

Isaiah 54:6 For Yahweh has called you as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, says your God- see on Zech. 11:10,11. God speaks as if He died, and therefore Israel was left as a widow (Is. 54:4,6); see on :1. "Cast off" is the term found later in the prophets: “My God will cast them away” (Hos. 9:17; Is. 54:6); the same Hebrew word occurs when God says He would “reject” Israel (Hos. 4:6). But even when Israel were to be in the land of their enemies as punishment for their sins, “I will not cast them away” [s.w.] (Lev. 26:44). God will not cast away Israel (Is. 41:9). Only if Heaven can be measured will God cast away Israel (Jer. 31:37). God has not cast away His people (Rom. 11:2). We see here the deep tension within God's mind as He considers His status and position toward His unfaithful people. He here compares Himself to a young man hopelessly in love with a woman (Israel) who was really no good, a man who took the blame when it was undoubtedly her fault (Is. 54:6,7), grieving that she wouldn't return to Him (Am. 4:8 etc.). "I am broken with their whorish heart... I am crushed" (Ez. 6:9; Jer. 8:21 NIV). God likens Himself to a broken man because of Israel's fickleness. He went through the pain of the man who knows He has been forgotten by the woman he still desperately remembers (Hos. 2:13).

Isaiah 54:7 For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you- But even in this small moment [intended to be 70 years], He was watering them and caring for them. He is involved "*every* moment" in the life of His people; Job, presented as the suffering exiles, came to realize this (Is. 27:3 cp. Job 7:18 s.w.).

The sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was the Lord. He too was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross.

The deathless love of Hosea for Gomer, the very intensity and height of it, in itself highlights the tragedy of God. That His love, yes, the passion and longing of God Himself, was rejected by His people. There are some reasons to think that the book of Hosea was rewritten (under inspiration) during the captivity. Isaiah had explained here that although God and Israel had departed from each other, they would come together again by Israel being regathered- i.e. by their return from Babylon to the land. And perhaps Hosea was rewritten at the same time, as an appeal for the Jews to 'return' to their God, i.e. to return to Judah. And yet, so tragically, whilst they all avowed their allegiance to Yahweh, generously supported the few who did return… the majority of the Jews didn't return to their God. They chose the soft life in Babylon, where they remained. It's why the close of the book of Esther is so sad- the Jews are there in prosperity and popularity in Babylon, no longer weeping by the rivers of Babylon.

Isaiah 54:8 In overflowing wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting loving kindness will I have mercy on you- We read of the anger of God "for a moment" (Ps. 30:5; Is. 54:7,8), and of His wrath coming and going, leaving Him "calm" and no longer angry (Ez. 16:42). When we sin, we provoke God to anger- i.e. at a point in time, God sees our sin, and becomes angry. This is attested many times in Scripture. But it's meaningless if God is somehow outside of our time and emotions. The very use of the terms 'remembering' and 'forgetting' suggest God is so fully willing to enter into our kind of time; for a Being cannot forget and remember simultaneously, an element of time is involved. Likewise at times we read of God being slow to anger (Ex. 34:6), at others, of Him not restraining His anger, or restraining it (Ps. 78:38; Is. 48:9; Lam. 2:8; Ez. 20:22), and holding His peace (Is. 57:11; Ps. 50:21), and being provoked to anger by the bad behaviour of His covenant people (Dt. 32:21; Ps. 78:58; Is. 65:3; Jer. 8:19). God clearly has emotions of a kind which are not unrelated to the emotions we experience, as beings made in His image. But those emotions involve a time factor in order to be emotions.

The prophets spoke of the amazing grace and eternal love of God for Israel, how His wrath endured but for a moment (Is. 54:8; 57:16); and yet Israel asked: "Will He be angry for ever?" (Jer. 3:5). It was more than frustrating for the prophets; they shared God's feelings of having poured out so great a love, to see it ignored and disregarded, no time to look at it, too busy sowing my seeds, weeding my garden, having coffee…

Says Yahweh your Redeemer- As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to

force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren

Isaiah 54:9 For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you- LXX offers "From the time of the water of Noe this is my purpose". The idea is that out of judgment comes a new creation, where the wrath of God doesn't figure because it has as it were been dealt with through the judgments. What is in view is a time when His judgments shall never again need to be revealed upon His people. This could have happened at the restoration but it evidently didn't, and all this is therefore reapplied to the time of the Lord's return.

Isaiah 54:10 For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but My loving kindness shall not depart from you- The departure of the mountains may refer to the huge geological changes at the time of the flood, but the mountains also figuratively refer to the nations and kingdoms which would be subsumed beneath the mountain of Yahweh's Kingdom- which could have come when the little stone of the exiles were cut out of the mountain of Babylon / Persia and returned to the land. But another, longer term fulfilment of the image prophecy of Dan. 2 had to come into play. As discussed there, the metals of the image initially represented "kings", and the application to "kingdoms" was brought about by the refusal of the exiles to repent and act as the little stone destroying the image of Babylon.

Neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, says Yahweh who has mercy on you- Every Israelite was intended to be a priest; they were to be "a Kingdom of

priests". The "covenant of my peace" was with both Israel (Is. 54:10) and the priesthood (Mal. 2:5). The same is true of spiritual Israel; "a spiritual house, an holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5). But the covenant in view was likely the new covenant of peace with God which the exiles could have accepted (Ez. 20; Jer. 31).

Isaiah 54:11 You afflicted- This is the word usually translated "poor" in the material sense. It was the poor who were to enthuse about the reestablishment of Zion (Is. 14:32; 41:17; 66:2 s.w.). The book of Esther makes clear that there were many wealthy Jews in Babylon / Persia. It was the simple pull of materialism which kept many of them from responding to the Gospel of quitting all that for the sake of the restored Kingdom of God. And it is the same today where "to the poor the Gospel is preached" with most response.

Tossed with storms- The usual word for "whirlwind", the symbol of God's judgment which had scattered them in exile. It is also the term used for Jonah's experience in the storm (Jonah 1:11,13); and he is to be read as representative of a disbelieving Israel.

And not comforted- The "comfort" of Is. 40 had been offered to them, but they had refused. But here God as it were feels sorry for them even in their "not comforted" position, which was due to their refusal of His comfort. Such is His grace and His earnest desire to as it were force through, as far as legitimate, His saving purpose with His people.

Behold, I will set your stones in beautiful colours, and lay your foundations with sapphires- The “stones” were laid (Nehemiah 4:2 s.w.), but not with colours, as could have been (Is. 54:11-14). And neither were the foundation stones gemstones, as could have been. This prophecy was therefore reapplied in Revelation to the things of the Kingdom to be established at the Lord’s return.

Isaiah 54:12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies, and your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones- LXX "and thy gates crystal"; GNB "and the wall around you with jewels"; see on :11. This is all alluded to in the description of the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21,22. It could've come true at the time of the exiles, had they repented; but is deferred to the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 54:13 All your children shall be taught of Yahweh; and great shall be the

peace of your children- Their children were not taught of Yahweh, because the priests were lazy to do so (Mal. 2). And so Yahweh Himself (who is speaking here) will teach them; hence GNB "I myself will teach your people". Teaching was envisaged as going forth from the restored Zion (Is. 2:2-4). But many of the exiles preferred to remain in exile because they likely excused themselves with the argument that remaining would be better for their children.

Isaiah 54:14 In righteousness you shall be established: you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not be afraid; and from terror, for it shall not come near you- This could be an appeal for the exiles to act rightly and justly so that the Kingdom could come about. Hence LXX "abstain from injustice, and thou shalt not fear; and trembling shall not come nigh thee".

Isaiah 54:15 Behold, they may gather together, but not by Me: whoever shall gather together against you shall fall because of you- The idea may be that whoever now attacks Judah, would not be doing so under God's direction as had previously been the case. And they would therefore face His wrath and destruction (:17). LXX "Behold, strangers shall come to thee by me, and shall sojourn with thee, and shall run to thee for refuge".

Isaiah 54:16 Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy- This leads on to the statement in :17 that the forming of any weapon against Israel is doomed. The creators were themselves created, by God- including those who had been created to destroy God's people in judgment. Both evil and good were from God (Is. 45:5-7). These who were created by God to destroy contrast with the category noted in :15, who were not sent by God in this mission.

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon that is formed against you will prevail- The "weapon" is that of :16. The exiles imagined all manner of opposition if they were to accept the prophetic call to quit Babylon / Persia and return to Judah. But God's promise was that they would leave in peace, be led by His visible presence and have the natural creation bursting into applause on the way (see on Is. 55:12). But they doubted that, focusing upon all the human devices ["weapons"] which they imagined might stand in the way. So many today likewise resist the call of the Gospel of the restored Kingdom of God for the same reasons. The word for "prevail" is used four times in the record of Rebekah's journey from the east

(where the exiles were) to the land of promise; it was indeed made prosperous (Gen. 24:21,40,42,56). And their journey to the land of the Kingdom likewise would have been made prosperous, and no opposition to it could have prospered with God on their side. The prophetic word of the restoration was to prosper and achieve their return and revival (Is. 55:11).

And you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgement- See on Is. 51:1,6,7. As explained on Is. 50:8, we need not fear insults nor false accusation from men because we shall ultimately be justified, and even now have righteousness imputed to us. And the exiles were invited to believe that, as they imagined all the verbal opposition they might encounter by returning to Judah.

This is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh, and their righteousness which is of Me, says Yahweh- This again refers to what Paul would term imputed righteousness, counting right those who believe in God's grace. LXX "ye shall be righteous before me".

Isaiah Chapter 55

Isaiah 55:1 Come, everyone who thirsts, to the waters! Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price- LXX "wine and fat", associated with the offerings. No longer would poverty or lack of resources mean that sacrifice could not be offered. One by one, every possible excuse in the minds of the exiles was dealt with. God would provide all and overcome every possible fear and imagined problem in responding to the call of the Kingdom, just as He does today. Cyrus even decreed that he would meet the costs of all sacrifices; he let the people go "without price" (s.w. Is. 45:13), for no personal reward. The same phrase "without money and without price" is found in Job 28:15 regarding the value of wisdom; see on :2. The book of Job is full of connections to Isaiah, as it was rewritten to encourage the exiles in captivity. The greatest wisdom was to leave Babylon / Persia and return to Judah, with all the inversion of values this required. But this appeal to the exiles wasn't responded to. And so these ideas were reapplied to the Lord Jesus, in His appeal to us: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me" (Jn. 7:37,38).

Is. 55:1-6 bids Israel seek the Lord, and then comments that His word will accomplish what He wants it to achieve; the earth / land will respond to the rain of His word which He sends upon it (:11). This seems to be saying that somehow there will always be response from Israel to the Gospel. And the following verses hint that this may be specifically so in the last days, for :12 says that the result of the land's response to the word will be that "ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing". Their response to the word in the last days ushers in the Kingdom.

Isaiah 55:2 Why do you spend money for that which is not bread?- LXX "Wherefore do ye value at the price of money?". This invites them to a radical revulation of life and the things which comprise it. The monetarization and capitalisation of everything was going on even in ancient societies. God's people are asked to a radical revaluation of all things.

And your labour for that which doesn't satisfy?- But they continued to do so; they were as greedy dogs who could 'not be satisfied' (Is. 56:11 s.w.), obsessed with personal gain. Again we detect that it was a love of the soft life of materialism in Persia which was the root cause for the exiles not responding to the invitation, and the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, portrayin the

Jews as wealthy and popular.

Listen diligently to Me- I noted on :1 an allusion to the appeal of wisdom in Job 28, and this here is a repeat of wisdom's call in the Proverbs. The way of wisdom was to accept the invitation to the free feast of fat things which Yahweh had prepared in Judah for those who quit Babylon.

And eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness- This refers to the banquet awaiting them on return to Zion, the feast of fat things of Is. 25:6- if they would say "Yes" to the Kingdom program. The Messianic banquet could then have come. It has now been reapplied, to our experience in the breaking of bread now, and ultimately to the marriage supper of the lamb when the Lord returns.

Isaiah 55:3 Turn your ear, and come to Me- The invitation therefore was to the great feast of :1,2- all for free. The parable of the great suppor therefore alludes to Is. 55:1-3; and thereby would suggest that we can interpret the call to the supper as the call of the Gospel, and the hungry people sitting down to a fine meal as our ecclesial experience now (although this isn't to say that we can't read it as concerning the future Kingdom too).

Hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David- This everlasting covenant refers to the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31 and Ez. 20, but it would only be iven if they 'heard' in obedience and repentance. The promises to David are described as the mercy of God (Is. 55:3; Ps. 89:33,34). God having a son is the sign of His love for us, and this must elicit a response in us. David himself marvelled that such mercy had been shown to him: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house…thou knowest thy servant" (2 Sam. 7:18-20). And yet in the very next chapters, we read of how David made a renewed attempt to show mercy to the house of Saul. Mephibosheth says that he is "thy servant…what is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such… as I am?" (2 Sam. 9:8). Mephibosheth is using the very words which David used to God; David is showing mercy to Mephibosheth in the very way in which the promises of God to him were the "mercies" shown to David. Appreciating that the promises concern us personally, and that they reveal such loving grace from the Father, can only lead to a similar response in showing love and grace through entering into the lives and destinies of others. Having expounded the deeper aspects of the promises to Abraham in

Romans 9-11, Paul spins the argument round to practical issues: "I beseech you *therefore,* brethren, by the mercies of God [a technical term for the promises- 'the sure mercies of David', Is. 55:3], that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). The "him" of :4 is the "sure mercies of David" of :3, perhaps an intensive plural for the great mercy shown to David, which was in the promise of his Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus.

"The sure mercies of David" result in the wicked man forsaking his way (Is. 55:3,7). The description of the promises to David as "sure mercies" (1 Chron. 17:13) may perhaps be with a reference to his sin with Bathsheba; his forgiveness in that incident is typical of that which we all receive (Rom. 4:6-8). The very existence of the "mercies of / to David" therefore inspire us in forsaking sinful thoughts and wicked ways (Is. 55:7).

Isaiah 55:4 Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples- LXX understands "the peoples" here as "the Gentiles". As noted on :3, the "him" is the "sure mercies of David", an intensive plural for the great mercy shown to David, which was in the promise of his Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus. The eternal covenant offered to the exiles was also going to be offered to the Gentiles, who would form a new multiethnic people of God (:5).

Isaiah 55:5 Behold, you shall call a nation that you don't know- As explained in :4, a new multiethnic people of God was to be formed around the new covenant being offered to all. The Jews would "call" the Gentiles by the name of their own nation, Israel. They would 'know' them in the Hebraic sense of knowing, i.e. having a spiritual relationship with them.

And a nation that didn't know you shall run to you, because of Yahweh your God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you- Again, the Hebraic sense of 'knowing' includes the idea of having a spiritual relationship with the other party. The remnant of the Gentile nations in the land would see how Yahweh had glorified the returned exiles, and would eagerly ["run to..."] wish to accept this God as theirs. But in reality, the exiles returned to the land and mixed with the Gentiles, worshipping their gods and marrying their women as they had done in the lands of their exile.

Isaiah 55:6 Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call you on Him while He is

near- The offer of the Messianic banquet (:1-3) and new covenant (:3) was not going to be on the table for ever. The exiles had to repent, leave exile and return to the land in order to reestablish and rebuild the things of God's Kingdom. There was no such repentance. And those who did return were motivated by personal gain and were not spiritual people, as the restoration prophets and the historical records in Ezra and Nehemiah make clear. So the window of opportunity closed, and the things of the new covenant, Messianic banquet and restored Kingdom became reapplied and deferred. The offered salvation was "near" to them, about to come (see on Is. 46:13; 51:5); but it swooped close to them, but they refused to catch it. But the same Hebrew word for "near" is translated “kinsman”. The servant songs go on to explain how Yahweh could become our kinsman through His Son, our representative, of our nature. See on Is. 49:26. The appeal is therefore urgent, because for the exiles, the amazing offer was time limited. It is therefore an appeal for repentance, hence LXX: "Seek ye the Lord, and when ye find him, call upon him; and when he shall draw nigh to you, let the ungodly leave his ways...".

Like Israel we can seek God daily, taking delight in approaching unto Him; and yet need the exhortation to urgently seek Him (Is. 55:6 cp. 58:2). We can appear to seek unto Him in prayer and attendance at our meetings, and yet not seek Him in the real sense at all. Likewise men came to Jesus physically, at quite some effort to themselves, and yet He tells them that they have not truly come to Him at all (Jn. 6:24 cp. 35-37). We can draw near with our mouth, honour Him with our lips, “but have removed [our] heart far from me” (Is. 29:13).

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh- We note that the way of a man is his thoughts. The appeal for repentance was and is essentially a call to change our thinking, our self talk; and to adopt God's thoughts, which at that time were not Judah's thoughts (:8). The return to Yahweh was to be reflected in a return to the land. We might have expected a call to forsake idolatry and other specific sins, but the appeal is to change their thinking. For that is the essential issue. We note the same juxtaposition of ideas in Is. 57:15- the exalted lofty one, dwelling in the hearts of men.

And He will have mercy on him; and to our God- "Mercy" is s.w. "compassion".

Unlike the stone faced gods of the Gentiles, Yahweh had emotion and passion, and internal conflicts. And His word reveals them to us. This "compassion" was only to be shown when Israel repented (s.w. Dt. 30:3) and would not be shown if they were impenitent (s.w. Is. 9:17; 27:11; 55:7). But although they had not repented, Yahweh still felt that fatherly "compassion" toward them (Is. 49:15 s.w.). He is unafraid of appearing to contradict His word, such is the passion of His love.

For He will abundantly pardon- This is the same word as often used in the law; when sacrifice was offered, "it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4:31,35 etc.). But in exile there was no opportunity to offer acceptable sacrifice. A forsaking of thoughts was what was required; for our hearts are the essential sacrifice. This "pardon" would have been given had the exiles had accepted the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 33:8).

Isaiah 55:8 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says Yahweh- This is not a statement about the inability of humanity to think as God does. Rather is it a lament that Judah didn't do this, when they could have done (:7). Note the parallel between the wicked's " way" and " his thoughts" ; they are unrelated to God's thoughts/ ways (Is. 55:8). Is. 55:7 is therefore saying that after conversion there must most importantly be a change of mind, an aspiring after God's unattainable thoughts / ways.

Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts- This is not to say that His thoughts are unattainable. The whole idea of :7,8 is that Judah could have God's thoughts. They are here being inspired to touch the sky, to rise above the mundane, earthly thoughts of the flesh. Is. 55:6,7 implies that we can find God in this life, we can return to Him. But Is. 55:9 then says that " as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are (God's) ways higher than your ways" . This seems to be one of the many Isaiah allusions to the book of Job: "Canst thou by searching find out God?" , the answer being 'No'. This shows that although ultimately we *cannot* find God by our searching, such is His moral infinity, yet if we *seek* to find Him, He will count us *as if* we have found Him; and we can think His thoughts (:7). Thus God will *impute* complete forsaking of human thinking to us. Our least response is to impute forsaking of sin to our brethren, and to think as Yahweh does.

Isaiah 55:10 For as the rain comes down and the snow from the sky and doesn't return there but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, and gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater- This statement about the power of God's word is in the context of urging Judah that they can in fact repent, and think God's thoughts (:7-9). The returned exiles, or [later] all who wished to become part of God's restored Kingdom, would be empowered by the water of the Spirit (see on Is. 44:3) to "spring up" on what had previously been dry ground (Is. 44:4). That Spirit would be articulated partly through the prophetic word (Is. 55:10 s.w. "bud", "spring up"). This will be the restored Eden, where Yahweh had caused the vegetation to "spring up" (s.w. Gen. 2:5). This sringing up or growing would be in the fulfilment of the promises to David of the establishment of the Kingdom of his seed (s.w. 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 132:17). But the springing up would be of a community of people, the plural seed who were "in" the singular Messianic seed, who would think God's thoughts (:7). And this is now experienced through baptism into the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:27-29). It is "righteousness" which would "spring up" (s.w. Is. 61:11); the work of the Spirit would result in the seed becoming righteous through their mental, spiritual transformation. And yet it will also be on account of their status as "in" the "branch of righteousness" which will "spring up" (Jer. 33:15). The work of the Spirit will be, and is, to transform the plural seed in practice into what they are by status in the Messiah- righteous. And it is this power, this gift, this Divine 'causing' us to be righteous, which every spiritual person so thirsts for.

Repeatedly, later Scripture alludes to the fact that it was by the word of God that the world was created; and that same powerful, re-forming, saving word was and is that heard by His people still (Ps. 33:6,9; 104:7; 147:15-18; 148:3-5; Is. 40:26; 44:23; 48:13; 50:2; 55:10). A. Heidel comments: "The word of the Babylonian deities was not almighty. On the contrary, the word of the creator in Gen. 1 is almighty. He commands and the result is in perfect conformity to his command…there is a profound difference between the Bible and non-biblical religions" [on this point of the word being the agency of creation] (Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 126).

Isaiah 55:11 so shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing I sent it to do- In the immediate context of the exiles, the LXX seems to suggest that God's word of judgment on His people would not end

until that word had produced the required response, which was repentance: "It shall by no means turn back until all the things which I willed shall have been accomplished; and I will make thy ways prosperous, and will effect my commands". The prospering of the prophetic word of restoration was certain, if they accepted it; see on Is. 54:17. But the context here is of thinking God's thoughts, even if His thoughts are higher than the earth (:7-9). It was His word of promised restoration which could achieve that; if they believed they would and could be restored to God, then this would affect their thinking.

We put God to endless pain and labour in order to fulfil His wish to save men, if we don't fulfil what in prospect we could fulfil. In the context of the restoration, Yahweh truly said that "...so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (AV). His word will have fulfilment in the end, but it can have its fulfilment in us, here and now. Nehemiah twice stated that Yahweh was prospering him in his work of restoring Zion [Neh. 1:11; 2:20 s.w.]; but generally, the word of prophecy was deferred in its fulfilment. Let's not be satisficers as Israel were, minimalists happy so long as we have our bit of land to live on, our cieled roof to dwell under... and neglect *His* house.

The RV translates the parable of the sower as if the seed sown is the convert: "he that was sown…" (Mt. 13:19 RV). And later on in Mt. 13:38 we are told so again: "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom". Yet the seed was a symbol of the word of God. The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (Is. 55:11). The apparent dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Is this parable only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man's rejection? Thus the word of God was 'made void' by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV- a conscious allusion to Is. 55:11?) …. This is perhaps one of the most defiantly unanswerable questions in our experience. As an aside, one possible explanation is that "the word" which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God's intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the 'prospering' of the Servant in His work: Is. 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: "… until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished". Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God's word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 AVmg., where we read that "the man clothed with linen"- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- "returned

the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me". The word 'returned' in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren't.

Isaiah 55:12 For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing; and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands- The immediate possibility was that the exiles would leave Babylon in peace, after "the servant" negotiated their release from there with full blessing and no violence; and the natural creation would as it were burst into applause as they journey to Zion. Thus GNB "You will leave Babylon with joy; you will be led out of the city in peace. The mountains and hills will burst into singing, and the trees will shout for joy".

But this could have had a yet earlier fulfilment in Isaiah's time. As the Jews of Hezekiah's time went out of Jerusalem to a revitalized land and started to receive the tribute of the surrounding nations (the primary application of Isaiah's Kingdom prophecies), so the saints will pour forth from Jerusalem to establish the Kingdom worldwide. "Ye shall go out (from Jerusalem) with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and hills shall break forth before you into singing..." (Is. 55:12). After the surrounding of Christ in Jerusalem and the defeat of Gog, Ps. 2 describes the establishment of the Kingdom worldwide: "I shall give the heathen for thine inheritance... kiss the son, lest He be angry " (:8,12).

Even as late as the time of Esther, this could have had a fulfilment. For the same word for "gladness" is used of the joy of the exiles when they were saved from Haman's destruction (Esther 9:17). The subtext to the otherwise positive picture of good triumphing over evil at the end of Esther, with a day of feasting and gladness proclaimed, is that their day of feasting and gladness was prophetically intended to be in Zion (Is. 25:6 s.w.). They went into exile exactly because they had days of 'feasting' and didn't respond to the prophetic message (s.w. Is. 5:12). It was in Zion that they were to experience "gladness" (Is. 35:10) when they returned (Is. 51:11). They were to leave the lands of their captivity in "gladness" and thus come to Zion (Is. 55:12 s.w.). But they didn't return. The "day of gladness" was to be accompanied by the blowing of trumpets (s.w. Num. 10:10), summoning them to Zion. But there is no mention of this; because they didn't want to return there, but to remain in prosperous Persia.

Isaiah 55:13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to Yahweh for a name, for an

everlasting sign that shall not be cut off- The myrtle (= "Esther") was a native of Persia and not Palestine. The idea is that the captives would return from Persia and be planted in the restored kingdom. The curse of thorns and thistles placed upon the *eretz* in Eden would then thereby be removed. But the book of Esther has a sad ending, in spiritual terms; for God's people were prosperous and accepted in Persian society, and preferred to remain there rather than do the work of the Kingdom and allow its restoration.

Isaiah Chapter 56

Isaiah 56:1 Thus says Yahweh, Keep justice, and do righteousness; for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed- The salvation of Yahweh's Kingdom could have soon come, *if* Judah had 'kept judgment'. But Malachi and Haggai, along with the record of the injustices of the Jewish nobles in Nehemiah, show the lack of judgment / justice amongst the returnees. Israel should have been just and not abusive of their brethren, precisely because "my salvation is near to come". We are to do righteousness, because God's righteousness is about to be revealed (RV). We seek to live the Kingdom life now, seeing we will so soon, by grace, be living it anyway.

The offer of the Messianic banquet in the preceding chapter (Is. 55:1-3) and new covenant (Is. 55:3) was not going to be on the table for ever. The exiles had to repent, leave exile and return to the land in order to reestablish and rebuild the things of God's Kingdom. There was no such repentance. And those who did return were motivated by personal gain and were not spiritual people, as the restoration prophets and the historical records in Ezra and Nehemiah make clear. So the window of opportunity closed, and the things of the new covenant, Messianic banquet and restored Kingdom became reapplied and deferred. The offered salvation was "near" to them, about to come (see on Is. 46:13; 51:5); but it swooped close to them, but they refused to catch it. The appeal is therefore urgent, because for the exiles, the amazing offer was time limited.

There is a parallel passage in Is. 50:8: "He is near who justifies me; who will bring charges against me? Let us stand up together: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me". Those who feel the real justification of the Spirit, the real power of imputed righteousness, will not be unsettled by human criticism or "charges" brought. For the nearness of God's justification in Christ is more than sufficient. Is. 56:1 speaks of how Yahweh's righteousness (imputed to us by His justification of us in Christ) is "near to come", and His salvation soon to be revealed. As Paul develops in Rom. 1-8, we are saved by the imputation of righteousness, justification by faith. But that is yet to be revealed, although it could have been "near" even in time for the exiles. They refused these wonderful things, but they are true for us too, as we await the soon revelation of the Lord Jesus at judgment day. Keeping this hope in view means we shall ultimately have nobody and nothing charged against us, there will be no legal adversary in court with us at the last day. And this means that we handle accusation, both justified and false, in that perspective. And yet it is criticism and the shame which arises from it which can psychologically and spiritually destroy people in

this life.

The tone in Isaiah appears to change now. The historical interlude in Is. 37-39 has demonstrated that the prophecies in Is. 1-36 of judgment at the hands of Assyria were ameliorated and deferred by the intense repentance and intercession of Isaiah's school of prophets. But the interlude concludes with the bad news that the reformation was not thorough, and that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon; and therefore the earlier prophecies of judgment by Assyria would be reapplied to judgment by Babylon. But out of that there was to come a wonderful restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel, explained in the so called 'second Isaiah' (Is. 40-55). But sadly, the Jews who returned failed to allow that amazing potential to come true; and that is the burden of the so called 'third Isaiah' (Is. 56-66). It seems that God therefore gave up trying to restore the Kingdom in a political, national sense; and looked instead to a purpose with individuals who had His word in their humbled hearts.

Isaiah 56:2 Blessed is the man who does this- As noted on :1, God was now looking to build relationships with just some individuals who were spiritually minded, seeing that on a national level His wonderful project for the restoration of His Kingdom had been disallowed by them.

And the son of man- The appeal is to individuals within the community, but "the son of man" looks forward to the Lord Jesus, the representative servant Messiah called "Israel", who would alone be completely obedient. Because Is. 64:7 laments that there was apparently not a single one in the community who would 'hold fast' the offered covenant (s.w. "who holds it fast").

Who holds it fast- To "hold fast" means to keep covenant (Is. 56:4,6; 2 Chron. 7:22; Jer. 31:32). The "it" they were to hold fast to was God's righteousness and not their own (Is. 56:1). But they refused to do so because like Job, they held fast (s.w.) to their own righteousness (s.w. Job 27:6). The word means literally, 'to harden / strengthen'. Then individual who wanted to accept the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31:32 and Ez. 20 would in turn be strengthened / confirmed by God in that way, just as today (s.w. 2 Chron. 16:9; 19:11). Hezekiah had initially 'strengthened himself' in Yahweh, just as his name means; but didn't remain in that way (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:5,7). Isaiah is asking his audience to continue as Hezekiah could have been. The returning exiles were initially 'strengthened' (s.w. Ezra 1:6; 6:22; Neh. 2:18 etc.) but on a national level, they hadn't continued in this. So individuals are now bidden strengthen themselves, and to be strengthened, in the things of the new covenant.

Who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil- There was a problem with Sabbath abuse during the restoration. And so these potential prophecies of what could have happened at the restoration were precluded from fulfilment. The Sabbath was intended to teach self-control, restraining the hand from doing evil.

Isaiah 56:3 Neither let the foreigner who has joined himself to Yahweh speak, saying, Yahweh will surely separate me from His people- There may be reference to how the returned exiles married Gentiles and then separated from them at the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Perhaps this is saying that this was unnecessary if those foreigners had joined themselves to Yahweh.

Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree-

Isaiah 56:4 For thus says Yahweh, To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and hold fast My covenant- This was the new covenant offered now to just individuals within the community of exiles, who were urged to "hold fast" the righteousness imputed from God which was part of the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31:32 and Ez. 20 (see on :2).

It seems a reasonable assumption that Hezekiah chose to be a eunuch for the Kingdom's sake. There is the implication in Is. 56:3-8 that his example inspired others in Israel to make the same commitment. They are comforted by Isaiah: "Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold (the same Hebrew word is used *five times* about Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 29:3,34; 31:4; 32:5,7) of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off". Hezekiah had lamented that he would die without a seed (Is. 38:12; Is. 53), and so did those who had also become (in their minds?) eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom. There was that human desire for a seed, a "house" to perpetuate their name. But they are promised a name in God's house (family) in the Kingdom, better than of sons and daughters in this life. This alludes to Ruth 4:15, where Ruth is described as being better than sons to Naomi. In other words, the Ruth: Naomi relationship, featuring as it did a willingness to deny marriage for the sake of the God of Israel, was a type of our relationship with God. In its restoration context, it has been suggested that this passage was a comfort to Nehemiah, who appears to have been a (physical) eunuch, and hence barred from entry to the temple which

he was devoted to. Hence his words: "Who is there, that *being as I am* would go into the temple...?" (Neh. 6:11). Isaiah is comforting him and those like him that they would eternally live in the temple.

Isaiah 56:5 to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off- The Gentiles who truly joined themselves to Yahweh would be "better than" the ethnic Jews, God's previous "sons and daughters".

All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

Isaiah 56:6 Also the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh- This was the new covenant offered now to just individuals within the community of exiles, who were urged to "hold fast" the righteousness imputed from God which was part of the new covenant offered to the exiles in Jer. 31:32 and Ez. 20 (see on :2). But this new covenant wasn't only open to Jews or Israelites; it was also open to the repentant minority of Gentiles which the prophets often foresee. On the basis of this new covenant, a new, multiethnic people of God could be formed; and that is what is happening today. But it could have happened then too, and the story of Jonah is surely to underline the possibility. As noted throughout Is. 13 onwards, the judgments upon the Gentiles in the land are only because they have refused to repent. God's desire was that the Gentile "briers and thorns" upon whom He would march (Is. 27:4) would "take hold" of Him and make peace, entering into covenant with Him as He offered. Is. 27:5 likewise speaks of this latter day 'taking hold' (s.w.) of Yahweh by the remnant of the judged Gentiles.

To minister to Him and to love the name of Yahweh, to be His servants, each one who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it, and holds fast covenant- Ministering and being Yahweh's servants is the language of priesthood. The new covenant offered to the exiles was not a repeat of the Mosaic covenant. Now, Gentiles who

took hold of the new covenant could serve on an equal footing. Is. 56:6 defines what is meant by “a house of prayer for all nations”- it was for those of all nations who “join themselves to the Lord, to serve him and to love the name of the Lord... every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and *taketh hold of my covenant*”. “The people of the land” were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God’s intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel’s temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not.

But these things have all been reapplied to we who accept the new covenant today. We have joined ourselves to the Lord (in baptism, in our case) *in order* to be His slaves. We love our Master, and are committed to Him and His cause 24 hours / day. And the future Kingdom will involve the same; for quite simply "His servants shall serve him" in that age, continually and eternally (Rev. 22:3).

Isaiah 56:7 Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples- See on :6. Their sacrifices, those of the Gentiles, were not just those they offered for themselves, but for others; for they were also to be ministers / servants of the sanctuary (:6).

The Sabbath was polluted, as Nehemiah recorded, and the Gentiles were mixed with and affirmed in their idolatry, rather than converted and brought to worship in the temple. And so the revelation of Yahweh’s salvation and righteousness in the Kingdom was deferred. The way Jews and Gentiles ate together at Nehemiah’s table (Neh. 5:17) pointed forward to what was almost possible. But in the end, they mixed with and adopted the ways of the Gentiles, and their leadership arrogantly developed a theology that said that dirty Gentiles could never be saved; for salvation, they reasoned, was only for Jews. The idea that the temple was to be a place for Gentiles also to worship not only didn't come true; but the very opposite happened. The Jews became intolerant of the Gentiles, nationalistically proud, and rejected the Samaritans from worshipping in the rebuilt Jewish temple. And therefore the Samaritans had to build their own temple on Mount Gerazim. Historical records suggest that the Samaritans dearly

wished to worship in the Jews' temple, and only built their own one because the Jews disallowed them. See M. Gaster, *The Samaritans* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1925) p. 28 ff. .

The Ezekiel prophecies of Ez. 40-48 had an intended and possible fulfilment at the time of the restoration under Ezra, but this was nullified by Israel's lack of response; and therefore, at least in principle, the prophecies had their fulfilment delayed until the second coming. This enables the prophecies to fit in with others which speak of some kind of centralized worship system in the future restored Kingdom (e.g. Is. 2:2-4; 56:7). Or it could be that these prophecies of Isaiah are likewise talking about what was potentially possible for a restored, obedient Israel; particularly at the time of the restoration from Babylon. The lesson that comes out of all this is the extent to which God is willing to work with us, to tailor His purpose according to how far we are prepared to work with Him, and in that sense to allow Himself to be limited by us. There could be no greater inspiration to a maximal commitment to His purpose and His work.

Some of the Bible's 'prophecies' are command more than prediction. The Lord Jesus criticized the Jews for trading in the temple because "Is it not written, My house *shall be* called of all nations the house of prayer" (Mk. 11:17). We can easily read this as meaning that one day, a 'house of prayer for all nations' was to be built in Jerusalem. But in that case, why should not the Jews trade in the temple there and then, well before this was to happen, say, 2000 years later? The Lord surely means that the prophecy that the temple "shall be called…" a house of *prayer* was a command more than a prediction. It "shall be" a place for *prayer* and not *trading*. The 'fulfilment' of this statement was dependent upon them praying there and encouraging all nations to pray there; yet they could limit the fulfilment of the 'prophecy' by stopping Gentiles praying there, and by discouraging prayer there because of their trading policies. Thus the Lord saw the prophecy as more of a command than mere prediction. 'Prophecy' really means the speaking forth of God's word, rather than the foretelling of the future. The prophecies of Ezekiel about the temple can be understood more as command than as simple prediction. This is how Israel were to behave and how they were to rebuild the temple. The Lord several times quoted an Old Testament passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise", leaving them to complete: "...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the

subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

Isaiah 56:8 The Lord Yahweh who gathers the outcasts of Israel says, Yet will I gather others to him, besides his own who are gathered- This verse is connected with :7 and explains it, according to the LXX. The Gentile "others" are going to be accepted by God on an equal footing with the ethnic Jews, and even become "ministers" in the sanctuary on the same basis as the Levites (:6). They would be "gathered" to the "ensign", the standard pole, in Zion. This now refers to the cross of the Lord Jesus (Is. 11:12; 43:5 s.w.). The exiles "gathered" from the nations were to come to Zion along with the repentant Gentile remnant who were likewise "gathered". This is to become the multiethnic ecclesia- LXX "for I will gather to him [Israel] a congregation / ekklesia". That ecclesia is based around the hope of Israel, for they are gathered "to Israel". They would gather themselves (Is. 60:4) and yet be confirmed in this by being gathered. Likewise all who respond to the call of the new covenant are confirmed by the Spirit in that response. See on Is. 57:13.

Isaiah 56:9 All you animals of the field, come to devour, all you animals in the forest- But despite all the wonderful spiritual potentials outlined in :1-8, the reality was that the people would not respond. Instead of the repentant Gentiles gathering themselves to Zion, they would like wild beasts gather together to yet again devour God's people for their impenitence.

Isaiah 56:10 His watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they can't bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber- The watchmen of God's people would not see the gathering of the wild beasts of the nations in judgment against them (:6). The LXX suggests this blindness and lack of knowledge was given to them, as confirmation of how they didn't want to see: "See how they are all blinded: they have not known".

Isaiah 62:6,7 speaks of watchmen [= the prophets, Ezekiel 3:17; Jer. 6:17; Hab. 2:1] set upon Jerusalem's walls as watchmen, keeping no silence [in their prophesying] until Jerusalem was established. For the link between the prophets and standing on a watchtower, see Hab. 2:1. But false prophets arose, as we see

in Ezekiel's experience amongst the exiles. Watchmen upon the walls were supposed to be looking for something- for the approach of the Messianic messenger with good tidings of Judah's full return from captivity, of which Isaiah had spoken in Is. 52:7,8. But most of Judah preferred to stay in Babylon, took up a collection for the few who did return… and no Messiah could appear with that news. God had promised this- but He asked to be put in remembrance of His promises (Is. 43:26), i.e. He asked for those watchmen to be His 'rememberancers', even though He cannot in that sense forget them (Ps. 119:49; Jer. 14:21). In all this we see an exquisite picture of how God works with men, how His promised faithfulness and omnipotence all the same has built into it a requirement for human prayerfulness and response. The reality was that the watchmen / prophets of Israel were blind, ignorant and sleepy.

Isaiah 56:11 Yes, the dogs are greedy, they can never have enough; and these are shepherds who can't understand: they have each turned to their own way, each one to his gain, from every quarter- "Can never have enough" are the same words as the lament in Is. 55:2: "And your labour for that which doesn't satisfy?". They were as greedy dogs who could 'not be satisfied', obsessed with personal gain, and disregarding the free feast of fat things Yahweh had prepared for them in Judah. Again we detect that it was a love of the soft life of materialism in Persia which was the root cause for the exiles not responding to the invitation, and the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, portraying the Jews as wealthy and popular. See on Is. 57:17.

Isaiah 56:12 Come, say they, I will get wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, great beyond measure- This is the way the flesh reasons; that life shall continue as it is today. Living for the moment is the temptation we continually battle with. Faith is all about looking to the future, and beyond the very narrow horizons of the immediate present. Drunken feasts are used as a metaphor of judgment; they were drinking their own condemnation, and what was so tragic was that they could have worked towards the reestablishment of God's Kingdom and their own place in eternity. The context in the next chapter is of their idolatry so we can assume these drunken feasts were part of idol worship rituals; like the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 11, they turned the worship of the true God into a form of idolatry. Again we see that the false prophets / teachers of :10 are condemned not to much for theological error arising from incorrect intellectual process in expounding God's word, but for moral false teaching. This is likewise the nature of false teaching in the New

Testament.

Isaiah Chapter 57

Isaiah 57:1 The righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the coming evil- This is probably alluding to what God did to Joash (2 Kings 22:20 cp. 23:29). But this was happening to the righteous amongst the exiles. They were suffering real persecution even unto death from the false prophets. Jewish tradition claims that Isaiah and Ezekiel died violent deaths at the hands of the Jews, and likely there is some truth in that. We notice the parallel here between "righteous men" and "merciful men". "Mercy" alludes to the covenants which they were faithful to, but they all the same were characterized by "mercy" as the lead characteristic of those who accepted them and were transformed by them internally.

Isaiah 57:2 He enters into peace; they rest in their beds, each one who walks in his uprightness- see on Rev. 21:12. RVmg. "each one straight before him". Jer. 31:9 had prophesied of the restoration: “They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a *straight way*, wherein they shall *not stumble*”. Likewise Is. 63:13 reminded the returnees that when they had been led through the wilderness to Canaan under Moses, they did not stumble [s.w.]. Although these righteous individuals died without seeing the restored Kingdom of God (:1), they entered into peace and would later be resurrected to participate in it. That is the implication I see in these words.

Despite the promise of a "straight way" to Zion, both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren’t sure that they would be given “a straight way” with Yahweh’s protection. Neh. 4:10 records that “Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is *decayed* [s.w. “stumble”, Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall”. They were easily discouraged by the words of the surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Ezra 8:21 LXX describes how Ezra fasted for them to be given a “straight way”, as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfill the prophecy. Note how Ezekiel’s vision of the cherubim featured “straight” progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to “keep in step with the Spirit”... They were to walk “each one straight before him” (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12).

Ps. 107:2,7 RV speak of Israel being gathered out of the nations and being led in a “straight way” to Zion, as they had [potentially] been enabled to do on their departure from Egypt. Yet then they spent 38 years walking a distance coverable in just 11 days- because they did not walk in the “straight way”.

Isaiah 57:3 But draw near here- This is the language of a summons to judgment. Judgment is in essence ongoing now, and we shouldn't imagine that God is not paying attention and will only open the books at judgment day. And so those amongst the exiles who were advocating paganism are called to judgment, right then.

You sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the prostitute- They were not in God's eyes the true Israel. The same ideas are used by Ezekiel about the exiles (Ez. 16:3,45). The prostitute and sorceress was Babylon; they had so assimilated with Babylon that they were no longer the sons of Zion but of Babylon.

Isaiah 57:4 Against whom do you sport yourselves?- 'To take delight'; and their delight ought to have been in the things of Yahweh rather than their idols and materialism (Is. 55:2; 58:14; 66:11 s.w.).

Against whom do you make a wide mouth, and stick out your tongue?- The language of persecution and mockery (Ps. 35:21).

Aren’t you children of disobedience, a seed of falsehood- See on :3.

Isaiah 57:5 You who inflame yourselves among the oaks- The same word in Is. 61:3 of how they should have been trees of righteousness. The continual usage of language about Yahweh worship in the context of idol worship suggests that they were justifying their idolatry as a form of idol worship. For at no time did God's people ever formally annul their relationship with Yahweh. As they had drunken feasts in the name of Yahweh worship (Is. 56:12), so they inflamed themselves in sexual lust as part of the same rituals.

Under every green tree; who kill the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?- Offering of children to idols was continuing even amongst the exiles, and Ezekiel appears to allude to it (Ez. 6:13,21). They did it under clefts of the rocks, thinking it would be hidden. When instead they should have been as Moses, cowering there in fear and respect of Yahweh's majesty and glory.

Isaiah 57:6 Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they are your lot; you have even poured a drink offering to them- There is a word play between the Hebrew for "smooth stones" and "portion". The reference may be to some idolatrous practice involving smooth stones. But the word for "smooth stones" also means deceit or flattery, and is used about the idols the exiles worshipped in Ez. 12:24. Yahweh was the portion of His people, but through idolatry done in His Name, He was no longer their portion (Dt. 4:19; Jer. 10:16).

You have offered an offering- This again confirms the impression that they were offering to the idols as a form of Yahweh worship.

But shall I be appeased for these things?- Judgment was going to have to come for them (Jer. 5:9), rather than the restoration of the Kingdom which had been possible.

Isaiah 57:7 On a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed; there also you went up to offer sacrifice- This is surely an allusion to mount Zion. It could be that the returned exiles committed adultery with their idols there, and that idea is confirmed in :8; or that they used other high mountains as an equivalent of mount Zion.

Isaiah 57:8 Behind the doors and the posts you have set up your memorial- It seems that within the rebuilt temple in Zion there was idolatry going on (see on :7). Or the door posts could refer to their own homes, where God's law ought to have been written for a memorial (Dt. 6:9; 11:20); but instead they effectively had there a memorial to their idols, right at the heart of domestic life.

For you have uncovered to someone besides Me, and have gone up; you have enlarged your bed, and made you a covenant with them: you loved their bed wherever you saw it- This is the whoredom with other gods amongst the exiles spoken of in Ez. 16:25; they were doing the very things for which they had gone into exile for (Jer. 2:20; 3:2; Hos. 4:12). Covenant relationship with Yahweh is intimate, an exposing of our nakedness before Him in a way we cannot do to anyone or anything else. They had rejected the new covenant which was offered for a covenant with idols.

Isaiah 57:9 You went to the king with oil and increased your perfumes, and sent your ambassadors far off, and debased yourself even to Sheol- "The king" is

"Moloch", hence GNB "You put on your perfumes and ointments and go to worship the god Molech. To find gods to worship, you send messengers far and wide, even to the world of the dead". By such sin, they brought themselves down to the grave. Just as they had sent ambassadors to other nations in seeking help against the Babylonians and Assyrians, now they were doing just the same. All this arose because Babylon sent its ambassadors to Judah and they accepted them and later their gods, as noted on Is. 39. But now they were sending their ambassadors to the nations, seeking help and relationships rather than being exclusively for Yahweh.

Isaiah 57:10 You were wearied with the length of your way; yet you didn't say, 'It is in vain'. You found a reviving of your strength; therefore you weren't faint- Not only is the logic of choosing God's way so powerful, but the way of the flesh is not satisfying. Sin became a weariness to Israel even before they reaped the punishment for it (Is. 57:10); their mind was alienated from the lovers they chose; they left the one they left the God of Israel for (Ez. 23:17). They always wanted *new* gods; they were never satisfied with their idols (Jer. 44:3). GNB "You think your obscene idols give you strength, and so you never grow weak" reveals the classic situation of the addict. They continued in the addiction because they apparently were getting some strength to continue in it from the addiction.

Isaiah 57:11 Of whom have you been afraid and in fear, that you lie, and have not remembered Me, nor laid it to your heart?- This connects with their fear of the Babylonian leadership, which meant they didn't take seriously the offer of restoration to Judah and the reestablishment of the Kingdom (Is. 51:12). And this resulted in their 'lying', breaking covenant with Yahweh through not having their covenant with Him laid "in your heart".

One thing that works against truthfulness is the neuroses that come from fear, the fearful tensions that arise between our real self and the false self. Fear and truth are opposed. This isn't merely psychotherapeutic babble. The life of brave faith, the life that is lived in the overcoming of fears, the fearless breaking out of our comfort zones… this is the true life, the life in which we have no need to lie nor believe in lies. But of course it's hard, because we think that the truth, the reality, is what we see around us; whereas faith is believing in what is not seen. Yet actually what is *not* seen is the reality, and what *is* seen is very often a lie. And the true life is a life of faith in those things which are not yet visibly seen.

Haven't I held peace even of long time, and you don't fear Me?- God's patience and lack of immediate judgment against sin ought to lead to yet greater awe and respect of Him; but for many, it becomes a reason to think they can continue in sin.

Isaiah 57:12 I will declare your righteousness; and as for your works, they shall not profit you- This is embedded within condemnation of Israel for idolatry. So we are to read this as irony, with GNB: "You think that what you do is right, but I will expose your conduct, and your idols will not be able to help you". When exactly this happened historically is hard to say; but it will surely come true at the last day. It was idols which would "not profit" (s.w. 1 Sam. 12:21; Jer. 2:8, and about the Egyptians whose idols they accepted, Is. 30:5,6). Their "works" were their idols; and so we have the abiding lesson that any trust in human works is effectively idolatry. Our performance based society makes intensely relevant to us.

Isaiah 57:13 When you cry, let those who you have gathered deliver you; but the wind shall take them, a breath shall carry them all away: but he who takes refuge in Me shall possess the land, and shall inherit My holy mountain- Instead of allowing themselves to be gathered by God, back to the land to Himself (see on Is. 56:8), they instead gathered idols to themselves. This is the essence of idolatry; a trusting in our own works (:12), rather than the faith to let God work in us. The allusion may be to the image vision of Dan. 2. The Jews who associated themselves with Babylon would share her judgment, and be blown away by the wind; whereas the faithful remnant would grow into the mountain which would begin as the holy mount in Zion, and then spread to cover the earth. We note the offer of possession of the land and mount Zion is now made to "*he* who takes refuge in Me", and not "they". This is in line with the refocus of Yahweh upon individuals rather than the collective, national group (see on Is. 56:1,2).

Isaiah 57:14 He will say, Cast up, cast up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of My people- The context has spoken of Israel's idolatry, and so the stumbling-blocks to be cleared refer to their idolatry. This teaches that a level way must be made amongst the Jewish people, i.e. the stumbling blocks and 'valleys' must be removed from their path. "*Cast ye up,* prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people" is

therefore a command to God's people to undo the generations of false shepherding which Israel have experienced: "They have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not *cast up*" (Jer. 18:15 s.w. "cast… up" in Is. 57:14). Once we have prepared the way in this sense in the last days, then the highway is in place over which the Lord Jesus will return. This is how vital our work is for the Jewish people. Then the essence of the prophecies of the way to Zion in Is. 40 will come about. But for the exiles, their way was blocked by their addiction to idolatry.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a broken and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite- The idea may be that when and if Yahweh returned to Zion, He would again dwell in the holiest place (LXX), the *shekinah* would again be seen in the Most Holy place; but no less would He dwell in the hearts of the humble, those with broken spirits like David's after his repentance. This is in line with the refocus of Yahweh upon individuals rather than the collective, national group (see on Is. 56:1,2). We note the juxtaposition of ideas- the exalted lofty one, dwelling in the hearts of men. It's the same idea as in Is. 55:7-9; the God whose thoughts are not the thoughts of men can have His thinking experienced and shared by mere men. Yet the temple system of Ez. 40-48 had no "Most Holy place". Perhaps the idea was that seeing they had refused to rebuild the temple as asked, God would instead send His Spirit into the hearts of repentant people to "revive" them. This is exactly what He offered the exiles under the new covenant. See on :16.

Israel had lost their hold on true doctrine, many scarcely knew the Law (Is. 57:4,5; 59:3). They got drunk at the temple feasts (Is. 36:10-12; 58:3,4), like Corinth they had an "eat, drink, for tomorrow we die" mentality (Is. 22:12,13); they committed all manner of sexual perversions, along with almost every other form of doctrinal and moral apostasy (Is. 5:11-13,24; 8:19; 9:15; 22:12,13; 24:5; 27:11; 28:7; 30:10; 31:6; 44:8-20; consider the similarities with Corinth). This list is worth reading through. And consider the terrible implications of their perversion in Is. 66:17. But the early chapters of Isaiah sternly rebuke Israel for their *pride*- there is not a whisper of all these other things until later (Is. 2:11-22; 3:16-20; 5:15; 9:9). And even throughout the later rebukes, there is the repeated criticism of their pride (Is. 13:11; 16:6; 23:9; 24:4; 25:11; 26:5; 28:1,3,14; 29:4; 30:25; 50:33; 57:15). This is why Isaiah's prophecies of Christ stress His humility (Acts 8:33), and the "lofty", "high", "exaltation" of God. These words,

common in Isaiah, are those translated “pride" in Isaiah's condemnations of Israel's arrogance; as if to say that *God* was the only one who could be 'proud'.

Isaiah 57:16 For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always angry; for the spirit would faint before Me, and the souls who I have made- This continues the allusion to a court case which began in :3. Yahweh will not endlessly contend in court with sinners- otherwise He would end up destroying all His creation, those in whom He had placed His Spirit. He would cut short His quite legitimate contention and judgment of His people in order to save at least some. Verse 15 has just spoken of God reviving the hearts of the repentant. The LXX suggests that here we have an extension of that thought: "I will not take vengeance on you for ever, neither will I be always angry with you: for my Spirit shall go forth from me, and I have created all breath". The gift of the Spirit was to be given when the judgment of God finished. At the end of the 70 years there could have been a restoration based around the gift of the Spirit to revive the hearts of the repentant (:15). But they weren't interested in repentance nor in true spirituality (see on :17).

The prophets spoke of the amazing grace and eternal love of God for Israel, how His wrath endured but for a moment (Is. 54:8; 57:16); and yet Israel asked: “Will He be angry for ever?” (Jer. 3:5). It was more than frustrating for the prophets; they shared God’s feelings of having poured out so great a love, to see it ignored and disregarded, no time to look at it, too busy sowing my seeds, weeding my garden, having coffee… God is angry with sinners, but He will not be angry for ever because “from me proceeds the spirit, and I have made the breath of life”; His passionate, constant outpouring of energy into His creation means He simply won’t be angry with man for ever. But amongst the Jews there was a revulsion against the idea of God having passion, being angry, and His children sharing those same emotions. It’s the same basic approach as the obsession we have today with ‘nice speak’- don’t be too committed, go so far but no further, don’t appear extreme. Here the spirit of the prophets must be our urgent example- we are to have passion for the positions we adopt. And of course that involves us in being careful, Biblical and prayerful about what positions we adopt. It was the passion with which the Lord Jesus held to His positions that so endeared Him to the Father. Because He so loved righteousness and hated iniquity, the Father so highly exalted Him (Heb. 1:9).

Isaiah 57:17 For the iniquity of his covetousness was I angry, and struck him-

We would rather expect God to give their idolatry and marital unfaithfulness to Him as reason for His anger. But rather it was their covetousness which is cited here, the petty materialism which so took a grip upon them that they turned to idols in the hope of some petty material blessing. See on Is. 56:11.

I hid Myself and was angry; and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart- I noted on :16 that the Holy Spirit would have been given to the exiles to change their hearts- if they wanted it and if they were brokenhearted like David for their sins. But they didn't want that transformation- and went on backsliding in the way of their heart / spirit rather than accepting God's heart and Spirit. The implication is that God's hiding of His face during the exile was in fact to elicit their seeking of His face. And yet they refused. And this partially explains the apparent silence of God in our lives; to elicit a more intense search for Him.

Is. 30:20 describes the reestablished Kingdom as a time when Judah's repentant eyes would "see" the God who had taught them through the sufferings of defeat and exile (see note there). Their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me... and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide

His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7).

Isaiah 57:18 I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners- Having lamented the lack of spiritual transformation in the people, God now looks forward to how ultimately He will give His Spirit to His people (see on :15-17). He will heal and lead by His Spirit, the Comforter which gives comfort. We would perhaps have expected Him to offer this healing and restoration to those who repented. But these is no mention of this; rather does this follow on from God's statement in :17 to the effect that if He endlessly contends with His sinful people He will end up destroying them. So despite having "seen his (sinful) ways", God now proposes to "heal him" and lead him back to Him, even if he is stubborn to follow. He would "create" peace with Him in order to effect this healing (:19).

Isaiah 57:19 I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace, to him who is far off and to him who is near, says Yahweh; and I will heal them- See on :18. The idea may be "Peace to him that is far off (in Babylon), and to him that is near" (in the land). But as explained on :17,18, God appears to be saying that if He endlessly contends with His sinful people He will end up destroying them. So despite having "seen his (sinful) ways", God now proposes to "heal him" and lead him back to Him, even if he is stubborn to follow. He would "create" peace with Him in order to effect this healing (:19). And so He is willing to give peace with Him both to those far from Him, and those who had come near to Him. It was only the stubbornly and insistently "wicked" who would not be calmed / given peace (:20).

Isaiah 57:20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea; for it can't rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt- As noted on :15-18, the Spirit was offered to the exiles, and we have read of the peace this would bring if it was accepted (:18,19); and I suggested on :18,19 that God was willing to as it were force through His healing with even those who were "far off" from Him. But if it were stubbornly refused, then there could be no peace in the hearts or experience of the unspiritual. The wicked amongst Israel would be like the sea of the Gentiles, always associated with casting up and endlessly recycling dirt.

Isaiah 57:21 There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked- See on :20. "The wicked" are the Jewish exiles of Is. 48:18 who refused the potential peace with

God which was offered if they repented and returned to Judah to reestablish His Kingdom of peace.

Isaiah Chapter 58

Isaiah 58:1 *Cry aloud*- The first 12 verses in this chapter are similar in essence to Is. 1:1-31. This is just one of many connections between the later part of Isaiah (Is. 40-66) and the earlier part (Is. 1-35). The two sections are connected by the historial interlude of Is. 36-39, where Isaiah works with Hezekiah towards repentance, and then has to judge him for his pride and collapse of faith, concluding that his sons shall go into captivity in Babylon. As I explained on Is. 36-39, Hezekiah sinned quite badly and let the baton drop. A Messianic Kingdom could have been established after the defeat of the Assyrian invader outside Jerusalem, but this possibility was ultimately deferred until our last days. But God didn't give up working with Judah. At the time of the restoration, there could again have been a Messianic Kingdom, the temple of Ez. 40-48 could have been rebuilt; but due to short termism and lack of repentance, this didn't happen. Therefore the same appeals are made to the returned exiles as were made to Judah in the days of Isaiah and Hezekiah.

This appeal in :1 is therefore in order that the returned exiles got a grip on their spirituality and relationship with God, so that yet another disaster and invasion could be avoided, and the Kingdom of God re-established in the land. But such invasions came under Antiochus and others, as Daniel 11 outlines. Again the land and people were dominated by their enemies. The appeal to repent so that this would not happen had already been made by Isaiah in his own day, in the context of Hezekiah and the Assyrian invasion. This explains the copious connections between the first half of Isaiah and the second half, the so-called Deutero Isaiah.

Is. 58:1,2 is a criticism of Judah in exile and also of those who did return to the land- they sought God daily, and yet abused their brethren (Is. 58:6), just as recorded in Neh. 5:15. If they had ceased from their sins, "*Then* shall your light break forth as the morning", *if* they had fed the hungry etc, *then* would've been fulfilled the Messianic Kingdom prophecies of the light of Zion rising above the Gentiles etc (Is. 58:10,12 cp. Is. 60:1).

But who is being asked to "cry aloud" or 'proclaim' this call to repentance? The second half of Isaiah begins with this same invitation to 'proclaim' to Judah the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. The same Hebrew word is used so often in Is. 40. John the Baptist, the Elijah prophet, was the one asked to make

this proclamation (Is. 40:3 s.w.). And it is the Christian preachers who take over the proclamation (Is. 40:6 = 1 Pet. 1:24). Initially, it was the ministry of the prophets like Haggai and Zecharahiah who made this call for repentance to the exiles (Zech. 1:4,17; 7:7,13, the prophets cried / called out aloud for Judah's repentance but were not answered). But it went largely unheeded: "When I called [s.w. "cry aloud"], none answered" (Is. 50:2; 65:12; 66:4; Hos. 11:2; Zech. 1:4). And the prophets themselves didn't make the call as they ought to have done: "None calls [s.w. "cry aloud"] for justice..." (Is. 59:4). John the Baptist likewise called for Judah's repentance, as did the early Christian preachers; and we are to make this call to Israel in the last days. And finally it will be heeded; a minority in Israel will respond, albeit due to the tribulation to come upon the land, and then the Messianic Kingdom shall finally come. The One who ultimately makes the "call" or 'crying aloud' is the Lord Jesus, the Messiah (Is. 61:1,2 "... to proclaim / call out / cry loud liberty... to call out the time of Yahweh's acceptance / the acceptable year of the Lord"). But He works through the voice of His people, those who are in Him. This is how in practice He will make this appeal / proclamation / crying out aloud to Israel, both now and in the very last days. The calling out to repent is on the basis of the fact that God has called out / proclaimed His radical acceptance. If we accept it, then sin is no longer any barrier between Him and us.

Don't spare- Literally, don't restrain. It's the same phrase as used in Is. 54:2 about Judah not holding back but lengthening the cords of their tent as far as they can. The idea is that the extent of the fulfilment of God's purpose is in our hands. These prophecies all had potential fulfilments in the time they were given; the preacher to Israel should be aware that according to his or her success, so the extent of the progress of God's program goes forward.

Lift up your voice like a trumpet- As noted above, there are many connections here with the crying out / proclamation of forgiveness and therefore the call to repent, which we find in Is. 40. In Is. 40:9 the same phrase is used, of lifting up the voice to tell Jerusalem that there is good news- her God "shall come", through manifestation in His Son, and re-establish Israel's Kingdom as God's Kingdom. Yet there the voice is lifted up in calling for repentance. The reality of the possibility of being part of His Kingdom is of itself a call to repentance. Anyone who says yes to those "good tidings", the Gospel, will naturally be moved to repentance by doing so. The trumpet being the crying aloud or proclamation sounds like the proclamation of the day of atonement. But the spirit of that day was to be proclaimed to men as an ongoing experience, which is very much in the spirit of the Lord Jesus now that the ritual feasts have been

ended. Now the atonement and the subsequent appeal for repentance to accept it is to be proclaimed to all men, all the time.

And declare to My people their disobedience, and to the house of Jacob their sins- The family of the historical Jacob were very weak spiritually, and yet from them came the foundations of God's people. This was and is to be remembered as an encouragement in our witness. These words are quoted in Mic. 3:8; he was one of the prophets called upon to make this proclamation, both in Isaiah's day and yet also, as with Isaiah, his words therefore also have reference to the exiles who had returned and needed to repent.

Isaiah 58:2 *Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways*- The word "yet" is such a challenge. They were disobedient, sinful and rejected by God. "Yet" they sought God daily, offering the daily sacrifices ('seeking' in Hebrew thought is to worship), and enthusiastic to have His word explained to them. One can attend meetings regularly, love the worship, and genuinely enthuse to intellectually, academically understand the Bible. And "yet" do no righteousness, and actually forsake the spirit of what "God" is all about. This is the problem with religion. If left at mere religion, it can blind us to true spirituality. They 'delighted' to know God's ways and to 'draw near to God', perhaps a reference to prayer or sacrifice. But this same category of persons chose the things which Yahweh did *not* delight in, and also "delighted in their abominations" (Is. 65:12; 66:3,4 s.w.). The abominations there listed were not idol worship; their arrogance and exclusivity was as if they offered pig's flesh to God. Their legally correct sacrifices were therefore seen as no better than that. This dualism in the human nature is encouraged by religion, if our faith is left at mere religion. These verses are one of the greatest challenges to all involved in serving God through organized religion. Prayer, sacrifice, worship, Bible study, attendance at meetings... can all be performed as just one pole of a dualistic, religious mindset. Whilst we get on and "delight" in displeasing God. Once we appreciate the challenge, we will no longer be shocked at the hypocrisy rampant in all forms of organized religion; that a person can do all these things, appearing a stalwart member of a church, and yet at the same time be involved with things which disgust God.

As a nation that did righteousness, and didn't forsake the ordinance of their God, they ask of Me righteous judgements; they delight to draw near to God- The call to repentance of :1 was not heeded exactly because of the veneer of religion which these Jews then had. This is the problem with religion. It shields us from the piercing appeal for repentance and real, live relationship with God. "Did

righteousness" is the phrase translated "do justice" in Gen. 18:19, which was to be a feature of the true seed of Abraham. As noted above, Israel went through all the motions of religious worship, but did not "do justice". The historical accounts in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi give many examples of this; and the lack of justice was expressed in terms of how they treated their own brothers. If the Jews had 'done righteousness' at the time of the restoration, then it would have hastened the revelation of God's justice in the re-establishment of His Kingdom on earth at that time (Is. 56:1 s.w.). For it is Messiah who would 'do justice' in His Kingdom (Jer. 23:5; 33:15 s.w.). The commands of Ez. 40-48 about rebuilding a Messianic temple included the command to 'do righteousness' (Ez. 45:9). But the Jews didn't do this, and thereby precluded the possibility of those prophecies coming true at the restoration.

Isaiah 58:3 *'Why have we fasted', they say, 'and You don't see?*- Zech. 7:5 says that the Jews at the time of the restoration fasted, but not to God. And here we see part of a major theme in Biblical teaching about spirituality- that spiritual disciplines can be performed, but not really, in God's book. We can pray and worship, but without achieving real prayer and worship; we can pay lip service to the idea that God's word is inspired and His real voice to us, and yet let the words glide over us. We can give, but for the sake of appearance and the praise of men. And so they fasted, but not to God. And complained that God apparently didn't recognize it. If they had *really* fasted on "the fasting day", then the whole Babylonian invasion and exile could have been averted (Jer. 36:6,9); they fasted but were not heard (Jer. 14:12). But now the captivity had ended, still they had not learnt that lesson.

Why have we afflicted our soul, and You take no knowledge?'- The day to 'afflict the soul' in fasting was specifically the day of atonement, the only fast required under the Mosaic law (Lev. 23:27 s.w.). They kept the day of atonement legally, but with no recognition of sin; just as we can keep the Lord's supper with no sense of our sins, no flame of passion to respond to His grace witha similar grace. Lev. 23:29 even taught that the soul who would not afflict themselves would be cut off from the people of God. But that is an example of the Law of Moses revealing how God judges the heart; for no priest could ever ascertain whether or not a worshipper was afflicting their soul as required. If we do not repent, and afflict our souls for our sins, then we likewise are signing ourselves out of God's true people. And only we know whether or not we do this. For such affairs of the heart cannot be judged by human eyes.

Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and oppress all your labourers- If they had truly afflicted their souls in repentance and in awe of their receipt of God's forgveness, then they would have reflected that grace to others, which is God's pleasure or will. And that principle is true of us too. We are not to be like the unforgiving servat who demanded what was owed; the AV renders "oppress" as "exact" (Mt. 18:28). Perhaps the Lord had this teaching in mind when constructing His parable. The oppression of their workers was the kind of thing going on at the restoration (Neh. 5). Israel failed to do God's pleasure and instead kept His laws whilst doing their own pleasure or will; and therefore the prophecy of the suffering servant who was to do God's pleasure at the restoration was changed in fulfilment from Israel as a people to Messiah as a person (Is. 53:8). The same word for "pleasure" is used in :13 of how these Jews did *their* pleasure on the Sabbath rather than God's pleasure. We can so easily serve God for our own pleasure, in ways which simply reinforce our natural passions and personality types. The challenge to us is indeed piercing and insistent.

Isaiah 58:4 *Behold, you fast for strife and contention, and to strike with the fist of wickedness: you don't fast this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high*- As noted on :3, the restored Jews fasated for their own pleasure rather than God's. They took pleasure from being more righteous than others, endlessly striving and contending with others as to how fasting should be done, even inventing new fast days (Zech. 7:5; 8:19). All the Law required was fasting on the Day of Atonement. The endless controversies over interpretation and ritual which have characterized the walk of so many Christians may well have been simply for their own "pleasure" and justification of striking other believers with a wicked fist. The Catholic and Orthodox churches argue bitterly about ritual, and the Protestant denominations argue over interpretation of Bible passages. Much of this was nothing to do with personal relationship with God, making your voice heard in His ears in highest heaven; but rather in order to put others down that we might appear the better. For the way the Jews criticized others for not fasating as they considered they ought to was effectivly striking their brother with a wicked fist. The allusion is to how righteous Naboth was struck down with a wicked fist when a fast had been proclaimed (1 Kings 21:9-13).

Isaiah 58:5 *Is such the fast that I have chosen? The day for a man to afflict his soul?*- As noted on :3, the only fast "chosen" or proclaimed by God was that on the Day of Atonement, when every person was to afflict their soul. The Jews kept this feast insincerely, bowing their heads like a bulrush blown in the breeze.

All such false humility, using phrases like "Of course, we're all sinners" insincerely, is so abhorrent to God.

Is it to bow down his head as a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to Yahweh?- The repentance and contrition required by the Day of Atonement was internal, rather than an external use of sackcloth. Judah had gone into exile exactly because they had rent their garments and not their hearts (Joel 2:13). And the restored Jews had not learnt that lesson. The Day of Atonement was the "acceptable day", and the acceptable day is now every day for us as Christians (2 Cor. 6:2). We are to live our whole lives, every day, in the spirit of the Day of Atonement; both confessing sin and receiving the pronouncement of forgiveness which fills us with all joy and peace.

Isaiah 58:6 *Isn't this the fast that I have chosen: to release the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?*- See on Is. 42:7. As noted on :3 and :4, the result of keeping the Day of Atonement properly was to release the bonds of others because our bonds of sin and its consequence have been released. Instead, the resotred Jews at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah were bringing their own brothers into bondage to them, taking their lands from them and then making them their slaves. Such releasing of others from their bonds, both to us and others, can happen on any day; the Day of Atonement was to be realized in the daily experience of the believers.

Consider how the Lord brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord". This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10), Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2. Is. 58:6 AV: "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that ye break every yoke?" is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's time, after the Sennacherib invasion; andalso at the time of the restoration. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47

and for “preach / proclaim the acceptable year” in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for ‘jubilee’ means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It’s as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off... and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: “The creditor shall release that which he hath lent… *because* the Lord’s release hath been proclaimed” (Dt. 15:2 RV).

There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite “to let the oppressed go free...loose the bonds”, and to “undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke” (Is. 58:6) as Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah’s first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as ‘in’ him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. “He was oppressed”, as Israel at that time were being “oppressed” by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory.

The passage in :6-13 seems to be a reference to an insincerely kept day of atonement in Ezra or Nehemiah’s time, as well as Hezekiah's. The Jewish nobles were oppressing the poor and thereby keeping the feast with no meaning. If they had properly kept the feast, *then* the promised Kingdom conditions would have burst forth to the world around them. But they were too caught up with their own self-benefit to be bothered to show true care for their brethren. If they had, *then* the glory of Yahweh would have entered the temple, just as Ezekiel 43 had prophesied would happen, if the Kingdom was built as commanded. Notice how Isaiah 60:1-3 speaks of how Zion’s light would certainly come and give light to the world- even though the prophecy was actually conditional on Judah keeping the Sabbath and caring for their poor brethren: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee... And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising”. Nehemiah repaired the breaches, Ezra laid the foundations of the temple...the prophecy of Isaiah 58

was fulfilled on the surface, but not in its Kingdom sense, because they failed to keep the Sabbath etc. Isaiah 58:10 says that *if* they drew out their soul to the hungry, if they allowed themselves to feel the hunger of others, *then* would their light rise and their darkness be as the noonday. And thus the prophecy of Isaiah 60:1,2 that Zion's light is going to dawn was conditional upon the Jews caring for their hungry amongst them- even though in that passage, the condition isn't directly stated. The restoration was therefore only a sham of what was possible.

There are several links between Is. 58 and Neh. 5, where we read of poor Jews who had to mortgage their vineyards and even sell their children in order to pay their debts. The “oppressed” or “broken victim” of Is. 58, to whom we are invited to proclaim deliverance, were therefore in the very first instance those under the throttling grip of poverty, who had become bondslaves because of their debts and now had no hope of freedom, apart from the frank forgiveness of a year of Jubilee. We take a like message to Westerners overburdened with mortgage payments, to those suffering from absolute poverty in the developing world, and to all those with a sense of debt and being trapped within their life situation. We pronounce to them a year of Jubilee, a frank forgiveness, a way of real escape and freedom.

Isaiah 58:7 *Isn’t it to distribute your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor who are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you not hide yourself from your own flesh?*- The leaders of Judah in Nehemiah's time were abusing their brethren. Their receipt of grace should have led them be generous to their poor brethren, rather than exploiting them. And that principle is true for us; for the restoration is used in the New Testament as a type of our redemption from the Babylon of sin and this world. And yet too many like to kid themselves that their response to grace is to do the opposite; to cast out their own brethren from their houses and then ignore their need, physically and spiritually.

Isaiah 58:8 *Then your light shall break forth as the morning, and your healing shall spring forth speedily; and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of Yahweh shall be your vanguard*- This is the language of the establishment of the glorious Messianic Kingdom (Is. 60:1,3,19,20). That Kingdom could have been established then, if the returned exiles had lived as they should have done; and so the prophecies have been deferrred in fulfilment until the Lord's return. The light of Zion was Messiah; this figure could have arisen then at the restoration. But he didn't, and the true fulfilment was in the Lord Jesus, who was

the light which arose in the darkness (:10; Mt. 4:16; Lk. 1:79). "Healing" translates a word meaning 'restoration'; the Kingdom of God in the form of Israel's Kingdom would have been restored. The same ideas are found in Mal. 4:2, where again the promise is repeated, that the Messianic sun of righteousness could have arisen at the restoration with healing in His beams. But that had to be delayed in fulfilment until our last days. Judah at this time were spiritually weak; "your righteousness" doesn't refer to their own, but to that of Messiah as "the Lord our righteousness". The Messiah figure bearing this title could have appeared at the restoration from Babylon (Jer. 23:6; 33:16; 51:10). It could have come "speedily" had they heeded these prophetic words. But it didn't, and was delayed. Yahweh's glory is parallel with "your righteousness", and this again should be read as a Messianic title. As Paul explains in Romans, it is through faith in Jesus as Messiah and identification with Him that His righteousness becomes ours.

Isaiah 58:9 *Then you shall call, and Yahweh will answer; you shall cry and He will say, 'Here I am'. If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking wickedly*- The Jews complained that despite their fasting, God was not answering (:3). The answer is that they were abusing their brethren, as recorded in Nehemiah 5. They were not only enslaving their brethren literally, but by placing heavy legalistic burdens upon, putting forth the finger in accusing them of spiritual inferiority (see on :4). This doing down of our brethren is the very opposite of the response to grace and restoration which we have received in Christ. It is called here "speaking wickedly". By treating our brethren like this, we place a barrier between God and ourselves, as John's letters also state; and our prayer experience will reflect that barrier.

Isaiah 58:10 *And if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul: then your light shall rise in darkness, and your obscurity be as the noonday*- As noted on :8, Zion's light refers to the coming of Messiah. His coming was and is dependent upon the spirituality of the Jews and their repentance. And that shall only come in the last days as a result of a tribulation and holocaust like none other in their history. "Darkness" and "obscurity" are used in Isaiah to refer to Judah's sinfulness and also their judgment for that sin. Despite all that, if they had shown love and justice to the poor, then Messiah's light would have broken in upon that darkness.

Isaiah 58:11 *And Yahweh will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in dry places, and make strong your bones*- The allusion is to how Yahweh "guided" (s.w.) Israel in the desert and satisfied them with food and water (s.w. Ex. 16:8,12 "bread to the full"), strengthening their bones for the wilderness journey. This guidance is typical of our journey after baptism towards God's Kingdom (1 Cor. 10:1-3). But our experience of that guidance will in fact be eternal [the idea behind "continually"]. The kind of Divinely guided life we experience now shall eternally continue. If they satisfied the soul of others in need (:10 s.w.) then their soul would be eternally satisfied. There is an absolutely direct connection between what we do for others now, and what God shall do for us eternally. This is not to say that salvation itself is upon the basis of works- for it is by grace alone. Yet it is also true that how we live now shall be reflected eternally in the nature of our eternal existence. At the time of the restoration, the Jews were not satisfied (Hag. 1:6 s.w.) despite all their efforts to achieve self-satisfaction. And lack of satisfaction was part of the repeated experience of an Israel who put their own pleasure first (Lev. 26:26; Ps. 59:15; Ecc. 1:8; 4:8; 5:10; 6:3; Is. 9:20; Ez. 16:28; Hos. 4:10; Mic. 6:14). Yet the righteous are often described as being satisfied both in this life and in the restored Kingdom; David and the righteous died "full" or satisfied (s.w.) with their days (1 Chron. 23:1). We see evidence of this all around us; those who make their own satisfaction their priority live unsatisfied lives.

And you shall be like a watered garden- This is exactly the language of Jer. 31:12 about the restored Kingdom; it really was possible at the time of the restoration. Eden could have been restored.

And like a spring of water, whose waters don't fail- If they did all these things of :6-13, there would be no drought; but Malachi records how there was drought, because they had not fulfilled these conditions. And so the promises were reapplied and rescheduled. Therefore the Lord promises believers even now this experience of being like an ever bubbling spring, through the experience of the Holy Spirit gift (Jn. 4:14; 7:38,39). It's a case of now but not yet. We can begin to experience now the kind of life we shall eternally have in the Kingdom; in this sense, in the language of John's Gospel, we have eternal life now.

Isaiah 58:12 *Those who shall be of you*- These words are inserted by the translaters. Literally, "Of you..."; the reference could be to an individual, not the nation.

Shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many

generations- This all alludes to Neh. 13:22. The restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah could have been far more glorious. There was an external appearance of rebuilding, but actually the Kingdom of God was not restored in Israel because the people simply didn't want it. This is why some rejoiced but others wept when the temple was dedicated; those who wept did so because they realized that this was not in fact the temple of the restoration prophecies.

And you shall be called The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in- Neh. 6:1 says that there was no breach [s.w.] in the walls. But that was only external. The restoration prophets use this word to describe the breach between God and Israel which was not filled at that time because the potential Messiah figures didn't or couldn't do so (Is. 30:13; Ez. 13:5; 22:30), failing to be the prophet like unto Moses who did stand in that breach (Ps. 106:23 s.w.). Am. 9:11 speaks of the possibility of reviving the tabernacle of David that had fallen, and closing up the breach at the same time as the ruins were revived. But this didn't happen; for this prophecy was to have its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus (Acts 15:16).

Isaiah 58:13 *If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy day of Yahweh honourable; and shall honour it, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words*- Judah abused the Sabbath, as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, wishing to trade with the Gentiles on that day; Am. 8:5 speaks of their longing for the Sabbath to end that they might get on with their trading. The Sabbath was intended to be a time when Israel would hear *God's* words and not speak their own words; to stop talking, and listen. We too can in essence make that same mistake, going through the motions of religion when our hearts are set upon our next social or business meeting. We should "delight" in God's ways; and if we do, then we shall eternally delight ourselves in them (:14). We can begin to live the Kingdom life now. For throughout our eternity, the ways and things of God shall be our eternal focus. And they ought to be now as far as possible. In this sense, we can live the eternal life now.

Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfil the Messianic prophecies about them which existed.

Isaiah repeatedly stated that the surrounding nation would come to Zion and

share in her joy. Ex. 23:12 had commanded that the Gentile who lived with Israel must keep the Sabbath. *If* the Jews had not done *their* pleasure on the Sabbath, *then* the Messianic Kingdom could have come (Is. 58:13,14). But instead the Gentiles who lived around Jerusalem traded with the Jews on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:16 RSV), they intermarried, and Israel / Zion was *not* a city set on a hill to enlighten the surrounding world; because they preferred to be influenced by the world around them, rather than vice versa.

The Sabbath was a release from the everyday things of life, the need to search for food (in the wilderness years), to work, from doing one's own pleasure and speaking words which relate to one's own earthly desires (Is. 58:13,14). It is therefore fitting that in our present experience of life, these necessary daily things will not obsess us; and if we may be made free from them, we will " use it rather" . Sodom was condemned for this revelling in the legitimate daily activities of life- attending and organizing weddings, eating, drinking... So let's drive away our nervousness at the idea of serious commitment; we are a priesthood, the centre of our lives is the service of God, His tabernacle is what we camp around by night and carry by day.

Isaiah 58:14 *Then you shall delight yourself in Yahweh*- This describes how eternally, in the restored Kingdom of God, we will 'delight outselves' in Yahweh; and yet we can do this now. For the same word is used of how He should be our delight now. Ps. 37:4,11 make the same point- we are to delight in Him now, so that we shall eternally do so. We are to live the Kingdom life now. If the things of God are to be our eternal delight, they should be now. The things of the Kingdom are not to be a mere hobby or occasional interest for a few hours / week, but the delight of our souls in every way, reflected in our attitudes to everything in our lives.

And I will make you to ride on the high places of the earth- To ride on high places could mean to bask in triumph and victory. The earth / *eretz* / land promised to Abraham [the common reference of *eretz*] was not fully under Jewish control when they returned from the captivity in Babylon. But it could have been. And the "high places" of the land of course recall the places of idolatry. They could have triumphed over all their historical sins and temptations.

And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father- "Jacob" rather than the other patriarchs is repeatedly mentioned in the restoration prophecies because he was clearly the weakest in spiritual terms, and yet from that

weakness was led to great heights, had righteousness imputed to him, and was restored to the land of promise by God's grace. He therefore became an appropriate pattern for the returned exiles. The Hebrew translated "feed" also means "to eat"; this word is so commonly used about Jacob 'eating' at various points in his life when covenant relationship was being celebrated and ratified. The list is impressive: Gen. 25:34; 27:19; 28:20; 31:46,54. The idea would be that the covenant with the patriarchs could have come true to that generation, if they followed the path of Jacob. And as Jer. 31 emphasizes, the promises to the patriarchs were in fact the new covenant which we too share in.

For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it- It was spoke just as that same mouth had stated that within 40 days, Nineveh would be destroyed. But God can change and adjust His stated purpose in accordance with human repentance and response, or lack thereof.

Isaiah Chapter 59

Isaiah 59:1 Behold, Yahweh's hand is not shortened that it can't save; neither His ear heavy, that it can't hear- The context is that although *their* ears were "heavy", God's ears were not heavy to them, if they would pray in repentance (s.w. Is. 6:10). Again Isaiah is answering all the possible excuses given by the exiles for not repenting and returning to the land. In Is. 50:2 the idea of Yahweh's hand being shortened is used as an excuse not to respond to God's call to quit Babylon for Zion. The idea was that His ability to act, His hand, was somehow limited or 'reaped down'. They assumed the fact they had been reaped in the harvest of judgment meant that their God had been (Is. 17:5; Jer. 9:22; Hos. 8:7; 10:13). They simply refused to accept the repeated prophetic message that it was the God of Israel who brought judgment upon Israel. They treated Him as the surrounding peoples treated their gods- always saving them in trouble, and if they didn't, then the god had died with them.

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear- God's apparent silence and inaction was not because His hand was shortened, i.e. He was unable to act or limited in possibility. The limitation of possibility was because of their sins. His ear was not intrinsically deaf (:1), instead He would not hear because of their sins at the same time as their prayers. Their prayers were "hindered" in the sense of 1 Pet. 3:7.

Is. 30:20 describes the reestablished Kingdom as a time when Judah's repentant eyes would "see" the God who had taught them through the sufferings of defeat and exile (see note there). Their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23; 13:24) just as

God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me... and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7).

Isaiah 59:3 For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness- The lies spoken may well have been to God, in dishonestly proclaiming they were His covenant people when instead they were involved in child sacrifice and perhaps other murders related to their idolatry. Their defilement with blood meant they were ritually unclean, and this unable to serve Him. In the same breath as they proclaimed His covenant, they were muttering words of wickedness.

Isaiah 59:4 None sues in righteousness, and none pleads in truth- AV "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth". The prophetic intention was that Zion would be 'called' the city of "righteousness" (Is. 1:26 s.w.). But the individual Jews were not interested in appealing for justice and truth. The day when the earth would be governed in "righteousness and... truth" was not going to come whilst Judah themselves didn't love the things of the Kingdom and refused to live the Kingdom life themselves (s.w. Ps. 96:13). It was Messiah who was to be girded with "righteousness and... truth" (s.w. Is. 11:5). But not one candidate of the various potentials had acted like this. The prophecies were therefore reapplied and deferred to the Lord Jesus.

They trust in vanity, and speak lies- "Vanity" is the usual term for idols. Idolatry is a worship of nothingness, and again this is the essence of so much in the empty, contentless world of today. This is the modern day idolatry. And it is manifest in 'speaking lies'. A lack of attention to truth and disinterest in truth and ultimate reality leads to personal dishonesty, a speaking of lies.

They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity- There is a theme in Isaiah of conceiving, suffering pain in labour- but bringing forth in vain (Is. 26:18; 33:11; 59:4). And so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24).

These words are quoted in Romans 3. Eliphaz thought there were only a few very sinful people in the world (Job 15:35); but His words are quoted by the Spirit in Is. 59:4 concerning the whole nation of Israel; and this whole passage in Is. 59:4-8 in turn is quoted in Rom. 3:15-17 concerning the whole human race. This same path of progressive realization of our sinfulness must be trodden by each faithful individual, as well as on a communal level.

Isaiah 59:5 They hatch adders' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he who eats of their eggs dies; and that which is crushed breaks out into a viper- GNB "The evil plots you make are as deadly as the eggs of a poisonous snake. Crush an egg, out comes a snake!". The people in view appear to be teachers or leaders, because they have people who as it were eat their eggs.

Isaiah 59:6 Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands- GNB "But your plots will do you no good—they are as useless as clothing made of cobwebs!". Their acts of violence would not ultimately be covered before God by carefully spun webs of excuses and self justification.

Isaiah 59:7 Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their paths- See on :4. This is quoting Prov. 1:16. Again we note the parallel between thoughts and paths; the path of a man's life is a reflection of his thoughts. And our thought patterns are the absolutely essential core of all spirituality and relationship with God. There is clearly the accusation that the restored exiles were guilty of plotting murder, and they did shed innocent blood. The reference may not be solely to child sacrifices, and the sacrifice of other vulnerable individuals; but to actual plans to kill the prophets such as Isaiah.

Isaiah 59:8 The way of peace they don't know; there is no justice in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whoever goes therein does not know peace- These people were false teachers, because they had others who would walk in their ways; hence GNB "no one who walks that path will ever be safe". The leadership of the exiles was deeply corrupt, as we find implied between the lines of Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi.

Isaiah 59:9 Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us: we look for light, but behold, darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity- The hope of Zion's light and the brightness of her Kingdom morning was precluded by the behaviour of the Jews and their idolatry. The restored Kingdom could have come then, but it didn't- because of them. So much potential was wasted; and :11 also laments this. But we can also read this as not just Isaiah's lament that the window of deliverance had been removed from them; but also as the cynical words of the exiles. Passages like Ezekiel 18 imply a certain bitterness of Israel towards their God, considering that He had dealt with them unfairly, and inappropriately punished them for the sins of their fathers. Despite Yahweh having enabled their exit from Babylon, they complained: "Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us" (Is. 59:9). This was an awful spurning of the great salvation enabled for them. They remonstrated against God's message of deliverance from captivity: "Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued?" (Is. 49:24). They thought their salvation was too hard even for God. They made the same mistake as all who reason that their situation or personality is too far gone for God to redeem. For the 'salvation' of the exiles in Babylon is alluded to in the New Testament as a prototype of our salvation in Christ. The good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15;

Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21). Time and again in the restoration prophecies we encounter statements intended to answer the skepticism felt by the exiles about the promises of redemption from Babylon (Is. 40:27-31; Is. 42:22; Is. 43:22; Is. 46:12; Is. 48:4,8; Is. 49:14).

Isaiah 59:10 We grope for the wall like the blind; yes, we grope as those who have no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the twilight; among those who are lusty we are as dead men- Darkness at noon was what happened at the crucifixion; this was the judgment upon Israel for their attitudes, because the killing of their own King and Messiah was the ultimate climax and final term of all their sinful behaviour. The apostate Jews have been condemned earlier in this chapter; the words we now are reading in :9-14 are now as it were spoken by them. Perhaps they are an imagination of the kinds of words these people would speak and the feelings they would feel in their day of final condemnation; recognizing in every detail their sins, but tragically too late. The time for such confession is now. All their human strength, appearing as "lusty", was now as death itself. Their stumbling at noonday was the curse for disobedience to the covenant (s.w. Lev. 26:37).

Isaiah 59:11 We roar all like bears, and moan bitterly like doves- Perhaps suggesting both men and women were in lamentation. This is the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the condemned, roaring like the waves who cannot pass over the bound set for them at the beach (s.w. Jer. 5:22), unable to enter the kingdom. One moment they will be roaring, the next moaning quietly; the same word is used of how they had muttered or uttered false words (:13). By doing so, they were living out their own condemnation.

We look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us- The salvation and justice of the restored Kingdom was precluded by the behaviour of the Jews and their idolatry. The reestablished Kingdom could have come then, but it didn't- because of them. So much potential was wasted; and :9 also laments this. But this is also the picture of the condemned Jews at the last day, desperately wanting salvation, but finding it now too far from them.

Isaiah 59:12 For our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them- The confession of sin in :12-15 was perhaps God's fantasy about His people's repentance, the kind of thing we see in Hosea's fantasy about

Gomer's return to him. Or it could have been Isaiah's *pro forma* expression of repentance which he intended Judah to make. Or as suggested previously on these verses, this is the recognition of sin by the condemned but all too late. They realize all too late that their sins have not been taken away from them, for they had refused the sin bearer. Their own sins testified at the day of judgment "before You" and called for their own condemnation.

Isaiah 59:13 transgressing and denying Yahweh, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood- We see the common Biblical parallel between thoughts and words; hence GNB "Our thoughts are false; our words are lies". "Uttering" is the word used in :11 for how the condemned will mutter or moan in condemnation; but by muttering false words in their hearts, they were living out their own condemnation experience.

Isaiah 59:14 Justice is turned away backward, and righteousness stands afar off- This contrasts with the frequent statements that Yahweh's truth righteousness was "near" in the sense that His restored Kingdom could so soon have been established. But now it was far away, because the window of opportunity was now closed because of their impenitence. Thus GNB "Justice is driven away, and right cannot come near".

For truth is fallen in the street, and uprightness can't enter- As just noted, the righteousness which was to enter Zion by the highway prepared in Is. 40 was not going to enter. There was an open, public, unashamed rejection of God's "truth", His covenant. GNB "Truth stumbles in the public square, and honesty finds no place there". The street or square may refer to the place of judgment, the law court. The injustice there meant that the Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 8:16 was disallowed of fulfilment.

Isaiah 59:15 Yes, truth is lacking; and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey- LXX "And truth has been taken away, and they have turned aside their mind from understanding". Those who 'don't understand' do so not simply because of intellectual failure, but because they do not want to understand. "He who departs from evil" is the term used about Job (s.w. Job 1:8; 2:3); and he too became a "prey" to evil. Job represents not only the exiles, but the righteous remnant amongst them who departed from evil but suffered all the same.

Yahweh saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice- The lack of justice and honesty might seem relatively small issues compared to the murder and gross idolatry mentioned as going on at the time. But the prophets often make clear that it is attitudes to justice which reflect the essence of a person's spirituality.

In the Lord Jesus we see a heart that more than bled for the salvation of others. He didn't live out His perfect life in isolation from others, withdrawn from society, insulated from the world's pain. Is. 59:15-20 speaks of how He came to perceive that really there was nobody apart from Him who could bring about such great salvation to the world: "And the Lord saw it, and it displeased [s.w. grieved] him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke" . So many of these phrases and ideas are picked up in the New Testament and applied to the Lord Jesus in His time of dying. It was His grief that inspired Him.

Scripture repeatedly speaks as if God notices things and is then hurt by what He sees (Jonah 3:10; Gen. 29:31; Ex. 3:4; Dt. 32:19; 2 Kings 14:26; 2 Chron. 12:7; Ez. 23:13; Is. 59:15 cp. Lk. 7:13). If He knew in advance what they were going to do, this language is hard for me to understand. But God is therefore hurt and 'surprised' at sin- He saw Israel as the firstripe grapes, but they were worshipping Baal even then (Hos. 9:9). Thus God can allow Himself to feel an element of surprise- and this was a shock to Jeremiah, who queried: "Why are You like a man who is caught by surprise...?" (Jer. 14:9).

Isaiah 59:16 He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor- None of the potential Messiah figures worked out; and it seems about nobody responded to the prophetic call for the exiles to repent. God was 'desolated' ["wondered"]about this, so great were His hopes for some response. And yet God wished to try to save them anyway by His dramatic intervention, which was to come to full term in the person and work of His own son. LXX suggests this was by His pure mercy and grace alone: "so he defended them with his arm, and stablished them with his mercy".

Therefore His own arm brought salvation to Him; and His righteousness, it

upheld Him- see on Ex. 2:11,12. The arm of Yahweh, the practical articulation of His power, is ultimately the Lord Jesus. God sent His prophets to appeal to Israel for repentance. They *could have lead to repentance*. But Israel would not. The marriage feast was totally ready and waiting for the Jewish people; they could have had it. But they didn't want it, and so the course of human history was extended. Therefore finally God sent His Son. The Lord Jesus Himself was amazed that no other man had achieved the work which He had to; and therefore He clad Himself with zeal and performed it (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16 cp. Rev. 5:3,4). God knew that salvation in the end would have to be through the death of His Son. But there were other possible scenarios for the repentance and salvation of mankind, which no man achieved. And so, as in the parable of the servants sent to get fruit from the vineyard, there was left no other way but the death of God's only Son. There is a clear parallel between Is. 59:16 and Is. 63:5. The same words are used, but there is one difference. In Is. 59:16, "His righteousness, it upheld Him", but in Is. 63:5 it was God's fury which upheld / sustained Him. The Messianic arm of Yahweh which brought salvation did so only because as Son of Man, the Lord Jesus is the only human who can rightly judge sin on behalf of God's anger. His necessary anger / wrath in judging sin is therefore part of the wider nexus of the absolutely legitimate salvation He achieved through the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 59:17 He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a mantle- Yahweh's arm which was to bring salvation (:16) required that the saviour referred to act as a high priest; hence the usage of priestly language here for the breastplate.; indeed all the items of clothing here are described with words which are found in the description of the high priestly clothing in Ex. 28. The "garments" are s.w. Ex. 28:3,4. The "helmet" alludes therefore to the high priestly mitre; the "mantle" to the priestly "robe" (s.w.) of Ex. 28:4,31 etc. And yet the suffering servant had been named "Israel, he was representative of all God's people. And so these words are applied to us, in that we are "in Christ" and all that is true of Him is true of us- even His High Priestly work for sinners. Thus Paul's description of the warrior of the Gospel in Ephesians 6 composites together various descriptions of Messiah's clothing in the servant songs (Is. 11:5 = "loins girded with truth"; Is. 49:2 "mouth like a sharp sword"; Is. 52:7 "bring good tidings / publish salvation" = "the preparation of the Gospel of peace"; Is. 59:17 "breastplate of righteousness"; Is. 59:17

“helmet of salvation”). We are to be Christ to the world.

Isaiah 59:18 According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, wrath to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the islands He will repay recompense- The adversaries and enemies of God's people are the enemies of God Himself and His Son. The salvation to be achieved by Yahweh's arm, His Son (:16,17) required the judgment of sin. Clothed as it were in high priestly clothing (:17), the priest-king-saviour will finally do justice- at the day of judgment. Their judgment will be according to what they did (Is. 59:18; 65:6); although Jer. 16:18 says that some will be recompensed double. By contrast, the exiles were not receiving punishment according as their deeds deserved, but less (Ezra 9:13). These different degrees of recompense suggest that Divine judgment is far more complex than a simple 'measure for measure'. The greater complexity is because He weighs motives and inflexions of meaning attached to actions which all require different judgments. And then on top of that, there is the credit He gives for forgiveness, and for the prayers and faith of others influencing the final outcome of judgment in any given case.

Isaiah 59:19 So shall they fear the name of Yahweh from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun- The judgments upon the surrounding nations were intended to bring forth repentance and acceptance of Israel's God, from east to west.

For He will come as a rushing stream, which the breath of Yahweh drives- AV "the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him". This elsewhere refers to the pole lifted up, the Lord Jesus, lifted up as crucified as the rallying point of faith in the midst of the stream of Divine judgments.

Isaiah 59:20 A Redeemer- "*A* redeemer" [although the text is unclear] rather than "*the* redeemer" could suggest there were other potential redeemers which could have arisen before the Lord Jesus came. As Hosea ‘redeemed’ Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel’s *go’el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh’s relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn’t come- even

under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: “We are slaves this day in the land you gave…” (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren’t realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren

Will come to Zion- No redeemer came to Zion as planned because the Jewish lack of repentance precluded it. So under inspiration, Paul changes this to "the redeemer shall come out of Zion" (Rom. 11:26), thereby combining the sense with that of Ps. 14:7.

And to those who turn from disobedience in Jacob, says Yahweh- The LXX and Rom. 11:26 have "shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob". The ambiguity is because man's turning away from sin is also a gift from God, in this case that requested in Lam. 5:2. Repentance and not just forgiveness is given from God; this is His grace to the extreme. Those who turn from sin are turned from sin by the Lord. The blessing promised to Abraham was not only forgiveness of sins, but that the Lord Jesus would *turn away* Abraham's seed from their iniquities (Acts 3:26). Yet we only become Abraham's seed by repentance and baptism. Our repentance and desire not to sin is therefore confirmed after our baptism. Paul's citation of this is deliberately altered to teach the truth that the *majority* of Israel will not turn before He comes. To them He will come and turn ungodliness away from them (Rom. 11:26). But Israelite repentance is a condition for the Lord’s return.

Isaiah 59:21 As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says Yahweh. My Spirit which is on you, and My words which I have put in your mouth- This would be achieved if they accepted the Spirit, part of the package offered in the new covenant. His words would be written in their hearts too. Having Divine words put in the mouth meant they were to be as Aaron and Moses before Pharaoh (s.w. Ex. 4:15); for it was also Moses who was covered in the shadow of Yahweh's hand as He passed by in the parallel passage in Is. 51:16. Remember that they were bidden flee Babylon before she fell to the Medes. The servant figure need not have feared the king of Babylon, he was intended to go to him and plead as Moses "let My people go". But the exiles feared men, perhaps one particular ruler of Persia or Babylon, whom they thought would not allow their restoration; see on Is. 51:12. They feared him rather than God, and so they didn't flee Babylon as asked.

Shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says Yahweh- The promise of the new covenant and the associated gift of the Spirit was that if they said "yes" to it, then they would be preserved eternally faithful. For the Messianic Kingdom would then begin. A connection between Joshua and Israel is developed here, which describes the new covenant which God will make with Israel in the Messianic Kingdom in terms evidently reminiscent of Joshua- as if the new covenant was made with him, thereby enabling him potentially to be part of a Messianic Kingdom even in his day: "And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: my Spirit that is upon thee ["Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him" Dt. 34:9; Num. 27:18-23] , and my words which I have put in thy mouth [Dt. 18:18- God's words were put in Joshua's mouth], shall not depart out of thy mouth ["this book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth", Josh. 1:8, s.w.], nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever". See on Josh. 1:6. But these things were to come true in the greater Joshua, the Lord Jesus.

From henceforth and forever- The Spirit would abide in them for ever. In other words, the sense of Spiritual strength from God which Israel will have will not just diminish into nothing, it will not just fade away. I think this is one of the saddest aspects of our present spiritual experience. You see a keen young brother emerge from the waters of baptism, entering the new covenant, throw himself into the study and preaching of the word, he grows spiritually... and then he slips, slips and slips, until he slides down the slippery path into the world. We go to a Bible study, a Bible conference, we read the word of the new covenant together in intense fellowship. And then it all slips away, we lose the reality of our calling, we're strong for the next day, perhaps the day after, and then back to base level. But then we will spiritually run and not faint, walk in the new and living way and not be weary. This is surely one of the most wonderful aspects of the Kingdom life; constant growth, no regrets, no looking back over our shoulder, no sense of spiritual anti-climax. No more fading away spiritually, instead the energy of constant growth.

Isaiah Chapter 60

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh is risen upon you- Even before the exile, Israel and Judah had been invited to perceive that light, hence Is. 9:2 LXX "O people walking in darkness, behold a great light". But they didn't. And so the returned exiles, "Zion", are asked at a later stage to arise and shine because their light had come (Is. 60:1). But again they didn't, and so these prophecies of a light coming are reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who was perceived by a new Zion as the light of the world. I explained on Is. 30:26 how the coming of Zion's supernaturally bright light is to come therefore when Babylon falls; and this has therefore been deferred to the latter day fall of Babylon.

"Arise" is the word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival.

Zion's light would certainly come and give light to the world- even though the fulfilment of the prophecy at the restoration from Babylon was actually conditional on Judah keeping the Sabbath and caring for their poor brethren: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee... And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising". Nehemiah repaired the breaches, Ezra laid the foundations of the temple...the prophecy of Isaiah 58 was fulfilled on the surface, but not in its Kingdom sense, because they failed to keep the Sabbath etc. Isaiah 58:10 says that *if* they drew out their soul to the hungry, if they allowed themselves to feel the hunger of others, *then* would their light rise and their darkness be as the noonday. And thus the prophecy of Isaiah 60:1,2 that Zion's light is going to dawn was conditional upon the Jews caring for their hungry amongst them- even though in that passage, the condition isn't directly stated. The restoration was therefore only a sham of what was possible.

Let's remember that the exiles were symbols of us. We in this life are passing through "the time of our exile" (1 Pet. 1:17 RSV). The restoration command to the exiles in Babylon to arise and shine, as their light had come (Is. 60:1) went unheeded by them; they preferred to stay in Babylon. And so this is reapplied to us as the new Israel in Eph. 5:14.

The LXX suggests that the coming of this light of Zion depended upon their being willing to accept it: "Be enlightened, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come".

Isaiah 60:2 For behold, darkness shall cover the land, and gross darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise on you, and His glory shall be seen on you- The darkness contrasts with the light which dawns mentally, internally, in minds which have desired to be enlightened (:1 LXX). Darkness covering the earth is the language of Gen. 1; we as the readers / audience are left in expectation of a new creation being spoken about. But we are also given the impression that Israel was being treated as Egypt whom they trusted in, suffering the plague of darkness. But 'covering with darkness' is a phrase only used elsewhere of death (Job 23:17; Ecc. 6:4). It was through death and judgment that the new life and creation could come forth. The land, of Israel, and "the peoples" (Gentiles) are paralleled here; for it was the Divine intention that the judgments upon the surrounding world would also be those upon Israel, and yet out of that was to emerge a repentant remnant of Jews and Gentiles who would merge into a new multiethnic people of God in the day when Yahweh would arise in glory. In a literal sense there was to be the light of God's glory in Zion when He personally dwelt there.

Isaiah 60:3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising- Isaiah 60:1-3 reasons that Zion's light was soon to come, but Judah were to reflect that light as if it had already come; in the same way as God's light was to rise, so Judah were to arise as if they were that light. The message is that they were to believe that the Messianic light of the world was to arise soon, and were to act as if that time had already come; they were called to live the Kingdom now life, to showcase God's Kingdom to the world. In this sense, Zion's sons are described as coming from all parts of their dispersion and being about to come to Zion; and yet they are described as having already "come" (Is. 60:4). The mixing of the tenses, present and future, is to suggest that they were to believe that this *would happen* and to act now as if it was already happening. "You shall see and be lightened" (Is. 60:5 RV)- and yet they were to act as if their light had in fact already come (Is. 60:1). Yet Judah sadly didn't believe that the restoration prophecies would come to pass, and so they didn't act as if they would come true. Instead of being a light to the world, they accepted the Gentile darkness instead of God's light. Mazdak, the Persian god of light, effectively became their god, instead of Yahweh.

Isaiah 60:4 Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather themselves together, they come to you- The 'coming / assembling' and 'drawing near / gathering' of the exiles (s.w. Is. 43:5) would have been primarily fulfilled at the restoration (same words in Neh. 1:9). But most of the exiles remained in the lands of their captivity, just as people resist the Gospel's call today. They had to themselves bring and gather themselves (Is. 45:20; 49:18; 60:4), so that God would confirm this by bringing and gathering them (Is. 43:5; Jer. 31:8; Ez. 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; Zech. 10:10). See on Is. 56:8. And so today with all who wish to be in God's Kingdom; our desire to be there and first moves towards it will be confirmed many times over by God's work through His Spirit.

Your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms- See on :3. The LXX suggests it would be as a result of the children born in exile returning along with the repentant Gentiles of the lands of their captivities: "lift up thine eyes round about, and behold thy children gathered: all thy sons have come from far, and thy daughters shall be borne on men's shoulders". This is a commonly expressed prophetic vision. It didn't however come about, and the essence of it has therefore been delayed and reapplied. The later feeding miracle occurred on the other side of Galilee to Magdala (Mt. 15:39), suggesting the miracle occurred in Gentile territory, with people present from "far off" (Mk. 8:3; hence the guests "glorified the God *of Israel*", Mt. 15:31). Surely there were Gentiles present at that meal, and the LXX uses this phrase to speak of how Gentiles from "far off" would come and sit down at the Messianic banquet of the last days (Is. 60:4; Jer. 26:27; 38:10; 46:27).

Isaiah 60:5 Then you shall see and be radiant, and your heart shall thrill and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you- "You shall see and be lightened" (Is. 60:5 RV). See on :3. "Turned" is AV "converted", suggesting there would be repentance amongst the nations of their captivity; see on :4. The nations around Israel were to repent and bring their presents to them. This began to happen after the destruction of the Assyrians in Hezekiah's time, but he entered into covenant with the Gentiles rather than bringing them to the God of Israel, the light of Zion. Perhaps Nehemiah was some kind of potential Messiah- for in Neh. 5:17 the surrounding Gentiles ‘came up’ to him and shared in the luxurious temple meals (a common Kingdom prophecy- the same Hebrew words are used for the Gentiles ‘coming up’ to the temple in Is. 60:5,11; Jer. 16:19; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Those meals could have been the Messianic banquets. But finally at the

last day, all these prophecies shall be fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus, despite all the previous failures in fulfilment.

Isaiah 60:6 The multitude of camels shall cover you, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praises of Yahweh- The gold and frankincense brought from the east recalls the gifts of the wise men to the infant Jesus. The conversion of the Gentiles [proclaiming the praise of Yahweh] which was possible at the restoration didn't happen, and so it was reapplied and reinterpreted. They would proclaim Yahweh's praise just as the Israelites themselves would (Is. 63:7) because the Gentiles would now identify themselves with the Israelites in forming the new multiethnic people of God which was to be formed on the basis of repentance and acceptance of the new covenant.

Isaiah 60:7 All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you- Kedar and Nebaioth were sons of Ishmael. The idea may be that finally the Jew - Arab conflict within the family of Abraham is resolved, and they too come to offer sacrifice to Israel's God.

They shall come up with acceptance on My altar; and I will glorify the house of My glory- Is. 60:7 prophesied that God would "*glorify* the *house* of my glory", LXX "my house of prayer shall be glorified". But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes "to *beautify* [s.w. "glorify"] the house of the Lord" (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God's special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building "cieled houses" for themselves (Hag. 1:4). The word for "cieled" occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The

glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Isaiah 60:8 Who are these who fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?- The reference is to the exiles returning to Judah along with the repentant Gentiles. LXX "Who are these that fly as clouds, and as doves with young ones to me?"; GNB "What are these ships that skim along like clouds, Like doves returning home?". Perhaps in view is the dove returning to Noah's window once the flood of Divine judgment receded.

Isaiah 60:9 Surely the islands shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your sons from far- No specific location may be in view, as "ships of Tarshish" was a phrase used like "an Indiaman" was once used to refer to a long distance trading vessel. Thus GNB "They are ships coming from distant lands, bringing God's people home". The text can also read "the ships of Tarshish *as* at the first", referring to how they brought gold and silver in the days of Solomon and the earlier kingdom of God which was now to be restored. There is another such allusion to Solomon's times in :13.

Their silver and their gold with them, for the name of Yahweh your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you- The Gentiles will be converted because of how God had saved and glorified His sinful people; for these Gentiles had been host nations for the Jewish exiles and were well aware of their sins. It is God's grace to sinners which is observed by others and causes them to turn to Him- and this is always the most powerful tool in the work of conversion, rather than advertising theological, abstract truths and expecting the general public to fall down in amazement before them.

Isaiah 60:10 Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you- It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (Ezra 4:3 cp. Neh. 2:20), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6 and in Isaiah, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion.

As with some of us, their quite correct refusal to allow “the adversaries of Judah” (Ezra 4:1) to fellowship with us in the work can lead us to an exclusive approach to fellowship, that actually disallows the essentially outgoing and inclusive spirit of the God we serve. The Jews returned from Babylonian having swung to the opposite extreme from their earlier worldliness; they returned proud and refusing contact with the Gentile world, considering themselves saved by their own strength. And this is perhaps reflected in the way they refused on principle to allow any Gentiles to help them in the building work. Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: “And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee [as in the decree of Cyrus]...Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night”; and them as Ez. 43 had also described, “I will glorify the house of my glory” (Is. 60:7).

The reality was that the walls were built from a motive not of glorifying Zion in fulfilment of prophecy, but for defence *against* the Gentiles. But the gates had to be shut to keep the Gentiles out (Neh. 13:19), lest they yet further corrupted the Jews who were eager to trade with them on the Sabbath rather than convert them to the God of Israel. Instead of bringing their goods through the gates to lay before Yahweh, they brought in their goods to sell to His people in trade. But returned Judah didn’t act as a nation of priests, the food the Gentiles brought in to Zion was to be sold for profit to the Jews. They failed to be a missionary nation, and rather were mere trading / economic partners on an equal footing [cp. the church today?]. The prophecy that the gates would be always open will now only come true in the future Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 21:25,26).

For in My wrath I struck you, but in My grace have I had mercy on you- As explained on :9, the Gentiles will be converted because ["for in My wrath..."] of how God had saved and glorified His sinful, condemned people by grace; for these Gentiles had been host nations for the Jewish exiles and were well aware of their sins. It is God's grace to sinners which is observed by others and causes them to turn to Him- and this is always the most powerful tool in the work of conversion, rather than advertising theological, abstract truths and expecting the general public to fall down in amazement before them.

Isaiah 60:11 Your gates also shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, and their kings led captive- AV "Therefore your gates...". The “therefore” connects with the preceding verse, as if the gates would always be open in order to constantly welcome repentant Gentiles. When the city and temple was rebuilt, Gentiles

would come and feed Israel's flocks and name them all "the priests of the Lord" and bring them food to eat in tribute (Is. 61:4-6). And yet Nehemiah had to close the gates of Jerusalem to stop Sabbath trading, thereby precluding the fulfilment of this prophecy at the time. The prophecy will therefore come to final fulfilment in the new Jerusalem to be established at the Lord's return (Rev. 21:25). Although clearly the fulfilment may not be strictly literal, but will be a reinterpretation and reapplication of these words which initially could have had a literal fulfilment at the restoration.

Isaiah 60:12 For that nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; yes, those nations shall be utterly wasted- Connecting with :11 ["for..."], the nations of the land would either perish, or enter into the open gates of Zion in covenant relationship with Yahweh. Thus a situation would come about whereby the earth was only populated by those in covenant relationship with God.

Isaiah 60:13 The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the fir tree, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious- But Haggai lamented that instead, Judah dwelt in "cieled houses", they used the exotic trees of the land for their own homes, whilst the house of Yahweh lay desolate. Thereby the prophecy of Ez. 43:7 was precluded from fulfilment: "the place of His throne, the place of the soles of His feet, where He will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever". The intention was that the ark would no longer be His footstool (Jer. 3:16; Ps. 99:5; 132:7; 1 Chron. 28:2), but He Himself would be dwelling in the temple. The idea was that as cedars had been sent from Lebanon for the building of the first temple, so they would again; the impression is of a restored Kingdom of God in Israel as it previously was, but to an even greater extent. See on :9.

Isaiah 60:14 The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending to you; and all those who despised you shall bow themselves down at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The city of Yahweh, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel- This prophecy started to come true after Haman's demise: "the sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet". But Judah didn't do their part in fulfilling the rest of the prophecy, which speaks of a rebuilt Zion. The promise that Judah's persecutors would bow before them was only partially fulfilled in Haman's destruction; the main fulfilment now awaits the Kingdom, although in a

reinterpreted form (Rev. 3:9). The renaming of the city is like that of Ez. 48:35 "Yahweh is there", because the idea was that He would literally come and dwell in Zion; the kingdom of heaven was to be transferred to earth. This wonderful possibility didn't come about at the restoration because the returned exiles didn't rebuild the temple and operate it according to the commandments of Ez. 40-48.

Isaiah 60:15 Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no man passed through you, I will make you an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations- The hatred was by God as well as man: “I hated them” (Hos. 9:15). This was the wrath of love unrequited and spurned. God is emotional and speaks in anger, and truly had these feelings; but the pole of His love is greater than that of His judgment. We note how God as it were takes the blame for Israel being "forsaken"; they had forsaken Him (s.w. Is. 1:28), but He expresses it in terms of Him having forsaken them.

Isaiah 60:16 You shall also drink the milk of the nations, and shall nurse from royal breasts- This continues the figure of Is. 49:21: "Then you will say in your heart, ‘Who has conceived these for me, since I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile, and wandering back and forth? Who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?’". Children born through another were still reckoned as the wife's children (Gen. 16:1; 30:1). The children of Zion were therefore suckled by the Gentiles (Is. 60:16).

And you shall know that I, Yahweh, am your Saviour and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob- As Hosea ‘redeemed’ Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel’s *go’el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh’s relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn’t come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: “We are slaves this day in the land you gave…” (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren’t realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren.

Isaiah 60:17 For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron- The language of Israel's return from captivity as found in Isaiah and Ezekiel all has evident reference to the second coming and the final establishment of the Kingdom. It isn't just that Israel's return under Ezra and Zerubbabel was a type of that final homecoming. It could have been the Kingdom- had they obeyed the prophecies. It was all about a potential Kingdom of God. But they were too caught up with their own self-interest, with building their own houses rather than God's; and so it was all deferred. Using the prophetic perfect, God had prophesied that at the time of the restoration, He would come and dwell in rebuilt Zion (Zech. 8:3)- just as Ezekiel's prophecy had concluded: "The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (Ez. 48:35). Clearly, Ezekiel's prophecies could have been fulfilled at the restoration; God was willing that they should be. But human apathy and self-interest stopped it from happening as it could have done. When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: "Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former (Hag. 2:9); Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that "For brass [in Solomon's temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon's fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". But it simply didn't happen, because God's people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own "cieled houses" (the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was "covered", or cieled, with cedar). And the old men wept at the fact that the glory of the new house was *less than* that of the earlier one.

I will also make your officers peace, and righteousness your ruler- "Officers" is the word commonly used for "visitation", in the sense of the enemies of Judah judging and dominating her in the day of her visitation. "Ruler" or AV "exactor" is the word for "taskmaster" and has been used by Isaiah of Judah's dominators and abusers (Is. 9:4; 14:2,4); the reference is to the repentance of Israel's historical abusers and their being given peace with God and imputed righteousness, so that they might also enter covenant with Yahweh along with a repentant Judah. All this was due to the way the Lord Jesus was "oppressed" as Israel's representative (Is. 53:7) and thus became the basis for righteousness to be imputed to all who had been oppressed and had oppressed others.

Isaiah 60:18 Violence shall no more be heard in your land, desolation nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise- "Salvation" is literally "Jesus". But Nehemiah records how the walls and gates were given very mundane names, connected to what merchandise was traded there [e.g. fish]. And so they chose not to make 'Jesus' their wall- and so His coming was deferred or re-interpreted. Yet Nehemiah encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfill the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion's gates in Messiah's Kingdom would be praise. The "violence" in view was not only that of foreign invaders, but the violence done by the Jews to each other (s.w. Is. 59:6; Jer. 6:7). We note that the promise of peace is limited to "within your borders". The initial intention was that the Kingdom would be reestablished within the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

Isaiah 60:19 The sun shall be no more your light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light to you: but Yahweh will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory- It seems that Yahweh Himself would have dwelt in Zion, the "brightness" of the cherubim would have returned there (s.w. Ez. 1:4,13) resulting in a visible light which would have eclipsed the need for light from the sun and moon (Is. 4:5,6, "shining" is s.w. "brightness"). Such great potentials were wasted. But these things will come true in the last days and are alluded to in Rev. 21:4 as having literal truth when the Lord Jesus returns. This would be the fulfilment of the promise to David, that his glorified kingdom would be as the "brightness" after the rain of judgment (2 Sam. 23:4 s.w.). But until then these things are reapplied in a spiritual sense to the way the Lord Jesus, who is the light of God's glory, is to be the light of our world in which we live, move and understand life. He who has no light can find "brightness" in Him (s.w. Is. 50:10). This was hinted at even in Prov. 4:18, where the path of the just is as the "brightness" (s.w.) shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Isaiah 60:20 Your sun shall no more go down, neither shall your moon withdraw itself; for Yahweh will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended- See on :19. Sun and moon were not to be destroyed, but to be replaced in function by the light of Yahweh. Hence LXX "nor shall the moon be eclipsed". The sun and moon, as in Joseph's dreams, may refer to the leadership of Israel. They would no longer be eclipsed by captivity and exile, although they would be replaced in function. "Withdraw" is the word for "gather", used of the gathering of Judah into captivity (Is. 16:10; 17:5; 24:22; 33:4). These words are

quoted as being true of God's future Kingdom on earth (Rev. 21:4); they were reapplied to a later fulfilment rather than coming true at the restoration. The days of mourning refer to the days of exile, as demonstrated by the mourning of the book of Lamentations and Ps. 137:1. But the exiles preferred to stay in exile; and thus precluded the possibility of these words having any primary fulfilment. "Days of mourning" is a phrase used several times for funeral mourning. There would be final comfort over the loss brought about by death- ultimately, through the resurrection of the dead.

Isaiah 60:21 Your people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified- Their salvation would be on account of their identity with the Messianic "branch", the Lord Jesus; they would be "in Christ" and thereby saved. Inheritance of the land forever is the language of the Abrahamic covenant; this would come true because of righteousness being imputed to them. And the end result of that system of salvation, as Paul brings out in Romans, would be glory to God.

Isaiah 60:22 The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation; I, Yahweh, will hasten it in its time- Despite LXX "I the Lord will gather them in due time", this connects back to Is. 5:19, where we read that the Jews mocked Isaiah and his God, saying "Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it". There was clearly opposition to Isaiah's prophecies. The idea of judgment coming would have been mocked in these kinds of words. But we wonder whether this is really a verbatim quotation from these people; or whether God read their thoughts as effectively saying this, and as being the real implication of their positions. For there is no evidence that Judah abandoned Yahweh; rather did they claim obedience and loyalty to Him, although they claimed the same about their idols whom they worshipped in His Name. But God was not deaf to their words, or the implications of their thoughts and actions. He in fact heard their mocking 'prayer', because He here says that He will "hasten His work" (s.w.).

Isaiah Chapter 61

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is on me; because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted- The sending forth of Isaiah was the sending forth of God's word to His people (s.w. Is. 6:8; 9:8). Isaiah like the Lord Jesus and like us, was the word made flesh. The man became his message; there was a congruence between him personally and the word preached. In the immediate context, Isaiah himself was the servant messenger sent forth (s.w. Is. 42:19; 48:16; 61:1); but he was largely rejected, and Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by Hezekiah's son Manasseh (Heb. 11:37). And so the messenger came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. He came to proclaim “the opening of the prison”, or “the opening of the eyes to them that are bound” (Is. 61:1 RVmg.)- He came to open blind eyes, to change the self-perceptions which imprison most of humanity. But that was possible if they wished to see. The Israelites were seen as grasshoppers by their enemies- and so this is how they came to perceive themselves (Num. 13:33). Prov. 23:7 RV observes: “As he reckoneth within himself, so is he”. We are defined by our own self-perception. We must come in the end to perceive ourselves from God’s perspective and not according to how men perceive us.

Lk. 4:18 parallels “the poor” with “the brokenhearted... the captives... the bruised”. The whole mission of Jesus was to bring good news to the poor (Is. 61:1,2 cp. Lk. 4:18–21; Mt. 11:5). This doesn’t mean that the materially rich are outside the scope of the Gospel. It means that we are all “the poor”. Therefore the huge emphasis on helping the poor applies to the poor themselves- to be generous to the poor in spirit. You don’t need money in your pocket to be generous to “the poor”. Paul could say that although he was poor, he made many rich (2 Cor. 6:10).

To proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to those who are bound- The allusion is to the proclamation of the year of Jubilee on the day of atonement. Through the cross, freedom was obtained for the spiritually imprisoned; but that jubilee is to be proclaimed by us. And so the Lord Himself quoted Is. 61:1 about Himself: He proclaimed liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. For the Babylonian exiles refused to accept they were imprisoned and largely didn't want the freedom proclaimed. But this passage is evidently behind Peter’s assertion that after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus preached to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:18,19). His resurrection was the basis of His command to go into all the world and preach the word; and thereby His

preachers went out to do and continue the work which He personally had done. Those who are bound are expanded into "the bruised" in Lk. 4:18; alluding to the temporal bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman by sin, the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). The opening of the prison in practice means, for now, the opening of blind eyes to the wonderful spiritual vista of the Kingdom and things of the Lord Jesus.

The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:4,5. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life.

Isaiah 61:2 To proclaim the time of Yahweh's grace, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn- "Time" is "year", alluding to the year of Jubilee of :1 being proclaimed. We note the contrast between a *year* of grace and the singular *day* of vengeance. When reading this passage (Lk. 4:20,21), the Lord Jesus stopped His reading after "the year of Yahweh's grace"; because the "day of vengeance" had been postponed by His work until the last day (2 Thess. 1:7-9). The comfort of the mourners was that spoken of in Is. 40; the coming of Messiah was to be prefaced by comfort to the mourners, those who mourned for their sins. It is not those generally in sorrow who are in view, but those who mourn their sins in repentance.

Isaiah 61:3 To appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to them a garland for ashes- "Garland" is literally a bonnet, and is used of the bonnets with which the priests were to be clothed in the restored temple (Ez. 44:18; Ex. 39:28). But they refused to build and operate the structure of Ez. 40-48 and so precluded any possibility of this being fulfilled in them; and they didn't mourn for their sins.

The oil of joy- The term is only used for the anointing of the sinless Messiah, the Lord Jesus (Ps. 45:7 = Heb. 1:9). But His anointing will become that of all who are "in Christ".

For mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness- Mourning is contrasted with being planted as trees of righteousness, confirming the suggestion on :2 that the mourning in view is of penitence, rather than sadness in general. Sorrow and mourning shall flee away in that forgiveness and salvation will finally come. The joy which replaces the mourning is the joy of good conscience with God. Nehemiah in his mourning for the state of his people began to fulfill Is. 61:3, concerning how those who wept over Zion would be given joy- but the prophecy continues to speak of how the old wastes of Zion would be rebuilt and repaired, and the Messianic age ushered in. He didn't go on to fulfill this. Mourning being turned into joy would have happened if the mourning exiles (Ps. 137:1; Lam. 1:4) had accepted the new covenant offered them (s.w. Jer. 31:13); but they rejected it. And so this comes true in the experience of those in our age who accept that covenant.

That they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that He may be glorified- This is the time of Ez. 34:29 (s.w.), and also of Is. 60:21 "Your people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified". Their salvation would be on account of their identity with the Messianic "branch", the Lord Jesus; they would be "in Christ" and thereby saved. Inheritance of the land forever is the language of the Abrahamic covenant; this would come true because of righteousness being imputed to them. And the end result of that system of salvation, as Paul brings out in Romans, would be glory to God.

Isaiah 61:4 They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations- "Arise / raise up" is the word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival.

And they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations- The temple still lay "waste" (Hag. 1:4,9) just as it had lain "desolate" [s.w. Jer. 33:10,12] after the Babylonian destruction. The 'restoration' was in fact not

really a restoration at all, in God's eyes. Thus Ezra sat down desolate [AV "astonied"] at the news of Judah's apostasy in marrying the surrounding women; using the very same word as frequently used to describe the 'desolate' Jerusalem that was to be rebuilt (Ezra 9:3 cp. Is. 49:8,19; 54:3; 61:4). He tore his priestly garment (Ezra 9:3), as if he realized that all Ezekiel's prophesies about those priestly garments now couldn't come true (s.w. Ez. 42:14; 44:17,19). Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfill the Messianic prophecies about them which existed. And this seems to have been foreseen in this prophecy, because it speaks of the desolations of "many generations", implying a far longer desolation than the 70 years exile in Babylon.

Isaiah 61:5 Gentiles shall stand and feed your flocks, and foreigners shall be your plough men and your vine dressers- This is all because "But you shall be... priests" (:6). The picture is of all their secular matters being attended to by Gentiles so that they might focus upon their priestly work. This is surely the hope and dream of every servant of God; to have all secular issues taken care of, so they can focus upon spiritual things.

Isaiah 61:6 But you shall be named the priests of Yahweh; men will call you the ministers of our God- Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). "Men", the Gentiles, would treat Israel as their priests. The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

You will eat the wealth of the nations, and you will boast in their glory- The Hebrew is difficult, literally "in their splendor you shall *be substituted* in their

stead". The idea seems to be that the Gentiles will not glory in their own wealth, but rather in how much they can do for Israel.

Isaiah 61:7 Instead of your shame you shall have double- LXX "thus shall they inherit the land a second time". Or the idea may simply be that they inherit double what they ought to, such is God's grace to them and desire to load them with double blessing (Is. 40:2; Zech. 9:12), just as He gave double to Job as representative of restored Israel (Job 42:10).

And instead of dishonour they shall rejoice in their portion- Their "portion" is parallel with "their land". But they didn't rejoice in their land because they preferred the softer life of Persia, as the book of Esther makes clear; rather than returning to a desolated land and rebuilding God's Kingdom there.

Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be to them- "In their land" the Jews would receive "everlasting joy"- but they didn't want to return to their land to receive it.

Isaiah 61:8 For I, Yahweh, love justice, I hate robbery with iniquity; and I will give them their recompense in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them-

A love as strong as God's is going to also elicit the emotion of hatred and anger when that love is rejected and abused. He "hated" (s.w.) Judah's insincere worship and relationship with Him (Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4). But it is hard to separate the sin from the sinner. That distinction may be helpful for us in order to avoid judging others too personally, but God it seems doesn't make that decision. He gave Israel into the hands of those who hated her (s.w. Ez. 16:27,37) and in that sense He hated her. The feelings of hatred which Hosea had for Gomer due to her abuse of His love were those of God for Israel: "There I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). God is not simply "love" in the abstract. He is love for real, with all the emotion and psychological complex which goes along with love; and this will include hatred if that love is abused.

Isaiah 61 gives a detailed prophecy of the restoration and how it could flourish into God's Kingdom, and then adds that "I hate robbery for burnt offering"; as if to say that *if* Judah offered with the right spirit and showed justice, *then* the everlasting covenant would be entered with them. But this just didn't happen. They themselves disallowed it.

Isaiah 61:9 Their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which Yahweh has blessed- The implication seems to be that the children of the repentant exiles would be known among the nations, as if they would travel amongst them revealing by example and teaching the Abrahamic covenant. They would be the fulfilment of the promises of blessing upon the seed.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels- Isaiah as representative of the true Israel rejoices in prospect of salvation, imagining and understanding how his salvation was due to being clothed as a high priest; being, in our terms, "in Christ". The LXX uses the language of the High Priest: "he has put a mitre on me as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments (NEV "jewels") as a bride". The jewels would then allude to the precious stones of the breastplate. It is the Messianic priest, the Lord Jesus, who is in view; and all those who are in Him. The idea is that high priest is getting married, and as he would clothe himself with these things to go into the sanctuary on service, he now does so in order to marry. His service of his wife is therefore in being her loving high priest.

We have been clothed with God's righteousness (Is. 61:10; Rev. 3:18) , and therefore we should be clothed with humility too, as our response to this (1 Pet. 5:5). And the element of unreality here is that God as it were dresses up His own bride. Israel is so often set up as the bride of God (Is. 54:5; 61:10; 624,5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; Hos. 2:19,20). This is why any infidelity to God is spoken of as adultery (Mal. 2:11; Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Dt. 31:16; Jud. 2:17; 8:27,33; Hos. 9:1). The very language of Israel 'selling themselves to do iniquity' uses the image of prostitution. This is how God feels our even temporary and fleeting acts and thoughts of unfaithfulness. This is why God is jealous for us (Ex. 20:15; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15)- because His undivided love for us is so exclusive. He expects us to be totally *His*.

Isaiah 61:11 For as the earth brings forth its bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord Yahweh will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nation- The returned exiles, or [later] all who wished to become part of God's restored Kingdom,

would be empowered by the water of the Spirit (see on Is. 44:3) to "spring up" on what had previously been dry ground (Is. 44:4). That Spirit would be articulated partly through the prophetic word (Is. 55:10 s.w. "bud" AV). This will be the restored Eden, where Yahweh had caused the vegetation to "spring up" (s.w. Gen. 2:5). This springing up or growing would be in the fulfilment of the promises to David of the establishment of the Kingdom of his seed (s.w. 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 132:17). But the springing up would be of a community of people, the plural seed who were "in" the singular Messianic seed. And this is now experienced through baptism into the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:27-29). It is "righteousness" which would "spring up" (s.w. Is. 61:11); the work of the Spirit would result in the seed becoming righteous through their spiritual transformation. And yet it will also be on account of their status as "in" the "branch of righteousness" which will "spring up" (Jer. 33:15). The work of the Spirit will be, and is, to transform the plural seed in practice into what they are by status in the Messiah- righteous. And it is this power, this gift, this Divine 'causing' us to be righteous, which every spiritual person so thirsts for.

Isaiah Chapter 62

Isaiah 62:1 For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest- At times the prophets are found pleading with God to change the word which they themselves had pronounced and knew to be justified. Is. 62:1-7; 51:9 even appear to be Isaiah's challenge to the Lord to not let His judgment remain on Zion- Isaiah will not keep silent, nor will his fellow prophets, until God acts. He begs God to not restrain Himself, and to take note of the desolation caused (Is. 63:15; 64:8-12).

The statement that God will not "rest" for Zion's sake (Is. 62:1) must be understood in the context of the faithful at that time urging God *not* to "be still" [same Hebrew word translated "rest"] for His people (Ps. 83:1; Is. 64:12). This is an allusion to Boaz not being at rest until he had redeemed Ruth and Naomi; see on Is. 49:26. God is *not* at rest, He is *not* distant from us; and yet His people in Babylon felt that He was. It's no wonder that we are tempted to feel the same. Yet we must give Is. 62:1 it's full weight- God is answering the complaint of His people by stating that no, He will never rest for them. In this same context we read that He that keeps Israel will "neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4).

We must give Is. 62:1 it's full weight- God is answering the complaint of His people by stating that no, He will never rest for them. In this same context we read that He that keeps Israel will "neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). The fact that *God* will never 'hold His peace' for His people's sake (Is. 62:1) means that *we* should likewise not 'hold our peace' for them (the same Hebrew is used in Is. 62:6). In our prayers for them, we are to give God no rest (Is. 62:7). And so the connection between Is. 62:1 and 6 leaves us with an amazing challenge: *His* restless activity and concern for His people should be ours. It *must* be ours, if we are His children. Being bored from having 'nothing to do' just isn't part of the believer's life; His huge activity, the endless surging of His Spirit, is to be replicated in us as we too seek the good of others. If this connection is firmly established between His activity and ours, His Spirit and ours… then quite naturally we will seek to maximize our time for Him and be minimalists in the hours we spend upon the things of this life. As He never slumbers nor sleeps in His restless activity and thought for His people, so we shall likewise be in the Kingdom age; and our desire to be there is not because we fancy an eternal tropical holiday with palm trees blowing in the mind, but because we wish to be more closely aligned with His activity, with His Spirit, and not be held back by the limitations of our current natures.

Until her righteousness- The Lord Jesus, "the Lord our righteousness".

Go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns- It seems that Yahweh Himself would have dwelt in Zion, the "brightness" of the cherubim would have returned there (s.w. Ez. 1:4,13) resulting in a visible light which would have eclipsed the need for light from the sun and moon (Is. 4:5,6, "shining" is s.w. "brightness"). Such great potentials were wasted. But these things will come true in the last days and are alluded to in Rev. 21:4 as having literal truth when the Lord Jesus returns. This would be the fulfilment of the promise to David, that his glorified kingdom would be as the "brightness" after the rain of judgment (2 Sam. 23:4 s.w.). But until then these things are reapplied in a spiritual sense to the way the Lord Jesus, who is the light of God's glory, is to be the light of our world in which we live, move and understand life. He who has no light can find "brightness" in Him (s.w. Is. 50:10). This was hinted at even in Prov. 4:18, where the path of the just is as the "brightness" (s.w.) shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Some prophecies are dependent on prayer for their fulfilment. This is an example: “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness”. But this is dependent upon prayer: “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem…ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest *till* he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (:6,7). The prophecy that “I will not rest” was dependent for fulfilment upon the faithful continuing to pray and thereby not giving Him rest. Of course, they pray from their own freewill; there is the possibility they won’t pray, and thereby, surely, there’s the possibility the statement “I will not rest” is purely conditional on our prayers…?

Isaiah 62:2 The nations shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of Yahweh shall name- They would perceive that their righteousness was in the Lord Jesus, "the Lord our righteousness", and that He was the glory of the people of Israel (Lk. 2:32). As is the case today, the witness to the Lord Jesus is most powerfully through the people whom He has redeemed. Their new name would be related to their being counted righteous; just as today, baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus means we are covered in the clothing of His righteousness.

Isaiah 62:3 You shall also be a crown of beauty in the hand of Yahweh, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God- It is God's people who are in His hand

(Dt. 33:3). The idea is that God is crowned with His people, they are His glory, and He is theirs, just as Paul's converts were his joy and crown.

Isaiah 62:4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall your land any more be termed Desolate: but you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for Yahweh delights in you, and your land shall be married- LXX "thy land shall be inhabited"; this fits with the meaning of the names given., for "Beulah" = "Inhabited by Yah"; "Hephzibah" = 'delight of Yah'. But the Hebrew Masoretic text reading "married" connects with how God speaks of how He would remarry Zion in the same way as her sons would remarry her (:4,5)- but her sons chose to stay in Babylon, and so the joyous wedding ceremony God envisaged didn't happen. They preferred to nurse their own negative self-image, that Yahweh had forsaken them (Is. 49:14).

God not only forgives, but He *delights* in doing so (as Mic. 7:18); the way He is spoken of as 'delighting' in spiritually weak Israel is part and parcel of Him lavishing grace as He does (Num. 14:8). It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly questioning His love. Seeing that God is Almighty, and God could have made [and could re-make] His creation to 'understand' and respond in a robot-like way... and seeing God has real and deep emotional feelings... it all makes God almost a tragic figure.

Isaiah 62:5 For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons shall marry you- LXX makes this more relevant to the exiles returning and living in Zion: "And as a young man lives with a virgin, so shall thy sons dwell in thee". But most of the sons of Zion didn't return there, preferring Babylon; and of those who did, most wouldn't live in Jerusalem but preferred living outside the city and developing their own farmsteads (see on Neh. 11:1,2). "Sons" is *banayich* but this is also a form of *banah*, to build. Her sons were to be her builders. The land and physical city of Jerusalem is likened to a female and the exiles as the young man. But the truth was that by declining the invitation to return to the land, the exiles were declining marriage.

But :4 has said that it is Yahweh as the man who delights in the young woman Zion. The exiles are therefore asked to identify with Him. So God likens Himself to the young man marrying the virgin of Zion; even though she has acted as a

whore, He sees her now as a born again virgin. It seems evident that there must have been some kind of previous creation(s), e.g. for the creation of the Angels. God existed from infinity, and yet only 2,000 years ago did He have His only and His *begotten* Son. And that Son was a human being in order to save humans- only a few million of us (if that), who lived in a 6,000 year time span. In the specter of infinite time and space, this is wondrous. That the Only Son of God should die for a very few of us here, we who crawled on the surface of this tiny planet for such a fleeting moment of time. He died so that God could work out our salvation; and the love of God for us is likened to a young man marrying a virgin (Is. 62:5). Almighty God, who existed from eternity, is likened to a first timer, with all the intensity and joyful expectation and lack of disillusion. And more than this. The Jesus who didn't pre-exist but was like me, died for *me*, in the shameful way that He did. Our hearts and minds, with all their powers, are in the boundless prospect lost. His pure *love* for us, His condescension, should mean that we also ought to reach out into the lives of all men, never thinking they are beneath us or too insignificant or distant from us. No wonder 1 Jn. 4:15,16 describes believing that Jesus is the Son of God as believing the love that God has to us.

And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you- This suggests that Yahweh's joy over the restored state of Zion was a reflection of the joy which the exiles showed over her. They should have responded to the decree of Cyrus with real joy, according to Ps 126:1-3: "When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad". But their joy wasn't *so* ecstatic. They were happy for those who chose to return and gave them material help to this end, but the majority didn't feel the joy personally. This Divine rejoicing over God's people is that of the God who rejoices in fulfilling His covenant with His obedient people (Dt. 28:63; 30:9). It will be a mutual joy, with Yahweh's people rejoicing in Him (s.w. Is. 61:10; 65:18) and He in them (Is. 62:5; 65:19) because they have entered the new marriage covenant with Him (Jer. 32:41).

Isaiah 62:6 I have set watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night: you who call on Yahweh, take no rest- The watchmen were looking for the return of the exiles from Babylon and were giving Yahweh no rest until He brought this about. But they were "set" there, just as God gives

repentance. He gave them that mindset. See on :1.

Prayer is a way of making us realize the presence of the God who is always present. God's people are told to "keep not silence" in their prayers to God (Is. 62:6). But the same Hebrew word is translated "Give Him no rest" in the next verse (Is. 62:7). Insofar as the voice of prayer is never silent world-wide, so far God is never, in that sense, at rest. The extent of His activity for us is simply *huge*.

Is. 62:6,7 speaks of watchmen [= the prophets, Ezekiel 3:17; Jer. 6:17; Hab. 2:1] set upon Jerusalem's walls as watchmen, keeping no silence [in their prophesying] until Jerusalem was established. For the link between the prophets and standing on a watchtower, see Hab. 2:1. Is this not a reference to Malachi, Haggai and Zechariah prophesying as the basis upon which the newly built walls of Jerusalem would be preserved, and the city develop into the Messianic Kingdom hoped for? Note that the rebuilt Jerusalem of Ezra's time and the latter day Jerusalem are the same thing in Isaiah; the Kingdom could've come then. Watchmen upon the walls were looking for something- for the approach of the Messianic messenger with good tidings of Judah's full return from captivity, of which Isaiah had spoken in Isaiah 52:7,8. But most of Judah preferred to stay in Babylon, took up a collection for the few who did return… and no Messiah could appear with that news. God had promised this- but He asked to be put in remembrance of His promises (Isaiah 43:26), i.e. He asked for those watchmen to be His 'rememberancers', even though He cannot in that sense forget them (Psalms 119:49; Jer. 14:21). In all this we see an exquisite picture of how God works with men, how His promised faithfulness and omnipotence all the same has built into it a requirement for human prayerfulness and response. The reality was that the watchmen / prophets of Israel were blind, ignorant and sleepy (Isaiah 56:10).

Compare the following passages:

"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Is. 62:6,7)

with

"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give

unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph. 1:15-17).

The ideas of praying without ceasing and making mention occur in both passages. Surely Paul had the Isaiah passage in mind. It seems that he saw the ecclesia as the spiritual Zion. In the same way as Zion's watchmen were exhorted to pray for her without ceasing until the Kingdom is established there, so Paul prayed for the spiritual growth of his brethren. The implication is surely that once a certain level of spirituality had been achieved, then the Lord will return to establish His Kingdom.

Isaiah 62:7 And give Him no rest, until He establishes and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth- See on :6. This was partially fulfilled by a minority praying for the restoration of Zion during the 70 years captivity; Daniel and his friends are evident examples. Several passages in Isaiah (e.g. Is. 64:8-12) record model prayers for Zion's restoration. But the prayers dried up after the return; Isaiah's exhortation was ignored. The returnees did keep silence, and therefore Zion was not established as a praise in the earth.

Our prayers are to give the Father no "rest" (Is. 62:7), no cessation from violent warfare (Heb.). Isaiah had prophesied that God would not rest until Zion be restored. Watchmen would be set upon Zion's walls who would give Him no rest until the walls be rebuilt (Is. 62:1,6,7). At this time, Zion was felt by God to be the "apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). This prophesy started to be fulfilled straight after the Babylonian invasion when Jeremiah urged the desolated people to pray: "O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease" (Lam. 2:18). The prayerful remnant gave *themselves* no rest; and thus was fulfilled the prophecy that *God* would have no rest. Sincere prayer according to God's will meant that there was a strange mutuality between the Father and those who prayed to Him. Both He and they considered Zion to be the apple of their eye; and thus the prayers were ultimately answered and Zion was restored.

What we bring to our mind in prayer, we bring to God's mind. Those who pray for Jerusalem "keep not silence"- and therefore they give God "no rest" (Is. 62:6,7). But the Hebrew word for "keep not silence" and for 'give no rest' is one and the same! There's a clear play on words here. If we give ourselves no rest in prayer, then we give God no rest. His Spirit or mind becomes our spirit or mind, and vice versa. And hence the telling comments in Romans 8 about our spirit / mind being mediated to God in prayer through Jesus, in His role as 'the Lord the

Spirit' (Rom. 8:26,27). Yet God Himself had stated that He will not rest nor hold His peace for Zion's sake (Is. 62:1). Yet His doing this is conditional upon His prayerful people not allowing Him to rest due to their prayers.

The failure of the restored exiles to fulfill these things led to their reapplication and reinterpretation. Paul in Rom. 1:9 ["unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers"] is surely alluding to Is. 62:6,7: "On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth". Paul saw the Gentile believers in Rome as spiritual Jerusalem. It's not that God forgets and needs reminding, but rather that by our prayers for others we as it were focus His special attention upon them. Paul several times states that he is day and night, continually in prayer for others. He likely had the Isaiah passage in mind; his brethren in Christ were now for him the Jerusalem upon whom his hopes were set, rather than upon the physical city as had been the case in Judaism.

Isaiah 62:8 Yahweh has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength, Surely I will no more give your grain to be food for your enemies; and foreigners shall not drink your new wine, for which you have laboured- To lose the fruits of agricultural labour to invading foreigners was part of the curses for breaking covenant with Yahweh. He promises here, therefore, not to punish sin any more. This would be because of His right hand and strength, terms which apply to His manifestation in His Son the Lord Jesus (Ps. 80:17). Such a situation implies the emergence of a situation where sin has already been appropriately punished, and Israel are not going to sin any more. The intention of the new covenant was to place God's Spirit within His people so that they didn't sin and were immortalized. If this Spirit is within us and is already beginning to work, we likewise have thereby the guarantee that we too shall emerge into the Kingdom of God, immortal and unable to sin (Eph. 1:14).

Isaiah 62:9 But those who have garnered it shall eat it, and praise Yahweh; and those who have gathered it shall drink it in the courts of My sanctuary- The "it" refers to the new wine made from grapes they had themselves gathered (:8). The allusion is to the commands to bring their tithes and offerings to the sanctuary and eat them there, rather than in their homes (Lev. 19:23-25; Dt. 12:17,18). This at best would be fulfilled in essence rather than to the letter in the final

fulfilment of the last days. The new covenant offered to the exiles was not the same as the Mosaic law, which was the old covenant which they had broken. But the flavour of this idea of bringing tithes and eating them in the sanctuary suggests that this was intended to have happened at the time of the restoration. So much potential was wasted.

Isaiah 62:10 Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way of the people! Cast up, cast up the highway! Gather out the stones!- This prepared highway is a major theme of Isaiah, e.g. Is. 26:7 "The way of the just is uprightness; You who are upright make the path of the righteous level". This is the language of Is. 40. The way was open for the exiles to return as righteous, justified by faith, to a restored Zion; and if they made that journey, Zion's gates were open to them (see on Is. 26:2). That way was potentially prepared at the restoration, but the exiles chose to remain in Babylon and Assyria, and those who did return did so without accepting the call to repentance which is part of the making straight of the path to Zion. But it was all potentially prepared. It is for us now to walk in that path likewise to Zion. In the future it seems there may be literal highways prepared leading to Zion for the repentant remnants of the nations (see on Is. 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 62:10; Jer. 31:21).

Is. 40:3, which is quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of “Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*”, whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of “Prepare ye the way *of the people*”. Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25). We are not only Jesus to this world but also effectively we are the witness to God Himself. We minister His care to others; to the extent that Paul could write both that he was a minister of God, and also a minister of the church (2 Cor. 6:4; Col. 1:24,25).

Lift up a banner for the peoples- LXX "the Gentiles". Clearly enough, the bronze serpent lifted up on the “standard” or pole was a symbol of Christ crucified. But time and again throughout Isaiah, we read that a “standard” or ensign will be “lifted up” in order to *gather people together* to it (Is. 5:26; 13:2; 11:12; 18:3; 62:10). This was the idea of an ensign lifted up. Thus our common response to the cross of Christ should be to gather together unto Him there. And we need to take note that several of those Isaiah passages are speaking about what shall happen in the last days, when divided Israel will unite on the basis of their acceptance of the crucified Jesus. They along with "the peoples", the Gentiles, will come by the same path to eternal fellowship with Yahweh and with each other in Zion.

Isaiah 62:11 Behold, Yahweh has proclaimed to the end of the earth- The ends of the *eretz* were Babylon and Persia, where the exiles were. They were being asked to repent and quit exile because their salvation was coming. But they stayed put.

Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your salvation comes- "Your salvation" could refer to Joshua-Jesus, the high priest, returning from Babylon. But Joshua didn't live up to the conditional prophecies made about him in Zechariah. Ezra and Nehemiah seem to have taken over the priestly and kingly work of Joshua and Zerubbabel respectively. Nehemiah's record concludes on the negative note that Judah had forsaken Zion (Neh. 13:11). Nobody wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there; the Levites even went and lived outside it where they had "fields", because they weren't given their tithes (Neh. 13:10. Lots had to be drawn to get people to live there (Neh. 11:1). It became a ghost town, when it should have been inhabited as a town without walls for the multitudes of returned exiles joyfully dwelling there (Zech. 2:5). It was God's intention that ten men (a reference to Israelites of the ten tribes?) would take hold of the skirts of a Jew (i.e. one of Judah) and come with him to worship in the new temple (Zech. 8:23). But in fact the opposite happened. So few wanted to live in Jerusalem, that the rulers had to cast lots to force one in ten Jews to go and live in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1). And the ten tribes didn't really unite with Judah, but went off and got lost in the Gentile world.

Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him'- The "reward" of God will be in the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham (Gen. 15:1 s.w.) in salvation (Is. 62:11), at the time when Judah were restored from captivity and accepted the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:16). This huge potential is all deferred to the last days, when the Abrahamic covenant will be finally fulfilled in the return of the Lord Jesus to earth bringing His rewards with Him (Rev. 22:12).

Isaiah 62:12 They shall call them The holy people, The redeemed of Yahweh: and you shall be called Sought out, A city not forsaken- See on :11. There was envisaged a new nomenclature for anything related to God's people, land, temple and city. This didn't happen to the restoration, with the gates of Jerusalem being given totally secular names such as "fish gate". The "they" in view are those who love at the ends of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham (:11), in Egypt, Babylon and Persia where the Jews were exiled. Those who had hosted Judah in captivity and witnessed their idolatry and hypocrisy would marvel at the extent

to which they had been redeemed and not forsaken by their God, when He had every reason to have treated them otherwise. This wonderful testament to Divine grace didn't happen at the time of the restoration; but it will do so in the last days. And therefore Jerusalem will be "sought out", as the Gentiles "seek" the ensign / standard pole in Zion (Is. 11:10), which the New Testament interprets as the cross of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah Chapter 63

Isaiah 63:1 Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This one who is glorious in his clothing, marching in the greatness of his strength?- These verses appear to be the Divine fantasy, a potential prophecy, about the Messiah saviour judging Babylon and then also Edom on His way to Zion along with the repentant remnant of both Jews and Gentiles. This is a repeated theme in the prophets- that Babylon was to fall and the nations judged, and thereby both elicit repentance from a Gentile minority and also release the Jews. These things didn't happen as they could have done at the time of the restoration of the exiles. But they will in essence be fulfilled in the future work of the Lord Jesus.

According to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah's real name was Zerubbabel, the branch (*Sanhedrin* 38a)- perhaps the same Zerubbabel as mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah. The Hippolytus Chronicle 7:3:37 even claims Nehemiah was a direct descendant of David and in the direct kingly line. His name, 'comfort of Yahweh', invites us to see him as the potential fulfilment of the Is. 40:1,2 prophecy about a Messiah figure arising to the exiles, giving them God's comfort. At the time of Judah's redemption, while the temple had been trodden down by her enemies, the promised Messiah figure of Is. 63:1-3,18 was to come from Edom and Bozrah - both code names for Babylon. The words "Bozrah" and "Babylon" have similar root meanings ('high / fortified place'). And he was to lament how the people of Judah were not with him- "of the people there was none with me". But this is the very spirit of Nehemiah, when he returns to Jerusalem from Babylon and looks around the 'trodden down' city at night, not telling the people of the Jews about his inspection- i.e. the people were not with him (Neh. 2:11-16). But all potential fulfillments of this prophecy failed, and so the prophecies were reapplied and reinterpreted with reference to the Lord Jesus.

It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save- So often, God's righteousness is associated with His salvation. Paul in Romans writes much about this. 'Rightness' means also 'justice'. By grace, we are counted right in Christ, and thereby will be saved. Yet in the world, there is huge angst about the issue of justice. It is inbuilt into our natures to feel outrage at injustice. It's not fair, it's not right... that I was treated like this, that they did that to her, that this or that group in society are not equally treated. And these are the conflicts which are the endless narrative of human history and existence. The sense of not having been given justice makes for depression, obsessions, anger, bitterness... But for those of us in Christ, we who were unjust have been counted right, we have found the

ultimate experience of justice; and can rest assured that finally, all shall be made right, justice shall eternally be done at the Lord's return. Not for us lifetimes spent in resentment, bitterness, endless restimulation of issues of past injustice. For we have been saved, by grace, and 'right' has triumphed in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, Yahweh's salvation and righteousness.

Isaiah 63:2 Why are you red in your clothing- In the context of the answer in :3, we could assume that the force of the question is "Why are you *alone* red...?".

And your garments like him who treads in the wine vat?- Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. "Treads" is the same Hebrew word used in Num. 24:17 of how the Messianic star out of Jacob would tread down Israel's historical enemies, who would be as it were reincarnated in the last days. This is the time of the 'treading down' of all the peoples of the *eretz* who were against Israel (s.w. Jer. 25:30), the 'treading down' of the daughter of Babylon (Jer. 51:33 s.w.). But it was not just Gentiles whom the Messianic figure was to tread down; "the Lord has trodden the virgin daughter of Judah as in a winepress" (Lam. 1:15; Mic. 1:3 s.w.). The judgment of Babylon and her supporters, epitomized by Edom (:1), was to be at the same time as the judgment of the apostate people of God. And out of a trodden down wine vat there comes wine- the symbol of blessing and the new covenant.

Isaiah 63:3 I have trodden the wine press alone; and of the peoples there was no man with Me: yes, I trod them in My anger, and trampled them in My wrath- The way the Saviour is "alone" would allude to the way that no other man rose up to the call to be the prophesied servant of the Messianic prophecies (Is. 59:16). The judgments are likewise performed by Him "alone" in the sense that the judgments upon the nations will be supernatural and only later will a repentant remnant be used as Yahweh's "weapons of war".

And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, and I have stained all My clothing- There is a connection between the Lord's death and the judgment of the world; "now is the judgment of this world" He commented, with reference to His upcoming crucifixion (Jn. 12:31). He alone has the right to judge, because He alone had our nature and never sinned. The Lord having His own clothes put

back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. His holy mind would have been on these Messianic prophecies of Is. 63:3 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

Isaiah 63:4 For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come- see on Ex. 2:11,12. This is the year of Jubilee pronounced in Is. 61. We note the difference between the single "day" of vengeance compared to the whole "year" of redemption. Saving is by far God's preferred activity. Those to be redeemed are not simply "Israel", but those of them who want the redemption which will come about through the "vengeance" of the judgments. For as explained on :2, the Jews are to be judged along with the Gentiles.

This chapter was quoted by Judas Maccabeus, who killed 20,000 from Edom in his campaigns against the Idumeans (:1); and John Hyrcanus, his brother Simon's son and successor, also defeated the Edomites and forced them to become proselytes to the Jewish religion, and to be circumcised. At best it could be argued that the Maccabees were potential fulfillments of the prophecies, but they failed to do so. And so the final fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus in the last days.

Isaiah 63:5 I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore My own arm brought salvation to Me; and My wrath, it upheld Me- The arm of Yahweh, the practical articulation of His power, is ultimately the Lord Jesus. The way the Saviour is "alone", as in :3, would allude to the way that no other man rose up to the call to be the prophesied servant of the Messianic prophecies (Is. 59:16). None of the potential Messiah figures worked out; and it seems about nobody responded to the prophetic call for the exiles to repent. God was 'desolated' ["wondered"]about this, so great were His hopes for some response. And yet God wished to try to save them anyway by His dramatic intervention, which was to come to full term in the person and work of His own son.

God sent His prophets to appeal to Israel for repentance. They *could have lead to repentance*. But Israel would not. The marriage feast was totally ready and waiting for the Jewish people; they could have had it. But they didn't want it, and so the course of human history was extended. Therefore finally God sent His Son. The Lord Jesus Himself was amazed that no other man had achieved the work which He had to; and therefore He clad Himself with zeal and performed it (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16 cp. Rev. 5:3,4). God knew that salvation in the end would have to be through the death of His Son. But there were other possible scenarios for the repentance and salvation of mankind, which no man achieved. And so, as in the parable of the servants sent to get fruit from the vineyard, there was left no other way but the death of God's only Son. There is a clear parallel between Is. 59:16 and Is. 63:5. The same words are used, but there is one difference. In Is. 59:16, "His righteousness, it upheld Him", but in Is. 63:5 it was God's fury which upheld / sustained Him. The Messianic arm of Yahweh which brought salvation did so only because as Son of Man, the Lord Jesus is the only human who can rightly judge sin on behalf of God's anger. His necessary anger / wrath in judging sin is therefore part of the wider nexus of the absolutely legitimate salvation He achieved through the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 63:6 I trod down the peoples in My anger, and made them drunk in My wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth- Blood from the sacrifices was poured out on the earth to symbolize that life is God's alone. This is the scene of Is. 34:6, where Yahweh has a great sacrifice to make in Bozrah and Idumea, which is the context here too (:1). The implication could be that through their heavy judgment, they would become an acceptable sacrifice to Him; see on Is. 34:2,6.

Isaiah 63:7 I will make mention of the loving kindnesses of Yahweh and the praises of Yahweh, according to all that Yahweh has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His grace- The same words would be said by the Gentiles; they would proclaim Yahweh's praise just as the Israelites themselves would (Is. 60:6). The Gentiles would now identify themselves with the Israelites in forming the new multiethnic people of God which was to be formed on the basis of repentance and acceptance of the new covenant. This praise is to be the result of His judgments upon the wicked, both of Israel and the Gentiles. Hence LXX "The Lord is a good judge to the house of Israel; he deals with us according to his mercy, and according to the abundance

of his righteousness". The term "the house of Israel" suggests that both Judah and the ten tribe kingdom would be united by the experience of grace; and that is indeed the basis for unity amongst God's people to this day.

Isaiah 63:8 For He said, Surely, they are My people, children who will not deal falsely: so He was their Saviour- The eagerness of the God who was in love with His woman Israel is quite something. "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie!" (Is. 63:8), He triumphed. But this was because of His mercy and love to them (:7). That love as it were blinded His eyes to their sin. And this is the basis of our being counted righteous if we are in His beloved Son. But with Israel, "*then* I saw that she was defiled... *then* my mind was alienated" (Ez. 23:13,18). How does this square with the omniscience of God? He stopped restraining His omniscience. He saw them for who they were, unfaithful, and reacted. He did everything He could for His vineyard, and was then so bitterly disappointed when it brought forth wild grapes (Is. 5:4).

The Father is ever seeking for some positive response, and is highly sensitive to it. He told Moses: “If they will not believe… neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign [but] if they will not believe also these two signs…” (Ex. 4:8). The God who knows the end from the beginning gives the impression that He is sure they will believe- even though they didn’t. He is so seeking for faith in His creatures (cp. “surely they will reverence my son”, Mt. 21:37, and Ex. 19:21 cp. 20:18). In this, Isaiah says, He shows His matchless grace: “For He said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: *so* [therefore] He was their Saviour… but they rebelled, and vexed His holy [gracious] spirit” (Is. 63:8,10). Our tendency is to notice the negative in others, and let it outweigh the positive. God works quite the other way. He hopes for positive response, and even speaks as if He will get it when He knows He won’t.

Isaiah 63:9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity he redeemed them; and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old- The same grace shown in saving Israel from Egypt, despite them still carrying the idols of Egypt with them and the tabernacle of Remphan, was to be shown in redeeming the exiles from Babylon. Just as God in love and pity carried them through the wilderness despite their unfaithfulness. And it will again be shown in the final salvation of God's people. "The angel of His presence" was the same Angel which went with Israel through the wilderness, fulfilling the promise that "My presence shall go with thee" (Ex.

33:14). But that Angel was intensely representative of God; to the point that the LXX offers: "not an ambassador, nor a messenger, but Himself saved them". Thereby in all their affliction, He was afflicted; and He achieves an even more powerful identity with our experiences through the work and nature of His Son, who is far greater and more effective than the ministry of Angels. "Afflicted" is the word used in :18 of the Babylonian "adversaries" who destroyed Jerusalem. Whilst this was an act of Divine judgment, God still felt for His people all through it. Jeremiah's laments in Lamentations that God had somehow switched off from feeling for His people were therefore simply stating things as they seemed to him at the time. For in reality, in their affliction He was afflicted.

Isaiah 63:10 But they rebelled and grieved His holy spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He Himself fought against them- see on Jn. 14:26,30; Gen. 8:1; Josh. 24:17. "His holy spirit" refers initially to the Angel of His presence (:9), for God makes His angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). They refused to follow the leadership of the Angel; for many of the exiles remained in Babylon / Persia, as the book of Esther makes clear. Likewise Israel had "rebelled" in not following God's saving plan in the wilderness and wanting to return to Egypt rather than go forward to the promised land (s.w. Dt. 9:23). And it grieved the spirit / Angel, representative of God Himself (:9). This describes the work of the Holy Spirit Angel with regard to punishing Israel in language which hints at the flood: "It repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth (land), and it grieved Him at His heart" (Gen. 6:6) connects with "They rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit (cp. grieved at the heart): therefore He was turned to be their enemy (cp. "repented"), and He fought against them". 2 Peter 3:6,7; Mt. 24:37 and Dan. 9:26 (an impressive trio) say that the flood is a type of God's judgement of the earth at the second coming- and we know that Jesus will come with His Angels with Him to do this, in the same way as the Angels were prominent in this earlier "coming" of the Lord at the flood.
God (in the Angel of the presence) "was turned to be (Israel's) enemy" because of their sin (Is. 63:10)- likewise Job complains that his satan-Angel has "turned to be cruel to me" (Job 30:21 AVmg.).

The gift of the Spirit, a new heart and opened eyes, was to be part of the new covenant deal offered to the exiles. They refused it, and so in a different form it is now offered to all who are baptized into Christ. The same gift of the Spirit is now available to us- but we are not forced to follow where we are led, towards salvation in the same reestablished Kingdom of God on earth. Thus Eph. 4:30 is a quotation from Is. 63:10- a lament about how Israel in the wilderness "vexed

His holy spirit" with their continued provocations. Ps. 78:40 says the same: "How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert!". Putting these verses together, we see that to provoke God, to grieve Him, is the same as vexing or grieving His spirit. Paul's point was that the Ephesian believers had likewise been redeemed from 'Egypt' and had been sealed by God "with that holy spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). I understand this to mean that God's spirit works upon and merges with the human spirit in the heart and life of the baptized believer in Christ. But by turning away from that leading, we are vexing or grieving God through frustrating the way of His spirit which He has put within us. Clearly it was *God* whom Israel grieved in the wilderness, and it is *God* whom we grieve by provoking and frustrating His spirit in us.

Isaiah 63:11 Then He remembered the days of old, Moses and His people, saying, Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put His holy spirit in their midst?- see on Ex. 34:27. It could be argued that this is the same "Spirit of the Lord [which] caused him (Moses) to rest: so didst Thou lead Thy people" (by an Angel in the wilderness, :14), the Spirit-Angel of :9,10. This shows God as it were looking back to the days when He led them through the wilderness by the Angel, and in wrath remembering mercy. "Where is He that brought them up... " He asked Himself. We have here an insight into the thought processes of God Almighty, recalling, as it were, how He had been with them at the exodus. Although the pole of His love and grace wins out within His personality over the pole of judgment, a struggle is involved; and the summary conclusion that "God is love" is not arrived at without appreciating this tension and struggle within Him. Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel “found grace in the wilderness” before, and they would do again, “When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest” (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would “cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble”. This is why Isaiah’s prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11).

Isaiah 63:12 Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses? Who divided the waters before them, to make Himself an everlasting name?-

Israel were led by God's hand (Heb. 8:9; Is. 63:13); but in practice by Moses' hand (Ps. 77:20; Is. 63:12). The Name of Yahweh is not simply a word, a lexical item, pronounced something like Yahoovah or Yahweh. His Name is His character and personality, which has been developed and exhibited historically. His salvation of His sinful, idol worshipping people from Egypt exhibited and exemplified His saving grace; and He wished again to show that same "arm" and "Name" in saving the exiles and bringing them to the Kingdom of God. They too frustrated His saving plans; and so that same mighty arm is outstretched in redeeming a new people, who are to leave the things of this world and likewise allow themselves to be led on a spiritual journey towards God's Kingdom.

Isaiah 63:13 Who led them through the depths, as a horse in the wilderness, so that they didn't stumble?- Jer. 31:9 had prophesied of the restoration: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a *straight way*, wherein they shall *not stumble*". Likewise Is. 63:13 reminded the returnees that when they had been led through the wilderness to Canaan under Moses, they did not stumble [s.w.]. But both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren't sure that they would be given "a straight way" with Yahweh's protection. Neh. 4:10 records that "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is *decayed* [s.w. "stumble", Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". They were easily discouraged by the words of the surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Ezra 8:21 LXX describes how Ezra fasted for them to be given a "straight way", as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfill the prophecy. Note how Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim featured "straight" progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to "keep in step with the Spirit"... They were to walk "each one straight before him" (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). Ps. 107:2,7 RV speak of Israel being gathered out of the nations and being led in a "straight way" to Zion, as they had [potentially] been enabled to do on their departure from Egypt. Yet then they spent 38 years walking a distance coverable in just 11 days- because they did not walk in the "straight way".

Isaiah 63:14 As the cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of Yahweh

caused them to rest; so You led Your people- see on Dt. 34:5,6. The "rest" was the promised land, and it was that same land to which Yahweh was willing to lead Israel from Babylon; but it was a redemption refused. We too as a new Israel are being led toward the "rest" of the Kingdom (Heb. 4:9). If we follow AV "the spirit of the Lord caused him to rest", we could make the referent of "him" to be Moses, who was led to his rest in death by an Angel, the "spirit of Yahweh" of :9-11. But more essentially the reference is to God leading His people as a shepherd, into the valley of rest.

To make Yourself a glorious name- See on :12.

Isaiah 63:15 Look down from heaven, and see from the habitation of Your holiness and of Your glory: where are Your zeal and Your mighty acts? The yearning of Your heart and Your compassion is restrained toward me- Isaiah, or the faithful remnant, seek to remind God of His compassion shown at the exodus to an equally apostate people who took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea. He Himself had this memory within Him (:11), and they are appealing for Him to recall that and act with a similar saving grace. Or it could be that here we are being told how the situation in :11 came about. Why did God recall His previous acts of saving grace toward sinful Israel? Because He had been 'reminded' of it by this prayer of the faithful. They were His rememberancers, the watchmen on Zion's walls reminding Him, as it were, of His previous saving actions and grace towards His very immature and faithless people. The tension within His heart we commented upon on :11 had been provoked by this prayerful appeal to recall the yearning of His heart toward His people. God had earlier accepted that throughout the captivity He had been "restrained toward" Israel, but now He would be restrained no longer (s.w. Is. 42:14). But He did so because of the prayer of the faithful not to restrain Himself longer (Is. 63:15; 64:12). The tragedy is that His unrestrained desire to save and redeem the exiles was still refused by them; and perhaps there were few who really begged Him to no longer restrain Himself. For they were quite happy with their prosperous lives in Babylon and Persia. And so the events of the last days will elicit this more intense prayer, and Yahweh will finally act unrestrainedly in this earth.

Isaiah 63:16 For You are our Father, though Abraham doesn't know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us: You, Yahweh, are our Father- This is a prayer of penitence, recognizing that although Yahweh is their Father, they have not acted as the seed of Abraham and Jacob. It is such penitence from God's people which

is required for His saving arm to be fully revealed in the last days.

Our Redeemer from everlasting is Your name- God's essential preference for saving grace rather than judgment is an essential part of His character; see on :11. That Name or personality was eternal and didn't change, and it is this which is being appealed to through the recollection of how He had historically articulated that grace within His Name. And His imputation of righteousness, the things of His Name placed upon His people, may be in view if we follow the LXX: "Thy name has been upon us from the beginning".

As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el* , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren

Isaiah 63:17 O Yahweh, why do You make us to err from Your ways, and harden our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, the tribes of Your inheritance- God does in fact lead men in a downward spiral as well as in an upward spiral of relationship with Him – Pharaoh would be the classic example. It is perhaps this situation more than any which we should fear – being hardened in sin, drawing ever closer to the waterfall of destruction, until we come to the point that the forces behind us are now too strong to resist... Saul lying face down in the dirt of ancient Palestine the night before his death would be the classic visual image of it. And the Lord urges us to pray earnestly that we are not led in that downward spiral of temptation. This recognition that they have been hardened in their ways can be read as part of the confession of sin in :16. The request to restore *all* the tribes suggests that those praying this prayer have moved on from the sectarian division between Israel and Judah. Again, it is the experience of repentance and receipt of restoring grace which is the ultimate

basis for unity between God's people. And yet it could be argued that :16-19 is the cynical complaint of a sector within Jewish society who accepted that they had not been as Abraham and Jacob (:16), but still lamented all the judgment which had come upon them without specifically joining the dots and realizing it was their lack of repentance which was responsible for the situation.

Isaiah 63:18 Your holy people possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary- Eternal inheritance had been promised, and compared to eternity, Judah had possessed the land only a little while before being driven out. Or as LXX "that we may inherit a small part of thy holy mountain". The mountain or Kingdom of Yahweh was envisaged as filling the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham, and only a small part of it, Palestine, was being possessed by Judah. The hope and prayer was therefore, in this case, that the entire land would be possessed. "Afflicted" in :9 is the word used here in :18 of the Babylonian "adversaries" who destroyed Jerusalem. Whilst this was an act of Divine judgment, God still felt for His people all through it. Jeremiah's laments in Lamentations that God had somehow switched off from feeling for His people were therefore simply stating things as they seemed to him at the time. For in reality, in their affliction He was afflicted (:9).

Isaiah 63:19 We have become as they over whom You never bear rule, as those who were not called by Your name- LXX "We are become as at the beginning, when thou didst not rule over us, and thy name was not called upon us". This is a request, therefore, to start over with Israel, giving them a new covenant and a new land inheritance, but for ever. I suggested on :16,17 that we have here a confession of sin; and this involves here recognizing that they are no better than Gentiles.

Or we can read with AVmg. : "We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; thy name was not called upon them". God's Name was called upon us at baptism into the Name. This bearing of His Name means that the principles of that Name bear rule over us in our lives. The Name *is* called upon us; and therefore and thereby we are Yahweh's servants, dominated by His principles and character. Because the Name was called upon the temple, therefore it was simply impossible that those who realized this could worship idols in it (2 Kings 21:4,7); whatever has God's Name called upon it, whatever bears His image, must be devoted to Him alone. The Lord pointed out that this applies to our very bodies, which being in God's image should be given over to Him.

Isaiah Chapter 64

Isaiah 64:1 Oh that You would tear the heavens, that You would come down, that the mountains might quake at Your presence- This chapter appears to be the continued request of some amongst God's people for Yahweh to no longer restrain Himself in (Is. 63:15). But that restraint had been because of their sins. There does indeed follow a confession of sin, but the plea seems to more be for immediate Divine salvation than for forgiveness. The mountains quaked at the exodus, and the prayer is that God would act again as He had acted then (as in Is. 63:15). But Is. 63:9-14 have stated that God indeed would act like that; the entire prophecy of God's intended restoration of His people is shot through with allusion to the wilderness journey and exodus from Egypt. He was willing and eager to do this. It was Israel's impenitence which precluded it.

Isaiah 64:2 As when fire kindles the brushwood- Perhaps a reference to the burning bush. The plea was for God to act as He had done at the exodus from Egypt.

And the fire causes the waters to boil- The idea may be as GNB "they would tremble like water boiling over a hot fire".

To make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence!- This trembling of the nations was to happen at the fall of Babylon and her confederacy (s.w. Is. 14:9), when Jerusalem would be restored (Jer. 33:9). But the attitude of the exiles precluded these things from happening. It is one thing to pray for things, but another to live in the spirit of them and act as if we do indeed really want them; see on Am. 5:18. Likewise it was one thing to pray that Yahweh's Name be known to His enemies; but it was quite another for them to make known His Name to them, as they were intended to (Is. 12:4 s.w.).

Isaiah 64:3 When You did awesome things which we didn't look for, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence- Again the plea is for God to act as He had done at the exodus; the great salvation then had been performed by grace, it was not what they had looked for. And so they ask for God to do the same; but as explained on :1, Isaiah's entire prophecy of God's intended restoration of His people is shot through with allusion to the wilderness journey

and exodus from Egypt. He was willing and eager to do this. It was Israel's impenitence which precluded it.

Isaiah 64:4 For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides You, what God has prepared for him who waits for Him- The idea is that the restoration and entry into the reestablished Kingdom was going to be the most wonderful of all God's saving acts seen throughout history; and no god besides Yahweh could achieve this. But this is quoted in 1 Cor. 2:9 as if it means that God alone appreciates the wonder of what He is going to do: “Men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, besides you, what He has prepared for him that waits for him”. Paul continues in 1 Cor. 2:9,10: “It is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto *us* by His Spirit”. The passage in Is. 64 says that no one except God can understand the things He has prepared for the believers. However 1 Cor. 2:10 says that those things have been revealed to *us*. We can accept His Spirit, His mind, and perceive things from His perspective.

Isaiah 64:5 You meet him who rejoices and works righteousness- God is in search of man, and man is in search of God. "Meet" is the same word translated 'intercede'; that meeting is due to the intercession of the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:6,12; 59:16). Their 'meeting' is now in this life; and the heavens are electric with joy therefore when the lost sheep is found. All the Angels of heaven rejoice... when the Father meets the prodigal son. The Father (manifest in the Lord) runs out to meet the son. That story was masterfully tied back in to Is. 64:5-8: " Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways...we have sinned...we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...but now, O Lord, thou art our father". The patient, hopeful father saw in the son a boy rejoicing and working righteousness; but this was hardly how *he* felt! And so it will be with Israel in the last days. And so it is with each of us now, in our times of repentance. That surpassing grace is ours; we are seen as working righteousness when all we have is a bitter self-loathing and desire to somehow get back to God.

Those who remember You in Your ways- The faithful Israelite was to remember the ways in which they were led through the wilderness to the promised land

(s.w. Dt. 8:2; 24:9; 25:17). They were to perceive the hand of God in their personal history, leading them to meeting with Him. But the exiles chose their own ways and not His (Is. 66:3 s.w.).

Behold, You were angry, and we sinned. We have been in sin for a long time; and shall we be saved?- AV "we shall be saved". In this case we would have a confident expression of faith in salvation despite recognizing that they had always sinned against Him ["for a long time" = *olahm*, eternally]. It could be that Is. 65:8-16; Is. 66:5 etc. speak of a minority of Jews who trembled at the word of prophecy and were Yahweh's servants, who had been disfellowshipped by the leaders of the Jewish community in Babylon. The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon admitted that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them.

Isaiah 64:6 For we have all become as one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is as a polluted garment: and we all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away- We feel inadequate as employees, students, parents, partners... fearing we won't make the grade. And we tend to feel the same way before our God too. But in Christ, clothed with His righteousness, we need not feel like this. Indeed, we *should* not. We have tended to misquote a number of Bible verses to justify our feeling that we can never please God- e.g. Is. 64:6 "All our righteousness are as filthy rags". Yet the context is clearly of a repentance from sin, recognizing that despite all their external good works, Israel were ritually unclean before God. We *can* and *do* please God! The wonder of this should never cease to impress us. J.R.R. Tolkien truly observed: " ...the chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks. To do as we say in the *Gloria in Excelsis*: ...We praise you, we call you holy, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your splendour". This admission of national sin must be contrasted with :5 AV "we shall be saved"- despite all this.

Isaiah 64:7 There is none who calls on Your name, who stirs up himself to take

hold of You- This is a recognition that the restored exiles had not allowed themselves to be stirred up as intended. God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves'. God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through.

Yahweh would "stir up" Cyrus (s.w. Is. 41:2,25; 45:13), so this could have been fulfilled through that stirred up "mighty man" of Is. 42:13. But he failed. The "mighty man", the *gibbor*, therefore became reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Is. 9:6 s.w.). But He will act through the stirring up of a repentant Judah (s.w. Is. 51:9,17; 52:1), seeing that no man would be 'stirred up' (s.w. Is. 64:7). All the potential candidates had refused the Divine nudges to be stirred up. There was apparently not a single one in the community who would 'hold fast' the offered new covenant (s.w. "who holds it fast" in Is. 56:2,4,6); apart from the Messianic "son of man" (see on Is. 56:2).

For You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us by means of our iniquities- Is. 30:20 describes the reestablished Kingdom as a time when Judah's repentant eyes would "see" the God who had taught them through the sufferings of defeat and exile (see note there). Their eyes would no longer be blinded, they would see and perceive the 'hidden' God who had tried to teach them through all their afflictions. Meaning will finally be attached to event, and the problem of evil resolved finally. God had as it were 'hidden' Himself during the exile (Is. 45:15; Mic. 3:4); but now He would be revealed to them. Just as Cain was exiled to the east of Eden (which I have suggested was the *eretz* promised to Abraham) and been hidden from God's eyes in his exile (Gen. 4:14; Dt. 31:17,18; 32:20 s.w.), so with Judah. The hidden things belong to God and only some are now revealed to us, but in the day of exile's end, all those things, the meaning attached to the events, will at last be revealed (Dt. 29:29 s.w.). Then there will be no need for Jeremiah's Lamentations and struggles about the exile, all developed in the story of the suffering Job, who felt God hidden from him (s.w. Job 3:23;

13:24) just as God was to hide His face from Zion at the time of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 33:5) and exile (Ez. 39:23,24). Therefore all human attempts to see the hidden God were doomed to failure, as Job was finally taught (Job 34:29 s.w.). But the glorious truth of Is. 30:20 is that finally, the Divine teacher will not be hidden any more and our eyes shall see Him and His ways, as Job did at the end (Job 42:5). And yet Isaiah and his family / school of prophets did look or see the hand of the God who was hiding Himself from Judah (s.w. Is. 8:17). At the restoration, there was to be no need for Judah to feel that their way was "hid from Yahweh" (Is. 40:27 s.w.) any more, as it had been during the exile "for a little moment" when God hid His face (Is. 54:8). Their eyes would see / perceive. But tragically, the exiles didn't; God reflected that "I hid me... and he went on proudly in the way of his heart" (Is. 57:17). Their sins continued to hide His face from them (Is. 59:2; 64:7).

Isaiah 64:8 But now, Yahweh, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand- Several passages in Isaiah such as this in :8-12 record model prayers for Zion's restoration. But the prayers dried up after the return; Isaiah's exhortation was ignored. The returnees did keep silence, and therefore Zion was not established as a praise in the earth. The plea was for Yahweh to continue working with them, rather than casting them away as clay which refused to be malleable in His hands.

We note that 'God the Father' is the only God. It is therefore impossible that there can be a separate being called 'God the Son', as the false doctrine of the trinity states. The Old Testament likewise portrays Yahweh, the one God, as the Father (e.g. Is. 63:16; 64:8). As there is only *one* God, it is impossible that Jesus could be God; if the Father is God and Jesus is also God, then there are two Gods. "But to us there is but one God, the Father" (1 Cor. 8:6).

Isaiah 64:9 Don't be furious, Yahweh, neither remember iniquity forever: see, look, we beg You, we are all Your people- As noted on :1, this is asking Yahweh to do what He had Himself multiple times promised to do- to not remember sin forever, and to look on His people with pity rather than grace. But He would no longer remember iniquity if they accepted the new covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:34). And thus man is brought to God- desiring and praying for the very things which we then realize He has been earnestly offering us all the time. As the Yiddish couplet says, "And going out to meet Him, I met Him coming towards me".

Isaiah 64:10 Your holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation- Isaiah's later prophecies are in response to the judgment of Is. 39, that Judah were to go into captivity in Babylon and Jerusalem be desolated. This is therefore as it were a *pro forma* prayer for the captives- which it seems they did not pray, or prayed simply from the secular point of view of lamenting the loss of what were the icons of their culture and self-identity, rather than being the prayer of repentance.

Isaiah 64:11 Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised You is burnt with fire; and all our pleasant places are laid waste- We could comment that they parallel "Your cities" with "our house... places", as if recognizing that what is Yahweh's is theirs. Or we could more negatively respond that it was God's house, not theirs. They only mourned for the loss of it insofar as it was a reflection of what they revelled in anyway, as an expression of themselves, rather than a means of worshipping God. And their fathers not only praised Yahweh there but offered idol sacrifice there, as Ezekiel demonstrates.

Isaiah 64:12 Will You refrain Yourself for these things, Yahweh?- God had earlier accepted that throughout the captivity He had been "restrained toward" Israel, but now He would be restrained no longer (s.w. Is. 42:14). But He did so because of the prayer of the faithful not to restrain Himself longer (Is. 63:15; 64:12). The tragedy is that His unrestrained desire to save and redeem the exiles was still refused by them; and perhaps there were few who really begged Him to no longer restrain Himself. For they were quite happy with their prosperous lives in Babylon and Persia. And so the events of the last days will elicit this more intense prayer, and Yahweh will finally act unrestrainedly in this earth.

The statement that God will not "rest" for Zion's sake (Is. 62:1) must be understood in the context of the faithful at that time urging God *not* to "be still" [same Hebrew word translated "rest"] for His people (Ps. 83:1; Is. 64:12). This is an allusion to Boaz not being at rest until he had redeemed Ruth and Naomi; see on Is. 49:26. God is *not* at rest, He is *not* distant from us; and yet His people in Babylon felt that He was. It's no wonder that we are tempted to feel the same. Yet we must give Is. 62:1 it's full weight- God is answering the complaint of His people by stating that no, He will never rest for them. In this same context we read that He that keeps Israel will "neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). Much of the later chapters of Isaiah speaks of the faithful remnant in Babylon. The prayers and thoughts of that faithful minority often surface- this and Is. 62:1 is

an example. Thus they fulfilled the prophecy that Zion’s watchmen would give God no rest (Is. 62:6,7). But overall, the poor response of Judah seems to have led God to abandon the plan for the gloriously rebuilt Messianic temple. The plan of saving His people and reestablishing His Kingdom was reinterpreted, delayed and reapplied.

Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?- Afflicted" is the word used in Is. 63:18 of the Babylonian "adversaries" who destroyed Jerusalem. Whilst this was an act of Divine judgment, God still felt for His people all through it. Jeremiah's laments in Lamentations that God had somehow switched off from feeling for His people were therefore simply stating things as they seemed to him at the time. For in reality, in their affliction He was afflicted (Is. 63:9). Here again we see their confession of sin tinged by misunderstanding and a lingering sense of injustice on God's part.

Isaiah Chapter 65

Isaiah 65:1 I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I' to a nation that was not called by My name- The idol worshipping exiles still sought Yahweh (s.w. Ez. 14:3; 20:3,31). The nation not called by Yahweh's Name would be Israel who were unknown to Abraham and Jacob and who were as if Yahweh's Name had not been called upon them, "as those who were not called by Your name" (Is. 63:16,19). The people in view are those of :2,3, who are clearly Israel. But Yahweh was willing to be sought and found by them even in that state. God set them up with the possibility to return to Judah, to establish there a Messianic-style Kingdom, giving them the commands in Ez. 40-48 for a glorious temple; but most of them preferred the soft life in Babylon, and those who did return proved small minded, selfish and disinterested in the vision of God's glory. In this context, Isaiah ends his restoration prophecies on a tragic note from God: "I was ready to be sought... I was ready to be found" (Is. 65:1) by the unspiritual exiles in Babylon. But Israel would not. He pictures Himself standing there crying "Here am I, here am I!"- to be rejected by a people more interested in climbing the endless economic and social ladder in Babylon and Persia.

Yet Paul appears to quote these words out of context, at first blush, applying them to the calling of the Gentiles who did not seek God (Rom. 10:20). But this is not so out of context; for as noted on Is. 63:19, apostate Israel were effectively as Gentiles. This calling of apostate Israel was the same therefore as the calling of the Gentiles. Although we can note that many Old Testament passages are quoted in the New Testament without strict attention to context.

Isaiah 65:2 I have spread out My hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts- LXX "After their own sins". Again we see the focus of the Biblical revelation upon thoughts and mental patterns as being the essence of sin. Our thoughts are our "way", and we walk in practice according to our way. This is why the gift of God's Spirit or thinking is so essential for real transformation. Otherwise we will continue in rebellion against God.

Isaiah 65:3 A people who provoke Me to My face continually, sacrificing in gardens and burning incense on bricks- The provocation was to God's face, or

LXX "in My presence", as if the temple precincts were in view; or perhaps the Angel of His presence of Is. 63:9 is in view, whom they rebelled against and grieved by refusing to repent and return from Babylon. Perhaps they had placed bricks and a garden structure there in which they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship. And the context is of the failure of the restored exiles; despite all the Godly influence of Ezra and Nehemiah, this is what was going on in the early generations after the exiles returned.

We note that Is. 65:3 LXX is clear that demons don't exist: "[Israel] burn incense on bricks to demons, *which exist not*". The idols of the nations, representing as they did the supposed 'demons' of the cosmos, were "vanity" because what the demons and gods they supposedly represented did not exist – they are "beings that are nothing" (1 Sam. 12:21 LXX), "a thing of nought" (Jer. 14:4). See on :11; Is. 66:17.

Isaiah 65:4 Who sit among the graves and lodge in the secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels- This seems to refer to various idol rituals, LXX "They lie down to sleep in the tombs and in the caves for the sake of dreams". The "vessels" may have been those of the temple which were returned from Persia to Jerusalem. Legion's situation was clearly presented as alluding to this verse; his madness was that of the returned exiles in their idolatry. His cure therefore looks forward as an acted parable to the final psychological healing of Israel through the work of the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 65:5 Who say, 'Stand by yourself, don't come near to me, for I am holier than you'. These are a smoke in My nose, a fire that burns all the day- "Stand by yourself" translates the common Hebrew term "draw near", which is that commonly used about drawing near to Yahweh in worship and offering. So the idea is that others were being told that they could do their worship "by yourself" and not with those who considered themselves spiritually superior (LXX "I am pure", see on Is. 66:17)- even though they were offering unclean offerings to Yahweh themselves (:4). This shows that the mentality of 'guilt by association' has always been engrained amongst God's people. It takes away any sense of self-examination and self awareness. For those saying this to the faithful remnant were idolaters and seriously morally compromised. This hypocrisy provoked the strongest wrath in God, and we must remember that whenever the guilt by association mentality emerges in our own thinking. See on Is. 66:5.

Isaiah 65:6 Behold, it is written before Me- Such self righteousness, insisting they were pure and condemning others when they were such idolaters, was what so deeply incited Yahweh's anger. Isaiah's words were written before God; the word spoken and preserved through Isaiah was and is also written in Heaven before God.

I will not keep silence, but will recompense, yes, I will recompense into their bosom- Their judgment will be according to what they did (Is. 59:18; 65:6); although Jer. 16:18 says that some will be recompensed double. By contrast, the exiles were not receiving punishment according as their deeds deserved, but less (Ezra 9:13). These different degrees of recompense suggest that Divine judgment is far more complex than a simple 'measure for measure'. The greater complexity is because He weighs motives and inflexions of meaning attached to actions which all require different judgments. And then on top of that, there is the credit He gives for forgiveness, and for the prayers and faith of others influencing the final outcome of judgment in any given case.

Isaiah 65:7 Your own iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, says Yahweh, who have burned incense on the mountains, and blasphemed Me on the hills; therefore will I first measure their work into their bosom- We doubt whether the Jews literally uttered blasphemy against Yahweh on the idol shrines in the mountains or hills. But that was the implication of their worshipping other gods, and Yahweh heard their actions as speaking like this. I suggested on :3 that this idolatry may have been taking place in the temple; therefore "mountains" and "hills" may be an intensive plural referring to the one great mount, the hill of Zion where the temple was located. Thus in :9 "My mountains" (AV) become LXX "My holy mountain" (singular). It was this category of idolater who also ordered the faithful remnant to worship away from (see on :5).

Isaiah 65:8 Thus says Yahweh, As the new wine is found in the cluster and one says, 'Don't destroy it, for a blessing is in it:' so will I do for My servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all- The idea seems to be that the grape harvest was generally bad, but for the sake even of a minority, the vine of Israel would have been saved. Hence LXX "As a grape-stone shall be found in the cluster, and they shall say, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for the sake of him that serves me, for his sake I will not destroy them all". But it was this remnant which were being so abused by the hypocritical religious leadership; see on :5.

The shortening of the days for the sake of a remnant is predicted in Is. 65:8,9:

“As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed [Jesus] out of Jacob… and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there”. The “elect” are paralleled with “my servants”. Because of them, the minority of faithful fruit, the whole tree is not destroyed. This is exactly the image of the fig tree parable; because of the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the tree of Israel, the whole nation will not be cut off and they will be saved by the coming of the Kingdom. The Lord’s description of the shortening of the days uses some rather odd past tenses: “Except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect’s sake…he shortened the days” (Mk. 13:20 RV). One wonders if we have here an allusion back to the days of Noah, where again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

Isaiah 65:9 I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of My mountains; and My chosen shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there- See on :8. AV: “And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there”. His obedience would enable the peoples’ establishment as the Kingdom, upon the "mountains", perhaps an intensive plural for the one great mountain, Zion. See on Is. 66:21. Or as with LXX, the reference could be to Yahweh's intention to lead the repentant Judah out of Babylon to the "mountains", the one great mount, Zion: "And I will lead forth the seed that came of Jacob and of Juda, and they shall inherit my holy mountain" (see on :7).

The reason why there are no accusers against us, not even our own sins, is because we are “God’s elect” (Rom. 8:33). The supreme chosen one of God was of course the Lord Jesus, “My elect, in whom My soul delights” (Is. 42:1). And yet later on in the servant songs of Isaiah, "My elect” clearly refers to the people of Israel (Is. 45:4; 65:9,22). The true Israel of God are therefore those counted as somehow “in” the elect one, the singular servant of God, Messiah Jesus. Those baptized into Him are therefore His elect. And how do we know we are “God’s elect”? If we are baptized into Christ, “mine elect”, then for sure we are. And further, we have heard the call of the Gospel, we have been called- so, we are

God's elect, His chosen ones. Of course the objection can be raised that the whole idea of calling or election may appear unfair. Indeed, the Greek word for "elect" can carry the idea of 'the favoured / favourite one'. There is no ultimate injustice here. The chosen One is the Lord Jesus, beloved for the sake of His righteousness, His spirit of life. Those who respond to the call to be "in Him" are counted likewise. And all this is the way, the method used, in order for God to be the one who counts us as right in the ultimate judgment- for "It is God that justifies".

Isaiah 65:10 Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down in, for My people who have sought Me- This mentions Achor [where Israel were judged for not possessing the land for the right motives] as a place of special blessing in the reestablished Kingdom of God on earth- it's as if God's grace rejoices in inverting things, pouring out His richest blessing upon the places of our darkest failures. And we in daily life, in the interactions we have with others, are asked to reflect this same kind of grace. As Hosea's children were to be renamed, Lo-ammi becoming Ammi, so the valley of Achor would become a door of hope (Hos. 2:17), and Jezreel, scene of Israel's rebellions, would become the place of joyful reconciliation between God and His people.

Isaiah 65:11 But you who forsake Yahweh, who forget My holy mountain, who prepare a table for Fortune, and who fill up mixed wine to Destiny- see on Gen. 49:19. The hypocrisy of this group is stunning; they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship, and yet disfellowshipped and persecuted the faithful remnant (see on :5). They 'forgot' Zion in that they didn't want to return there, and constructed a theology which allowed them to remain in Babylon and worship Yahweh through idol worship.

It is significant that the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) used the word *daimonion* for "idol"; this is the word translated "demon" in the New Testament. "Idols" in Ps. 96:5 is translated "demons" in the Septuagint; and the Septuagint uses the same word in Is. 65:11 to describe Gad, the Syrian god / idol of fortune. See on :3. GNB "who ignore Zion, my sacred hill, and worship Gad and Meni, the gods of luck and fate". It was not that they totally rejected Yahweh worship; rather they ignored Zion for the sake of the gods of the nations.

Isaiah 65:12 I will destine you to the sword, and you shall all bow down to the

slaughter; because when I called, you didn't answer; when I spoke, you didn't listen; but you did that which was evil in My eyes- The tragedy was that if they had called to Yahweh, even despite all their sins, He would have heard them (see on :1). And although they didn't do that, He took the initiative and called to them through the prophets such as Ezekiel, who ministered to the exiles; and they refused to hear. They bowed down to their idols; and thereby were self-condemned, effectively bowing down to their own executions.

And chose that in which I didn't delight- The context is their choice of sacrificing to idols; but in Is. 1:11 the same term is used of God's lack of delight in the sacrifices offered to Him. It seems that they worshipped the idols in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is an abiding temptation for all God's children- to worship our idols in the name of worshipping God.

Isaiah 65:13 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be disappointed- Is. 65:8-16; Is. 66:5 etc. speak of a minority of Jews who trembled at the word of prophecy and were Yahweh's "servants", who had been disfellowshipped by the leaders of the Jewish community in Babylon (see on :5). The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon admitted that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them. And so they would not partake of the Messianic banquet, being left hungry and thirsty whilst the "servants" drunk and ate at it, and finally being left "ashamed" [s.w. "disappointed"] in the shame of final condemnation.

Isaiah 65:14 Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit- This is the weeping and gnashing of teeth of final condemnation. The wailing and anguish will be because they see ["behold"] the believers in the Kingdom, and themselves cast out (Lk. 13:28). The sense of the eternity they have missed, which could have been theirs, will be psychologically unbearable for them. This is far worse than any 'hell fire judgment' of popular but mistaken tradition.

Isaiah 65:15 You shall leave your name for a curse to My chosen- This is the same threat in the context of the exiles as Jer. 29:22.

And the Lord Yahweh will kill you; and He will call His servants by another name- GNB "I will give a new name to those who obey me" is alluded to by the Lord Jesus, when He promises to write a "new name" upon all those who have been finally faithful, at the last day when He returns (Rev. 3:12). This is part of the wider theme of a new vocabulary being used at the time of the restoration (Is. 62:2,4,12), looking forward to the completely "new" naming and understanding of things in the future Kingdom.

Isaiah 65:16 So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth- "The God of truth" is as LXX, "the true God" in comparison with the idols they worshipped (:11). The picture is of all peoples in the *eretz* promised to Abraham swearing only by Yahweh. This could have come true at the restoration, but was precluded by Judah's impenitence and failure to exhibit the Gospel to the Gentiles in the "earth".

Because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My eyes- This didn't come true at the restoration, but it will ultimately at the last day (Rev. 21:4). If we can accept that God allows His power (i.e. His omnipotence) to be limited, it becomes easier to accept that there are circumstances He allows His omniscience (i.e. His knowledge) to be limited. Thus the God who by nature cannot forget and for whom time is nothing, can therefore have the capacity to not remember our sins on account of the Lord's death (Is. 63:25). God clearly speaks of limiting His omniscience in Is. 65:16, saying that "the former troubles… are hid from my eyes". God forgets our sins; and yet God knows everything that happens and is thought today, and also yesterday. And yet, He limits that total knowledge by forgetting our sins. In Amos 8:7 God swore He would never forget Israel's sin. Yet the same word is used in Is. 65:16 of how God hid their sin from His eyes. God restrained His omniscience. He erased His own permanent memory as it were.

Isaiah 65:17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind- The former things which would not be remembered refer primarily to Israel's sins. They would not be remembered in that they would be forgiven. For that is a common enough usage

of the term 'not be remembered'. The new system ["heavens and earth", contrasting with the sinful heavens and earth of Judah in Is. 1] would be therefore without sin. That is the primary feature of this new creation. Is. 65:17-19 describes the new creation of Zion as it was possible at the restoration, when the former heavens and earth would not come into mind. The former “heavens” of Solomon’s temple *did* come to mind, and the old men mourned because of how far superior the former had been (Ezra 3:12). The voice of weeping *was* heard in the streets of Zion, as Judah mourned for their sins of marrying the surrounding nations and breaking the Sabbath. And so these things are applied in spiritual terms to the latter day, eternal Kingdom of God on earth.

Isaiah 65:18 But be you glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy- The new creation in view is of psychological attitudes within people, "joy", because the former things of their sins are not remembered against them (see on :17). And this new creation has started now in the hearts of all who allow God's creative Spirit to work in them (2 Cor. 5:17).

Isaiah 65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people- This Divine rejoicing over God's people is that of the God who rejoices in fulfilling His covenant with His obedient people (Dt. 28:63; 30:9). It will be a mutual joy, with Yahweh's people rejoicing in Him (:18; s.w. Is. 61:10; 65:18) and He in them (Is. 62:5; 65:19) because they have entered the new marriage covenant with Him (Jer. 32:41).

And there shall be heard in her no more the voice of weeping and the voice of crying- See on :17. The "weeping" is that of the condemned in :14, or the weeping in repentance. They will weep but then be mercifully slain in the second death. And then the faithful will no longer hear this reminder of those who chose other gods.

Isaiah 65:20 There shall be no more there an infant of days, nor an old man who has not filled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, and the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed- This appears to describe the reestablished kingdom possible for the restored exiles. The simple idea is that lifespans would be greatly increased, although mortality would remain (see on :22). This didn't happen then, and so the essence of it will do so at the return

of the Lord Jesus to ultimately restore the Kingdom. But the letter of it may not be fulfilled; for eternal life is what will then be given, and not simply increased mortal lifespans. We note that for a sinner to live a long time would be part of the severity of his judgment; to simply exist, rejected, whilst the Kingdom is established... is going to be a fate worse than death. It confirms the point the Lord makes several times- that the punishment of the wicked is going to be in terms of their own psychological trauma, weeping and gnashing of teeth in anger at themselves. Rather than any physical torture by gleeful saints or an angry God. It is for us now to realize this and to be wise, living the Kingdom life now, without reserve.

Isaiah 65:21 They shall build houses and inhabit them themselves; and they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit- The idea is as in :22, that they would not build and then lose what they had worked for to others. But very few houses were built in Zion, because the people preferred to live on their farms, in their cieled houses, outside the city (Nehemiah 7:4). They planted vineyards, but sold the fruit to others- on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15,16). The possible fulfilment in a reestablished Kingdom of God at the time of the restoration was thus again precluded. The essence, although maybe not the literal letter of all this, will come true in the eternal Kingdom to be established at the Lord's return. Then, there will be ultimate satisfaction in existence; and the eternal enjoyment of the fruit of the lives we are now living. We are therefore moulding right now the nature of our eternity. It's not that our works shall save us, but that we will live with the eternal fruits of what we do for the Lord's cause and people in this very brief life. See on :22.

Isaiah 65:22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree shall be the days of My people, and My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands- LXX "they shall long enjoy the fruits of their labours". See on :21. This phrase is alluded to by Paul when he reflects that his labour for others spiritually will result in him seeing the fruit of his labour (Phil. 1:22). This will be the fruit of the righteous in the eternal Kingdom- seeing the eternal effect of their work for others. The initial fulfilment could have been in increased lifespans ["as the days of a tree", not eternal, but long] in the Kingdom of God in Israel which could have been reestablished at the restoration from Babylon (see on :20). But Israel's impenitence precluded

this. And so the essence of it will be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus, although to a far greater extent- eternal life, rather than enjoying the fruit of good works for a long time ["long enjoy"], as the days of a tree, which all the same dies at some point.

Isaiah 65:23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for calamity; for they are the seed of the blessed of Yahweh, and their offspring with them- As explained on :22, the labour in view can be understood as our spiritual labour for others, which we will then perceive was not in vain. Again, Paul has this phrase in view about our work in Christ not being in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen here as a characteristic of all worldly life). But the day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travaileth" (Is. 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3). The Lord seems to have alluded to this when He spoke of how the faithful just before His coming would be like a woman in travail, with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of acceptance at Christ's return (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man... shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14).

Isaiah 65:24 It shall happen that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear- This speaks of the closer relationship with God possible under the new covenant. This could have been the exiles' experience had they accepted that new covenant. But they refused that. And so the essence of it comes true for we who have accepted the new covenant (Mt. 6:8). And this will be even moreso in the future, eternal experience of the Kingdom of God. Our focus should be more on the *quality* and *nature* of the Kingdom life, rather than the mere eternity of it.

Isaiah 65:25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox- Perhaps the curse of Eden was to be ameliorated in the restored Kingdom. But wild animals are frequently used in the prophets as symbols of Israel's aggressive neighbours (see on Is. 5:5), with Israel and Judah presented as lamb and ox. But in the restored Kingdom, these tensions amongst the nations within the *eretz* would have been no more; this is the force of "feed *together*". This didn't come about, but it shall eternally do so at the Lord's return.

The lions in Is. 5:29,30 clearly represent the Babylonians and Assyrians; but here the prophetic hope was that the lion would be tamed and live in Zion, the holy mountain. The vision was of Judah's enemies being judged and repenting, and coming to live in the restored Kingdom. f Israel's enemies would become harmless, and through repentance as a result of their judgment, come to live in God's restored Kingdom. This was precluded at Isaiah's time by Hezekiah's wrong attitude to the Babylonians, and Judah serving their gods rather than bringing them to Israel's God. And so the prophecy will come to a much grander fulfilment in the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus on earth.

And dust shall be the serpent's food- The allusion is to Gen. 3:14, as if to say that there will be an eternal reminder of the past existence of sin and its judgment. Snakes don't eat dust, but their location in the dust may give that impression. The idea is that the serpent will as it were remain 'down'.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says Yahweh- The situation in view was still confined to Yahweh's "holy mountain", Zion. The initial intention of the prophecies was that the Kingdom would be reestablished in Judah and Zion when the exiles returned from Babylon. But Dan. 2:44 had spoken of the returned exiles as a stone becoming a mountain which would fill the *eretz*. That didn't happen at the time, and so a far more glorious and global extension of the "mountain" of God's Kingdom came into view, through the work of the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah Chapter 66

Isaiah 66:1 Thus says Yahweh, Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: what kind of house will you build to Me? And what place shall be My rest?- LXX "And of what kind is to be the place of my rest?". See on Ps. 132:8. The answer was that God recognized that the idea of a reestablished Kingdom and temple wasn't going to happen with the restored exiles, and instead He was going to focus upon dwelling in the hearts of humble individual hearts.

Is. 11:10 had spoken of how the Messianic figure possible at Isaiah's time could have restored the Kingdom, "And his resting place will be glorious". This could simply refer to a literal appearance of glory upon mount Zion, as hinted at in several prophecies. But this was precluded at the time by Judah refusing this "rest" (Is. 28:12 s.w.). Or His resting place could be the hearts of those who "trust" in Him (Is. 11:10), a resting place chosen by Him because the temple on Zion had not been rebuilt as required and therefore God chose to dwell in the hearts of individuals instead.

Much of the later chapters of Isaiah speaks of the faithful remnant in Babylon. The prayers and thoughts of that faithful minority often surface- e.g. “Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt thou hold thy peace?” (Is. 64:12; Is. 62:1). Thus they fulfilled the prophecy that Zion’s watchmen would give God no rest (Is. 62:6,7). But overall, the poor response of Judah seems to have led God to abandon the plan for the gloriously rebuilt Messianic temple. Is. 66:1,2 records Him reflecting that “Where is the house that ye build unto me?” [i.e. they had not built it as He required in Ez. 40-48], and instead deciding to focus on dwelling in the hearts of the contrite faithful minority who trembled at His word. Ezekiel was sent to preach to the early captives, with the message that they were responsible personally for their exile- even though they insisted they were innocent and were suffering unjustly for their fathers' sins. Ezekiel 18 and other passages labour the point that they personally, sitting their in captivity, were serious sinners. God even warned Ezekiel ahead of time that those captives were "a rebellious nation" (Ez. 2:3), just as wicked as their fathers. There was active opposition to Ezekiel's witness to the exiles- they persecuted him as with "briars and thorns", behaving as scorpions to him (Ez. 2:6). His face had to be hardened against their faces (Ez. 3:8). This was in the very early days of the exile. Jewish tradition has it that Ezekiel was murdered at the command of senior Jews in Babylon. See *The Lives And Deaths Of The Prophets* in J.H. Charlesworth, ed., Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1985).

The same book claims that Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh, and Jeremiah was stoned to death by the Jews.. By the time of Isaiah 66, we see that even well after the restoration had happened, there was still major persecution of the faithful remnant and their prophets. Thus Isaiah speaks of the reapplication of the promises about building a temple- that temple would now be in the individual lives of a faithful remnant. Zech. 4:7 had prophesied that if Zerubbabel lived up to his potential, then a flat tableland would be prepared as a "platform" [Heb.] on which the new temple could be built. But this didn't happen- and so this language was reapplied to the work of John the Baptist in making the rough places of men's hearts smooth, in order for them to accept Jesus, the true temple.

Isaiah 66:2 For all these things has My hand made, and so all these things came to be, says Yahweh- The contrast is between what God has made, and the man who trembles at God's word. It's as if God is searching for something which He Himself has not created, in the sense that He created the physical world. Perhaps the implication is that when a human being responds to the word of God, then there begins a totally free creation by the believer in his or her own life. God in one sense is the author of the new creation of human hearts- and yet the parallelism in Is. 66:2 seems to imply that the difference between us and the natural creation is that we are in some sense not created by God in that same way, but rather have we allowed God's word to mould us as, and to respond to that word, in ways which we have control over… and thus we offer ourselves to God as a creation which we have made, and in which He thereby takes extra pleasure.

But to this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a broken spirit, and who trembles at My word- "Poor" is the word usually translated "afflicted". Isaiah's prophecies continually emphasize that God is fully aware of their "affliction" at the hands of the Babylonians, and would have mercy upon them in it (Is. 49:13; 51:21; 54:11 s.w.). Remember that these words were primarily addressed to the exiles. It was the poor who were to enthuse about the reestablishment of Zion (Is. 14:32; 41:17; 54:11 s.w.). The book of Esther makes clear that there were many wealthy Jews in Babylon / Persia. It was the simple pull of materialism which kept many of them from responding to the Gospel of quitting all that for the sake of the restored Kingdom of God. And it is the same today where "to the poor the Gospel is preached" with most response.

Is. 66:1-5 seems to anticipate that the actual rebuilding of the temple would be nullified by an incorrect attitude to the sacrifices, and more important would it be that individuals in Judah trembled at God's word. The Jews did tremble at the word at the beginning of the rebuilding (Ezra 10:9). But it was a momentary thing; they came to see the building of the walls as more important than keeping a trembling spirit. Works eclipsed spirituality. Yet Isaiah had taught that the trembling at the word was more essentially important than building temples. But Judah paid no attention in the long term. So these verses speak of God's change of purpose after the failure of the exiles to restore the Kingdom as intended. The idea could be that God is here asking His people to not bother trying to build the temple, and stating that He will now focus upon individual relationships with humble minded individuals, through His Messiah Son who trembled at His word.

Isaiah 66:3 He who kills an ox is as he who kills a man- The man under the Old Covenant who made his offering of, e.g. an ox, at a place other than at "the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" was viewed as having shed blood and therefore was to be cut off from the congregation (Lev. 17:3,4). The Law foresaw that there would be this tendency, to worship God away from the rest of the congregation. Those who did so were condemned in the strongest terms: their sacrifice of an animal was seen as the murder of their brother, whereas they would have seen it as an expression of their righteousness. "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man" (Is. 66:3) refers back to this, making it parallel with idolatry and proudly refusing to let God's word dwell in the heart. Later Isaiah is criticizing the exiles in Babylon for their refusal to 'return', both to their God and to their land. Perhaps in view is their attempt to offer sacrifices in Babylon, away from the sanctuary.

He who sacrifices a lamb, as he who breaks a dog's neck; he who offers an offering, as he who offers pig's blood; he who burns frankincense, as he who blesses an idol. Yes, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations- What is criticized in later Israel is the tendency to worship Yahweh through offerings to Yahweh (even though they had no temple or sanctioned sanctuary), whilst at the same time as offering sacrifice to other gods. Is. 66:3 speaks of this dualism in worship. An ox was sacrificed to Yahweh whilst a man child was killed in worship of the idols; a lamb was slain as a dog was struck down to an idol; an offering was brought to Yahweh as pig flesh was

eaten in an idol ritual; incense was offered to Yahweh, suggesting this happened within the temple precincts, whilst idols were kissed. And the new Israel made just this same blasphemy in the way some in the Corinth ecclesia ate of the Lord's table and also at the table of idols ["demons"]. Paul wasn't slow to bring out the similarities when he wrote to the Corinthians. It is this kind of dualism which is so wrong; to be both Christian and non-Christian at the same time, to mix the two. But differences of interpretation between equally dedicated worshippers of Yahweh, or believers in Christ, were never made the basis of condemnation. We note that the apostate exiles in Babylon still felt the need to sacrifice to Yahweh, even though they worshipped idols; such is the strength of the culture of traditional religion. And we have that same pull within our own psychological wiring.

Isaiah 66:4 I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears on them; because when I called, no one answered; when I spoke, they didn't listen; but they did that which was evil in My eyes- God deceived prophets to speak things in His Name which were actually false (1 Kings 22:20-22; Ez. 14:9). He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer them (Is. 66:3,4). Jeremiah feared God had deceived *him* (Jer. 20:7)- showing he knew such a thing was possible. Dt. 13:1-3 warns Israel not to believe prophets whose prophecies came true although they taught false doctrines, because they may have been raised up to test their obedience. God deceived Israel by telling them about the peace which would come on Jerusalem in the future Kingdom; they didn't consider the other prophecies *which were given at the same time* concerning their imminent judgment, and therefore they thought that God was pleased with them and was about to establish the Messianic Kingdom; when actually the very opposite was about to happen (Jer. 4:10). This is why the Bible is confusing to those who wish to believe their word rather than God's. God had called them back to Zion, and they had refused to respond. They preferred to worship their idols in the name of Yahweh worship; and so God confirmed them in those delusions.

And chose that in which I didn't delight- The context is their choice of sacrificing to idols; but in Is. 1:11 the same term is used of God's lack of delight in the sacrifices offered to Him. It seems that they worshipped the idols in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is an abiding temptation for all God's children- to worship our idols in the name of worshipping God.

Isaiah 66:5 Hear the word of Yahweh, you who tremble at His word- The double

reference in Is. 66:1-5 to trembling at Yahweh's word is a definite prediction of the situation in Ezra 9:4; 10:3, where the same rare Hebrew word is used regarding how those of the exiles who repented for their marriage out of the Faith trembled before the word in repentance. Then, at that point, the Kingdom blessings could have been brought about, as described in the rest of Is. 66. But again, there was no staying power in their repentance. By Nehemiah's time, and by Malachi's time even after his, marriage out of the Faith was still their weakness.

Your brothers who hate you, who cast you out for My name's sake, have said, 'Let Yahweh be glorified, that we may see your joy;' but it is those who shall be disappointed- See on :24. The religious leadership used the old argument of exclusionists- that Yahweh's Name will be glorified through separation from those considered substandard or spiritually different within the community of believers. The faithful remnant were therefore disfellowshipped by the corrupt religious leadership of the Jews in Babylon; see on Is. 65:5. And for this they would face the shame (s.w. "disappointed") of condemnation. Such behaviour provokes the intense anger of Yahweh.

Isaiah 66:6 A voice of tumult from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of Yahweh that renders recompense to His enemies- The enemies of the humble, excluded believers (:5) were Yahweh's enemies. He was identified with those humble, excluded ones. The city and temple which they had refused to return to was to the source of this Divine voice of judgment against them in Babylon. The city and temple would be restored, and from there would come judgment against these awful hypocrites.

Isaiah 66:7 Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she delivered a son- The idea is more or less as in GNB "My holy city is like a woman who suddenly gives birth to a child without ever going into labor". The implication is that the final travail or birth pangs of God's faithful people will be cut short in the last days (Mt. 24:22). This "son" who suddenly appears in Zion will utter the voice of Yahweh which judges the hypocrites amongst His people (:6). Ultimately this is speaking of the revelation of God's Son, the Lord Jesus, after the travail of the faithful daughter of Zion is cut short by His grace.

Isaiah 66:8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a

land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children- As explained on :7, a singular "son" was to be brought forth after the travail of the faithful daughter of Zion is cut short. But here we find that this son is in fact plural "children", an entire nation with their own land. The restored people of God in their restored land, the Kingdom of God on earth, would be suddenly brought forth out of the sufferings of the faithful minority in Zion. Whatever primary application this could have had to Hezekiah's time and other sufferings of Zion, the ultimate application is to the appearance of the Lord Jesus and a new nation "in Him" after the sufferings of Zion, geographically and spiritually, shall be cut short by grace (Mt. 24:22).

Isaiah 66:9 Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? says Yahweh: shall I who cause to bring forth shut the womb? says your God- This can be read as an implicit criticism of the words of Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion, who lamented that the children had come to be born but there was no strength to bring them forth (Is. 37:3). God is saying that He will certainly bring forth the new nation of Zion out of their trauma at the hands of their invaders. He is not powerless, and therefore Hezekiah was wrong to imply this. Why the children were not brought forth at Hezekiah's time was because of the lack of spirituality in the daughter of Zion, rather than because of God's limited ability.

Isaiah 66:10 Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her: rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn over her- LXX has in view the people of Jerusalem rejoicing along with the Gentiles in a Divine feast in the last day, the marriage supper of the lamb: "Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and all ye that love her hold in her a general assembly". This Divine rejoicing over God's people is that of the God who rejoices in fulfilling His covenant with His obedient people (Dt. 28:63; 30:9); and the Gentiles who now love Zion will join in with it (:11). It will be a mutual joy, with Yahweh's people rejoicing in Him (:18; s.w. Is. 61:10; 65:18) and He in them (Is. 62:5; 65:19) because they have entered the new marriage covenant with Him (Jer. 32:41).

Isaiah 66:11 That you may nurse and be satisfied at the comforting breasts; that you may drink deeply, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory- This continues the image of Zion's sufferings bringing forth a new nation (:8,9). Just as a newborn baby is immediately nursed at the breast by the mother, so these Gentile converts would be. The implication is that the new nation of Yahweh

brought forth is multiethnic.

Isaiah 66:12 For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream: and you will be nursed. You will be carried on her side, and will be dandled on her knees- LXX suggests that the nations would come to Zion carrying the children of the repentant Israelites: "their children shall be borne upon the shoulders, and comforted on the knees". This is in view in other restoration prophecies; the idea was that the fall of Babylon would elicit repentance and migration to Zion, not only of the Jews but of the peoples amongst whom they lived, after the pattern of Egyptians joining in with the exodus. See on :11. But the ambiguity of the text is intentional; the Gentiles would nurse the children of Israel, and Israel would nurse the Gentiles (:11). This reflects the unity of Jew and Gentile within this new nation, which is to come forth from the sufferings of Zion in the last days.

Isaiah 66:13 As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted in Jerusalem- The "comfort" continues the picture of a newborn baby being nursed at the breast of the mother. God Himself likens Himself to a nursing mother, an unusual and radical figure in the male-dominated culture of the time. But this "comfort" was offered to the exiles in Is. 40:1; but they then refused it. Finally it will be accepted, and even now it can be experienced through acceptance of the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, given to all who accept the new covenant.

Isaiah 66:14 You will see it, and your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like the tender grass- The dry bones of Ez. 37 will now flourish, because the wind of the Spirit of the new covenant is breathed into them, and they accept it. This could have happened at the restoration from Babylon, but is now reapplied to the final revival of God's people.

And the hand of Yahweh shall be known toward His servants; He will have indignation against His enemies- To know Yahweh's hand is to recognize His hand in the sense of His power and ability; and "His enemies" will know this also, through their experience of final condemnation (s.w. Jer. 16:21; Ps. 109:27). The physical restoration of Zion and the Kingdom would likewise make His hand known to His servants (s.w. Is. 41:20). If all are to "know" Yahweh

finally, either through salvation by grace or through condemnation- we logically must know Him now, with all that having relationship with Him implies and demands ['knowing' in the Hebraic sense].

Isaiah 66:15 For behold, Yahweh will come with fire, and His chariots shall be like the whirlwind; to render His anger with fierceness, and His rebuke with flames of fire- This would perhaps initially have been fulfilled through the cherubim returning to Jerusalem, as envisioned by Ezekiel- fire, chariots, whirlwind is all cherubim language. That didn't happen because God's people didn't "return" to Him, and so this full "return" didn't then happen. But it will come the more gloriously true in the last days, when the Lord Jesus returns in flaming fire taking vengeance (2 Thess. 1:8). See on :18.

Isaiah 66:16 For by fire and by His sword will Yahweh plead judgement on all flesh; and the slain of Yahweh shall be many- The sword of Yahweh will come down in judgment upon the peoples of the *eretz* and perhaps on the resurrected former abusers of His people (see on Is. 26:21). It may take the form of literal fire, as He destroyed Sodom, and as also mentioned in 2 Pet. 3. But His sword comes down as part of His 'pleading with all flesh' (see on Is. 27:1). This can be read as an allusion to judgment; but there is still the idea of pleading. The threat of the sword descending is His appeal, His pleading for repentance.

Isaiah 66:17 Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves to go to the gardens, behind one in the midst, eating pig's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, they shall come to an end together, says Yahweh- I suggested on Is. 65:3 that these gardens may have been within the temple precincts. And LXX adds "and eat swine's flesh in the porches", the temple porches. But it may refer to some idolatrous sanctuary in exile, which the exiles used as a form of Yahweh worship. It was this same group who pronounced themselves 'purified' and abused and disfellowshipped the faithful remnant (Is. 65:5 LXX "I am pure"). Isaiah ends with particular condemnation of this group; it was their hypocrisy and disfellowship of their brethren which clearly elicited God's maximum wrath.

Isaiah 66:18 For I know their works and their thoughts- Again we note the

parallel between works and thoughts. The state of the heart, our thinking, is of such paramount importance to God.

The time comes, that I will gather all nations and languages; and they shall come, and shall see My glory- "All nations" usually refers to all nations within or around the *eretz* promised to Abraham. They will all be gathered to judgment, and perceive God's glory- which will be manifest in Israel, the parade example of the glory of His saving grace towards sinners (Lk. 2:32). I suggested on :15 that the initial fulfilment could have been in the visible return of the cherubim to Zion, and they are repeatedly associated with the glory of the God of Israel (Ez. 9:3; 10:19; 11:22). This would then have fulfilled the prophecy of the glory of Israel's God entering the rebuilt Zion in Ez. 43:2. But the exiles didn't rebuild nor operate the temple system of Ez. 40-48 and so this was precluded. The greater fulfilment will be in the Lord Jesus as the image of the glory of God, returned to Zion and enthroned there before literally all nations.

Isaiah 66:19 I will set a sign among them- The "them" is repentant, accepted Israel. They will have a sign / token placed upon them, just as circumcision had been the "sign" of the old covenant (s.w. Ex. 31:13 etc.). "Among them" can as well be "upon them". The token of the new covenant is the Spirit, and so this may be here in view.

The idea of taking the Gospel world-wide in the great commission was alluding to Is. 66:17-20. Here those who are spared the ‘Gehenna’ of the last day judgment will have a sign placed on them, as upon Cain, and they will then be sent “unto the nations… and they shall declare my glory among the gentiles”. The rejection process glorifies God’s righteous Name, and this world-wide exhibition of the rejected will actually bring men “out of all nations” to God, just as Israel’s condemnation was an “instruction” unto the surrounding nations. The connection shows that in our obedience to the great commission, we go forth as condemned men who in our case, like the disciples, have known the wonder of grace. Mark’s record stresses three times in the lead up to the great commission that the disciples “believed not”; and then, he records how they were told to go and preach condemnation on those who believed not (Mk. 16:11,13,14,16). They were humbled men who did that.

And I will send such as escape of them to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the islands afar off, who have not heard My fame, neither have seen My glory; and they shall declare My glory among the nations- These peoples could earlier have come to repentance and to

Zion, but they refused. Prophecies like Is. 18:7 were to have a deferred fulfilment in the last days, when repentant Jews are sent to call in to Zion these "tall" peoples; those who draw or make tall the bow (s.w. "tall" peoples, Is. 18:7). The witness was to be by those Jews and Gentiles who 'escaped' from Babylon, by grace (s.w. Jer. 50:28; 51:50) and repented (Ez. 6:9). Their united experience of grace would be such a powerful witness.

Paul's desire to go to Spain (Rom. 15:24) indicates a commitment to taking the Gospel to the very ends of the world he then knew. He may well have been motivated in this by wishing to fulfill in spirit the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 66:18,19, which describes how Tarshish (which he would have understood as Spain) and other places which “have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory” will be witnessed to by those who *have* seen His glory and have “escaped” from God’s just condemnation by grace. Paul sees this as referring to himself. For he speaks in Rom. 15:19 of his ambition to take the Gospel to Spain; and in that same context, of how he will bring the Gentile brethren’s offering up to Jerusalem. This is precisely the context of Is. 66- the offerings of the Gentiles are to be brought up to Jerusalem, as a result of how the Lord’s glory will be spoken of to all nations. So Paul read Isaiah 66 and did something about his Old Testament Bible study; he dedicated his life to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he encouraged them to send their offerings to Jerusalem. He was no mere theologian, no academic missiologist. His study and exposition of Old Testament Scripture led to a life lived out in practice, to hardship, risk of life, persecution, loneliness, even rejection by his brethren. It is also significant in passing to note that Is. 66:19 speaks of nations which occur in the list of nations we have in Genesis 10, in the context of the effect of Babel. It is as if Paul sees the spreading of the Gospel as an undoing of the curse of Babel and the establishment of the Kingdom conditions described in Is. 66. By his preaching of God’s Kingdom and the reign of Christ, he brought about a foretaste of the future Kingdom in the lives of his converts. And we can do likewise.

Isaiah 66:20 They shall bring all your brothers out of all the nations for an offering to Yahweh, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and on mules, and on dromedaries, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says Yahweh- I explained on :19 that the "them" are the repentant minority of Jewish exiles. It seems they are sent to bring their impenitent brethren back to Yahweh and to Zion. This is the key to successful preaching; repentant, forgiven sinners sharing the experience of grace.

As the children of Israel bring their offering in a clean vessel into the house of Yahweh- The offering they brought would have been of their converts; and Paul uses this idea in speaking of his converts as a sacrifice. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV “instruments”] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah’s ‘Kingdom’ passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The restoration of the kingdom could potentially have happened at the time of Ezra.

Isaiah 66:21 Of them also will I take for priests and for Levites, says Yahweh- The "them" appears to refers to the Gentile converts. A new priesthood is in view. This would have been part of the new covenant offered to both Jews and Gentiles at the restoration, had they responded. This again was the intention for the restored exiles; for the work of the Lord Jesus put an end to the priesthood.

In the restoration from Babylon context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, “And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD”. This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zechariah 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and ‘bearing the glory’, i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua’s obedience: “This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey” (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn’t have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the ‘Kingdom’ prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah’s prophecies of the restoration feature “the servant”- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: “And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there”. His obedience would enable the peoples’ establishment as the Kingdom.

The restoration prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 commanded: “Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things”. The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65- it wasn’t possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God’s

acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ezekiel 13:9: "neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraven stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraven stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfill Ezekiel 42:13.

Isaiah 66:22 For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, says Yahweh- Ez. 44:15 uses the same word: "But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall *stand before me* [s.w. "remain before me"] to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD". But Ezra had to confess, using these very words of Isaiah and Ezekiel which he would have been familiar with: "O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot *stand before thee* because of this" (Ezra 9:15). They hadn't lived the Kingdom life, and therefore the Kingdom prophecies could not come true in them. It makes a profitable exercise to consider all the times that Ezra and Nehemiah allude to the words of Isaiah and Ezekiel. It must have been heartbreaking for them to see the possibility of fulfilment within their grasp, and yet to know that their people didn't see the wonder of it all.

So your seed and your name shall remain- This is more than a bald statement that they would be immortalized. Their seed and name would remain, just as Yahweh's seed and Name would- for they would be identified with Him. But we shall each be given a name which is eternal, a unique reflection of our personality and character. Our struggles towards the person of Christ uniquely refracted through us will be eternally memorialized. Who we are now is who we shall eternally be. This points up the crucial importance of spiritual mindedness.

Isaiah 66:23 It shall happen, that from one new moon to another, and from one

Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, says Yahweh- "All flesh" would not fit in the literal temple; the immediate reference is to a restored temple in the land of Judah, used by the remnants of "all flesh" in the land promised to Abraham who came to live in Judah as they came into covenant with Israel's God. The Sabbath law has been ended in Christ. This is therefore another example of how these prophecies of the restoration were envisaged as coming true at the time the exiles returned from Babylon. But they broke the Sabbath themselves, as Nehemiah records; and they didn't teach the Gentiles God's ways. The essence but not the letter of all this will therefore be fulfilled in the last days, when all flesh will come before Yahweh.

Isaiah 66:24 They shall go forth, and look on the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched- The context here is of the destruction of the apostate, hypocritical Jews who had condemned and disfellowshipped their faithful brethren (see on :5). They are the "sinners in Zion" of Is. 33:14, here described as "the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched". This is quoted in Mk. 9:44 concerning Gehenna, the place of punishment for the unworthy saints. If the judgement is to be at Jerusalem, it would fit into place if the unworthy are punished literally in the physical location of Gehenna. This would make more sense of the Lord Jesus Christ's repeated allusions to it when talking of the judgement. The repeated reference to fire being used to punish the unworthy (remember the Angels can be made a flaming fire) implies their punishment will be within a defined period of time- probably very short, seeing God has no pleasure in punishing sin- and if fire is to be used, it would be logical if it was in a confined location. A punishment in literal Gehenna fits in.

The servant was called to sustain the “dispirited” by the prophetic word (Is. 50:4). And yet passages like Is. 50:4-11 and even Is. 53 speak of how the servant met even physical abuse as well as rejection in his ministry to his fellow Jews. Indeed the servant feels that his mission to them has been a failure (Is. 49:1-6), a complaint met by God’s promise that his mission would be in some way reapplied to the Gentiles in their captivity to sin. The way the servant is beaten and has his hair pulled out (Is. 50:4-11) reminds us of how the prophet Jeremiah was treated the same way by the Jews when his message was rejected (Jer. 20:2; Jer. 37:15). The servant was spat at by his fellow Jews- an expression of utter contempt (Job 30:10). Whilst the servant prophecies find their later fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, it seems to me that in their first context, they speak of how a

prophet or prophets at the time of the exile were rejected and even beaten up by their fellow Jews. Indeed, Isaiah ends on a negative note, describing the judgments to come upon the Jews who had rejected the message of deliverance from Babylon (Is. 66:24). Is. 65:8-16; Is. 66:5 etc. speak of a minority of Jews who trembled at the word of prophecy and were Yahweh's servants, who had been disfellowshipped by the leaders of the Jewish community in Babylon. The majority of the captives insisted, according to Ez. 18, that they hadn't sinned, and they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers; whereas this righteous remnant in Babylon admitted that "we have sinned. Equally with them of old time have we transgressed" (Is. 64:5). They took the message of Ezekiel to heart- unlike the majority. And thus this was the sad end of the great plan developed by the God of all grace for His people in Babylon. They rejected it, and hated His servants who brought that good news to them.

And they will be loathsome to all mankind- AV "shall be an abhorring to all flesh"- the Hebrew text of Dan. 12:2 concerning the punishment of the responsible at judgement suggests some allusion to this: "Some to shame and everlasting contempt".