INTRODUCTION:
This commentary is based upon my personal devotional notes and reflections on the Book of Isaiah. It is intended to help you better understand some of the historical background of the book and the theological issues in Isaiah’s prophecy. It is not a technical commentary designed for academic projects so I do not use footnotes or include a bibliography. This material is intended for use by members and friends of Southside Christian Church to help you in a verse by verse study of Isaiah. I try as much as possible to link what Isaiah says with other parts of the Bible especially the New Testament so readers can see the connections in Scripture.

In the commentary there are occasional references to the original Hebrew words Isaiah used in a particular passage. Those Hebrew words are always written in italics and are transliterated into English from the Hebrew. I go chapter by chapter in the commentary and sometimes individual verses are commented upon, sometimes it is several sentences and sometimes a whole paragraph. This commentary is based on the New International Version and all Scripture quotations are taken from that version of the Bible. Books of the Bible, Scripture references and quotes are also italicized.

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP:
There is no disagreement among scholars that Isaiah needs to be split into two sections. The first from chapters 1-39 is set during Isaiah’s lifetime in the days of Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah and the destruction of the north Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian Empire. The second section, chapters 40-66, speaks to the Jewish exiles in Babylon and those who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonians destroyed the city. Its setting is after 586, the destruction of Jerusalem, and right before or soon after the decree of Cyrus the Great of Persia allowing the Jews to return home and rebuild their temple in 538. Some more liberal scholars postulate a third section of Isaiah but their arguments are not convincing.

The controversy over Isaiah is about authorship. Almost all liberal scholars and even many evangelical ones believe that the two sections of Isaiah were written by two different prophets. Chapters 1-39 were written by Isaiah Ben Amoz of Jerusalem who began his prophetic career “the year that King Uzziah died” or 740 BC. Chapters 40-66 were written by an unknown prophet during the exile of the Jews in Babylon. The two sections of the book were then combined into the one prophecy of Isaiah we have today by some later editor.

The more traditional view, the view to which I subscribe and which I take in this commentary, is that the whole prophecy of Isaiah was written by Isaiah Ben Amoz. See the commentary notes for Isaiah 1:1 for a more detailed defense of the traditional position. Since the second half of Isaiah speaks to the exiles and their situation it is only logical to assume that the final form of the prophecy was completed by one of his disciples in the time of the exiles probably before the dedication of the second temple in 515 or a little later.

KEY HISTORICAL DATES IN THE TIMELINE OF ISAIAH 1-39:
• Assyria is weak and there is a revival of prosperity under Uzziah of Judah & Jeroboam II of Israel, 783-746
• The first of the great writing prophet’s begin their ministries and critiques: Amos and Hosea in the north and Micah and Isaiah in the south, 750-700
• The storm gathers: Tiglath-Pileser III becomes king of Assyria and leads an Assyrian resurgence and expands his empire. He invades northern Israel and annexes Galilee in 738, Isaiah 9.
• Israel pays tribute to Assyria and there is continual betrayal, assassination and war under Kings Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea, 745-724.
• Shalmaneser V of Assyria campaigns against Israel and Samaria; Samaria finally falls under Sargon II, 721, 2 Kings 15-17.
• The northern kingdom of Israel ceases to exist as a nation; the 10 northern tribes are deported by the Assyrians to northeastern Turkey or Armenia. Some refugees flee south to Judah, 722-721.
• Hezekiah son of Ahaz reigns in Judah and leads a revival of the worship of God in Judah, 715-686.
• Hezekiah rebels against Assyria and King Sennacharib invades Judah laying waste to Judah’s fortified cities and laying siege to Jerusalem 700-701, 2 Kings 18.
• God sends a plague among the Assyrian army and Sennacherib is forced to return to Assyria, 701.
• Sennacherib is assassinated by two of his sons in Nineveh and Esarhaddon takes the throne of Assyria, 680.
• Judah is an Assyrian vassal under Manasseh son of Hezekiah who becomes the most evil idolatrous king in Judah’s history, 686-642, 2 Kings 21.
• Esarhaddon and Asshurbanapal invade Egypt, and sack Thebes, 663
• Nabopolassar rebels against Assyria and founds the Neo-Babylonian Empire, 626.
• Cyaxares king of the Medes invades Assyria in 625.
• The fall of Nineveh under Nabopolassar of Babylon, 612, Nahum 3:18-19.

KEY HISTORICAL DATES IN THE TIMELINE OF ISAIAH 40-66:
• King Jehoiachim of Judah dies and is replaced by his son Jehoiachin; he reigns three months, 598.
• Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem after a siege and deports Jehoiachin to Babylon along with his mother, and many of the leading citizens of Jerusalem, including a young priest named Ezekiel; he puts Jehoiachin in prison upon arrival in Babylon, 597.
• Nebuchadnezzar installs King Jehoiachin’s uncle Mattaniah, son of Josiah as King of Judah and changes his name to Zedekiah, 597.
• Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invade Judah and lay siege to Jerusalem, January 588, Jeremiah 52 & II Kings 25.
• The Babylonians breach the walls of Jerusalem, July 18, 586; Zedekiah flees the city in the night and heads toward Jericho where he is captured and taken to Riblah in Syria, Nebuchadnezzar’s headquarters. There his sons are killed before him, his eyes put out and he is taken to Babylon in chains where he dies, July 586.
• Nebuzaradan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar’s guard, comes to Jerusalem with orders to burn the city to the ground. This he does, taking all the sacred objects of the temple to
Babylon as booty. He burns the temple and tears down Jerusalem’s walls. He also deports many of the elders and leading officials of the city who are left alive, executing some at Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar’s headquarters, August 586.

- Evil-Merodach, King of Babylon, frees Jehoiachin from prison and gives him a place at the king’s table, 561, *II Kings 25*.
- Babylon falls to Cyrus the Great of Persia, October 539.
- Cyrus decrees that the Jews of Babylon are free to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord, 538, *Ezra 1*.
- Work on the second temple begins in 536. The foundations are laid but very soon opposition grows from the surrounding peoples especially the Samaritans. Work is halted, *Ezra 4-5*.
- Beginning in 520, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the exiles to finish the work on the Lord’s temple.
- The second temple is completed and dedicated, March 12, 516, 70 years after it was destroyed, *Ezra 6*.

**KINGS OF ISRAEL & THEIR REIGNS DURING ISAIAH’S LIFETIME, ISAIAH 1-39:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Reigns</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeroboam II</td>
<td>(786-746)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zechariah</td>
<td>(746-745)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shallum</td>
<td>(745)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menahem</td>
<td>(745-738)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pekahiah</td>
<td>(738-737)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pekah</td>
<td>(737-732)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoshea</td>
<td>(732-724)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fall of Samaria(721)</td>
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**KINGS OF JUDAH & THEIR REIGNS DURING ISAIAH’S LIFETIME, ISAIAH 1-39:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Reigns</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uzziah</td>
<td>(783-742)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jotham</td>
<td>(742-735)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahaz</td>
<td>(735-715)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hezekiah</td>
<td>(715-686)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manasseh</td>
<td>(686-642)</td>
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**OUTLINE OF ISAIAH:**

As stated above, *Isaiah* can be divided into two parts: the first set in Isaiah’s own lifetime from 742-686, and the second set in the time of the Babylonian exile and immediately after, 586-515. The first part of the book is often called The Book of Judgment and the second half, The Book of Consolation or Comfort. The outline below is based on the outline in the NIV Study Bible.

**Part I: The Book of Judgment (chapters 1-39)**

I. Prophecies of Judgment & Promise (chapters 1-6)
   A. Introduction: Charges against Judah for breaking God’s covenant (1:1-31)
   B. The Future Glory and Discipline of Judah and Jerusalem (chapters 2-4)
      1. Jerusalem’s future blessings (2:1-5)
      2. The Lord’s discipline of Judah (2:6-4:1)
      3. The restoration of Zion (4:2-6)
C. Judah and Jerusalem’s Judgment and Exile (5:1-30)
D. Isaiah’s Call as a Prophet of God (6:1-13)

II. Prophecies Concerning the Threat against Judah by Aram (Syria) and Israel (chapters 7-12)
A. Ahaz Warned not to Fear and the Sign of Immanuel (7:1-25)
B. Isaiah’s Son (8:1-22)
C. David’s Son, the Messiah (9:1-7)
D. Judgment against Israel (9:8-10:4)
E. God’s Judgment against Assyria (10:5-34)
F. The Establishment of the Messiah and his Kingdom (11:1-16)
G. Songs of Praise for Deliverance (12:1-6)

III. Judgment against Various Nations (chapters 13-23)
A. Against Babylon as Part of Assyria (13:1-14:3)
B. Against the King of Babylon (Satan?) (14:4-23)
C. Against Assyria (14:24-27)
D. Against the Philistines (14:28-32)
E. Against Moab (15:1-16:14)
F. Against Damascus (17:1-14)
G. Against Cush (18:1-7)
H. Against Egypt (19:1-25)
I. Against Cush (20:1-6)
J. Against Babylon (21:1-10)
K. Against Edom (21:11-12)
L. Against Arabia (21:13-17)
M. Against Jerusalem (22:1-25)
N. Against Tyre (23:1-18)

IV. Judgment and Promise of the Lord’s Kingdom (chapters 24-27)
A. The Lord’s Devastation of the Earth for Sin (24:1-23)
B. Praise to the Lord for his Kingdom and Feast (25:1-12)
C. Praise to the Lord for his Care (26:1-21)
D. Israel’s Enemies Judged and Israel’s Remnant Restored (27:1-13)

V. Six Woes (chapters 28-33)
A. Woe to Ephraim (Samaria) (28:1-29)
B. Woe to David’s City – Jerusalem (29:1-14)
C. Woe to Those Who Trust in Alliances (29:15-24)
D. Woe to the Obstinete Nation – Judah (30:1-33)
E. Woe to Those Who Rely on Egypt (31:1-32:20)
F. Woe to Assyria but blessing for God’s People (33:1-24)

VI. Prophecies of Judgment and Promise(chapters 34-35)
A. Judgment Against the Nations (34:1-17)
B. The Future Blessings of a Restored Zion (35:1-10)

VII. Historical Transition from the Assyrian Threat to the Babylonian Exile (chapters 36-39)
A. The Siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib and the Assyrian Army (36:1-22)
B. The Lord’s Deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian Threat (37:1-38)
C. The Lord Extends King Hezekiah’s Life (38:1-22)
D. Envoys from Babylon and the Babylonian Exile Foretold (39:1-8)
Part II: The Book of Consolation (chapters 40-66)

VIII. The Deliverance and Restoration of Israel (chapters 40-48)
   A. The Coming of the Sovereign Lord (40:1-31)
   B. The Helper of Israel (41:1-29)
   C. The First Servant Song (42:1-9)
   D. Praise and Exhortation (42:10-25)
   E. The Lord’s Love for Israel (43:1-44:5)
   F. The Lord Almighty vs. Idols (44:5-28)
   G. God Anoints Cyrus of Persia for His Purposes (45:1-14)
   H. The Lord Alone is God! (45:15-24)
   I. The Lord vs. the Gods of Babylon (46:1-13)
   J. The Fall of Babylon (47:1-15)
   K. The Lord Exhorts His People (48:1-22)

IX. The Servant’s Ministry and Israel’s Restoration (chapters 49-57)
   A. The Second Servant Song (49:1-7)
   B. The Restoration of Israel (49:8-26)
   C. Israel’s Sin (50:1-3) & The Third Servant Song (50:4-11)
   D. Restoration and Salvation for Zion (51:1-52:12)
   E. The Fourth Servant Song (52:13-53:12)
   F. The Future Glory of Zion (54:1-17)
   G. The Lord’s Invitation to a Covenant Relationship with Him (55:1-13)
   H. The Lord’s Invitation Extended to Even the Gentiles (56:1-8)
   I. God’s Judgment on the Wicked but Comfort for the Humble (56:9-57:21)

X. Everlasting Salvation vs. Everlasting Judgment (chapters 58-66)
   A. True and False Fasting and Worship (58:1-14)
   B. Sin, Repentance and Redemption (59:1-21)
   C. Zion’s Future Glory (60:1-22)
   D. The Lord Sends His Anointed Servant to Bring God’s Favor (61:1-11)
   E. Zion’s Redemption and New Name (62:1-12)
   F. God’s Day of Vengeance Against the Nations (63:1-6)
   G. A Prayer to God for Deliverance (63:7-64:12)
   H. Judgment and Salvation (65:1-16)
   I. The New Heavens and New Earth (65:17-25)
   J. Judgment for False Worshippers and Salvation for True Worshippers (66:1-16)
   K. God Will Draw True Worshippers to Himself from the Nations (66:17-24)

A WORD ABOUT HEBREW POETRY:

Most of the Book of Isaiah is written in Hebrew poetic style. In fact Isaiah has some of the greatest Hebrew poetry in the entire Bible. What is Hebrew poetry and how does it work? The following helps explain it.

The nature of Hebrew Poetry is paralleling ideas rather than rhyming sounds. Think of “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Try reciting it in English. Now try it in German or Spanish! It only works in English because the poem depends on the sounds of the words. Hebrew poetry doesn’t depend upon rhyming words and sounds, but on putting ideas together in patterns called parallelism. There are three basic types of Hebrew Poetry.

2. **Opposite** – You say the opposite. The technical term is *antithetic*. Examples: *Proverbs* 10:9, 12:25.


   Isaiah will use all three types. It will help you understand his writing better if you can learn to spot the type of poetry he is using so you can better interpret and apply it.

**A FINAL PERSONAL NOTE:**

   It took me over two years to work my way through *Isaiah*. It is a long and complex book. However, other than *Deuteronomy* it is the Old Testament book quoted most often by the Lord Jesus. There is so much here that speaks to the Lord’s ministry and mission as both Messiah and Servant. Isaiah not only prophesied to his own day but God had him writing to people he would never meet who would live a century and a half after he died. I often wondered when I was working my way through his book whether he grieved over messages of judgment he was called to give realizing that his people would continue to disobey God and the Lord would indeed have to destroy Judah and Jerusalem and send his people into exile. Thinking about his ministry I am glad the Lord called me to be a teacher and pastor and not a prophet. I do not know whether I could have carried the burden. Fortunately Isaiah saw more than judgment. He saw hope, grace and salvation in the King and Servant who would come. Isaiah’s words are some of the most beautiful, powerful and beloved in all of Scripture. I hope you enjoy studying this extraordinary prophecy as much as I have!

   Pastor Galen Doughty  
   Southside Christian Church  
   September 2018
THE COMMENTARY:

Chapter 1:

**1:1 - Verse 1** is a superscription that introduces Isaiah's prophecy. Since it is written in the third person it was probably added later by whoever edited the final collection of Isaiah's visions. Isaiah is identified as the son of Amoz, a person mentioned only here in Scripture. Some have suggested he was a member of the royal family while others have postulated he was a priest. Both theories have evidence for and against them. He was a contemporary of the prophet Micah and followed the writing of Amos and Hosea. His name means "Yahweh is salvation." That fits with the overall theme of Isaiah's prophecy.

The opening verse uses the singular "vision" rather than the plural to describe the book, which suggests one source, namely Isaiah, for all the words in the book. Most liberal scholars and even some evangelical scholars separate the book into at least two parts written by two different authors and sometimes even three. **Chapters 1-39**, can be dated during Isaiah's lifetime from the year King Uzziah died, 742 BC, to the time of King Hezekiah who died in 687 BC. **Chapters 40-66** speak to the exiles in Babylon and after. That would place them no earlier than 586 BC. The exiles returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel in 538 and the second temple was dedicated in 515 BC. Some of chapters 56-66 apply to a time when the Jews are back in the land and are worshipping once again at the temple. That could only be after 536, when the second temple foundations were laid and the altar of burnt offering was built. See **Ezra 1-3**. That means Isaiah's prophecy applies to the Jewish people all the way from 742 to at least 515 BC, some 225 plus years! That is the reason most liberal scholars say there must have been at least two "Isaiahs" and most likely three.

The chief reason liberal scholars give for multiple authors of **Isaiah** over several centuries is that no one human being could write such a book that applies over such a huge span of time. They also add literary reasons citing stylistic differences between especially **chapters 1-39** and 40-66. The arguments for one author of **Isaiah** however are just as compelling. First of all, prophecy by its very nature is supernatural. The prophet is receiving direct revelation from the God of the universe, the Creator. The same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead is more than capable of giving his prophet insight into events two centuries in the future. It may not be a normal occurrence but it is certainly within the realm of God's power. To say otherwise is to imply that we live in a closed universe without the possibility of the miraculous which is not part of a Biblical worldview. Second, the so-called stylistic differences collapse when one considers the long career of Isaiah. He prophesied from the year of Uzziah's death in 742 BC all the way into the time of King Hezekiah in the 680's BC. It is even possible he lived into the reign of Hezekiah's son Manasseh who reigned from 687-642 BC. Isaiah's career as a prophet spanned at least 40 years and maybe even 50! Word usage and literary and poetic styles change over the length of a writer's career. Plus there are still enough similarities in language between the two main sections of **Isaiah** to affirm one author. The most telling reason is that Jewish rabbis of the later Persian and Greek periods spoke of only one Isaiah not two or many. There is no evidence to suggest that they knew of more than one Isaiah. Jesus himself quoted from different parts of **Isaiah** and always attributed the book to Isaiah not several people.

One other piece of internal evidence should be noted that lends credibility to the idea that one person wrote the entire prophecy. In **8:16** Isaiah says to bind up the testimony and seal the teaching among his disciples. The statement implies that Isaiah received visions from God that did not concern his day but were related to the time of the exiles more than a century into the
future. He gave them to his followers or disciples to keep safe and reveal at the appropriate time when the Jews were in exile in Babylon to give them comfort and hope. I conclude therefore that Isaiah wrote Isaiah and that God revealed the entire work to his prophet.

1:2-3 - Isaiah uses Hebrew poetry to great effect in this early section of his prophecy. The timing of this message is difficult to determine but it was probably during the reign of Jotham or Ahaz. Israel and Judah were still living off of the prosperity and wealth of the reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam II. Isaiah describes conditions that are similar to the ones described in Hosea and Amos. Israel and Judah on the outside look prosperous and blessed. But spiritually they are bankrupt. Their worship of Yahweh has been paganized and they give lip-service to God's covenant with them.

NOTE: I use the term paganized to mean that Israel worshipped God like the pagans worshipped their gods. Pagan religions worked off of a quid pro quo principle. You gave Baal his sacrifices and worship in exchange for good weather or fertile fields. Baal didn't care how you treated people; he only cared if you gave him his due. He was amoral! When Israel paganized the worship of Yahweh they divorced their worship from their behavior and set aside God's covenant. They thought as long as we continue to give God his sacrifices and worship he will protect us or give us good crops, after all we are his chosen people! The sacrifices were no longer to deal with sin and communicate God's forgiveness; they became Israel's part of the bargain they had with God. What's worse they began to worship pagan gods alongside of Yahweh. He became one god among many. Yet their twisted thinking said they were still worshipping God and holding up their end of the covenant. This is why Isaiah says his people no longer understand and are as dumb as an ox!

The northern kingdom of Israel was worse than Judah as at least Judah had the temple in Jerusalem, the priests and the sacrifices. Some in Israel would make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices but many still worshipped at the calf shrines of Jeroboam I in Bethel and Dan. Both countries were corrupt and idolatry dominated their worship. Hosea and Amos had been sent to expose their sin by the Lord and call them to repentance. Isaiah and Micah continue that mission.

Isaiah calls heaven and earth as witness that the Lord has spoken to his children, Israel and Judah. God had made them his children and raised them. He was their Father. But the children have rebelled against their Father. They are dumber than an ox or a donkey. The beasts at least know where they are fed and housed. They know who takes care of them but Israel has forgotten the Lord. They no longer remember him. They are so blinded by their sin and idolatry that they do not perceive their problem. They think nothing is wrong!

1:4 - Isaiah identifies his people as laden with sin, the offspring of evildoers who deal corruptly. He indicts the whole nation as sinful and corrupt not just a few. This is a Hebrew principle that relates to community and the covenant. A few can corrupt and make unclean the whole unless the sin is cut out of the community. Israel has become so corrupted by sin that the whole nation is spoiled. Even their children have become corrupt because they only learn sinful behavior from their parents.

The worst thing Israel has done however is forsake the Lord. The word means to depart or abandon; in the context it means abandoning their relationship with the Lord. Israel has
become apostate and has violated their covenant with Yahweh by worshipping other gods. They
have committed adultery with pagan gods and divorced themselves from their relationship with
God. They have in effect despised him. The word means to treat with contempt and in some
cases to blaspheme. Israel has rejected God and has turned their back on him. They have become
utterly estranged from their Creator. The word for estranged is the opposite of what God's
covenant established with Israel. They were like a wife to Yahweh and now they are like a
complete stranger. He doesn't know them and they don't know him.

Isaiah says Israel is estranged from and despises "the Holy One of Israel." This is the first
time he uses this title in his prophecy and it will be the most important name he uses for God
throughout the entire book. In many ways it ties all the chapters together and unifies Isaiah. God
is the Holy One, the one who is completely holy and pure. God has no evil within him. He is
totally good and morally righteous. Holiness can also denote power and mystery. God is unlike
anything that is common or profane. Thus ritual or cultic purity is related to and reflects his
holiness. It expresses God's complete perfection of being. God is holy so he is free from our
moral imperfections and human frailties. He is holy and calls his people to be holy as well.
Because of God's nature his covenant with Israel concerns his holiness. One cannot have a
relationship with the Holy One of Israel and behave in an unholy manner. How one treats others
relates to how one treats and worships God! When Israel began to worship pagan idols they not
only abandoned the first four of the Ten Commandments they also violated the last six which had
to do with how they treated one another. That was the problem with paganizing their religion.
The pagan gods may not have cared how people treated one another as long as they received
their worship but Yahweh cared passionately how the Israelites treated one another because he
was holy! The evidence of their betrayal to Isaiah is not only their idolatry but also their immoral
behavior to each other! God was holy and called his people to be holy but they were not. By
their actions they showed they had despised and abandon their covenant relationship with God!

1:5-6 - Isaiah asks why Israel continues to rebel because they have already been struck down by
the Lord. They are wounded and their wounds have not been bound up or treated. Isaiah gives a
graphic picture of a beaten bruised Israel with wounds from head to foot. Verses 7-9 speak of
devastation in the country. To what is Isaiah referring here? It is possible he is referring to
Tiglath Pileser III's invasion of Israel in 734 BC when he took sections of Galilee. It could also
refer to his conquest of Damascus in 732 when he also conquered many of the fortified cities of
Israel and Pekah King of Israel was deposed by Hoshea the last king. Tiglath Pileser had invaded
Syria and Israel at the request of Ahaz king of Judah who became his vassal. Isaiah may be
referring to these events because Israel and Judah were wounded, especially Israel. The north
kingdom only lasted another eleven years till 721 when the Assyrians captured Samaria, its
capital and completely destroyed it.

Isaiah is telling Israel and Judah that the invasion of the Assyrians and the war and
destruction that has accompanied it is a direct result of their rebellion against God and the
breaking of their covenant with Yahweh. This is a common theme in the writing prophets and
will continue all the way through the prophets of the fall of Judah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. God is
punishing his people because they have rebelled against him but he punishes them to bring them
to repentance.

1:7-9 - The events of Tiglath Pileser III's invasion of Syria and Israel at the bequest of Ahaz king
of Judah in 732 BC seem to fit best the description Isaiah gives in these verses. Israel was
devastated by the Assyrian invasion and many of her fortified cities were destroyed. Judah had been invaded by Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel and Jerusalem had been besieged. This was the reason Ahaz had appealed to the Assyrians for help. Tiglath Pileser was more than happy to oblige him! As a result Israel was left a shell of her former self; Judah was also damaged in the war with Syria and Israel and the subsequent "deliverance" by the Assyrians.

Isaiah gives us a poetic picture of the consequences of the war. Israel was left desolate, her cities burned with fire. Foreigners have invaded her land, God's Promised Land! The daughter of Zion, which is Jerusalem or Judah is left isolated and damaged like a booth standing at the edge of a vineyard that has been destroyed. Isaiah exclaims that if the Lord had not left them at least a few survivors then Jerusalem would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah, completely devastated.

Some in Judah and Jerusalem would have looked at events and concluded they were the logical results of Ahaz’s appeal to Tiglath Pileser for help. He invaded Syria and Israel and the destruction in Judah was collateral damage from that invasion. Isaiah writes to tell his people that behind the military and political events of 734-732 stands Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. His people have rebelled against him and he is holding them accountable just as he had said he would in his covenant in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Israel and Judah’s feigned ignorance of God's covenant and their relationship with the Lord is no excuse. They need to repent if they are to save themselves from destruction!

1:10-11 - Isaiah now calls the rulers of Jerusalem Sodom and Gomorrah. He calls them to listen to the Word of the Lord. Ezekiel in Ezekiel 16 calls Jerusalem Sodom and Jeremiah does the same thing in Jeremiah 23. John names Jerusalem Sodom and Egypt in Revelation 11. The title is ominous. God told Abraham he had determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their extreme wickedness unless he could find at least ten righteous people in the city. He found only Lot and his family and even they were not righteous. Isaiah says Jerusalem has come to that point. The people are wicked and deserve God's judgment because of their rebellion and sin.

He then indicts their worship and shows just how much they have paganized it and how displeasing it is to God. The Lord exclaims he has had enough of all of their sacrifices, their burnt offerings, bulls, lambs and goats. They do not move him to love Israel and Judah because he knows how hypocritical they are. The Jews were bringing their sacrifices to the temple thinking they would please God and appease him. They were treating him like Baal and the other pagan gods. They thought, God will be pleased with all our sacrifices and worship and then we can get what we want from him. The next verses show how thoroughly they had divorced their worship from their behavior!

1:12-15 - Jesus in John 4 told the woman at the well that the Father seeks those who will worship him in Spirit and in truth. Isaiah says the people of Jerusalem do neither. In blunt, powerful language Isaiah tells his fellow Jews what God truly thinks of their worship and sacrifices in the temple.

The word for "appear" in verse 12 is the same word that is used in the Law of Moses in Exodus 23 & 34 to describe the feasts that the Lord commanded Israel to keep. Three times in the year all the men in Israel were required to "appear" before the Lord and hold a feast holy to the Lord. God commanded them to appear before him yet they had so twisted his command to worship him at their appointed feasts that the Lord no longer even recognizes what they are doing. To him it is a trampling of his courts. The word is used most often in a negative way in
the rest of the Old Testament. It is used of animals trampling crops or armies overwhelming a city. Most chilling of all, Isaiah will use it later in Isaiah 63 to describe the Lord trampling the grapes in the wine press of his wrath. The picture Isaiah gives us here is of a huge crowd, overwhelming the temple courts with no order or decency. This is no feast to the Lord this is a mob! They think the Lord is pleased with all their crowds and ceremony on the high feast days. Instead he is disgusted!

Yahweh through Isaiah tells his people to stop bringing him "vain offerings." The word for offering most often refers to a grain offering which would have normally been used to express thanks and gratitude to God. Their thank offerings are empty and worthless because there is no relationship with God behind them. They don't care about what Yahweh cares about they only want to use him for their own selfish purposes and desires. Their incense is an abomination to God. He despises it. The word for abomination is used to describe that which God abhors. Their incense makes him sick! Incense represented the prayers of God's people. Isaiah says Israel's prayers are an abomination to God! Hypocritical worship and prayer separates us from God it does not draw us to him. God is repulsed by it and turns away from it.

God condemns their New Moon and Sabbath special services and their convocations, which refer to the appointed feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. A convocation can also refer to a special assembly called to seek the Lord, which is parallel to the solemn assembly at the end of verse 13. The New Moon, Sabbath and feast day offerings and gatherings were commanded in the Law of Moses. They were designed to regularly remind Israel of their covenant with God, his promises to them and their responsibility to the Lord to keep his covenant commands. Isaiah says they have now become a so abhorrent to God he can no longer endure them. The word is a bold word for Isaiah to use. It normally means to be able to do something or to have power or to prevail. Isaiah says God is no longer able to bear their solemn assemblies because of the unrepentant sin the people bear in their hearts when they come before the Lord. Isaiah says GOD is not able to bear something: the people's iniquity and sin!

Isaiah then uses remarkable language in describing God. The Lord says all their appointed feasts, "my soul hates". The word for soul is nephesh which when referring to human beings is most often translated soul. In the Septuagint it is translated by the Greek word psuche or psyche. The word can mean being, person, or life. Isaiah is not saying God has a soul like human beings have a soul. He is using the word in relation to God's very person and life. At the core of his being Isaiah says God is wearied by his people's worship. It does not please him because it is so inauthentic. His warning to Israel needs to be a warning to us about our worship of God. Do we weary the Lord with hypocritical worship or is he pleased with our praise and worship because we come with humble and truthful hearts before him? Is our worship a burden to God or a blessing? If we come wanting something from God and using him for our own ends, without ever confronting our own brokenness before him that worship is a burden. We need to repent just like God called Israel to repent!

Isaiah shows Israel that how they treat people affects their worship of God. They cannot come with unrepentant sin in their lives and think God is pleased with them. He is the Holy One and our sin separates us from him! Thus Isaiah warns the Jews because their hands are full of blood, meaning they are treating each other with violence and even murder, God no longer is listening to their prayers. Jeremiah told the Jews the same thing in Jeremiah 11. God will not listen to the people's prayers because they refuse to repent. They are blind to their sin and think that if they simply follow the form of worship and ritual God is appeased and will continue to
provide them with blessing and protection. They have paganized their worship! We must not do the same today!

**1:16-17** - What would please God the most? Israel and Judah need to change their behavior, especially toward others. God desires them to repent. He calls them to wash themselves and make themselves clean. The word for wash refers most often to the ritual washing of things, sacrifices and people as a part of the cleanliness or holiness rituals of the temple. To make oneself clean is always used to refer to moral purity and cleanliness. Isaiah tells Israel she needs to repent and change her ways. Ritual purity however is only applied to the surface. What Israel needs is a true change of heart. When God says to remove the evil of their deeds from his eyes he means to turn away from their sin and replace their evil deeds with good ones. The word for remove means to turn aside, depart or less frequently to remove. It is close in meaning to repent. Isaiah shows us God's definition of repentance. It is not enough to confess our sins and be sorry for them we need to change our behavior. He calls them to cease doing evil and learn to do good. The word for cease means to stop, to leave, or to forsake. Israel's behavior had deteriorated to the point where their treatment of one another was continually evil and selfish. They would then come to the temple and worship as if nothing was wrong! God calls them to change their behavior. Turn from their evil treatment of one another and learn to treat each other as God wants, as his Law called them to do.

God calls Israel to seek justice and correct oppression. He further defines what he means by commanding Israel to bring justice to the fatherless and plead the widow's cause. The word for seek normally means to seek out or search out but it also has the nuance of care for. In other words Isaiah says Israel needs to seek justice and care about justice rather than their selfish desires. Repentant behavior would be for Israel to help the fatherless get justice and to plead for or defend the widow's cause. The fatherless and widows are frequently cited in the prophets as people who are on the margins of society and therefore have little power to affect their lives. They are most often oppressed because they are vulnerable and cannot fight back. Plus in ancient times a fatherless child meaning an orphan or a widow had very few civil rights. That is why God's Law protects them and God has a special place in his heart for the widow and the orphan. James in *James 1* even describes looking after the widows and orphans as religion or spiritual practice that is pure before God. He does so because a poor widow or orphan can't give anyone anything because they have nothing. There is no earthly benefit in defending their cause. They don't have deep pockets! Israel had deteriorated to the point where widows and orphans were being exploited for the few resources they did possess by the wealthy and the powerful. They were no longer protected. God tells Israel he notices and he will protect the most vulnerable of his people. We need to do the same today!

**1:18-20** - These verses are one of the great offers of forgiveness in the Bible. However, they are often taken out of context and made to sound as if God's offer of forgiveness is entirely unconditional. God is going to forgive Israel and Israel doesn't have to do anything in response. When one reads all of verses 18-20 one can see that is not the case. God is ready to forgive a repentant people. If they do not repent he is ready to judge them. That is clear from the "if" that begins verse 19 and the "but" that begins verse 20. Having said that however, we must not turn these verses into some kind of conditional forgiveness like the Pharisees formula in the gospels with their demonstration of sincerity. Verse 19 says if you are willing and obedient. That describes true repentance quite well. Repentance brings a change of heart, a turning away from
sin and a turning toward God. Repentance results in a new obedience and a commitment to live as God calls us to live. Isaiah shows us that repentance is more than confession it is an actual change of mind and deeds.

God calls Israel to "reason together" with him over Israel's sin and rebellion. The word for reason means to argue one's case in court. God invites his people to come and argue their case before him. God has an indictment against Israel. Is there anyone in Israel who can defend the people's sinful behavior before God? Who will win such a case? The outcome is certain because who can argue against God? Israel's sin has condemned her before God. She has no hope of escaping judgment from the Lord over her sins!

Yet God still offers hope! Her sins, like scarlet, shall be like the new fallen snow. They are red like crimson but they shall be like white wool. The poetic couplet is intensified by Isaiah's choice of words. The word used for crimson is used of a powerful die made from the body of a female insect that lived on a particular kind of oak tree in Arabia. The die was highly prized because it resulted in a deep red or crimson color that was permanent and would not wash out. It is the color of the die God told Moses to use in the furnishings for the Tabernacle in Exodus. It is called "scarlet stuff" or "scarlet yarn" in Exodus 26 & 36. Isaiah's image is clear. Israel thinks their sin will never come out because it is like the deep scarlet or crimson die used in clothes for the rich and powerful. God has made his case and there is no possibility for forgiveness. But nothing is impossible for the Lord. Their sins can become white like wool and clean like the snow. God can forgive their sins and cleanse them from all unrighteousness as 1 John 1 says.

God is able to forgive but they need to repent. Repentance does not earn God's forgiveness but it is our necessary response to God's offer. Both Jesus and the apostles affirmed this. Jesus in Mark 1 calls people to the Kingdom of God by preaching the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel. Peter in Acts 2 at Pentecost sums up what people need to do when he says, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus, every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament faith in Jesus Christ communicates God's forgiveness. Repentance is an essential part of that saving faith. Jesus and the apostles affirm what Isaiah declares to Israel here in Isaiah 1. God is ready to forgive Israel for her sins even though they cannot cleanse themselves. He will do for them what they cannot do for themselves. For their part they need to repent.

If they do they will receive God's covenant blessings. If they do not they will experience his covenant curses. If they refuse to repent and continue in their rebellion then the sword of their enemies will swallow them. That is exactly what happened. Israel fell in 721 BC to the Assyrians. Judah fell a century and a half later in 586 to the Babylonians. Failure to repent brings judgment but it is not God's first desire. His first desire is to forgive!

1:21-23 - Isaiah contrasts Jerusalem and Judah's past behavior with its present sinful behavior. She was a faithful city dedicated to worshipping Yahweh alone when the temple was first built. It can be argued that 1 Kings 8 and Solomon's dedication of the temple was the highpoint of Israel's faith in Yahweh. Even during the later years of Solomon's reign their faith had already begun to deteriorate. Idols began to populate the high places around Jerusalem and by Isaiah's day there is evidence they were even in the temple complex itself! God says Jerusalem was a faithful city but has now become a whore. Sexual immorality was prevalent but like many of the prophets Isaiah labels Judah's idolatry as adultery against the Lord. She has cheated on her husband, the Lord, and broken their marriage covenant.
Idolatry inevitably led to the breakdown of social morals. The Law of Moses was designed to keep Israel faithful to God so that they would treat each other with love and justice. When they became unfaithful to Yahweh they treated each other with injustice. Jerusalem had been full of justice but now it is full of murderers!

God had abundantly blessed his people with wealth and the best of things like fine wine. But now her leaders rebel and have become thieves. *Micah 2:1-2*, written around the same time as Isaiah, describes the greed that is prevalent in Judah that leads people to plot how to seize another family's inheritance from the Lord. They covet what other people have and plot to take it for themselves.

Bribery is rampant and officials who were sworn to treat everyone fairly now pursue gifts and payoffs in order to line their own pockets. The ones who suffer from this greed are the fatherless and the widows; the ones for whom God has a special place in his heart. Unfortunately we see the same things happening today with Congress, the bureaucracy and the corporate lobbyists that dominate politics in Washington D.C. and in the state houses across our country. We don't call it bribery today just campaign contributions and perks! We are guilty of the same things for which God condemned Judah!

1:24-26 - God declares his judgment upon Jerusalem, Israel and Judah. Isaiah strings together three names or titles for God in verse 24. “*The Lord declares*” is the word *adonai* or Lord. The Lord of hosts is *Yahweh Sabaoth*. Yahweh is God's Name revealed to Moses in *Exodus 3.* *Sabaoth* is translated various ways but most often hosts. It is the title used in the famous hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy;* “*Lord Sabaoth his name.*” The word is plural in this verse, literally meaning armies, divisions or troops. The NLT translates it, “*Lord of heaven's armies.*” The picture is of God commanding legions and legions of his angels who fight for him and do his bidding. It is a very common title for God throughout the Old Testament but especially in the prophets and the *Psalms.* The third title is the Mighty One of Israel. The word means strong or powerful. It is used in Jacob's blessing of Joseph in *Genesis 49* and in *Psalm 132* both with the name of Jacob. Isaiah uses the title Mighty One of Jacob in *Isaiah 49 & 60.* Here in chapter 1 it is the Mighty One of Israel. Since Jacob and Israel are the same person and personify the people Israel there is no material difference between the two names. It is interesting to note that the title Mighty One occurs in all three sections of what liberal scholars call Trito-Isaiah; chapters 1, 49, & 60. By stringing together all three names or titles for God in verse 24 Isaiah leaves no doubt that the declaration or revelation of God is from him alone. The LORD is speaking!

God declares he will "*get relief from my enemies.*” This is a difficult phrase. The word normally means to be sorry, console oneself or to be moved with compassion. In the context here it means to be relieved or to ease oneself by taking vengeance. The ESV, the 1984 NIV, and NASB all translate the phrase this way. The NRSV translates it "*pour out my wrath on my enemies.*" The updated NIV translates it, "*vent my wrath on my foes.*" The NLT translates the phrase, "*take revenge on my enemies.*" The foes or enemies God speaks of are the people of Israel and Jerusalem who have sinned and rebelled against him. God is not speaking here of Assyria or any pagan power. His own people have become his enemies because of their sin!

God says he will turn his hand against them. This is the same hand that brought them out of Egypt. See *Exodus 7, 13 & Deuteronomy 6 & 7.* They have broken God's covenant so God will punish them as he said he would in the covenant curses in *Deuteronomy 28.* God will judge them like metal being smelted in the furnace. He will burn away their dross, meaning sin, and remove all their impurities. The ESV says he will smelt away their dross as with lye. Lye was
used as a flux that was added to the furnace when the ore was melting in order to combine with the dross so the pure copper or iron could be extracted. God is going to smelt his people through hardship. Isaiah does not mention the specific means which God will use. We know from the rest of Biblical history that God used the Assyrians and Babylonians to purge and refine his people.

God promises he will restore Israel's judges as in the days of old. The refining process is meant to purify Israel not destroy her. God's purpose is to refine her and bring her to repentance. His desire is to make Jerusalem a faithful and righteous city again. He wants to see her leaders filled with justice and righteousness again not greed and corruption. No one in Isaiah's day could honestly call Jerusalem the city of righteousness and the faithful city. Yet God's purpose was to purify them and give them a new identity in him. Isaiah expresses God's desire for a faithful people who will live in covenant relationship with him and fulfill his covenant purposes for them. They will once again be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation as in Exodus 19.

1:27-31 - This is the first time Isaiah directly calls Jerusalem Zion in his prophecy. Zion was the name given to the fortress of Jerusalem that David captured in 2 Samuel 5. By Solomon's day it was applied to the entire City of David or Jerusalem. Technically it was separate from Mount Moriah and the Temple Mount which was above the City of David and to the north. By Isaiah's time it had come to mean all of Jerusalem or even the people of God in Judah.

God says there will come a day when Zion will be redeemed with justice. There will be people who repent, who are penitent and they will be righteous before God. Sinners and those who rebel against God will be broken. Those who forsake the Lord will perish or die. Some might take this as an eschatological prophecy of the end times or the time of the Messiah but in many ways Isaiah's words are fulfilled in the events of the exile and the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem.

The exiles bore the shame of the idolatry of their people and repented. Sacred oaks were great trees often on high places. They became sites for pagan sacrifices and worship which often involved cult prostitution. See Isaiah 57, Hosea 4 and Jeremiah 2. Isaiah says they will be disgraced by their gardens. Gardens in and of themselves are not evil. God planted a garden in Eden for the first humans and it was paradise on earth. Isaiah is referring to the practice of tending a garden that was dedicated to a fertility god or goddess. Pagan sacrifice or cult prostitution was then carried out in the garden which normally would have been walled off. The gardens Isaiah speaks of are pagan worship places where Israel committed adultery with pagan fertility gods and goddesses!

The Lord says they used to be proud of their sacred oaks and gardens where they violated their covenant with God. A day will come when they will be like an oak tree whose leaves have withered and a garden that has died because there is no one to water it. The strong among them, meaning the powerful and mighty will be like tinder. A tiny spark will set them afire and they will burn with none to put them out. All that Israel and Judah have built in their time of prosperity under Jeroboam II and Uzziah through pagan worship, corruption and oppression will be burned away. They were proud of their worldly wealth and prosperity. God will strip them and call them back to him. Some will hear God's call. Many will not. They will perish in the fire of his judgment that is coming!

Chapter 2:

Chapter 2 begins a new section in Isaiah's prophecy. Verse 1 is another superscription that identifies what follows. Chapters 2-5 appear to be governed by this title since they deal with
Judah, Jerusalem and the temple. Chapter 6 is Isaiah's call as a prophet and is separate from the preceding chapters. The phrasing of the verse points to a later editor because it is written in the third person rather than the first person which one would expect if Isaiah wrote it. It is similar in language to 1:1 at the beginning of Isaiah. The difference is there is no time reference here in 2:1. Isaiah is identified once again as the son of Amoz.

The section in verses 2-4 is repeated almost exactly in Micah 4. This is very rare in the Old Testament. Ezekiel and Jeremiah both quote a proverb current in Judah at the time of their writing in Jeremiah 31 & Ezekiel 18 but that is the only other example I know of. We do not know whether God gave both Micah and Isaiah the same message at almost the same time or whether one was led to copy from the other. Did Micah and Isaiah know of one another? It seems likely since both prophesied around the same time and in Judah. Whether they had any regular interaction or cooperation in their prophetic roles we do not know. Their messages are similar although Micah starts his ministry slightly later than Isaiah.

Verses 2-4 concern a prophecy of the "latter days", or as the NIV translates it the "last days." The phrase points to the Day of the Lord and the coming of the Messiah. It also concerns the nations. Frequently prophetic passages that deal with the nations and the last days are about judgment. This one is different. Isaiah says in the latter days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be the highest of mountains and will be lifted above the hills. He is speaking of Mt. Moriah or the Temple Mount. A mountain is often a symbol for a government, power or rule in the prophets. In Daniel's vision of the great image in Daniel 2 a stone not cut out by human hands strikes the image on its feet and it crumbles. Then the stone becomes a mountain that fills the whole earth. Isaiah uses a mountain to describe the kingdom of the Messiah or the Kingdom of God in Isaiah 11 & 25. Here God's temple or the Temple Mount will become the greatest mountain and the center of the entire world. What does he mean?

Isaiah says the nations will come to God's holy mountain. Many peoples will encourage each other to go up to the "mountain of the Lord." The reason is so they can learn his ways and walk in his paths. The word of God, his Law or his teaching will flow from Zion or Jerusalem. Isaiah shows us a picture of God's people and his city fulfilling their destiny by being the priests they were supposed to be to all the world in Exodus 19. In the last days the nations will come to the Jews to learn from God in order to follow him and worship him. God's people will carry out their mission! In Luke 24 Jesus tells his disciples after the resurrection that repentance and forgiveness of sins shall be preached to all the nations beginning in Jerusalem. The gospel of the Lord Jesus at least partially fulfills Isaiah's prophecy. But there is a second half of his message that is yet to occur.

Verse 4 says in the latter days God will judge disputes between the nations and they will have peace. There will be no more war. The covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 declared that in a future time a king from David's line would reign on David's throne and Israel would have peace from all her enemies. That covenant forms the basis for all the Messianic prophecies of the prophets and Psalms. Isaiah expands the peace of the last days and extends it to the nations. In Revelation 19-22 John gives several pictures of the nations at peace through the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ both in the Millennium, his 1000 year reign, and in the new heaven and new earth in the New Jerusalem.

Isaiah paints a picture of the nations in the last days turning their weapons of war into farming implements. The last half of verse 4 has been made famous by the United Nations. The phrase is on display as one enters UN Headquarters in New York City. However, the UN ignores the context and implies that by human effort and will the nations will turn away from war and
turn toward peace. That is a noble ideal but denies the reality of human sin and the need for God's Spirit to change human hearts and do in us what we cannot do ourselves. It is God who transforms the human race and turns us away from the violence and consequences of war. It is God who makes peace and enables human beings to "beat their swords into plowshares and their spear into pruning hooks." A human future without war is a future only God can bring when he founds his Kingdom and sends his Messiah.

Verse 5 is a call to all of Israel to walk in the light of the Lord, in other words to come back to him. John said in 1 John 1, "...if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." Isaiah makes a similar call to Israel. They had strayed far from God's light through idolatry and wickedness. God had an amazing destiny for them but they need to repent and turn back to the Lord!

2:6-9 - Isaiah exclaims that God has rejected his people. The NIV reads abandoned, as does the NASB. The verb means to forsake or cast off. God has turned away from Israel and Judah because of their idolatry and sin. God has an amazing future and destiny for them if they will obey him. But they have not, so instead he is rejecting them.

Isaiah says the people are full of things from the east. The NIV reads, "full of superstitions from the East." This probably refers to the occult practices of Assyria and Babylon. In 2 Kings 16 King Ahaz of Judah goes to meet Tiglath Pileser III of Assyria in Damascus and swear allegiance to him. While there he sees a pagan altar and sends Uriah the priest a model of the altar so he can copy it and put it in the temple. Ahaz then returns to Jerusalem and sacrifices on the new altar, taking the altar of the Lord from in front of the sanctuary and putting it on the north side of the temple. The incident occurred in 732 or 731 BC. Isaiah may be referring to Ahaz's idolatry in verse 6.

Isaiah also singles out the fortune-tellers or those who practice the art of divination like the Philistines. Divination was the occult art of reading the entrails of a slaughtered animal, or reading omens like special sticks or bones to try and glimpse the future. The broadest use of the word included things like consulting the dead through mediums and astrology, reading the stars to know the future. The Law of Moses in Leviticus 19 & Deuteronomy 18 forbids Israel to practice divination. King Ahaz encouraged the practice along with many other forms of pagan worship including sacrificing his son in a fiery altar.

The end of verse 6 reads "they strike hands with the children of foreigners." The NIV reads "clasp hands with pagans." This could refer to Ahaz pledging allegiance to Tiglath Pileser III in order to gain his help to defeat Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus who had attacked Judah and taken many captive in 733 BC. See 2 Kings 16 & 2 Chronicles 28. Judah put their hope in an alliance with Assyria to save them from Syria and Israel. Later Judah and King Hezekiah would pin their hopes on a military alliance with Egypt to save them from an invasion by Sennacherib, King of Assyria. See 2 Kings 18.

Isaiah criticizes Israel for being a land full of silver and gold, horses and chariots but most of all idols. Ahaz stripped his treasuries to pay off Tiglath Pileser and by so doing made the land poorer. I think Isaiah is trying to show that the people don't care about the Lord and what he thinks. They are centered on money, power and pagan idols. In many ways it sounds like America today! Israel bows down to the work of their hands; idols they themselves have made instead of the Holy One of Israel who made heaven and earth!
The result of Israel's sin is they will be humbled and brought low. The words for humbled and brought low are synonyms because both refer to bowing down or being forced to abase oneself. Isaiah is saying that Israel will be humbled. They will abase themselves before either a foreign power or before God. Perhaps he means both. The Assyrians are expressions of God's judgment on his rebellious people. They will invade the north kingdom and utterly destroy it. By 721 BC Samaria will be in ruins, all of Israel's cities will be destroyed and the people will be hauled off into exile. Israel will cease to exist as a nation. Corporately it will be abased and humbled. Individually every Israelite will be affected. God will have carried out his just punishment upon them. He will not forgive them which is what Isaiah asked God to do; don't forgive them. The word can also be translated do not lift them up or raise them up. In other words, Isaiah asks God to keep them humbled and abased on the ground. Don't lift them up because they do not deserve it! This is one of the most chilling prayers in the Bible. Israel was a religious people; Isaiah has said so. They bring their sacrifices and perform their rituals in the temple. But their hearts are far from the Lord. It is all for show. The cost is being estranged from the Lord their God. Religious rituals alone cannot save us. Salvation is a matter of the heart!

2:10-11 - Isaiah tells the people who do not follow the Lord to hide in the rocks from the splendor of the Lord's majesty. John reports in Revelation 6 at the breaking of the sixth seal and the great earthquake that followed it that the people of the world both small and great hid in the rocks and beg the mountains to cover them from the wrath of the Lord God and of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

Isaiah says the haughty or the arrogant and prideful will be humbled. The Lord alone will be exalted on that day, the Day of the Lord, when God will judge the nations and save his people. Isaiah's implication here in chapter 2 is that God will also judge those of the Israelites who have turned away from him in pride and arrogance. They too will be brought low when the Lord alone is exalted.

2:12-19 - Isaiah continues his theme of the Day of the Lord. He has a day when he will judge the proud and arrogant who ignore him or set themselves against him. Once again he says the Lord will bring low all those who are proud. He uses the same Hebrew word as in verse 11. As author Jack Deere observes, pride is one of the worst of sins because it pushes God away from us. Psalm 138 says God looks upon the lowly but the proud he knows from afar. Pride separates us from God. His own people in their pride and arrogance have pushed their God away from them until now he is ready to punish them and hold them accountable for their idolatry and wickedness.

Isaiah goes even beyond the arrogance of people. He says God has a day against all that is proud and lofty, even the things human beings have built in which they take pride. He says the Day of the Lord will bring low the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan, even the mountains and hills will be torn down so that nothing will stand above God. I do not think God is complaining the nature he created is proud because creation points to God. I think Isaiah mentions the cedars of Lebanon because Solomon built his palace in Jerusalem from cedar and called it the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. See 1 Kings 7. Following Solomon the palace was the residence of the kings of Judah. Bashan is the Golan Heights above the Sea of Galilee. The prophets often indict both Judah and Israel for using great oak trees as sites for pagan worship that involved cult prostitution. They complain that on every high place Israel has built pagan altars and worshipped the gods of the nations around them. In verse 18 Isaiah says on the Day of
the Lord all the idols shall utterly pass away. God is not indicting nature and judging it he is judging his people who have corrupted the nature he created with idolatry!

In their pride and arrogance fed by their idolatry human beings have built great cities and sailed the seas in great ships to grow rich. In and of themselves architecture, shipbuilding and trade are not bad things but when they are centered on something other than God they only feed the greed of people. This is a similar concept to the judgment of Babylon John saw in Revelation 18 when the merchants and sailors of the world lamented over Babylon's fall. God will bring it all down on the day of his wrath over human sin. No one or no thing will be higher than the Lord of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel!

God will rid the world of idolatry, the worship of anything other than the worship of God, whether that is an idol made to represent a god or goddess or the greed and pride of human accomplishment. God will bring it all down!

Verse 19 repeats the themes of verse 10. Isaiah uses it as a literary, poetic device to set off verses 11-18. In the former people are told to go hide from the terror of the Lord. In verse 19 Isaiah says they will go into caves and holes in the ground to hide from the terror of the Lord, the same word. Like in Revelation 6 people will flee from God's wrath and majesty when he comes in judgment. When the Lord Jesus came the first time his majesty and holiness were veiled by his humanity. When he comes again there will be no veil. He will come in glory in all his resurrected power and people will be terrified.

2:20-22 - Isaiah says that in the Day of the Lord when he comes in righteousness and glory to judge the people of the earth they will abandon the idols they have made. They will throw them away in their terror at the Lord's coming in order to hide in the caves and the rocks. They will throw them away because they will realize their impotence. When confronted with the living God what is an idol? It can do nothing; it can say nothing; it cannot help. People will come to that stark realization and in their helplessness and fear cast away the idols they themselves have made and worshipped in order to hide from the wrath of the Creator who made them. Isaiah says they will leave their idols to the moles and the bats. Bats were listed as unclean animals in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Moles are not mentioned but they are animals that burrow underground and rarely see the light of day. Some translations use the more general term rodent but most translate the word mole. Bats sleep during the day and only come out at night. Moles and bats are creatures of the dark just like idols are things that represent the darkness of pagan gods and the demonic.

The picture Isaiah paints is one of people panicking, throwing away the gods they have made in order to run and hide in the caves and rocks because the Lord himself is coming. He is not coming in a pillar of fire or cloud. He is coming in splendor and light. God will come in all his holiness and glory with nothing to mitigate it. His presence will be overwhelming to those who are unrepentant.

Verse 22 is a command. Isaiah tells Israel to stop trusting in people for they are frail and mortal. Human beings have been given life and breath by God and it is God to whom they are accountable. Isaiah asks Israel why they are trusting to allies and pagan powers like Assyria or Egypt rather than the God who made them and gives them life. He echoes Psalm 146:3-4 which says, "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit (breath) departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing."
Chapter 3:
3:1-3 - Isaiah shifts his focus from all of Israel to Judah and Jerusalem. It was easy for those in Judah to believe that the prophet's indictment of Israel's sins was just for the north kingdom. They were innocent. They still had the temple and a king from David's line. This is the beginnings of the official theology that would dominate Jerusalem's thinking in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's time prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC by the Babylonians.

Isaiah says God will take away from Jerusalem all support and supply. This is a play on words in Hebrew because the root word in Hebrew is the same, *mashan*, but it changes from masculine to feminine to *mashanah*. God is going to cut off all bread and water, or food and water in Jerusalem. He is also going to take away all support which means leadership. In verses 2-3 he describes who will be taken away. The word means to be removed but it can also mean fall away as in apostasy. I think Isaiah means both. This is another play on words. God will remove Jerusalem's leaders so there is no one to face the crisis but he will remove them through their own falling away from him. The leaders of the city and the country will abandon Yahweh! The mighty man and soldier, judge and prophet, diviner and elder will all fall away. The captain of fifty and the soldier in the ranks, the counselor and skillful magician along with the expert in dreams God will remove. Notice how some of these people like the hero or mighty man and the captain of fifty, the judge, the prophet, and the counselor are all people who led the people when Judah and Jerusalem were faithful to Yahweh. These are roles that are listed in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings during David's rule and early in Solomon's rule. Isaiah also lists people who counseled the king and led the people who were not faithful to Yahweh and who were forbidden by the Law of Moses. These are people like the diviner and the skillful magician or enchanter, people who use occult and pagan arts to foretell the future. Judah and Jerusalem have become corrupted by pagan ideas and methods so that those God raised up to be true to him and lead his people now worship and follow idols and no longer listen to the voice of God. Therefore God will remove them all, from the least to the greatest. There will be no one to guide Jerusalem in the crisis that is coming!

3:4-5 - God says he will put boys or youths in charge of Jerusalem and Judah and infants shall rule over them. The word for infants is a difficult word because it only occurs infrequently and means several different things. Context must determine its precise meaning. Generally it means capricious or arbitrary. Paralleled with boys or youths it is translated as infants in the ESV. The NLT translates the phrase as, "toddlers their rulers." I like that translation the best because it preserves the parallelism of Isaiah's poetry but expresses the kind of rulers God will give Judah; toddlers. They will be unpredictable and flit from one thing to another. They cannot be trusted to do what is wise and right because they have no wisdom and no moral compass. They follow their feelings and their whims and desires. God is going to judge Judah and bring it down and part of the way he will accomplish that judgment is to raise up for them incompetent leaders.

Verse 5 says not only are Judah's leaders bad but the people behave just as badly. They oppress one another. The word for oppress goes back to the overseers in Egypt when the Israelites were slaves. They demanded more and more work from them and drove them to work harder with less. The word means demanding oppressive pressure. Isaiah says the youth of Israel will demand work from their elders. They will despise them and treat them with dishonor. This was especially true near the end of the south kingdom when Judah's kings were young, inexperienced and wicked. Isaiah's prophecy was literally fulfilled.
The crisis in Judah's leadership at the time of the Lord's judgment against them will result in desperation on the part of the people. A man will grab his brother and ask him to be the leader because he has a cloak. He will say, "this heap of ruins shall be under your rule." But the brother will reply that he has no ability to heal or bind up the nation's wounds. He has nothing and cannot be their leader. When people abandon God and are desperate they will turn to anyone to lead them. This opens the way for one of two things: either someone like a Hitler who is a despot and thirsts for power or someone who is incompetent like a Jehoiakim in the time of Jeremiah who was selfish and wicked. Leaders who follow God and look to him are nowhere to be found. It is happening in America today!!!

Isaiah says Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen. Everything they say and everything they do is against the Lord. They defy him and refuse to obey him. Therefore God will judge his people and discipline them in order to bring them back to him. The Assyrian invasion during Isaiah's time during the late 700's BC precipitated a crisis in Judah that resulted in a turning back to God under Hezekiah. However that was followed by the rule of Manasseh who was the most evil king Judah ever had. A king so evil God determined to destroy Judah for her sins. His reign eventually led to Jerusalem's fall and the end of the nation of Judah during Jeremiah's time in 586 BC. Despite God's discipline God's people only briefly returned to him. It was not long before they abandon faithfulness to Yahweh once again.

Isaiah observes that even the look on the faces of the people proclaims their sinfulness. They are like Sodom in their sin and cannot hide it. Even more disturbing, they don't try to hide it! They proclaim it as if they are proud of it. Isaiah declares they have brought evil upon themselves for their sin and rebellion.

He tells the righteous that it will be well with them and they will experience the fruit of their deeds. In other words God will reward them for being faithful to him. As for the wicked it will not be well with them. What their hands have done they will receive back. Jesus said in Luke 6 that we should be gracious, forgiving and generous because with the measure we use to treat people it will be measured back to us. Isaiah is saying the same thing here. What the wicked have done to others will be done to them.

Verse 12 is a difficult verse in the ESV. The first line reads, "My people - infants are their oppressors." The NIV translates the phrase, "Youths oppress my people," which makes more sense. The Hebrew lexicon BDB renders the phrase. "My people - its ruler is acting the child." The Hebrew word is a participle and BDB tries to capture that nuance of meaning whereas the ESV translates it as a noun. What does Isaiah mean? One possibility is that King Manasseh was only 12 years old when he succeeded his father Hezekiah on the throne of David. He reigned over Judah for the next 55 years and was the most wicked and idolatrous king Judah had in her history. Isaiah may be referring to Manasseh. The problem is there is some doubt as to whether Isaiah lived to see Manasseh's reign. It would also mean that this passage in chapter 3 was written late in Isaiah's career and not early as seems more likely. However, there would hardly be any difficulty for God to give Isaiah a picture of Manasseh's reign when he would also give him prophecies that relate to the exile and the return of the Jews in 538 BC, more than a century in the future. The other possibility is that Isaiah is not referring to Manasseh at all but simply saying that the kings of Judah, like Ahaz, are acting like children and don't know what they are doing!

Isaiah also declares that women lead the people. In ancient times that would not have been common as women were looked down upon and believed not fit to rule. Athaliah the
daughter of Ahab and Jezebel was queen of Judah for seven years before the boy king Joash was placed upon the throne. 2 Kings 10 paints her reign as a dark and evil time in Judah's history.

The other difficult phrase in verse 12 is the last, "they have swallowed up the course of your paths." The NIV translates the phrase, "they turn you from the path." The difficulty is with the word translated swallow. The word can also mean to confuse or confound and Isaiah uses it that way in 9:15 and 19:3. The NIV's translation fits the context better. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem have led the people astray and deceived them. They have led them into idolatry and foreign alliances and have disobeyed the Lord. Jeremiah describes the leaders in Jeremiah 18 & 32 as the king and princes of Judah, the priests, the court prophets and the wise men. That may be what Isaiah has in mind here when he refers to Judah's leaders.

3:13-15 - The leaders of Judah have led God's people astray into idolatry and wickedness. God therefore is prepared to judge them. Isaiah paints a picture of God taking his place to make his case in court. The word for contend often refers to someone arguing their case in court. Isaiah says God will act as both prosecutor and judge. He will lay out the evidence against his people and show how they have mistreated the poor. Then he will stand in judgment against them. It is unclear whether Isaiah has in mind God prosecuting the leaders of Judah in his heavenly court or in the city gate in Jerusalem. Major cases were tried in the gate of the city and the king or judges would often sit in the gate to settle disputes. They would hear the evidence in the case and render a judgment. It is unclear if they would stand to announce their verdict as Isaiah says God stands here but it is possible. God stands to judge people because he is the Lord of all the earth and the Lord of nations.

Verse 14 intensifies that statement by declaring God will judge the elders and princes of his own people. They have done something which God abhors. They have mistreated the poor. Isaiah says the leaders of Judah "have devoured the vineyard." The NIV translates the phrase "ruined my vineyard." The word most often refers to burning or consuming something by fire. The idea here is more general and means something like destroy. In Isaiah 5:1-7 God sings a song of Israel as his vineyard. He planted it and cared for it. That is the meaning here. Israel and Judah are God's vineyard and the leaders have consumed it. They have taken all that is good and kept it for themselves. They have left nothing for the poor. What is worse, the little the poor had the leaders have stolen for themselves. They have robbed the poor in order to get rich. God will not let them get away with it any longer. He has come in judgment against the leaders.

The Lord asks why the leaders have crushed the poor. The word means to grind into dust or utterly defeat. It is often used of God defeating Israel's enemies. Here it is an indictment against Israel's leaders. They have oppressed the poor and crushed their lives leaving them no means of support or hope. God will judge them for it!

When God looks at America today does he see the same thing? Do we at Southside crush the poor or lift them up and give them hope? God is watching!

3:16-17 - The Lord now speaks about the "daughters of Zion" or the women of Jerusalem. There is some chance the women are a metaphor for Jerusalem itself but it makes more sense to take the passage at face value.

The Lord sees the women of Jerusalem as haughty or proud. Isaiah paints a picture of women who walk "with outstretched necks" meaning they walk with their noses in the air, holding their heads high, communicating that people around them are beneath them. They glance with wonton eyes. The NIV reads they flirt with their eyes. They are shamelessly flirting with
men they pass by on the streets. They even walk seductively with small steps that jingle the ornaments on their ankles. Those ankle bracelets probably had little bells on them that would tinkle when moved. It is a seductive fashion accessory the women would wear. Isaiah paints a picture of high class women who go about in the streets of Jerusalem dressing and walking seductively, enticing men with their actions and demeanor. They are women of means who act like prostitutes. They act in public towards men they do not know as they should only be acting in private with their husbands. The Lord is repulsed by such behavior.

If the women of Jerusalem are a symbolic picture of Jerusalem itself then the picture is clear. Isaiah and the other prophets often refer to God's relationship with his people as a marriage. Idolatry they view as adultery against the Lord. Jeremiah 2 compares the people of Judah with a wild donkey in heat seeking out any males she can find. She cannot help herself because she is too far gone in her adultery and idolatry. They have no more shame. Isaiah's picture of the women of Jerusalem is similar. They have no shame and act in a wonton manner in public.

God therefore will bring judgment upon the women of Jerusalem with all their finery and flirting behavior. He will strike them with sores all over their heads. He will take away their beauty and cause them to be ashamed of their appearance. The last phrase of verse 17 is difficult. Most translations, like the NIV, translate the phrase the Lord will make their heads bald or they will shave their heads. It would have been very shameful for a woman to have a shaved head in Isaiah's day. The ESV translates the phrase a different way based on another possible meaning of the word translated scalps. It reads, "The Lord will lay bare their secret parts." The meaning of the term in Hebrew can be taken as the hinge in a door or to open a hole. It is possible Isaiah is referring to the opening of a woman's legs that would then expose her "secret parts" or genitals. This would be extremely shameful for her and points to rape or sexual assault. Isaiah may be referring to the coming invasion of the Assyrians who would conquer Judah's fortified cities and lay siege to Jerusalem. Ancient armies often practiced the rape of the women of a city when they conquered it. It was a brutal, violent and grossly immoral act. Either way God says he is going to shame the women of Jerusalem because of their pride and arrogance.

3:18-23 - Isaiah says in the day the Lord judges the "daughters of Zion" he will remove all their finery, all their high fashion and jewelry that marks them as women of means. He then lists some of what they wear. There are some discrepancies with the NIV in the list but they are minor and are simply different ways to describe the same thing. They wear anklets or ankle bracelets which probably had tiny bells on them as in verse 16. Headbands and crescents or crescent necklaces were worn around the neck along with pendants or earrings that dangled from the ears like some modern day earrings are listed next. Bracelets were worn around the wrists and scarves which more likely means a veil. The veil normally would cover her lower face but leave her eyes uncovered. It is unclear how thick or heavy the fabric was for the veil. Various fanciful depictions in movies have the veil being thin and almost transparent. Others have it heavier so one could not see a woman's mouth. Whether they are accurate or not, it is impossible to know exactly what the veils were like in Isaiah's day.

The women wore headdresses, probably some sort of elaborate turban. The word can mean turban and was probably different for women and men. There is a difference of opinion as to the next word. The ESV translates it armlets, like an arm ring worn above the elbow. The NIV translates the word ankle chain meaning a decorative chain that was attached to the ankle and somewhere else on the body. The NIV follows the verbal form of the word which means to
march in a cadence like a military formation. Either way whether armlet or ankle chain the picture is of a woman dressed in finery wearing much jewelry and fancy accessories to show her wealth and beauty and to call attention to herself much like celebrities today on the red carpet at awards shows. She wears a fancy sash around her chest and carries a perfume box or bottle probably on a little chain hung around her neck. Literally the words translated perfume box mean a breath holder or a breath house. The word for perfume in Hebrew is nephesh, which is most often translated like or being, that which has breath. Isaiah's picture is of a little bottle or flask worn around the neck and sniffed to receive a pleasant smell.

An amulet would have been a small charm worn around the neck to ward off evil. They were thought to be magic items and were probably linked to pagan gods since Israel was forbidden to wear any object that represented Yahweh. If the daughters of Jerusalem were wearing pagan magic amulets in Isaiah's day it points to their idolatry and syncretistic religious practices. They were mixing the religion of Yahweh with pagan religions. As in Jeremiah's day they had paganized the religion of Israel!

Isaiah continues his elaborate description of the women of Jerusalem. They wear signet rings on their fingers and nose rings in their noses. The signet ring could have been a ring with the seal of their family on it, marking the woman as of noble birth. It could also mark her as the property of her owner as a slave would be marked. However, given Isaiah's elaborate description here I do not think he is describing a slave woman but a noble woman or a woman of means, perhaps a rich merchant's wife or someone similar. The nose ring in other places in the Old Testament marks a new bride or a married woman and that could be what Isaiah means here. She flaunts her marriage to her powerful husband yet at the same time calls attention to herself and flirts with all the men passing by relishing the attention.

Isaiah says she is dressed in festal robes or the finest robes which were probably only worn on special occasions like a feast day. She has a mantle or capes around her shoulder and a cloak overall. She carries a handbag or purse with a small mirror to check her appearance. This speaks of vanity and a heightened concern for her appearance. The linen garments may refer to her underclothing as fine linen was often worn as a first layer of clothing with other robes worn over the top. Turban in the ESV is translated tiara in the NIV, though the word most often refers to the turban or head wrapping worn by a priest. “Veils” is translated shawls in the NIV as Isaiah has already listed a veil in verse 19 which the ESV translates as scarves. Either way it summarizes the description and shows a woman decked out in her finest clothing and jewelry, showing off her wealth and calling attention to herself. God has had enough of the women's vanity and pride. He will bring them down and humble them!

3:24-4:1 - Verses 18-23 tell how God will take away all the high fashion and jewelry of the daughters of Jerusalem. Isaiah continues that description adding what God will put in its place. Instead of perfume there will be rottenness. The word for perfume means sweet balsam an aromatic oil taken from the balsam tree which was sweet smelling and pleasant. Perfume was often a mark of the wealthy because it covered over other smells less pleasant. On the day God judges Jerusalem all the perfume will be taken away and the rottenness of the dead and wounded will be uncovered. The streets of Jerusalem will reek with the stench of battle, famine and siege. This was literally fulfilled in Jeremiah's day in 587-586. Rather than a fancy belt the women will be dragged along with a rope. When the Babylonians finally captured Jerusalem they led many captives away into exile tied together with a rope. The women will no longer have fancy hairdos but will shave their heads in mourning and shame. See also Micah 1:16 which speaks of the
same event. They will put off their rich robes and clothes and wear sackcloth instead. Sackcloth was the garment worn during intense mourning. Instead of seeing her beauty people will see her branded as a captive or slave. She will be burned with a mark which is the meaning of branded.

Jerusalem's young men will fall as well as her mighty men. Her best soldiers and the young men who follow them and fight under them will die. The city's gates will be empty and broken. Isaiah pictures the gates of Jerusalem sitting on the ground in sadness and grief. The city will be empty. Once again this was all fulfilled in Jeremiah's day a century later than Isaiah's time.

The situation will be so bad that seven women will grab one man and beg him to marry them and give them his name. They will provide their own food and clothing if he will give them his name and take away their disgrace and shame. The word means disgrace with the specific connotation of casting blame or fixing blame on someone. The implication is the people of Jerusalem blame the women of Jerusalem for their destruction. How will taking the name of a survivor and marrying him take away people blaming them for what happened? Isaiah may be hinting that the women goaded their men and young men into battle and resisting the enemy. Their pride fed the folly of Jerusalem. That is possible, especially as one reads Jeremiah's prophecy and the attitude of the people at the time of the Babylonian siege against Jerusalem. It was also the attitude of the Jewish exiles who fled to Egypt after Jerusalem's fall. See Jeremiah 44.

Chapter 4:

4:2-6- Isaiah follows the message about God's judgment upon the daughters of Jerusalem with the first of many prophecies about the days of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. Isaiah says in that day, the Day of the Lord a day of judgment for the wicked and salvation for the righteous, the "branch" of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious. This is a reference to the Messiah, the branch, shoot or stump from David's line. Isaiah uses the same concept in Isaiah 11 although it is a different Hebrew word. Jeremiah and Zechariah use the same word referring to the same concept in Jeremiah 23 and Zechariah 3. The idea is after or during a time of great trial and judgment a shoot out of the family tree of David will arise to rule over God's people and his reign will be glorious and bring salvation. See Isaiah 9 & 11 for a more detailed description of what Isaiah envisions. Isaiah briefly mentions the Branch in 4:2 and then turns his attention to the land and the people.

When the Branch comes the Promiseland will be restored. Despite the terrible judgments upon all of Israel a remnant will survive. Not everyone will be killed in the judgment that is coming. This is the first time in his prophecy that Isaiah introduces us to the concept of the remnant. This idea enabled the Jews to understand how God could keep his promises to his people and yet judge them for their idolatry and wickedness. He would preserve and save a righteous remnant and they would experience his blessings and the blessings of the coming of the Messiah. All those who had rejected Yahweh and his covenant, who had worshipped other gods, he would cast away.

Isaiah says when the Branch comes and the remnant survives then the land will be fruitful again. Those left in Jerusalem will be called holy, all those who had been recorded for life. This concept of God recording the names of his people in a book reoccurs throughout the entire Bible. See Exodus 32, Psalm 69, Luke 10, Romans 11, Hebrews 12 & Revelation 20. God knows who are his! That does not mean that all of the righteous will not die or suffer in the time of judgment but that God will preserve a remnant of his people and keep his promise to them. The remnant
will be clean from their sin and filth. The word for filth is a graphic word often translated excrement. That is how God perceives our sin. He will cleanse the bloodstains from the city. Bloodstains refer to the shedding of innocent blood, including murder. In 2 Kings 21:16 it says King Manasseh shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from one end to another. He even killed his own infant son in a fiery idol. When Cain killed Abel in Genesis 4 God said the blood of his brother cried out from the ground. Since blood was the symbol for life, see Leviticus 17, if it was spilled on the ground it defiled it. Murder therefore was one of the worst sins Israel could commit because it shed innocent blood. God will one day cleanse Jerusalem of all the innocent blood that has stained the city through a spirit of judgment and fire or burning.

From a prophetic standpoint this prophecy of judgment would be partially fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. A second fulfillment could be seen as the time of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The ultimate fulfillment awaits his Second Coming and the return of the Jewish people to their Messiah.

In verses 5-6 Isaiah says when the Branch comes and the Lord renews Jerusalem after a time of judgment he will be present once again in the city. Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord depart the temple and the city in Ezekiel 10. Over all of Mt. Zion, which was the City of David, and over all the assemblies of the people the pillar of cloud will be there by day and the pillar of fire by night just like in the wilderness of Sinai after God rescued Israel from slavery. The word for assembly usually describes a special gathering like a feast day or a special day of prayer and fasting. When the remnant gathers to worship God and call on the name of the Lord God will be there. The glory of the Lord will be a canopy over the whole city. The picture is of God's glory protecting Jerusalem from any heat by day or shelter from a storm with wind and rain. The word also relates to the bridal canopy for a wedding under which the ceremony is performed. Isaiah could be using the word in a double way. God will shelter his people but the glory of the Lord also represents his renewed relationship with the remnant of his people. He will be like a husband to them and they will be his bride. The prophets often picture Israel as God's bride or wife and the Lord as her husband. See Hosea 1 & Jeremiah 31.

Chapter 5:

5:1-7 - Isaiah sings a song of the Lord's vineyard in 5:1-7. It is a song about the love of God for his people and his provision for them. It is also a song of their rebellion against their Creator. God in love creates us and provides for us. He desires love in return that results in obedience to him. We are free to obey God or reject him. Israel and Judah rejected God. He is then free to bring judgment against us when we deserve it for our rebellion and disobedience.

Isaiah sings about the one he loves, meaning God. The Lord planted a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug up the ground and cleared it of stones. Having been in Israel I can say that the ground is extremely rocky in many places. Israelis joke that the national crop of Israel is rocks. The hillsides are mostly of limestone so if the vineyard was on a hillside the ground had to be cleared before one could plant the grapes. The Lord plants the vineyard with the choicest of grapes, meaning the best grape vines of the best varieties. The Lord even built a watchtower to guard the vineyard to keep away those who would steal the grapes. He protected it. He hewed out a winepress to process the grapes after their harvest. The picture is of the winepress hewn out of the rock and stone of the hillside.

At the harvest time God looked for a crop of good grapes but the vineyard yielded only wild ones. The word for wild grapes also means sour, bad, or worthless grapes that cannot be used.
Isaiah gives us a metaphor in poetic form of God settling his people in the Promiseland. He provided for them and gave them every good thing. But they produced nothing that he could use. They were worthless and sour as a people!

Verses 3-4 are God asking the people of Jerusalem and Judah if he had done everything he could for his vineyard. God asks the people to judge between him and his vineyard. Could he have done anything more for it than he did? God is asking was he fair? Did he provide for the vineyard? Was it reasonable to expect a good crop of grapes? If he had done everything to care for the vineyard then why did it produce sour grapes? Why did it yield bad grapes and not good ones? God makes his case to his people that based on everything he did for them he had a right to expect their obedience and love. Instead they rejected him and rebelled against him. They treated him as if he had done nothing for them, as if they had no covenant with the Lord. The people cannot defend their actions to God. He is just in his judgment against them.

Verses 5-6 outline God's verdict and justice concerning his vineyard, Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord will take away the hedge protecting the vineyard. People today often pray that God would put a hedge of protection around someone. God had put a hedge around Judah and Jerusalem. No more; now he will remove it and open up Judah to invasion and attack. God will allow Judah and Jerusalem to be destroyed. The word means to be devoured, grazed over or ruined. The walls of the city will be broken down or breached. This prophecy was literally fulfilled in 586 when the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem and destroyed the city. Isaiah says Jerusalem and Judah will be trampled down like a herd of cattle trampling a field of grain. When the Assyrians invaded in 701 BC in the days of King Hezekiah, Jerusalem was spared destruction but the Assyrian army reduced the fortified cities of Judah to rubble and stripped the land to support the massive Assyrian army. These events could also be seen as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy.

Isaiah says God will make the land a waste. It will not be pruned or tilled. Briers and thorns will grow up where crops once grew. This is a picture of the time of the exile when only the poorest people were left in the land to till it and care for it. God will also bring a drought and stop up the rain. Elijah prophesied in the days of Ahab king of Israel in the 800’s that there would be no rain and did not rain for three years. God had threatened this specific judgment in the covenant curses in Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 28. Isaiah in his song of the vineyard is simply restating what God had said he would do if Israel disobeyed him.

Verse 7 is the conclusion to the whole section and explains the symbolism of the song. Isaiah says the vineyard of the Lord is Israel and Judah. He says God looked for justice but found only bloodshed. That is a play on words in Hebrew as the word for justice, mispat, sounds like the word for bloodshed, mispah. God looked for righteousness but found an outcry or cries of distress. This is another play on words. The word for righteousness in Hebrew, sedakah, sounds like the word for outcry or distress, seakah. The bottom line is God did everything for his people and expected more from them than disobedience, rebellion and idolatry. They have broken the covenant he made with them and now he will judge them.

5:8-10 - Isaiah begins a series of woes and judgments upon the people of Judah who sin against the Lord and against their fellow Israelites. This section goes from 5:8-5:30.

The first woe and judgment is against those who buy up all the land they can find. They keep adding property to their holdings. They are greedy and take other families' inheritances from the Lord. They would keep buying up land, Isaiah says, until there is none left to buy and
they would live alone in the land. Their hunger for more is never satisfied. They are greedy and selfish.

Isaiah hears the Lord swear that he is going to make the land desolate and take away all the mansions and fine houses from the rich and greedy. They will be left without anyone to live in them. The land will be devastated. A ten acre vineyard will only yield a *bath* of wine. A *homer* of seed planted will only yield an *ephah*. The ten acre vineyard is literally a ten yoke vineyard, meaning it was the amount of land that ten yoke of oxen could plow in a day. A *bath* of wine is about six gallons or 22 liters. If a ten acre vineyard produced only six gallons of wine it would be a disaster. There would be very few grapes on the vines. A *homer* of seed is around 6 bushels or 220 liters. From that amount of seed one would expect at least up to ten times that amount in grain. But it only produces an *ephah* or 3/5 of a bushel, 22 liters. That kind of a harvest would be unheard of and would be a tragedy for the farmer who planted the field. Isaiah's picture is one of disaster in the fields. There would be no wine of grain from such a harvest. God demonstrates his judgment upon the greedy and the selfish who care nothing for the fellow Israelites and the poor whose land they have gobbled up for themselves.

**5:11-12** - God declares woe and judgment on those who get up early to start drinking and who stay up late into the night drinking wine till they get drunk. Strong drink is evidently another form of alcohol that was known to Israel. One lexicon suggests it was some type of beer. The word for wine is a different word. The point is plain however. God condemns those who pursue getting drunk. Isaiah says they even have singing with the lyre, harp, flute and tambourine for accompaniment. But their songs are not about the Lord and what he has done. There is no praise at their parties. Verse 12 in the NIV reads: “*they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord, no respect for the work of his hands.*”

Isaiah describes people for whom parties, escape, and getting drunk is the center of their lives. They are like people today who only live for the weekend in order to get drunk or high. The Lord is nowhere to be found in their lives or their thinking.

It is important to note that wine and strong drink are not condemned in and of themselves. God condemns pursuing them all day in order to get drunk. Singing and celebrating is also not condemned. God condemns leaving him totally out of the celebration because he is the one who does good things for his people. In the descriptions of the feast days in the Law of Moses and in *Nehemiah 8* wine and celebration was an essential part of feasting before the Lord. God condemns drunkenness not feasting. Increasingly in Judah and Jerusalem this party mentality and seeking to get drunk began to dominate the people's thinking in Isaiah's time. It separated them from God because they were focused on escaping their troubles rather than turning to the Lord for help.

**5:13-17** - Verses 13-17 are the Lord's judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah for their drunkenness and escape. The people will go into exile because they lack knowledge God says. If one thinks of addicts today one can understand that statement. An addict will drink or get high despite knowing it will destroy him or her. Logic is not the way to get an addict to face reality. They have to suffer enough negative consequences for their behavior to stop. That is what God is going to do with his people. He will send them into exile. Their honored men or men of position, probably meaning nobles, will starve and masses of people will be parched with thirst. That is a picture of either people suffering during a siege or suffering and dying on a march into exile.
Both happened to the people of Jerusalem in the days of the Babylonians about a century after Isaiah wrote.

Isaiah says Sheol or the grave has opened its mouth wider to swallow even more. Those who party and spend the night in revelry or in drunken brawls will be destroyed. They party to escape thinking about the future or their problems. God's reality and judgment will catch up to them and they will perish.

Verses 15-16 contrast the pride of people with the glory of God. Man is humbled and every person will be brought low. The word means to be brought down, abased or humbled. Those who are proud are humbled. Author Jack Deere says pride is the anti-God because it sets itself up against God as the center of all things. Pride is at the core of Satan's sin. He wanted to make himself God. It is the core of his temptation to Eve in the Garden in Genesis 3, "you will be like God." As Exodus 20 says, God is a jealous God and he will not tolerate any rivals. He is exalted in justice or exalted by his justice. God will be glorified when he judges Judah and Jerusalem, when he brings down the proud and exalts his righteousness before his people. As Ezekiel exclaims many times, "then they will know that I am the Lord!" God's righteousness and his justice are all related to his holiness. They show that he is holy, pure and righteous. God's holiness demonstrates that he is the Lord God Almighty and there is no other. See Isaiah 40, 43, 44, 45 & 46. In these chapters Isaiah again and again says the Lord is the one and only God; there is no other.

Verse 17 is a difficult verse. The meaning of the phrase is uncertain. The ESV reads, "Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, and nomads shall eat among the ruins of the rich." The NIV reads, "Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich." The last phrase in the NASB reads, "And strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy." The last phrase in the NRSV reads, "fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins." The NLT reads, "and fattened sheep and young goats will feed among the ruins." There is a note in the NLT & NIV that says young goats or lambs is in the LXX, but the Hebrew text reads strangers. This explains the discrepancy. Some translations like the NIV and NLT have followed the LXX because its word order preserves the Hebrew poetry of Isaiah. The ESV and NASB use the original Hebrew which has the word nomads or strangers. Literally the word is sojourners meaning aliens or strangers in the land. Either way Isaiah paints a picture of the land at peace but the Jews who once lived there will be there no longer. Strangers will live among the rich houses they had built. Lambs and goat kids will graze among them. The poorest shepherds will live in the land where once the wealthy lived, played and had their parties where they got drunk.

5:18-19 - God declares sorrow or woe for another group of people in Jerusalem and Judah. He says woe will come to people who draw or drag their sin, guilt or iniquity along behind them with cords or ropes of deceit or falsehood. The word for falsehood most often means empty or worthless. In other words they are dragging their sin with them and are bound to it by lies, by empty thinking. There is no good reason to be attached to their sin and guilt but they continue to drag it with them thinking they must or thinking it is necessary. Their actions are based on lies and futile thinking but they refuse to see the truth and are therefore burdened with their guilt. They drag their wickedness with them like they would drag a cart with ropes. It is excess baggage they do not need to carry and has blinded them to the truth.

In their sin and moral blindness their thinking becomes futile and empty. They even dare to challenge God and mock him. They demand that God hurry up with his plan. This probably
means his plan of judgment as expressed by Isaiah and the other prophets. Hosea and Amos had already finished their ministries by the time Isaiah writes this prophecy but Micah was prophesying at the same time. The arrogant and wicked people of Judah doubt the prophet's words, especially since what they declare will happen is often delayed by years or even decades. In their eyes Isaiah's messages from God are so much hot air and not to be believed. If God is so mad at us let him hurry up and show it! Let him speed up his word so that we may see it. Let it come; we're not afraid. We don't believe Isaiah anyway. This is their attitude.

Two more woes describing other sinful behavior follow this one before in verses 24-30 God pronounces his judgment and describes what he will do with people who mock him and are tied to their sin. Isaiah describes a time in Judah's history when people had lost all fear of the Lord. They doubt his reality and his justice.

5:20 - Isaiah indicts another group of people in Judah that God is ready to judge for their behavior. Great sadness will come to those who twist God's Law and morality, who call good what God has called evil. He says woe to those who put or assign darkness for light, in other words they exchange that which is light, good or righteous for that which is evil and dark. They call that which is bitter sweet and say that which tastes sweet is bitter. Isaiah implies that people who do this are in rebellion against the Lord who created them. John Milton in his great poem Paradise Lost has Satan declare after he has been thrown out of heaven, "All good to me is lost, evil, be thou my good." People try and redefine good and evil; something Satan tempted Eve to do in the garden. The wicked and rebellious in Judah will take God's place and define for themselves what is right and wrong. In their sin they call what God has deemed wicked righteous. God declares great sadness will come to them. Paul says in Romans 1 people rebelled against God and worshipped idols which led to more and more wicked behavior. Therefore God gave them over to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. To name evil good and good evil invites one's own destruction. God makes it very clear in his Word there are terrible consequences for rebelling against him.

Isaiah's words here are some of the most chilling in his prophecy. One can see this happening in the United States just as it happened in Judah. God says there will be great sorrow for people who turn morality on its head, calling what everyone once understood as evil good and what was good evil. I immediately think of homosexual marriage. Fifty years ago homosexuality was universally viewed as sinful. Now it is widely accepted and people who continue to view it as sinful or immoral are seen as bigoted and labeled as homophobic, as if only an irrational fear motivates a person to make a moral judgment upon homosexual behavior.

In Isaiah's day idolatry and the wickedness that followed it like cult prostitution was viewed as good or "enlightened behavior" because one needed to cover one's bases when it came to appeasing the gods in order to get what one wanted. This view was prevalent because of the paganizing of the worship of Yahweh in Israel. God gave Israel the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai in a very specific order. The first four commands are all the God commands, expanding on how we are to love God with all our hearts. The last six all have to do with how we treat one another, how we love our neighbors. God's implication is clear. If we disobey the first four God commands we will not obey the last six neighbor commands. Idolatry produces sinful and wicked behavior to our fellow human beings. This was born out in Israel's history. We can see it happening in America today. The further we abandon God and his standards the worse we treat people and the more difficult it is to get people to cooperate in a civil society.
5:21-23 - Isaiah identifies another group in Judah and Jerusalem whom God will judge and who will experience great sadness because of their behavior. Woe will come to those who are wise in their own eyes and shrewd in their own sight. Proverbs 3 says those people turn away from the fear of the Lord. Isaiah refers to people who think too much of themselves and their own intelligence. He is talking about the proud and the arrogant.

It is possible he is referring to the wise men or wise counselors who advised the king and guided him in making policy and governing the country. See Jeremiah 18:18. Too often from Isaiah's day all the way to the fall of Jerusalem the wise counselors at court gave the king bad advice and not wise counsel. They advised the king to form alliances with Egypt and other nations around Judah in order to protect their country from the great empires of Assyria and Babylon. They thought the answers to how to manage the great crises Judah faced were through politics and maneuvering. Increasingly they were either unable or unwilling to consider that the fundamental problems Judah faced were spiritual in nature and not political. They could not see or refused to see the moral decay of their own nation. Thus they did not advise the king to turn back to Yahweh and lead the people to repent and renew their faith. They ignored the voices of the prophets like Isaiah, Micah and later Jeremiah and Habakkuk. They ridiculed the prophets as unsophisticated men who did not understand the subtleties of politics and the complexities of running a nation. For all their worldly wisdom they were blind to the real problems their country faced. That led to an arrogance and pride that hardened their hearts towards God so that they refused to repent and see the truth until it was too late. Too many people in Washington DC and Olympia today have the same attitude. God says they are heading for a fall!

The next group Isaiah warns in verse 22 are those who are heroes at drinking wine and mixing strong drink. He has already condemned a similar group of people in 5:11-12. Here he expresses disdain for people who are proud of their drinking accomplishments as if they have done something important. In our day these are the people who live for the weekend and trumpet their ability to down many drinks or chug massive quantities of beer. They are the "stars" of the party. They specialize in getting drunk and all the rude and crude behavior that goes with it. There are even people who look up to them and try and emulate them. The truth is their drinking only helps them escape reality and they contribute nothing to those around them. God says they are under his judgment and when it comes they will not be able to "drown their sorrows" or escape the consequences of their shallow lives. Their hedonism will destroy them.

Verse 23 highlights a very different group. These people are those in some position of authority and power. They use that power for selfish gain. They are charged in God's economy with protecting the innocent and defending the poor. Instead they take bribes from the rich and ignore the innocent. They even acquit the guilty in order to gain more wealth. They are corrupt and ignore God's Law. The Hebrew poetry of these verses links those who drink much wine and those who take bribes and ignore justice to the declaration of woe by God. It is difficult to know whether Isaiah includes both behaviors in one group of people or if he is talking about one group. It appears from the Hebrew grammar that both groups come under God's judgment but Isaiah is talking about two different groups. Either way the meaning is clear. God sees our sinful behavior and there are limits to his patience. His justice will triumph in the end and those who practice rebellion and wickedness toward God and others will be stopped. God will stop them when they suffer the consequences of their lifestyles. God will not be mocked!

5:24-25 - Isaiah says God will judge his sinful people, those who rebel against him. They will be like the grass of the field that is burned in a prairie fire. Even their roots will be damaged so that
they will never bloom again and grow. The reason is they have rejected God's Law and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. God gives us freedom to obey or disobey him. He does not force our obedience upon us or coerce us into obeying his Word. However, if we disobey the Lord he will allow us to face the consequences of our disobedient and sinful choices. Sin always breeds death and destruction. It destroys our relationship with God and with other people. The Lord has declared that those who behave in the way Isaiah has described in 5:11-23 have been judged and will now be punished.

Verse 25 describes God's wrath against Israel's sin. It is curious however because most of the verse is in the past tense and describes what God has done to punish Israel's sin. His anger was kindled against his people. He has stretched out his hand and struck them. The mountains quaked and the dead were piled up in the streets. The question is, to what is Isaiah referring? There are several possibilities. First, Isaiah could be referring to a future event but writes as if it has already occurred. Against this is the last part of verse 25, which states that the Lord's anger has not turned away from Israel and his hand is still stretched out against them. A second possibility is that Isaiah is describing what happened to the north kingdom when Tiglath Pileser III of Assyria invaded Israel in 732 when King Ahaz of Judah appealed to Tiglath Pileser for help to save him from Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel who were attacking him. A third possibility is Isaiah is describing the invasion of Sennacherib of Assyria in King Hezekiah's day in 701 BC. He attacked Philistine cities and many of the fortified cities of Judah including Lachish. Assyrian records say Sennacherib took over 200,000 Jews captive from the fortified cities he destroyed. Even though it is late in Isaiah's career the third option seems the best to me for the historical setting of Isaiah's prophecy of God's judgment on a rebellious people.

The last phrase of verse 25 is chilling and prophetic in its implications. God says despite all the destruction and death the Lord's anger has not turned away from Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel was finally destroyed by Assyria in 721. The Assyrians did great damage to the southern kingdom of Israel through Sennacherib's invasion in 701. The worst however was yet to come. The Babylonians would finally complete God's judgment against a sinful nation in 597 and 586 when they would destroy Jerusalem, burn the temple to the ground and carry the leading citizens of Judah into exile to Babylon. Only then would the Lord's hand of anger be withdrawn. By 586 neither Israel nor Judah would exist and the Jewish people would be scattered. They would never have a country of their own and a nation of their own again except for a brief century under the Hasmoneans before the Romans annexed Judea into their empire in 63 BC. They would be a scattered people without a homeland until 1948 AD when the United Nations formed the modern nation of Israel!

5:26-30 - Isaiah says God will raise a signal and whistle for nations far away to come and carry out his judgments against his people, Israel and Judah. They come from a great distance but they do not grow weary. It is as if they do not sleep. Their clothes do not wear out on the long journey. They battle gear is ready and their weapons sharpened. The sound of their coming is like a pride of roaring young lions. When they seize their prey no one can stop them. Lions were symbols of strength and royalty in the ancient Middle East. Isaiah's reference here is probably to the empires of either Assyria or Babylon both of which would invade Judah and attack Jerusalem. The Babylonians would capture the city and destroy it in 586. God says great armies from distant empires are coming to attack Judah and judge her and there is nothing the Jews can do that will stop them.
They will come like the roaring sea that cannot be stopped. If one turns to the land for hope all they will see is darkness and distress. The word the NIV translates roaring is literally growling and refers most often to a growling lion. Roaring does make sense but Isaiah relates the image of lions roaring to a relentless unstoppable sea. The word for distress literally means to be in a tight space or a narrow space so that one is squeezed together in order to fit through the space. This is similar to the Greek word thlipsis in the New Testament translated tribulation, stress or trouble. It literally means to be squeezed together. Isaiah is telling the Jews that a time of squeezing, stress, distress and trouble is coming upon them and they will not be able to avoid it.

It is interesting to note that at the end of his life King Hezekiah entertained envoys from Babylon and showed them all his treasures; see Isaiah 39. God chastised him for it and told him that Judah would be judged for all her sins and that God would remove all the treasure to Babylon that Hezekiah was so proud of. Hezekiah told Isaiah that the Lord's Word was good but secretly he was pleased because he knew that in his lifetime he would have peace and security. The judgment was not going to happen while he was alive. It would be his descendants that would suffer. One wonders whether the people who read this word of Isaiah's in 5:26-30 felt the same as Hezekiah. Judgment will come but it won't be in my lifetime. I am safe.

Chapter 6:

6:1-3 - The Book of Isaiah now moves away from Isaiah's initial prophecies against Judah and Israel and shows us his call to be a prophet of God. This famous passage is one of the greatest appearances or visions of God in the Old Testament and it also gives us instruction into how to worship God and the flow of worship.

Isaiah is in the temple in the year King Uzziah of Judah died which would have been 740 BC. He has a vision of the throne of God which becomes the basis for his call to prophetic ministry. He sees the Lord on a throne, high and exalted, lifted up above everything else. The Lord in verse 1 is adonai, lord, in Hebrew. It is not until the song of the seraphim in verse 3 that he is identified as Yahweh of Hosts. Isaiah says the train or hem of the Lord's robe filled the temple. He is in the direct presence of God in the temple and sees what no one else is granted to see yet Israel believed, which is God was enthroned in the temple; it was the footstool of his throne.

Above the Lord stood the seraphim, great angelic creatures who surround God's throne. They stand above God not in authority but in the position of guarding his throne and serving him. Ezekiel in his call in Babylon sees four living creatures around God's throne that have four faces and four wings. He names them the cherubim in Ezekiel 10. The cover of the Ark of the Covenant was overshadowed by the wings of two cherubim, represented in gold. John in Revelation 4 & 5 sees four living creatures similar in nature to Isaiah's seraphim in that they each had six wings and they sang of God's holiness. It is difficult to tell whether Isaiah, Ezekiel and John are speaking of separate angelic creatures or the same ones. Seraphim literally means burning ones or flaming ones. In other passages not describing these angelic creatures it means a burning serpent. In Ezekiel 28:14 in a prophecy about the King of Tyre that is often applied to Satan, Ezekiel says he was the appointed the guardian cherub. Is there a connection with the serpent in the Garden of Eden who tempted Eve? Was Satan one of the "flaming serpents" or seraphim that guarded God's throne? The links are intriguing but there is no way to confirm the idea.
The seraphim each have six wings. Two cover their faces in the presence of God's holiness. Two cover their feet and with two they fly. The implication is God's throne is flying in midair just like Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1 where the cherubim support the throne of God and help it to fly in midair.

Isaiah heard the seraphim calling to one another and declaring God's holiness. They sang or declared that the Lord of hosts or Yahweh of Hosts is holy. The NIV reads Yahweh Almighty and the NLT reads the Lord of Heaven's Armies. The title is an acknowledgment that God is in command of legions and legions of heaven's angels; angels beyond count. His authority is limitless. The Hebrew word is sabaot, which the famous hymn based on this passage, Holy, Holy, Holy uses. The Lord is holy, that is, he is righteous, pure, set apart from all his creatures because he is the Creator. He is beautiful and shining with light and glory. All these things describe his holiness. The whole earth is full of or contains his glory. In other words all of creation points to the glory of God, something Paul observed in Romans 1.

The song of the seraphim is central for Isaiah and his view of God because his favorite title for God in his prophecy is the Holy One of Israel. That title and his vision are linked and his experience of beholding God's throne in the temple in 740 BC must have had a lasting impression on the great prophet. He gives us many descriptions of God throughout his prophecy but the most important and most central is always he is holy!

God's holiness is also the first thing one must realize in worship; he is pure, righteous, glorious and beautiful; he is holy. He invites us into his presence and we in turn recognize that he is holy and worthy of our praise and worship.

6:4-7 - When Isaiah heard the seraphim praising God the doors of the temple shook like an earthquake because the sound of the seraphim's singing was so great. According to 1 Kings 6 and the description of Solomon's temple the doors or thresholds Isaiah speaks of here are probably the inner doors to the most holy place or to the holy place. They were made of olive wood overlaid with gold. These are probably the doors Isaiah felt shaking which would make sense if he was in the temple sanctuary. This indicates Isaiah was a priest serving in the temple when he had his vision. Early Jewish tradition states that Isaiah was of the royal family and not a priest. Only the priests were allowed into the main sanctuary of the temple, the holy place, where the altar of incense stood along with the table of the Bread of the Presence and the menorah. If however Isaiah was not a priest then he must have been outside the temple and visualized it rather than being inside where he could see the temple itself. Nothing in the book itself says he was of the royal family. It makes more sense that Isaiah was a priest serving in the temple at the time of his call.

The words Isaiah uses here are rare so there is some discrepancy in the translations. The ESV reads "the foundations of the thresholds shook." The NIV reads, "the doorposts and thresholds shook." The NLT reads, "shook the Temple to its foundations." The NRSV reads, "the pivots on the thresholds shook." Most translations note that the meaning of the Hebrew word variously translated pivots, foundations, doorposts etc., is uncertain.

The sound of the seraphims' cry shook the doorways of the temple. Isaiah then reports that smoke filled the whole sanctuary. The smoke is similar to the cloud that represented the presence and glory of the Lord. The cloud filled the tabernacle in Exodus 40. It filled Solomon's temple when it was dedicated in 1 Kings 8. The glory of the Lord descended once again on the eschatological temple of the Lord in Ezekiel 43. The smoke Isaiah sees means the same thing as
the cloud of the Lord's glory in those other passages. God is directly present in his holiness in the
temple of the Lord on the day Isaiah saw him.

Isaiah's response to the Lord's holy and glorious presence is not wonder or praise; it is
grief, sadness and woe. His vision of God's holiness and glory confronts him with his own
sinfulness. This is the second step in traditional worship. We praise God for who he is and that
leads us to confessing our sins because we realize we are sinners. That is exactly the insight
Isaiah has in the temple. He exclaims he is lost or ruined. The word literally means destroyed or
ceasing to exist. In other contexts it is used to express the belief that if one saw the Lord face to
face it would destroy you or kill you. See Judges 13:22. Isaiah recognizes his sin separates him
from God and he deserves death. He exclaims he is a man of unclean lips and dwells in the midst
of a people of unclean lips. The word for unclean is the normal word used to describe ritual
uncleanness or ceremonial purity. It can also mean defiled and that is the sense in which Isaiah
uses it here. He and his people are morally defiled by their sin, especially as they compare
themselves to Yahweh! Isaiah shares through a graphic picture what Paul will later summarize in
Romans 3; all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God! We are all sinners before God in
need of his forgiveness. Not only that, our sin so separates us from God that we cannot bridge the
gap. Unless God does something to purify us we are lost before the Lord and cannot be in his
presence. Isaiah has seen the Lord and it has unmade him!

God however, has a purpose for Isaiah and does not leave him mired in his guilt, which is
true for us as well. One of the great fiery angels, a seraph flies to Isaiah. He had taken a live or
burning coal from the altar. It is curious that Isaiah reports the seraph took the coal with tongs. If
he is a fiery angelic spirit why does he need tongs to pick up the coal? One must remember this
is a vision and sometimes there are details in visions that do not always seem logical. The altar is
probably the altar of incense because Isaiah is inside the temple proper. It could be the altar of
burnt offering outside the temple doors but it makes more sense to understand the coal as coming
from the altar of incense before the most holy place. The seraph touches Isaiah's lips and declares
that his guilt is taken away and his sin atoned for. Isaiah had specifically declared his lips and his
speech were unclean. The angel acting for God atones for his lips and takes away his sin. The
Jews believed according to the Law of Moses that through the sacrifice of a lamb, bull or goat
God would accept the animal's life represented in their blood for the sin of the people offering
the sacrifice. Here there is no blood shed yet God accepts Isaiah as cleansed and ready to carry
out God's purpose for him. God is free to declare what satisfies his holiness and atones for our
sin. He is not bound by any formula for forgiveness. We are bound to the methods he has
revealed to us! In the Old Testament it was animal sacrifice. In the New Testament God has
declared the sacrifice of his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, atones for our sins. No blood is shed
for Isaiah but the burning coal represents God's holiness and purity. It has "burned away" Isaiah's
sin. Isaiah has confessed his sin and been assured of God's forgiveness. That is the third phase of
worship his call teaches us.

6:8-10 - After Isaiah is assured of his forgiveness the Lord speaks and asks whom shall he send.
This is the next step in traditional worship; hearing God's Word and answering his call. Isaiah
responds with, "Here I am! Send me." When God calls we must answer. We have the freedom to
say no to God but if we are truly his follower why would we? If we are to be obedient to our
Lord we need to go where he sends us. Isaiah's answer reflects Paul's attitude on the road to
Damascus; "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Standing in the temple that day in 740 BC Isaiah
could hardly have understood the implications of what God was asking him to do or the cost of
being a prophet of the Lord. Nevertheless he said send me because he had seen the Lord and how
else could he have responded and been true to his faith, his people and the Lord?

God immediately gives Isaiah his marching orders, summarizing the message he wants
Isaiah to preach and the consequences of preaching that message. God tells him to go preach to
the people. The Hebrew phrases that follow God's command intensify the verb to hear. The word
is repeated, the first in the imperative form as a command and then the second as an infinitive
absolute which intensifies the meaning of the verb. The ESV translates the phrase "keep on
hearing" and the NIV translates it "be ever hearing." The NLT translates it "listen carefully".
The point is God commands them to listen up but they will not. They will hear the words Isaiah
says but will not comprehend them. They will not understand. He follows the command to hear
with an intensified command to see or watch closely. They will look but will not perceive or
discern what is happening. God will give Judah and Israel every chance to repent through the
preaching of his prophet but their minds will be dulled and their hearts hard so they will not
repent. God is not causing their stubbornness of heart his Word is confirming what is in their
hearts. Like many prophets the refusal of the Jews to repent will cause Isaiah great frustration.
Any preacher hopes people will respond to their message. When they do not and their hearts
remain hard it causes disappointment. Yet the job of the preacher or the prophet is to declare
God's Word. How people will respond to that Word is not up to him or her. That is in God's
hands. Isaiah's job is to remain faithful to his call and his charge from God to preach his Word.

Jesus quotes this famous passage from Isaiah in Matthew 13 to explain to the disciples
why he speaks to the people in parables. Many people misunderstand Jesus' motive. They often
interpret Jesus' words quoting Isaiah as Jesus purposefully trying to confuse people by making
his message difficult to understand. But as I have learned from Dr. Ken Bailey Jesus' parables
were designed to press the listener to make a decision for or against Jesus as Messiah or for or
against the Kingdom of God. Taken that way Jesus’ quote of Isaiah 6 makes great sense. He
speaks to the people in parables to push them to decide. Is he the Messiah or not? The parables
merely expose what is in their hearts already. They refuse to repent because they reject God's
Messiah and his offer of salvation through the Kingdom of God. Jesus like Isaiah is not trying to
keep people from repenting, he is trying to shine God's Word on the attitudes of their hearts and
expose them for all to see. God desires his people to repent but they refuse. There will be no
question when he judges them that his judgments are just and they deserve all that is happening
to them.

God tells Isaiah make the heart of this people dull or fat. The word is normally translated
fat or heavy denoting well-being and prosperity. It is a curious word to use in this context. The
ESV and most translations take the word in context to mean dull or insensitive or even harden.
The LXX uses a Greek word that means to harden and our English translations follow the LXX.
The word for heavy in the phrase make their ears heavy can mean both dull or weighted down
with a burden or honored or cause to be honored. Isaiah uses a rare word for "blind their eyes." It
literally means smear something on the eyes so they are smeared shut and cannot open. The word
choices are picturesque enough that it gives a deeper picture than just dull their hearts and close
their eyes and ears. Uzziah's reign was a time of unparalleled prosperity in Judah. That prosperity
lasted into the reign of Jotham. It wasn't until the reign of Ahaz that Judah was severely
threatened by not only Israel and Syria but Assyria as well. It is possible that Isaiah is describing
the material prosperity of the people but their dullness and blindness to their spiritual problems.
One must remember Isaiah received this call in the year Uzziah died which was the height of
Judah's economic prosperity. The people were fat, happy and lazy but they were totally oblivious
to the spiritual danger they faced and the moral corruption of their country. I think Isaiah uses the words he uses to paint a double picture. Outwardly this people is fat and prosperous, but inwardly they are rebellious against the Lord their God. Isaiah's task was to preach God's Word to them and expose them for what they are. God will demonstrate the people trust in their riches and their politics and do not trust in God. They have conveniently forgotten their covenant with Yahweh of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel!

God says make them dull of heart and heavy of eyes lest they repent and are healed. The word lest or otherwise (NIV) is a conjunction whose primary function is to express precaution. God tells Isaiah preach the message I give you to this unrepentant people and expose their rebellion otherwise they might repent and be healed. God implies that he has already made up his mind about what he is going to do to Judah and its people. He will judge them. Yet he will also give them a chance to repent because that is his heart's desire. He wants to forgive them and see them return to him, but he knows they will not. Yet he instructs his prophet to give them the chance by declaring their sinfulness and calling them to repentance. A few will respond but the majority will continue in their sin. Their prosperity has dulled their faith and caused them to trust in their riches, wealth and comfort. One can live that way in stable times and get away with it. Once trouble occurs that life strategy no longer works. Isaiah's job was to expose the fallacy of their thinking and the shallowness of their faith. Jesus uses the entire quote in Matthew, Mark and Luke and Paul uses it with the Jews in Rome in Acts 28. In Jesus' day it is not the people's prosperity that he has in mind but their trust in their own legal efforts and work's righteousness. The gospel exposes our hypocrisy and our trust in our own ability to earn God's favor. The gospel carries with it the power to save us or to judge us. Isaiah's message carried the same power.

6:11-13 - Isaiah asks God how long. I think he is asking how long must he keep preaching this message so that Judah will become dull of heart and hearing. How long do I have to keep emphasizing this message Lord? Like Jeremiah his message is one that will bring judgment. God doesn't say so that the people will repent and turn back to my covenant and Israel will become faithful to me again. The picture God gives him is one of condemnation and rebellion against the Lord. That is a daunting task. The reality is Isaiah's prophetic career lasted 40 years and perhaps even longer depending on how long he lived into Manasseh's reign. He preached this message of judgment for most of his adult life. Yet God also gave him the message of grace and restoration to write to the exiles but Isaiah was long dead when that message finally applied to his people. Like Jeremiah, God asks Isaiah to commit to a lifetime of faithfulness. Can we do the same?

God tells Isaiah to keep preaching his message until cities are ruined and deserted and the land is a desolate waste. The Lord is going to remove his people and take them to a faraway place and the Promiseland will lie empty. This is one of those places in Isaiah's earlier chapters where one can see there is only one prophet but two different messages and times about which he prophesies. Verse 11 happened to the north kingdom Israel in Isaiah's lifetime. The Assyrians destroyed Israel in a series of campaigns which finally resulted in the capture of Samaria in 721 by Sargon. Many Israelites were taken captive and were moved to the area of Armenia in the Assyrian Empire. Other captive peoples were then resettled in Israel to work the land. They became the Samaritans of the New Testament. Many of Judah's cities were destroyed in the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 but Jerusalem remained intact because the Lord spared the city by sending a plague through the Assyrian army and forcing it to withdraw. However, these verses were not totally fulfilled in Judah until a century later after Isaiah had died and the
Babylonians had captured and burned Jerusalem. Throughout his prophecy Isaiah focuses on Judah and its kings and on Jerusalem and its fate. He will speak to the north kingdom Israel but he concentrates on the south in Judah. These verses were fulfilled in Israel but not in Judah while Isaiah lived. Isaiah 40-66 deals with the exiles in Babylon and their return after Jerusalem has been destroyed. This is evidence not of two Isaiahs but of a split prophecy, the latter part of which was preserved for a later time by Isaiah's disciples yet was given by God to Isaiah. There is one prophet but two messages, otherwise these verses in Isaiah's call are never fulfilled and don't make sense!

God tells Isaiah the crisis will be so great in the land that only a tenth of the people will remain. Then it will be burned or suffer again! After the fall of the north refugees from Israel swelled the population of Judah yet it never built back up to its zenith in the days of Uzziah. After the Babylonian captivity only a small remnant of the poorest people remained in the land to farm it. The number of the exiles in Babylon was also not large because the Babylonians only took the cream of the country's leadership yet the exiles were the most significant group of Jews because they were the leaders. God says like a chopped down tree life can still remain in the stump and a shoot emerge to grow again. This is a picture of the remnant of the people God will preserve in order to save his people and preserve his covenant promises with the Jews. The remnant will undergo much suffering as it is preserved but God's promise will prevail. It is also a veiled reference to the Messiah, the shoot from David's line that will be preserved until the time of his coming. This is a reference to the Lord Jesus who is the holy seed (singular) or offspring of Israel as a people, Judah as a tribe and David his ancestor. Isaiah will develop the concepts of the Messiah and the remnant more fully in the chapters ahead.

Chapter 7:

7:1-2 - Early in the reign of Ahaz or Jehoahaz, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the king of Israel invaded Judah to force Ahaz to join their anti-Assyrian alliance. According to 2 Kings 16 the invasion occurred just as Ahaz ascended to the throne of Judah following the death of his father Jotham. There is some discrepancy in the number of years of the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz which can be explained by years of co-regency, a son reigning with his father. Unlike Jotham, Ahaz was a weak and immoral king who did not follow the Lord but worshipped idols alongside Yahweh. According to 2 Chronicles 28 Rezin and Pekah inflicted heavy casualties on the army of Judah during the invasion, took over 100,000 people as captives and slaves and laid siege to Jerusalem. Ahaz panicked; Isaiah describes him and the people as trees shaking before the wind in verse 2. Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria for help. Tiglath-Pileser obliged and invaded Syria, taking Damascus in 732 BC, executing Rezin. He also invaded Israel taking much of the Galilee. During this time Hoshea assassinated Pekah and seized the throne of Israel becoming Tiglath Pileser's vassal. Ahaz also swore allegiance to Tiglath Pileser in Damascus and Judah began a century of vassalage under the pagan Assyrian yoke.

7:3-9 - During Rezin and Pekah's invasion of Judah, Isaiah went to Ahaz and tried to counsel patience and trust in the Lord. He took with him his son, named Shear-jashub, which means "a remnant will return", a living prophecy of Judah's fate. Isaiah and his son met with the king at the end of the conduit of the upper pool. This would have been near the spring Gihon, the main water source of Jerusalem. This is also before King Hezekiah, Ahaz's son, covered over the
spring and had his engineers build a tunnel to supply water to Jerusalem in case of a siege by the Assyrians. See 2 Chronicles 32.

Isaiah goes to Ahaz with his son and tells him not to fear Rezin and Pekah. He compares them to two smoldering stumps. Then Isaiah gives this message to Ahaz. The invasion will not pass or stand. Within 65 years Ephraim will be so shattered they will not be a people. The Hebrew word means to be broken, destroyed, shattered, demoralized or in panic and terror. Then Isaiah tells Ahaz to stand firm in his faith in God otherwise he will not stand at all! Tiglath Pileser captured Damascus in 732 BC. Shalmaneser laid siege to Samaria in 724 and Sargon finished the task destroying the city and deporting the people in 721. Esarhaddon continued the deportation and re-settling of the territory of Israel in 669 according to Ezra 4. By that time, which was during the reign of Manasseh, some faithful Israelites had fled south to Judah and become absorbed into the people of Judah. Israel or the ten northern tribes lost their cohesion and ceased to exist as a people. 669 BC is 65 years from the time Isaiah gave this prophecy to Ahaz. The Lord fulfilled his word to the frightened young king even though Ahaz never lived to see it come true. Ahaz would ignore God's Word to him and rather than trusting God he would trust to being a vassal of Assyria or making alliances with Egypt.

7:10-17 - God knows the young king is frightened and he wants to reassure him. He tells him to ask for a sign, anything he wants; as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven! Ahaz with false humility says he won't because he will not put the Lord to the test. This is so hypocritical of Ahaz because he is already testing the Lord with his idolatry and lack of trust!

God says to Ahaz through Isaiah that he will give Ahaz a sign whether he likes it or not! Ahaz and Judah test people's patience must they test the Lord's patience as well? God himself will give them a sign. The word for sign most often means miraculous sign, something only God can do. Ahaz didn't want to push God to do some miraculous thing even though God said he would. After the king's refusal God says he will give the king and all of Judah a "miraculous sign" that will assure them of God's protection and deliverance from the forces of Rezin and Pekah.

God says a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and she shall name him Immanuel, meaning God with us. The word translated virgin literally means a young woman of marriageable age. However, in most instances in the Old Testament it means a virgin. See Genesis 24 & Song of Songs 6. There is no evidence to prove that the word can mean a young woman who is not a virgin. Matthew uses Isaiah's prophecy as a prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus in Matthew 1. Isaiah says the virgin shall conceive or become pregnant. The verb is in the feminine singular which implies she became pregnant without the help of a man. This is exactly what Matthew and Luke imply in Jesus' birth narratives in Matthew 1 and Luke 2. God conceived the child in Mary; Joseph took no part in Jesus' conception and birth. The child in her was from the Holy Spirit. Genetically he was Mary's son; legally according to Jewish law he was Joseph's son.

The name Immanuel means God with us. The birth of the child was to communicate to King Ahaz that God was with him and the Jewish people. They were threatened from outside and needed reassurance that God could handle the crisis. Matthew in his gospel interprets this part of Isaiah's prophecy as referring to Jesus' virgin birth. God is now with us through the incarnation of his Son in Jesus of Nazareth.

Whose son is Immanuel? There are two reasonable possibilities. First he is Isaiah's son, and like his first son, Shear-Jashub which means a remnant will return, Immanuel is a living
prophecy to Ahaz. The other possibility is that Immanuel is King Ahaz's son which would mean this is a prophetic name for Hezekiah, Ahaz's heir. This would make the most sense since Isaiah's wife was not a virgin when Immanuel is conceived and born because she had already given birth to a son. It is possible the "virgin" Isaiah mentions here is a second wife of the prophet but that seems unlikely. It is more probable that Immanuel is the son of Ahaz. 2 Kings 18 says his mother's name was Abi or Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. She would have been a virgin when she was married to the king. 2 Kings 18 says Hezekiah was 25 years old when he ascended the lion throne of Solomon. The math however may not work out since Hoshea, the last king of Israel, became king in the 12th year of Ahaz. Hezekiah became king in the 3rd year of Hoshea and was already 25 years old. Immanuel would have only been 15. It is a difficult puzzle but it still makes the most sense to see the boy as being the son of the king, whether Hezekiah or another child.

There is considerably more to the prophecy of Immanuel in its context however, more than just the birth of a miraculous child. Isaiah says the child will eat curds and honey when he knows how to discern right from wrong. The Hebrews marked a young boy's transition from boyhood to manhood around 12 or 13 years of age. This became the later celebration of the Bar Mitzvah. Curds and honey is a simple diet and indicates the land is not producing like normal. There is no grain being grown from which to make bread. This is a sign that the land has suffered a terrible trauma. Thus Isaiah tells Ahaz within twelve years Judah will be devastated but Israel and Syria will also be devastated. Their lands will be deserted. The Lord is about to bring upon Judah something that has not happened since the north kingdom of Israel broke away from Judah after Solomon died. He will bring the king of Assyria. If Isaiah gave Ahaz this message in around 735 or 734 during the time Rezin and Pekah were pressuring him to join their anti-Assyrian alliance his words are literally fulfilled. Tiglath Pileser III took Damascus and destroyed it in 732. Shalmaneser invaded Israel in 724 and took Samaria in the fall of 722. He died and his son and successor Sargon II finished the task of destroying Samaria and deporting the population. Israel was completely destroyed as a country. All this took place within 12 or 13 years of Isaiah's prophecy to Ahaz. Syria and Damascus were destroyed and the land of Judah was severely damaged because of the wars. The land did not yield its normal crops because many were killed or unable to plant and harvest the grain that normally fed the people just as Isaiah had said. See 2 Kings 17:3-6 & 18:9-12.

7:18-25  - Isaiah continues his description of what the Lord will do to the land in the days of the youth of Immanuel, the child born as a sign to unfaithful Ahaz. Isaiah compares the looting, pillaging Assyrian soldiers to swarms of flies that inhabit the streams of Egypt. He is probably thinking of the stinging nuisance flies that live in the channels and streams of the Nile Delta. Or he says they are like the bees that live in Assyria, in the northern Euphrates Valley. The flies and bees will come and settle in the steep ravines or wadis of the land. Israel, especially in the north, east and the Judean Desert along the Dead Sea, is dominated by dry stream channels that are active in the rainy season when thunderstorms lead to flash floods and the water rushes down into the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River Valley or the Dead Sea. Isaiah says God will whistle for the flies and bees to come. They are under his command and control. The king of Assyria may think he is in charge and Ahaz may believe he needs to negotiate with him but in truth it is the Lord God who brings them and controls them. This is his judgment upon an unfaithful and untrusting people and king. Like an infestation of insects, of flies and bees, the Assyrian troops will be everywhere in the land, both in Israel and in Judah.
God says in that day, meaning when Immanuel is 12 or 13, God will use Assyria, the land Ahaz will hire from beyond the Euphrates, to shave off their hair and beard, to shame them publicly as if they are in mourning. Ahaz would not trust God and heed Isaiah's counsel. Instead he appealed to Tiglath Pileser III and offered himself as his vassal if he would come and help him against Rezin and Pekah. The Assyrians had been looking for an excuse to expand their territory into Syria and Israel and Tiglath Pileser obliges Ahaz by taking Damascus, invading Israel and putting Ahaz under heavy tribute. The land was ravaged and Ahaz was humbled.

Isaiah says when the Assyrians come a man will keep alive his cows and sheep so he will at least have milk and cheese curds for his family to eat because the land will be so damaged no one will be able to plant crops. People will eat curds and honey just like Immanuel. See Isaiah 7:15-17. It will not be a time to eat delicacies but a time to try and survive on whatever people can find to eat. The wheat, the barley, the grapes and the olives will not bear their crops. The rich vineyards in Israel will become fields of thorns and brier bushes. The cultivated hillsides of Israel, especially in the hill country and valleys of the mountains of Samaria between Galilee and Jerusalem will be overgrown with thorns and briers. The tilled fields and vegetable gardens will be gone because there will be no one to plant and keep them. Cattle and sheep will escape to roam the hills and fields where once vineyards and farms produced richly. God had promised his people a land that was fertile and flowing with milk and honey. The briars and thorns are the opposite of that picture. They are not specifically listed as covenant curses in Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 28 but they are the opposite of his covenant blessings about the land. The Promiseland will be devastated by the Assyrian invasion with few people left to till it and keep it. This will be God's doing to punish Israel and Judah for their sins. Ahaz will think he has found a solution to the attacks of Rezin and Pekah when in reality he will have opened up the north kingdom to destruction and sold Judah into slavery to the king of Assyria and his gods.

Chapter 8:
8:1-4 - God tells Isaiah to take a large scroll (NIV) or tablet (ESV, and most other translations) and write on it with a pen or a stylus this message: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, meaning quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil or the spoil speeds, the prey hastens. This would be the name of Isaiah's son. There are differences in the translations because of the uncertainty of the Hebrew word translated scroll or tablet. Despite the difficulties the meaning is not in doubt. God tells Isaiah to write down the name of the child in large letters on a tablet or scroll and then get Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah to witness the scroll. Uriah the priest is the one to whom King Ahaz gives instructions for how to build the pagan altar the king sees in Damascus when he swears allegiance to the Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser III in 2 Kings 16. Uriah takes the instructions and builds the altar. His actions say he was not totally loyal or faithful to Yahweh but instead obeyed the king's command to allow idolatry into the temple. Zechariah is otherwise unknown although it is possible he is the Zechariah mentioned in 2 Chronicles 29:13, a Levite who helped King Hezekiah in cleansing the temple after Ahaz' death. That identity is by no means certain. However, if it is correct God tells Isaiah to get an unfaithful priest and a faithful Levite to witness the writing of the name on the tablet or scroll. The name will be the name of the prophet's son and he will be a living prophecy that will testify to the fact that before very long the Assyrians will hasten to their prey of Damascus and Israel.

Isaiah says he "went to the prophetess and she conceived and gave birth to a son." That is a polite way of saying Isaiah made love to his wife, she became pregnant and gave birth nine months later to a son. God told him to name his newborn son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the name
Isaiah had written on the tablet or scroll; quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil. Isaiah's son will be a living prophecy. Every time he introduces him to someone, or he and his mother call him by name the Lord's message to Judah and Israel will be declared again.

God then further clarifies his message through Isaiah's son. Before the boy grows old enough to say father or mother, mommy or daddy, Damascus and Samaria will be plundered by the king of Assyria. Judah's enemies will be defeated. Maher-shalal-hash-baz was born at least 10 months to a year after Immanuel, who is either the son of Ahaz, meaning Hezekiah, or a son of Isaiah, and was a living prophecy. If we allow a year after his birth to enable him to grow old enough to call out to his mother or father that means that this prophecy was given around 734, two years before Tiglath Pileser conquered Damascus and invaded Israel in 732. God's Word to Isaiah and Judah, that in a short time when Isaiah's son learns to say mommy and daddy the threat from Damascus and Israel will be abated, was fulfilled. God is telling Ahaz to stay faithful to the Lord because he will protect him from his enemies.

8:5-8 - God gives Isaiah a further message concerning Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus related to both Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz and Immanuel. Isaiah also speaks to both Israel, the north kingdom, and Judah the south kingdom. He says this people, meaning Israel, has refused the gentle waters of Shiloah or Siloam, meaning the Pool of Siloam, one of the outlets for the spring Gihon in Jerusalem which was connected to the pool by a channel. Hezekiah covered over the spring with stone and built a tunnel linking Gihon with the Pool of Siloam to protect the city's water supply before the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701. See 2 Kings 20. According to archeologists the original channel from the spring flowed very gently into the city because its angle of flow was minimal. Isaiah says Israel has rejected these gently flowing waters, meaning Jerusalem and David's line and gone after Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel. Isaiah may be portraying Ahaz as weak and gentle and so Israel is looking for what they believe are stronger kings to resist the growing might of Assyria. Isaiah may also be referring to a party in Judah who preferred to be rid of the weak Ahaz and who supported Pekah and his schemes to divide up Judah with Rezin and install the son of Tabeel over Judah. See Isaiah 7:6.

Isaiah tells both Israel and Judah their rejection of the house of David and Jerusalem will not turn out as planned. Instead God will unleash not gentle waters but the flood of the great River Euphrates, meaning Assyria. He will come with all his pomp and glory and sweep over the land of Israel and into the land of Judah too. It will overflow and spread over the land, even up to the neck, meaning it will almost conquer Judah. Its outspread wings will cover the whole land. The wings here may be a reference to the winged bulls frequently used in Assyrian art and temples. Israel will be overwhelmed and even Judah will barely survive when Assyria comes to Immanuel's land.

Rather than trusting God as Isaiah counseled him Ahaz appealed to Tiglath Pileser III and offered to be his vassal in exchange for help against Rezin and Pekah. Tiglath Pileser obliged in 732 by taking Damascus, killing Rezin and annexing northern Israel or the Galilee as part of Assyria. Pekah was assassinated during the attack and Hoshea became king, swearing allegiance to Assyria. Ahaz was now an Assyrian vassal and led the people to worship the gods of Assyria as part of his submission to Tiglath Pileser. For that 2 Kings 16 severely condemns him. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled!

8:9-10 - In contrast Isaiah says in verses 9-10 that the nations should prepare to do their worst, meaning Assyria should come and attack Judah. They should prepare for battle and lay out their
plan of attack. Do your worst Isaiah says but it will not stand. God is with us! Isaiah uses the
name for the child born either to him or to King Ahaz, Immanuel, God with us. The child is the
sign that if the king and the people will trust God he will watch over them and thwart all the
plans of King Pekah of Israel, King Rezin of Damascus and King Tiglath Pileser of Assyria.
Isaiah tells the people to have faith! Ahaz's lack of faith in the face of the invasion of Israel and
Syria is in marked contrast to Hezekiah's faith in God during the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in
701 by Sennacherib. The outlook was even bleaker in Hezekiah's day yet because he was faithful
to the Lord and believed the words Isaiah told him God delivered Jerusalem and Judah from the
Assyrian army. Ahaz could not trust God and made the politically expedient choice of submitting
to Assyria instead. God was still with Judah no matter what but Ahaz's choice pulled Judah into
the worst kind of idolatry and wickedness. God finally turned away from the apostate nation in
the days of Jeremiah when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and sent the Jews into exile.
God would fulfill the promise of Immanuel but it would be eight centuries into the future when a
young virgin in a small town in Galilee would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit and call his

8:11-15 - God admonishes Isaiah and warns him not to follow the ways of the people but follow
the Lord of Hosts. God tells him don't call conspiracy what this people calls conspiracy and don't
fear what they fear. The root word for conspiracy is to bind together or tie together. An
alternative translation in the NIV is, don't call for a treaty every time these people call for a
treaty. God tells Isaiah not to be drawn into all the 'conspiracy theories' that are popular among
the people. Don't believe all the stories about what is happening. The Assyrians were getting
ready to invade and attack Syria and Damascus. Imagine the rumors swirling in Jerusalem!
Imagine the talk in the markets of the city about Egypt and whether they would help and what
Rezin and Pekah were going to do and what about Tiglath Pileser? God says don't focus on all of
that and don't fear it. Fear the Lord! Honor the Lord above everything else. He is sovereign and
the one whom you should fear, meaning be in awe of and worship.

    God's counsel to Isaiah is good counsel to us in America today. Rumors, conspiracies,
    wild stories in the news abound about the president, terrorism, the border with Mexico, the
    Chinese, the Russians, the North Koreans, global warming, etc., etc., etc.! We are not to be
drawn into them but fear the Lord and honor him! He is Lord of all, the Creator, the Lord of
    history and all the nations. God is sovereign and in charge; not rumors and headlines!!!

    Isaiah says God himself will become either a sanctuary or a stone that causes people to
stumble for both houses of Israel, meaning Israel and Judah. The word for sanctuary means holy
place and most often refers to the tabernacle in the wilderness or the temple in Jerusalem. Here in
context it means a place of safety and shelter in the presence of God. He will be their sanctuary. I
am reminded of John 1:14 which says the Word became flesh and tabernacled or dwelt among us
and we have seen his glory. Isaiah is contrasting a holy and right faith in the Lord that will
protect and shelter his people and the paganized form of the worship of Yahweh that had taken
hold in Israel and Judah. That faith would cause Israel and Judah to stumble and fall. It would
become a trap and a snare to capture them because they were treating the Lord like a pagan god,
thinking they could keep in his favor and receive good things from him if they simply appeased
him. Like in Jeremiah's day Ahaz and his followers in Judah and the majority of people in Israel
had mixed the worship of God with the worship of idols and had divorced their worship from
their moral behavior. That is something many prophets consistently warned all of Israel not to
do. One cannot violate the first four God commands and expect to keep the last six people
commands of the Ten Commandments. If one does not love God one will not love his or her neighbor!

Isaiah tells all the house of Israel that if they consistently worship Yahweh just to appease him yet disobey his commands their "religion" will not help them and shelter them. Instead they will stumble over it and be broken by it. They will believe God has abandoned them and wonder why he does nothing to help them, not understanding that it is they who have abandoned Yahweh.

Both Peter and Paul quote this statement by Isaiah as applying to Jesus and his ministry. The majority of Jews could not accept Jesus as Messiah because he did not fit their paradigm of what the Messiah was supposed to be like and to do. Jesus fit God's paradigm and the prophets foretold who he would be. The people however rejected him. That eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem and Herod's temple by the Romans in 70 AD. Some believed and Jesus became their holy sanctuary, God himself among us. Most did not and they stumbled over the crucified Messiah.

8:16-22 - Isaiah calls upon his disciples to bind up or preserve the testimony and the teaching. The word for testimony means to give a witness or to testify as to events. In Isaiah's context it means God's Word to him, his prophecy. His disciples are to bind it up or keep it safe. They are to seal or preserve the teaching. Teaching in Hebrew is the word torah which came to mean the Law of Moses. Here it specifically means God's teaching through his prophet but one cannot ignore the later implication of the word. In New Testament times the Pharisees and the Essenes believed the prophets carried as much authority as the Torah, the Law. The Sadducees rejected the prophets and the Writings. Jesus however affirmed all three sections of the Hebrew Bible as Scripture as did the Pharisees.

Verse 16 also gives us a clue as to how Isaiah's message came to Judah and the Jews in exile in chapters 40-66. If we take this verse at face value it means Isaiah asked his disciples to preserve his message for a future time. If one holds to the single author viewpoint of the Book of Isaiah, namely that Isaiah wrote the entire prophecy but it is split into two parts, then this explains how chapters 40-66 were preserved for a century and a half to be circulated when the exiles were in Babylon before Babylon fell and Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return home to rebuild the temple. Those who hold to the two-author view of Isaiah ignore this verse or they explain it away saying it does not apply to the preserving of the second half of Isaiah's prophecy but merely refers to the first half. It should also be noted that chapters 1-39 can also apply to the time of the exile and that the entire Book of Isaiah is relevant to Isaiah's time and the exiles' time as well.

Isaiah declares that he will wait for the Lord and trust in him even though it is clear that Israel has abandoned the Lord and God has decided to withdraw his support from them. Isaiah says he and his children are signs and symbols from the Lord to the people of Israel. They are living prophecies of what God has declared will happen. A remnant will return but the Assyrians will be swift to plunder and destroy the north kingdom of Israel. The words for signs and symbols are synonyms and are simply expressing a Hebrew poetic couplet. They are repeating the same idea.

Isaiah exposes the people's apostasy and sin. They say to ask the mediums and the spiritists, those who claim to be able to speak to the dead, for advice and knowledge of the future. Israel and Judah had fallen for the practices of the pagan peoples around them. Occult rituals of consulting the dead were a part of the paganism of many of the nations around Israel,
including Assyria. Satan was able to deceive even great nations with these practices and the superstitions about omens and signs that went with them. Isaiah holds these practices in utter contempt. "Should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" It must have boggled the prophet's mind that his people were falling into superstition and occult practices when the Holy One of Israel, the Lord God Almighty, was ready to reveal his plans and future to them if they but asked! Isaiah calls his people to believe the teaching or the torah and the testimony! The irony was the priests were supposed to teach the people the Law of Moses and instruct all of Israel in the Lord's ways. They had failed miserably in that task and now Israel was consulting mediums to fill the vacuum.

Isaiah says the mediums and the spiritists do not speak according to God's Law (which forbade the practice, see Deuteronomy 18) because they have no light, literally no dawn. The noun is used to describe the light in the eastern sky just before the sun rises. Here Isaiah uses it as a metaphor for knowledge and understanding. There is no light of knowledge in the mediums because they try and consult the dead. Only God is the living God who knows both the present and the future. He is the Creator. In Isaiah 60:1 Isaiah tells the exiles of Judah that their light has come and the glory of the Lord now shines upon them. He is referring to the coming of the Servant-Messiah. The words in Hebrew are different words than the word for dawn here but the meaning is the same.

Those who follow the superstitions the Law forbids will roam the land in distress and hunger. Their fear and pain will cause them to look to heaven and curse the Lord as if all their distress is his fault. They disobeyed him and now suffer the consequences of their disobedience but they cannot bring themselves to see the truth and repent. They will continue to blame God for their troubles. When they look around at their circumstances all they will see is distress and darkness. The word for distress Isaiah uses gives a picture of a heavy yoke that overwhelms the oxen trying to carry it. The picture is similar to Jesus saying his yoke is easy and his burden is light in Matthew 11. The weight of the burden of superstition and occult practices the people have adopted brings them only a crushing burden and darkness. There cannot see the light of God's truth. There are only the lies and deception of Satan. The people therefore wander around as in darkness not knowing the way out or what to do. The word for distress in verse 22 means to be bound or tied up and constricted. It is similar in meaning to the Greek word thlipsis which means tribulation, trouble or pressure in the New Testament. The word for darkness figuratively means ignorance, evil and unbelief. God's people who have abandoned him will be thrust into darkness and trouble. These are the consequences of their sinful choices. Incredibly God however still wants to be gracious to them. Isaiah follows his declaration of judgment in chapter 8 with a declaration of hope and the coming of the Messiah in chapter 9.

Chapter 9:
9:1 - These words must have been written soon after Tiglath Pileser III took Damascus and invaded and annexed Galilee in 732. These were the tribal lands of Zebulun and Naphtali included Galilee, especially west of the Jordan Valley. Hazor was one of the major cities in Naphtali which Tiglath Pileser destroyed. 2 Kings 15 says the Assyrians took all the tribal territory of Naphtali and deported the population to Assyria. The territory of Zebulun included the Jezreel Valley, which Isaiah calls the way of the sea. The Jezreel Valley stretches in the west from the Mediterranean Sea at the modern port of Haifa to the Rift Valley and the Jordan River in the east, down to the Sea of Galilee. Zebulun's territory also included a small village on the northern side of the Jezreel Valley which in New Testament times was named Nazareth.
Isaiah's implication is that the first part of Israel to be conquered by Assyria, namely Galilee, will be the first part of Israel to behold or see God's glory through the coming of the Son who will be born to all of Israel, the Messiah. Matthew 4 quotes this passage as fulfilled because Joseph and Mary settled in Nazareth and raised Jesus there. He even becomes known as Jesus of Nazareth.

The Jews did not link Jesus being from Nazareth to the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy here in Isaiah 9. When Philip tells Nathaniel about Jesus in John 1 Nathaniel asks can anything good come out of Nazareth. Later in John 7 the leaders of the Pharisees tell Nicodemus that he is mistaken in his support for Jesus because no prophet will come out of Galilee. However, Isaiah makes clear that in the time of the birth of the Son who will be given it is in Galilee that his glory will first be revealed. It is no accident that Jesus is raised in Nazareth in Galilee!

Furthermore Isaiah calls Galilee, Galilee of the nations, meaning an area within the ancient territory of Israel that has been settled by Gentile nations. That process began when Tiglath Pileser annexed Galilee, deported the population and re-settled other nations there in 732. It accelerated when the north kingdom completely fell to Assyria in 721. By New Testament times Galilee was a mixed area with both Jews and Gentiles living there. Archeologists have unearthed Sephoris a major Greco-Roman city in Galilee near Nazareth that was thriving in Jesus’ day. It is even possible Joseph or Jesus worked there as carpenters or day laborers since Sephoris was under construction in their time. The Jews of Galilee had considerable interaction with the Greek speaking Gentiles of Galilee, much more so than the more conservative Jews of Judea near Jerusalem. Isaiah prophesies a time when Galilee will be settled by Gentiles, like the New Testament days of Jesus when he grew up in Nazareth!

9:2-5 - Note that Isaiah 9:2 in our English Bibles is Isaiah 9:1 in the Hebrew Bible. Our English translations follow the verse numbering of the Septuagint. It makes no difference in interpretation.

Isaiah begins a poem dedicated to the birth of a son, a king from David's line who will be born to all of Israel not just Judah. This is one of the greatest prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament. Some scholars believe Isaiah borrowed this poem from another source and added to it and that it was a poem celebrating the birth of a royal heir. That is possible but unlikely because of the language especially in verses 6-7. The coming king is born like any human being but he is clearly more than a human being. It is Isaiah who expands the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and reveals more of God's plan in bringing a future king from David's line. Isaiah shapes all subsequent theology of the Messiah in this passage.

In verse 2 Isaiah is still speaking of Galilee and its people who have suffered much oppression under the yoke of Assyria. In verse 3 he expands that oppression and darkness to include the whole nation. Those walking and living in deep darkness have seen a light shine upon them. The words for darkness are different than the gloom of verse 1 but they are still synonymous. The verbs in Hebrew convey the sense that the light shining, the breaking of the oppression and the birth of the coming king are all part of one total action by the Lord himself. God is going to do this! See verse 7 concerning the zeal of the Lord.

The New Testament sees these verses as fulfilled in the birth and life of Jesus of Nazareth. Luke and Matthew see Jesus growing up in Galilee as a direct fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Those living under great oppression and darkness without hope upon them God will shine a great light that will lift them out of their oppression. Some in Jesus' day wanted to interpret Isaiah's prophecy as saying that the Messiah would free Israel from her oppressors by
being a military leader who would rally Israel to throw off the Romans. God saw the darkness and oppression of his people as the darkness of sin and death. This is one of the reasons Jesus' mission was misinterpreted and misunderstood. Even after the resurrection in Acts 1 the disciples were still looking for Jesus to lead the people against the Romans and establish the Davidic Kingdom.

If verse 2 refers still to Galilee verse 3 makes it plain that Isaiah is talking about all of Israel. Verses 1-2 make it also clear that he is not talking about just Judah but all of Israel. There is no sense here of a divided kingdom because David was to rule all of the twelve tribes, all of Israel. It was sin that split Israel into two kingdoms but the prophets make it clear throughout the Old Testament that when the Messiah comes he will rule over a united Israel once again!

God will multiply or increase the nation. The word means to grow or increase in number like "be fruitful and multiply” in Genesis 1. God will restore Israel's population when his glory shines on his people and he sends their Messiah. This idea is significant when one considers the context in which Isaiah wrote it. The population of the north kingdom Israel was severely reduced by the Assyrian invasion. Many people from the northern tribes would not survive the collapse of the north kingdom. Judah as well would suffer many deaths because of the Assyrian invasions. From the time Uzziah died in 740 to Sargon's capture of Samaria in 721 to Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701, the population of Israel and Judah was decimated. Isaiah sees God restoring their numbers in some future day when God sends the Messiah.

How is this prophecy fulfilled in the New Testament? When Jesus came the Jewish population of Judea and Galilee had grown and been restored but that is not what Isaiah means here. By 70 AD the population would once again be decimated, this time by the Romans as they crushed the Jewish revolt. How then would God's people be multiplied? The answer has to be the Gentile believers in Jesus as Messiah who would become part of God's people in the church. God would form one new people out of the two as Paul says in Romans 15 & Ephesians 2. God would do something the Jews did not expect even though Isaiah prophesied it in Isaiah 11, 52 & 65. Paul says these prophecies are fulfilled in his Gentile mission in Romans 10 & 16.

The restoration of Israel would also restore their joy. Isaiah's days were marked by tragedy, grief, famine and war. Those are not times of joy. But when the Messiah comes it will be a time of great rejoicing. Israel's numbers will swell and their joy will become great. The two words multiplied and increased are synonyms here and mean basically the same thing. What kind of joy will increase? It will be the kind of joy people have at the harvest. Succoth or Tabernacles was the feast at the time of the main harvest in the fall of the year and was a feast marked by joy and covenant renewal. The people's joy would be like after a great victory by Israel's army when the people are able to divide the spoil of battle among each other. See for example 2 Chronicles 20 when God helped Israel defeat the Moabites and Ammonites in the days of King Jehoshaphat of Judah.

Isaiah says that in the time of the Messiah he will break the yoke of Israel's burden and the staff and rod of his oppressor. The words give the picture of forced labor like the Israelites' slavery in Egypt. The staff and rod here are not instruments of comfort and guidance like the Lord's rod and staff in Psalm 23 but instruments of oppression and violence. This is a picture of the terrible oppression of the Assyrian Empire against Israel and Judah.

Isaiah says God will break that oppression and worse future oppression like he did when he used Gideon and his 300 men to defeat the Midianites in Judges 7-8. Gideon's battle with the Midianites was a complete victory for Israel but it was also a completely supernatural victory. There was no earthly military reason Gideon with his 300 men with trumpets and torches should
have defeated the Midianite forces. God was with them. Isaiah implies the same will happen when the Messiah is born. There will be no earthly way the child to be born should defeat the oppressors of Israel but he will because he will have God's help. The NIV translates the verb in verse 4 as shattered, as in God will shatter the yoke of their oppression. The ESV reads broken as do most other translations. Broken makes sense in the context but the NIV brings out the force of the word. God will not simply break or snap his people's yoke he will shatter it! The word in other verbal forms carries the idea of terror and dismay. Israel will not be afraid and dismayed when God acts her enemies will!

How did Jesus' coming satisfy and fulfill this verse in Isaiah's prophecy? Jesus did not break the yoke of Roman oppression nor did the Romans fear him. It will not be until his Second Coming that the Antichrist and his forces will be dismayed by the Lord's appearing and he will shatter their forces at the final battle in Jerusalem. It is possible Isaiah is ultimately referring to that time and telescopes and combines Jesus' first and second comings. Prophets often telescope events in prophecy. The other possibility is that the oppressor Isaiah is talking about here is spiritual. The demon in Mark 1 asks Jesus if he has come to destroy it. The legion of demons in the Garasene demoniac begs Jesus not to torture them or send them into the Abyss in Luke 8. Paul says in Colossians 2 that Jesus triumphed over the demonic powers making a spectacle of them on the cross. And 1 John 3:8 says Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 that if the rulers of this age both demonic and political had understood God's plan they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. The cross which from a worldly viewpoint looked like Jesus' greatest defeat turned out to be his greatest victory over Satan and evil and sealed their fate. It was a victory totally unlooked for and miraculous just like Gideon's defeat of the Midianites!

In verse 5 Isaiah describes a time following a battle when all the clothes and even boots of the invading army will be burned in the fires that disposed of the leftovers of battle. The word for boot is a loan word from Assyrian and means the boot or sandal worn by an Assyrian soldier. The phrase tramping warrior is the participle form of the word meaning boot and paints the picture of a massive army marching through the land tramping down the soil and the grass. Roads were narrow in Isaiah's day and hardly more than footpaths in places. A huge invading army would tramp down the grass and soil along the route of the road, tamping down a large swath through the country like the buffalo herds used to do on the Great Plains. Besides the tramping the invading army would live off the land and strip it bare of anything to eat and drink. The impact on a country would be horrendous. Isaiah paints the picture of the defeated Assyrians in this verse with the image of the fires all over the battlefield burning the soiled clothes of the dead, even their shoes. This too is a miraculous occurrence that only God could bring about because no army Judah could put into the field had any hope of defeating the Assyrian hordes. They were simply too large and too powerful. Only God could do this!

Isaiah tells us in verses 6-7 that it will be God himself who will defeat Israel's enemies and establish his Kingdom through the birth of the miraculous child who will come. It is probable that the child to which Isaiah refers here in chapter 9 is the child Immanuel that he prophesied would be born to a virgin in chapter 7.

9:6-7 - Verse 6 is linked back to 7:14 and the birth of Immanuel. There Isaiah says a virgin shall conceive, give birth to a son and call his name Immanuel or God with us. The child shall be a sign to "you" plural, meaning all of Israel and Judah. Here in chapter 9 the child born, the son given, is to "us", meaning everyone. The child has earthly parents who are not named but he is
born to all of Israel not just to his parents. He is given to the people and the verb form in Hebrew means to bestow upon or give as a gift. The son born will be a gift to his people! John said in John 3:16 that God gave his only Son to save the human race from sin.

The word for government is a rare word. It means dominion or rule but the most intriguing thing about it is, it is the root for the name Israel (sara) which means one who contends or strives with God. It is used only here in Isaiah 6-7. Isaiah may be using the word in a double way implying both that Messiah will have rule and dominion but that rule will be especially over Israel itself. The word for shoulder implies carrying a burden or figuratively a responsibility but it can also mean displaying something or wearing something that asserts authority and status. Thus the Messiah not only "shoulders the burden" of the government or rule of his people he also wears it proudly. Jesus not only took up his cross and came to serve his people he has the name that is above every name, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! See Matthew 28, Mark 10, John 13, Philippians 2 & Revelation 19.

In the Old Testament one's name is more than simply what people call a person. It represents one's existence, character, and reputation. It came to mean one's person and being. This is especially true when speaking of God and his name Yahweh or I AM. The Messiah has a name too. The Hebrew for name is singular yet his titles or names are many just like the name (singular in Greek) of God that Jesus gives us in Matthew 28 in the Great Commission; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The name of the Messiah is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Wonderful Counselor means an extraordinary counselor, like a counselor or advisor to the king. It implies extraordinary wisdom and advice. This is in contrast to the ridiculous and wicked advice the kings of Judah often received. The implication is the Messiah's advice or counsel will never go wrong. Mighty God is used again in Isaiah 10:21 to describe God himself. Isaiah expands the bounds of the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 and shows us that not only will the Messiah be a human being, a child born like every other child yet from David's line; he will also be God himself, the Mighty God. This idea is the seed of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

The Messiah is the Everlasting Father. The kings of Judah ascended their thrones, reigned and died. This king will reign forever and will be like a father to his people. The apostles viewing this prophecy in the light of Jesus' life, death and resurrection rightly said Isaiah showed us the Messiah would be God himself. He will show us the Father. Jesus himself says the same thing in John 14:9: Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

Messiah will be the Prince of Peace. He will be the shalom-bringer. Messiah will fulfill God's promise to David and his descendants in 2 Samuel 7 that when the coming king from David's line reigns Israel will live in peace-shalom and security. John in Revelation 19-20 says that when the Lord Jesus returns he will defeat Satan and all evil and usher in his 1000 year reign of peace, called the Millennium. Not only that, Paul says in Romans 5 that we now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection. In 2 Corinthians 5 he says God has reconciled the world, made peace with the whole human race, through Christ. And in Ephesians 2 Paul says Jesus is our peace and has brought both Jews and Gentiles together in one body and made us one people, his people, the church. Jesus the Messiah will bring peace and be the Prince of Peace in many ways; between us and God and between our fellow human beings.

The Messiah's "name", which are many, demonstrates that he is a human descended from the line of David and born to a human mother yet he is also God himself in human form. Coupled with Isaiah's prophecy of Immanuel's birth in 7:14, this prophecy of the Messiah here in
chapter 9 forms the basis for the New Testament understanding of the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth. He will be a human being, born of a virgin descended from David, but he will also be God himself. John will say in John 1:14: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. God through his prophet Isaiah told his people this would happen 700 years before Jesus was born!

Isaiah declares that the government or rule of the Messiah will increase and never end. The Hebrew words might be awkward in English but their meaning is clear. The authority, rule, dominion and government of the Messiah will grow and grow and it will never end. Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 28:18 that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to him. His statement reflects Isaiah's idea here. Not only will his government, dominion and authority increase and never end but peace or shalom will never cease either. The Prince of Peace will bring peace. His rule will be marked by wholeness and peace not coercion and violence. He will not be a despot like the kings of Assyria or even some of the kings of Judah. He will be a king whose reign will be marked by peace but will also give his people peace. Shalom will not be a temporary thing that will fade, it will continue forever.

If the identity of the coming king and Messiah was not certain before, Isaiah clears up all doubt. He will reign on the throne of his father David and over his kingdom. Not only will he reign over it he will establish it, make it firm and uphold it and sustain it. Isaiah speaks of a coming king from David's line who will be more than just a human king; he will be God himself. That king will reign one day and fulfill all of God's promises to David and Israel in 2 Samuel 7. He will reign forever, which means he will be immortal. He will be king forever! Nothing will ever again threaten God's people and the peace God desires to give them when Messiah reigns.

Isaiah continues his contrast with the tyrants who ruled the great empires around Israel like Assyria. The Messiah's reign will be marked by justice and righteousness. There will be no corruption, no bribery, no favorites who gain wealth and power because of their position. Justice and fairness will prevail. Righteousness based upon God's character and Law will be the standard by which Messiah reigns and rules. Human history has never seen such a king or ruler. There have been good kings but even they had their flaws. Messiah will rule as God rules with perfect justice and judgment. That rule will lead to shalom-peace because injustice and all the causes of strife, war and conflict will cease. John describes that rule in the Millennium in Revelation 20 and in the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21-22. Jesus has been shown to be the Messiah by his resurrection Paul says in Romans 1. Now we await his Second Coming to establish his Messianic kingdom forever.

The ESV translates the next clause, "from this time forth and forevermore." That implies the Messiah's kingdom will be established very soon, within Isaiah's lifetime. However, many other versions translate the phrase similar to the NIV, "from that time on and forever." The Hebrew word means now and so the ESV translates it "from this time". From the context it seems clear that Isaiah is looking forward to a future time. Yet he begins this section of the prophecy with the present declaration that a son is born not will be born. This is one of those places where prophecy telescopes time and speaks of a future event as if it is happening now or has already taken place. We know the Lord Jesus who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy was not born for another 700 plus years from the time Isaiah prophesied. However the language he uses gives hope to his people that soon the Messiah will be born. Just like Jesus and the New Testament gives us hope that the Lord Jesus will return soon even though it has been over 2000 years.
The most important phrase of this remarkable prophecy is the last one. The zeal of God himself will accomplish the birth and reign of the Messiah. The Hebrew word means zeal, jealousy, or passion. God wants to do this! He passionately wants to bring about the birth and rule of his Messiah. He will bring this about. Isaiah's meaning here is that nothing will stop the Lord of hosts from fulfilling his promise to bring Israel her Messiah. He will accomplish this even when all the events of history seem to mitigate against it. This promise, like many of the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, had to be believed in faith because the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem a century and a half later made Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah seem empty and ludicrous. God did bring the Messiah but not in the way Israel was looking for him. Paul says in Galatians 4:4-5: But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Isaiah only hints at the complete plan of God in his prophecy. Messiah was to bring more than just the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. He was to bring salvation from sin not only to Israel but to the Gentiles as well. The zeal and passion of God himself would bring this about!

9:8-12 - Isaiah now turns from the future when the Messiah will come and reign to the present and the threat of Assyria and God's judgment against Israel. The message is addressed to Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, namely the northern kingdom of Israel. They are full of pride and arrogance and the Lord is going to judge them. They do not see the defeats and judgments that have occurred as being from the Lord. In their pride they think they will rebuild greater and better than ever. That is the meaning of the bricks have fallen so we will rebuild with dressed stones and the sycamores or fig trees have been chopped down so we will plant cedars in their place. God sees their pride and he has had enough. They have lost all perspective and have forgotten their covenant with Yahweh. They think their security is of their own doing. They cannot see that as Yahweh has withdrawn his protection they need to repent. They deny their sin and in their pride think they can come back better than ever.

In verse 11 Isaiah says that the Lord raises the adversaries of Rezin against him. The word translated raises means to set on high or exalt in hostility. The NIV translates the word strengthened. The adversaries or foes Rezin faces are Assyria and her allies. Damascus fell in 732 and Isaiah foretells that disaster. He says God has spurred on Assyria to attack Rezin and Israel, which Tигlath Pileser did in 732. It is possible that this prophecy refers to a later date but the historical context fits best during Assyria's conquest of Damascus and their invasion and annexation of Galilee. If that is the case then the timing of Isaiah's prophecy is the same as the beginning of chapter 9 when he speaks directly to those living in Galilee after Assyria's invasion.

Verse 12 is difficult because Rezin and the Aramean or Syrian army and Pekah of Israel invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem to try and force Ahaz to join their alliance against Assyria. When Ahaz appealed to Tигlath Pileser he obliged, took Damascus and annexed Galilee severely crippling Israel. Right before the Assyrian invasion the Syrians and the Edomites captured the port of Elath on the Red Sea (see 2 King 16) and the Philistines raided and took towns in the Negev that belonged to Judah (see 2 Chronicles 28.) These appear to be the events to which Isaiah refers. However he says the Syrians and the Philistines devour Israel and not Judah, even though it was the nation of Judah that was attacked and the nation of Israel was approving of and helping the attackers. This is one of those places where Isaiah uses a theological title for Israel and not a political one. The Syrians and Philistines were raiding the
Promiseland of Israel not just the territory of the nation of Judah. Those attacks were judgments upon all of God's people both Judah and Israel.

The difficulty is in verse 9 Isaiah addresses his prophecy to Samaria and the north kingdom. Yet in verse 12 the context fits Judah and the south kingdom best. Isaiah is telling us that all of Israel, the theological Israel, God's people, are being judged. The north kingdom is beyond redemption and is doomed for destruction because of their pride and idolatry. The south kingdom will not be spared either unless they repent. Isaiah says for all of this, all the attacks and the looming threat of Assyria, God's anger has not been spent and his hand is still raised against his people. This phrase, "For all this his anger etc." is repeated four times in the section beginning at 9:8 and ending at 10:4. It is a literary device that ties together the entire section on God's judgment against Israel and why he is so angry with them.

9:13-17 - Isaiah says even though God has allowed Assyria to attack Israel and Syria and Philistia have raided towns in Judah yet the leaders and the people have not repented and returned to the Lord. Therefore the Lord will cut off the leaders from Israel. The word for cut off means to literally cut and is used in the phrase to "cut a covenant". In the context here it means to destroy, remove, or take away. God will take away the elders and wise counselors and the prophets who teach lies. Isaiah uses the phrase "head and tail, palm branch and reed." The head he says are the elders and the tail are the prophets.

The palm branch and reed are difficult to understand but because of the parallelism they are related to the head and tail. The entire phrase is used again in Isaiah 19:15 in a prophecy against Egypt. Isaiah says in a time of judgment and destruction the Egyptians will be helpless to stop it and won't know what to do; head or tail, palm branch or reed. The words for palm branch and reed are rare words in the Old Testament and only occur three or four times, two of which are here in Isaiah. My best guess is the palm branches refer to those who have position and status among the people like the elders. They are analogous to the head. The tail or the reed are those who are lowly or insignificant. They are the people who have no status. Isaiah relates them to the prophets which is difficult because prophets had status among the people but socially they could be of any class and were frequently not from the nobility or those in power.

Verse 16 clarifies what Isaiah is saying. He says those who have been guiding the people have led them astray. Those who are being guided are literally swallowed up, meaning are destroyed. The verb form implies the people are being acted upon not doing the acting. Isaiah sees the result of the leaders' guidance as the destruction of the people. They do not see the dangerous counsel and leadership their leaders are giving and they blindly follow them to their destruction! Is this the United States today?!

Isaiah reaches the conclusion in verse 17 that the Lord has handed over his people for judgment. He takes no pleasure in the young men, the next generation. He no longer has compassion for the fatherless and the widows. God frequently declares his compassion for this group of people and part of the prophets' indictment against Israel is their treatment of the vulnerable, the widows and the orphan. Israel's sin has gotten so bad that God sees even those he most cares about as ungodly and wicked. God declares that Israel has crossed a line of no return. Their sin is so great, including all the people not just the leaders, only his judgment upon them remains. Their sin has grown so horrible that every mouth only speaks villeness. The word means folly and or willful sin. It carries the idea of faulty thinking because the person disregards all moral or religious claims. They justify sin and the worst kinds of moral behavior and ignore God and his Law. They have descended into the worst kind of immorality and sin because of their
thinking. Paul describes that moral slide in Romans 1. There he says God gave them up to such thinking and allowed them to suffer the consequences of their wicked behavior. Isaiah says the same thing here in Isaiah 9.

God's anger has not turned away from his people. He will judge them and punish them for their wicked thinking and behavior.

9:18-21 - Isaiah paints the picture of the consequences of Israel and Judah's wicked behavior. The way the leaders and the people treat one another is like a wild fire. It burns everything in its path and nothing can stop it. The fire has been set ablaze by the wrath of God who desires Israel to repent but they do not. Instead, brother turns against brother, tribe against tribe. Nothing satisfies their wickedness and their desires. Verse 20 is analogous to addicts searching for another fix even though they know it is destroying them. They turn to the right and eat meat but are still hungry. They devour on the left but are not satisfied. In their cravings for more they even eat their own flesh. During the siege of Jerusalem in 587-586 Jeremiah describes the people turning to cannibalism in order to fend off starvation. I don't think Isaiah is being literal here about cannibalism but is showing how insatiable sin becomes in us when we surrender to it.

Their wickedness has become so prevalent that Manasseh devours Ephraim and vice versa. Manasseh and Ephraim were brothers, the two half-tribes of Joseph and each received a full share of the Promiseland. They were the two chief tribes of the north kingdom of Israel. Isaiah says they devour each other. Their sin and wickedness has destroyed their unity and even family means nothing. They fight against each other, but in their hatred and sin they both turn against Judah. This refers to Pekah and Israel attacking Ahaz and Judah.

Isaiah declares that God has allowed Israel to descend into this sinful behavior because it is an expression of his wrath against their wickedness. He is allowing it so that they will repent. His judgment is just so because their sin is so great he is not yet ready to withhold that judgment. There is still more to come. Israel is going to fall to the Assyrians and Judah will be Assyria's slave and vassal.

Chapter 10:
10:1-4 - Isaiah returns to speaking to the leaders of Israel and Judah but especially Israel. He says woe to those who issues oppressive decrees and makes unjust laws. Those laws exploit the poor, the oppressed, the widow and the orphan. They take advantage of them and deny them justice all in the name of power and wealth. They rob the poor yet do it in such a way that they claim they are following the law.

Isaiah says there is a day of judgment coming. He asks these crooked politicians and leaders what they will do when that day comes. When God brings the day of reckoning where will they run? That day is coming because the Lord is sending "disaster from afar", meaning Assyria. Where will the rich and powerful run for help? What will they do with the wealth they have gained by wicked means? God's judgment upon them will be so swift and so sudden that there will be nothing to do but cringe among the prisoners or die along with so many others. This is the Lord's doing and he will not turn away from his judgment or stay his hand.

Sin and corruption had so blinded the powerful in Israel that they could not or would not see the consequences of their actions. They would not repent. They knew the cost of Assyria invading Israel. They had seen what the Assyrians had done to Damascus, Syria and the nations who opposed them in Mesopotamia. Yet they would not repent. God was going to use Assyria to
judge his sinful people and the leaders who had led them into wickedness and idolatry God would judge the harshest.

Biblical history shows us that God judges nations and kings of even pagan states. He holds the nations to his standards of justice and righteousness. He held Israel and Judah to a higher standard because they were his covenant people and bound to him. Yet he did not allow Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome or any other modern nation to get away with injustice forever. Judgment ultimately fell upon them too. The United States and the corrupt men and women in our government need to heed this warning. God will not allow wicked behavior forever. The longer we continue in this pattern of greed and lust for power the more we sow the seeds of our own destruction. We as a nation need to repent and turn back to God and his ways or what happened to Israel and the nations around her will happen to us!

10:5-11 - The Lord speaks against Assyria yet confirms that he chose Assyria to punish and judge Israel. The Assyrians are the rod and staff in the Lord's hands to display his anger and wrath toward his sinful people. God has commanded the king of Assyria to attack and plunder Samaria and Jerusalem. The Lord desires Israel and Judah to be punished not destroyed. Yet that is not in the heart of the king of Assyria. His purpose is not to subdue nations and plunder them. His purpose is to eradicate them. Verses 5-7 express the conundrum of how God can use godless, violent, pagan nations to carry out his purposes in history. Habakkuk wrestled with this question in his prophecy in the days of Jeremiah and the Babylonian Empire. How can a holy and righteous God use such a nation? Isaiah's answer in verse 7 is that though God will use Assyria to punish Israel and Judah the king of Assyria has other plans. What is in God's mind to do is not in the king's mind. His heart's desires go beyond the Lord's purposes. God knows this and so Assyria is accountable to God as well for her actions. God will punish them if they go too far. God did destroy the Assyrian Empire a century after Isaiah through the attacks of the Medes and Babylonians.

Verses 8-11 are a quote by the King of Assyria, expressing his heart and what he intends to do. It is boastful and arrogant which the Lord acknowledges and judges in verses 12-19. He boasts that all his commanders are kings. Isaiah may be using a play on words here. The Hebrew word for commander or prince is sar, and the Assyrian word for king is sarru. The king of Assyria is saying, compared to all you little nations I have conquered even my captains are greater than your kings. He then mentions six cities, the last of which is Samaria, that were all either conquered by the Assyrians and became part of their empire or were destroyed by them. Each pair moves closer to Jerusalem. Thus Calno and Carchemish are cities on the Euphrates in northern Syria. Hamath and Arpad are a little south and west of Carchemish. Damascus is further south and finally Samaria which was the capital of Israel. The description expresses the inexorable conquests of the Assyrian armies and declares to Jerusalem that there is no hope of stopping Assyria's might.

Verses 10-11 confirm Isaiah's and the other prophets' indictment against Jerusalem. The pagan Assyrian king declares that he has captured and destroyed many pagan cities filled with great idols, much greater than those in Samaria and Jerusalem. He says he will do to Jerusalem and its idols what he did to Samaria and its idols. He will conquer the images of Jerusalem just as he did the other nations. Isaiah and the other prophets consistently preached against the idolatry of Jerusalem. They showed how the people had disobeyed the Lord and tried to worship Yahweh at the same time as they worshipped pagan gods and their idols. King Ahaz himself had placed the gods of Assyria in the temple of the Lord and constructed a pagan altar in the place of the
altar of the Lord, moving the altar of sacrifice aside to appease the king of Assyria and his gods. Isaiah declares to Ahaz and all Jerusalem that the strategy of appeasement will not work. The Lord God of Israel will not tolerate idolatry in his people because he is a jealous God. Jerusalem will be destroyed if it does not repent just as God allowed Assyria to destroy the nations of the Middle East, including Israel and its idolatrous capital Samaria.

10:12-14 - Isaiah develops a theme that is prevalent in other prophets like Jeremiah and Habakkuk. God will use a wicked pagan nation like Assyria or later Babylon to judge his sinful, disobedient people but he will not allow those nations to go unpunished for their wickedness either. In Jonah and Daniel we see God wanting the nations to acknowledge him as God and repent from their wickedness and idolatry. God may choose Assyria to chasten and punish Israel and Judah but he will not look the other way when they commit atrocities against his people or let their pride think that their empires were all their own doing and God had no say in their rule.

Isaiah says in verse 12 that after Assyria has finished the work God gave them to do against Judah and Jerusalem he will punish the willful pride of the king of Assyria's heart and the boastful look in his eyes. God abhors pride and it repulses him. It is wholly Satanic in nature because it is anti-God and wants to set up oneself over against God.

Isaiah quotes the king of Assyria, whether these were his actual words or words Isaiah gave him that reflect his attitude and character is unclear. The king of Assyria says by his own strength and efforts he has built his empire and conquered nation after nation. His own prowess has allowed him to plunder the nations and build the wealth of his empire. The last line of verse 13 is disputed. The NIV reads, *like a mighty one I subdued their kings*; the NASB reads the same and takes the word for mighty one in a general sense. Other translations like the ESV, NRSV, NLT and Good News translate the word in a more specific sense as a bull, painting the picture of a charging bull that sweeps away anything in its path. The word generally means mighty or violent but can specifically refer to a bull. No matter which way one translates the word the picture is clear. The king of Assyria has charged through nation after nation and no one has been able to halt him.

He declares he is so powerful and unstoppable he is like someone who gathers eggs from a bird's nest. He has taken what he wants because there is no one to stop him. The nations and their wealth were vulnerable like a nest that had been abandon. No mother bird was there to drive him away so he took what he wanted. The picture Isaiah paints is of a ruler who is so arrogant and full of pride in his own power that he cannot see it is God who has allowed him to rule and has allowed him to conquer other peoples. God alone is Lord of history and sets up and removes kings according to his plan and will. This theme will occur again and again in Isaiah. It climaxes in Isaiah 44 & 45 where God calls Cyrus the Great of Persia his shepherd, servant and anointed one to deliver his people from Babylon and allow them to return to Jerusalem.

10:15-19 - God responds to the King of Assyria's boast. What he says is reminiscent of God's words about the potter and the clay in Isaiah 29 & Jeremiah 18. Assyria is like the axe or saw in God's hands to carry out his work. God says Assyria's boasting is like a rod or staff wielding the one who lifts it. The Assyrian king has refused to acknowledge that he rules and wields his power because of God. God warns the boastful king that he will send a wasting sickness among his army and a fire will be kindled among them that cannot be put out. God himself will burn against the Assyrian army and they will be devoured in one day. Then the Lord will turn his anger and judgment against the land of Assyria. His forests and fertile fields will be destroyed.
After the Lord is finished the destruction of the forests of Assyria will be so complete a child will be able to count the trees because they will be so few. The Assyrian Empire collapsed almost overnight when the Babylonians and Medes destroyed Nineveh in 612 BC fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy.

2 Kings 19 and Isaiah 37 tell the story of God delivering Jerusalem from Sennacherib King of Assyria when he had laid waste to Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. God sent a plague among the Assyrian army and crippled it so badly that Sennacherib was forced to withdraw and Jerusalem was saved. It is quite possible Isaiah is looking forward prophetically to this incident or this section of chapter 10 was written after Sennacherib's invasion. Given the context it is more likely Isaiah is looking forward and foretelling what God will do to protect his people and judge the destroyer Assyria. God will allow the Assyrian invasion to chasten and punish his people but he will by no means withhold his justice against this brutal pagan power. The Holy One of Israel is not only Israel's God he is the Lord of the nations and of history itself; a theme repeated again and again in Israel's prophets.

10:20-27 - After passages of God's judgment on both Israel and Assyria, Isaiah introduces a key concept in his prophecy; the idea of the remnant of God's people. Both Israel and Judah struggled with making sense out of the destruction wrought by both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. One of the chief responses by people was God has abandon us as his people. His covenant with us is null and void because he has allowed Israel to be destroyed and Jerusalem and his temple to be burned to the ground. Isaiah's prophecy spans both times from the late 700's when the Assyrians destroyed the north kingdom of Israel to the early and middle 500's when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The two nations of Israel and Judah ceased to exist. Were the Jews still God's people? They asked if God was so angry with us he allowed our nations to be destroyed what hope have we? Isaiah's answer to these questions and issues was the concept of the remnant. God had not forgotten his people; he had chastised and punished them for their idolatry and sin. He still had plans for them. Those plans however were no longer focused on the nations of Israel and Judah and his covenant would not be tied to them any longer. Rather God's plans would be worked out in history through a remnant of his people. He preserved them through both the calamity of 721 during the fall of Samaria and 586 and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Jeremiah and Ezekiel would pick up Isaiah's concept and use it to help the Jews make sense of what had happened and point them to a new future. Isaiah outlines these concepts in verses 20-27.

In that day, refers back to the judgments of both Israel and Assyria. In some future time of great turmoil when Israel has gone through God's judgment God will save a remnant of the survivors of the house of Jacob. Not all of his people will perish in the cataclysm. Some will survive and out of them God will forge a new future for his people Israel. A key idea linked to the remnant is that they will be faithful to the Lord. Whereas the majority of Israel and Judah had descended into the worst kind of pagan idolatry the remnant God will preserve through the cleansing of his people will rely on the Lord. They will keep his covenant. They will lean on the Lord and not Assyria, Egypt or any other nation. They will not count on political alliances to keep them safe. They will count on the Lord their God, the mighty God. This is the title Isaiah used in chapter 9 to describe the Messiah from David's line. It is possible Isaiah is hinting that the faithful remnant of Israel will be revealed in the days of the coming of the Messiah, the Mighty God.
God acknowledges that the people of Israel had been like the sands of the sea. But after the destruction of the two faithless nations only a remnant of them will return. The idea of return points to a time of exile when God's people will live far away from the land God gave to them. This literally was fulfilled when the Assyrians took into exile many of the survivors of the fall of Samaria and the Babylonians took the cream of Judah's leadership to exile in Babylon. Isaiah is telling the Jews many will go into exile but someday God will bring a remnant back to the Promised Land!

God has decreed destruction, the destruction of Israel as a nation and later the destruction of Judah, the temple and Jerusalem itself. God's decree of judgment will be overwhelming but it will be righteous. Part of the task of the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel was to prepare the people for the coming calamity. They were to warn them God's patience had run out concerning their idolatry and wickedness. What was coming was what their sins deserved because they had committed adultery with other gods and divorced themselves from God's covenant with them. Without their ministries the people in their grief would have arrived at the wrong answer as to whether God had abandoned them permanently. God punished them and his punishment was righteous and they deserved it, but he would preserve a remnant, a faithful remnant. From the ashes of Israel and Judah God would raise up a faithful people for himself through whom he would carry out his plan. That plan Isaiah had already prophesied in chapters 7 & 9; the coming of Immanuel, the Messiah.

Isaiah tells those who live in Zion, in Jerusalem, not to be afraid of the Assyrians even when they strike Jerusalem and the people as the Egyptians did before the Exodus. Is Isaiah speaking to all the people here or to the faithful remnant? It would have been very difficult indeed not to be afraid when Sennacherib's armies surrounded Jerusalem and he had laid waste to most of the fortified cities in Judah. In fact in 2 Kings 18 & Isaiah 36 it is clear that even King Hezekiah is terrified of the Assyrian army and what it will do. Those who had lost their faith in Yahweh were most certainly afraid. Even the king who had a strong faith in God was afraid. I think however that Isaiah is speaking here to the remnant. He tells them God's fury over Israel and Judah's sin will come to an end very soon. Then his anger will be directed to the destruction of Assyria. They will not survive and will be judged for their cruelty and wickedness as well because ALL nations are accountable to the Lord of History, Yahweh of Hosts! Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 but the Lord delivered Jerusalem by sending a plague among the Assyrian army and he was forced to withdraw. Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his sons in 681 and Assyria fell as an empire when the Medes and Babylonians sacked Nineveh in 612. Within 90 years of Isaiah's prophecy of Assyria's destruction following Assyria's attack on Judah it was fulfilled!

Isaiah declares that the Lord will lash Assyria with a whip like he did when Gideon defeated the Midianites in Judges 7. The Lord will raise his staff "over the waters" in the NIV. The ESV reads "over the sea." The word is most often translated as sea like the Mediterranean Sea or the Sea of Galilee. In context here the NIV captures the most likely meaning. God is going to part the "waters" like he parted the Red Sea to allow the Children of Israel to flee the Egyptians in Exodus 14. The "waters" in context are probably the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers which the Babylonians and Medes had to overcome when they conquered Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. Nineveh was built on the banks of the Tigris River and a smaller river that flowed through the city. The Babylonian Chronicles tell how the combined forces of the Medes, Scythians and Babylonians were able to gain access to the city through breaches in the walls from the flooding rivers. Isaiah's prophecy was literally fulfilled!
God declares when Assyria falls the burden will depart from Israel's shoulder. The yoke will be lifted from their necks. These words Jesus echoes in Matthew 11 when he speaks of the yoke of the Jewish Law as it had been embellished by the Pharisees. Jesus' burden will be light and his yoke will be easy.

The last phrase of verse 27 is difficult because the meaning of the Hebrew words is uncertain. The NIV translates the phrase, "because you have grown so fat." The ESV translates it, "will be broken because of the fat." The NLT follows the Septuagint here and translates the phrase, "and lift it from their shoulders." It avoids "the fat" altogether. A permanent solution cannot be found at this time to the meaning of the Hebrew words. It does not however radically alter the overall meaning. God is going to lift the Assyrian yoke from his people when he judges Assyria. Ultimately Jesus will lift the yoke and burden of the guilt of the Law from our shoulders and will end our bondage to sin!

10:28-34 - Isaiah mentions several cities and towns in the territory of Benjamin in this section, like Migron, Geba, Ramah, Gibeah and Anathoth. He lists other towns as well like Aiath and Laishah which are otherwise unknown. However, from the context we can assume they are probably in the territory of Benjamin as well. Isaiah says "he has come to Aiath," meaning the King of Assyria, probably referring to Sennacherib and his invasion of Judah in 701. Isaiah describes the invading Assyrian army approaching from the north through the territory of Benjamin in order to reach Jerusalem. Historically this was how most invading armies approached Jerusalem. Technically Sennacherib approached Jerusalem from the southwest after laying waste to Lachish, the last fortified city standing against the Assyrians. The description here is more poetic than literally historical. However, the Assyrians did come from the north when they invaded Judah even as they moved to destroy its fortified cities including Lachish before laying siege to Jerusalem. The point is Assyria is coming and the people cannot stop them. They have no power to resist such an army. Isaiah has already said Assyria is the hand of the Lord's judgment against them. Sennacherib and his horde will shake their fists at Mt. Zion and the hill of Jerusalem, which could be the Temple Mount.

However, just as all seems lost and defeat is all but certain God will intervene. Even as he has used Assyria to judge faithless Israel and Judah so he will judge the arrogant and wicked Assyrians. Isaiah uses the metaphor of God chopping down the forests of Lebanon. He will bring the lofty down like a tree is cut down in the forest. In the end it will be God's majesty that will be lifted high not Sennacherib and the Assyrian might. No king or nation will be able to stand long who exalts themselves before the Lord Most High. He is the one who sets up kings and brings them down again. The remnant of God's people Israel can be confident that God will bring the arrogant pagan Assyrians to justice. Their wicked, cruel empire will not last. By 612 Nineveh was in ruins and Assyria had collapsed, never to rise again. The prophet Nahum describes its fall in Nahum 3:18-19: O king of Assyria, your shepherds slumber; your nobles lie down to rest. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them. Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?

Chapter 11:

11:1-5 - Isaiah now turns from the judgments of Israel and Assyria to the line of David. Yet instead of a new pronouncement of judgment upon David's line he declares that out of the "stump of Jesse" a new king will come. This is the third great prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah.
following the ones in chapters 7 & 9. If Isaiah gave this prophecy during Ahaz' reign then it is not hard to see how he viewed the line of David as a stump. The line had failed and brought forth a cowardly, idolatrous king who did not follow the Lord and refused to trust him. Even if this prophecy was given during Hezekiah's day Isaiah knew the lineage of David was waning. If he lived into Manasseh's reign he saw the most wicked, idolatrous king in the history of David's lineage. By Jeremiah's day after Josiah's death the line had failed utterly and God removed their ability to rule over his people.

Isaiah says in some future time a shoot will emerge and a branch grow from the roots of Jesse's family tree. It will appear to all that the line has failed, the tree has been cut down and all that remains is a stump. Yet out of that stump will grow a new branch. The stump may express God's covenant with David which was unconditional and grace based. God promised David in 2 Samuel 7 that a son of his would sit upon his throne forever and God would be a father to him and the king would be like God's son. This covenant is the foundation of all the Messianic promises in the prophets. It will appear God's promise to David has failed but God will raise up a new king in the future who will fulfill the covenant God made with the "man after God's own heart." The branch will bear fruit for God, his Kingdom and his people. This picture of David's future genealogy can apply to Jesus' line through both Joseph, through Solomon (see Matthew 1) and Mary, through David's ninth son Nathan, also a son of Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 5:14, 1 Chronicles 3:4-5 & Luke 3).

The king to come would be filled and endowed with the Holy Spirit in a special way. The Hebrew word is rest, which means not only the absence of movement but something being settled in a particular place with overtones of finality or permanence. In other words the Spirit of the Lord will settle onto or into the Messiah and he will not leave him like he had left King Saul. God will not remove his Spirit from the one who is to come. In the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 God promises, "But my love will never be taken away from him as I took it away from Saul (2 Samuel 7:15)." God promises his Spirit will rest on the future king. All four gospels describe the Spirit of God coming down from heaven and resting upon Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan by John. See Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, and John 1.

Isaiah then uses three poetic couplets in Hebrew. The Spirit will be the one of first, wisdom and understanding; second, counsel and might; and third knowledge and the fear of the Lord. John in Revelation 1, 3 & 5 ignores the Hebrew parallelism and names the Spirit the "seven spirits of God." He counts seven by using, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might or power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord: thus seven. The point is all the Spirit's gifts and presence will be given to the Messiah. He will be endowed with God's Spirit unlike anyone before or after him. It will be the same Spirit that was hovering over creation at the beginning in Genesis 1. The same Spirit who was with Israel in the wilderness and the one who anointed David his father and all the prophets.

Wisdom and understanding are frequent poetic synonyms in the Wisdom Writings. Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom in order to rule God's people. He founded a movement of wise counselors and teachers that valued wisdom and the fear of the Lord above all things. The Messiah will have such wisdom. In Luke 2:47 the priests and teachers of the Law are astounded by the young Jesus' "knowledge" and answers to their questions. The Greek word for knowledge is the same word used by the Septuagint in Isaiah 11:2. The crowds at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 are astonished at Jesus' teaching because he taught them as one with authority not like their scribes. And in Luke 20 the Pharisees are astounded by Jesus' answer to
their question of whether people should pay taxes to Caesar. His shrewd mind stumps them so badly they stop trying to trap Jesus with their questions.

Counsel and might, or counsel and power as the NIV translates the phrase, are the next pair. These two words are not necessarily synonyms like wisdom and understanding. Counsel can mean wise counsel like that of the king’s advisor. It is also used to describe a victorious general making battle plans but that is not a common usage. The word for might is often used to describe God’s might and power to work out his plan and will in the world. It frequently refers to his miraculous power. If Isaiah means for the two words to be related then it is most likely they describe God’s ability to devise successful strategies against his enemies and his power or might to carry out those strategies. Isaiah uses the name Wonderful Counselor in Isaiah 9 to describe the Messiah. The word for counselor is a synonym for but not the same root word in Hebrew as counsel here in chapter 11. The New Bible Commentary describes the three couplets as wisdom and understanding for government; counsel and power for war against God’s enemies and knowledge and the fear of the Lord for spiritual leadership.

The third pair of words that describe the Spirit of the Lord that will rest on the Messiah is knowledge and the fear of the Lord. The Hebrew word for knowledge is the common word yada. It means more than simply an accumulation of facts and information. It is related to moral and relational knowledge and is often used in the context of knowing God. In the Wisdom Writings it is a synonym of wisdom and understanding. It is also used in the context of marital intimacy as in Genesis 4:1 where Adam "knew" his wife and she conceived and bore a son. In the context here in Isaiah 11 it is clearly related to the fear of the Lord and means a relational knowledge of God. The Messiah will “know” the Lord intimately. He will be filled with the fear of the Lord which is a phrase also frequently used in the Wisdom Writings and means not terror of God but awe, worship, respect and the desire to obey God in all things. Proverbs 1:7 says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. If one would possess wisdom and understanding of people and the universe then one must begin with a healthy fear, awe and respect of the Creator. That is the fear of the Lord. The phrase is closely related to one who practices obedience to God’s commands. Thus the Messiah will have an intimate personal relationship or knowledge of God and will practice reverence and obedience to God in his life. Jesus said in John 6 that his food was to do the will of the Father who sent him. He said in Luke 10 that no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. The Gospels demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies of the Messiah!

Verse 3 begins with an interesting phrase. The Messiah’s delight will be in the fear of the Lord. The word for delight is from the root word ruach, meaning wind, breath or spirit. Here it means fragrance, something one smells that gives off a pleasant odor like a flower. The word is sometimes used to describe the "pleasing aroma" of sacrifices to God. See Genesis 8. Isaiah’s implication is clear. The Messiah will delight not in sacrifices but in the fear of the Lord; in awe, reverence and obedience to God rather than ritual.

The Messiah will judge by righteousness rather than appearances. He will not let what is visible and audible sway his judgments. He will see into the heart of the matter and God’s righteous will. He will not allow the poor and the humble and meek to be taken advantage of but instead will stand with them and be an advocate for them. The NIV reads needy and poor while the ESV reads poor and meek. The words are synonyms. Jesus in John 8 demonstrates this quality with the woman caught in adultery. By all appearances the woman was guilty and should have been stoned according to the Law of Moses. The Pharisees were right. But Jesus perceived what was in their hearts and demanded the one without sin should cast the first stone. They all
left knowing that none of them were without sin. They were only using the woman for their own selfish ends to trap Jesus. He refuses to condemn her but he also exhorts her to repent and sin no more. That is the kind of justice and wisdom Isaiah says the Messiah will have.

Verse 4 implies God has a special place in his heart for the poor and the meek or humble. They have no one to speak or advocate for them. The rich and powerful have all the advantages in this world. Jesus in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and Luke 6 reinforces Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus affirms it is the poor in spirit and the poor who will receive the Kingdom of God. It is the meek who will inherit the earth. The rich and powerful now have their reward. It is to the lowly and humble God will give his Kingdom! God's justice is upside down compared to the world's. Messiah will set things right!

Isaiah says the Messiah will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and slay the wicked with his breath. In Revelation 19 when the Lord Jesus returns he defeats the armies of the antichrist with the sword that comes out of his mouth which symbolizes the Word of God. He speaks and the wicked are destroyed. The idea is similar here. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 that the Lord Jesus when he comes will slay the lawless one, the antichrist, with the breath of his mouth. The word for breath in Hebrew is ruach which is the same word for wind or spirit. The word for rod can mean a scepter or club but is most often translated as rod, meaning a shepherd's rod with which he strikes the sheep. The NLT translates the phrase, "strike the earth with the rod of his mouth" as: "the earth will shake at the force of his word." The image of the rod out of the Messiah's mouth and his breath slaying the wicked are related to his Word. The Messiah speaks the Word of God, including words of judgment.

Righteousness will be like his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The Hebrew word for belt and sash is the same word. The ESV translates it that way using belt in both lines. The word can also mean waist cloth or loincloth and that is probably the meaning here. The NLT translates verse 5: He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment. That captures Isaiah's meaning well.

Righteousness is the normal Hebrew word for the term and means right conduct or character most often referring to God's character. His Law is righteous because it reflects his holy character. A synonym is justice. God is righteous and just and a righteous man or woman reflects God in his or her character and actions. Faithfulness reflects God's fidelity to his Word, his promises. His character is certain. The word is related to faith as certainty in what God will do. God always fulfills his Word. He never breaks his promise. He is faithful. Paul uses a similar concept in describing one part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: faithfulness which I often translate as fidelity. God is faithful to his promises and in all his relationships. Fidelity here means the same thing. God is faithful and sure in keeping his covenant with his people. They may break it but he NEVER will! Paul expresses this idea well in 2 Timothy 2:13: If we are faithless he will remain faithful, for he cannot deny himself. Messiah will act in righteousness and faithfulness because he has the character and Spirit of God!

11:6-9 - Isaiah expands his vision of the Messiah's reign to the creation. What he describes is beyond anyone's experience. Is his description meant to be taken literally or is it poetic language expressing an extraordinary change in creation? It is difficult to tell. His picture describes a complete change in all the biological processes we observe and know in nature. The wolf and the lamb dwell together in peace as do the leopard and the young goat. Lions no longer hunt the cattle and a little child shall lead them all. A bear grazes in the field like a cow and lions cease to be predators but eat straw like an ox. All signs of violence have been removed from the animal
world, especially the relationship between predator and prey. Does this change run all throughout the food-chain or only with the large animals? Do birds stop eating insects or whales stop eating krill? These are the kinds of questions that lead me to believe this is poetic language Isaiah uses to describe a renewed earth. Paradise will be restored when the Messiah reigns!

Any danger from the animal and natural world will cease. In the covenant punishments of Leviticus 26 attacks and death by wild beasts were part of the punishments. In the paradise of the Messiah's reign that no longer occurs. Isaiah pictures a child playing over a cobra's hole or sticking his hand into an adder's den. Those actions would invite serious injury and even death. But in the renewed earth of the Messiah's reign they are no longer even dangerous.

Verse 9 summarizes what Isaiah is saying. "They shall not harm or destroy". "They" refers initially to wild animals but is also inclusive of people as well. All violence and actions that lead to pain and death will be banished from God's Kingdom. John pictures such a world in his vision of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21-22 where there is no more death, crying, suffering or pain.

The image of God's holy mountain represents his Kingdom. It is first symbolic of Jerusalem or the Temple Mount, the literal mountain of God's presence. In Isaiah 2 the mountain of the Lord's temple is established as the greatest in all the earth. That symbolizes his power, rule and Kingdom. In Isaiah 25 the prophet sees God preparing a great feast for his people especially the poor and on his mountain he will destroy death forever. In Daniel 2 Nebuchadnezzar dreams about a great statue that is destroyed by a rock not cut out by human hands. The rock becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth. Daniel tells the king that God has revealed human history to him. The rock that becomes the mountain is the Kingdom and rule of God. Isaiah shows us that when the Messiah comes and God's reign is finally established violence and death will be banished from the earth because all will know the Lord. The whole earth will know the Lord just like the waters cover the oceans. The noun for knowledge is from the common root yada in Hebrew. It means relational knowledge, a close intimate knowing of a person not the remembrance of facts. It is the same root that Isaiah used to describe the Spirit of the Lord which resides in the Messiah. He has the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. When all peoples everywhere know the Lord in his Kingdom paradise conditions will come again upon the earth. This will all happen when the Messiah comes, when the Branch is revealed.

John's vision of both the Millennial Kingdom and the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 20-22 fulfills Isaiah's vision. The Lord Jesus is the Messiah who brings the Kingdom of God. His first coming reconciled the human race to God and paid for our sins. His second coming will finish his work and he will establish God's rule and reign forever and the earth will be renewed. Jesus is the Messiah Isaiah prophesies here in chapter 11.

11:10-11 - Verses 10-11 and 12-16 are related. Verses 10-11 declare that in the days of the Messiah God will bring his people back from all the nations to which they were scattered. Verses 12-16 say essentially the same thing yet do it in a poetic form rather than a simple declaration.

Isaiah declares that in the days of the Messiah he will stand as a signal (ESV) or banner (NIV) for the peoples, meaning the Gentiles. The word for banner or signal most often refers to a battle standard used to rally troops to a position. The Messiah will rally the nations to himself not for battle but for rest. The word refers to a place of safety and security. The nations will find rest from the world and from their enemies. Since this passage occurs in the context of Isaiah's description of the Messiah's reign, rest here describes salvation from sin and the forces of evil. Hebrews 4 describes God's reign in terms of the Sabbath rest of God's people. That is what
Isaiah is speaking about here as well only it includes the Gentiles not just the Jews! This passage points to the salvation of the Gentiles when the Messiah establishes his Kingdom for his people.

This is not the only time that Isaiah relates the reign of the Messiah with the salvation of the Gentiles. He repeats the theme again in chapters 56, 60 & 66. Paul saw his mission as fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies that when the Messiah came the Gentiles would come to God. See Romans 9-11 and Romans 15.

In verse 11 Isaiah says the Lord will rescue his people from all the nations to which they have been scattered. He will reclaim the remnant of his people. Isaiah describes God's rescue of his people as a second Exodus. "The Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people." He then lists the places from which he will rescue them: Assyria, Lower and Upper Egypt (Pathros), Cush or Sudan, Elam on the Persian Gulf, Shinar which is Babylon, Hamath in northern Syria and the coastlands of the sea. That is a general term meaning the coastal areas of Greece, Turkey and the islands of the Mediterranean like Cyprus and Crete. It usually describes a place quite distant from Israel. However, the Jews were not a seafaring people and so any distance from the Promiseland that needed to be reached by ship to them was a great distance.

11:12-16 - Verses 12-16 repeat and expand Isaiah's declaration of a Second Exodus for God's people. This time he puts it in poetic form. God will raise a signal or banner for the nations presumably to "let his people go." The Lord will gather the exiles of Israel and Judah from the four corners of the earth, meaning from all the places to which they have been scattered. It is difficult to know when Isaiah wrote this section but it clearly speaks to a time when both Israel and Judah have gone into exile. The Assyrians sent Israel into exile in 721. The Babylonians sent Judah into exile in 597 & 586. God is going to rescue his people. Isaiah develops this theme in much greater detail in the second half of his prophecy in chapter 40-66.

One new detail Isaiah adds to his declaration in verses 10-11 is that when God gathers the remnant of his people the jealousy and hostility between Israel and Judah or between the northern and southern tribes will cease. God will not only rescue them he will reconcile them and give them rest from their enemies. They will be one people again. This theme is picked up in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well. See especially Jeremiah 31 & Ezekiel 37.

The whole people of God, Israel and Judah, will sweep away their enemies. They will come down on Philistia in the west and subdue the nations to their east, Edom, Moab and Ammon. Their territory will be restored which these other nations had claimed when Israel and Judah were weakened by invasion from Assyria, Egypt and Babylon.

Verse 15 describes God making a way for his people to return home. He will "dry up the gulf of the Egyptian Sea" (NIV) or "utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt" (ESV). The Gulf of the Egyptian Sea is probably the Red Sea and perhaps more specifically the Gulf of Aqaba. God will dry up the waters as he did when he rescued Israel from Egypt in the Exodus. The people who have fled to Egypt to escape the carnage will return home to their land on dry land.

God will send a scorching wind over the Euphrates River in order to dry it up. Rather than a major barrier that was difficult to ford the Lord will split up the river into seven channels that people will be able to cross in sandals! In other words God will clear the way for his people to come home. The remnant that has been taken to Assyria in exile God will rescue and bring back the Promiseland. God's rescue of the exiles will be like his rescue of the slaves in Egypt; a Second Exodus!
From an historical fulfillment perspective the return of the exiles under Zerubbabel in 538 partially fulfills Isaiah's prophecy. Some of the Jews did return home to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. However, because the larger context of this prophecy is in a passage concerning the coming of the Messiah and his reign, the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy is yet to occur. It is possible that the modern emigration of many Jews back to the nation of Israel is a beginning of the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision. It is difficult to deny that God is doing something with the Jews today and it cannot be coincidental that many are returning to their ancestral home after the horrific persecution they have endured over the last several centuries especially in the Holocaust. One must however not be too quick to say the Jewish emigration to Israel in the 20th and 21st centuries is the fulfillment of Isaiah 11. Other places in Isaiah and in Ezekiel make it plain that the remnant God will gather in the last days when the Messiah reigns will be his righteous remnant. See Isaiah 10 and Ezekiel 36-37. The modern secular state of Israel can hardly be called the righteous remnant. Clearly there is more for God to do. However, to see the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the return of many Jews to their homeland as nothing more than a coincidence of history is to deny the miraculous nature of the founding of Israel and the survival of the Jews. God is still active with his ancient people even if a majority still rejects Jesus as their Messiah. We know from Romans 11 someday they will recognize him and worship him. It appears what we see happening today with the Jews is at least a beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy.

Chapter 12:

12:1-2 - All of chapter 12 is a song of praise to God for rescuing Israel out of exile and bringing her back to the Promiseland during the reign of the Messiah. It looks back on God's mighty deeds through the Messiah Isaiah prophesies about in chapter 11. It is composed in two parts, verses 1-3 & verses 4-6, with each part beginning with the phrase "In that day you will say." Isaiah uses quotes from various Psalms and even the Song of Moses from Exodus 15. He might have used so many quotes in order to connect the future remnant that God will save with the people the Lord rescued out of slavery in Egypt and to whom he gave the Promiseland. The beginning phrase, you will say in that day, of each stanza connects the poem with chapter 11 and the Messiah. Just as Israel celebrated the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea so will the remnant celebrate Messiah's victory and their return home. Because there are so many quotes from Psalms and other parts of the Old Testament this shows us that Isaiah had access to many of the scrolls of the Hebrew Scriptures even if they were not during his time collected into what we know today as the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible. This speaks in favor of an earlier date for their composition than many of the more liberal scholars want to give.

Verse 1 begins with "in that day you will say (NIV)," which is repeated in the second half of the psalm in verse 4. Isaiah uses this phrase back in 10:20 concerning the remnant who have survived the Lord's anger and judgment. They will rely on the Lord and not on the nations around them. By this literary device Isaiah ties the entire section from 10:20 to chapter 12 together and confirms that this psalm of praise is the words of the remnant spoken after the Messiah has rescued them.

The people declare their praise to the Lord. The ESV translates the word give thanks as do some others. The root means to declare, confess or to cast or throw. It is used frequently in the prophets and the Psalms for praise or give thanks. It means to declare publicly what God has done. The remnant praises God because he is no longer angry with them. The Lord's anger over Israel and Judah's sin in chapters 9 & 10 has now dissipated. The Lord's punishment for their
disobedience is finished. Now they experience God's comfort or consolation. Isaiah shows us that even if the Lord is angry with us over our sin and disciplines us for that sin his first inclination is to forgiveness and comfort. He loves us like a parent loves their children. No parent takes pleasure in discipline and punishment for their children. They do it because they love them and want to correct them. When the punishment is over they are moved with compassion to reassure the child he or she is loved and forgiven. That is Isaiah's picture here.

Verse 2 begins with a declaration of God's salvation. This is a theme that is repeated frequently all throughout both halves of Isaiah's prophecy. The curious thing about these verses is that the verbs and pronouns are all singular in verses 1-2 but they shift to plural in verses 3-5 but back to singular in verse 6. Perhaps Isaiah is trying to show that the remnant is made up of individuals who trust in the Lord. This is a major theme in Jeremiah and Ezekiel and marks a turning point in Israel's theology. Rather than simply see God's people as a corporate entity made up of people who were born into Israel the prophets see Israel as made up of individuals who believe in Yahweh and have a relationship with him. This is a New Testament view of God's people. Israel is still a people but who makes up that people shifts to those who have faith. Isaiah is describing the remnant of Israel in the days of the Messiah in chapter 12. From a New Testament perspective he is describing the church!

There is another remarkable part of verse 2 from a New Testament perspective as well. The word for salvation in Hebrew is yeshuat from yeshua. Yeshua is the Hebrew form of Jesus and Jesus is Israel's Messiah! Did Isaiah know this when he was writing it? Probably not, but God knew it and the connection between God's salvation that he will provide through his Son and the name of that Son when he became a human being is too great to ignore.

Isaiah writes the remnant will trust the Lord and not be afraid. This is in marked contrast to his people living in the midst of Yahweh's judgment over their sin. When they were experiencing the Lord's anger they were very afraid, especially as the Assyrians and Babylonians were before the walls of Samaria and Jerusalem. They wondered whether God had abandoned them. Now they know that God has kept his covenant with them. The word for trust is a frequently used word in the Old Testament. It means to be confident in and feel safe. The word for fear means to tremble or be filled with dread in the face of danger or threat. The two words are complete opposites.

Isaiah gives the reason the remnant no longer has to quake in terror but can trust the Lord. He quotes a line from the Song of Moses in Exodus 15 which Moses sang after the Lord had defeated Pharaoh and his chariots at the Red Sea. The phrase is also repeated in Psalm 118. "The Lord God is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation." The ESV translates the Hebrew words Yah Yahweh, the Lord God. The NIV translates the phrase, the Lord, the Lord. It is basically a repeat of God's name with a slightly different spelling. Yah is a word that means God and Yahweh is the Lord's sacred name, the Tetragrammaton. Strength means power, might or strong fortress. Song is a melody of praise sung to God. Salvation is once again the Hebrew word yeshua. By quoting the line from Exodus and Moses' song Isaiah directly links the salvation of the remnant with God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The return of the exiles during the coming of the Messiah will be like a second exodus and a re-founding of the Lord's people. Isaiah will describe the return of the Babylonian exiles as a second exodus in the latter half of his prophecy.

12:3-6 - The verbs and pronouns in verses 3-5 shift to plural in Hebrew. Isaiah gives no explanation for the shift nor why in verse 6 he shifts back to singular again.
Isaiah says in the days of the Messiah when the remnant of Israel is gathered together they will experience joy like thirsty people drawing water from a well. Jesus used that image with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4.

Verse 4 begins with “and you will say in that day” which ties the verses that follow with verses 1-2. It also maintains the time frame of the days of the Messiah. Verse 4 is a compilation of quotes from the Psalms. The first line, “give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name,” is from Psalm 105. It is a restatement of all the mighty deeds God performed in rescuing Israel from Egypt and slavery. It is unclear from the Psalm when Psalm 105 was written and whether the Psalm quotes Isaiah or Isaiah quotes the Psalm. However, Psalm 105 is also a repeat of the psalm David composed and gave to Asaph when the ark was brought into Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 16. It would make sense that Psalm 105 was in use in the temple in Isaiah's day and Isaiah quotes it.

The second line of verse 4 is a compilation of quotes from Psalm 145 and Psalm 148. Make known among the peoples or nations what the Lord has done is a frequent theme in Isaiah and points back to God's purpose for Israel when he called them at Mt. Sinai. They were to be his holy people whose job it would be to live in such a way and to speak in such a way that the nations would want to know more about Yahweh. In the days of the Messiah Israel's task will still be the same. Isaiah 11 & 52 say the Gentiles will come to the Lord when the Messiah comes. Paul uses that idea in Romans 15 when he declares that his Gentile mission is a fulfillment of prophecy because the Gentiles are coming to God through Jesus the Messiah. The word for proclaim means to declare. The righteous remnant of Israel gathered together when the Messiah comes will call all peoples to the Lord God. They will be his evangelists!

Verse 5 begins with a quote from Exodus 15 which is repeated in Psalm 98. "The Lord has done gloriously" is very similar to both Moses' song in Exodus 15:1 and Miriam's short song in Exodus 15:21 that she led when all the women sang to celebrate the fact that Yahweh had thrown the Egyptian chariots into the sea and defeated Pharaoh's army. Psalm 98 repeats the theme in a more general manner. Isaiah says the scope of Israel's praise is not just to the Jewish people but to all the nations, to the whole world!

Verse 6 returns to singular pronouns like in verses 1 & 2. It could be Isaiah's way of showing us that even though all the people will praise the Lord to the nations, the remnant of Israel is composed of individuals who are faithful to Yahweh and have faith in him. This concept agrees with Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The people of God are composed of those who have faith in God not those who have simply been born a Jew. This is a New Testament concept and points to the church of the Lord Jesus who is the Messiah Isaiah prophesies is coming.

Isaiah invites the people of Zion to sing and shout for joy. The invitation is given to the individual citizen of Jerusalem yet it is clearly an invitation to all the inhabitants of the city. Why sing and shout for joy? Great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel! Many times in Psalms God is called great. The key here is God is great among his people. He is not far away. He has not abandoned them even though they have gone through a terrible time of testing and judgment. God is once again among them and doing great things for them.

The Lord is the Holy One of Israel. This is one of Isaiah's favorite titles for God throughout his prophecy which unifies it together. It is also a title other prophets use like Hosea in Hosea 11 or Ezekiel in Ezekiel 37. His actions on behalf of his people like punishing them for their rebellion and sin and saving the remnant and rescuing them from exile show his holiness.

Chapter 13:
13:1-5 - 13:1-14:23 is a prophecy against Babylon or an oracle that Isaiah saw concerning Babylon. In historical terms this oracle belongs with chapters 40-66, the section of Isaiah's prophecy that applies to the exiles in Babylon. When Isaiah wrote this section Babylon was a province, albeit a major one, of the Assyrian Empire. It was not an independent state but was ruled by Assyria. It was not until Nabopolassar rebelled against Assyria in 625 and drove the Assyrians out of Babylon that it once again became independent. Nabopolassar was succeeded by his son Nebuchadnezzar who built up the Neo-Chaldean or Babylonian Empire. Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon and annexed it as part of the Persian Empire in 539. He issued his decree allowing the exiled Jews under Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in 538.

For liberal scholars who hold to the two or even three Isaiah theory this section of Isaiah’s prophecy had to have been inserted into chapters 1-39 by a later editor. For those who believe in one Isaiah to whom God gave his Word that would apply to centuries of Israel and Judah's history we have no problem with God showing Isaiah what was to happen a century and a half into the future because it applied to his people Israel. This prophecy against Babylon marks the beginning of a section of Isaiah's prophecy dedicated to prophecies against the nations. The section goes from 13:1 all the way to at least 21:17 and perhaps to 23:18 and the prophecy against Tyre. There is some question as to how far the section extends because chapter 22 is about Jerusalem. The prophecies in this section cover an amazing span of time from Isaiah's day in the 700's to the fall of Babylon in 538. They are similar in scope to Jeremiah's prophecies against the nations in Jeremiah 46-51. They are also similar in message. Yahweh is the Lord not just of Israel but of all the nations and the nations of the world are ultimately accountable to him. Yahweh is not the little God of the Jews but the Lord of all of human history, the one and only Creator!

Verses 2-3 are a summons from the Lord to gather his armies and mighty men at the gates of Babylon. It is a call for invasion. He calls this army his holy ones or consecrated ones. The word for banner, signal in the ESV, is one Isaiah has already used several times, especially in the context of the Messiah rallying the Gentile nations to himself. God calls his warriors, literally mighty men, to carry out his wrath against Babylon. It is possible warriors and mighty men refer to an angelic force, the holy ones. The context however points to an army made up of many nations whom God has summoned to conquer Babylon. The last phrase of verse 3 is difficult. The NIV translates it "who rejoice in my triumph." The ESV translates it "my proudly exulting ones." The NASB and NRSV follow the ESV and translate the phrase "my proudly exulting ones." Isaiah's picture is one of an army who exults in the Lord. They rejoice that they can carry out his wrath. The curious part of this verse is that the pagan nations who conquered Babylon could hardly be seen historically as holy to the Lord and consecrated to him. Yet Isaiah names Cyrus the Great of Persia his servant and anointed one whom he has summoned to carry out the Lord's purposes for Israel in Isaiah 44 & 45. God uses even the pagan nations around Israel to accomplish his purposes in history.

That idea is confirmed in verses 4-5. Isaiah hears a great noise on the mountains. It is the sound of a huge army gathering together. The Lord has called together many nations and kingdoms to invade and conquer Babylon. They are going to destroy the whole land.

They come from faraway lands, from the end of the heavens, which is poetic language for a long way away. The nations are the weapons of the Lord's wrath and it is he who wields them even if the kings and generals who command their armies do not acknowledge the Lord or his authority. This is the Lord's doing. He is the Lord of History and works out his will through
nations who do not know him or worship him. This was confirmed in history in 539 when Cyrus the Great of Persia led the armies of the Persian Empire to conquer Babylon and take the city. They were made up of soldiers from many peoples that the Persians had already absorbed into their empire; nations that to Israel might as well have been from the end of the heavens.

13:6-8 - The whole section from 13:1-14:27 is about God's judgment against Babylon. However verses 6-13 have a global perspective and talk about the Day of the Lord. Like many prophets Isaiah uses that title to mean more than one thing. God's judgment upon Babylon in history can be the Day of the Lord but so can his ultimate judgment against sinful, pagan nations in the end times as in Revelation 13-18. The historical judgment upon Babylon is a type of the ultimate judgment upon sinful humanity. In New Testament times the rabbis called this time "The Birth Pains of the Messiah." They taught right before the Messiah came to the earth to set up his eternal kingdom there would be a time of great calamity and judgment, what the prophets called "The Day of the Lord." That is what Isaiah is writing about in verses 6-8.

Isaiah calls people everywhere to wail, howl or make a lament. The Day of the Lord is near. It is coming. It will bring destruction from the Almighty, Hebrew shaddai. The word for destruction in Hebrew is shod meaning devastation, destruction or violence. Isaiah uses a play on words to emphasize that the calamities coming upon the world are brought by God himself. These are no ordinary natural disasters or political invasions by nations desiring a larger empire. This is all God's doing.

People's response will be helpless terror and fear. Their hands will hang limp at their sides and their hearts will melt. They will feel totally helpless to stop the carnage because they will be totally helpless! People will be terrified and dismayed. They will writhe in anguish like a woman experiencing intense labor pains. When she is in the grips of labor a woman cannot stop the labor pains and has no control over the contractions and the pain. That is the image Isaiah gives us in verse 8. There will be no stopping the pain and no way to control it or mitigate it. One person will look at another helpless to do anything. Isaiah says their faces will be aflame. The NLT translates that phrase as "their faces aflame with fear." Isaiah uses the same word in Isaiah 29, 30 & 66 and each time it refers to the Lord or his presence. The NLT adds fear to interpret the meaning of faces aflame. I think they are correct. The image is one of fever or being flushed with pain and stress or it could be the color of one's face when it reflects fire. Given the context and the Hebrew poetic form of verse 8, faces on fire is not a positive image. It is a fearful, negative one. The Day of the Lord is a terrifying day. One should pray and hope not to be caught in it.

The Day of the Lord is the day the Lord acts only in holiness and wrath toward the human race. He does not show his grace or love. According to the Book of Revelation the only grace God shows to humanity is there is still an opportunity to repent and turn to God. John however continually declares that even after all of God's terrible judgments in the final Birth Pains of the Messiah people do not repent even though they know the judgments are from God! His holiness and wrath for human sin will be vindicated in his Day.

13:9-10 - Isaiah continues to describe the Day of the Lord. The day is referenced in many prophets: Isaiah 2, Jeremiah 46, Ezekiel 30, Joel 1, Amos 5, Obadiah 15, Zephaniah 1, and Malachi 4. In all the prophets it is the day of God's vengeance and judgment upon not only his sinful people but also the sinful pagan nations of the world. There are celestial signs that accompany the Day. Most often the stars, moon and sun stop shining which Isaiah mentions here
in Isaiah 13. In the Day of the Lord the order God established at creation is overturned. In the fourth day of creation in Genesis 1:14-19 God creates the stars, sun and moon to mark the seasons and to give light to the earth and govern day and night. The sun and moon were to separate the light of day from the darkness of night. In the Day of the Lord that order is turned upside down! Isaiah says when the sun comes up it will be dark and the moon will not shine at night.

All these signs in the heavens point to the Day of the Lord as a day of wrath and anger from God toward a sinful human race. God's wrath is so powerful and all-consuming that even the natural order is upset to the point where the most regular things in nature we count upon, the sun, moon and stars, all are darkened and their light is removed from the earth. That alone would strike terror in the hearts of all who inhabit this planet.

God says he will make the land a desolation in order to destroy sinners from it. The purpose of the Day of the Lord is to punish sinners and destroy them. The difficulty in verse 9 is what Isaiah means by land. Is he speaking of the land of Israel? Is he talking about Babylon, which chapter 13 is about, or is he talking about all the land of the earth? Perhaps all three ideas are correct because all three "lands" will be affected in the Day of the Lord. Nothing will remain as it was and the old order will pass away.

The Gospel writers use the images of the Day of the Lord in the prophets to link God's wrath at his day to Jesus' crucifixion. Matthew 27, Mark 14 and Luke 23 all state that from noon to 3pm darkness came over the land until Jesus died. The New Testament shows us that the Day of the Lord, the day of God's wrath over human sin, has already occurred at the cross of Jesus. There will be a final Day right before Jesus returns but the human race can now see the consequences of its sin in the cross of Jesus of Nazareth. Like the Kingdom of God which is already and not yet, the Day of the Lord has already come but it awaits its final fulfillment.

13:11-13 - The Lord continues to declare what he will do in the Day of the Lord. It will be a day when he punishes the whole world for its evil. He will punish the wicked for their sins. In that sense the cross of the Lord Jesus was a type of the Day of the Lord. It is there that God punished the sin of the human race in order to forgive it. But here in Isaiah 13 his grace is not in view, only his holiness and righteous wrath toward sin. The Lord singles out the arrogant and prideful. God will put an end to them and their pomp. C.S. Lewis said pride is anti-God because the proud set themselves up as the highest authority. They exalt themselves over their Creator. Pride repulses God but humility attracts him. See Psalm 138. The proud are simply following the example of Satan whose pride caused him to exalt himself and try to usurp God's rule and become God himself.

Isaiah says in the Day of the Lord when God punishes a sinful human race the punishment and calamity will be so terrible that there will be few people left alive. They will be scarcer than fine gold! Jesus said in Matthew 24:22 that unless the days of the Tribulation or Birth Pains of the Messiah were shortened there would be no one left alive. But for the sake of the elect God will send his Messiah and establish his Kingdom forever!

In those days God will make the heavens tremble and the earth will be shaken out of its place by the wrath of God over sin. Jesus in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 describes signs in the heavens above and a great earthquake that will end history as we know it when he returns. John describes the same thing in Revelation 16. God is going to finally judge human sin and punish it in the Day of the Lord!
13:14-16 - Verses 14-16 continue Isaiah's description of what will happen to people in the Day of the Lord. It is a chilling brutal picture. People will be slaughtered. In their panic they will flee back to their homelands from where they had been scattered. But their homes will provide no safety. Like sheep without a shepherd they will seek shelter but instead run straight into those who want to destroy them. Whoever is captured will be run through with the sword. Their infants will be brutally murdered before their eyes. Their homes will be looted and their wives raped. The picture Isaiah paints is one of ancient conquering armies and what they would do when they swept into a country to claim it. Their soldiers would be unleashed in a frenzy of killing, looting and raping. No one was safe and no amount of reasonable appeal would halt the slaughter. Isaiah says this is how it will be in the Day of the Lord when God takes away all barriers and allows human sin to have its way in order to punish the world. It is a time we do not want to experience!

13:17-22 - Isaiah returns his focus once again to Babylon. He declares that God is going to stir up the Medes who will attack Babylon and destroy it. The Median Empire was to the northeast of Mesopotamia whose capital was Ecbatana in the mountainous region of modern day Iran between the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and the Caspian Sea. The Medes had assisted Babylon in conquering Nineveh in 612. They were allied with the Persians of the Iranian Plateau. In 549 Cyrus the Great conquered his grandfather Astyages, the Median king, and united Persia and Media into one vast territory founding the Achaemenid dynasty and the Persian Empire. In 547 Cyrus conquered Lydia in Asia Minor and overran northern Mesopotamia. In October 539 his general Gobryas took Babylon when he dammed up the Euphrates River and entered the city through the river culverts. Seventeen days later Cyrus entered Babylon as a conquering hero and the Babylonian Empire ceased to exist.

This part of Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon has much in common with Jeremiah 51 where Jeremiah also prophesies that Babylon will be destroyed by the Medes. Like Jeremiah, Isaiah says the Medes will slaughter the armies of Babylon and the city will be deserted, never to be inhabited again. It will become a haunt of jackals and desert creatures and no one will live there. When it falls it will never rise again. Historically the city endured for another 60 years before Xerxes destroyed it in 478 putting down a rebellion. After that it began to fall into further ruin. By New Testament times the temple to Bel still endured until around 75 AD. By the end of the 1st century AD it was completely deserted. Today it is an archeological site but only the outer sections of the city have been excavated. A section of the Great Ishtar Gate built by Nebuchadnezzar is in the British Museum. The central temples, palaces and the legendary Hanging Gardens have yet to be discovered and excavated. No one lives in Babylon just like Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied. The ruins of Babylon are in uninhabited desert.

Isaiah says the time of Babylon's judgment and ruin is close at hand. Isaiah wrote this prophecy in the 700's. It was not until 539 that Cyrus conquered the city and 478 when Xerxes destroyed it. God's meaning for "at hand" is not our meaning. Plus when Isaiah wrote Assyria was still the great power in the Middle East. Babylon was simply its major southern province. It was not until 612 that Nineveh was destroyed and 606 that Nebuchadnezzar founded the Babylonian Empire. God's time is not human time! Yet his word will be fulfilled in his time!

Chapter 14:
14:1-2 - Isaiah now focuses upon Israel and the aftermath of God's judgment upon Babylon in the Day of the Lord. The Lord will have compassion on his people and will once again choose them. One of the great questions the exiles raised among the Jews was, has God abandoned us.
Are we still his people because he has allowed us to suffer such punishment and destruction?
Isaiah's answer, along with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was that Israel was still God's chosen people. Even though he had punished them and disciplined them for their sin his covenant still was in force. Here in 14:1 Isaiah describes God choosing Israel once again. He chose them to be his people when they were slaves in Egypt and did not deserve his grace. Now he chooses them again when they are exiles in Babylon and do not deserve his grace. Zechariah 1:17 says God will once again comfort Jerusalem and choose Israel. Zechariah wrote around 520 after Zerubbabel had led a group of exiles back to Jerusalem but before the 2nd temple was finished. His words reflect Isaiah's words written two centuries before. They apply to the same time and situation but also look ahead to the ultimate fulfillment of the Day of the Lord. It will be a time when God judges the sinful nations of the world but the other equally important theme of the prophecies of the Day of the Lord in the prophets is it will be the time of salvation for God's people. Isaiah says God will once again choose Israel, bring them back to their land and sojourners or aliens will join themselves to the house of Israel. He is speaking of Gentiles who will become part of Israel when God rescues them in the Day of the Lord. This foreshadows the Gentiles becoming part of the church in the New Testament. See Ephesians 2.

Verse 2 describes a time when the nations of the world will take the Jews, as in take them by the hand, and lead them to the Promised Land. Isaiah sees a time when the Jews will possess the nations as male and female slaves or servants. They will rule over the captors. Their captors, in context the Babylonians, they will take captive. Verse 2 does not describe the church of the New Testament except to note that all Christians are servants of God and servants of one another. There is no hint in the New Testament that Jewish Christians are superior or will rule over Gentile Christians and they will serve their Jewish brothers and sisters as their slaves. Isaiah must be speaking of another time describing a time when God will vindicate his people before their oppressors. From our perspective it is possible that the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948 by the United Nations is a partial fulfillment of this prophecy. Certainly the nations allowed and encouraged the Jews to return to their homeland. However they have hardly become the servants or slaves of the Jewish people. Isaiah is looking ahead to the Day of the Lord and the ultimate fulfillment of God's justice for his people against the nations who had oppressed them throughout their history.

14:3-8 - God tells Israel when they have relief from the pain and suffering they have endured, and the bondage they have suffered, God invites them or commands them to take up a taunt against the king of Babylon. It's as if God says now that the hard times are past I give you an opportunity to vent your anger and frustration at your oppressor.

The "taunt" begins by declaring the king of Babylon is dead! His fury has ceased. The word for fury is translated from the Dead Sea Scrolls version of Isaiah. The meaning of the word in the Masoretic text is uncertain. The idea however is clear; the king is dead and his oppression is at an end.

The Lord himself has broken the rod of the wicked and the scepter of the rulers. The king that oppressed God's people was the last in a long line of oppressors. Now his rule has been broken and his power taken from him. He had used it to strike the nations and subdue them. He used persecution to keep them in line and his ways were unjust and cruel. Finally the whole earth is at rest because his power is broken. Peoples break into singing in celebration of his death! Even the cedars of Lebanon rejoice at his demise because no woodsman comes to cut them down anymore. Nature itself sings for joy because he not only oppressed peoples but nature.
Verses 12-15 of this taunt are often applied to Satan. It is possible these earlier verses (vv.1-11) also apply to Satan. Certainly God's people will rejoice when Satan is finally defeated and vanquished and he will no longer be able to tempt or deceive the nations. See Revelation 19-20. However this taunt against the king of Babylon is also exactly that, a taunt against an earthly king. Verses 12-15 can apply to Satan because they go beyond what any mortal could be. However, because this is highly symbolic and poetic language it is equally possible that they all apply to an earthly king and have nothing to do with Satan as a fallen angel.

14:9-11 - Isaiah paints a poetic picture of former kings and powerful people in Sheol greeting the king of Babylon at his death when he goes down to Sheol. The Hebrew concept of Sheol is fluid. It can mean the underworld, and is often pictured in the Old Testament as a shadowy world under the earth where the spirits of the dead go after death. It can also mean the pit or the grave and is simply the Hebrew term used for the grave as a place where the bodies of all people go after death. Everyone, both small and great, goes "down to Sheol" and their bodies decay and are "eaten by worms." In that case Sheol is the great leveler of all people. That is the picture Isaiah paints here in chapter 14 of the king of Babylon. For all his earthly power and pomp in Sheol he is just another dead body whose earthly form is now rotting away. His power means nothing anymore!

There are hints in Isaiah 29, Daniel 12 and other passages in the prophets and Psalms that there is life after death and that the souls of the righteous live on with the Lord in heaven even though their bodies rot away in Sheol. By New Testament times Sheol had taken on an even more complicated meaning with a Paradise side, meaning heaven, and a hell side or punishment side, given the Greek name for the underworld, Hades. That was the title Jesus used in his blessing to Peter after his great confession in Matthew 16 when he spoke about his church declaring, "the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Context helps us interpret which of these varied meanings of Sheol Isaiah and other authors intended.

In verses 9-11 Isaiah uses Sheol as the grave and repeats a theme the Book of Ecclesiastes declares. All people, the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the peasant meet the same fate in the end: death. In death human beings are equal and everything we did during our earthly lives matters nothing because our bodies decay in the grave and there is nothing we can to do stop it. Parts of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament declare that our souls can be saved from death and decay through faith in God and specifically his Messiah, Jesus Christ. It further declares that the future of God's people in the Day of the Lord is a resurrected body over which death, the grave or Sheol, will hold no power because we will be immortal just as Jesus is immortal. See 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4 and Revelation 20-22.

14:12-15 - These verses have historically been applied to Satan because of the name Isaiah gives to the King of Babylon in verse 12, Day Star, Son of Dawn. In the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible, the Latin word is Lucifer, which is then applied to Satan. Lucifer was said to be Satan's name before his fall and he was thought to be one of the most powerful archangels. This passage along with Ezekiel 28 is interpreted as a veiled reference to Satan, his character and his fall. The case for Ezekiel 28 applying to Satan is much stronger than here in Isaiah 14. The best that can be said about Isaiah 14 applying to Satan is that the king of Babylon exhibits the character of Satan, mainly pride and arrogance. The best interpretation of this passage is the
plain meaning of the text. Isaiah poetically mocks the once powerful king of Babylon and shows how God has brought him down to suffer the fate of every other tyrant of history: death.

Isaiah calls him the morning star, day star or son of dawn. In Revelation 2 & 22 Jesus names himself as the bright morning star, historically referring to the planet Venus. If Jesus is the morning star then from a New Testament perspective the king of Babylon or perhaps Satan sets himself up as Jesus Christ or God. That is in keeping with his pride and arrogance. He believes he is God or a god yet he has been cut down by death. He conquered many nations yet now he is nothing!

His desire to be like God is further explained in verse 13. Isaiah quotes what the king says in his heart. He declares he will ascend to heaven above the stars of God. He will set his throne on high and sit on the mount of assembly, the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. The Hebrew word is Zaphon. The ESV translates the phrase "in the far reaches of the north." In Canaanite mythology the north was the place of meeting of the gods. Mt. Zaphan was where Baal's throne was and where he reigned supreme. If that is the case then the king of Babylon sees himself as Baal or taking over the rule and power of Baal for himself.

He would not know Yahweh, even though Yahweh is the one and only God. He thinks he will take Baal's place and rule from on high. The Hebrew word for utmost heights is bema and means high places. These were the places of pagan sacrifice that were sometimes also used to worship God in ancient Israel. The prophets condemned them because they led Israel into idolatry. Jeroboam I built the golden calf altars on the bema in Bethel and Dan. 1 Kings cites his idolatry as one of the chief reasons God judged Israel and later Judah for following the same practice. Jeroboam led Israel into sin! An obscure or rare meaning for bema or high place can also be grave or funeral mound where a king would be buried. It is possible Isaiah is using a play on words here in Hebrew. The king of Babylon will ascend to the utmost heights and take Bel's place but it will really be his grave because he will die and descend into Sheol.

He uses another name for Baal, a name that in the Old Testament is also applied to Yahweh, the Most High; Elyon in Hebrew. It is possible the king is referring to Yahweh as well as Baal or Bel in the Babylonian pantheon, but it is more likely he is simply referring to the highest god he knew, Bel.

All his pride and arrogance will gain him nothing in the end. All his desire to be a god himself and in fact be the chief god and rule over earth and heaven will go unfulfilled because he will die just like the poorest peasant in his empire. He will go down to Sheol and the grave. Isaiah says he will go down to the "depths of the pit." The Hebrew word means the furthest part or the deepest part. In other words if Sheol is viewed as a deep hole he will be in the darkest, deepest part of the hole. In The Inferno Dante pictured Satan at the core of hell or the deepest level of hell. It is possible he took this passage for inspiration.

14:16-17 - People everywhere will be shocked at the fate of the King of Babylon. They will think about and ponder his fate because one so powerful and invincible is now destroyed. How could this happen? Kingdoms trembled at his coming and he overthrew cites. Now he is nothing. He did not let his captives return home but kept them in exile. He kept control over them. The prophet Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar as one who was swelled with pride over his accomplishments. He believed he had subdued the whole world and could do whatever he wanted. In Daniel 4 God sent a mental illness upon him for his pride until he acknowledged that the "Most High" was sovereign and established kings and their reigns. It is no accident as well that Nebuchadnezzar and his successors did not allow the Jewish exiles to return home to
Jerusalem. It was not until Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon that he allowed the Jews under Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in 539. Isaiah accurately describes the kind of attitude and actions Nebuchadnezzar displayed to the world and to the Jew here in chapter 14, a century and a half before he even lived and Babylon became a power in the Middle East.

14:18-20a - Isaiah observes that the kings of the earth lay in their tombs after death. They have places of honor to remember them. But the king of Babylon will be cast down and cast out. He will lie at the bottom of a pile of the slain from the battlefield. People will trample over him like soldiers walk over the dead after a battle. He will not be buried in an elaborate tomb that celebrates his accomplishments. His body will lie with the dead soldiers of his defeated army because he has slain his own people and led them to destruction. Babylon will fall and so will its king!

14:20b-23 - Isaiah declares that the king's offspring, his sons will never be mentioned again. The ESV translates this phrase as a curse, "may the offspring of evildoers nevermore be named." The point is he will die childless because his sons who would have succeeded him on the throne of Babylon will be killed as well. God will judge the line of the Babylonian kings and will overthrow them.

The last line of verse 21 is curious. God will bring judgment on the sons of the king of Babylon and wipe them out lest they inherit the land of Babylon or possess it and "cover the earth with their cities". The ESV reads, "fill the face of the world with cities." The verse implies that cities are evil things and God wants to prevent the urbanization of the world by the Babylonian kings. That idea is negated by other passages of Scripture not the least of which is Deuteronomy 6 which describes the Canaanite cities Israel will conquer as gifts from God. Plus the Bible ends with God dwelling with his people in HIS city, the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22. City in Hebrew refers to a walled or secure settlement. It carries no political meaning like the Greek word polis used in the New Testament. It refers more to the sense of protection of the people living there. There were often villages surrounding a city where the ground was planted and tilled for food. The villages depended on the city for protection. The city then held governmental authority over its villages and the people there. Isaiah implies that God is going to put a stop to Babylon spreading its influence over the entire world. Every city they take or build brings more and more people under its authority and rule. God has had enough of Babylon and will halt its drive for more and more territory and empire.

God is going to rise up against Babylon. He will bring her to an end and will cut off from Babylon, any survivors, offspring and descendants who would carry on her memory or rebuild her. Instead Babylon will become a dwelling for wild animals like owls. The Hebrew word is uncertain in that it can refer to several kinds of animals. The ESV translates the word as hedgehog as does the NASB and the NRSV. The NLT and GNB follow the NIV and translate the word as owls. The point is it will be abandoned and become the dwelling of wild animals. People will no longer live there.

The final picture Isaiah gives us of Babylon is more difficult. He says it will have many pools of water or be turned into a swampland. God will sweep Babylon with the broom of destruction, like someone sweeping away the dirt in a house. The difficult picture is of the swampland. Earlier in Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon in 13:20-21 he said it would be like a desert with only wild animals living there. This agrees with Jeremiah 50-51 which also
prophesies that Babylon will become a desert place where no one lives. Here in 14:23 Isaiah says it will be like a swamp. That is very different from a desert! However, both pictures may be true. Today the ruins of Babylon lie in a desert place where no one lives. Yet very close by is the lower Tigris-Euphrates Valley which is a swampy, marshy area where the two rivers come together in a delta area before they flow into the Persian Gulf. Desert or swampy area describes the environs around the ruins of ancient Babylon. One does not have to conclude Isaiah is contradicting himself in chapters 13 & 14. The point is God is going to destroy Babylon and it will never rise again as a power. It will be swept away. One needs to remember that Isaiah wrote this prophecy of God's judgment a century and a half before it became the power that destroyed Jerusalem and took the Jews into exile. God had already told his people through his prophet Isaiah the entire story of their fall, exile, return and the destruction of Babylon their oppressors. Unfortunately the Jews were not listening even when Jeremiah and Ezekiel were giving the same message in the time of Babylon's reign. God's plan for his people was already worked out and he would save them from exile and punish their punisher for its violence and wickedness. God is truly the Lord of History!

14:24-27 - God will carry out his purpose against Assyria who at the time Isaiah was writing this was oppressing Judah and perhaps even invading it. No one living in Isaiah's time would have foreseen how Assyria was to be broken. They were the mightiest empire and military machine anyone in the Middle East had ever seen! Prophets like Isaiah could prophesy that God would destroy Assyria but who believed them? Isaiah reminds Israel that God is sovereign. He always carries out his plans. His will is never thwarted! He has promised he will break Assyria and he WILL bring it about. From the Assyrian perspective Yahweh was a little god of a little country who posed no threat to the might of the gods of Assyria. They did not understand that Yahweh was the one and only God, the Creator of all and the Lord of nations. He had chosen the little nations of Israel and Judah to carry out his plan in the world. He might be angry with both of them, and use Assyria to punish them for breaking his covenant but God's purpose would stand and he would save his people. They may break his covenant but he would never break his promise to them. God would break the yoke of Assyria from off the shoulders of his people.

When Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701, which was after Shalmaneser and Sargon's destruction of Israel and Samaria, God sent a plague among the besieging Assyrian army which forced Sennacherib to withdraw and return to Nineveh. Though Manasseh was an Assyrian vassal and sinned greatly against the Lord while he placated his Assyrian masters, yet God finally brought down Assyria. Nabopolassar of Babylon made an alliance with the Medes and took Asher in 614 and then Nineveh in 612. Assyria was finished and never rose again as a power in the Middle East. The little book of Nahum celebrates its fall.

In verses 26-27 Isaiah re-states God's sovereignty over all the nations of the earth. He asks who will thwart the Lord when he has decided to carry out his will. There is not a nation or power on earth that can stop him. The reality is God used other nations to carry out his purpose not only for Israel but also for the salvation of the entire world including the pagan nations surrounding Israel. As Jesus said in John 3 God loves the whole world not just the Jews. If his purpose for the nations cannot be stopped then his plan of salvation for all people also cannot be stopped! He is the Lord!

14:28-32 - Isaiah speaks against the Philistines whose five city states dominated the Gaza Strip and the territory along the coast. He says God gave him this message in the year King Ahaz died
which would have been 715. Sargon II was king of Assyria during this time. He had finished the siege of Samaria, the capital of Israel, and destroyed it, sending many Israelites into captivity in what is modern day Armenia. Sargon had laid heavy tribute on Judah and Ahaz responded by becoming a loyal vassal. Unfortunately he also embraced the paganism of Assyria, even sacrificing his young son in a fiery idol. He set up a new altar based on an Assyrian design in the temple and used the bronze altar dedicated to the worship of the Lord for divination. He was a weak and cowardly king who would not stay faithful to God. Isaiah had a low opinion of Ahaz. See Isaiah 7!

During Ahaz' reign at the time of the fall of Israel, Philistia used the chaos of that time to attack many Judean towns in the Negev and the coastal regions, annexing the towns and their farmlands for themselves. This oracle is God's response to those attacks.

God tells the Philistines not to rejoice that Assyria has been broken. It is unclear if Isaiah is speaking of the ultimate fall of Assyria in 612 or of a temporarily weakened Assyria following the death of Ahaz its vassal. It makes more historical sense to refer to the fall of Assyria because when Ahaz died Assyria was strong. Another possibility is Isaiah is describing the strife and civil war over the succession of a new king when the old king died. This happened several times and the Bible tells us, and Assyrian chronicles confirm, that Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his sons in 681 and his younger son Esarhaddon succeeded him on the throne of Assyria.

After Ahaz died his son Hezekiah took the throne of Judah and fostered an anti-Assyrian alliance that included Egypt. When Sennacherib learned of it he attacked Tyre, Sidon, the cities of Philistia and Judah. He sacked many of the Philistine cities and forced Hezekiah to pay tribute. He could not destroy Jerusalem however as the Lord sent a plague among his army which forced him to withdraw. See Isaiah 36 & 2 Kings 18. It is possible that in this prophecy against Philistia Isaiah looks forward to the death of Sennacherib who destroyed much of Philistia. Yet Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal his son would once again sweep through Philistia on their way to subdue Egypt to squelch the fomenting of rebellion in its western provinces like Judah. This could be the meaning of the root of the serpent bringing forth an adder like a flying serpent or dragon. Just as one king falls another more powerful will take his place. The Hebrew word for fiery serpent is seraph, the plural of which is seraphim, the fiery angels Isaiah saw in his vision of the Lord in Isaiah 6.

In verse 30 Isaiah shifts his message of judgment to a message of comfort and reassurance. The powerful and the rich may suffer God's judgment but God will protect the poor and the needy. Is he speaking of Judah's poor and needy or the poor among the Philistines? It may be both. God will bring judgment against Philistia but her poorest people will survive because the Lord will protect them. Yahweh has a heart for the poor of all nations.

A great cloud of smoke is coming from the north like a storm. This is once again speaking of the Assyrian army but it could even apply to the Babylonian army a century and a half later. In context this is Assyria which would destroy the Philistine city states. They would never again be a power that threatened Judah after the Assyrian conquests.

Isaiah reassures Zion that the Lord will protect his people during all the judgments he will send against Philistia. Zion will survive along with the poor. Philistia, that ancient enemy from the time of Judges, will not. Today the Gaza Strip is once again filled with a people hostile to the Jews but they are not Philistines but Palestinian Arabs. All vestiges of the people of the Philistines and their culture have long ago been absorbed into the Arab peoples who now live in the Gaza Strip.
Chapter 15:
15:1-4 - Like Jeremiah, this section of Isaiah contains oracles or pronouncements about many nations. The word in Hebrew literally means a burden. Isaiah's "burden" in chapter 15 is for Moab, the nation to the east of Judah in the Jordanian Highlands, east of the Dead Sea and north of Edom. At various points in Israel's history Moab extended its territory all the way north to the Jabbok River. The Moabites were descended from Lot and his oldest daughter after the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah. See Genesis 19. The Moabites turned to pagan ways and worshipped the god Chemosh. Human sacrifice was often practiced and because of this Chemosh is called the "abomination of Moab" in 1 Kings 11 after Solomon built a high place for the worship of Chemosh on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. Moab was both an enemy of Israel and a temptation to idolatry for the Jews.

Isaiah says Ar and Kir are laid waste and destroyed. Ar was one of the chief cities of Moab near the Arnon River on the highlands east of the Dead Sea. It was built along the King's Highway, the ancient road from the Gulf of Aqaba to Damascus in Syria that runs along the Arabah, the Jordanian Highlands and east of the Jordan Valley. It was one of the major trade routes of the ancient Near East. In times of prosperity Israel and Judah controlled this highway and thereby controlled trade gaining great wealth through tariffs on the goods carried by the caravans. Ar guarded the King's Highway in Moab. Kir is unknown but given the context it too was probably in central Moab near the King's Highway.

Dibon was a Moabite town north of Ar and the Arnon River, mentioned in a stele built by Mesha, king of Moab, around 830 in the days of Ahab and Elisha. Isaiah refers to a temple there and a high place probably for Chemosh, the god of Moab. The people go to the temple to weep and mourn the fall of Moab. The Assyrians subdued Moab in Isaiah's day and forced them to pay tribute. Moab was finally destroyed in 582 by Nebuchadnezzar as he campaigned to the east of Judah. Isaiah may be referring to both conquests here as the Assyrians conquered Moab and it was no longer free and independent.

Nebo and Medeba were towns in the north part of Moab. Nebo was near to Mt. Nebo where God showed Moses the Promiseland in Deuteronomy 32. It marked the border between Moab and Ammon to the north. Heshbon was also in the far north and was very near the border of Ammon. Elealeh was a twin city of Heshbon and is often mentioned with it. Jahaz was a town on the plains of Moab near the top of the Dead Sea. It was the site of the battle with Sihon, king of the Amorites, where Israel defeated his forces on the way to the Promiseland. See Numbers 21. Isaiah paints a dramatic picture of the mourning of the Moabites. They wail and weep in Heshbon on the highlands above the Dead Sea. Their weeping is so loud it can be heard all the way down to Jahaz on the plains of Moab on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.

Isaiah describes Moab weeping and mourning from the north at Nebo and Heshbon to the central part of the country in Dibon and to the south in Ar. The men of Moab, including their soldiers, shave their heads and beards in mourning. The people wear sackcloth and wail in grief over the fall of their country.

15:5-9 - Isaiah says his heart cries out for Moab and her survivors. He grieves for the people of a traditional enemy. It gives him no pleasure to pronounce God's judgment on Moab. They will be forced to flee their homes and become refugees because of the destruction that is coming. They will flee to Zoar, which was one on the southeastern shore of the Dead Sea near the border of Moab and Edom. In Genesis 19 it was nearby Sodom and Gomorrah. Eglath-shelishiyah is otherwise unknown but given the Hebrew poetic form was also probably near Zoar. The point is
the people will flee the highlands where they lived and descend down to the Dead Sea hoping for safety. However, the valley of the Dead Sea is one of the hottest, driest, most desolate places on earth. They will find no comfort there. The ascent of Luhith is unknown but Horonaim was at the foot of the plateau near Zoar. Isaiah describes a pass or wadi that goes down from the highlands where the Moabites lived to the plain along the eastern shores of the Dead Sea. As the people flee they cry out in grief and weeping. They know their homeland has been destroyed. The Assyrians attacked Moab and subdued it, forcing the Moabites to pay tribute but Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 582. Isaiah may be speaking of both incidents.

Isaiah says the waters of Nimrin are now dried up. All the grass has withered. Nimrin was a wadi just to the south of the Dead Sea which was near Zoar and the southern border of Moab. The Assyrians and later Babylonians bring death to the people but when God judges Moab it will also bring destruction to the land itself. The Brook of the Willows in the ESV is the Ravine of the Poplars in the NIV. The word for the tree is translated both ways in the Old Testament. The ravine or wadi is unknown but given the context it too was probably in the south of Moab near the border of Moab and Edom which was just south of Zoar at the Zared River that flowed into the very southern end of the Dead Sea. Isaiah says all the wealth of Moab the people carry away down the wadi to escape.

A mournful cry echoes all along the border of Moab. It reaches to Eglaim. The site is unknown although context indicates it was probably in the south of Moab. Beer-Elim is also unknown however it could be the same as Beer, which was a Moabite town just north of the Arnon River, the original northern border of Moab. Later in Old Testament times Moab expanded all the way to Nebo near the northern part of the Dead Sea. If Beer-Elim is near the Arnon then Isaiah is saying the cry of grief sounds from the south to the north in Moab. The whole land echoes with the wailing of the people.

Isaiah says Dibon’s waters have been spoiled by blood because the slaughter has been so great. Yet God is not finished with his judgment. He will bring a lion upon Moab upon all who escape the carnage and all who remain. Both the Babylonians and the Assyrians used lions in their symbolism. They stood for strength and power in the ancient world. They were feared beasts. Moab needs to fear Assyria and Babylon. Even more, they need to fear the Lord of History, Yahweh of Hosts! It is he who is bringing them to judgment for all their idolatry and sin.

Chapter 16:

16:1-2 - Verses 1-2 are a plea to Judah for shelter for the people fleeing the destruction of Moab, especially the women. Isaiah tells the refugees to send a lamb or lambs to the "ruler of the land" to the mount of the daughter of Zion. The ruler of the land is probably the king of Judah. It is also possible he is speaking of God himself because lambs were a sacrificial gift and not a gift one gave to a king. Sela was the Edomite fortress conquered by Amaziah King of Judah in 2 Kings 14. In New Testament times it was rebuilt and expanded as the capital of the Nabatean Arabs named Petra.

Isaiah describes the refugees from Moab as a flock of birds flushed from the nest in panic. In Numbers 21 the Arnon is listed as the northern border of Moab. The people of Moab are fleeing their country because it has been destroyed. They seek shelter in Judah!

16:3-5 - Isaiah counsels the king and Judah to shelter the refugees from Moab. God through Isaiah says hide them and don't reveal their whereabouts to their enemies, namely the Assyrians
or perhaps the Babylonians. God says Judah needs to welcome the Moabites as fugitives and they are to become sojourners among the Jews. This principle goes all the way back to the Exodus and the conquering of the Promised Land. Israel was to welcome the stranger and alien in their midst because they were strangers and aliens in the land of Egypt. In a sense they are to treat the Moabites like the Jews want to be treated; an early version of Jesus' Golden Rule. This passage also has implications for our modern refugee problem in Syria and other war torn areas of the Middle East and Africa. We are to welcome the refugees fleeing destruction and death. *Hebrews 11* reminds us that Christians are also strangers and aliens in this world because we await a city whose builder and maker is God, the New Jerusalem.

Isaiah says Judah is to shelter the Moabite refugees until the oppressor is no more and all destruction has ceased, until the aggressor vanishes from the land! Is he speaking of Assyria here or Babylon which will attack a century later? It makes more sense to see his reference to the oppressor as Assyria because Judah survived Assyrian oppression whereas Babylon destroyed her. It is also possible that Isaiah is looking a long ways ahead to the days of the Messiah and his kingdom.

Verse 5 says when the oppressor is vanquished a throne will be established in love, Hebrew *hesed*, God's steadfast covenant love. On that throne will be one who will reign in faithfulness who will be from the house of David. He will seek justice and will be swift to do righteousness for all his subjects, including those from Moab! Isaiah is talking about the Messiah who will come. The only king from the line of David that would reign over Judah from Isaiah's day to the destruction of Jerusalem that even comes close to Isaiah's description would be Josiah. He would be faithful to God's covenant, the most faithful of all Judean kings. In his day Assyria would be destroyed but Babylon would rise as the new power in the Middle East. Isaiah's implication is that violence and oppression would totally vanish from the land. Perhaps Josiah is a type of the king who is to come. It is easy to see how faithful Jews applying this passage in Isaiah a century later would see Josiah as the great hope of the Jewish people and would have supported his revival. Yet like *Hebrews 11* the Jews were to look forward to a new king from David's line, one who would bring peace and righteousness forever; the Messiah.

16:6-7 - In verse 6 Isaiah returns to the theme of the sin and corruption of Moab that deserves God's judgment. It feels disjointed from the verses preceding it because verses 1-5 spoke of protecting the refugees from Moab and having compassion on them. Now beginning in verse 6 Isaiah once again speaks judgment. It is possible this discrepancy resulted from the fact that Isaiah did not write this entire oracle or message concerning Moab at the same time but once it was finished collected all the messages about Moab into one section of his prophecy. Or Isaiah wrote all the different parts of the oracle but one of his disciples who later edited the entire prophecy collected these oracles about Moab into one and placed them here.

Isaiah returns to the sins of Moab that have resulted in God's judgment upon her. First and foremost is the pride of Moab and her arrogance. I take that to mean their arrogance towards God and the people of Judah and the other peoples around them. God hates pride with a particular passion. Peter in *1 Peter 5* quotes *Proverbs 3* that says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. That means that anyone who believes that their moral actions will be enough to earn them a place in heaven and eternal life and that their good outweighs their sinful actions and choices is arrogantly assuming God will use their standard of conduct rather than his own holiness and righteousness to judge the human race. Works righteousness is the height of human arrogance towards God. That is why Jesus had such a great problem with the Pharisees.
even though their theology was close to his own, certainly much closer than the Sadducees. Their spiritual pride and arrogance got in the way of them knowing Jesus and following him as the Messiah.

Isaiah says for their arrogance the Moabites will wail and mourn. He says grieve for the people of Kir Hareseth, a city in the south of Moab. The fields of Heshbon wither, which was a city in the north. From one end of Moab to another the people will wail in grief. The ESV translates the phrase in verse 7 "the raisin cakes of Kir-Haraseth." The NIV translates it "the people of Kir-Hareseth." The root word can mean either raisin cake or people depending on if the word is given as masculine or feminine. The word is masculine in Hebrew in verse 7 which means people as the NIV. But the ESV chooses to translate it as the feminine form of the word, meaning raisin cakes. The raisin cakes were a delicacy made from compressed grapes that were often used in pagan rituals especially fertility rituals. They were also used in Israel however as a delicacy apart from pagan rites. See 2 Samuel 6 and Song of Solomon 2.

The meaning of the paragraph is clear even if the word for raisin cakes/people is disputed. The Lord will bring judgment to Moab and from one end of the country to the other the people will cry out in grief because their cities and their nation have been destroyed.

16:8-11 - Heshbon and Sibmah were towns in the northern territory of Moab that originally were in Ammon and were captured by Sihon the Amorite king whom Moses and the Israelites defeated in Numbers 21. They were incorporated into the tribal lands of Gad. Jazer was also one of these northern towns. The Moabites gained control of the towns and much of southern Ammon around the time of the fall of Samaria. This part of Isaiah's oracle is remarkably similar to Jeremiah's prophecy against Moab in Jeremiah 48. Did Jeremiah know of Isaiah's oracle? It is impossible to know.

The lords of the nations are Assyria, Babylon or both and Isaiah is referring to both empires and their conquests spread over a century and a half. The sea is probably the Dead Sea as Moabite territory never spread to the Mediterranean. Isaiah says he weeps with the people for their summer harvest and fruit will never come. Moab was famous for its vineyards and orchards and even today there are many fruit trees and vineyards on the slopes of the valleys that go down from the highlands to the Dead Sea. Isaiah delivers God's message of judgment against Moab but it gives him no pleasure to do so. His heart laments for Moab because Isaiah knows the consequences for her people in the Lord's message. He has seen the same thing against Israel and Judah. There are grave consequences for nations that arrogantly disobey God and ignore him!

16:12-14 - Isaiah says when the Moabites come to their high place to pray and entreat Chemosh their idol for help all they will succeed in doing is wearing themselves out. There is a Hebrew play on words in this verse. The Hebrew verbs for present oneself or appear sound like weary oneself or wear oneself out. There is only one letter difference between the two. Chemosh will not answer and Moab will not prevail. Their nation will fall.

The Lord had given this message to Moab before Isaiah says. But now the Lord tells him within three years Moab's splendor and all her people will be despised and her survivors will be few. In other words Moab will be destroyed and only a small number of fugitives will be left. The difficulty is knowing about which three years Isaiah is speaking. The most likely possibility is the Assyrian invasion around the time of Samaria's fall, 724-721 BC. Archeologists have confirmed in the ruins of Heshbon, Dibon and other Moabite cities an Assyrian attack on Moab.
Isaiah says the calendar is fixed like a hired servant’s contract. Neither the servant nor the master can change the contract. It will be carried out. So the Lord will judge Moab.

Chapter 17:
17:1-3 - Isaiah now gives a message about Damascus in chapter 17. The difficulty is Isaiah's statement that Damascus would become a heap of ruins and will no longer be a city. Tiglath Pileser of Assyria attacked the city and took it after King Rezin of Damascus revolted in 734-732. The people were deported to Kir which is difficult to pinpoint but was probably in what is now northeastern Turkey, a distant part of the Assyrian Empire. See 2 Kings 16. The problem is the phrase "will no longer be a city" or "cease to be a city". It implies Damascus was never settled again like Babylon when it was finally destroyed. However, historically that was not the case. The stem of the verb in Hebrew means to be removed or taken away. Damascus was sacked and its people carried into exile but it survived as a city on into New Testament times and even up to the present day. One needs to take the phrase to mean that Damascus would be captured, sacked and cease to be the capital of Syria which is what happened. Its time to rule came to an end in the Assyrian attacks. However, it would be resettled and rebuilt. There was even a large Jewish population in Damascus by New Testament times which becomes critical in the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. See Acts 9.

Verse 1 illustrates the difficulties in interpreting Biblical prophecy, matching the pronouncement with what we know of history. Sometimes the two do not always neatly go together. We need to do the best we can in interpreting what is written and acknowledge the difficulties. As always Scripture needs to interpret Scripture. If there are other passages of Scripture that also speak about Damascus, like Paul's conversion in Acts 9, they should be consulted and used to help interpret Isaiah 17. It is obvious from Acts 9 that in New Testament times Damascus was a thriving city so Isaiah's statement that it will cease to be a city must therefore be a temporary condition and not permanent. Scripture then interprets Scripture.

Verses 2 & 3 are difficult to understand at first reading. Aroer in Joshua's day was the southern border of Reuben's territory. So it marked the southern border of the Promiseland on the eastern side of the Jordan. In Elisha's time, the 800's, King Hazael of Damascus invaded the Transjordan and annexed all the territory east of the Jordan down to Aroer. The Moabites claimed Aroer and the countryside around it for their own about this time as well. Isaiah says Aroer will be deserted and will become a place where the sheep will graze and not be afraid of any enemies. The implication is there will be no people there to bother them. Isaiah says the fortified city will disappear from Ephraim, that is Israel. Damascus will no longer be a kingdom. One must remember that the images Isaiah is using here are all applying to Damascus or Syria. He is saying Damascus will become like the deserted city of Aroer, like the fortified cities of Israel. It will be destroyed and deserted.

The remnant of Syria will be like the glory of Israel. In 1 Samuel 15 and Micah 1 Yahweh is called the glory of Israel. However, that is not Isaiah's meaning here. In verse 4 he says the glory of Jacob will fade. He is speaking of the people and their health. In Hosea 9 Ephraim's glory is his children. In 1 Samuel 4 Eli's daughter in law named her son Ichabod which means the glory has departed from Israel. The ark of God had been captured by the Philistines. Isaiah is saying the people of Damascus will fade or die out just like the northern tribes of Israel did when God's blessing and favor, his glory, left them.
17:4-6 - From verse 4 to the end of chapter 17 Isaiah changes focus back to Israel and away from Damascus and Syria. Isaiah says in the time when Damascus and its people are judged Jacob or Israel will be judged as well. The glory of Jacob will be brought low as well. He paints a picture of a people starving for lack of food.

The picture of people reaping grain in the field and leaving the gleanings in the olive trees is a picture of judgment. The Valley of Rephaim was the place where David routed the Philistines in 2 Samuel 5. It was one of the valleys leading from the coastal plain where the Philistines lived up into the mountains of Judah near Jerusalem. The Lord gave the Philistines into David's hand just like he will give the Israelites into the hands of the Assyrians and they will conquer them and destroy them. The Assyrians will "reap" Israel like people harvesting grain and beating the olive trees at harvest time. All that will be left are a few ears of grain and a few olives high up in the trees. Tiglath Pileser began that process when he crushed Damascus in 732. Shalmaneser and Sargon finished the task in 724-721 when Samaria was destroyed. Most of the Israelites were either killed or led away into permanent exile. A few survived and fled south to swell the population of Judah. They were the gleanings from what was left of the ten northern tribes. God had executed his judgment upon a sinful people allowing them to be destroyed because they would not repent of their idolatry and wickedness.

17:7-9 - Isaiah says in the time when God judges Israel and Damascus people will look to God once again. God's chastisement will have the desired effect. The NIV translates the phrase "men will look". The ESV tries to maintain a more literal translation and reads, "man will look." The Hebrew word is singular, adam. This implies more than the Israelites will return to the Lord and abandon their idolatry. Isaiah implies the whole human race will come to God! People will turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the altars they have made, their idols. They will reject the Asherah poles and the incense altars they would build on the high places to burn incense and practice fertility rites. Isaiah hints that the time of God's judgment will also be a time of great turning to God. This theme is repeated frequently in Scripture into the New Testament. It is caught up in the Day of the Lord imagery from the prophets so that the Day of the Lord becomes not just a time of God's judgment upon Israel's enemies and the wicked pagan nations it is also a time of salvation for all who will turn to Yahweh.

Verse 9 is difficult to interpret. Isaiah says during the same time frame as people rejecting their idols and turning to the Lord their cities will be deserted too. The difficulty is that Isaiah says their cities will be deserted because of the Israelites. It is possible he is speaking of the Canaanites who deserted their cities when Israel conquered the Promiseland. The problem is verses 7-8 are a positive picture of people turning away from pagan ways and turning to God. Verse 9 paints a picture of desolation and judgment. Isaiah may be saying that is what needs to happen to force people to give up their idols and turn to God. All they have built and taken pride in with their own hands, including their altars and idols needs to be destroyed before they will finally turn to God. They have to be shown God is greater than any idol.

17:10-11 - Isaiah speaks to Israel and Judah in these verses and not to Damascus and Syria. Israel has forgotten their God, their Rock and fortress. Isaiah uses the title Rock for God several times; see Isaiah 26 & 44. The fortress or refuge could be referring to Zion and Jerusalem or it could simply be a metaphor for God's covenant protection. It is difficult to tell. Isaiah warns Israel of the consequences of forgetting God and his covenant. Their harvests will be as nothing. It will not matter how careful they are in planting their vineyards and
getting the finest vines, even importing them. They can fence and cultivate the vines and carefully tend them but it will make no difference. When God withdraws his favor from them their harvests will fail. It will bring them only grief and pain. Isaiah like Jeremiah after him warns Israel of the consequences of violating God's covenant and uses images from the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28. There, Moses warns the people what will happen if they disobey God and forget him. One of those consequences is their harvests will fail. The Promiseland will not produce as it should. It will not be the land's fault it will be their fault!

17:12-14 - Isaiah repeats a theme seen many times throughout the prophets. God will discipline his disobedient people using one of the pagan nations around them, in Isaiah's day Assyria and then Babylon. Assyria will conquer Israel and destroy her. Babylon will do the same to Judah. They are the many peoples he speaks of in verse 12. However, once God has used them to judge Israel he will judge them as well. They may be God's instrument of discipline but they are not exempt from accountability for their actions. Assyria and Babylon roared over the Middle East, conquering all of Mesopotamia, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Judah and even Egypt. But God will rebuke them. They will flee away. What seems impossible at the height of their powers God will accomplish. Assyria fell to Babylon and the Medes in 612. Babylon fell to Cyrus of Persia in 539. The great empires will be like chaff in the wind, like a tumbleweed blowing in the wind. Isaiah says the nations may invade and be a terror to the people but in the morning they are gone. He could be referring to Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem in 701 when he surrounded the city and threatened to destroy it but God sent a plague among his army that forced him to withdraw. They were there in the evening but gone in the morning! Such Isaiah says, is the portion or the inheritance of those who threaten God's people. They will receive nothing in the end but be blown away with the wind. God will keep his covenant promises to his people even when he must discipline them. Their oppressors and invaders will not "Get away with it"! Isaiah reminds his people of this fact. The Lord is faithful even when his people are not.

Chapter 18:
18:1-2 - Chapter 18 is an oracle concerning Cush or the Sudan. Some translations read Ethiopia but Cush in the Old Testament rightly refers to southern Sudan or Nubia near where the White Nile and Blue Nile come together and not to the modern country of Ethiopia in the highlands where the Blue Nile has its sources. Furthermore during Isaiah's lifetime Egypt was ruled by a Sudanese dynasty, the 25th, and Tirhakah was the general in command of Egyptian troops that fought Sennacherib in 701 when the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem.

Isaiah calls Cush the land of whirring wings which are the locusts or insects which inhabit the Sudan. The wings belong to insects and not to birds. They inhabit the country along the rivers of Cush, probably the White Nile and the Blue Nile. Isaiah describes Cush as sending ambassadors in papyrus boats over the sea. The word in Hebrew is yam and can mean sea or lake. It is difficult to know to what Isaiah is referring. There are no large lakes an envoy would need to cross in the Sudan. He could be referring to the Red Sea and sending envoys to Arabia. Papyrus boats would have difficulty crossing such a large body of water. The sea here is almost certainly not the Mediterranean.

God commands swift messengers go to Cush with God's message. The word for messenger can mean a human one like a prophet or a messenger or courier from a king but it is also the common word used in Hebrew for angels, God's messengers. Since Isaiah describes the messengers as swift or speedy I tend to think the messengers here are angels sent with God's
message for the people of Sudan. They are described as a people tall and smooth-skinned which describes the Sudanese people of Africa today and many who live in the highlands of Ethiopia as well. Smooth skin could also refer to them being clean-shaven in contrast to many other peoples who live in Africa. They are a people feared far and wide with strange speech that conquers nations around them. This fits Isaiah's day as the Sudanese had conquered Egypt and ruled it during Isaiah's lifetime. Sudan or Cush is a nation the rivers divide. This is another reference to the White Nile flowing from the Lakes Region of East-Central Africa and the Blue Nile flowing down from the Ethiopian Highlands. The two rivers join at Khartoum the traditional capital of Sudan, to form the main Nile River which flows north into the Mediterranean Sea.

18:3-6 - Verses 3-6 are difficult to understand. The context is the oracle to Cush or Sudan but in verse 3 Isaiah addresses all the inhabitants of the world, all the people of the world. He tells them to look when they see a banner raised on the mountains and listen when they hear the trumpet blowing. In other parts of Scripture the trumpet sounding is a signal for the coming of the Messiah and the Day of the Lord. See 1 Thessalonians 4 or 1 Corinthians 15. In Israel the trumpet was sounded to gather the tribes for assembly. See Numbers 10. Ancient armies would use a banner or flag on a high place above the battle to signal the troops as well as a trumpet. It appears that Isaiah is referring to that picture here. Although in chapter 11 he said the Messiah's coming would raise a banner for the nations and they would gather to him. That is a positive picture of salvation for the nations of the world. This passage appears to be a picture of judgment upon the pagan nations like Sudan and all who support it.

Verse 4 is a quote from the Lord himself. It implies that when the armies of the nations gather he will look upon them from afar and will remain silent. The Lord chooses not to interrupt the evil the nations will do to one another and to his people Israel. Sometimes God works out his purposes by not acting but waiting and allowing history to take its course. He is still in charge and still working out his ultimate will. But he does not always intervene to stop evil even when he could because he will not violate human free will but also because he sometimes uses even evil nations like Assyria and Babylon to carry out his purposes of discipline and judgment upon his rebellious people.

Isaiah says the Lord is still there watching. He uses the image of heat waves shimmering in the sun. You can see them but they are indistinct. The Lord knows what is happening to his people and to the nations and he is watching to carry out his purposes but he is barely visible.

Verses 5-6 depict the Lord's judgment on the nations. Is this Assyria or Babylon or is it the pagan nations in general? This oracle had begun talking about Sudan or Cush but has expanded to express the Lord's judgment on all those who attack his people. Isaiah borrows another image from the vineyard. Before the harvest comes, that is before the nations succeed in their attack, between the time when the buds are ripe and the grapes begin to form and ripen God will prune the vines. In other words before Assyria can fully carry out her plans of conquest on Judah God will "prune" her. He will lop off her branches. This is exactly what happened when Sennacherib invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem in 701. See Isaiah 36 & 2 Kings 18. From a military standpoint there was no way his invasion was going to be thwarted. But at the height of his terror and power God sent a plague on the Assyrian army and forced Sennacherib to withdraw. Jerusalem was spared!

Verse 6 sees what is left of the Assyrian army or the armies of the nations left on the mountainsides for the birds and beast to feast upon. The dead will be so great the birds will feed upon them all summer and the beasts will have carrion enough to feed all winter! Ezekiel 39 tells
of the great feast for the birds and beasts after the Lord defeats Gog and Magog when they attacked Israel. John in Revelation 19 uses the same image when he describes the defeat of the armies of the beast or the antichrist by the Lord Jesus and his saints when he returns. Isaiah's prophecy could be taken to describe the aftermath of the Assyrian defeat at Jerusalem but also the ultimate aftermath of the Lord's defeat of Israel's enemies at the last days. God may have been silent when Assyria or the pagan nations attacked his people but he will not let such attacks go unpunished. He will vindicate his people because he is faithful to his covenant.

18:7 - Isaiah repeats the description of the Sudanese in verse 7 from verse 2. Only this time rather than judgment and woe he says they will bring Yahweh their gifts or tribute as offerings of submission to the Lord. They will come to Mount Zion, to Jerusalem to worship. They will come to the place of the name of the Lord Almighty, the Lord of Hosts. The Sudanese will come to worship Yahweh at the day of the judgment of nations Isaiah describes in the preceding verses. The Day of the Lord is a day of judgment but also a day when the nations will come to worship Yahweh. Both themes are included in Isaiah's description of the time of the end. Repeating the refrain from verse 2 is a literary way of binding the whole of chapter 18 together. He starts and begins with Cush but in the middle speaks about God's judgment of the nations. He begins with destruction but ends with worship.

Why frame chapter 18 this way? Verses 1-2 & 7 deal with Cush or Sudan. Verses 3-6 deal with the nations. God will be silent and watch as the nations fight one another and God uses them to punish his people but also to bring judgment on one another. History itself becomes the judgment of God who is the Lord of history. It is possible Isaiah brackets these lessons about God and history with his message to Sudan in order to remind his readers that God's desire is for all nations to come and worship him like the Sudanese do in verse 7. However, the reality is most nations will not worship the Lord. Those that do not God will judge because he is the Creator and sovereign over the human race that he created. Even when it seems as if God is silent and uninvolved he is working out his purposes for the nations.

Chapter 19:

19:1-4 - Isaiah gives a prophetic message about Egypt. This oracle fits closely with Egypt's contemporary history during Isaiah's lifetime. He declares that the Lord is coming to Egypt to judge her. Her idols will tremble and the hearts of the people will melt. The Lord will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian. Hoshea, the last king of Israel, appealed to Egypt for help in fighting Assyria in 724. No help came because Egypt was torn apart by civil war between Upper and Lower Egypt at this time. The whole country was unstable. Isaiah describes this time of great unrest in detail in verse 2. He says the Egyptians will turn to their pagan gods for help and consult their idols, and appeal to those who claim to speak for the dead for council. They will fail. Their mediums and spiritists or necromancers will not be able to save them. These were all pagan magicians and occult practitioners who tried to communicate with the dead and with spirits in order to gain knowledge of the future and determine what to do. God had forbidden Israel to practice such dark arts but the pagan nations around them used them frequently. We know from the New Testament that the spiritual power of these occult arts was demonic. God says he will confound the mediums and the Egyptians will lose heart and despair because they will not be any help against the power of Assyria that is coming. Isaiah says this is all the Lord's doing because he is going to use Assyria to judge Egypt.
God says he will hand over Egypt to a cruel master, a fierce king from a foreign land, namely the king of Assyria. Following the civil wars and a weakened Egypt a new Nubian-Sudanese dynasty emerged from the chaos. This is Cush that Isaiah prophesies about in chapter 18. Egypt under the Cushite dynasty tried to interfere with Assyria's conquests in Israel and Judah. They attacked Assyria and were soundly defeated three times! Finally Ashurbanipal had enough of Egyptian interference and invaded Egypt in 664 going all the way down the Nile to Thebes which he sacked and plundered. He garrisoned the country following the invasion and for a while Egypt was under the Assyrian yoke. This is exactly what Isaiah prophesied was going to happen!

19:5-10 - Isaiah pictures a time of great drought when the Nile itself will dry up and its riverbed will lie parched and dry. The ESV translates the Hebrew word yam as the sea. It can also mean lake or body of water and in the context that makes the most sense. The NIV translates the word as the river. Isaiah pictures the Nile, its tributaries and the delta dry and full of dust. When the river dries up the plants along the shore wilt and die as well. The nurturing floods that bring the life-giving silt and nutrients to the soil of the Nile Valley stop. Crops fail and fish die. Fishermen cast their nets but catch nothing. Those who gather the flax plants that grow along the river have nothing to gather. They are out of work and the fine linen that was a staple of the Egyptian economy fails. People lose hope because there is no work.

Isaiah paints a bleak picture. Egypt depended upon the Nile for its life. The spring floods renewed the valley every year. If they failed all of Egypt suffered. This is the situation Isaiah describes. Is he describing a literal occurrence or is this a symbolic picture of a damaged and suffering Egypt? Besides a foreign power conquering the land which the Egyptians in their pride could not imagine, the failure of the Nile floods and the subsequent disastrous consequences for agriculture and the Egyptian economy would have been the greatest calamity the Egyptians could have imagined. I think this is what Isaiah is saying to them. Whether the Nile was literally going to fail or not the disaster that the Lord is going to bring upon Egypt is the worst thing they can imagine. It will be as if the spring floods did not come and all the crops failed. Egypt would be permanently damaged. After Assyria Egypt revived somewhat under Neco and his successors but the Babylonians crushed them at Carchemish in northern Syria in 605. Egypt never recovered. After the Babylonians came the Persians who conquered Egypt and after the Persians Alexander and the Greeks. Following the Greeks came the Romans. Egypt would never again be ruled by great Egyptian pharaohs who would spread their influence throughout the ancient world. It would become a great prize because of its agriculture and crops but it would never again be a great player on the stage of the Mediterranean world. Isaiah paints a symbolic picture of Egypt's collapse and fall. The Nile would fail and dry up. The great Nile gods would be defeated!

19:11-15 - Zoan or Tanis was the northern capital of the Ethiopian or Nubian dynasty that ruled Egypt in Isaiah's lifetime. Thus Isaiah says the princes and counselors in the capital of Egypt are fools. They have been deceived and give senseless advice to Pharaoh. If they are so wise then let them show Pharaoh what the Lord has planned for Egypt. They cannot because they do not know. The Lord has confused them in order to give Pharaoh stupid counsel. Egypt will stagger like a drunkard and there will be nothing Egypt can do to recover.

It is possible Isaiah is referring to the foolish attack by Egyptian forces against Sennacherib when he invaded Judah. Tirhakah attacked Assyrian forces three times between 701
and 665 and each time was soundly defeated. His strategy was like the recovery definition of insanity; keep doing the same thing over and over but expect different results each time!

19:16-25 - Isaiah gives a series of prophecies concerning Egypt all beginning with the phrase "in that day". In context "in that day" could refer to the Assyrian defeat of Egypt's armies and its invasion and conquest of Egypt. In other places in Isaiah and other prophets however it is code for the last days or the coming of the Messiah to establish the Kingdom of God. The third possibility is the phrase means both and Isaiah swings back and forth between the two meanings.

Verses 16-17 could be referring to both times. Isaiah says when the Lord lifts up his hand in judgement upon Egypt its armies will be like women. In the ancient world this was an insult as women did not fight battles because they were thought to be too weak and emotional. At this time in history invading armies would take the women of a city captive, rape some of them and take the rest as slaves. The women of a city would not resist the invaders but would be terrified. Isaiah says that is what the army of Egypt will do.

That could easily refer to the time of the Assyrian invasion as the Egyptian army offered little resistance to the Assyrian hordes. However verse 17 says Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians. Whenever it is mentioned the people of Egypt will tremble in fear because of the Lord's purpose for his people. In Isaiah's day Judah hardly struck fear into the hearts of the Egyptians so this must refer to a future time. It is interesting to note that in the Six Day War of June 1967 the Egyptian army was afraid of the Israeli army and its tank forces. The Israelis routed the Egyptian tanks and drove them all the way across the Sinai Peninsula almost to Cairo.

Verse 18 is difficult to translate because of a textual issue. Isaiah declares that there will be five cities in Egypt that will speak the language of Canaan. Isaiah does not identify the five cities. I would speculate that they would be Tanis/Zoan in the delta, Memphis and On/Heliopolis, the twin capitals of Lower Egypt, and Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt on an island in the Nile. That however, is only a guess. These five cities will swear allegiance to the Lord and speak the language of Canaan. Long before Isaiah's day the Canaanite language had been swallowed up by Hebrew in Israel. The other possibility for the language of Canaan would be Aramaic which was already being spoken in Jerusalem and Israel and was one of the languages current in the Assyrian Empire. If the five cities swear allegiance to Yahweh then Hebrew makes the most sense. To the Egyptian prior to Isaiah's time and into Isaiah's time this prophecy would be ludicrous. The Egyptians would never give up the Nile gods because they were part of Egyptian identity. Furthermore Egyptians were racist and considered Semitic peoples beneath them and that they themselves were superior to all other peoples. This partly contributed to their demise as a nation because they could not believe the empires of Mesopotamia could ever be superior to Egypt. To speak Hebrew as a language therefore would be unthinkable in the Egyptian mind. Hebrew to them was uncultured, a peasant language and not sophisticated like Egyptian. Isaiah is saying that "in that day" Egypt will be transformed. They will give up their pagan ways and their arrogance as a culture and be transformed into followers of Yahweh, the Lord God of the Hebrews!

One of the five cities will be called the City of Destruction. The title of this city is the textual problem. The Masorete Text, the standard Hebrew text scholars use to translate the Old Testament, gives the title of the city as destruction, using the Hebrew word heres. That sounds very close to the normal name for On/Heliopolis which is the Hebrew word cheres, with the Hebrew sound for H having a harder sound than the normal English H. Many scholars believe Isaiah is making a play on words here changing the name of Heliopolis, City of the Sun, to City
of Destruction. This would not be a problem except the Dead Sea Scrolls, some manuscripts of the Masoretic Text and the Latin Vulgate translation read City of the Sun, Heliopolis. The Masoretic Text was codified in around 1200 AD while the Dead Sea Scroll copy of Isaiah was written between 200-100 BC. In textual criticism one usually takes the earliest manuscript as the best manuscript. Thus the NRSV, updated NIV, NLT and GNB all follow the Dead Sea Scrolls and read City of the Sun. The NASB, NIV 1984 and the ESV all read City of Destruction and give a textual note with the alternative reading.

There is a further difficulty with the phrase in that it is difficult to understand what Isaiah is talking about. If one translates the phrase the city of the sun, it is simply referring to Heliopolis or On, one of the chief twin cities of Lower Egypt on the Nile near Memphis. On or Heliopolis, the Greek version of the city's name, means city of the sun and it was a major center for sun worship in Egypt. Isaiah may mean that rather than worship Ra, the sun god, one of the chief gods in the Egyptian pantheon, the Egyptians will now worship the Lord. If one translates the phrase city of destruction it is difficult to know to what Isaiah is referring. Will Heliopolis now be destroyed and the sun god along with the city? The first part of verse 18 is positive in nature, in that Isaiah says Egypt will turn to the Lord and the people of the five chief cities of Egypt will all speak Hebrew. Then he says one of those cities will be the city of destruction. Why turn a positive into a sudden negative? What will be destroyed? In verses 19-22 that follow Isaiah talks about God saving the Egyptians. After looking at the textual evidence and the context of the passage I think it makes more sense to follow the Dead Sea Scroll version of Isaiah and read verse 18 as saying city of the sun, referring to Heliopolis. Isaiah is saying "in that day" the center of sun worship in Lower Egypt will now become the center of the worship of the Lord God. That makes the most sense to me as to the meaning of the verse.

As I stated earlier verses 19-22 paint the picture of a time in the future when the Egyptian people will turn to the Lord and worship him. Isaiah says there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of Egypt and a pillar or monument to the Lord at the border of the land. When someone oppresses Egypt the people will not cry out to the sun god or the gods of the Nile, instead they will cry out to the Lord and he will rescue them. He will do so by sending them a savior and defender who will deliver them. This is an extraordinary prophecy because it says one day God will save the Egyptian people by sending them a savior! This is a prophecy of the Messiah of Israel who will also save a Gentile people, a people that had once oppressed God's people Israel. Isaiah is saying the Savior God will send Israel will also save the Gentiles. This is pointing to Jesus and the Gentile mission in the gospel the apostles preached. The oppressors here are probably not other nations and armies but sin and the demonic. God will deliver the Egyptians through his Son, Jesus Christ, who will save them by his death and resurrection. Isaiah does not specifically say that here but he points us in that direction.

When God saves Egypt through the savior he will send them then the Egyptians will worship Yahweh and they will know him because he will have revealed himself to them. They will worship the Lord with their offerings they used to give to their pagan gods.

The Lord will strike Egypt with a plague but he will do this in order to lead them to repent. When they repent and call out to him he will save them and heal them. They will return to the Lord and he will listen to their pleas for mercy.

One of the great centers of early Christianity was Alexandria in Egypt. The Coptic Church in Egypt is one of the earliest and oldest Christian churches in the world and can trace their roots back to the early second and even first centuries. Many people in Egypt turned to the Lord Jesus and believed the gospel. Today there are still Christians in Egypt even though it is a
Muslim country and Christians are under persecution there. God fulfilled his Word and there may come a time in the future before the Lord Jesus returns when many Egyptians will once again turn to the Lord Jesus their savior and be saved.

Isaiah says in verse 23 that "in that day", that is the day of the sending of the savior to Egypt, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will come to Egypt to worship and the Egyptians will go to Assyria and worship God there as well. The two peoples will be united in their worship of Yahweh and they will no longer be enemies. Like the other prophecies of this section this paints a remarkable picture of peace and unity between two people who were ancient enemies. In Isaiah's day there was a highway from Egypt to Assyria along the coast road or another route inland up the Arabah to Damascus on the Jordanian Highlands called the King's Highway. These routes in times of peace were the major trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia. But they were also disputed highways in times of war because they controlled the trade routes between the two centers of civilization. Both routes ran through the territory of Israel. Isaiah implies that "in that day" there will be much coming and going between the two peoples and it will be in a time of peace. That means neither power will be trying to control Israel so they can control the highways.

More remarkably Isaiah says Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together and travel to each other’s countries to worship. The two peoples were ancient enemies but Isaiah foresees a time when they will be united through their worship of Yahweh. The only feasible fulfillment of this prophecy is the unity believers in both nations have that comes with their common worship of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. One must admit however, that even though there have been Christians in Egypt and Assyria since the early 2nd century they have not always been united. Much of Isaiah's vision is yet to be fulfilled. It will completely be realized when the Lord Jesus returns and all the world will be united in him.

Isaiah finishes this remarkable section by saying that Egypt will be his people and Assyria the work of his hands with Israel as his inheritance. He implies that Egypt and Assyria will have equal standing in God's eyes with his people Israel. God uses titles for Egypt and Assyria here in Isaiah 19 that he uses to describe Israel herself. He says Egypt, Assyria and Israel will be a triad, a threesome of blessing to the world, like the blessing God will bring through Abraham. There is only one way I can think of this prophecy can be fulfilled. God does not abandon his covenant with his people Israel. They are forever his people for the sake of his promise to their ancestors. See Romans 9-11 and Paul's discussion of Israel as God's chosen people. But, God has grafted Gentile nations into his chosen people through faith in Israel's Messiah Jesus Christ. We were once no people but now we are the people of God. See 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Romans 9-11. Through Jesus we now inherit the blessing of God to Abraham and are ourselves children of the promise. See Galatians 3. Isaiah's prophecy of Egypt, Assyria and Israel being equally part of God's chosen people is fulfilled the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. By faith in him we the Gentiles are included into Israel and are heirs with Christ of the promises of God!

Chapter 20:
20:1-6 - The year is 711. Ashdod, the Philistine city, had rebelled against Assyria under a rebel king and had appealed to Egypt and Judah for help. None came. Sargon sent his commander, in Hebrew the Tartan, to take Ashdod and crush the rebellion. He did.

God instructed Isaiah to take off his sackcloth and sandals and walk around naked as a sign to the people. The fact he was wearing sackcloth means he was in mourning, which was
probably a result of the ongoing mourning he was expressing at the fall of Samaria and Israel. Many commentators suggest Isaiah was not completely naked but wore a loin cloth for modesty, just covering his genitals. However, the Hebrew word means naked, without any clothes. It would be a very visible sign and also a shameful one for Isaiah. He did this for three years!

Prophets often gave their messages from God to the people through actions and not just words. In this case the message was for Egypt and Cush or Sudan. Egypt was ruled by an Ethiopian or Sudanese dynasty at the time. The message was a warning. Ashdod had appealed to Egypt for help but Egypt turned it down. Isaiah's nakedness was a message to the Egyptians ruled by the Cushites that the King of Assyria would do the same thing to them as he had done to Ashdod. They would be led into captivity naked and barefoot by the Assyrians just like Isaiah was naked and barefoot. They had thought themselves secure in their power and isolation in Egypt. Yet the people of the coastlands, meaning the Philistine cities like Ashdod, will declare in the day the Assyrians invade that they had hoped in Egypt only to be disappointed. Now the same thing has happened to them as happened to us! Egypt will fall!

Ashurbanipal finally had enough of Egyptian meddling in Assyrian affairs in Israel and Judah and invaded Egypt in 664. He went as far as Thebes and sacked it in 663 taking many captives and slaughtering many of its people. Isaiah's warning to them went unheeded.

The rest of the chief Philistine cities will be thrown into a panic by Egypt's downfall. They had trusted in Egypt for help and even though Egypt had betrayed Ashdod and sent no help they still believed in Egypt. God says they will be sorely disappointed! Nothing will protect them from the king of Assyria. The same fate that happened to Ashdod will happen to them and there will be no one to help them or save them.

Chapter 21:
21:1-4 - Isaiah begins a message or oracle about Babylon but he does not specifically name the city until verse 9. He addresses the message to the wilderness or desert by the sea. The word for wilderness means an uncultivated land where flocks would be grazed or a wild place that is uninhabited. That is a curious description of Babylon because the city was on the Tigris River near where the Tigris and Euphrates came together in the great Mesopotamian Valley one of the greatest cultivated places in the ancient world. The area around Babylon was not uninhabited, in fact there were large towns and cities near the great capital. Why would Isaiah describe it this way? Perhaps he is seeing Babylon after its fall and not as it was in Isaiah's day.

The timing of this oracle is also interesting. When Isaiah was alive and ministering in Judah and Jerusalem, Babylon was an important province of the Assyrian Empire. It did not become a nation and power on its own until Nabopolassar, assisted by the Medes, sacked Nineveh in 612, almost a century after Isaiah lived! This section of chapter 21 belongs in the setting of chapters 40-66, yet it is placed here by whoever finally edited Isaiah's prophecy. That demonstrates that the obvious division in the book between chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66 is not as clear cut as it first appears. If Isaiah's disciples preserved his writings and kept them for the right time when the Jews were in exile in Babylon, then this chapter makes sense because it is in a series of oracles concerning the nations around Judah like Jeremiah 46-51. If there were two "Isaiahs" then it is more difficult to explain why chapter 21 ended up where it is. Either way the final editor of the book placed the oracle about Babylon here.

Isaiah says a whirlwind will come against Babylon like the whirlwinds in the Negev. She will be betrayed by allies and destroyed. He names those allies, Elam and Media. Elam was annexed by the Persians after Assyria's collapse in the middle 600s. Media was an ally with the
Babylonians when they sacked Nineveh and ended the Assyrian Empire in 612. Yet in 539 when the Persian general Gobryas entered the city Elam was a province of Persia as was Media. In fact Susa, the capital of Elam and Ecbatana, the capital of Media, became two of the chief cities of Persia along with Persepolis on the Iranian Plateau. Countries that had once been Babylon's allies or provinces turned against her and were now allied with the Persians who conquered Babylon under Cyrus the Great.

Isaiah says all the groaning Babylon has caused the Lord will bring to an end. When Isaiah is given his vision of the destruction of Babylon he is wracked with pain like a woman in labor. He is dismayed and bewildered by what he sees. He had longed for sleep but his vision or dream appalls him and he cannot sleep. The twilight has become a horror for him he says. That suggests he is afraid to close his eyes again because of what he might see.

21:5-10 - Isaiah paints a picture of people or soldiers sitting down to the evening meal. The table is prepared with food, the rugs are spread for the people to recline upon and they begin to eat and drink. Everything is normal. Then suddenly a command comes. Officers get up, oil your shields. In other words prepare for battle! We are being attacked.

Isaiah is speaking of Babylon here and he is saying things will be normal when suddenly they will be attacked. It is interesting to note that in Daniel 5 Daniel is summoned to a banquet hosted by Belshazzar, crown prince of Babylon and regent for his father who was in Arabia. Belshazzar ruled Babylon as king. He was hosting a banquet for all his nobles when a giant hand appears and writes a message on the wall of the banquet hall. Daniel tells the king that his rule is over and his kingdom will be handed over to the Medes and Persians. Daniel 5:30 says that very night he was killed and Darius the Mede took over Babylon.

The Lord tells Isaiah in verse 6 to go set a watchman or post a lookout and have him tell what he sees. When he sees horses, camels or riders on donkeys let him be alert. Then in verse 8 the lookout shouts to Isaiah. He says he has stood watch every day and night. He has been at his post and has seen nothing, until a chariot comes with an announcement. Babylon has fallen! All her idols have been shattered on the ground. John in Revelation 14 & 18 depicts the fall of Babylon the Great or Rome in Revelation. The cry goes up from mighty angels "fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!" God tells his people their greatest enemy and oppressor has fallen. Here it is Isaiah that gives the great announcement. God's people have been have been threshed on the threshing floor by the Lord through the destruction of Jerusalem and their exile. Yet God will bring Babylon to justice for all her evil deeds to Israel. Isaiah tells his people I have heard it from the Lord Almighty the God of Israel himself.

In the midst of exile the Jews struggled with the question of whether God had forgotten them or if they were still his people. They wondered whether Yahweh was really as powerful as they thought he was. Were the gods of Babylon stronger? Isaiah's answer is no. God will destroy Babylon one day and bring her to justice!

21:11-12 - Verses 11-12 are a short cryptic message to Edom, the descendants of Esau who inhabited the highlands on the eastern side of the Arabah Valley from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. In New Testament times Petra was the capital of the Nabatean Arabs who ruled the land.

Isaiah's message is to Dumah which means silence or stillness. It is a play on words with Edom which sounds and looks similar in Hebrew. Isaiah says someone calls to the watchman from Seir, which was a mountain height in the Jordanian Highlands to the south of the Dead Sea
and is often used as an alternative title for Edom in the Old Testament. They ask the watchman how long will the night last or what is left of the night. The watchman replies morning is coming and then night again. If you want to ask again, then ask. In other words, there is no real news. Everything is quiet.

From a historical perspective Edom was a vassal state of Assyria then joined the Babylonians in sacking Jerusalem. This earned them great hatred from the Jews. See Psalm 137. Edom maintained its independence until Arabs overran it in the 400's BC. The Nabateans conquered Edom in the 200's and built Petra as their capital. Reflecting on the history Isaiah's message makes sense. In Isaiah's lifetime and after things will be quiet in Edom. Day will follow night for the foreseeable future.

21:13-17 - The next oracle or message is concerning Arabia. In Old Testament times Arabia referred to all the territory of the Arabian Peninsula up to the Syrian Desert between Syria and Mesopotamia. However, the settled portion of the peninsula was in the south in the highlands of modern Yemen. That is where the kingdoms of Sheba or Seba flourished. It was strategically placed to take advantage of the spice trade from Africa to Mesopotamia. The Arabs controlled the trade and caravan routes which is how they grew wealthy and prosperous.

Isaiah's message in verses 13-15 speaks about the Arabs helping the fugitives fleeing from war. It is unclear who the fugitives are. Are they Jews or Israelites fleeing from the Assyrian or Babylonian invasions? Are they Babylonians fleeing from the Persians? Isaiah tells the Arabs to help the fugitives not flee themselves. I think given the context he is telling the Arabs to help Babylonians fleeing the destruction of Babylon. However, that is by no means certain.

Verses 16-17 are difficult to pin down when Isaiah is talking about when he says within a year the glory of Kedar will come to an end. Kedar is another name for the Arab tribes or Arabia, since Kedar was the second son of Ishmael. The year according to the years of a hired worker is a way to mark time. A hired worker would mark a year as short as possible so that their year of servitude would be over quicker. Also, the ancient Hebrews and other Middle Eastern nations did not have a standardized way to mark time and the years. Thus often the Bible will give the year as the fifth year of some king's reign, etc. They had no concept of 715 BC or 2018 AD.

Sargon invaded Arabia in 715 and Isaiah may be referring to that here. If it is then verses 13-15 refer to Assyrian attacks on the northern Arab tribes. Dedan and Tema were cities on the caravan routes in southern Arabia. Isaiah may be saying the southern Arabs need to help their northern brothers and sisters as they flee from the Assyrians. But, it won't be long before all Arabia is attacked and defeated. God is going to discipline the Arab peoples. They will not be exempt from his judgment through his chosen instrument of Assyria.

Chapter 22:
22:1-4 - Isaiah now speaks against his own city, Jerusalem. He addresses his oracle or message "concerning the Valley of Vision." It is clear from verses 2-13 that this message is about Jerusalem. The Valley of Vision therefore refers to a valley near or around Jerusalem. The two most likely candidates are the Kidron Valley on the east side of the City of David or the Hinnom Valley on the south. Jeremiah frequently refers to the Hinnom Valley because it was the site of much pagan worship and the altar Topheth that King Manasseh built to offer human sacrifices to Molech, the Moabite idol. In the New Testament the Hinnom Valley becomes Gehenna, or hell, a place of burning and torment because it was the garbage dump and fires were constantly
burning. It was a place of smoke and it stank. The Hinnom Valley is mentioned more often in Scripture than the Kidron Valley so I believe that is the valley Isaiah refers to here in verse 1.

Isaiah confronts the people of Jerusalem. He asks them why they have gone up to the rooftops of their homes. Why are they full of noise and commotion? Why are they celebrating? He uses the word revelry or wild rejoicing. In Isaiah's lifetime the city celebrated the withdrawal of Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion force after it appeared Jerusalem would fall in 701. God delivered the city and it was saved.

Unfortunately the people of Jerusalem would use God's deliverance of their city and corrupt it into the official theology of Jeremiah's day a century later. The official theology believed Jerusalem was safe from destruction because a king from David's line ruled there and the Lord's temple resided in the city. God would not allow either the king or the temple to be destroyed. No matter what Jerusalem was safe. They twisted God's covenant promises to justify a false theology that warped their behavior and their ability to perceive their own need for repentance and minimized the threat of God's judgment and discipline upon them.

After Isaiah's question about the celebration in the city his oracle takes a darker turn. Isaiah fast forwards to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586. On July 18, 586 the Babylonian army breached the walls of the city and King Zedekiah fled by night with some of his soldiers and his sons through the wall and headed for the Jordan Valley. He was captured near Jericho and taken to Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters in Riblah in Syria. There his sons were slain before him, his eyes put out and he was taken in chains to Babylon where he died.

Many in the city died of starvation and disease during the two year final siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The people were so desperate at the end they turned to eating their dead in order to survive. That may be what Isaiah describes in verse 2. Verse 3 refers then to Zedekiah fleeing in the night. He was captured and his sons with him. If I am correct this is a remarkable prophecy by Isaiah written a century before any of the events of the final siege of Jerusalem took place.

Isaiah sees the final destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the ruling line of David in the capture and death of King Zedekiah. He tells the people to let him grieve by himself and not to console him. He has seen the destruction of his people, the Jews. It gives him no satisfaction or comfort. His experience prefigures Jeremiah's grief over everything he prophesied to the Jews coming true. It broke his heart.

22:5-11 - God says he has a day that he has decided to judge Jerusalem and all who live in it. It will be a day of terror, trampling and confusion. Walls will be battered down. Foreign troops will attack the city, bowmen from Elam and infantry from Kir. Elam was a province of Assyria and then Babylon, famous for its archers. Its capital was Susa and it lay between the Zagros Mountains of Persia and the Persian Gulf to the southeast of Babylon. Kir was also part of the Assyrian Empire although its exact location is unknown. It is likely in the area of modern northeast Turkey and Kurdistan. 2 Kings 16 says Tiglath Pileser of Assyria sent the people of Damascus into exile to Kir when he conquered the city in 732. The army Isaiah describes here could be the Assyrian army and the time-frame of this passage speaks to the invasion of Sennacherib in 701. However, the ultimate fulfillment of the entire prophecy in chapter 22 is the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586. Judah's sin during the Assyrian invasion was not forgotten by God.

Isaiah says in verse 7 that the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem and Assyrian troops and chariots filled the valleys around the city, namely the Kidron and Ben Hinnom Valleys. God
took away the covering of Judah, his protection of her, because of her sin. He allowed Sennacherib to invade and destroy much of the country in order to discipline his people and bring them back to him.

However, verses 9-11 show that Judah continued to look to its own efforts to save Jerusalem and not to the Lord who had made a covenant with them. Through the guidance of Isaiah King Hezekiah did turn the people back to the Lord and God saved Jerusalem from the siege of Sennacherib. But God did not forget their attitude before the attack nor the focus of their hearts.

Before the king and the people sought the Lord Isaiah says they looked to the weapons stored in the House of the Forest. This is the title of the king's palace that Solomon built. The officials surveyed the city walls and saw where the breaches were. In order to repair them they tore down houses in Jerusalem and used the stone to repair the walls. Hezekiah commissioned a tunnel to bring the water of the Spring Gihon, Jerusalem's only water source, inside the city. His engineers covered over the spring outside the city walls and hid its location then dug a tunnel through the rock under the city walls bringing the water inside the city to the Pool of Siloam. The tunnel still exists today. I have walked its length. The water still flows from the spring. See 2 Chronicles 32.

All these preparations for defense of the Assyrian invasion the people made before they turned to the Lord. They forgot it was the Lord who had placed the spring there in the first place and who had authorized Sennacherib to attack Jerusalem. It would also be the Lord who would allow Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to attack and capture the city and destroy it in 586. God was in charge not the people and not even a good and faithful king like Hezekiah. We must never forget from where our success comes. It is from the Lord!

22:12-14 - When Sennacherib invaded the Lord called the people to repent, to mourn and weep over their sin. Instead the people held a banquet. They celebrated as if they had achieved a great victory. They denied their sin and ignored its consequences. Their attitude was. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" Let's party because we're going to die anyway. We might as well die drunk and happy.

Drowning our sorrows and denying them in dissipation and drunkenness is repugnant to the Lord. Isaiah says the Lord told him he would not forget the peoples' attitude. Even though Isaiah had told Hezekiah and the people that the Lord would save them from the Assyrian invasion, see Isaiah 36-37, instead of praying and believing the Word of the Lord to them, they denied their sin and engaged in revelry. Their unbelief and hopelessness led them to more sin! God would not forget this nor would their unbelief be atoned for. Only their death would pay for their sin. This reminds us that if we must pay for our own sin only our death will atone for our sin. No one is righteous before God. We all deserve death. Thank God that the Lord Jesus died in our place and could pay for, atone for our sin.

This is a chilling passage because it shows how even when God saved Jerusalem the peoples' hearts were still far from the Lord. Their unbelief sowed the seeds of the eventual destruction of the entire country a century later. It also lends credibility to the theory that even though Hezekiah led a great revival and reform in Jerusalem for the people the revival was only external. Their hearts were still far from the Lord. The same would be true in Josiah's reforms beginning in 628. The king was faithful along with some of his leaders. The people were not. In only one generation after Josiah's death they had already reverted to their idolatry. The same happens with Hezekiah because he was followed by his son Manasseh, the most evil king in
Judah's history. It was because of his leadership and sin God said he would send Judah into exile and destroy Jerusalem. Even with good and faithful leaders unbelief in the congregation, in the people, has grave consequences.

22:15-19 - God gives Isaiah a message concerning Shebna, the steward in charge of the king's household. Shebna is revealed as a proud and arrogant man who loves the trappings of his office but is not faithful to God. He, and Eliakim were the first officials to speak with the commander of the Assyrian army during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701. By that time Shebna was the secretary and Eliakim was the steward. It appears that at some point between the time Isaiah gave this message and the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem Shebna was demoted by King Hezekiah and Eliakim was elevated to the position of steward.

God ridicules Shebna for carving out an impressive tomb for himself. He says he will hurl Shebna away from Jerusalem and into a "large country". This could refer to some sort of exile though it is not recorded in Scripture. Some scholars have speculated that Shebna was part of the pro-Egypt faction of the king's advisors who advocated an alliance with Egypt in order to rescue Judah from the Assyrian threat. God through Isaiah roundly condemned this idea. In verse 17 God says he will thrust Shebna from his office and pull him down in station. By Sennacherib's invasion in 701 he was the secretary and Eliakim, a man of faith, is the king's steward. It appears Shebna had been demoted in favor of Eliakim. It is possible that Isaiah gave this message during Ahaz's reign. When Hezekiah, a man of faith, came to the throne he saw Shebna's character and demoted him in favor of the better man, Eliakim.

22:20-25 - Isaiah contrasts Shebna and his arrogant attitude with Eliakim who is faithful to the Lord as one of the king's chief advisors. In the day that God humbles Shebna he will lift up Eliakim and he will become the steward of the palace. The Lord will give all of Shebna's authority to Eliakim. He will be like a father to the people of Jerusalem and Judah.

God says he will place the key of the house of David on his shoulder. The key was a symbol of authority and office like today when we give a dignitary the "key to the city." It was usually tucked into one's sash or attached to cloth or a rope and slung over the shoulder. It was probably made of wood and was ceremonial in nature. Just like a king would carry a scepter as a symbol of his office the chief steward would carry the key. With the key comes both authority and responsibility, especially to the Lord for carrying out his office. The steward was chosen by the king to serve but Isaiah makes it clear that Eliakim was chosen by God!

He shall open and no one shall shut and he shall shut and no one shall open. This refers to his authority to make decisions on behalf of the king and administer his affairs. Only the king would be higher in the land just like Joseph was accountable only to Pharaoh and no one was higher in Egypt. See Genesis 41. More importantly prophetically the authority and stewardship of the keys is picked up by Jesus in the gospels. In Matthew 16 he tells Peter that he now has "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" and the power of binding and loosing which relates to forgiveness and power over the demonic. Later in Matthew 18 Jesus confers this power and authority on all the disciples. In Revelation 1 the Lord Jesus tells John he has the keys of death and Hades. And in Revelation 3 to the church in Philadelphia Jesus tells them he has the key of David and what he opens no one can shut and what he shuts no one can open. This is clearly a reference back to Isaiah 22. Eliakim was the steward of King Hezekiah and carried his authority. The Lord Jesus is the steward of God and the Kingdom of God and carries his authority. Jesus confers the authority and power of the keys to his church as well.
God says in verse 23 that he will fasten Eliakim like a peg that will not come loose and he will bring honor to his father's house. In fact his whole family will receive honor through the service and ministry of Eliakim, from the least to the greatest. In Isaiah 33 God describes Jerusalem or Zion as the Lord's tent that will not be moved whose stakes or pegs will never be pulled up. In Isaiah 54 Isaiah uses the same word for peg to describe God's people returning from exile. They are to expand their tent, lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes to make it bigger to accommodate more people who will come home from exile. It is possible that Isaiah uses the image of the tent to recall the tabernacle, the Lord's tent, in the wilderness. It was the place where God dwelt among his people.

Eliakim will have a role in securing a prosperous future for the people of Judah. He will be like a great tent peg that will not be moved. Yet with great authority and responsibility and with a great destiny from the Lord comes accountability to God to fulfill the task God has given us. It is similar to James 3 which warns us that not many of us should want to be teachers because we will be judged more strictly than all the rest. Leaders are held to a higher standard by God and Isaiah warns him that he too will be judged by God for his deeds in office. He will begin well and bring honor to the king, the people and his family.

Verse 25 warns him however that he will fall. God says the peg that was driven into the ground so securely will give way. It will be sheared off and fall. That which depended on it will be cut down. Nothing more is mentioned of Eliakim after the incident with Sennacherib's commander in Isaiah 36 or 2 Kings 18. We do not know what happened to him. Was he corrupted during Manasseh's reign? Was he killed or executed? We don't know. A curious fact however is that Eliakim is the birth name of the son of Josiah whom Pharaoh Neco placed upon the throne of Judah after he had defeated and killed Josiah. He made him his vassal and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was a weak and evil king who reigned eleven years and presided over the beginning of the downfall of Judah and Jerusalem. Is verse 25 a prophecy not of the fall of the faithful steward of God but of the weak and evil king of Judah who shared the same name but reigned from 609-598? It is possible.

Chapter 23:

23:1-3 - Isaiah next gives a message concerning Tyre, one of the two major Phoenician seaports on the coast of Lebanon, its sister city being Sidon. Tyre was built in two parts. There was a city on the mainland with walls where the majority of the population lived and then an island fortress and port just off offshore that had no bridge or causeway to it. It made Tyre very difficult to destroy and easy to defend. Tyre was captured by Sargon II of Assyria in 722 at the same time as the siege of Samaria. Some 50 years later in 677 Tyre rebelled and Esarhaddon besieged the port but could not take it, however it was forced to pay tribute. After Assyria declined as an empire Tyre regained its independence only to be attacked by Nebuchadnezzar in a 13 year siege. Nebuchadnezzar captured the mainland portion of Tyre but could not take the island. Only Alexander the Great in 332 captured all of Tyre when he built a causeway to the island fortress. By New Testament times the city had been rebuilt and it had regained much of its prominence as a trading and port center.

Isaiah tells the trading ships of Tarshish to grieve over the fall of Tyre. It has been laid waste without houses or port. This probably refers to one or all of the attacks by Assyrian kings. The location of Tarshish is unknown even though it is frequently referred to in the Bible. Jonah fled from God bound for Tarshish when God sent the storm and the great fish to bring back the reluctant prophet. See Jonah 1. Some Old Testament passages point to a city in the western
Mediterranean near Sardinia or Spain. I have speculated Carthage because it was founded by Phoenician traders. Other contexts suggest Tarshish as a descriptive term for great ships that would carry ore for smelting. The bottom line is Tarshish represents trading ships that plied the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea off the coast of Africa. The Hebrews would have been awed by the ships of Tarshish because they were not a sea-faring people and the sea represented the forces of chaos in the Hebrew mind. Anyone who battled the sea and prospered deserved their respect.

Isaiah says Tyre and her sister city Sidon have grown rich from hauling the cargo of many nations including Egypt and her grain. Shihor is mentioned but is unknown although it is paralleled with the Nile which makes me think it is related to Egypt. Tyre was the merchant of many nations. It was a trading power but never really a military power bent on conquest. Tyre grew rich by sea trade and the founding of colonies across the Mediterranean, the most famous of which was Carthage in North Africa, modern day Tunisia.

23:4-9 - Isaiah calls Sidon to be ashamed and Tarshish to wail or grieve. The sea speaks to Sidon about the fate of Tyre. The city has fallen so now there are no merchants on the sea, no children for the sea to nurture. When news of Tyre's fall comes to Egypt there will be anguish over it because who will ship Egypt's grain and trade with her. Isaiah asks Tarshish if this was the ancient city from whom sprung many colonies and trading centers? Who has done this to Tyre? Why has this happened to the city of traders? The answer is the Lord of hosts has done this. Tyre's pride needed to be humbled. God has had enough of Tyre's arrogance. He has brought down Tyre. Isaiah's point is similar to Jesus in the gospels when he says those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted. The principle is the same. Even as Israel and Judah are being humbled by the Lord Tyre will not escape for they traded with anyone and used all nations to further their trade and wealth.

23:10-12 - Verse 10 is difficult because the meaning of some of the Hebrew words is uncertain. This has given rise to markedly different translations in the various versions. The NIV reads: "Till your land as along the Nile, O Daughter of Tarshish, for you no longer have a harbor." But the ESV reads: "Cross over your land like the Nile O daughter of Tarshish; there is no restraint anymore." The NASB reads: "Overflow your land like the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish, there is no more restraint." A margin note reads, perhaps girdle or shipyard. The NLT reads: "Come people of Tarshish, sweep over the land like the flooding Nile, for Tyre is defenseless."

The NIV follows the Dead Sea Scrolls and a LXX translation in order to read "till". The ESV follows the Masoretic Text which reads "go through" and translates the verb as cross over.

The ESV translates the final phrase in the verse as: "there is no restraint anymore." The NIV translates the phrase: "for you no longer have a harbor." Several translations give a margin note that says the meaning of the Hebrew word is unclear. Literally the word does read restraint but it is also translated as girdle or even shipyard. The idea appears to be that which has protected Tyre is now gone. The restraints have been destroyed.

Taken together the different versions are trying to paint a picture of Tarshish and other Tyrian colonies flying into a panic over Tyre's destruction. What will they do? Where will they go for help? As we see in verse 11 Isaiah says the Lord has ordered Phoenicia's fortresses destroyed.

Why has Tyre been captured and sacked by the Assyrians? This is the Lord's doing. He has determined that Tyre will be destroyed. Various Assyrian kings attacked, captured and
forced Tyre to pay tribute until Ashurbanipal took the city in 664. He sacked the larger part of Tyre on the mainland but left the island fortress. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre for 13 years but could not subdue the island. Finally Alexander the Great built a causeway to the fortress from the mainland and captured Tyre in 7 months. Tyre eventually was built up again in during the Seleucid Empire and by New Testament times was once again a thriving port city.

Isaiah says the Lord was disciplining Tyre for its idolatry and pride. Tyre will never rejoice again since God has crushed it. Even if its people flee to Cyprus, one of its colonies they will find no rest because of its destruction.

23:13-14 - Isaiah asks the people of Tarshish to compare Tyre to Babylon or the land of the Chaldeans. The Assyrians had captured and sacked Babylon just like they captured Tyre. The ships of Tarshish will wail because Tyre, their fortress has been destroyed.

The Assyrians did capture Tyre and Babylon but soon after both cities were rebuilt. Tyre flourished especially in the Seleucid times after Alexander captured the city, including the island in 332. Babylon eventually usurped Nineveh as the most powerful city in the Middle East until Cyrus of Persia captured the city in 539. It was finally destroyed by Xerxes after a rebellion in 478. Alexander wanted to restore the city to its former glory but died before he could carry out his plans. Isaiah's vision of the destruction of Tyre and Babylon was fulfilled, partially in his day by the Assyrians and completely many centuries later by Alexander the Great and the Persians under Xerxes.

23:15-18 - This is a confusing passage. "In that day" I take to mean in the days when Tyre is attacked and destroyed by Assyria. It will be forgotten for those years but then rebuilt and once again will thrive and ply her trade all over the Mediterranean. She will be forgotten for 70 years, the span of a king's life. Seventy is probably symbolic as well and not literal. In context it means a lifetime, probably referring to the people of Tyre. It will be forgotten for their lifetimes and then rebuilt once again.

The most difficult part of the passage is the song of the prostitute. There is no reference to the song of the prostitute in any other Old Testament book. Isaiah may be referring to the cult prostitutes of Asherah which were part of the worship of the Canaanite goddess Asherah who was the consort of the Tyrian Baal. Israel was often tempted by Asherah worship. The song says she walks throughout the ruined city singing sweet songs about days past and the beauty and glory of Tyre that is now gone. Proverbs 7 tells the story of a prostitute who seduces a man walking down the street and lures him into her home. Hosea was told to marry Gomer the prostitute as a parable of Israel's relationship with God in Hosea 1. These are key examples of prostitutes in the Old Testament. The examples in Proverbs and Hosea however take place in Israel and not in a pagan city like Tyre.

The prostitute laments that Tyre's glory days are past. Then in verse 17 Isaiah says they will be restored again because the Lord himself will restore it. He will visit Tyre and she will return to her trade. But verses 17-18 are also confusing because on the one hand Isaiah says the Lord will prosper Tyre but on the other hand her newfound prosperity will once again be worldly in nature. Then he says even though her new prosperity will serve the kingdoms of the earth yet her profits and her goods will be holy to the Lord. Her wages will be not be stored but will supply food and fine clothing for those who "dwell (or live) before the Lord."

To what is Isaiah referring? Tyre will obviously be rebuilt and will prosper once again. That did occur. By the time of the Seleucid Empire following Alexander's conquests in the late
300's Tyre was rebuilt and was a flourishing trade city once again. One possibility is that this is a veiled prophecy of the church in Tyre. Christians in Tyre could be those who live before the Lord. When Paul is on his way to Jerusalem in Acts 21 he stops in Tyre and stays with the disciples there for a week. They feed him and offer him hospitality. There are followers of Jesus in pagan Tyre in the days of Paul. This is way beyond seventy years from the Assyrian invasion but as we have seen before prophetic timelines are very fluid and often have a nearfield fulfillment and another fulfillment far into the future.

If this is not the church in Acts 21 then somehow it refers to God's people Israel as benefiting from Tyre's renaissance. It will be the Lord's blessing for his people who now live in Tyre. It should be noted that Jesus journeyed to the region of Tyre and Sidon in the gospels in Matthew 15 and Mark 7. He ministered there and healed some people. There were also people who journeyed down to Galilee to hear him and follow him from Tyre. The gospels do not tell us whether they were all Jews who lived there or if there were some pagans among them too. Isaiah could be speaking about all of these examples.

Chapter 24:
24:1-3 - From chapter 13 through chapter 23 Isaiah has given various prophecies concerning the nations including Babylon, Egypt and Tyre. Now his prophecy focuses upon the whole earth. Isaiah uses language that is similar to Amos and other prophets speaking of the Day of the Lord or the last days. This is a prophecy of judgment for the sin of the world and its wickedness.

He begins by saying the Lord is going to lay waste or empty out the earth. The word for empty gives the picture of water emptying out of a sink, going down the drain. The Lord is going to devastate the whole earth. 2 Peter 3 says the Day of the Lord will come like a thief and the heavens will disappear with a roar and the elements will be destroyed by fire and everything will be laid bare. Isaiah says the Lord will "twist" the surface of the earth (ESV). The NIV says the Lord will "ruin its face." The Hebrew word literally means to bend, twist or warp. The picture is of the surface of the earth contorting so much that it totally destroys everything. The only force that can do that is an earthquake of mega proportions. When God twists the earth's surface he will scatter its inhabitants. People everywhere will try and flee the destruction.

In verse 2 Isaiah lists the different kind of people who will try and run away from the Lord's judgment. No one will be exempt or favored. The people or laity and the priest will run. Slaves and masters will be no different and the same for maid and mistress. The rich and the poor will all be in the same situation. The buyer as well as the seller, the lender and the borrower, the creditor and the debtor all will run away. The picture is all parts of society will flee. No one has an advantage. In fact Isaiah says those the world thinks have all the advantages, the rich, the masters, the merchants who are wealthy are just as helpless before the Lord's judgment as the poor, the debtor and the slave.

God is going to utterly lay waste and totally plunder the earth. The Lord himself has declared it. This is a picture of the final judgment of God against human sin. Revelation 16 describes it as the seven bowls of the Lord's wrath or the seven last plagues. They are in response to human sin and wickedness to press those who reject God to finally repent or confirm them in their rebellion against God.

24:4-13 - Isaiah sees the earth drying up and withering from the judgment God will pour out on it. There is some discrepancy in the translation of the word dry up. The ESV reads mourn as do several other translations. That is an alternative reading of the Hebrew word. The essential
meaning is the same in that the world mourns, languishes, dries up and withers because of God's actions against it. The great and high people of the world languish or grow depressed and feeble, wasting away in grief. The highest people are those who have the loftiest positions in the world. These are the kings and queens, the prime ministers and the generals. They are those whom regular people look to in order to solve crises and lead in times of trouble. Isaiah says they will be helpless to act when the Lord pours out his judgment upon the world.

God says the earth is defiled by its inhabitants, meaning the human race. The word for defiled means to be profaned or polluted which is related to moral pollution. In Numbers 35 defiled is related to blood spilled on the land. Israel was forbidden to defile the land by shedding innocent blood. This is a picture not of war but of murder, violence; for us today, gang shootings, terrorism and even abortion. The innocent have been slaughtered in the earth and it has defiled it!

People all over the world have broken God's commands and laws. They have broken the everlasting covenant. The covenant Isaiah refers to here is not the covenant God made with Israel because Isaiah is speaking of the inhabitants of the earth. The language reflects that which God used in Genesis 9 following the flood. He made an everlasting covenant with humankind not to judge human sin again by destroying the earth with a flood. God promised to deal with human sin another way. His chosen way was the cross of Jesus Christ where he judged and paid for human sin once and for all. God's judgment here in Isaiah 24 is against those who reject his means of paying for human sin. They face his full wrath over their sin because there is no way left to atone for it. They are responsible before him for their own sins. They broke God's commands and disobeyed his will. They have rejected the Lord. Therefore they will suffer the consequences!

Isaiah says in verse 6 that a curse consumes the earth. The word for curse literally means an oath and most often refers to the swearing of an oath in the making of a covenant. In that context it is also used of the swearing of a curse. This is the word used in Deuteronomy to describe God's covenant curses for disobedience if Israel did not keep God's covenant. Here Isaiah is referring to the curse of sin and its consequences rather than his covenant with Israel. He says the people will suffer for their guilt before him. They will have to bear it themselves. The result is God's judgment. The earth will be burned up and scorched with few people left alive. God's holiness will consume everything and the earth which has been defiled by human sin will be consumed when God judges sin. God will act to punish human sin. His holiness will not let it go as if it were of no account.

From a New Testament perspective the consuming fire of which Isaiah speaks of here is the holy consuming fire of Hebrews 12. God in his holiness punishes human sin by sending his own Son as a sacrifice. Those who are burned up here in Isaiah 24 are those who reject God's sacrifice for their sin. They are doomed to bear their guilt on their own and it will destroy them.

Verses 7-13 paint the picture of all celebration and partying ceasing. "The wine dries up and the vine withers" is the same word picture Isaiah used to describe the earth in verse 4. The merrymakers groan or sigh in grief and pain. They had laughed before when they had gathered to drink and party. They are laughing no longer. The singing, dancing and music have stopped. The laughter has ceased. Isaiah says they had drunk wine with their drinking songs and gotten drunk. They were partying and celebrating. Now they drink to drown their sorrows and grief. The beer is bitter to those who drink it. The word for beer in some versions is translated as strong drink. That is a literal translation but is misleading. It implies distilled alcohol of some sort which the ancient Hebrews did not have. The word implies some sort of fermented drink using grain rather
than grapes. That is why the NIV translates the word beer and is the most likely meaning. The beer was probably strong in nature.

Isaiah writes of a city whose walls have been broken down and whose gates have been battered to pieces. That is a reference to ancient siege tactics which used battering rams to knock down a city's gate and gain entrance through the walls of a city to capture and sack it. The people cry out for wine to drink and forget their pain but there is none. Every house is barred shut. All the joy of the city is turned to grief. Literally the words mean to become evening. In other words the sun has set on joy and celebration in the city. The lights have gone out! The city is left in ruins and desolation.

Isaiah concludes that this is how the whole earth will be when God sends his righteous judgment. The earth will be like the olive harvest when the trees are beaten to loosen the olives. Only a few will be left on the trees. It will be like the grape harvest when only a few grapes are left for the gleaners to pick and use. Only a few will be left alive so great will the death and destruction be. Amos 5 says the Day of the Lord will be a day of darkness and not light. It will be a day of gloom and destruction. That is what Isaiah describes here.

24:14-16 - Isaiah sees the remnant of the earth singing for joy over the majesty and glory of the Lord. Are the survivors God's people? It is unclear. They shout from the west, literally from the sea and from the east, literally in the realm of light, meaning where the sun rises. The call goes out to give glory to the Lord all over the world. The Hebrew word for glory means to be heavy, to give weight to. The Greek word in the New Testament is similar. It could have something to do with the weight of gold or other wealth a king possessed. It came to mean honor. The Romans used the word gravitas which is a good synonym. God has gravity, weight or honor. God's people are called to give him glory. In Revelation 5 the angels and all the creatures of the universe give glory, honor, wisdom and power to the Creator who sits on the throne and to the Lamb who was slain, the Lord Jesus Christ. One of our functions as God's people in eternity will be to give God glory, gravitas and honor. Jesus taught the disciples to pray, may your name be honored in the Lord's Prayer.

Isaiah says from the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise giving glory to the Righteous One, the Lord God of Israel. Peter speaking to the people in the temple after the healing of the cripple calls Jesus the Holy and Righteous One. Stephen in his defense before the Sanhedrin said they killed the Righteous One, meaning Jesus. Here in Isaiah the Righteous One is definitely God. In the New Testament that title is given to the Lord Jesus the Messiah, showing that he is God himself come among us.

The second half of verse 16 shifts perspectives. Isaiah no longer looks far ahead to the praise of the remnant of God's people, the gleanings left after his judgment; see verse 13. He now speaks for himself from his own time and situation. He wastes away and cries out in grief and pain. The treacherous have betrayed him or his people. Who are the traitors who have betrayed Isaiah and his people? It is difficult to tell because Isaiah does not identify them. There are several possibilities. Egypt is one because Judah counted on Egypt to intervene to save them from Assyria but they did not or could not. Assyria proved too strong for them. Another possibility is King Ahaz and his advisors, who have led the people astray when they swore allegiance to Assyria and worshipped their gods. The third possibility is the people of Judah themselves who abandon the Lord and served and worshipped pagan idols. This option has some merit because in verse 13 Isaiah talks about the remnant left after the Lord's judgment like the gleanings in the olive grove after the trees are beaten. The majority of Judah like Israel before
her was unfaithful to the Lord and his covenant. They abandoned God for the false hope of the idols of Assyria and the nations around them. All three options may be possible.

24:17-20 - Isaiah uses a play on words in verse 17. The Hebrew words for terror, pit and snare all sound alike. Terror is pahad, pit is pahat and snare is pah. In verse 18 he says the one who flees from the terror will fall into the pit and the one who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare. This language is reminiscent of Amos describing the Day of the Lord in Amos 5. Amos says the Day of the Lord will catch people and they won’t be able to escape. It will be as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him or as if he leaned his hand on the doorpost and a snake bit him. In Jeremiah 48 Jeremiah uses the same metaphor of terror, pit and snare in his prophecy against Moab. It is possible that he had seen Isaiah's prophecy and used the same image to describe the fate of Moab as God judged them. Here in Isaiah 24 Isaiah is describing the Day of the Lord and God's judgment against a sinful world.

Isaiah says the windows of heaven (ESV) or the floodgates of heaven (NIV) will be opened. The phrase is borrowed from Genesis 7 and the description of the flood. In Hebrew thinking the firmament or dome of the sky separated the waters above the earth from the waters below the earth. See Genesis 1 and the description of creation. In the flood God allowed the primordial waters to pour down from heaven and to well up from under the earth. Following the flood he made a covenant with humankind never to destroy the earth with a flood again if he was going to judge sin. Here Isaiah says the floodgates will open but the earth will shake in a great earthquake. The waters pouring in will not destroy the earth. It is the earthquake that will shake the earth and destroy it. In Revelation 6 in the breaking of the 6th seal there is a great earthquake where every mountain is moved from its base and every island shifts in its place. In the 7th bowl of wrath in Revelation 16 there is a great earthquake more severe than any other in history that shakes the earth. John may have had Isaiah 24 in mind when he describes the great earthquake that splits the earth.

The earth trembles so hard it is literally split apart Isaiah says. It is thoroughly shaken and broken up. It reeks like a drunkard and sways like a hut in the wind. The word for hut means a temporary structure designed to give shelter from the wind and elements. It would shake in a strong wind and perhaps even blow down. Isaiah uses these images because he says the guilt of the sin of the earth and its people are so heavy upon it that it will fall never to rise again. Isaiah says on the day God judges humanity's sin the earth will be utterly destroyed.

When Jesus died on the cross Matthew records that the earth shook and the rocks split apart. Tombs were opened and some of the dead who were holy were raised again to life. See Matthew 27. John records the great earthquake at the end of the bowl judgments in Revelation 16. He says in Revelation 21 that the earth will pass away and God will create a new heaven and a new earth where all vestiges of sin will be vanquished. The old order will be gone and a brand new order of creation will be established. Isaiah agrees with that picture for the old earth will never rise again.

24:21-23 - On the Day of the Lord the Lord will not only punish the kings of the earth for all their sin he will even punish the “powers in the heavens above (NIV)” or “the host of heaven (ESV)”. In other places this would refer to the stars but here in contrast to the rulers of the earth Isaiah is referring to the cosmic powers or angelic powers that oppose God. He is speaking in veiled terms of Satan and his demons. Paul says Jesus disarmed the powers at the cross and triumphed over them in Colossians 2. He wrote in Ephesians 6 that our fight is not with flesh and
blood but with the spiritual forces of darkness in the heavenly places. Peter says in 2 Peter 2 God captured the demonic spirits who rebelled and sinned against God and threw them into the pit in chains reserving them for the Day of Judgment. Some at least are still free but many are already imprisoned. The demons in Matthew 8 ask Jesus if he has come to torture them before the appointed time. That "time" is what Isaiah describes here.

The demonic powers and the kings of the earth will be gathered together in a prison or pit. In Revelation and in the Gospels the Pit or Abyss is described as the prison or holding pen for demonic angels awaiting eternal punishment. See Revelation 9 & Luke 8. Isaiah describes something similar here. The kings and heavenly powers are held in the prison for a long time and then one day finally punished.

On that day, the day of the Lord's judgment and punishment the Lord will shine so greatly that the sun and the moon will be embarrassed by it. The Lord of Hosts will reign in Jerusalem forever. He will show his glory. The NIV ends verse 23 with, "before its elders, gloriously." The elders are Jerusalem's elders. The Good News and NLT concur. However, the ESV translates the phrase, "and his glory will be before his elders." The NRSV, RSV and NASB follow that translation. The Lord's elders would not be Jerusalem's elders but God's heavenly court similar to the elders in Revelation 4 & 5. The difficulty is because of the Hebrew pronoun attached to the word elders. Literally it does read "his elders" which contrasts with the rebellious heavenly beings the Lord has imprisoned and punished. The NIV reads Jerusalem's elders to avoid the difficulty. I think the ESV is correct in this case and the elders are part of God's heavenly court who has stayed faithful to him and who will see his glory on the Day of the Lord!

Chapter 25:
25:1-5 - Isaiah now changes focus and breaks into a song of praise for God's deliverance from foreign invaders. He declares that God is his God. He will exalt and praise him for the wonderful things he has done. The word for wonderful or marvelous is the same Hebrew word he used in chapter 9 to describe the name of the Messiah. He will be the Wonderful Counselor. God has been perfectly faithful in his promises to his people. His plans were formed long ago and he has carried them out.

The Old Testament is a testimony to the faithful plans of God. The earliest person we can date with some certainty from history is Abraham around 2000 BC. David lived around 1000 BC. Isaiah prophesied in the 700's BC. Jerusalem fell in 586 and Malachi, the last prophet in the Old Testament, gave his prophecy in the Persian era around 400 BC. That is 1600 years of history during which God was working out his plan to save a people for himself through whom he would bring forth the Messiah to save the world and forgive human sin. Through him he would fulfill the promise he made to Abraham to bless the whole world. We are mortal and want God to do everything in our lifetimes but God had to orchestrate just the right conditions to send his Son into the world so he could save it. Paul said in Galatians 4 that when the time had fully come God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law to save those under the Law, namely the whole human race. We need to remember Isaiah's words about God's plans formed long ago when we wonder why God does not send Jesus right now to end human history and establish his Kingdom. He is being patient to give people a chance to repent as 2 Peter 3 tells us.

God has made the city a heap of rubble. The fortified city is in ruins. Given the context this could be any number of cities such as Nineveh, Babylon, Damascus or even Jerusalem. The fact that Isaiah says the city will never be rebuilt points to Nineveh and its destruction in 612 by Nabopolassar of Babylon.
Isaiah says the result of "the city's" destruction is that even the Gentiles will honor God and revere him. The nations will come to worship the Lord because of what he has done.

The Lord has been a shelter to the needy and a refuge from the storm. He helps the poor and shields them from distress. He is like a shelter in a storm or shade in the heat. The ruthless and the powerful like the Assyrians are like a storm driving against a wall or being out in the desert heat. God saves his people from them! He subdues the invaders and protects his people like the shade of a cloud on a hot day. He silences them which is probably a reference to the noise and tumult of a battle. The soldiers would give a war cry when they attacked. God has silenced their shouting.

25:6-8 - Isaiah says "on this mountain" the Lord will host a feast for all peoples. The mountain he refers to is probably the mountain of the Lord, or the Lord's temple from chapter 2. The picture of the mountain occurs suddenly here without any prior reference in this oracle. Since the rest of the message concerns the Messianic Feast of God the Temple Mount or Mt. Zion seems the most likely candidate.

God will host a feast not just for his people but for all peoples; every nation, tribe, people and language as John says in Revelation 7. It will be the greatest of feasts with the richest of foods and the finest of wines. Rich food in Hebrew means filled with fat or oil. That means chocolate will be served! No one will have to worry about calories or cholesterol at the Messianic Feast of God! The best of meats will be served. The ESV translates "rich food full of marrow." The fat pieces of meat that were full of marrow were considered a delicacy among the Hebrews. The finest best aged wine will also be served. At the Messianic Banquet alcohol in the form of the finest of wines is a gift from God not a temptation to sin. The same could be said of the meats and rich food. The description is of a feast that would only be found at a king's table that the ordinary Israelite could only imagine. God will serve this amazing food to all peoples, rich and poor, slave and free.

In the Middle East to eat with someone and share a meal or a feast with them were the highest forms of fellowship and acceptance. That is probably why banquets became the norm at a wedding. It was the gift of friendship shared with the wedding guests. Isaiah says God will host all the peoples of the world at his banquet. They will fellowship around the tables with the Lord himself who is hosting and providing the feast! John pictures the feast as a wedding feast in Revelation 19. The Lord Jesus marries his bride, the church. Jesus pictured a king’s feast in his parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew 22. He uses the picture of a feast as a celebration in the parables of the Great Banquet in Luke 14 and the parable of the Two Lost Sons in Luke 15. God gave Israel three great feasts to share before him to commemorate what he had done in saving them, with Passover being the greatest. Jesus himself used the setting of Passover to inaugurate the Lord's Supper. Fellowship or peace offerings in the Tabernacle and temple rituals ended with a feast with God as the host. See Leviticus 7. The Lord hosted the elders of Israel on Mt. Sinai when he ratified his covenant with Israel in Exodus 24. All throughout the Bible the symbol of a feast with God is used to picture the ultimate fellowship and friendship with the Lord.

Isaiah says on this same mountain, meaning Mt. Zion or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem God will also destroy or swallow up the shroud that covers up, wraps around, or enfolds the whole human race. He will remove the veil that covers the nations. The shroud or veil is what the Hebrews would use to cover a dead body and wrap it for burial. Isaiah is pointing to the grave clothes of a dead body. This is the most likely meaning of the shroud and veil because in verse 8
he says the Lord will swallow up death forever. The word means to destroy or gulp down and carries the idea of something happening quickly. God will suddenly wipe out death! Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye we shall be changed and resurrected. Isaiah speaks here of resurrection day and the hope of eternal life in the resurrection with the Lord Jesus in heaven. This is one of the clearest statements in the Old Testament that there is something more to existence than just this life. There is life after death and death does not have the final say in human affairs. God does. His purpose is resurrection and eternal fellowship with his people!

Isaiah says on that resurrection day God will wipe away all tears from our eyes. Sorrow and mourning and suffering will be no more. John paints the same picture in Revelation 21-22 in the new heaven and new earth. We will be with God forever and reign with him in heaven. There will be no more suffering or death or pain for the former things, all that sin destroyed and damaged will be gone forever. God will make all things new. This is the ultimate picture of God's salvation for his people in the Bible. Isaiah hints at it here. The New Testament and especially Revelation flesh it out.

Finally, Isaiah says God will remove the disgrace or the reproach of his people from all the earth. The Jews have been persecuted, demeaned, hunted and killed, ridiculed and forced to move time and again throughout history. They have suffered as has the Lord's church for being God's people. When the resurrection comes and God hosts his people in the Messianic Banquet all that persecution will stop. We, his people, and especially his ancient people the Jews, will reign with him. God will completely vindicate his people forever.

25:9-12 - Isaiah records how the people will praise God "in that day". They have trusted God to save them and he has. The cry goes out to rejoice and be glad in the salvation of the Lord. This song of praise reinforces the idea that if the Day of the Lord is judgment and vengeance upon Israel's enemies, the pagan nations of the world, it is salvation for God's people. He will save them. What awaits his people “in that day” is fellowship with the Lord and resurrection!

The song of praise takes an unexpected turn in verse 10. Up until now it has been focused upon a wide field, the whole world and all the nations. In verse 10 Isaiah narrows the focus down to Moab and the consequences of the Day of the Lord for its people. Isaiah has already given an oracle about Moab and the fate of its people in chapters 15-16. Now he says when the hand of the Lord will rest on “this mountain”, meaning Mt. Zion or Jerusalem, Moab will be trampled under him like straw in the manure. He paints the picture of the Moabites spreading out their hands as they fall into the manure pile like swimmers spreading their hands in the water. God will humiliate the pride of Moab. They had trusted in their skill and intelligence but they will fail them when God saves his people and judges the nations. He will lay low or bring down their pride just like he will bring down the strong walls and fortifications. Isaiah uses the same word in Hebrew to intensify the picture of God's humiliation of Moab.

Isaiah has said the Lord will bring down Moab and humble them because of their pride in chapter 16. The biggest question I have about this passage in chapter 25 is why does he single out Moab here in the midst of a message about God's ultimate salvation for his people and even all the nations? Is he saying that Moab will be excluded from the salvation God offered to the nations because of her pride? Or is Isaiah singling out Moab as an example of a nation that desperately needs God's salvation but stubbornly refuses it because of their pride? Moab becomes the type of all nations who reject the Lord and his salvation. They will receive judgment and humiliation rather than salvation in the Day of the Lord.
Chapter 26:

26:1-6 - Isaiah now gives us a song of praise sung in Judah in the Day of the Lord, "that day." It is a tale of two cities, first describing Jerusalem as the "strong city" and then the "lofty city", which the Lord humbles and brought low. Verse 3 is a famous verse made well known by a hymn or anthem sung in many traditional churches over the past century.

God has made Jerusalem strong, not because it has the greatest manmade fortifications but because his salvation is made known there. The Lord's salvation is its strength and fortress. The Hebrew word for salvation is prophetic here as it is yeshua which is the Hebrew form of Jesus or God saves. Jesus, God's Son, will save Israel from Satan and sin and not only them but all who trust in him. Isaiah says more than he knows here in verse 1.

The people call for the gates to be opened to allow the righteous nation to enter. They are those who have kept faith. Isaiah is the prophet who especially focuses on the faithful remnant of Judah that God preserves through all the judgments to come. They will be saved because God keeps his covenant with his people even though they broke it. The remnant who are righteous will inherit the Lord's Salvation. They trusted in him to save them. Isaiah, along with Jeremiah and Ezekiel fundamentally redefine what it means to be a part of God's covenant people Israel. True Israelites are those who keep faith with God. They are Israelites by faith because they have an ongoing relationship with the Lord. It isn't enough just to be born an Israelite, one must also have faith in God and trust in him. This sets the stage for the New Testament and God's people the church. One must trust Jesus with one's life and follow him as Lord to become part of the church and God's covenant people. One is not born into the church but born again.

Verses 3-4 appear to be similar to a chiasm expressing trust in the Lord and his faithfulness. Literally the Hebrew word order in verse 3 is: The mind stayed (rested) on you, you keep in shalom (peace) shalom because in you he trusts. Verse 4 reads literally: Trust in the Lord forever because the Lord Lord (Yah Yahweh) is a rock everlasting. Yah is a variation of Yahweh so grammatically it is as if Isaiah wrote Yahweh Yahweh.

The poetic form is not exactly a chiasm but the two verses feature a repeating word as a theme that links them together literally. In verse 3 shalom is repeated and in verse 4 Yahweh is repeated. This is not accidental. God is the source of perfect peace or literally peace peace. We can trust the Lord because he is an everlasting rock that will not fail. Thus Isaiah repeats Lord Lord. God supplies peace or shalom, wholeness, to those who trust in him and rest in him. He is a rock, one of Isaiah's favorite descriptions of God in his prophecy. It means he does not change and will not crumble no matter the circumstances. Hebrews 13:8 describes the Lord Jesus this way; he is the same, yesterday, today and forever!

Verses 5-6 focus on "the lofty city" which is the second city in contrast to "the strong city". Both describe Jerusalem. God has humbled the powerful, rich and arrogant in Jerusalem. He has brought them low. Isaiah describes not just a time of attack against Jerusalem but its destruction. The NIV says God levels it to the ground. That points to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586. This is a prophecy of a time a century after Isaiah when Jerusalem's walls will be torn down, the temple burned and the king captured and imprisoned in chains. All those who were not faithful to the Lord, who trusted in alliances and political intrigue, will either be hauled away into exile in Babylon or they will perish in the siege of Jerusalem. The destruction of the city was total unlike the damage caused by Sennacherib in the days of Isaiah.

Isaiah says feet will trample the city but they will be the feet of the poor and oppressed. This describes the people left by Nebuchadnezzar after he had captured Jerusalem and taken the leaders of Judah into exile. 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 39 say that Nebuzaradan, the commander of
Nebuchadnezzar's guard who was in charge of the destruction of Jerusalem, left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields. This was exactly as Isaiah had prophesied.

26:7-10 - Isaiah now turns his song of praise to the Lord and his ways. The path or way of the righteous is level, meaning straight and smooth. It is not up and down with twists and turns. Isaiah describes not an easy life for the righteous but an easy way, in that when we let the Lord guide our lives we are not confused as to what is good to do or avoid. We know the right way and the right decision because the Lord makes it plain for us.

When we walk in the way of the Lord, the way of righteousness, we wait for the Lord and he becomes the desire of our hearts. The word for wait is a word Isaiah uses frequently throughout his prophecy. It means to wait patiently with expectation, to hope for. It is the same word Isaiah uses in the famous passage in chapter 40 about those who wait or hope in the Lord renew their strength like eagles.

Isaiah says morning and night his soul longs for the Lord. He yearns for his presence. The word for yearn in its normal Hebrew form means to be beautiful or lovely. In an alternative form of the Hebrew verb it means to desire, yearn or even lust after. It carries the idea of desiring something that is beautiful. Isaiah says God himself is beautiful and desirable beyond anything in this world. Isaiah says his soul, Hebrew nephesh as in Genesis 2 where God breathed into Adam and he became a nephesh hayya, a living being; and his spirit, Hebrew ruach, meaning wind, breath or spirit, long, yearn and desire the Lord. Here soul and spirit are synonymous and describe the spiritual side of human beings, that part of us that can relate to and fellowship with God because he is spirit, ruach.

Isaiah says when God's judgments become plain to people they learn righteousness. The implication is they did not know what was right before but when they see God's righteous decrees working out in history they learn what is right to do. Verse 10 continues the thought. Isaiah declares that when the wicked are shown grace or favor they learn nothing. They will not question their behavior and they do not change. Even in a land where righteousness is practiced they will continue to do evil because they do not see or pay any attention to the Lord and his glory or majesty. Their hearts are so stubborn they need some sort of crisis to learn to turn away from their wickedness and turn towards God. Without that they will not change!

26:11-15 - When the Lord lifts up his hand he is about to render a judgment. He is pronouncing sentence. The wicked don't see it because they are not paying any attention to the Lord. They do not know their lives are about to be changed. They are so blind they do not understand that their lives belong to the Lord and they are accountable to him.

Isaiah calls on the Lord to open their eyes. He wants them to see how zealous God is for his people. When the wicked finally perceive it they will be put to shame and humbled before the Lord. Isaiah then calls on God to do more than just humble the wicked. He wants God to destroy them. May they be consumed by the fire the Lord has reserved for his enemies! This fire could be the fire reserved for the final judgment on the Day of the Lord. Peter says in 2 Peter 3 that the world and all its elements will be consumed in fire on judgment day. Isaiah calls on God not to use just any fire but the eschatological fire of the last days on the wicked in Judah.

God's plan for his people is not destruction and fire but peace. God has ordained it or established it. In fact everything that Israel has accomplished, meaning all that is good and noble has been done through the Lord's work. He has done it. The NLT translates this phrase, "all we
have accomplished is really from you." Isaiah reflects a Biblical principle here. We choose and act but God empowers and guides. He supplies his Holy Spirit to enable us. Did we do it or did God do it? The answer is yes to both sides of the question. James 1 says all good and perfect gifts come down from the Father of lights above. God partners with us to accomplish his purposes. Isaiah perceived this truth in his day and it is no less true in ours.

Isaiah observes that others have ruled over Israel but it is God alone that they worship. Verses 13-15 fit best in the time of Josiah after Assyria has fallen and Judah has recovered some of her territory including the former lands of Israel, the north kingdom. It does not fit Isaiah's day when Assyria destroyed Israel and subdued Judah. In fact Manasseh worshipped the gods of Assyria and all sorts of other pagan gods during his reign. Judah was not faithful to the Lord at all! But Josiah renewed the covenant when Assyria faltered and Judah was faithful at least for a time. If one fast forwards to the Babylonian era these verses make no sense because Judah was destroyed and her people taken into exile. I think Isaiah is looking forward in his day to the great renewal under Josiah and the fall of Assyria.

Those whom Judah served, namely the kings of Assyria are dead and gone. Their spirits will never rise or return for the Lord has punished them and brought them down. He has wiped out all memory of them. Is Isaiah merely stating that the conquering kings of Assyria are dead or is he also commenting on their eternal state? They are dead but their spirits will never be raised to eternal life. Rarely in the Old Testament is the subject of life beyond death spoken about. Yet in verse 19 Isaiah will speak of the Lord raising his people from the grave so that they live again. It is possible that he is contrasting God's people and their future resurrection with the pagan kings of Assyria who will never see resurrection. Revelation 20 says the dead who do not know the Lord Jesus will be resurrected at the last judgment but it is for judgment and hell not eternal life. In a sense they are raised to eternal death and punishment whereas God's people are raised to eternal life and heaven with the Lord.

Isaiah says the former kings who ruled over Judah the Lord destroyed. He attacked them and brought them down. He may be referring to Sennacherib and his army that was destroyed by the plague the Lord sent among them forcing Sennacherib to retreat to Assyria after he had laid siege to Jerusalem.

God destroyed the pagan kings that had conquered Israel and Judah but he has made Israel great. He has extended their borders and restored the nation. Therefore they will give God the glory and praise! Once again the only historical period given Isaiah's time to which he might be referring is the renewal and revival under Josiah. Judah for a time was free and the king led the people in a thoroughgoing cleansing of the land and the temple, renewing God's covenant. Josiah was also able to recover much of the territory of the Promiseland taken by the Assyrians.

26:16-19 - In a time of crisis the people came to the Lord. The pain and distress was so great they could barely manage a whispered prayer but they sought the Lord. They were like a woman in labor crying out and writhing in pain. But unlike a normal woman at the end of her labor pains there was nothing. Israel gave birth to wind.

The second half of verse 18 is difficult. Literally the words read, "We have accomplished no salvation (yeshua) in the earth and the inhabitants or people of the world have not fallen." The difficulty is in the translation of the word for fallen. Its meaning is disputed in this verse. The NIV-84 translates the phrase: "we have not given birth to people of the world." The NASB says: "nor were inhabitants of the world born." The NLT says: "nor brought life into the world." But the RSV reads: "and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen." The GNB translates the
phrase: "we have accomplished nothing." The updated NIV reads: "and the people of the world have not come to life."

Isaiah frequently uses the word for fallen in his prophecy and in most cases it means fall down, either by accident or by violence, as in fall by the sword. The problem in verse 18 is the context. If one translates the word as fallen as Isaiah frequently does the meaning of the phrase is confusing and makes little sense.

The first half of verse 18 is a remarkable confession of the failure of Israel's mission in the world. They have not accomplished their God-given purpose to bring salvation into the world. Only the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would do that 700 years in the future. They were God's chosen people to bring the world to God but they squandered their opportunity and instead disobeyed God and broke his covenant so that he had to discipline them to bring them back to him. Isaiah understands that the history of Israel is a tragedy. Israel has given birth to wind.

What then does the second half of the verse mean? If one takes the word as fallen as the ESV does the meaning is obscure. However if one translates it as the NIV, NASB and GNB do then the meaning is clear. When Israel failed in her mission to bring salvation to the world the nations were not saved either. They were not brought to life or salvation. But where does one get that meaning? The key is in verse 19 where it reads, "the earth will give birth to her dead." The word for give birth is the same root translated fallen in verse 18 but in a different Hebrew verb form. Verse 19 is speaking of resurrection which I will discuss below. The verb for fallen can have various meanings depending on the context like many Hebrew verbs. Given the immediate context of verses 18-19 it makes sense to translate the verb as giving birth, lying down in some sense, which relates it to fall down. If one translates the word as giving birth then the meaning becomes clear. Israel failed to bring salvation to the world and the nations were not born (perhaps even born again?). But God will bring resurrection and when he does the dead will live!

Verse 19 is one of the earliest statements about resurrection in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 37, Daniel 12 and Hosea 13 all state something similar but Isaiah makes the clearest statement. Some scholars try and discount Isaiah's words claiming he is speaking of national hopes and the "resurrection" of barren farm land. However, that interpretation ignores the context of verse 18 and the rest of chapter 26 which deals with the Day of the Lord.

Isaiah says your dead will live! The word for dead here means those who have died or are dying. Their bodies will rise, stand up or awake. Isaiah is pointing to bodily resurrection. The dead will rise again in new, awakened bodies. They shall live again. Those who now dwell in the dust of the earth will awake and shout for joy. God told Adam after the fall in Genesis 3 that out of dust he was made and his body would return to dust when he died. God promises here to reverse that process! The final consequence of sin in human beings God will overcome: resurrection! Isaiah paints a picture of the dead rising like the dew in the morning with the light of the sunrise shining on the water droplets. The dead will rise shining and full of light. He adds the earth will give birth to her dead. The word for dead in this phrase means shades, ghosts, describing the spirits of the dead in Sheol who have a shadowy immaterial existence. Those shadows or shades will shine with light. The earth itself will give birth to people with new life, a life full of light not shadow and darkness.

Israel had failed in her mission and for all her struggles had only given birth to wind, meaning nothing. God however will one day give birth to resurrection and the dead will rise to new life. The New Testament fleshes out this promise and confirms it in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The resurrection of the dead is the climax of God's Kingdom so much so that John in Revelation 21-22 shows us a picture of God's people resurrected and immortal living in the light
of God forever, seeing him face to face. The beginning of that promise Isaiah speaks of here in chapter 26.

26:20-21 - Verses 20-21 are a warning to Israel to hide and get indoors in order to stay safe because the Lord is coming to judge the world. Isaiah tells his people to go inside into their inner rooms and shelter in place like people in the Midwest go into their storm shelters when a tornado is coming. The Lord's wrath is coming against the world, his fury over human sin. God wants to protect his people. He will not take them away during the time of his wrath but he will protect them from his wrath. It is not coming against them but against sinful humanity.

Isaiah's picture in verse 20 is another passage that confirms my theory about the end times. God does not remove his church from the time of danger and judgment but protects them in the midst of that time. The theory of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture does not fit the pattern of the Bible when God's people face danger. Protection is different from complete removal. God's people will need to take shelter during the time of the Lord's wrath but the time will be short. It will pass. He will protect them.

God is coming out of his dwelling, perhaps meaning his heavenly temple, in order to punish the people of the earth for their sins. See Micah 1. Isaiah singles out bloodshed or murder as especially evil and deserving of God's wrath. In Genesis 4 God says the blood of Abel cries out from the earth for justice. God says bloodshed defiles the land and pollutes it. He says in Numbers 35 that atonement for bloodshed can only be made by the shedding of the blood of the one who shed it in the first place; in other words capital punishment. Isaiah says God is going to judge those who have shed innocent blood because the earth will expose the blood shed upon it. People who have committed murder will no longer be able to hide their crime against God and their victims. What Isaiah describes will be a time of vengeance; a time where sin will be exposed and punished. It will be a frightening time; a time when God's people need to stay hidden and safe. It is the part of the Day of the Lord where God will come down from heaven to judge and punish sinful humanity. He will preserve his people in it but they are to hide and seek shelter until the time has passed. What awaits them on the other side of the darkness of that Day is resurrection and light as in verse 19!

Chapter 27:

27:1-6 - Isaiah says "in that day" meaning the Day of the Lord, the time of judgment and salvation, God will slay Leviathan, the great sea serpent or sea monster with the Lord's great and powerful sword. The sword may be a picture of his powerful Word that he speaks and things come about. Paul pictures the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit in Ephesians 6. John pictures the Lord Jesus in his visions in Revelation 1 & 19 as having a sharp sword that comes out of his mouth which is his Word. Leviathan occurs at least six times in the Old Testament often referring to the Nile crocodile. Here it is clearly a serpent or great snake, a legendary sea serpent. Isaiah could be referring to the legendary dragon of chaos in Babylonian legends that the gods were supposed to have defeated in a great battle and the world was the result. Revelation 12 identifies a great red dragon as Satan, "that ancient serpent." Isaiah's description of Leviathan here is definitely not a crocodile. It is symbolic of the dragon of chaos representing evil and chaos in the world. The point is in the Day of the Lord he will defeat Leviathan with his Word. That is exactly what John says in Revelation 19 that the Lord Jesus will defeat Satan when he returns to earth.
Isaiah then shifts scenes contrasting God’s defeat of evil with his salvation for his people, which are the two sides of the Day of the Lord in the prophets. He describes Israel as a fruitful, pleasant or delightful vineyard. Isaiah has already described Israel as the vineyard God planted in Isaiah 5. There the vineyard failed to produce good fruit. Here the vineyard is very fruitful. The Lord himself is its keeper and he watches over it to water it and guard it so that no one will harm it. God says he is not angry; he has no wrath against his vineyard. In the Day of the Lord the time for discipline and punishment against a rebellious people is over. The Lord brings them salvation in that day. Evil is vanquished. In fact God wishes there were briers or thorns or something he could attack and set on fire in order to protect his vineyard. He is so passionate about his people!

God calls out to his vineyard, his people, to come to him for refuge, to come and make peace with him. He even repeats the request for emphasis. This is God's heart towards his people; shalom, reconciliation, peace, and love. God loves us, his people, and wants to be with us and shelter us because we are his!

Verse 6 seems to stand on its own. It is separate from verses 1-5 though somewhat related and it is not part of the next section in verses 7-11. God says in days to come, not necessarily "in that day", Jacob will take root and Israel will bud and blossom filling the world with fruit. Isaiah says in some future time Israel will not "give birth to wind" but will bear fruit for the whole world. Isaiah may be referring to two things here. First, at some future time Israel will take root again in the Promiseland; she will come home from exile. Second, when she does she will finally blossom and bear fruit for the whole world. She will fulfill her mission to bring God's salvation to the world. See Isaiah 26:11. This could also be a veiled reference to the Messiah, who will bring the salvation God promised he would bring to all peoples through his people Israel. The Lord Jesus will bring God's fruit to the whole world!

27:7-11 - These verses appear to be about the Lord disciplining Israel, especially the ten northern tribes of the Kingdom of Israel. The Lord has struck Israel like he struck her enemies that attacked her, namely Assyria. The Lord killed many in the Assyrian army which laid siege to Jerusalem in 701 under Sennacherib. See Isaiah 36 & 2 Kings 18. Many in Israel had also been slain by the Assyrians in the siege of Samaria and their conquest of Israel. God disciplined them through war and exile. He drove them out of the Promiseland in order to bring them to repentance and atone for their guilt when they rejected his covenant and worshipped and served pagan idols. The word for warfare in verse 8 is uncertain. The NIV follows the Septuagint in translating the word that way. God removed the northern tribes from their land with his fierce breath or wind like the fierce east wind. I have been near the Sea of Galilee when the east wind blows down from the Golan Heights onto the lake. It was dry and intense and whipped up the lake so there were numerous whitecaps on the water. That is the kind of wind Isaiah describes here that blows off the Syrian-Arabian Desert into Galilee, into the north part of Israel.

God says Israel’s destruction and exile atones for her sins. God has judged her and cleansed her. Israel's full atonement for her sin will be accomplished when she crushes all the pagan altars into chalk dust and cuts down all the Asherah poles. When all the incense altars on the high places are torn down then Israel's sin will be completely atoned for. She will not only have been punished and disciplined by the Lord she will have shown she is repentant because the pagan altars and shrines will be cleansed from the land. Even though the ten northern tribes did not return from exile in Assyria many Israelites fled south and swelled the population of Judah after the fall of Samaria. When Josiah began his reforms he took back much of the territory of Israel and tore down and destroyed the pagan altars and Asherah poles on the high places.
throughout the land. In many ways Josiah's reforms and revival fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. The problem was after his death the people reverted back to their pagan ways and the Lord would destroy Jerusalem and take Judah into exile a mere 23 years after Josiah was killed.

Isaiah speaks in verse 10 of the fortified city being deserted and destroyed. There is some debate as to the identity of the city. One option is Jerusalem. A second option is Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. A third option is Samaria, the capital of Israel. All three make sense but in the context of a passage about the destruction of the north kingdom Samaria or Jerusalem make the most sense. If this is Samaria then Isaiah may be looking back on its destruction or looking ahead in the near future to its capture in 721. If this is Jerusalem then he is looking a century and a half into the future to when the Babylonians will capture it in 586. It is quite possible that Isaiah poetically is referring to both cities and uses one metaphor and picture to describe both. Historically both would be destroyed; Samaria first followed by Jerusalem. Judah simply repeated Israel's sins and both kingdoms were destroyed by God.

Isaiah describes a city where the cattle graze on its ruins and people come and use what wood they can find in the ruins to fuel their cook fires. He declares that this is a people without discernment, an insight with which he began his prophecy in chapter 1. They have failed to see their sin and so the Lord will not have compassion on them and the one who created them will show them no favor. They have broken and abandoned the Lord's covenant. Only judgment remains. Yet even after judgment the Lord holds out hope that Israel will come back to the Lord.

27:12-13 - Isaiah connects verses 12-13 with the preceding verses with another use of the phrase "in that day". That refers to the Day of the Lord, the day of judgment upon Israel's enemies, the pagan nations of the world, and salvation for God's people. Isaiah describes a time when God will gather his people one by one from the Euphrates River to the Wadi of Egypt. That describes the entire Promiseland that Israel only controlled for a short time during the reigns of David and Solomon. The word for gathered up literally means gleaned like the poor who would go through the fields after the harvest and pick the few kernels of grain or grapes that were left. That implies they will be few in number because of the Lord's punishment against them. Yet even though they are few God will gather them back to the land. It also implies that he will gather them one by one, not as a group. Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel after him Isaiah begins to redefine who will be part of Israel in the future. Not all born in Israel will be Israelites but only those God chooses. Individuals who believe in the Lord and are faithful to him are the true Israel. These are the ones the Lord will gather to himself. This concept sets the stage for the gospel of the New Testament. Those who have faith in the Lord Jesus as Messiah and Lord belong to the people of God, the new Israel!

Isaiah says a great trumpet will sound and those who were perishing or lost in Assyria will hear it and come home. Those in exile in Egypt will do the same thing. In Numbers when the Israelites were living in the desert the trumpet was used to sound assembly. Isaiah says in the Day of the Lord, God will sound a great trumpet to assemble his people. That image is used in the New Testament to describe God assembling his people when the Messiah comes to usher in the Kingdom of God. Jesus says in Matthew 24 when he returns the trumpet will sound and his angels will gather his elect from the four winds. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 & 1 Thessalonians 4 when the Lord Jesus returns God's trumpet will sound and we will be gathered to meet the Lord in the air and be resurrected and changed forever; made immortal. Isaiah does not speak of resurrection here but says Israel will be gathered to the Lord and come home to Jerusalem where they will worship the Lord. Revelation 21-22 pictures God's people living and worshipping the
Lord forever in the New Jerusalem where all vestiges of sin and its consequences will be banished. In the Day of the Lord God will gather his people from the nations in which they were scattered and bring them home to Jerusalem!

Chapter 28:

28:1-4 - Isaiah shifts focus in chapter 28 to Ephraim or the northern kingdom of Israel. The proud wreath or crown of the drunkards of Ephraim is Samaria. Isaiah pronounces woe upon the city. Set at the head of a valley on a hill, Samaria had been built by Omri, father of Ahab in 879 and became his capital along with the remaining kings of Israel. It was besieged in 725-722 by Shalmaneser V of Assyria and finally destroyed a year later in 721 by Sargon II.

Isaiah mentions those laid low by wine in verse 1 and Ephraim's drunkards in verse 3. Isaiah says the Lord is sending one who is powerful and strong like a great hailstorm to destroy Ephraim. Their response is to get drunk on much wine. The leaders of Israel are so corrupt all they can do is try and escape through getting drunk to try and avoid the pain and disaster coming upon them. The city will be trampled underfoot and destroyed by the Assyrians, who are the hailstorm the Lord is sending. Samaria will be swallowed up like an early ripe fig that someone notices on the fig tree and eats before all the other fruit is ripe.

28:5-6 - Isaiah contrasts the drunken city of Samaria that Israel considered her crown and wreath with the Lord himself who will be a crown of glory for those who follow him: the remnant of the people of Israel. Isaiah declares God will save a remnant of Israel who will be faithful to him. He will be for them a spirit of justice and strength. Many Israelites were killed in the conquest of the nation by the Assyrians. But some faithful Israelites fled south to swell the population of Judah during this time. Even though the Assyrians sent many into permanent exile in Armenia God did preserve a remnant of the northern tribes; evidence of which is Anna the prophetess in Luke 2 who was of the tribe of Asher. Somehow her tribal identity was preserved for 700 years up to Jesus' day. She was part of the remnant God saved from the northern tribes of Israel.

28:7-8 - The preceding context of these verses appears to point to the prophets and priests of Israel. However, the following context, especially verse 14, indicates Isaiah is speaking now about the leaders in Judah who are becoming like their northern brethren. They too are reeling from strong drink, from too much wine and beer. The very ones who were to lead the people of Judah spiritually and speak for God and teach them God's Word are too drunk to stand up. Their faculties are diminished by alcohol. Verse 8 is especially graphic and disgusting. Isaiah states that the tables upon which they eat are all covered in vomit and there is not a spot upon them which is not covered in their filth. The image is of God's spiritual leaders so drunk they can't function. They stagger when they are telling their visions and can't stand straight when they are handing down their judgments. They are good for nothing and lead the people astray.

Isaiah's indictment of the prophets and priests of Jerusalem points to a larger problem in Judah. Their alcohol problems were a symptom of Judah's decline and spiritual unfaithfulness to God. Like Israel before them Judah too had begun to succumb to the temptation to escape through alcohol and not deal with their pressing moral and spiritual problems. They were not seeking the Lord for solutions. They were escaping and trying to drown their pain and distress! This too was idolatrous behavior because they were not turning to the Lord for answers.

Their problems with escaping to alcohol as a symptom of their idolatry are chilling in their implications for us today in the United States. We as a culture habitually seek to escape
from confronting our problems through not only alcohol but marijuana and other drugs, or through video games, pornography and other forms of entertainment. This kind of escape was a symptom of Israel's spiritual disease. It is also a warning symptom for ours as well!

28:9-10 - Isaiah asks to whom the Lord will teach his message and explain it. The priests and prophets are all drunk with wine. Isaiah wonders if it is infants the Lord must teach, those just weaned from their nursing mothers. The truth is the priests and prophets might as well have been children for all their understanding!

Verse 10 is like a jingle meant to be sarcastic and reflect the contempt the priests and prophets have for God's Law which gives life. They had perverted it into rule upon rule upon rule like the Pharisees of the New Testament. Rather than pointing people to God and helping them live as God wanted them to live they ignored God's Law and perverted it. This poetic jingle reflects their sarcasm towards Isaiah's message. All they hear in his plea to obey God and live is law, law, rule, rule, rule! They do not see the Law as a response to God's gracious covenant with Israel. It is a burden, a set of rules that make no sense that are too difficult to follow. They have stopped paying attention, like children who are learning their lessons and repeating things by rote. As one commentator put it, when Isaiah speaks all they hear is "blah, blah, blah."

28:11-13 - Verses 11-13 express God's judgment upon them for ignoring his Law and holding it in contempt. They think Isaiah is treating them like children who need to be taught their lessons. God sees them as rejecting his Law and holding it in contempt because he sees both their attitude and their drunken behavior. They have failed. They need to learn their lessons but it won't be from his prophet that he sent to turn them back to him. They will not listen to Isaiah so he will send another teacher, a nation that does not speak Hebrew but a foreign tongue; the Assyrians!

God spoke to Israel and Judah through his Word in the Law and through his prophets. His Word is rest and life but they would not listen and rejected it to follow pagan idols. Israel rejected God's covenant. Now because of their sin all that is left is discipline through the invading Assyrians. Samaria fell in 721 and Jerusalem was almost conquered in 701 by Sennacherib. Both Israel and Judah suffered under the Assyrian yoke. Isaiah says when Assyria comes God's Word to them will be law, law, law and rule, rule, rule. They reject it and do not believe it so it will literally become "blah, blah, blah" for them so that they may fall and be captured. By refusing to believe God's Word they will be judged by it. Judgment is coming and they will not be able to stop it. The Lord whose Word they have ignored and held in contempt has spoken!

Paul quotes verse 11 in 1 Corinthians 14 in his discussion about tongues and prophecy. He quotes this verse and concludes that tongues are a sign for unbelievers and prophecy for believers. In the context here in Isaiah that makes sense. God sent Israel Isaiah and the other prophets but Israel did not believe they had sinned and broken the Lord's covenant and were deserving of judgment. God determined to send Assyria against them, a nation who spoke a strange tongue in order to discipline them and bring them to repentance. That is the principle Paul is using in 1 Corinthians 14. The prophet is for edifying believers. When he or she speaks believers hear God's Word and are encouraged or they repent and turn back to the Lord. But tongues are to expose unbelievers in the congregation. When someone with a "strange tongue" speaks the unbelievers do not hear God's Word, they scoff at it and reject it, especially when there is no one to interpret. They think people are crazy. Someone speaking in tongues exposes
their unbelief. That is what Isaiah says God will do through the Assyrians to Israel; expose their unbelief through Assyria’s foreign tongue.

28:14-15 - The Lord through Isaiah directly addresses the leaders in Jerusalem, the king and his court, including the court prophets, and the priests who oversee the temple. He calls them scoffers because of their contempt for the Lord's message through Isaiah and for their contempt for the Lord's Law.

They boast about their covenant with death and Sheol or the grave. The ESV translates boast as "say" but the NIV and several other translations read boast. The word is not the normal frequently used Hebrew word for say. It has various shades of meaning depending on the context so it makes sense to translate it boast in verse 15 because it expresses the arrogant attitude of the leadership and their false confidence in their own political maneuverings.

The covenant with death and the grave probably refers to alliances with Egypt that Judah tried to establish again and again hoping Egypt would provide a buffer against Assyria and preserve Judah alive. Or it could refer to their worship of pagan gods like the Egyptian gods or even the gods of Assyria! Isaiah is being sarcastic in the extreme! The leaders in Jerusalem think that Egypt will help them and save them from Assyrian aggression but the reality is they have made a deal with death and the grave!

They are so deep in denial over their sin and disobedience that they do not hear Isaiah's warnings to repent or any of the other prophets like Micah, Amos and Hosea the Lord has sent them. They say the "overwhelming scourge" will not touch them. Isaiah scathingly has them saying, "we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place!" Falsehood can be translated as deception and false gods or idols. They have been deceived by Satan and they don't even know it; they are incapable of seeing it. Denial is their strategy to deal with the Assyrian threat!

Isaiah gives us another clue as to what happens to a people who deny God and break their relationship with him. The leaders in Jerusalem escaped into alcohol and drunkenness in verses 7-8. Here in verses 14-15 Isaiah shows us that denial is also a signal of a lack of repentance and a refusal to face one's own sin. We try strategies that are empty and foolish that actually will bring death rather than life and then claim we are safe from the forces that threaten us. We refuse to repent or acknowledge that our predicament is because of our sin and refuse to see the Lord's discipline and our need to humble ourselves before him. Our pride and denial cause us to behave in an insane manner, trying strategies that do not work and thinking we are safe. If alcohol, escape and denial are all signs of a descent into idolatry and wickedness that deserve the judgment and punishment of God then our nation is in deep trouble because they are apparent in our leaders and our people today in America.

28:16-18 - God responds to Judah's leaders and their covenant with death, their false alliances that they think will protect them from Assyria's might. He has laid a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, a tested stone for a sure foundation. God has laid this stone. The word for tested is most often used with God as the subject. Its root is related to mining metal like gold. It means to test or assay the ore to see if it is genuine and valuable. God is going to put Judah and its leaders to the test by testing them against the cornerstone he has laid. Whoever believes in this stone will not be dismayed, literally be in haste. The word carries the idea of anxiety and confusion. The leaders of Jerusalem are in confusion and are so anxious they have formed worthless alliances with Egypt and have drunk themselves into a stupor in order to flee from the judgments that are
coming. In contrast the one who trusts in the sure foundation and cornerstone God lays in Jerusalem will not be anxious and will not be dismayed.

God is going to measure Judah’s leaders by this stone. He will set a plumb line on it and will see whether the leaders act justly and righteously. A cornerstone was used to keep the walls of a building straight and true. It was the standard to build the walls so they did not fall. In the same way God will measure Judah and Jerusalem by the cornerstone he lays.

Isaiah says a storm of hail, a thunderstorm, and a flood of water, a flash flood, will sweep away their refuge of lies and their shelter of death. Their covenant of death will be annulled and their agreement with Sheol will be null and void; it will not stand. When the "overwhelming scourge" passes through Judah and Jerusalem it will beat them down. God will use the Assyrians as the instrument of his testing and judgment and those who trust in false gods and false alliances will fall. A century and a half later he would use the Babylonians in the same way, only in 586 Jerusalem was taken and Judah as a nation was destroyed.

The cornerstone however is not Assyria. In context it probably refers to the Law of Moses or Isaiah’s message based on the Torah and God’s covenant with Israel. However, New Testament writers apply this passage to the Lord Jesus. Paul in Romans 9 and Peter in 1 Peter 2 both quote the passage and refer it to Jesus. Combined with the stumbling stone passage in Isaiah 8, the two passages together point to Jesus as the one through whom God will not only test his people but judge them, using Jesus as the standard of righteousness. Isaiah says God will judge the leaders of Jerusalem and Judah and they will not survive the Assyrian attack but he will judge all his people and even the whole world when he lays the foundation stone in Zion. Jesus’ cross and resurrection is the ultimate laying of that stone and all who believe in him will not be put to shame. They will not live in anxiety but faithfulness to God. Faith in Jesus God's cornerstone will determine one's eternal fate because he is the standard God will use to test and judge the world!

28:19-22 - The "overwhelming scourge" of Assyria will pass through Judah and Jerusalem again and again. The Assyrians did invade Israel and Judah several times and as a result Judah became a vassal of Assyria and was bound to it, including worshipping Assyrian gods. This was especially evident in Manasseh the son of Hezekiah’s reign. Isaiah says when the Jews finally understand this message and realize all their political alliances are worthless Isaiah’s message will bring them sheer terror. They will know the Lord is against them and seeks to punish them and there will be nothing they can do to stop it. If only they would repent but they will not!

Verse 20 is a vivid portrayal of their lack of resources to meet the invading Assyrians. The bed is too short and the blanket too small! All they have is inadequate to meet the challenge.

Verse 21 shows them why. The Lord is the one who is bringing Assyria and later Babylon down upon them. The great pagan empire might be invading Judah and laying siege to Jerusalem but behind it stands the Lord Almighty who is carrying out his justice upon an unfaithful people. Mount Perazim and the Valley of Gibeon refer to the battle where David's forces routed the Philistines in 2 Samuel 5 & 1 Chronicles 14. During the battle the Philistines abandoned all their gods, their idols, on the field and David ordered them burned and destroyed. It was soon after this battle that David brought the ark to Jerusalem. Isaiah’s contrast is clear. Just as David broke the power of the Philistines in order to establish his kingdom so God is going to break the power of Judah and Jerusalem and bring down David's kingdom. Just as the Philistines abandoned their idols at Gibeon God will cause Judah to abandon the idols they worship as well.
The last half of verse 21 gives us insight into God's heart for his people when he has to judge and discipline them. He will use Assyria to judge and punish Israel but it is not his first choice. Isaiah says God will do his work, "his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task." Isaiah says if we know God we know he is full of mercy and grace. His first inclination is to forgive, reconcile and restore. This is what led him to send Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. But there is a limit to even God's patience. There is a line when our sins are so great God turns away and his holiness demands punishment for our sin. He moves in his holy wrath to punish and to judge. Israel had reached that point. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem had exhausted his patience. For 600 years God had sent his prophets to his people calling them to keep his covenant, from the time of Moses at the Exodus until Isaiah's day. A few times they would return to the Lord but they kept turning away and worshipping idols which led them to wicked behavior that grossly violated God's Law. God was patient. Sinful Israel and Judah kept banking on that patience. When Isaiah and later Jeremiah and Ezekiel told the people his patience had run out and now there remained only his wrath they did not believe them. It was too "strange", too "alien". They did not understand that though God is loving, merciful, patient, forgiving and gracious he is also holy and righteous and his holiness demands that sin be dealt with. Martin Luther spoke of this verse and called God's judgment his alien work, his strange work because we experience God through our Lord Jesus as gracious and forgiving. The Book of Revelation at the end of the Bible combines both the themes of God's grace and his strange work of judgment, fueled by his holiness.

Isaiah gives the arrogant leaders of Judah a final warning in verse 22. Stop your mocking or your chains will be heavier. He calls them to give up their arrogance and mocking of the Lord's Word through his prophet. He called them scoffers in verse 14. Now he calls them to give up their scoffing or it will be worse because Isaiah has heard the Lord's decree about them. The Lord has decreed destruction against the whole land, the whole nation of Judah, not just Jerusalem. The word for destruction means annihilation. The root word for decree means to cut and in a more general sense to decide. Here in context it means God's decision has been cut out like a carver carves a stone. It has been determined and nothing will change it. Judah is going to be destroyed.

Historically only the repentance and reforms of Hezekiah saved Judah and Jerusalem from complete destruction. Yet once Manasseh became an Assyrian vassal and reverted to the worst kind of idolatry and wickedness God determined that the king's sins and the people's sins who followed him were too great. God would judge Judah and Jerusalem and destroy it. The reforms and repentance during Josiah's reign postponed the Lord's judgment but his sons quickly reverted to idolatry. The Lord sent Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to execute his judgment in 597 and in 586 Jerusalem and the temple were completely destroyed. Judah was annihilated according to the Lord's decree. Isaiah's words were confirmed.

28:23-26 - Isaiah uses the picture of a farmer plowing and sowing his fields to describe God's wisdom and his willingness to teach and guide if people are open to him. He asks if a farmer keeps plowing his fields again and again or does he prepare it once and then plants. Isaiah's readers would know it would be silly and wasteful to plow again and again without planting. When he has readied his field does he not sow his seeds in the best way possible so the spices and grain will grow? The NIV reads caraway and cumin in verse 25 while the ESV and other major translations read dill. There is some question as to the precise meaning of the Hebrew word for the herb just like the precise meaning of the Hebrew words for gem stones in the Old
Testament are also unclear. Even if the exact herb is questionable the meaning of the sentence is not. The farmer knows how he is going to plant his fields and orders it accordingly. The ESV brings out the planning of the farmer's planting in verse 25. The farmer uses the best soil he has for his wheat, planting it in rows. The "emmer" or spelt (NIV) which is a cheap grain and less valuable he puts around the border of his field because that is the worst ground. If any of it bears fruit it is a bonus, whereas planting the wheat in the best soil guarantees a good crop of the most valuable grain! Isaiah says in verse 26 that it is the Lord who has taught the farmer this wisdom. He is making the point that even the farmers have learned from the Lord how to plant their fields in order to maximize their crops. They understand different crops take different methods to grow. The leaders in Jerusalem are too dense to learn from the example of the peasant farmers of the land. They understand the Lord's wisdom, the leaders do not!

28:27-29 - Isaiah uses the same picture in these verses only now he describes how the farmer harvests and threshes his herbs and grain. He doesn't use one method for all his different crops. The farmer doesn't thresh his dill or caraway with a threshing sledge built for his wheat. That would ruin the caraway and cumin. The herbs and spices he beats out with a rod or stick, that doesn't ruin the seeds. He knows in order to make bread he doesn't keep threshing the wheat again and again. He threshes the wheat in order to separate the kernels from the chaff and then grinds it. Like the planting when he harvests his grain and seeds he uses different methods adapted to each kind of grain. This is wisdom that he has learned from the Lord because he is wonderful in counsel and wisdom. The words "wonderful in counsel" are very close to the same words Isaiah used in chapter 9 to describe the Messiah, the Wonderful Counselor.

The whole point of 28:23-29 is that God gives wisdom to the farmers because they are willing to listen to the Lord and have taken his counsel. They see that different situations call for different responses in order to maximize the benefits. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem keep trying the same thing, alliances with Egypt and worship of foreign gods, thinking that they will get different results in different situations. That is the AA definition of insanity. They refuse to listen to the Lord and obey his prophets when they tell them what to do and then can't understand why Judah and Jerusalem are threatened but even worse why the Lord is still angry with them. His patience has run out. The wise are not wise at all. The peasant farmers have more wisdom and intelligence than the leadership in Jerusalem. God has had enough!

Chapter 29:
29:1-4 - Isaiah declares a lament against Ariel, which he identifies as Zion or Jerusalem in verse 8. Ariel means the lioness of God. Revelation 5 says the Lord Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah, meaning the Messiah. Revelation 21 says the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from God is like a bride adorned for her husband. It is symbolic of the dwelling of the Lord Jesus with his people. She, the New Jerusalem, is the lioness of God, the mate of the lion!

Isaiah further identifies Ariel as Jerusalem when he says it is the city where David settled or encamped. Year after year it is where God's people gather for his feasts. When Isaiah wrote this Jerusalem had been Judah's capital for three centuries. Now however, the Lord will bring distress to Ariel, mourning and grief. The city will be like an altar hearth, like the burning altar. The word for altar hearth sounds like Ariel and is very close in spelling. Ezekiel uses the word to describe the new altar in his vision of the eschatological temple in Ezekiel 43.

God says he will encamp all around Jerusalem and lay siege to it. The word for encamp is the same Hebrew word as in verse 1 where David settled or encamped at Ariel. The city is going
to be besieged! In Isaiah's lifetime this describes the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701. The city was never captured in the Assyrian siege but Hezekiah had to pay a huge tribute to Assyria as a result. Isaiah also looks forward a century and a half later to the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 that resulted in its ultimate destruction.

Ariel, the lioness of God, will be brought low or humbled by God himself! God will deal with the pride and foolishness of Jerusalem's leaders. The city will speak but as a ghost from the dust. The image is of something crushed in the dirt, completely destroyed. Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, came to Jerusalem in August of 586 after the Babylonians had taken the city. He had orders to destroy the city and put it to the torch. His troops burned the temple and the houses of Jerusalem and tore down the walls so that the city was uninhabitable. It was not until 445, when Nehemiah led his expedition to Jerusalem as governor of Judea under Artaxerxes I, King of Persia, that the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt and the city was safe to live in once more.

29:5-8 - Isaiah has been declaring that God is angry with Ariel-Jerusalem. He has determined to judge her, but verses 5-8 point to deliverance not destruction. The "ruthless hordes" of the nations who have come to attack Jerusalem will suddenly be destroyed. They will be like dust blowing in the wind. The Lord himself will come to deliver her with powerful signs; thunder, an earthquake, great noise and a windstorm and with flames of a devouring fire! These are all apocalyptic signs of the Birth Pains of the Messiah that Revelation outlines. Historically, Jerusalem was delivered by God in the siege of Sennacherib in 701. God sent a plague among the Assyrian troops and Sennacherib was forced to withdraw. See Isaiah 37 and 2 Kings 19. But the plague among the Assyrian troops could hardly be taken as all the apocalyptic signs of verse 6. The Lord's deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria becomes a type of the greater deliverance from her enemies in the last days, the time of the return of the Lord Jesus to earth. Ezekiel speaks of an eschatological attack by Gog of the land of Magog in Ezekiel 38. John in Revelation describes the nations coming against Jerusalem and being delivered by the coming of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 16 & 19. God delivers his people living in Jerusalem from the nations Satan has deceived one final time after the Millennium with fire coming down from heaven in Revelation 20. Isaiah points to that final deliverance of Jerusalem and other "deliverances" are types of the great victory of God over Jerusalem's enemies in the last days.

Isaiah says all those who fight against Jerusalem will be like a dream in the night. It will be like a hungry man who dreams he is eating but when he wakes up realizes he is still hungry. Or it will be like a thirsty man who dreams he is drinking but when he awakens he is still parched with thirst. That is how it will be with the hordes that fight against Mt. Zion. They will think they are conquering Israel and Jerusalem but they will "wake up" and realize they have failed. Sennacherib is a prime example of this. He had laid waste to Judah's fortified cities and laid siege to Jerusalem. There was no way Hezekiah's forces could defeat the Assyrian army. In his arrogance he even told Hezekiah that Yahweh had sent him to punish Judah! See Isaiah 36 & 2 Kings 18. In the night God sent the plague that decimated the Assyrian troops and Sennacherib was forced to flee. He went to sleep ready to capture Jerusalem. He woke to a very different reality! That is how Isaiah says the nations who wish to attack Jerusalem will feel on the day the Lord intervenes for his city! Many times in history pagan nations have thought they were going to destroy the Jews or the Lord's church and yet God intervened. Isaiah sees the last and greatest intervention of the Lord for his people will be in the last days.
It needs to be noted that Isaiah's prophecy of Jerusalem's deliverance by the Lord and the Lord's saving of Jerusalem during the siege of Sennacherib in 701 contributed to the so-called "official theology" of Jeremiah's day (626-585BC). The kings, the priests and the court advisors along with the people of Jerusalem began to believe that Jerusalem was inviolate. God had promised to save the city and he had. There was a king from David's line who ruled in Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord was in the city where God had declared his name would dwell forever. Because of these two things God would never allow the city to be taken or destroyed. Isaiah's prophecy here in Isaiah 29 further cemented that false teaching in the people's minds. It was as if the people ignored 29:1-4 & 9-10 and only paid attention to 29:5-8! They heard what they wanted to hear and continued to deny their own sin and responsibility before God. That may be part of the reason Isaiah talks about the people's blindness and refusal to repent in verses 11-16. In the end their false theology cost them their city and their lives. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple and the city in July-August of 586.

29:9-10 - Isaiah once again addresses the leaders in Jerusalem and Judah who have not been faithful to the Lord and who do not see why the Lord's judgment is coming upon them. The first two phrases of verse 9 in Hebrew are a play on words. Be stunned and amazed the ESV translates as "astonish yourselves and be astonished." The two Hebrew verbs Isaiah uses sound alike and have similar meanings. The second phrase about being blinded yourselves uses the same Hebrew word for being blind. Isaiah invites them to be drunk and stagger only not with wine or strong drink like beer. Their inability to perceive what the Lord is doing in Jerusalem and his discipline through the Assyrians has made them like they are drunk. They can't see what is going on. They are unable to understand anything!

Isaiah tells us why in verse 10. The Lord himself has put them into a deep sleep. He has sealed the eyes of the prophets and covered the ears of the seers. He is probably referring to the court prophets of the kings of Judah, those attached to the king's household and who served as some of his chief advisors. These prophets had been coopted by the kings of Judah and were seduced by the power of the king's court so much they ended up telling the kings what they wanted to hear and blessing it by saying thus says the Lord. Jeremiah often railed against these false prophets who continually gave the last kings of Judah bad counsel. It was one of the reasons God had to raise up true prophets from among the people to speak to the people and to those in power what the Lord was truly saying to them. See Jeremiah 23. Isaiah says if these prophets ever did speak truth in the Lord's name they do so no longer because God has shut their eyes and ears. His Spirit is not with them any longer. Thus anything they tell the king about what the Lord is saying only compounds the leaders' blindness to their predicament. Their "vision" has been cut off by the Lord himself!

29:11-12 - Isaiah tells the leaders in Jerusalem that his message to them, or perhaps his whole prophecy, has become like words written in a scroll that is sealed. The Hebrew word for scroll the ESV translates book. That is misleading in some ways because we think of a bound book with pages whereas in Isaiah's day official documents were most often written on scrolls with two or more columns of writing. The scroll or book is sealed meaning some kind of official seal. We think of medieval times when a king would use his signet ring to seal a document in wax. In Isaiah's day a seal was often a cylinder made of copper or metal that one wore around one's neck and the scroll or book was sealed with soft clay or sometimes wax that was then tied around the
scroll to keep it in place. The book could legally be opened only by one authorized to break the seal. That is the picture Isaiah gives us here in verses 11-12.

The scroll is given to one who can read and they say I can't read this it is sealed, meaning I'm not authorized to break the seal. Yet Isaiah gave his prophecy to the people of Judah and Israel and to their kings and leaders! They were authorized to read it! God wanted them to read it and repent! When the scroll is given to one who can't read they exclaim I can't read. The leaders are so clouded by their sin and stubbornness that they can't read a message given directly to them. They see it as sealed and unable to be read. The very prophetic message that would save them if they would obey it they think they can't read and therefore understand. It is not God who has sealed the message against them it is their own foolish pride and sin! So when Isaiah shares his message with them they don't listen because they think they cannot understand and their failure to listen confirms their guilt before God. Jesus used the same principle when he spoke to the crowds and the Pharisees in parables. He was not trying to hide his Word from them but to confirm the condition of their hearts. His parables pushed them to make a choice and they rejected him and refused to listen to him because their hearts were already hard towards God, trapped in their own self-righteousness.

29:13-14 - These two verses are quoted in significant ways in the New Testament. Jesus quotes verse 13 in Mark 7 & Matthew 15 in a confrontation with the Pharisees. Jesus saw this passage as perfectly describing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They talk as if they want to worship and serve God but in their hearts they are far from him. In Isaiah's day the people were far from him because of their idolatry. In Jesus' day the Pharisees were far from God because of their self-righteousness which was self-idolatry. Isaiah says this people come to the temple and worship Yahweh with their lips but inside they do not want to love and obey him. Their paganizing of the worship of Yahweh leads them to think that following the rituals in the temple will lead God to give them what they want. Their worship is spiritual manipulation of God as if they think they can actually get away with it!

Paul quotes verse 14 in 1 Corinthians 1. God will shame the wise and the so-called intelligent. God will do wonders among them that will cause the king's wise men and the leaders in Jerusalem to lose great face. They will be shamed which in that Middle Eastern culture is the worst thing that could happen in their eyes. Wonders here could be referring to the Lord's deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria. It could also be the Lord's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem by using the pagan Assyrians and later the Babylonians. The wise if they were faithful to God and attuned to his Spirit would have understood what God was doing and repented. They would have listened to Isaiah, Micah and the other prophets. But they refused and instead pursued their alliances with Egypt and their political intrigues trying to find a military and political solution to their problems. Isaiah and the prophets kept telling the people Judah's problems were spiritual and could only be solved by a return to Yahweh and repentance. The wise saw that as "foolishness" and unsophisticated. God says he will shame their wisdom and their intelligence will vanish, it will be shown to be stupidity! Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 1 that the gospel, the message of Jesus the crucified Messiah, is foolishness to the wise and learned of the world. God will show how his "foolishness" is greater than all the philosophers' wisdom! Jesus the crucified one is Lord of all! Their wisdom will be exposed and they will be shamed before the entire world!
Isaiah shows how ludicrous Judah's leaders are being in their attitude towards the Lord. Their vision of God is too small. They think they can hide their true plans and feelings from God, as if he cannot see what they are doing. They ask who sees us and who will know. The first line of verse 16 is profound; "you turn things upside down." Isaiah shows how the leaders are acting like the Creator rather than the creature. In their folly they think the roles are reversed. Isaiah sarcastically asks, "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, he did not make me? Can the pot say of the potter, he knows nothing?" The leaders of Judah have forgotten that the Lord God is the Creator of all. He made them and so knows them more intimately than they know themselves. There is no hiding from him as if we could conceal our thoughts or intentions. We cannot keep him from knowing our plans because he is all-knowing; he is omniscient. Isaiah will flesh out these themes in greater depth in chapters 40-66.

Paul quotes these verses in Romans 9 in his discussion of God's election and rejection of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. He uses them to reinforce God's sovereign will and the fact that God is independent from his creatures and free to act as he pleases in order to accomplish his will. The Lord God Almighty is not beholden to us and he owes us nothing. We however owe him everything! The fact that we are not God but instead are his creatures that he made and are therefore accountable to him is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. The Bible begins with God the Creator. Isaiah reinforces the concept here in 29:15-16.

The proud and arrogant rulers of Jerusalem, the "scoffers" as Isaiah calls them in 28:14, are about to see how futile it is to leave the Lord out of their plans. He will do the impossible and they will be bereft of their power and influence. The very ones they tried to silence and oppress to keep their power, the poor and those who were faithful to God, the Lord will exalt while they will be humbled and shamed! This idea echoes Jesus' words about those who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be humbled. See Luke 14:11. See also Matthew 11 and Jesus' statement about his burden is light for the humble and the downtrodden.

Isaiah says Lebanon is about to turn into a garden and forest again. Isaiah may have given this example because as the Assyrian army moved through Lebanon they would have used up the land, cutting trees for their cook-fires and siege engines and eating everything they could find leaving the land barren. God says one day soon it will all recover because Assyria will be gone! Another possibility is Lebanon was considered like the wilderness of Isaiah 32 but soon it will be cultivated fields and what is planted now will seem like a forest. The problem with this second view is that the vision of chapter 32 is separate from his message here in chapter 29. The themes or the wording are similar but the context appears to be quite different.

In that day, or the day Lebanon turns into a fertile field, the deaf will hear the words of the scroll and the blind will see. The leaders of Jerusalem could not hear or see the Lord's message because of their pride and arrogance. The poor, the blind and the deaf were not given the Lord's Word by the leaders but now they shall see it and hear it. God will unseal his word to them. See 29:11-12. Historically this is what happened during the Protestant Reformation. Luther and the other Reformers put the Scriptures in the hands of the common people while the Pope and the bishops wanted to keep the Bible and in the hands of the priests in order to control its interpretation and thereby control the people. By making the Bible accessible to the people the Reformers changed the church and the power of the priesthood forever! All could read the Bible and study it!
The meek or the humble will rejoice in the Lord again because he will deliver them. Jesus said in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 that the meek would inherit the earth in the Kingdom of God. This passage in Isaiah while not immediately Messianic, does express ideas and themes Jesus used to describe the Kingdom of God and the reign of the Messiah. See Luke 4, Matthew 5 and Luke 7. God will vindicate the poor and those who seek righteousness and follow the Lord. The "scoffers" will come to nothing and their power will be taken from them. Those who practice injustice and lies will be cut down and destroyed. God will cleanse the leadership of Jerusalem from those who seek to do evil and do not follow the Lord. He will restore justice to his people and his land. This prophecy was fulfilled in several ways. First, Hezekiah's reforms brought the people back to the Lord. Then Josiah's reforms and revival restored Jerusalem. Finally, when God allowed Babylon to destroy Jerusalem the exiles were chastised and repented while the king and those who had corrupted the people and refused to follow the Lord were killed or destroyed. The ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy will be when the Lord returns and establishes his Kingdom in all its fullness. Those who seek to pervert justice for their own ends will be brought down.

29:22-24 - Isaiah reminds Judah that the Lord is the same God who redeemed Abraham and it is he who speaks to the house of Jacob. Even though he is the Lord, Yahweh, he is also the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or Israel!

God says Jacob will no longer be ashamed and his face or the faces of the people will no longer grow pale with shame and embarrassment. Israel had been shamed by Assyria and Judah would be shamed by Babylon when the two great powers conquered them. Their humiliation will vanish because they will see their children once again. They had believed their nation was destroyed and their generations cut off. At this time Israel did not have the same developed doctrine of life after death so progeny and future generations were the chief ways one lived on after death. Israel had come to believe there would be no future generations and that their people were going to die out. Isaiah says God will change all of that. They will see their children and rejoice.

Isaiah's next phrase is profound in its implications. He says Israel's children are the work of his hands. In context he is saying God will renew his people and restore their generations. What they thought was impossible God will bring about. In their grief in the aftermath of the Assyrian invasion and conquest they thought their nation was going to perish. God says he will restore it. But there is a wider more global implication from Isaiah words. Children are the work of the Lord. He is the Creator of every new human life. We as parents are co-creators with God but one could say he is the one who creates the soul of every new human being and combines that new soul with the DNA of its parents to bring about a brand new creation, a completely unique individual human being. If that is true then this has profound application to the whole question of abortion and infanticide. That new baby is God's creation; it is not a product of simple biology. God creates that new child it is not something happening to the mother's body alone and so is disposable depending upon her desires and whims. If the new child is God's new creation then we have no right to take its life for our convenience and benefit because it is not ours to take! That new life does not belong to us it belongs to God! In our modern debate about abortion and when it is justifiable we have forgotten this fundamental Biblical principle of human life! God creates it!

Isaiah says when God restores his people Israel through new generations of children he will create then his people will once again revere his holiness and worship his name. God's
restoration will be as dramatic as his rescue from Egyptian slavery. They will stand in awe of the
God of Israel. When God restores their generations he will also restore their worship! The ones
who have gone astray, or as the NIV translates, who are wayward in spirit, will come to
understanding of the Lord. The word for wander or go astray is the same word Isaiah used
to describe the drunken wanderings or staggering of the leaders of Jerusalem in 28:7 at the
beginning of this whole section. Isaiah says what the leaders did in their sin God will correct in
their restoration. The one who could not or would not hear and understand in their rebellion God
will redeem and cause to come to know him and follow him. Those who grumble and complain
will be humble and accept instruction. Those who used to complain about the Lord, his Law and
Isaiah's message, refusing to listen will now have a teachable spirit when God restores Jacob. In
practical terms Isaiah shows us the attitudes and character of the righteous remnant of God's
restored and redeemed people. In the New Testament this comes about because of the work of
the Holy Spirit within the heart of each believer and in the collective heart of the church. Isaiah's
implication is that this new attitude is as much a creation of God and a result of his work as the
new children God will give to his people.

Chapter 30:
30:1-5 - Isaiah returns to his critique of the current generation of Israel and Judah and their
leaders. This section focuses on Judah's intrigue with Egypt and their attempts to form an
alliance with Egypt for protection against Assyria and later Babylon. This chapter may be from
the time right before Sennacherib's invasion in 701.

Isaiah says woe to the obstinate children, the stubborn children, who carry out plans that
are not the Lord's and form an alliance with Egypt that is not prompted by his Spirit. God gave
them priests and prophets to communicate his will to his people but they ignore truth. In fact the
kings and rulers had so co-opted the priests and court prophets they told the kings what they
wanted to hear and baptized it with "thus says the Lord!" God says all that does is heap sin upon
sin. He wanted them to trust him not trust in political solutions. Isaiah tells Israel that the root of
their problem is spiritual not political and military in nature. That is the same problem we have
today in America. As we move further and further away from God and his will we have begun to
trust more and more in our economy or military or political groups and the Lord has removed his
blessing from our country just as he began to remove his blessing from Judah and Israel in
Isaiah's day. He had warned them in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 this would happen but
they ignored his Word and would not listen to his voice.

Isaiah expresses God's opinion of their hope that Egypt would rescue them from the
Assyrian threat. They had not consulted the Lord or sought his direction when they asked Egypt
for help and protection. In God's eyes it was like returning to the slavery from which God had
delivered them six centuries earlier. They wanted to shelter in the shadow of Egypt while God
was willing to shelter them in the "shadow of his wings", a picture of a mother hen sheltering her
chicks. See Psalms 17, 36, 57, & 63. Jesus used the same image when he wept over Jerusalem
for rejecting him as Messiah and Lord in Matthew 23.

God warns the leaders of Israel and Judah that their plan to seek help from Egypt will
backfire because Egypt is impotent to help them. They will only experience humiliation and
shame. Verse 4 claims that Judean officials have already reached Zoan or Tanis in the Nile Delta,
the northern capital of Egypt. Hanes is most often used to designate a city in Lower Egypt some
50 miles up the Nile, but the parallelism of verse 4 leads many to believe Isaiah is referring to
another city by the same name near to Tanis in the Nile Delta.
Tanis became the capital of Egypt in the later dynasties during Isaiah's time. By Sennacherib's invasion in 701 an Ethiopian dynasty had taken over Egypt. The pharaohs of that dynasty had a policy of interference and alliances with the kings of Judah in order to hold off Assyria. The problem was they grossly underestimated Assyria's strength and it finally led to the sack of Thebes by Ashurbanipal in 664. God warns Judah that Egypt is incapable of helping them and they are only deluding themselves. The leaders of Judah will only be shamed and disgraced if they pursue this course of action.

They ignored Isaiah's counsel and it led to Sennacherib's invasion in 701 that almost destroyed Judah and left it an Assyrian vassal. That led to Manasseh's disastrous reign in which as a vassal king of Assyria he led the people into the worst idolatry and pagan worship. The problem was their sins and the sins of his people were so great during his reign that God determined to destroy Judah as a result. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon accomplished God's judgment in 586 taking Jerusalem, destroying the temple and sending the leading citizens of Judah into exile in Babylon. The nation of Judah would cease to exist. The seeds of that disaster Isaiah speaks to here in chapter 30.

Isaiah shows us that when we refuse to trust in God for counsel and protection we begin to look to other things to protect us and save us. The problem is like Egypt with Judah, nothing else is stronger than the Lord God. Every other resource we look to in order to solve our problems is like Egypt for Judah, impotent. Looking at our own resources or to other people or government or another human leader will only bring us grief and shame. We need to trust in the Lord God Almighty!

30:6-7 - Isaiah continues to speak about the futility of Judah forming an alliance with Egypt to stop the Assyrian threat in verses 6-8. He speaks of the animals of the Negev Desert describing the envoys from Judah using the desert road through the Negev to get to Egypt. The analogy he draws compares the dangerous desert to the futile alliance. The Negev is a land of distress and hardship; the ESV reads trouble and anguish. There one finds the lion and lioness, which in Biblical times still inhabited Israel unlike today. Isaiah describes the dangerous poisonous snakes in the desert, the adder, probably a viper, and the darting snakes. Literally the Hebrew words translated darting snakes in the NIV are "flying fiery serpents" in the ESV. That translation is misleading. Isaiah is not describing some mythical, magical flying creature but poetically describing the behavior of the horned viper, native to the Negev. It hides in the sand with only the top of its head and eyes exposed lying in ambush. When prey comes along it swiftly strikes by thrusting its body out of the sand, literally flying through the air for a short distance and injecting its venom into its victim which is excruciatingly painful; thus the "flying fiery serpent." Isaiah describes the Negev Desert as a dangerous country where predators lurk waiting to attack.

A caravan would travel the desert road through the Negev with their cargo or goods laden upon donkeys or camels. Isaiah says it will do the envoys of Judah no good to take their treasures to Egypt as payment. They will find no profit in Egypt because Egypt is utterly useless! The ESV says, "Egypt's help is worthless and empty!" God calls her "Rahab the Do-Nothing!" Rahab is used in various places in the Old Testament. It describes the Nile crocodile and came to mean Egypt. In the pagan nations around Israel it represented the dragon of chaos that the gods wrestled in the beginning and defeated in order to create the world. Job uses Rahab this way and associates it with the churning sea which was seen as a threat in Israelite thinking being a desert people and not a sea-faring one. The sea is often associated with the waters of the primeval chaos and thus called Rahab. The most direct example of this is in Genesis 1 where the Spirit of God
hovers over the waters before God speaks the universe into existence. In Revelation 12 John sees the dragon as representing Satan himself, "that ancient serpent." Isaiah's point is that Rahab was seen as powerful and not easily overcome. No one can control it and that is how the leaders of Judah perceive Egypt, powerful and not easily overcome. Surely it will help them against Assyria! God sees the truth. He calls Egypt "Rahab the Do-Nothing", or as one commentator translated it, "Dragon Do-Nothing!" The once mighty dragon is impotent and helpless and the envoys' journey through dangerous and hostile territory is all for nothing. God shows us when we look to other things besides him to satisfy our needs or to help us in times of crisis we are like the envoys of Judah going to Egypt; making a fruitless journey to gain the help of something that is powerless to do anything at all! We need to keep trusting God!

30:8-11 - This section (from 30:8-30:26), though it is tied to the verses before it, summarizes Isaiah's prophetic message to Israel and Judah, both the Lord's indictment against his sinful, rebellious people and his promise to them of what will happen if they repent. It is one of the most significant prophecies in Isaiah and echoes many of the other prophets and their messages, including language that is similar in content to the New Covenant language of Jeremiah 31.

Isaiah is told to write on a tablet or inscribe in a scroll the words of his message. They shall be a witness to the people of Judah and Israel forever. In Joshua 4 Joshua commanded twelve men, one from each tribe to gather a stone and set it in a pile on the west bank of the Jordan near Jericho where the children of Israel crossed the river as a reminder and witness to them of what the Lord had done. Here God commands Isaiah to write down his message as a witness and reminder of the Lord's Word to his people. The Bible is God's witness to us of who he is, what he has done, his plan for us, what he desires us to do and how he desires us to live. It is his eternal written Word!

God gives Isaiah the reason why he is to write his message on a scroll for all time. Israel is a rebellious people; they are deceitful children who lie and refuse to listen to the Lord. They are unwilling to learn from God how they are to repent and what they are to do. They are unwilling to learn because they have stopped listening to God.

Verse 10 says they tell the prophets and those who have visions from God, the seers, no more visions; no more unpleasant messages. Don't tell us we need to repent. Don't tell us what is right! Only tell us pleasant things. The Hebrew word is literally smooth, but it can also mean flattering. The implication is the people only want the prophets to tell them things that please them and flatter them. Don't confront their sin and rebellion and their need for repentance. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 that the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine and teaching but will gather around them false teachers who will tell them what "their itching ears want to hear." I am reminded today of a certain famous TV preacher who has a huge church in Texas who never preaches about sin and the need for repentance. He only preaches "positive things" to help people feel better about themselves. He is very much like the false prophets that Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophets condemn!

The false prophets feed the people's rebellion. The people command the false prophets to leave the Lord's way and get off the Lord's path. Stop confronting us "with the Holy One of Israel!" Jeremiah commands the people in Jeremiah 6 to "seek the ancient paths". In Isaiah 35 the prophet foresees a time when the people will return to the Lord and walk a highway to a renewed Jerusalem. It will be called the Way of Holiness. Here in chapter 30 the people refuse to follow the Lord's way because they are full of rebellion against the Lord their God!
30:12-14 - Isaiah declares the Lord's punishment upon Judah for their rebellion and refusal to listen to the Lord's Word through his prophets. They have refused to listen to the Lord's message and rejected it, preferring the way of deceit and oppression instead. They have relied on them instead of God. The word for rely means to lean on something like a strong wall.

Isaiah then turns that image against them. He says they have leaned on deceit but the wall of their sin and rebellion they lean upon is cracked and bulging like a high wall about to fail. They are so blind in their rebellion they do not see the bulge in the wall but continue to lean upon it as if it will hold them up! Instead it will collapse, suddenly and without warning. When it does it will break in pieces like a piece of pottery; shattered so mercilessly that there will not be a shard big enough to take coals from a fire or scoop out water from a cistern. There will be nothing left of their "alliances with Egypt" that is useful. God will shatter them and expose their idolatry and lack of trust so completely they will be nothing of their own designs and alliances to trust.

I am reminded of Jeremiah 19, when Jeremiah took the elders of Jerusalem out to the Potsherd Gate and shattered a baqbuq, the precious flask the potter made, in front of them. He declared this is what the Lord will do to Jerusalem. He shattered the flask, the baqbuq, so completely that it could not be put back together again. It was useless and only good to be thrown out of the gate with the rest of the broken pottery pieces. Jeremiah used an acted parable to declare the Lord's judgment upon Jerusalem. Isaiah uses the picture of a bulging, failing wall to declare the Lord's verdict upon his sinful, rebellious people. They refuse to repent therefore the Lord will discipline them severely and all that they trusted apart from God he will remove and destroy so that they are left with either returning to the Lord and trusting him again or nothing!

30:15-17 - The Lord addresses a rebellious Judah again in verses 15-17. He tells them what they need to do and warns them of the consequences if they do not. He calls them to repentance and rest; in these things is Judah's salvation, not alliances with Egypt! Repentance means to return to God. Isaiah has used this theme many times before. Jeremiah would use it as well. Hosea, a few decades before Isaiah began his ministry called on the people to return to the Lord; see Hosea 14. The meaning of repentance is clear. The people have wandered away from the Lord and denied him. They have tried to live without him. They need to return to a close relationship with the Lord who made them his people. Jesus uses the same idea for repentance in the Parable of the Two Lost Sons in Luke 15. Both sons had broken their father's heart and refused to be close to him. The father longed for them to return to him because he loved them. The same is true for God's people Israel. God loves them and wants to show his grace, mercy and favor to them, but they have turned away. The same is true for us. Have we wandered away from God or are we close to him? We need to repent and rest in the Lord.

Rest refers to the Lord fighting for Israel and the people experiencing his direct presence with them despite their enemies. They would be able to "rest" in the assurance that God would fight for them. Exodus, Deuteronomy and Joshua frequently use the concept to describe the fact that because God is with Israel the battles they fight will be miraculously won. They will not have to be filled with anxiety over the outcome of a battle because the Lord is with them. He will cause their enemies to flee. In the covenant blessings of Leviticus 26 God says Israel will pursue her enemies; five will chase a hundred and a hundred will chase ten thousand! Moses in Deuteronomy 32 wonders how the Israelites defeated their enemies the way they did without the
Lord fighting for Israel because one chased a thousand! Isaiah will turn that promise on its head in verse 17! Judah needs to return to the Lord and rest in him!

Isaiah says in quietness and trust is their strength. A faithful people trusts in God and it gives them quietness, peace, and tranquility. Quietness means a lack of anxiety and stress just as Paul said in Philippians 4 to have no anxiety about anything but in everything pray and the peace of Christ that passes all understanding will be given you. Isaiah counseled King Ahaz in Isaiah 7 to trust in the Lord and not be anxious over the invasion of Judah by Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus but the king would not. The sign of Immanuel was given him to assure the king. Instead he panicked and appealed to Tiglath Pileser of Assyria. Isaiah's own career had demonstrated the consequences of disobeying the Lord and not trusting in him. Judah was about to repeat the same mistakes again! They would not trust. They would not rest and be quiet in the confidence that the Lord was with them.

They were unwilling. They ignored the Lord's Word through his prophets. They refused to repent but kept trusting their own resources and wits. Their alliances with Egypt would save them from the Assyrian menace! How wrong they were. God says because you have said we will flee on swift horses and escape, they will flee because the Assyrians will drive them from their land. The swift cavalry and chariots of the Egyptians they thought would save them will not. Instead their pursuers, the Assyrian army will overtake them.

God then reverses his promise to Judah that one will put a thousand to flight. Instead, a thousand Israelites will flee at the threat of one. Even if only five attack they will run away in order to escape. God says they will be left like a flagstaff on top of a mountain and like a banner on a hill. Commanders would often rally their troops to the high ground by planting their battle flag or banners on top of a hill or mountain because it was more easily defensible. Isaiah says Judah will be defeated and all that will be left as a testimony will be the banner left alone on top of the hill. It is possible Isaiah is recalling the defeat of Saul and his sons by the Philistines on Mt. Gilboa in 1 Samuel 31. All the king's forces were slaughtered and Saul himself committed suicide rather than be taken. No one was left alive. One can picture a lonely banner on top of the mountain surrounded by the slain of Israel. The text does not directly quote that passage but it was one of the crushing defeats in Israel's history and the image was a powerful one. Isaiah's message is clear; because Israel will not repent and turn back to God she will be routed and only a banner will be left as a testimony to their defeat.

30:18 - Verse 18 gives God's final Word in this section and it is a word of hope, mercy and grace. This is significant because it shows us that though the Lord will discipline and judge his last word to us is grace and mercy not judgment. Isaiah begins the verse with "yet". The little particle in Hebrew can mean thus or so, comparing what has come before to what follows. It can also mean therefore, which is how the ESV translates it in context. It can serve as a causal particle giving the reason for an action or event. I think the NIV is a better translation and gives the deeper meaning. God longs to be gracious to his people not because he has judged them but because his deepest desire is grace and mercy not judgment. God always wants us to repent and return to him because he longs to be gracious to us because he loves us!

Isaiah uses a play on words in this verse with the word "wait". It means to patiently wait for something, to long for something. The NIV translates the word as "longs for" in the first line which is a proper translation. God is waiting patiently for the right time to show his mercy to his people. In Isaiah's context and time God would deliver Judah from Assyria in 701 during Sennacherib's invasion. More significantly he would bring the exiles back from Babylon under
Zerubbabel in 538. Most significantly of all he would send his Servant and Son, Jesus of Nazareth, to save us all from our sin, the ultimate act of grace to us. That was 700 years in the future for Isaiah. God's timetable is not ours!

The Lord rises to show us his compassion and mercy. He will act to be gracious to us; we can count on it. God is a God of justice and though he judges sin he also acts to save sinners. His holiness is never divorced from his love for us. That is the reason he sent his Servant Jesus to die for us.

Isaiah ends the verse with the second usage of the word for wait. Blessed or happy are those who "wait" for the Lord. We receive a blessing and are fortunate when we patiently wait for God to act in grace and mercy. This is a different word from the word for hope or wait in Isaiah 40 but the meaning is similar. Waiting for the Lord means we hope and patiently endure the trials we suffer because we know and have confidence God will act in our favor. It is who he is. Habakkuk, writing in Jeremiah's day about a century later encouraged the Jews to wait patiently and confidently for God to act. The prophet asked God how long his people would have to suffer under the cruelty of the Babylonians before God would deliver them. God answers in Habakkuk 2:3: "For the revelation awaits the appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay." When we face trials and hard times we need to "wait" for God's timing and deliverance. It will surely come as he wills because our God longs to show us grace and mercy!

30:19-22 - Isaiah outlines the blessing and mercy God will give Judah in the days ahead. They will weep no more because the Lord will be gracious to them. When they cry out he will answer right away. This is in sharp contrast to Jeremiah's words which said that God would no longer answer the people's prayers because of their sin. He was no longer listening because they would not repent. See Jeremiah 7, 11 & 14. Isaiah speaks of a time when God's discipline is past and he will renew his people and the covenant he made with them.

The Lord has given them the "bread of adversity and the water of affliction", meaning bread and water, describing prison food. The people have suffered under their oppressors, namely the Assyrians and a century later the Babylonians. God has brought this upon them to bring them to repentance. He has seemed far away from the people. This often describes our feelings and perception about God in difficult times. We think he has forgotten us because he feels far away from us. God says everything is going to change.

"Your Teacher will not hide himself anymore." This is the way the ESV translates the phrase is verse 20. The NIV translates it "your teachers will be hidden no more." The difficulty is that the Hebrew word for teacher is plural, teachers, but the verb is singular, suggesting teacher. The Good News and NLT translate the phrase so that it is God who is their teacher and see it as singular, the plural teachers reflecting God's majesty like in Genesis 1. The NASB, NRSV and RSV all translate the word Teacher. In the larger context of Scripture it makes more sense to translate the word as a singular, teacher. If that is the case then this becomes an important prophecy of the Lord Jesus as Messiah. God will not hide from his people anymore. He will come to them to teach them his ways. This also points to Jesus' teaching ministry as an essential part of his Messianic calling and mission.

In verse 21 God says the people will hear a voice from behind saying, "This is the way; walk in it." It will keep them from turning to the right or the left. The implication of the "Teacher's" voice coming from behind is that they were walking the wrong way, away from God and the "Teacher" calls them back to the Lord. Isaiah prophesies about God's Way of Holiness in
Isaiah 35. In the time of the Messiah God will bring his renewed people to Jerusalem and they will be transformed and live in holiness before him. This phrase also implies that in the time of the "Teacher" Israel will not be perfect but the possibility of straying will still be present. It is the Teacher's ministry that keeps them on the right way. This describes the situation during Jesus' ministry and afterward in the church. We have his teaching but we can still stray. The Kingdom of God is present in the words and guidance of the Teacher but we are not yet perfected as in the new heaven and earth of Isaiah 65. This is the already-not yet picture of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament.

Just as significantly in the New Testament the earliest name for the Christian movement was the Way. See Acts 9 & 24. Jesus calls himself the Way, the Truth and the Life in John 14. And in Mark 12 the Pharisees come to Jesus in the temple to test him but even they acknowledge that he teaches "the way of God." Jesus is the Teacher that God would send to his people to show them his way so that they could walk in it. He will not hide himself but will be among them. Jesus for three years went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people; see Matthew 4 & Luke 4. The Lord Jesus came to do exactly what Isaiah had prophesied the Lord's "Teacher" would do!

Isaiah's picture of the "Teacher" and what he will do for Israel mirrors Jeremiah's language in Jeremiah 31 of the New Covenant. Israel broke the covenant God made with them at Mt. Sinai even though he was their husband. God will make a New Covenant where he will write his will or his Law on their hearts not on tablets of stone. They will all "know the Lord" and he will remember their sins no more. Isaiah's "Teacher" will bring Israel back to the Lord and guide them in the way of the Lord. When they come back to him they will reject the idols they have been worshipping and despise them. In fact Isaiah says the people will have such a change of heart they will say to the idols of silver and gold they have made and worshipped "be gone" or better, "get out of my sight!" (GNB). The people will treat their idols like unclean things. The ESV and other versions translate the phrase in a general way as unclean or filthy things, and that is the most literal translation in Hebrew. The NIV uses a specific translation that the word was used to describe, that of a menstrual cloth. The image is of a woman after her period throwing away her menstrual cloth because it is unclean and filthy. Isaiah describes a radical change in the people's hearts towards idols! They had worshipped them before but now they treat them as some disgusting and unclean thing. Their hearts have been completely turned toward the Lord by their "Teacher"!

30:23-26 - Isaiah expands his vision of a renewed Israel by focusing on the land and God's blessing of it when he restores the people. He will provide abundant rain so their crops will grow and their fruit or bread will be plentiful. The Lord will give their livestock large pastures or meadows within which to graze. Their beasts of burden will have plentiful mash to eat. On every hill there will be streams of running water. Some of Israel has plentiful water and streams like the Galilee but the southern part of Israel, especially the territory of Judah is mostly desert. Streams of water from every high hill would be a miracle and blessing that people could only dream about. Isaiah describes the blessings of God that echo the covenant blessings of Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 28.

God will restore his people and his land in the day of the "great slaughter, when the towers fall." Isaiah is most likely referring to God's judgment upon the pagan powers of the world that have oppressed Israel. God has already judged Israel and Judah for their sin using

Isaiah then describes how God will renew creation itself for his people. The moon and the sun will give more light so that the darkness will be banished. This passage is similar to Isaiah's description of the new heaven and earth in Isaiah 65 & John's expansion of Isaiah in Revelation 21-22. God will heal the brokenness of his people and heal the wounds that he has given them when he judged them for their sins. Isaiah shows us God is a God of restoration! He will restore his people and his creation in the Kingdom of God!

30:27-28 - Isaiah paints a picture of the Lord coming in judgment against the nations. This is in contrast to the salvation for his people in the preceding verses. The contrast corresponds to the prophecies about the Day of the Lord; a day of judgment upon the pagan nations of the world and salvation for God's people.

The Name of the Lord comes from afar, meaning God's person comes from a faraway place to judge the nations. Isaiah paints a vivid picture of the Lord's face contorted in anger and wrath. He comes with mounting clouds like a great thunderstorm. His lips are full of wrath and his tongue is like a fire that burns so hot it consumes everything in its path.

He then changes the metaphor and describes the Lord's breath as a flash flood rushing down a desert wadi sweeping everything in its path. His breath or ruach which can also be translated spirit is a flood reaching up to a person's neck. A flash flood of that volume would be irresistible, impossible to stand against. God comes in wrath to judge, sifting the nations like a sieve. Isaiah calls it a sieve of destruction and the word means worthless, vain, or empty and often describes idols. He will place a bit in the jaws of the nations to lead them astray. The word means to wander and stagger around aimlessly. The image relates to God confirming the nations in their ignorance and idolatry. They believe the lies of the idols and so therefore God will deliver them over to their ignorance. They will be lost in their idolatry with no chance for repentance. The only way they will know God is in his wrath. Paul reflects this idea in Romans 1.

30:29-33 - Isaiah continues to contrast the Lord's judgment upon the nations, especially Assyria with the people's celebration at the Lord's deliverance. This reinforces the contrast of the Day of the Lord prophecies among the various prophets. The ultimate Day of the Lord will be at the end of history when God judges Israel's enemies and the pagan peoples but at the same time saves Israel and restores them along with the land. In the New Testament it comes at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. See Matthew 24, Mark 13, Acts 1 & Revelation 19-20.

Verses 29-30 illustrate the contrast. The people will sing like they do when they celebrate one of the Lord's feasts; Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles. They will go up singing to the mountain of the Lord, the Temple Mount or Mt. Moriah, with flutes playing and great celebration. They go up to the Rock of Israel. Jacob named God his Rock in Genesis 49. Isaiah uses the term in his prophecy as well; see Isaiah 26 & 44. In Genesis 49 Jacob uses Rock to describe the Lord's unchanging nature. He cannot be moved or destroyed; he is the Rock. Today the Dome of the Rock stands on top of the Temple Mount celebrating the place where the Muslims claim Mohammed was taken up into heaven for his final vision. It is also the traditional
top of Mt. Moriah where Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22 and David bought the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite where he was going to put the temple in 2 Samuel 24 & 1 Chronicles 21. In Isaiah's day it would have been the highest place right above the City of David with the Lord's temple on its summit.

The people celebrate while the Lord's fierce wrath burns against the nations. He will come with his majestic voice and his anger raging like a fire that consumes all. Isaiah pictures the Lord coming like a huge thunderstorm, with hail and a cloudburst which would send the flash floods down the dry wadis sweeping everything in their path.

The Assyrians will be terror stricken by the Lord's coming. In 701 when Sennacherib invaded the land the Lord sent a plague among his army and he was forced to withdraw from Jerusalem before he could take the city. Isaiah had told King Hezekiah not to be afraid, that the Lord would deliver the city from the Assyrian army, See Isaiah 36-37 & 2 Kings 18-19. It is difficult to know whether Isaiah wrote this prophecy in chapter 30 before or after Sennacherib's invasion.

However, Isaiah compares the people shouts and singing with tambourines with the stroke of the Lord's staff that he will use on the Assyrian invaders. Then he says Topheth has long been prepared for the king and the Lord will kindle a great fire with burning sulfur to burn it up. 2 Chronicles 33 says King Manasseh sacrificed his son in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom which was to the south of Jerusalem. Topheth was built on a high place in the Valley of Ben Hinnom; see Jeremiah 7 & 19. By New Testament times the valley was called Gehenna and became synonymous with Hell, the place of burning because it had become the garbage dump for Jerusalem. The smoke from the burning garbage rose up continually and it stank. Most scholars believe it was Manasseh who built the altar Topheth. If that is the case then this prophecy in chapter 30 either looks forward to Manasseh's great sin or it was written during Manasseh's reign as a judgment upon the king's actions. His grandson Josiah would tear down the altar of Topheth dedicated to Molech the god of Ammon, defiling it so it would never be used again. God says he will judge Topheth and burn it with a stream of burning sulfur in order to consume it.

Isaiah links the Assyrian invasion and oppression with Topheth and the grossest kind of idolatry that of child sacrifice. It was Manasseh, as an Assyrian vassal, who committed these heinous acts and led Judah to practice them. God determined that because of his sin he would judge Judah and destroy Jerusalem. Isaiah prophesied in the century of the Assyrian oppression of Judah but also wrote to the exiles a century and a half later after the fall of Jerusalem right before their return to Judea under Zerubbabel and of the time immediately after in 538 before the second temple was completed in 515.

Chapter 31:
31:1-3 - Isaiah now turns his attention to Egypt and those who trust in a political alliance with the Pharaoh to deliver them from Assyria and the Lord's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. He says woe to those who go down to Egypt for help thinking their horses and chariots will rescue them from the invading Assyrians. The problem was not that an alliance with Egypt was wicked in and of itself. The problem was the king and leaders of Judah were trying to solve their problems without consulting the Lord or trusting him. They faced one of the gravest threats to their nation they had ever faced and their answer was Egypt! They did not go to the Lord in prayer until the Assyrians were at the gates and Jerusalem was going to be overrun.

One can see the spiritual condition of the leaders and the people. The temple sacrifices were happening morning and evening. The rituals were performed but they were empty. There
was no faith in Judah. That is one of the reasons God sent his prophets to call Israel and Judah back to him. God was keeping his covenant and he was calling his people to keep the covenant as well.

Isaiah reminds Judah that God is wiser and greater than Egypt! Egypt will change its mind. The Lord God of Israel will not. What he says he will do. He does not take back his words. One never hears the Lord say, "never mind, I didn't mean it!" God has told his people through his prophets, including Isaiah, that he is going to discipline Jerusalem and Judah just like he judged Israel because of their idolatry and sin. He will not take back his words but is coming to punish the evildoers and the wicked among his people.

Isaiah shows only contempt for the "strength" of Egypt. They are men not God. Their horses are flesh not spirit. When the Lord comes in judgment the ones whom Judah has called upon to help will fall and so will Judah. They will both perish together. In Hezekiah's day the people hoped Egypt would save them but they did not come. Hezekiah appealed at the last minute to God when Sennacherib in 701 had laid waste to his fortified cities and his army had surrounded Jerusalem's walls laying siege to the city. Hezekiah prayed and asked God to spare the city and his people. God answered and sent a plague among the Assyrian army forcing Sennacherib to withdraw. See Isaiah 36-37.

The problem was the people didn't learn the lesson that the Lord would save them and could be trusted while Egypt could not. Jehoiachim also formed an alliance with Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon hoping the Egyptians would save Judah and Jerusalem when Jehoiachim rebelled against Babylon. They did not. Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem in 597 and deported the new king Jehoiachin and the cream of the country's leadership to Babylon. He installed the king's uncle Zedekiah as king as a vassal to Babylon. Zedekiah repeated the same mistake ten years later when he too rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar hoping Egypt would intervene and break the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. Egypt briefly moved troops toward Judah but then turned back when Nebuchadnezzar threatened them. Egypt abandoned Judah and Jerusalem to its fate. In July of 586 the Babylonians breached the walls of the city and captured King Zedekiah. A month later they burned the city, the king's palace and the temple to the ground and Judah was no more. Everything the Lord said would happen happened. He had warned them to trust in him and not Egypt to save them. The kings, priests and leaders of Judah ignored his warning and paid for it with their lives and the destruction of their nation. The people survived but the nation of Judah was gone. See 2 Kings 24-25 & Jeremiah 52.

The lesson for us today is clear. Whom do we trust when a crisis comes? Do we trust our own wits and resources to solve our problems or do we trust the Lord? We are faced continually with the same dilemma that the kings and people of Judah were faced with. What is our Egypt to which we keep looking? When will we learn that only the Lord God is strong enough and wise enough to help us?

31:4-5 - These two verses speak of the Lord's protection and salvation for his people even though verses 1-3 condemn Judah's dabbling with Egyptian alliances as if the Egyptians will save them from Assyria. God warns Judah and its leaders he will judge the wicked among them for turning away from the Lord. Yet here in verses 4-6 the Lord tells Isaiah he will protect his people! God's favor and protection come to us not because we are worthy but because he is gracious and loves us!

Isaiah gives us two pictures of the Lord protecting his wayward people. The first is of a lion or a young lion growling over its prey. It is not disturbed when a whole band of shepherds
comes out to chase it off. They shout and make a commotion but the lion is not frightened. In the same way the Lord is not scared of the Assyrians and their army. They may come with great fanfare and a show of power but they are like shouting shepherds to the Lion of Judah! He is not moved.

The second picture is of birds hovering or flying over their young. They chase away the hawk or some other predator by continually flying around and swooping down upon it. They guard their nest and shield their babies from the predator. The Lord will do the same for Judah and Jerusalem. Assyria may attack but God will guard them and not let the Assyrians conquer them. He will deliver Judah from the might of the Assyrians.

In verse 5 the ESV reads "he will spare and rescue it." The verb in Hebrew is pasah from which we get pesah, the Passover. The NIV translates the phrase, "he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it." In various contexts the verb means to limp by or go over or pass by something. Exodus 12:23 says: When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down. The verb for pass over is the same word as here in Isaiah 31:4. It seems highly unlikely that Isaiah's use of this Hebrew verb in this passage is coincidental. I believe he is deliberately reminding the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem of the Lord's deliverance of them from the destroying angel on the night of the first Passover. The Lord is going to deliver them again. Exodus 12 speaks of both the Lord passing over the house of an Israelite with blood on the doorposts and the Lord shielding the home of faithful Israelites from the destroying angel with the deadly plague. He would not allow the angel to attack that house. That is the image Isaiah uses here in 31:4. The Lord will shield his people from the Assyrian attack like birds protect their nest and young from predators. He will not allow the Assyrians to destroy his city or his people even though they are faithless and turn to Egypt for help. In the end the Lord will save his people because he is gracious to them and he made a covenant with them.

31:6-9 - Isaiah calls for the people to return to the Lord from whom they have rebelled or revolted. The concept of return is used frequently throughout the prophets, especially in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The word itself means to come back to a point previously departed; in other words turn around and go back to where one began. Thus it is related to repentance and restoration. In Isaiah the remnant shall return to the land after the exile. Here in 31:9 Isaiah uses it to describe the repentance of his people and their abandonment of the idols they have been worshipping. They will turn back to the Lord away from their idols.

The context of Israel's "return" to the Lord will be the destruction of the Assyrian army who has invaded the land. God himself will slay them but not by the sword of any man. Isaiah is pointing to the plague the Lord would send against the army of Sennacherib in 701. The Assyrians had besieged Jerusalem and King Hezekiah had refused to surrender upon advice from Isaiah. See Isaiah 36-37. There was no way the forces of Hezekiah could defeat Sennacherib's army, the largest and mightiest army of the time. God defeated them. A "sword" not of man slew the Assyrians and forced them to withdraw back to Mesopotamia.

In verse 9 Isaiah further prophesies the destruction of Assyria itself. Their fortress will fall. Ninevah was sacked by the combined armies of Media and Babylon under the command of Nabopolassar in 612. Assyria was finished at Carchemish in northern Syria in 605 by his son Nebuchadnezzar.
Isaiah says it is the Lord who will do this, something his people could not imagine would ever happen. Assyria will be conquered and fall. God has said so; the one whose fire is in Zion and whose oven or furnace is in Jerusalem. The fire of the Lord denotes his presence in the temple. Interestingly the word for furnace or oven relates to the portable ovens used to bake bread. It is the same word used in Genesis 15 to describe the smoking fire pot or oven which Abraham saw when he cut the sacrifices in two and the Lord passed between them to ratify his covenant with Abraham. It was cylindrical in nature and the dough was slapped on the sides to bake, like modern day nan-bread in India. Isaiah may be referring to the incident in Genesis 15 and pointing to God's ancient covenant he made with his people to remind them that the Lord is faithful even when they are not! He will keep his covenant with the children of Israel and defeat their enemies. For their part they need to return to him because the Lord is waiting and wanting his people to repent. He is always willing to take us back and restore us to fellowship when we humble ourselves and repent.

After Assyria fell Judah did repent and return to the Lord under King Josiah. It was the greatest revival in Judah's history. The king led them to reject their pagan idols, restore the Lord's temple, defile the pagan altars and high places and once again celebrate the Passover as the Lord had commanded them. Unfortunately it was short-lived. After Josiah's death in 609, the kings that followed him all turned back to idolatry and led the people away from the Lord once again. The ultimate result was God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 and the exile of the Jews to Babylon.

Chapter 32:
32:1-5 - Isaiah gives us a picture of a future king and his coming reign. Unlike the prophecies about the Messiah in chapters 9 & 11 which focus upon his character and his rule, this prophecy focuses upon the effects the king or Messiah has upon his court and his subjects.

A king is coming who will reign in righteousness. This could be taken in a very general way to refer to someone from David's line who will be a righteous and good king as over against kings like Ahaz or Manasseh who were evil and faithless. Thus Hezekiah or Josiah could at least partially fulfill Isaiah's prophecy. Its greatest fulfillment is seen however in the Lord Jesus who is the king who reigns in righteousness.

This king's counselors or princes, meaning his court officials, will rule in justice. They will decide disputes with justice according to the Lord's Law and character. Bribery, scandal, favoritism and oppression will be a thing of the past. Everyone will be equal before the law because the officials will faithfully use God's Law to mediate disputes. Isaiah foresees a time when the king's character will be passed on to his officials and they will be like him. Jesus told his disciples that in the Kingdom of God they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel. They were to be like him. See Luke 22. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 that we will even judge angels!

In verse 2 Isaiah describes a desert scene similar to the Judean Wilderness near Qumran or En Gedi on the western shores of the Dead Sea. The king and his court will be like a hiding place from the desert wind and a refuge from the cloudbursts that happen in the rainy season. His people will be protected from the things that can harm them.

The oppression and wickedness of the rule of evil kings will be overturned. In Isaiah's call from the Lord in Isaiah 6 the Lord gave Isaiah his message so that those who hear would never understand and those who see would never perceive. His message was to harden the hearts of the people so that they would not repent; they would be confirmed in their rebellion and sin. Here in verses 3-4 all that is reversed in the reign of the righteous king. Those with eyes to see
will open them. Those with ears to hear will listen to the Lord. The heart or mind of the rash and impetuous will know and understand the Lord. The one who stammers will slow down and speak clearly. Fools will no longer be called noble and scoundrels will not be given respect. Righteousness will be lifted up in the king's reign. Virtue, justice and peace will reign and the people will be treated fairly and honorably.

Judah longed for such a king. The world today still longs for rulers, presidents and kings who would rule this way. When the Lord Jesus returns at his Second Coming the whole world will finally know and experience a ruler who will reign in perfect righteousness and justice. Come quickly Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20)!

32:5-8 - During the reign of the righteous king the role of the fool and the scoundrel will radically change. In the reigns of the wicked kings of Judah like Ahaz and Manasseh the fool and the scoundrel were called noble and honorable and their counsel was followed and valued. Some of them were the king's close advisors and some were the court prophets who were really false prophets. They counseled the kings to ignore God's Law and his true prophets. They practiced and approved a paganized version of the religion of Yahweh that led the people to treat the Lord like they treated pagan gods! They taught Yahweh was not concerned with how they treated the people and whether they took advantage of them in order to get rich or gain power. As long as we give Yahweh his due everything will be fine. They totally ignored the second half of the Ten Commandments, the six people commands because they had already violated the first four God commands!

Isaiah describes the fool and scoundrel and what they do in verses 6-8. The fool speaks folly and only thinks about evil all the time. The word for fool means one who ignores what is right and true. He or she blatantly refuses to consider God's Law and Word. The fool acts only for self-interest and gain. They are the embodiment of a paganized religion, denying God's covenant and Israel's relationship with the Lord in order to pursue what they want. They lie, cheat, twist the truth and deceive people for their own ends. They are all together wicked and evil and lead others to practice the same kind of behavior. Paul summarizes the fool and how they act and what they value in Romans 1:32: "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

The fool purposefully deceives people to disobey the Lord. They teach lies and untruths about God in order to lead people astray because they want power and wealth for themselves. They do not value those who are poor and weak and have no power or influence to help themselves. Instead they take advantage of them, blatantly ignoring God's commands about the poor. The prophets frequently speak out about this behavior. See Isaiah 1. Isaiah says they leave the hungry empty and deprive the thirsty of water to drink. The ESV translates the phrase "the craving of the hungry." Literally the Hebrew word is nephesh, meaning the soul. Isaiah gives a double meaning here. The fool and the scoundrel mistreat and deprive those who are literally hungry for bread but they also deprive those who, as Jesus said in Matthew 5, "hunger and thirst for righteousness".

The scoundrel or the deceiver or swindler, takes advantage of people for his own ends much like the fool. He plans evil and tries to ruin the poor and those who cannot defend themselves in order to take what little they have. The scoundrel lies by nature and will even lie and deny the poor their rights when what they desire is just. They simply do not care.
The fool and the scoundrel are the exact opposites of the noble. They completely disobey God’s second great commandment to love one's neighbor because they do not obey the first, to love God with all one's heart, soul and strength. They think only of themselves and leave God and concern for others completely out of their schemes. By contrast the noble desires to follow God. He honors the Lord and honors people in all he does. His plans are not wicked but good and generous. He stands on his deeds and like the righteous king treats people with dignity and respect, especially the poor, the downtrodden and those who are too weak to defend themselves. In other words the noble person reflects the character of the righteous king and God. Isaiah’s description is profound because he defines a noble person by what they do not by their title and position. In the Judah of Isaiah's day many who were noble by position and rank were really fools and scoundrels. It is not so different in America today. Isaiah looks forward to the day when those who have the position of noble also have the character and deeds of a noble. Only God can transform sinners in this way. Isaiah looks forward to the reign of the righteous king, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah!

32:9-13 - Isaiah now turns to indict the wealthy women of Jerusalem, those whose husbands had positions of power and influence. Perhaps they are married to the fools and scoundrels of verses 6-8. They are women who are rich and have no care in the world. Isaiah calls them secure or complacent in the ESV. The word means to trust in something, but in this case they are confident not in the Lord but in their position, wealth and power. They cannot see any other future but one of ease and comfort. Isaiah warns them in a short time all of their wealth will disappear. The phrase “in little more than a year” is a significant one because it helps us date this prophecy from Isaiah. From the context of Isaiah's life this prophecy was given around 703 or 702, a year before Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem. The problem is verse 14 which sounds like Jerusalem is completely destroyed, "the fortress will be abandoned." The city will be deserted. Jerusalem never fell to Sennacherib; the Lord delivered the city with a plague against the Assyrian army before they could take the city. It was not destroyed nor was it "deserted." Verse 14 fits better with the final siege of the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar which began in 588 and lasted until July of 586. The city fell and was deserted. If that is the case then this prophecy belongs most in the setting of the second half of Isaiah in chapters 40-66.

However, there are at least three other possibilities. The phrase, "in little more than a year" can be translated "for a long period" which points to the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. However, all of the women of Jerusalem to whom Isaiah speaks would be long dead by then so this interpretation makes little sense.

The second possibility is more probable because it fits the historical circumstances better. Isaiah could be referring to one of the chief fortified cities of Judah, Lachish. Lachish was situated about thirty miles to the south and west of Jerusalem on the edge of the coastal plain. It guarded the road up into the Judean hills to Jerusalem. It was a strategic and important city. Sennacherib raised it to the ground in his invasion. See 2 Kings 18 & Isaiah 36. After the Assyrians destroyed the city it was rebuilt as a new smaller city which was conquered and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's invading army in 586. See Jeremiah 34. The city was permanently abandoned during the Hellenistic period. The problem with this view however is while Lachish was one of the chief fortified cities of Judah during Isaiah's day; would it have been prominent enough for Isaiah to single it out as "the fortified city" in verse 14? That idea is questionable at best.
The third possibility is Isaiah is referring to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria and this is a prophecy of both judgment on the Assyrians for their invasion of Judah and deliverance of Judah by the Lord. In Isaiah 27:10 Isaiah uses the same phrase, "the fortified city" and the same image, that of it being abandon. The problem is in context he could be referring to Jerusalem, Nineveh or even Samaria. The meaning is uncertain. We are left then with an unclear picture of the time and the city to which Isaiah is referring in verses 10-14. Given all the possibilities it makes the most sense to take his phrase "a little more than a year" as referring to Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701.

The result of the invasion will be the complete disruption of the satisfied, wealthy life of the women of Jerusalem. They will shudder with fear and tremble because their life of ease and comfort will be shattered. They will mourn for it and strip themselves bear to the waist and tie on sackcloth because of their grief over their loss. Their smug complacency and arrogance God will replace with hardship and sorrow. All in which they trusted will be taken from them and because they trusted in their wealth and luxury and believed it would never end they will be left with nothing because they were faithless toward the Lord. This is what happens when we trust in things, money, power and wealth and ignore God. Material wealth and possessions can be taken in an instant. They do not last. Only God is permanent.

32:14-17 - Verse 14 gives the reason why the women of Jerusalem should tremble and mourn. The fortress or fortress palace will be deserted and the citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever. Wild donkeys will roam there and shepherds will graze their flocks there but it will be uninhabited.

In the note above for verses 9-13 I gave three possibilities for the city or fortress Isaiah speaks of here. The first and most likely is Jerusalem. The second would be one of the chief fortified cities of Judah, most probably Lachish. The third would be Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. As stated above verse 14 is difficult because the historical details don't quite fit Isaiah's prophecy. The most likely city he identifies is Jerusalem. The problem is during the Assyrian attack by the forces of Sennacherib in 701 Jerusalem was not destroyed and abandoned. Even if one takes the verse to refer to the future invasion by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar the city was not permanently abandoned. It was not until the Romans destroyed the city in 70 AD that it became as Isaiah describes, yet even then Jerusalem was eventually rebuilt. It was never literally abandoned forever. That would point to Nineveh as the city which was abandoned when the Babylonians and Medes destroyed it in 612. The problem with that however is why the women of Jerusalem would mourn the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of their conquerors and oppressors? Jerusalem still makes the most sense. One must therefore take Isaiah's language as poetic, written for emphasis and not to be taken literally.

The city and fortress will be abandoned UNTIL. Verse 15 marks a fundamental shift in Isaiah's prophecy to the women of Jerusalem. He has spoken of judgment in verses 9-14, now the emphasis shifts to salvation. Isaiah relates it to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the benefits he will bring when God pours out his Spirit on his people.

Isaiah says Jerusalem will be a deserted city where donkeys and sheep pasture until God pours out his Spirit "upon us," meaning Israel, God's people. He won't pour it out from heaven on the city but on the people. When he does everything will change and even the land itself will be renewed. The desert will become a fertile field and the field will become a forest. The metaphor is agricultural but Isaiah is speaking of the renewal of his people by God's Spirit. God's pouring out of his Spirit will happen in some future time that is after his judgment upon Judah.
and Jerusalem. The renewing of the land when God saves his people is also a sign of God's Kingdom and the reign of his Messiah!

Isaiah declares one of the great prophetic promises of the Scriptures: the Age to Come will be the Age of the Holy Spirit. His coming will mark the presence of the Kingdom of God. This is fulfilled in the New Testament, especially in Acts 2. The New Testament understanding of the Kingdom of God is it is here already in the presence of the Holy Spirit but it is not yet completely fulfilled until the Lord Jesus comes again to fully reign on the earth as he now reigns in heaven.

When the Spirit comes justice and righteousness will prevail not selfishness and pride. Peace will flow from a renewed and obedient people. Trust and confidence in the Lord will result from the peace God brings. His people will be at rest. God's covenant promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 that Israel would have rest from her enemies will be fulfilled. It is important to note that peace, shalom, and rest or security flow from righteousness and justice. Peace is a consequence of justice and righteousness among people. When they are obedient to the Lord and his Law then they have peace. The problem with liberal or progressive theology is the refusal to see life-change as a necessary precursor to peace and shalom. In progressive thought one works for peace and justice, especially in social systems. It is the result of our good works in response to God's desire for justice and peace. Isaiah tells us peace is a byproduct of the moral changes within people when God's Holy Spirit is poured out upon them. It is a work of GRACE in individuals not political changes in social systems that brings peace.

Verse 18 further expresses God's promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7, the basis for all the Messianic promises in the prophets. God's people will have rest from all their enemies and they will live and dwell in peace. Judah will be secure because the Lord God will provide their security.

Verses 19-20 are difficult, especially in the ESV, because they seem out of place with the preceding verses and appear to return to the theme of judgment rather than the restoration of God's people. Fortunately, the NIV's translation clarifies these verses. The ESV takes the little Hebrew particle that begins verse 19 and translates it as one normally would a coordinating particle, "and." However, it can also be translated as a contrasting particle, "though" or "but", which is how the NIV translates it. Isaiah is contrasting the restoration of Jerusalem and God's people with the judgment that is coming before that restoration. "Though hail flattens the forest", meaning even if God's judgment comes upon Jerusalem the people will be blessed after God's discipline is finished. These verses are a call for the people to stay faithful to God, especially those who still love the Lord and obey him. They will be caught up in Jerusalem's destruction but Isaiah calls them not to lose faith in the Lord. He has not forgotten them and will restore them. This was one of the greatest faith struggles for the exiles. After Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 and they were living in Babylon it was easy to doubt God's love and his promise of return. The prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all called them to stay faithful. God would restore them. They were to humble themselves and wait upon the Lord to act. The second half of Isaiah, chapters 40-66, speaks to the exiles' situation.

Chapter 33:
33:1 - Chapter 33 is a dialogue between the Lord and his people. It reads like a psalm used in the temple worship. The people speak then the Lord answers back or vice versa.

Verse 1 seems out of place or disconnected from the rest of the chapter. It also does not fit with the end of chapter 32. Perhaps Isaiah uses it as a transition.
The stanza is based upon two Hebrew roots; one which means destroy and the other betray. God says woe to the destroyer and the traitor or betrayer. The word for betray can refer to a spouse who commits adultery with someone and is often used to describe Israel's idolatry with pagan gods. The destroyer or betrayer is left unnamed, apparently on purpose in order to give it the widest possible meaning. However, from the context it appears to be speaking of a conquering or oppressing nation rather than an individual. My best guess is this verse refers to Assyria or perhaps Babylon. If this does refer to Assyria at the time Isaiah writes this Assyria is at the height of its power. No one threatens it or dares to plot against it. One day however, its power will cease and its ability to withstand outside threats will vanish. When that day comes it will be destroyed and betrayed just as it has done to other nations, especially Judah and Israel.

Isaiah declares a principle of God's justice. God used Assyria to judge Israel and Judah for their wickedness and idolatry but he did not turn a blind eye to their own brutality and oppression. It will be judged in turn and brought down. As the old Bethel Bible Series said, "history itself is the judgment of God." If one looks at Biblical history and the empires that oppressed or conquered Israel the pattern repeats itself again and again. First Egypt was brought down, then the Philistines, the Syrians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and finally the Romans. All of them fell and lost their power. The same principle is still going on today and we in the United States need to pay attention to God's justice lest we find ourselves destroyed and betrayed as well.

33:2-6 - Verse 2 is a call for God to be gracious to his people. Isaiah or the people call on God to be their strength or arm in the morning and their salvation in time of trouble or distress. Many times in the Old Testament the Lord is described as rescuing Israel from Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. That is the picture Isaiah uses here. The people call upon God's power to rescue them in their time of distress. The LXX translates the word distress as thlipsis, the same word in the New Testament meaning trouble or tribulation. Its root means stress or squeezing. The Hebrew word for salvation is yeshua, which becomes the Greek name of Jesus in the Gospels.

Verses 3-4 describe what happens to the nations when God comes down to save Israel. The nations flee at the thunder of his voice. They scatter and flee leaving behind the spoils of battle or the plunder which is gathered like locusts gather the plants in a field. They leave nothing behind. Isaiah looks forward to the day when Israel will despoil Assyria like it plundered Jerusalem and Judah.

Isaiah returns to describing the Lord and what he will do for his people in verses 5-6. The Lord is exalted on high and from his exalted place he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. He will provide a firm foundation for "your times". This is in marked contrast to Isaiah's time when invasion, intrigue, assassination and subjection reigned. His times were full of wickedness and idolatry that led the people astray and moved God to punish Israel for violating his covenant with them. Isaiah prophesies a day when Judah will be faithful to the Lord and he will give them stability grounded in his justice and righteousness. The Lord will give his people a rich storehouse of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. The key to it all will be the fear of the Lord, the awe and reverence due to the Lord their God. Isaiah sees a time in the future when Israel will fear the Lord again and he will restore them and bring salvation to them. It will be a time when he will put their enemies to flight and they will have his peace and protection. In many ways this describes his plan to bring his Messiah to them as in chapters 9 & 11 but also the Day of the Lord as in chapters 24 & 25.
33:7-9 - These verses return to describing the chaos resulting from an invasion, probably from Assyria. They contrast the salvation that God will bring to his people and his land with the destruction an enemy invader brings. Isaiah shows us what will happen when God allows a power like Assyria to discipline Israel and Judah. The aftermath of that discipline is the setting for God to act and restore his people.

The brave men or fighting men of Jerusalem cry out in the streets. They have lost their courage. The peace envoys sent to negotiate come back weeping because of their failure. The highways in the countryside are deserted. No one travels on them. Trade has stopped.

The treaty, literally covenant, has been broken. The ESV translates the singular Hebrew word as “covenants” which is puzzling. The next line it translates as "cities are despised." The word “cities” occurs in the Masoretic Text but the NIV and most other translations follow the Dead Sea Scrolls which read "its witnesses are despised." The NIV translation makes more sense. Isaiah could be referring to the covenant Hezekiah made with the Assyrians when Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701. He settled with Sennacherib paying him a massive tribute in exchange for not destroying Judah and Jerusalem. Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem anyway. See 2 Kings 18 & Isaiah 36. Even though Hezekiah had paid off Sennacherib he didn't stop the invasion basically breaking his "treaty" with Hezekiah. The court officials Hezekiah sent to negotiate peace with Sennacherib return in shame. The Assyrians had no regard or respect for the Jews or anyone else because they saw themselves as superior.

The invasion of the Assyrian army brings devastation upon the land of Israel because all those troops take what they need from the land to survive, stripping it of its produce. Isaiah says Lebanon is shamed and withers away. Sharon, the fertile coastal plain north of Joppa looks like the Arabah Valley south of the Dead Sea. Bashan, the Golan Heights north and east of the Sea of Galilee; and Carmel, the great ridge above modern day Haifa that runs along the southern side of the Jezreel Valley, drop their leaves. Both areas are forested. Isaiah describes them in winter or after a drought. The land is devastated by the Assyrian invasion!

33:10-12 - Isaiah hears God respond to his people's oppression. "Now I will arise!" God will come and show himself to the Jews and to Assyria and all the nations. He will be lifted up and exalted and do only what he can do.

God speaks to the Assyrian invaders. They give birth to chaff and stubble, meaning they produce nothing usable, only that which is fit to be burned in the cook-fires. They produce no fruit. Their breath or spirit (Hebrew ruach) will be a fire that consumes them. Their own spirit and actions sow the seeds of their destruction. They will be burned up like the dry grass stubble thrown into the fire.

The Lord says all the peoples, probably referring to the Gentile nations who had allied themselves with the Assyrians, will be burned to lime. Lime was what was left when one burned limestone or sea shells, crushing them to powder which was used as whitewash. Isaiah uses the image of the grass stubble and the thorn bush being burned. He is saying what is left of Assyria and its allies will be ash so fine it looks like lime, fine white powder.

Isaiah says the seeds of Assyria's destruction are present in the way she treats people and oppresses them. The Assyrians ruled by terror and oppression. The problem with that policy is it gains one no friends. Nations would cooperate and ally themselves with the Assyrians because they had no choice. But when the Assyrian Empire finally fell the nations of the Middle East did not grieve they celebrated! The amazing verse at the end of Nahum in Nahum 3:19 says: Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his
hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty? God shows Isaiah the inevitable fall of the Assyrian Empire. God will use history to judge the evil of Assyria and it will never rise again. Its ashes will be like lime that is left in the fire pit.

Isaiah 33:13-16 - God calls everyone near and far to acknowledge what he has done. The Jews and pagan nations alike are called to pay attention to God and his power.

Isaiah says "the sinners in Zion" are terrified and the godless tremble. He is specifically pointing out those in Jerusalem who have violated God's covenant and disobeyed the Lord through their worship of idols and their immoral lifestyle. They still come to the temple and worship God but they also practice idolatry. For them judgment is coming!

They recognize the Lord's holiness and ask who can live with "the consuming fire"? Who can dwell with "everlasting burning"? These images depict God's holiness and purity. They remind us of instances like the burning bush or the pillar of fire in Exodus; the fire that consumed Korah and his men in Numbers 16, or the fire from heaven that burned up Elijah's offering on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18. All these images have to do with the holiness of God, his righteousness and his wrath against sin. The "sinners" rightly ask who can live with such a God. Unless God does something for us his holiness makes him unapproachable! Hebrews 12 affirms that idea when it refers to Isaiah 33 and declares that our God is "a consuming fire." We want to soften that image, usually by referring to Jesus because he became human. Yet in Revelation 1 John sees Jesus with eyes like blazing fire. The Lord God is holy and Jesus is holy too!

Who can live with a God like that? Isaiah says the one who walks righteously and speaks what is right or true. He describes someone who lives to honor God and love people. This person rejects gain from extortion and does not accept bribes but does the right thing. They do not listen to plots of murder and don't look at plans that contemplate doing evil. They will dwell on the high places where God dwells. Their refuge will be the Lord's fortress and his or her needs will always be met. They will not hunger or thirst. In other words how can one live with God who is holy, the "consuming fire"? Be holy oneself in one's behavior. This is what God told Israel to do in the Holiness Codes of Leviticus 18-19. Peter reiterates the same counsel in 1 Peter 1 when he calls the church to be holy because God is holy.

This kind of moral behavior, accountable to a holy God, is what America needs in its leaders and its people again. We need to be thinking how to please the Lord God Almighty and his holiness rather than a political party or some agenda. Isaiah calls us to live holy and upright lives before God and people. If we do then he will bless our country. If we do not and continue the corruption and the oppression and killing of the innocents then we will find it is impossible to live with "the consuming fire!" God will judge our nation and he will be just in his judgment just as he was with Israel and Judah!

Isaiah 33:17-19 - The righteous person closes their eyes to evil in verse 15. In verse 17 their eyes are opened and they see the king in all his beauty. The word for beauty normally means outward appearance but in the context Isaiah is referring to the quality of the king, his moral authority and character. The contrast between the "sinner" who plans evil and the king who is faithful to the Lord is dramatic. The king's character is a sign that Israel has repented and returned to the Lord. Isaiah tells the people what happens to them when they do.

They will see a land that stretches afar. Judah's borders had shrunk as had the north kingdom's before the Assyrians destroyed it. I don't think Isaiah is saying the Jews will amass more territory from the nations, I think he is saying all the Promiseland that God had given them
will be theirs again. God had said their borders would stretch from the Euphrates River in the north to the Wadi of Egypt in the south. See *Genesis 15 & Deuteronomy 11.* That is the picture Isaiah wants to give them.

When their thoughts turn to the terror that they had experienced under Assyria they will understand that the foreign invaders are gone for good. The word for ponder the ESV translates as muse. Literally the Hebrew word means to growl or groan and is used for everything from the cooing of a dove to the roar of a lion. One gets the picture of someone talking to themselves as they think about what has happened. We humorously say people make the sound of "Christian mooing." They make a sound like "hmm". That is the sound Isaiah says people will make when they think about the Assyrian invaders that God has vanquished.

The people will wonder where the commanding officer went who was in charge of the occupation force, or the officer who collected the tribute to the Assyrian king. The soldier who commanded the garrison who manned the watch towers is also gone. In other words the Assyrians who had conquered their land and occupied it are nowhere to be found!

The arrogant, insolent soldiers who spoke a strange speech that the Jews had difficulty understanding have left. The NIV describes the Assyrian language as "their strange, incomprehensible tongue." The word for “incomprehensible” literally means to stutter or stammer. To the ears of the Jews the Assyrians sounded like they were stuttering! Now there are none of them to be found in God's land. He has restored it to his people once again!

33:20-22 - The people will see the king when the Assyrians leave and they will also see Jerusalem, Zion. Instead of a city under siege it will be peaceful and undisturbed. It will be like a tent that is set firmly in the ground and cannot move. Its stakes will never be pulled up nor its ropes broken. By definition a tent is a temporary home that is movable and not permanent. God will make Jerusalem so extraordinary it will be like a tent that cannot be moved!

The Lord himself will be their God and will live with them there. The city will be like a place of "broad rivers and streams." That image sounds like Memphis and On built on the Nile River or Nineveh built on the banks of the Tigris. These were some of the greatest cities in the known world at that time and Jerusalem will be like them. Isaiah says the city will be like a place of broad streams yet no sailing ship will be able to invade and no galley will attack it. It is a curious image to use to describe Jerusalem since there are no rivers within miles of the city. I think Isaiah is comparing Jerusalem to Nineveh and showing his people how God will restore their city.

How will this happen and why? Isaiah tells them. The Lord is our judge, lawgiver and king. It is he who will save Jerusalem and his people. Judge, lawgiver and king are three titles for God and express who he is to Israel. He is the judge; the one who settles their disputes and legal matters with perfect fairness. The elders of a city would sit in the city gates and decide disputes between people. There was always a question of their fairness and integrity. There are no questions of God's fairness when he decides. The word also implies the ability to carry out punishment or sentence in a criminal case.

The Lord is their lawgiver. Literally the Hebrew word means to inscribe like the Lord inscribed the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai. The Lord is the one who gives Israel their Law, the will of God which governs their lives. He is the judge but is also the one who carves out the Law for them to follow. His will for Israel and the entire world is expressed in his Law.
He is the king, the ruler and the one who will save Israel from all her enemies. Jesus is called the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in Revelation 17 & 19. The Messiah was to be the ideal king from David's line who would save his people and bring in the Kingdom of God. In Israel and Judah the king was the ruler but he was always accountable to God's Law. The Lord is accountable to no one but himself. His rule is completely just and righteous and therefore is absolute. The Lord is the perfect king and only he can fully save Israel and bring her restoration and peace. The Lord Jesus is that perfect Messiah and King and someday when he returns he will bring the rule of God over all the earth, the Kingdom of God in all its fullness. See Revelation 19 & 20.

33:23-24 - Verse 23 seems to be unrelated to the preceding verses because suddenly Isaiah uses the picture of a sailing ship whose rigging is hanging loose and whose mast cannot be secured. Its sails therefore cannot be unfurled so the ship will not sail. The difficulty is what does this have to do with the Lord being Judah's judge, lawgiver and king? The key is the word for ropes or rigging. Isaiah is still contrasting those who are sinners in Zion with those who follow the Lord and live uprightly before him. In verse 20 a renewed Zion is described as a tent whose ropes will never be broken. In verse 23 Isaiah shifts abruptly to the terrified sinners of verse 14; their ropes or rigging will hang loose, like a damaged ship that will not sail. The metaphor is different but he links both images with the same word for rope. He also refers back to the sailing ships that cannot attack Zion because of its new defenses that the Lord will put in place for them.

In the last half of verse 23 and in verse 24 Isaiah contrasts those whose rigging hangs loose with those whom the Lord will save. The tables will be turned when the Lord rescues his people. Plunder and the spoils of war will be gathered but not by some conquering power but by God's people. Even the lame will gather the booty left over from the invader's defeat. Isaiah uses a play on words in Hebrew in the last line of verse 23. The verb for "carry off" means to plunder. Isaiah then uses the noun form of the same word for plunder. In other words the lame will "plunder the plunder". Verse 24 expresses an ideal restored world. No one living in Zion will say they are sick anymore. God will forgive the sin and iniquity of his people. This looks forward to the days of the Messiah and of the Servant of God in Isaiah 53 when God forgives the sins of his people through the sacrifice of his Servant. Jesus fulfills this prophecy. His healing ministry looks forward to the day when all illness and the consequences of sin will be removed from God's people.

Chapter 34:
34:1-4 - Isaiah turns to the nations with a message to them from the Lord. He has spoken to the people of Israel in chapter 33 about his judgment and salvation of his people. Now in chapter 34 he speaks a word of judgment to the pagan nations.

God tells them to come near and listen up. The Lord is angry with all nations. Isaiah uses strong language to express the Lord's anger over their idolatry and rejection of him. He will completely destroy the armies of the nations and give them over to slaughter. The word for completely destroy is the Hebrew word haram, which is used several times in the Old Testament to describe the devoting of things or persons to the Lord, usually meaning their complete destruction. Joshua was told to completely destroy (haram) Jericho and leave nothing alive. Saul was told to do the same thing to the Amalekites. Here the Lord has "devoted" the nations to destruction. This reflects language John uses in Revelation 16 & 19 concerning the godless nations of the world allied with the beast gathering at Armageddon to attack the returning Lord.
Jesus and all his saints. The Lord destroys them all when they attack Jerusalem. The slaughter is horrendous just like Isaiah describes here in chapter 34. The slain will be left to rot where they fall and the mountains around Jerusalem will flow with their blood. John uses similar language to describe the carnage in Revelation 19.

In verse 4 Isaiah describes an eschatological scene beyond human imagination. The stars will be dissolved or rot away. The Hebrew word refers to the decay of dead organic matter. The picture is of the stars dying and decaying like dead animals or plants. Isaiah says the sky will roll up like a scroll and all the stars will fall like leaves from a vine or shriveled figs from a tree. It's as if Isaiah is saying, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" Jesus uses the image of the stars falling in Matthew 24 in his sermon on the last things. John uses the image of the sky rolling up like a scroll in the breaking of the 6th seal in Revelation 6. Isaiah is pointing ahead to the final battle between God and the pagan nations of the world led by the antichrist and of the end of the world itself before the foundation of the new heaven and earth in the Kingdom of God.

34:5-7 - Verses 1-4 deal with the big picture and the Lord's anger and judgment of all the pagan nations of the world. Verses 5-7 focus on one nation, Edom, the descendants of Esau that lived to the south and east of the Dead Sea. Edom was conquered by David and was held by the kings of Judah for most of their history up to the time of Isaiah. During King Ahaz's reign Edom regained their independence. It became a vassal state of Assyria after 736. When the Babylonians invaded Judah Edom was an ally of Babylon and even helped with the siege of Jerusalem. This resulted in several scathing critiques of the Edomites including the little prophecy of Obadiah which speaks of the Lord's judgment on Edom. Psalm 137 sung by the exiles in Babylon talks about the Edomites mocking of the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem. It calls for terrible vengeance upon Edom including killing her children.

Here in Isaiah 34 the Lord says his sword has drunk its fill in the heavens and now focuses upon Edom. The Lord has a sword and it is bathed in the blood of sacrifices, of lambs, goats and rams. The sacrifices appear to be the Edomites. God says he has devoted Edom to total destruction so that there will be no one left. The little prophecy of Obadiah in Obadiah 18 says there will be no survivors in Edom after the Lord judges it. The Lord says he has a sacrifice in Bozrah, which was one of the chief cities of Edom up on the highlands above the Arabah Valley about 40 miles north of Petra and 25 miles south of the Dead Sea. When Bozrah and Edom fall the land will be drenched with the blood and fat of steers and bulls. Isaiah paints a picture of hundreds of bulls, goats and rams sacrificed, so much so that the ground runs red with their blood and is soaked with their fat. The animals are compared to the Edomites! It is a grim picture of slaughter and retribution on a nation that was related to Israel and descended from Abraham. Despite that relation Edom came to symbolize an ungodly people who persecute the Lord's people and thus deserve his judgment.

One must remember that Esau, though he was the eldest son of Isaac, gave away his birthright to his brother Jacob and God's promise to Abraham ran through Jacob not Esau. Malachi 1 says that God loved Jacob and hated Esau. Paul quotes Malachi in Romans 9 when he explains God's election of the Jews. Malachi also notes that Esau's land was a wasteland by his day which would have been around 400 BC in the Persian era. That coincides with the Arabs overrunning and settling Edom. A century later the Nabataeans captured ancient Edom and built their capital at Petra south of Bozrah. The country remained settled but not by descendants of Esau but descendants of Ishmael. The Edomites as a people were absorbed into the Jews. King Herod's family had Edomite ancestry.
Isaiah continues to paint the picture of the Lord's destruction and judgment of Edom in verses 8-12. The Lord has set a time, a day and year of judgment for Edom. He will exact his vengeance upon it and defend the cause of Zion, meaning he will give justice for his people. The sense of the words in verse 8 means payback. God will pay back Edom for how they have treated Israel over the centuries.

Edom's streams, soil and land will be turned into burning pitch and sulfur. The fire will never be quenched and the smoke of it will go up forever. The image of burning sulfur or brimstone is reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah which most scholars place near the southern end of the Dead Sea, very close to the territory of Edom. Isaiah says from generation to generation the land will lie desolate or empty; meaning it will never be re-settled. No one shall go there because of the destruction and the emptiness.

The only living things that shall live in that land will be unclean animals. There is some dispute over the meaning of the Hebrew words for the various animals. The NIV uses the desert owl and screech owl, the great owl and the raven; all birds. The ESV translates the animals as the hawk, porcupine, owl and raven. The variations in the translations show there is uncertainty among scholars as to the precise meaning of the words. The bottom line is the animals or birds are all unclean. The picture is similar to Jeremiah's prophecy in Jeremiah 50-52 of the destruction of Babylon. It would be deserted and only unclean animals would live there.

Isaiah says the Lord will stretch a measuring line or a plumb line over the land of Edom. It will be the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation. The ESV translates the two words confusion and emptiness. The word translated chaos however means void or empty and is the same word Genesis 1 uses to describe the formless and empty earth before the Lord began his work of creation. The image is related to the primeval chaos of the universe in the beginning before God imposed his order on the universe. It is an ancient picture that the author of Genesis uses to describe God's creative work. Isaiah says God's judgment will be so terrible and final the land of Edom will revert to its primeval form; it will be formless and void.

There will be no one who lives in that land to call it a kingdom. All the princes of Edom will be gone, vanished. God will overthrow Edom in his day of vengeance and retribution. Today Edom lies within the Kingdom of Jordan, but its former territory is mostly uninhabited and is a stark desert landscape. The settled parts of Jordan are further north on the eastern highlands above the Jordan River Valley. Even Petra, the great capital of the Nabataeans who conquered Edomite territory, is abandoned and deserted. Now only tourists go there.

Isaiah then describes the various animals and birds that will live among the ruins of Edom, all of which are unclean to the Hebrews. This makes the ruins doubly undesirable and a place to be avoided. The difficulty in these verses is that the meanings for the various animals and birds are often uncertain in Hebrew. Some of the words like those translated desert creatures and night creatures in the NIV in verse 14 in other contexts can even mean demons. For instance, the word for "night creatures" in Hebrew is lilith. In later Hebrew writings Lilith became a legendary creature; the first wife of Adam before the creation of Eve who left the Garden of Eden and became a night demon who brought destruction. There is a small possibility that Isaiah
is suggesting Edom has become a haunt for demons here in chapter 34. John calls Babylon-Rome a haunt for demons and unclean birds in Revelation 18. However, given verse 15 which clearly talks about owls nesting and laying eggs and the wider context of the passage such a fanciful translation is not necessary. The NIV translation which attempts to describe the desert and night creatures who have taken over the ruins of Edom is far more likely. The Lord says Edom will become a place of thorns and briars that entangle a person and a haunt of wild animals and birds where people will not go.

34:16-17 - Isaiah tells his readers to search or study the scroll of the Lord to confirm his judgments against Edom. He has declared he will give the land to the wild birds, specifically in context to the falcons and owls of verse 15. Isaiah says God has declared that the raptors and unclean birds of the desert shall possess the land of Edom after he has judged it. Search his Word and see if this is true! He has spoken it; his Spirit has gathered them. He has allotted the land to them and portioned it out to them. The picture of God casting lots for the birds in verse 17 is similar to God portioning out the Promised Land to the tribes of Israel. God's judgment is final. He has given the land to the falcons and owls forever!

God's statement in verses 16-17 is a challenge to confirm his Word. God has spoken his righteous judgment against Edom through his prophets, including Isaiah, and his Word shall be fulfilled just as surely as he has spoken about his people Israel. He will fulfill it and it will not be thwarted! Though the context is totally different the message is the same as Isaiah's statement later to the exiles in chapter 55. God's judgment will not return to him empty but accomplish what he desires. His powerful creative Word carries with it the power to carry out what the Lord declares, just as Paul says the gospel is the power of God for salvation in Romans 1.

Chapter 35:
35:1-2 - In chapter 35 Isaiah contrasts the destruction and desolation of Edom with the restoration and flourishing of the land of Israel and God's people. This is the last prophetic passage of the first section of Isaiah. After this chapter Isaiah or his disciples included the narrative of King Hezekiah and the Assyrian invasion, taken largely from 2 Kings 18-20. As the New Bible Commentary puts it this chapter and its setting is "an oasis between the visionary wasteland of chapter 34 and the history of war, sickness and folly in chapters 36-39."

The theme of restoration after judgment reflects the Day of the Lord theology in Isaiah and the other prophets. The Day of the Lord is not only a day of judgment upon God's enemies and the enemies of his people it is also a day of salvation and the bringing of the Kingdom of God to Israel and this earth.

Isaiah says a day is coming when the desert or the wilderness will be glad. When the desert or wilderness was used by the prophets the people of Israel would immediately think of the Wilderness of Judah, the Arabah Valley south of the Dead Sea or the area around the Dead Sea itself. Many of them had traveled those lands and it was a stark contrast to the fertile and lush territory in Galilee or on the Coastal Plain. The contrast is so great people could not imagine the desert blooming and becoming lush and fertile. It would take an act of God to make that happen. That is exactly what Isaiah says will happen. Whether Isaiah is meant to be taken literally here is debatable. He links the desert blooming with the restoration and return of Israel to the Promised Land. They will be a people wholly devoted to God and the land will become a paradise that God will give them. Their restoration will be as great a miracle as the desert of Judah blooming!
Isaiah says the wilderness will rejoice and the desert will bloom like a crocus or lily. Older translations read rose for the flower but that is not accurate. Crocus is a better translation of the word.

In verse 2 Isaiah uses Hebrew parallelism to make his point. In English it reads the desert will burst into bloom and will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. In Hebrew it reads the desert shall "blossom blossom" and "rejoice rejoice"! He repeats the Hebrew roots for emphasis. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to the land, probably referring to the great cedar forests of Lebanon. The splendor of Carmel and Sharon will also be given the land. Mt. Carmel is the great ridge rising up from the sea near the modern port of Haifa. Today it is a place of forests and meadows among the rocks. That is probably the image Isaiah has in mind as well. Carmel in Isaiah's day was also probably forested. Sharon is the fertile Coastal Plain between Joppa the Gaza Strip and Mt. Carmel. It is the best farmland with the best climate in the land of Israel. There are many orchards and crops grown there today. Isaiah says; imagine the desert with forests like Lebanon and Carmel and farmland like the Plain of Sharon. That is what the Lord is going to bring to the land for his people when he restored them. The land itself shall sing and rejoice as at a festival! This will be the Lord's doing and the people will see his glory and majesty when he restores the land!

35:3-4 - Isaiah speaks to those who are full of fear over what is happening, who struggle to believe God will protect and redeem his people. He says to strengthen the feeble hands and steady the weak knees. In other words, stop shaking! It's going to be all right! Hebrews 12 uses the first line of verse 3 as an exhortation to believers to not be afraid.

Isaiah says to speak to those who are full of anxiety. They are to be strong and not fear because God is coming. He will bring his vengeance upon Israel's enemies and he will save them. This is the foundation of the Day of the Lord. God will save his people while at the same time pay back those pagan powers that have oppressed them. The Lord has a day when he will judge the pagan nations of the world who have rejected him and persecuted his people because he is just. But he is also merciful and wants to save his people. Isaiah's message spoken to a people who had suffered greatly under the Assyrian yoke and later under Babylon would give Israel great hope and comfort. It would be hard to believe when the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem's walls but it was true. And beyond the lifting of the Assyrian siege was a Day when God would restore his people and redeem the land. His salvation would be so much more than the lifting of a siege. It would be paradise and healing for Israel. Nothing would remain as it had been because God was coming to his people!!

35:5-7 - When the Lord brings salvation to his people they will be healed. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk and the mute will shout for joy. This is in marked contrast to the Lord's words to Isaiah in his call in chapter 6. There Judah was seeing but not perceiving; hearing but not understanding. Jesus quoted that text to explain why he spoke to the people in parables in Luke 8. God's Word to Isaiah in his call was words of judgment. Now here in chapter 35 his words are words of healing and salvation. Jesus quotes this passage to John the Baptist's disciples in Luke 7 when they ask Jesus if he is the Messiah or should they be looking for another. Jesus points them to this passage in Isaiah, a passage about the salvation of God and the Kingdom of God. Jesus fulfills this prophecy in his healing ministry throughout the Gospels. His healing is a sign that the Kingdom has come among God's people, the Jews.
Isaiah says water will flow in the wilderness and streams in the desert where water is scarce. One sees this miracle today in the canyon of En Gedi on the western shore of the Dead Sea. You start out in the desolate wilderness, hiking up the canyon until you come to a waterfall and a stream flowing over the barren rocks. The barren landscape is suddenly transformed with rushes, trees and other plants. Even the air feels different because of all the water. Isaiah says that is what will happen to the deserts of Israel. They will all be transformed when God restores them. The burning sand will become a pool with springs bursting from the ground. Where jackals hid in caves will become a marsh with reeds and papyrus growing. Papyrus only grows in marshy, wet areas. No one in Isaiah's day would imagine such a change in the Wilderness of Judah along the western shores of the Dead Sea. It is impossible. Only a miracle of God himself could transform such a barren, forbidding landscape yet that is exactly what Isaiah says God will do when he comes to save his people. It is not only a picture of what he will do with the land but a picture of what he will do with a sinful, broken, rebellious people. He will redeem them!!

35:8-10 - In verses 1-7 Isaiah concentrates on describing the renewed and re-created Promiseland. It will be redeemed so greatly that the wilderness and desert will become fertile ground with pools and springs. God's purpose is declared in verse 4, to save his people, and in verses 8-10 Isaiah finally describes that people and God's salvation for them. They will be transformed as radically as the land has been changed.

Isaiah says the Lord will bring them home to Jerusalem, a holy and joyful people. At first reading this prophecy appears to be describing the return from Babylonian exile of the Jews in 538. However, it is included in the first section of Isaiah which is set in Isaiah's time during which the north kingdom of Israel was destroyed, Judah and Jerusalem were attacked by Sennacherib and the northern ten tribes were sent into exile by the Assyrians in what is modern day Armenia in northern Turkey. One can easily conclude that in chapter 35 Isaiah is looking ahead to the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile in a new exodus, which is a major theme in the second half of his work. However, it is also possible that Isaiah places this prophecy of redemption and return here to give hope to the northern tribes that someday God will even redeem them and bring them back to Zion, reunited with their Judean brothers and sisters. It is possible that Isaiah implies both meanings for this passage to give hope to the whole people of Israel.

Isaiah says through the desert that is now blooming a highway will run. It will be called the Way of Holiness and the unclean, or the defiled will not walk on it. The word "Way" is a significant word because "The Way" was the earliest title Luke uses for Christianity in the Book of Acts. Christians followed the "Way" of Jesus. The Septuagint uses the same word for "way" as the Greek New Testament; hodos. That is hardly coincidental.

Isaiah calls it the Way of Holiness. Throughout the first section of his prophecy, chapters 1-35, he has repeatedly shown how Israel and Judah were not living as the holy people of God. They had betrayed him with their idolatry and had defiled themselves with their resulting wicked behavior. The fact that now as the Lord brings them back to Zion they are walking on the Way of Holiness speaks to a miraculous transformation as great as the transformation of the desert that will bloom. In the New Testament the way of Jesus produces a holy people who live upright lives through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit living in every believer. Isaiah's image is one of the greatest prophetic pictures of what the ministry of the Messiah will produce in his people: transformation! This is the essence of the "already" eschatology of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament. God's people are saved and forgiven through the work of the Servant-
Messiah that Isaiah will describe in chapters 40-66. Then they are transformed through the indwelling Holy Spirit poured out to all believers by the Messiah. The ultimate end of the Messiah's work, the redeemed earth and people of God, awaits the "not-yet" fulfillment in the return of the Lord Jesus at his Second Coming. The New Testament reveals the full mystery of God's plan in his Messiah. Isaiah does not separate the two parts but sees them as happening together.

The Way of Holiness will be free from fools, those who reject God and do not live for him. The last phrase of verse 8 the NIV translates, "wicked fools will not go about on it." An alternative reading which the ESV uses is: "even if they are fools, they shall not go astray." The one reading assures God's people those who reject God will not be among his people anymore. The second reading implies that even the fool who had rejected God in the past can be changed. If they repent God will keep them on the Lord's Way of Holiness. Both meanings are possible and both point to the transformation of the people of Israel.

Isaiah declares that no lion or any other ferocious or ravenous beast will be found on the Way. Isaiah says they will not get up on it, implying the Way is an elevated highway, safe from the predators that try and attack people. The lion was the most feared predator that lived in Israel in biblical times. Big cats are frequently the most feared of animals because they are the top predators in any area one finds them. An individual has little protection from an attack by a big cat, especially in Isaiah's day.

It is interesting to note that Peter in 1 Peter 5 describes the devil as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Was Peter thinking of Isaiah's words when he wrote his letter? He could have been. Isaiah's meaning is that if we walk on the Way of Holiness we will be safe from the attacks of beasts and lions. Natural predators are not the greatest threat to the Christian. Demonic attacks and spiritual evil are our true enemies. Paul shows us that in Ephesians 6. Isaiah's implication is that when we walk on the Way we are safe. When we get off of the Way that is when we are vulnerable to attacks. The New Testament affirms this, especially Jesus in John 16 and Paul in Galatians 5. Abiding in Jesus and walking in the Spirit keep us safe from following our sinful natures. When we walk in the Way of Holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit we will bear fruit and are protected from the enemy!

Isaiah finishes his picture of a redeemed Israel by declaring that the ransomed of the Lord will return to Jerusalem singing and praising God. Historically this was partially fulfilled in the return of the exiles to Jerusalem in 538 under Zerubbabel but it has it ultimate fulfillment in the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. Zion is Jerusalem. John in Revelation 21-22 shows us a picture of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven prepared as the eternal dwelling place of God with his people. Revelation says God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death, sorrow, suffering and pain will be eliminated. All the consequences of sin will be wiped clean. Isaiah says in the redeemed Zion only joy and gladness will overtake them. The word for overtake means to catch up as if something is chasing them and finally catches them. Think of Isaiah's context. The people had to flee from invasion and war. Suffering was about to overtake them. In the Lord's Zion it will be joy and gladness that catches them! Sorrow and sighing will flee away. Their world will be turned upside down. That which they flee now, suffering, will be as if it had never been. John completes Isaiah's picture in the new heaven and earth in Revelation 21-22. God will live with his people face to face forever and all suffering, pain and death; all the consequences of sin, will be as if they had never been. It is as C.S. Lewis says at the end of the Narnia Chronicles, all of this life is like the cover and the title page. Now at last we will begin the great story which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before!
Chapter 36:

36:1-7 - Chapters 36-39 are taken from II Kings 18-20 & 2 Chronicles 32 with some additions by Isaiah. II Kings was written late in the exile or after it which means a disciple of Isaiah after the exile inserted this material into Isaiah's prophecy to show how God had fulfilled his prophet's words. It lends credence to the idea that there was one prophecy and one prophet whose disciples put the work together a century and a half after Isaiah lived. It is likely that at least the earlier section of Isaiah was already circulating at the time of the exile. The second section which Isaiah told his disciples to seal up until the right time (see Isaiah 8:16) was unsealed during the exile and then the two sections were put together by a later editor.

There is some dispute of the dates for Hezekiah's reign given in chapter 36, especially verse 1, the fourteenth year of Hezekiah as the date of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem. The 14th year of Hezekiah appears to be c.715. However, we know from excavations at Lachish in southern Judah and Assyrian records that Sennacherib's invasion occurred in 701. The problem appears to be solved if Hezekiah serves as co-regent with his father Ahaz beginning in 729 and becoming sole ruler and king in 716. Thus the fall of Samaria would have been in 722, the 6th year of Hezekiah's co-regency (2 Kings 18:10) and Sennacherib's invasion would have occurred in 701, the 14th year of his sole reign. The text does not specifically say he served as co-regent with his father Ahaz but this formula does solve most major difficulties.

The Hebrews, like most ancient Near Eastern peoples, did not count dates of a king's reign or major historical events according to a standard solar fixed calendar. They kept their monthly calendar based on the phases of the moon for religious reasons to mark their most important festivals. However, that calendar shifted with the lunar months and had to be adjusted periodically in order to keep the feasts like Passover in their proper time of year. The reigns of different kings were marked by when they ascended to the throne or by their deaths. Infrequently, problems with fixing an accurate historical date arise because of a co-regency as in Hezekiah's case. Archeology can help us fix important historical dates so that we can get a more accurate reading on when something occurred in the Biblical narrative. The Bible is always our beginning point when trying to discern the timing of an event. When the dates of Scripture disagree with the dates established by archeology we do the best we can in trying to understand the correct timing of an event. That is why scholars have proposed a co-regency for Hezekiah with his father Ahaz in order to synchronize the Biblical and archeological dates for the invasion of Sennacherib.

Sennacherib invades Judah in 701 and systematically begins to subdue all of Judah's fortified cities. Sennacherib sends his commanding general with a large Assyrian army to Jerusalem to confront Hezekiah. The Bible does not say why the Assyrians attacked Judah but II Kings 18 says Hezekiah confessed he had done wrong and offered to pay Sennacherib much gold in tribute in order to withdraw. Sennacherib took the gold but came against Jerusalem anyway. It is possible Hezekiah thought to rebel against Assyria and that is the reason for the invasion. Another possibility is Ashkelon, one of the Philistine cities, had rebelled against Assyria at this time and Sennacherib moved to suppress it as well as meet the Egyptians to stop their meddling in Assyrian territory. This is the most likely setting for Sennacherib's invasion of Judah as well. Hezekiah was forced to pay tribute and later in that same campaign Sennacherib moves to besiege Jerusalem. Excavations at Lachish about 30 miles south and west of Jerusalem confirm the Biblical account.
Sennacherib had taken Lachish and sent his general to Jerusalem along with a large army to give Hezekiah a message. The Hebrew word for general is Rabshakeh which is a title not a name. Basically the message was: Surrender! From a military standpoint Hezekiah could hold Jerusalem for a while but he would not have been able to withstand a long siege by the Assyria army. II Kings and Isaiah report that the Rabshakeh comes to the conduit of the upper pool near the Washer's Field to deliver his message. The location of the conduit and the upper pool is unknown, although it cannot refer to the spring Gihon which was in the Kidron Valley to the east of Jerusalem. By this time Hezekiah's engineers had constructed his water tunnel that connected the spring which was outside the city walls with the Pool of Siloam which was inside the walls. See II Chronicles 32. It is likely the conduit was near the northern or western part of the wall of Jerusalem. It is where Isaiah and his son met King Ahaz during the invasion of Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus in Isaiah 7.

The Assyrian general comes to speak to King Hezekiah just outside the city walls. Hezekiah sends Eliakim his palace steward, the king’s secretary Shebna and his recorder, Joah, to meet the Assyrian Rabshakeh. The general speaks to the king’s delegation as if he is the mouthpiece of Sennacherib.

He asks them what reason they have for confidence that their rebellion will succeed. He accuses them of trusting in Egypt to rescue them. He calls Egypt a "splintered reed of a staff that pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it." Trusting Egypt is so ridiculous it would be like using a thin reed for a staff. The only thing it would do is wound your hand if you leaned on it. It has no capability to support you! In that the general spoke the truth. Those among Hezekiah's advisors who trusted Egypt to help Judah were fooled by Egyptian strength. No power in the Middle East was able to stand against Assyria, including Egypt, and the Rabshakeh knew it and he knew Hezekiah knew it. The advisors' trust in Egypt was a false hope.

The Assyrian general then proceeds to question their faith in the Lord and trust in him. He lies to them and says it is the Lord himself who has told Sennacherib to invade Judah and take Jerusalem. He questions the reforms of Hezekiah who removed the altars at the high places around Judah and focused the worship of God at the temple in Jerusalem. This was according to the command of the Lord in Deuteronomy 12. Furthermore both II Kings and II Chronicles commend Hezekiah like they would Josiah for tearing down the altars on the high places because the people would often mix the worship of Yahweh with the worship of pagan gods and goddesses on the high places. The pagan general mistakenly appeals to King Hezekiah like he would a pagan king, thinking what would be normal and accepted practice for Assyria would be normal and acceptable for Judah as well. Hadn't they worshipped this way under Ahaz and the king's before him?

The Assyrian general speaks to Hezekiah with the half-truths and outright lies of Satan. There is a little truth mixed in with the lies. It WAS foolish to trust in Egypt but then he calls into question the Lord's own words in Deuteronomy. It is similar to Satan's question to Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3; "Did God say?" Satan's consistent tactic is to get us to question or doubt God's Word. That is what the Assyrian general tries to do with the officials from the king. It sounded reasonable and logical and from a pagan perspective it was. But God had commanded the king to centralize worship in Jerusalem and whether it violated common pagan worship practices or not was irrelevant.

36:8-12 - The Assyrian general, the Rabshakeh, arrogantly taunts Hezekiah's officials. He says make a bet with the king of Assyria. He'll give Hezekiah 2000 horses if they have enough riders
to put on them. *I Kings 10* says Solomon at the height of his power had 1400 horses. 2000 would have been a huge number. The Rabshakeh knows Hezekiah doesn't have enough charioteers to staff such a massive force. He says even if you could put that many men in the field you wouldn't be able to repulse even the least of his master's captains. And you are trusting Egypt to supply you horses and chariots? His argument is mocking and prideful but it is true. Hezekiah didn't have the manpower to fight off Sennacherib's forces and the Assyrians know it and Hezekiah knows it as well.

Then the general blatantly lies to the king's officials. He says the reason the king of Assyria is attacking Judah is because the Lord sent him. In *Isaiah 10* Isaiah declares that the Lord will send Assyria to attack and destroy the northern kingdom of Israel for all her sins. But he never said he would do the same for Judah. The Assyrian general is following the same pattern Satan followed when he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden in *Genesis 3*. He questions God's Word and command in verse 7, and now he boldly lies to Hezekiah in verse 10. Satan questioned God's command by asking Eve, "Did God say?" and then directly lied to her when he said, "You will not die." God had not sent the king of Assyria to attack Jerusalem. He lies to Hezekiah's officials in order to overwhelm them. He challenges their weakness militarily and then tries to sow doubts in their hearts in order to get them to surrender.

The strategy shakes Hezekiah's officials. They beg the Rabshakeh to speak to them in Aramaic the language technically of Persia, but obviously understood by many at the time. They ask him not to speak Hebrew in the hearing of the men on the wall. The general taunts them and says he'll speak to everyone because his master sent him to tell the whole city what would happen unless they surrender. The men on the wall will be like the king's officials; they will eat their own dung and drink their own urine before the king of Assyria is finished with them. It is a horrific picture designed to destroy hope but it is based upon lies. That is the lesson for us today. Do we listen to Satan's lies or God's truth, even when the situation looks grim? On what do we base our actions and our attitude? The king of Assyria mockingly flaunted his power in order to subdue Jerusalem. Hezekiah, with Isaiah's help would trust in the Lord!

36:13-20 - The Assyrian general ignores Hezekiah's officials' request to speak in Aramaic and to speak just to them and not to the soldiers on the wall and the people of Jerusalem. He calls out in a loud voice to all the soldiers within hearing in Hebrew. He gives them a message from his master, Sennacherib. Don't trust in the Lord. Don't believe what Hezekiah tells you, that the Lord will deliver you from Sennacherib. A moment before he had boldly lied to Hezekiah's officials and told them the Lord himself had sent the Assyrians to attack Jerusalem so why should they trust the Lord to deliver them. Now he says Yahweh is too weak to deliver you from Assyria's army. He won't because he can't!

His alternative is to surrender. Come out to Sennacherib. He makes it sound as if it won't be too bad. Surrender and they will all be able to eat from their own vine and fig tree. The Assyrians will come and take them away to another land, but it will be a wonderful place; a land filled with grain and new wine, just like their own. What a great future the king of Assyria will give them and it will be theirs if they surrender the city to him.

The Rabshakeh's promise is as empty as ISIS promising the citizens of Mosul in Iraq how great their lives will be under ISIS. It will be an Islamic paradise! The only part of his message that is true is the promise that the Assyrians will take them away to another land. The truth is when the Assyrians captured a city they would haul off the surviving population to another part of their empire. That is what they had done to the people of Israel when they conquered Samaria.
They took many of the survivors to modern day Armenia in northeastern Turkey. The Assyrians were known for their brutality. When they captured a city they would often slaughter many of the citizens and pile their skulls in front of the city gates to remind people not to rebel against Assyria. They would take the prisoners and put out eyes and tongues and cut off ears to keep them subdued. They would re-settle the newly conquered territory with exiles from other parts of their empire in order to work the land that would bring their own pagan gods with them. The Assyrians would then demand that the newly settled people also worship the native gods of their new home. This is what happened to Israel and the newly settled pagan people became the Samaritans of the Persian period and the New Testament. The Assyrians told them to worship Yahweh as well as their own gods so that their land would be blessed because the native god of Israel would be appeased. They treated the Lord and his worship in a completely pagan way. This is what the Assyrians did to cities they conquered. What the commander of the Assyrian troops told the people on the wall that day was a lie.

The Rabshakeh's final point to the people of Jerusalem and the soldiers defending the walls was not to trust in Yahweh because he is too weak. What other god has delivered their country from the might of Assyria? He names Hamath, Arpad and Sepharvaim. These are all cities in northern Syria that the Assyrians conquered on their way to Israel and Egypt. The general adds the Lord was not able to save Samaria, not understanding that God had judged Samaria and used the Assyrians to carry out that judgment. He would use the Babylonians to carry out his judgment against Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day a century in the future.

36:21-22 - King Hezekiah's advisors are silent before the Assyrian general. They do not answer his question or his offer of surrender. The king had commanded them not to answer and they obey. However, it is clear how they responded emotionally to the Rabshakeh's boasts. They come to the king with their clothes torn, a sign of grief and they tell him everything the Assyrian commander said. Clearly his boasts and his lies upset them. From a military and political standpoint Hezekiah is helpless to stop the Assyrians. They know it and Hezekiah knows it. The question is can Yahweh stop them and does he even want to? It must have been going through Hezekiah's mind that the Lord was ready to judge Judah and Jerusalem like he had Samaria and Israel. He had seen the idolatry that his father Ahaz had practiced once he became an Assyrian vassal. It was a political necessity but did the Lord see it that way? Was he not offended by the idols and pagan practices in his temple? All these questions must have been going through Hezekiah's mind. It is why he sends his aids to speak to Isaiah in chapter 37. Hezekiah needs to know what the Lord is going to do. It is his only hope to save his city and his people.

Chapter 37:

37:1-7 - When King Hezekiah hears the report of his officials and the words of the Assyrian commander he tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth, a sign of mourning and grief. He goes to the temple to pray and worship. He sends Eliakim, Shebna and some of the leading priests all wearing sackcloth to speak to Isaiah. Shebna and Eliakim had been there at the walls to listen to the Assyrian commander, the Rabshakeh. I think Hezekiah knew the message from Sennacherib would not be good, but when he hears it for himself he is overwhelmed. That's why he sends his officials to speak to Isaiah. He needs to hear what the Lord has to say. He goes to the temple but he doesn't consult the high priest about what to do. He wants to hear from Isaiah because he knows Isaiah is a true prophet of the Lord and is the Lord's mouthpiece to the king and all of Judah.
Hezekiah tells Eliakim's delegation what to say to Isaiah. He says this is a day of distress, rebuke and disgrace like when a child is ready to be born but there is no strength in the mother to deliver the baby. Think of Hezekiah's time. There would have been midwives to help a woman birth her baby but there were no doctors. No one knew how to do an emergency C-section. If the family and friends of the mother were helping her birth her baby and they realized she had no energy left to push the baby out they were helpless to do anything. The mother and the baby were doing to die. Hezekiah describes a scene of futility and grief, a scene of helplessness and despair. That is the message he wants his officials to communicate to Isaiah. The king is at a loss for what to do.

He expresses the slimmest of hopes in that he tells Isaiah because the Assyrian general has insulted the Lord perhaps the Lord will rebuke Sennacherib for his mocking words. Then he asks Isaiah to pray for the remnant that is left. The implication is that remnant is in grave jeopardy of being destroyed. Hezekiah holds no illusions about what the Assyrians will do if they take Jerusalem. His people will be slaughtered and the survivors carted into exile.

Isaiah replies to the king in verses 6-7. Isaiah tells Hezekiah not to fear the words of Sennacherib delivered by his "underlings", which is Isaiah's sarcastic description of the field commander, the Rabshakeh. The ESV translates the plural word as young men which the Hebrew can also mean. It is doubly insulting because Isaiah implies that the blasphemy of the Assyrians was spoken by a group of teenage boys who know nothing! They have reviled and blasphemed the Holy One of Israel! In response, God is going to put a spirit in Sennacherib so that when he hears a report from Assyria he will turn around and go home. The implication is when he returns to Assyria he will stop his siege of Jerusalem and his attack on Judah. It will be spared. Furthermore Isaiah says when he returns to Assyria he will be assassinated and be king no more. The Lord will judge Sennacherib for he has questioned God's power and sovereignty over his own people and lied about who God is.

In Isaiah 37:38 Isaiah's prophecy tells us that Sennacherib was in Nineveh, worshipping the pagan god Nisroch and two of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword and escaped. A third son, Esarhaddon succeeded him as king. Assyrian accounts tell us Sennacherib was assassinated in 681 by his two sons. Isaiah's words were fulfilled twenty years after he gave them.

37:8-13 - The Assyrian commander leaves Jerusalem to report back to Sennacherib who is now laying siege to Libnah, another fortified town of Judah about 10 miles northeast of Lachish. It was on a straight line to Jerusalem from Lachish running southwest to northeast. Sennacherib had taken Lachish and was now attacking the next city in line to Jerusalem.

He hears a report that Tirhakah, the Cushite Pharaoh of Egypt, had set out to attack the Assyrian army. Tirhakah or Taharqa in Egyptian records reigned from 690-664 as part of the Nubian or Ethiopian 25th dynasty of Egypt. There is some confusion over Isaiah's mention of Tirhakah here (and II Kings 19) because if Isaiah is reporting Sennacherib's invasion of 701, Tirhakah would not become Pharaoh until 11 years later. Several alternative explanations have been given to explain the discrepancy. One is that Tirhakah commanded the Egyptian army as its general but Isaiah and II Kings call him Pharaoh. The second is more complicated. This theory postulates a second Judean campaign of Sennacherib after Tirhakah has taken the Egyptian throne that is not spoken of in the Assyrian chronicles. The records of the two campaigns are then combined in Isaiah and II Kings 19 and account for the discrepancies in the dates of Tirhakah's reign. The great weakness of this theory is that there are no records at all of such a
campaign in the Assyrian annals, whereas Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 is described in
detail, including his siege and sacking of Lachish. The two campaign theory does not hold up but
a satisfactory explanation for the differences in the timing of Tirhakah's attack and his reign
cannot be solved at this time. In the end it does not change the message or Hezekiah's dilemma.
Sennacherib was coming against Jerusalem and Hezekiah could not stop him nor hold the city
against him.

Isaiah mentions Tirhakah's coming against Assyria for two reasons. First, this was
exactly what some of his officials were hoping for; Egypt would stand with Judah and protect
her. This was the political-military solution they had desired. The second reason is it gives the
context for Sennacherib's message to Hezekiah where he ridicules his faith in the Lord and the
Lord's power.

Sennacherib sends a message to Hezekiah. Don't let your god deceive you that Jerusalem
will not be given into my hand. He reminds Hezekiah of all the cities and nations the Assyrians
have conquered and destroyed. None of their gods saved them. What makes you think Yahweh is
any different? He will not be able to save you either!

Sennacherib then lists many of the cities and territories the kings of Assyria had taken to
expand their empire. Remember, in pagan thinking their gods were territorial so to expand their
influence pagan empires would campaign to take new territory to make their gods' power greater.
Sennacherib asks Hezekiah where are the gods and people of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the
people of Eden in Telassar? Gozan was in northeastern Mesopotamia near the Euphrates River.
Haran was in northern Mesopotamia to the north and east of the Euphrates. Rezeph was another
important northern Mesopotamian city on the caravan route from the Euphrates to Hamath on the
Orontes River in northern Syria. The people of Eden or Beth-Eden were a small kingdom the
Assyrians had conquered in northern Syria around Carchemish. All of these cities Sennacherib
mentions are in northern Mesopotamia and Syria. The idea is no one was able to stop the
Assyrian Empire as it spread west and south. Judah will not stand either. Sennacherib then lists
Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah. Hamath, Arpad and Sepharvaim were listed in the
first message from Sennacherib recited by the Assyrian commander, the Rabshakeh, before the
walls of Jerusalem. They too are cities in northern Syria the Assyrians had conquered. Assyria is
coming like a flood that Judah will not be able to stop. Hena and Ivvah are cities in northern
Syria. There is a good possibility they are names for cities in the territory of Avva where
Shalmaneser took residents and re-settled them in Israel after Sargon II took Samaria in 721.
They would become some of the ancestors of the Samaritans. See 2 Kings 17.

Sennacherib tells Hezekiah from northeastern Mesopotamia near Nineveh to northern
Syria on the borders of Israel the Assyrians have conquered people after people. None of those
people, their armies or their gods has been able to stop them. What makes you think puny Judah
and its little god Yahweh will be any different? Sennacherib perceived Yahweh as any pagan
would. His territory was tiny, little Judah, so he was a tiny god as well. The gods of Assyria were
mighty and powerful because Assyria was mighty and powerful. One sees the thinking of the
demons behind the pagan idols. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 that behind all idols are demons
and the worship of idols is really the worship of demons. Demonc powers would be interested in
power, prestige and territory in order to prove their greatness. Yahweh had no need for such
demonstrations because he was the Creator of all, including the original angels who became the
demons when they rebelled with Satan! See Revelation 12. The truth is Sennacherib has no idea
with whom he is dealing. That will become clearer in the rest of chapter 37.
Hezekiah, upon receiving the message from Sennacherib, goes up to the temple to pray. Isaiah says he "spread it out before the Lord." It is an interesting phrase because it implies Hezekiah laid it out before God as if to say, have you seen what this pagan king has said about you. On one level he knows God already knows but on another he wants the Lord to "see it for himself." Hezekiah addresses the Lord as Lord Almighty or Lord of Hosts, Hebrew sabaoth. This is a frequent title for God in Isaiah. He is the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel who is enthroned above the cherubim. That is a reference to the two cherubim whose wings cover the mercy seat on the top of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the temple. The Hebrews believed the ark was the footstool of the Lord's throne. It was where heaven touched earth.

Hezekiah affirms that the Lord is unlike any other pagan god. He is God alone and is God over all the kingdoms of the earth, including Assyria, because he is the Creator. The Lord made the heavens and the earth. Hezekiah affirms in his address to God in prayer who God is and his relationship to all the nations and to Israel. In that, it is similar to Jesus' teaching in the Lord's Prayer, our Father in heaven. He acknowledges who God is before he asks him anything in prayer.

Verse 17 is very similar to Daniel's great prayer in Daniel 9:18: “Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name.” The language Hezekiah uses is obviously anthropomorphic. God is all seeing and all knowing. He does not need anyone to tell him where to look or to listen to something. On one level Hezekiah knows this but he appeals to God for his people and for the Lord's Name and glory. It's as if he is saying, you have to listen to what is going on. Lord, have you seen what this pagan wrote in his letter? Sennacherib has insulted you! Are you going to let that stand? It is one thing to attack us it is another to mock you, the Lord of Hosts!

Hezekiah then acknowledges that some of what Sennacherib has said is true. The Assyrian armies have conquered many lands and nations. They have burned their gods in the fire. But they are no gods at all! They are idols made of wood and stone by people's hands. The Lord has no idol because he is the Living God!

From Sennacherib's point of view Yahweh is nothing. Judah is such a little land and the Assyrians have subdued far greater powers than Judah. There is no way that Yahweh will not also be subdued. Pagan gods were measured by their territory and the strength of the peoples and nations that worshipped them. Judah is nothing therefore Yahweh is nothing. But from Hezekiah's point of view the Lord God is Creator of heaven and earth and is the ONLY God! The miracle of God's love and covenant is that he chose little Israel to be his people alone out of all the peoples of the earth. Deuteronomy 7:7-8 says: The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. This is what Hezekiah knows and in a sense reminds the Lord in his prayer. Show yourself mighty before this pagan king who blasphemes you Lord! Show yourself to be God alone to all the kingdoms of the earth! Glorify your Name Lord! That is still a great prayer to pray today in the situations we face.

Isaiah sends Hezekiah the Lord's answer to his prayer concerning Sennacherib. He begins with the Virgin Daughter of Zion despises and mocks you! The Daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head at you in scorn or derision. Sennacherib had scorned God and his people. Now
the Lord's people personified as a young virgin woman, not a soldier or mighty man, scorn the
great Assyrian king.

Isaiah gets to the point. Sennacherib has mocked and blasphemed the Holy One of Israel!
He has shouted against the one and only God and lifted his eyes in pride towards him. God is
replying in exactly the way Hezekiah hoped he would for God will not be mocked! Paul says in
*Galatians 6:7*: *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also
reap.* Sennacherib was about to learn that lesson from the weak, little god of the Jews.

Sennacherib had mocked the Lord through his messengers like the Rabshakeh. They had
simply passed on the king's words to Hezekiah and all Jerusalem. Sennacherib boasted of his
military might and his conquests from Lebanon to Egypt. Isaiah uses picturesque metaphors for
Sennacherib's boasts. He has cut down the tallest cedars on the highest peaks in Lebanon, which
would be Mt. Hermon at over 9000 feet. Nothing has stood in his way. He has dug wells in
foreign lands and drunk their water. With the mere soles of his feet he has dried up all the
streams of Egypt, including presumably the Nile itself! The boasts are outlandish and over the
top because they suggest that Sennacherib has done things no one else has done or could do. He
brags that he is so great that no little god from some little country is going to stop him. Isaiah
paints Sennacherib's attitude as if he does not fear Yahweh at all but Yahweh and Judah should
fear him!

37:26-27 - Sennacherib thought he was more powerful than any nation or king in the Middle
East. He thought he was in charge and could do as he wished with no one to stop him. Isaiah
declares the truth. God is the true sovereign one. He is the one who gave power to Sennacherib
and made him able to conquer nations. God planned long ago that the Assyrians would come
against first Israel and then Judah. He it is who gives kings their power and determines who rules
in his world. Paul reinforces this idea in *Romans 13* when he speaks about governments being
instituted by God and given power to rule by him. The classic Bethel Bible Series said, "*History
itself is the judgment of God.*" God is the Lord of history. The Assyrians believed Yahweh was
the little god of a little people but Isaiah declares he is the one and only Lord of creation and
history.

It was the Lord who gave Sennacherib his ability to destroy cities and strike fear and
dismay into people. His campaign to attack Judah's fortified cities was sanctioned by the Lord
himself not Sennacherib. If the Lord had not given him permission to attack his people and the
other nations he had conquered nothing would have happened.

Isaiah uses picturesque Hebrew language in verse 27. The people of the fortified cities
Sennacherib has conquered are drained of power or shorn of strength as the ESV says. Literally
in Hebrew the phrase means they have short hands. Often the prophets say the Lord brought
Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Here the conquered people have little hands which have
no might. They are drained of their power.

Isaiah says the people are like plants of the field, the tender green shoots that are easily
damaged and don't hold up in the hot weather. They are like grass that sprouts on a roof, which
would have been made of wood beams covered in branches with a thick layer of mud plaster
over it. The plaster often had to be re-done after the rainy season because they would develop
leaks because of cracking. Isaiah's picture is of a roof after the rainy season where grass has
sprouted in the mud plaster that will soon be replaced. It would be like moss that grows on our
roofs here in the Northwest. It is a nuisance and short-lived. So are the inhabitants of the cities
the Lord has allowed Sennacherib to destroy.
37:28-29 - Sennacherib thinks because he is king of a mighty empire and his gods are more powerful than Yahweh (How could they not be?), he is secure in his power and pride. Isaiah shows him how mistaken he is. The Lord knows where he stays. The Hebrew words imply God knows where he lives! He knows when he comes and goes. Nothing is hid from the Lord! God knows his raging against the Lord, meaning his insolent words. The word for rage literally means to quake or shake and can be applied to someone who is so angry they are shaking. That is the word picture Isaiah gives of Sennacherib's anger toward the Holy One of Israel!

The Lord tells Sennacherib his raging has reached the Lord's ears. He knows what has been said and how he has insulted the Lord. The NIV reads his insolence and the ESV reads his complacency. The Hebrew word means to be at ease and so secure one thinks nothing will bother them. They are completely in control. It implies a person of immense arrogance. Sennacherib forgot or has never understood that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. See Proverbs 3:34. He is about to learn that lesson the hard way.

It is the Lord who has allowed him to rule and gain power and now he insults the very Lord of history; no more! God will put his hook, his nose ring, in his mouth and his bit between his teeth and make him return the way he came; back to Assyria. The two images of hook or nose ring and bit are pictures of control. One used a nose ring on a bull and a bit on a horse.

Sennacherib is living under an illusion. He thinks he is so powerful that he has become smug in his power. God will turn him around like a horse with a bit in its mouth. Sennacherib is not in control at all; the Lord God Almighty is!

37:30-32 - Isaiah shifts his focus from Sennacherib to Judah and Jerusalem but he specifically addresses Hezekiah. Think of the situation. The Assyrian army has been campaigning through Judah and destroying Judah's fortified cities. An army of that size has to live off of the land as there was no provision to store food in that time. That means crops and livestock have been plundered and eaten to feed the Assyrian troops. The population has been forced from their homes and many would have fled to the cities for safety. No one has planted new crops or tilled the field. Herds have been abandoned. Now Sennacherib has laid siege to Jerusalem and the city is in grave danger of falling. Hezekiah has asked God to intervene but what will happen? How will the people survive?

The Lord gives Hezekiah a sign, just as he had given Ahaz a sign in chapter 7. This year the people will eat what has grown of itself and the second year they will eat what comes up from that. The implication is there will just be enough to feed the people who are left alive. Then the third year from the Assyrian invasion they will plant crops and vineyards and be able to eat of their fruit. The land will recover! What's more in that time the remnant of Judah, those who have been spared will root downward and bear fruit upward which is the more literal translation of Isaiah's words. They will begin to repopulate the land and replant it once again. Judah will survive! This must have been a great comfort to the king because he had seen his northern cousins destroyed by the Assyrians and it looked like the same thing was going to happen to Judah.

God promises a remnant will go out from Jerusalem and a band of survivors from Mt. Zion. I think the picture is of the surviving population who has been holed up in Jerusalem for safety will go back out into the land to recover it and make it bloom once again.

God says this is a sure promise because the zeal or passion of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. The word for zeal is related to jealousy which echoes God's statements to Moses that the Lord is a jealous God. He will give his glory to no other. Isaiah used this phrase once
before in chapter 9 in the prophecy about the future king from David's line, the Messiah, who would rule over David's kingdom forever. The zeal of God himself would bring it about. The promise is a guarantee by God to Hezekiah that his people and his city would be spared. Judah will recover. God himself will see to it!

37:33-38 - The Lord through Isaiah then declares the fate of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. He will not enter Jerusalem or capture it. Isaiah describes the kind of siege warfare that was current in his day. An army would surround a city with troops then build siege ramps against the city's walls upon which they could bring their battering rams to hammer against the city's gates and break them. The soldiers building the ramps would be protected by archers who would try and keep the city defenders from killing or stopping the soldiers building the ramps or carrying the battering rams. That is what Isaiah speaks about when he says Sennacherib's forces will not come against the city with shield or siege ramp and no archer will shoot an arrow there.

The Assyrians had surrounded Jerusalem but had not yet begun to come against it with siege ramps and battering rams when Sennacherib sent his messenger to Hezekiah. God says there will be no siege! Sennacherib will return home by the way he came. He will go back to Nineveh because the Lord himself will defend the city for the sake of his own name, meaning glory and reputation, and for the sake of David his servant, meaning the promise he made to David and his descendants in II Samuel 7. God isn't going to save Jerusalem just to save Hezekiah. He is going to save Jerusalem to keep his promise to David!

[NOTE: It should be stated that the language of Isaiah's declaration to Hezekiah and the subsequent saving of Jerusalem and Judah through the plague God sent against the Assyrian army resulted in a gross misinterpretation of the Lord's promises to Judah. God said he would save Jerusalem to keep his promise to David and to glorify his Name. After Jerusalem was spared there began to develop an idea that a century and a half later would result in what I have called "the official theology" of Jeremiah's day. The corruption of God's promises became divorced from God's covenant at Mt. Sinai which the prophets used to consistently judge Judah. The official theology said as long as Judah had a king from David's line ruling on David's throne and as long as the Lord's temple stood in Jerusalem where God's Name dwells Jerusalem would be safe. The city would never fall because God would not allow David's son to fall or his temple where his Name dwells to be destroyed. That official theology completely ignored the idolatry and wickedness of the Jews, especially under Manasseh's reign which followed Hezekiah's. Thus God's saving of Jerusalem under Hezekiah was corrupted into a false theology that divorced God's promises and grace from the people's behavior and obedience.]

In the night God sent the Angel of the Lord to strike down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. Historically this is a huge number and some have suggested it represents all of the Assyrian forces in Judah not just those surrounding Jerusalem. It also probably represents camp followers and support troops besides regular troops. No one is aware of the awful plague that strikes the Assyrian camp because it is only when people arise early the next morning that they find all the dead bodies. It must have struck terror in the hearts of the Assyrians when they found all their troops dead. In a superstitious pagan environment it would be easy for them to believe the gods did this or some god other than their own gods. They would have believed, which was correct, their gods could not protect them from whatever god struck down their comrades. Did they suspect Yahweh? It seems likely. Given the circumstances, Sennacherib is forced to withdraw back to Assyria. He could not risk even a weakened Egypt attacking him. Plus, if the plague really was an attack by the God of the Jews how was he going to fend off another attack when he
could not stop the first one that had devastated his army? Sennacherib goes home with his tail between his legs!

In the Assyrian chronicles Sennacherib speaks of shutting up Hezekiah in his city like a bird in a cage but there is no mention of a plague that slaughters his army. One would not expect it anyway for the annals of ancient kings were not interested in reporting history but in celebrating victories. Ancient kings were notorious braggarts and one must sift through their statements to find the true historical facts.

The facts we can know or surmise are that Jerusalem was saved from the siege of the Assyrians. God showed himself as mighty to save against the Assyrians and able to protect Judah and Jerusalem. Sennacherib was forced to withdraw and never campaigned again in Israel. In fact after squelching a revolt in Babylon and other eastern parts of his empire, he settled down with his favorite wife and embarked on a major building campaign in Nineveh, including a new royal palace, new city walls and gates and a new aqueduct to strengthen Nineveh's water supply. It is possible that he was humbled by his defeat.

There is a time gap between verses 37-38. Sennacherib's invasion of Judah was in 701. Verse 38 takes place twenty years later in 681. Sennacherib is worshipping his chief god in Assyria, Nisroch, when two of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer assassinate him in the temple of Nisroch in Nineveh. They flee to the region of Ararat in northeastern Turkey. Esarhaddon, who had been designated crown prince, takes the Assyrian throne in his place. The Hebrew word for struck down is the same word used to describe the angel’s attack on the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem. Isaiah hints that even though his sons held the swords that killed him it was Yahweh who judged Sennacherib and struck him down. The arrogant pagan king who mocked the living God of Israel had been humiliated and finally judged by the "little god of the Jews." Sennacherib discovered that Yahweh was not a little god at all but the Lord of history!

Chapter 38:
38:1-8 - The timing of Hezekiah's illness appears to be before Sennacherib's invasion or just at it is beginning. Verse 6 says the Lord will deliver the king and Jerusalem from the hand of the king of Assyria. It is likely that Hezekiah's illness happened before the events of chapters 36-37. Isaiah follows the order of II Kings to illustrate Hezekiah's pride and to set up the need for the judgment and exile of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, 150 years in the future.

Isaiah does not tell us what the king's illness was only that he was very sick and on the point of death. Isaiah 38:21-22 & II Kings 20 say Isaiah recommended a poultice of figs be placed upon a boil the king had and it would heal the king. That points to an infection that probably had spread to his bloodstream which could easily turn fatal as there were no antibiotics with which to treat such infections.

Isaiah comes to Hezekiah and tells him to "put your house in order because you are going to die; you will not recover." This was brutal news to hear for the king. Think of the situation. Sennacherib and the Assyrian army were laying waste to Judah's fortified cities and Jerusalem was next. This was not the time for the king to be sick and die! Plus as Hezekiah's prayer shows, he pleaded with the Lord that he did not deserve this. He had lived faithfully before the Lord which included many reforms that rid Judah of the idols she had been worshipping. Hezekiah asks the question many good and faithful people ask: Why is this tragedy happening to me now?
Isaiah says Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept bitterly. The Hebrew words literally read he “wept weeping.” Turning his face to the wall indicates he didn't want anyone to see him weeping and crying out to the Lord. He pleads with the Lord to remember his life and how he has tried to live. Underneath his prayer is the idea that this illness isn't fair. He doesn't deserve this. These are feelings that many people have when an unexpected tragedy strikes us or a loved one. We ask why and we plead with God on the basis of his fairness. The underlying premise of those thoughts is that we are upright before the Lord and don't deserve any kind of bad thing happening to us. When a wicked and despicable person is struck down by illness or tragedy we say they got what they deserved. The truth is compared to God we are all wicked! All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. None of us deserves good things from God. As chapter 39 will show, even Hezekiah, one of Judah's best kings had a weak spot; his pride.

Yet Hezekiah does the right thing. He takes his plea to God who was the only one who could do anything about his illness and heal him. He prays and asks God to remember how he has tried to do the right thing before the Lord. Sometime after his prayer, the text suggests it was fairly quickly, Isaiah comes back to Hezekiah with an answer from the Lord. He comes in the name of the Lord, the God of David, your father. The Lord reminds Hezekiah of his promise to David in II Samuel 7, meaning it is not because of Hezekiah's righteousness that the Lord is going to heal the king but because of his "faithful love promised to David," Isaiah 55:3.

Isaiah tells the king the Lord has heard his prayer and seen his tears. He will add fifteen years to his life and the king will not die. Hezekiah reigned as king for 29 years. Fifteen more years puts his illness during his 14th year, which is also the timing of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. That means he was 39 years old when he fell ill and survived until his 54th year. Isaiah tells the king the Lord will deliver you and Jerusalem from the Assyrians. God himself will defend the city. II Kings 18-19 & Isaiah 36-37 describe those events.

God then gives Hezekiah a sign that reinforces his promise to the king of healing for him and deliverance for his people. The Lord says he will cause the shadow of the sun to go back ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz. The ESV translates the word for stairway as dial, meaning a sundial. The Hebrew word means steps and this is the only time it is ever translated dial. The ESV, NRSV, RSV and the NLT all translate the word as sundial with the NLT offering a textual note saying the Hebrew word means steps. The GNB, NIV and NASB all translate the word steps. Sundial is an interpretation from the context and the more literal translation is steps. However, no matter the interpretation of the word the meaning of what happened is clear. God caused the shadow of the sun on the steps or the sundial to go backwards ten steps. The problem is we have no way to know how big the steps on the stairway were or the units of time on the sundial. Many commentators assume Isaiah means hours but that is only speculation. II Kings 20 says Hezekiah appealed to the Lord for the sign and asked the Lord to do the more difficult thing, move the shadow back the ten steps. Isaiah leaves out those details. Isaiah tells us the Lord moved the shadow backwards ten "steps" in order to confirm the promise to Hezekiah. How God made the shadow move backward and exactly how long he made it move backward we have no way of knowing. This sign is obviously miraculous and shows God's power on a cosmic scale, especially given our knowledge of celestial mechanics and our solar system. That God would do that for a son of David who was ill is a remarkable thing for it shows not only his power as Creator but his love for the king and his faithfulness in keeping his promise to David.

38:9-11 - 38:10-20 is a psalm of lament written by Hezekiah after he had recovered from his near fatal illness. It is similar to many of the lament Psalms because it deals with suffering and
the questions it brings. Yet as the author looks to the Lord in suffering answers begin to emerge. Thankfully the Hebrews were not afraid to ask the great questions of life and faith which sometimes have no clear answers. In their wrestling and struggle they give us great insight into the human condition and how our faith in God relates to those struggles.

Hezekiah laments in verse 10 that in the prime of his life or the middle of his days (ESV) he must depart or die. He has been consigned or counted among those who must go through the gates of Sheol, the grave or place of the dead in Hebrew thought. The Greeks called it Hades and it was thought to be under the earth. To the Hebrews there is no returning from Sheol. The inventory of the dead has been taken and Hezekiah's name is on it. In Isaiah's day there had not yet developed a belief in the resurrection of the dead or eternal life with God in heaven. There are hints in Isaiah's prophecy but not a fully developed view of eternal life. It is not until New Testament times that resurrection is an integral part of Hebrew theology.

Hezekiah thinks he will never again see the Lord in the land of the living. He is probably referring to worshipping the Lord in the temple and experiencing his presence there. There is no evidence of Hezekiah having some kind of vision of the Lord. His observation is related to his understanding that the dead do not worship and praise the Lord so that once he is in Sheol his relationship with the Lord is forever cut off. He then observes that his relationships with other people will also be cut off. The dead are alone in Sheol. They do not experience the community of faith in the worship of God. The grave or death is an empty place where people are alone in some kind of shadowy existence if one could call it an existence at all. Compared to the living Sheol is nothing. There are hints in other parts of the Old Testament that if one lived a long and fruitful life Sheol becomes a place of honored rest like Abraham when he was gathered to his family in Genesis 25. Hezekiah's lament is that he will never have a chance to live that full and meaningful life because his illness will rob him of it.

38:12-14 - In these verses Hezekiah uses several vivid metaphors to describe his illness and suffering. He is like a shepherd's tent that has been pulled down around him and taken from him. He is like a weaver who rolls up the thread he has been using on the loom but then the Lord cuts his thread from him, meaning the Lord cuts off his life. He then uses the phrase “day and night you made an end of me,” in verses 12-13, which ties the whole section together.

Hezekiah says he waited patiently till dawn trying to calm himself down but the Lord broke all his bones like a lion gnawing on a carcass! The image is of great pain and anguish. He was hoping things would be better in the morning but they were only worse. If he had a boil that had grown infected and the infection had spread to his bloodstream then the pain and swelling would have been excruciating! He then repeats the phrase "day and night you made an end of me." He is convinced his suffering is the Lord's doing.

Hezekiah describes his moaning in the night waiting for the Lord. I chirped or cried like a swift or thrush (NIV). The ESV reads swallow or crane. Swift or swallow are similar birds that make chirping noises when they fly and dart about the air. The Hebrew word the NIV translates thrush is based on a Persian loanword. The ESV translates it crane. On our trip to Israel in 2016 we were able to visit a bird sanctuary in northern Israel. It was a stopover on the flyway from Europe to Africa and there were thousands of cranes in the fields and marshes. They do not make a soft chirping sound but a harsh croak! Given that the Hebrew verb in this sentence means to chirp softly not croak loudly, the NIV translation of thrush is more likely. That is reinforced by the next line which says the king moaned like a dove. A dove's call is soft and mournful not loud
and obnoxious like the cranes. Hezekiah gives us a picture of him moaning in the night, waiting for the dawn, hoping things will get better but they do not.

He summarizes his suffering by saying his eyes have grown weak with looking up to heaven waiting for God to save him. He is troubled and stressed, oppressed by his situation. He cries out to the Lord for aid. The ESV reads, "Be my pledge of safety!" The Hebrew word translated aid means surety or security for a loan or mortgage. Hezekiah is asking God if he will guarantee his healing; be his earnest money that guarantees the mortgage. It is a vivid picture of the king pleading for his life. The Lord is his only hope and if he does not come through Hezekiah knows he will die.

38:15-16 - In typical lament style Hezekiah now turns his focus to God and his actions rather than his suffering. In doing so he finds meaning and strength in his pain.

Hezekiah recognizes that the Lord himself has done this to him; meaning allowed his illness that almost killed him. One can debate whether God allowed it to happen to Hezekiah or caused it to happen but the result is the same. The king realizes that the Lord has had a hand in his almost fatal illness. God himself has spoken to him, meaning Isaiah's visit when he told the king to get his house in order because he was going to die in 38:1.

The second half of verse 15 is difficult. The NIV reads, "I will walk humbly all my years because of the anguish of my soul." The ESV reads, "I will walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul." The Hebrew word for walk slowly or humbly means to lead a procession in a slow and deliberate manner. It is possible Hezekiah is referring to his role as king in leading the festal procession of the people up to the temple during the great feasts of Israel. The NIV's translation of humbly is an interpretation of the attitude Hezekiah now has. The ESV sticks to its literal method but ends up with a confusing translation of the text. I think Hezekiah means he has been permanently affected by his illness. He has been humbled by God but also realizes that he will never again have the strength and vigor of his youth. He says it is because of the bitterness or anguish of his soul that he has been affected. The word is mara, which means bitter to the taste or anguished and bitter when describing an emotional state. It is what Naomi told Ruth to call her after the deaths of her husband and sons in Ruth 1. Hezekiah's description of the result of his depression lends credibility to the NIV's translation of being humbled.

Verse 16 is also difficult. What does Hezekiah mean by "by such things men live"? He says his spirit finds life even in "such things." I think Hezekiah means that his illness, though very personal and humbling to him, is a common experience among people. His situation is not unique and like so many others, people survive and find life even when they suffer. Hezekiah has gone through one of the worst times of his life yet he still lives! That is a lesson for us as well. Suffering is not always fatal. It can be very painful and humbling but we can survive it. As we will see, we can even find meaning in it and see God's hand at work. We need to remember that God's purpose in us is to conform us to the image of his Son, as Paul says in Romans 8. God's purpose is not to make us happy but to make us like him! If suffering is the best way to do that God will allow it into our lives. We don't like it but we can survive it. Hezekiah's attitude began to turn around when he realized God's hand was at work even in his illness.

The last phrase of verse 16 is also difficult. The NIV translates it as a statement of fact. The Lord has restored the king and let him live. The ESV translates it as a plea, restore me to health and make me live. The first Hebrew verb, restore, is a jussive, which is the form of a request or plea like the Greek subjunctive mood, the mood of contingency. The second Hebrew verb, make or let, is in the imperative, the form of a command and is often used as a jussive
when addressing God. The ESV more closely reflects the sense of the Hebrew verbs but the NIV makes better sense in the whole context of the passage, especially to what follows in verse 17. Is Hezekiah saying please Lord heal me, or is he declaring the Lord healed me? In the context he is declaring God's healing of his illness and this line in verse 16 is the turning point in the whole lament. God did heal the king in a miraculous fashion and that fact gave him insight into the purpose behind his illness. Even in all the suffering and pain God had a purpose. So often we cannot see that purpose until after we are better just like Hezekiah. But it is important for us to remember this lesson when we are in pain and can't perceive what the Lord is doing.

38:17-20 - Hezekiah realizes the true meaning of his suffering. The Lord allowed it for his good. Even though he was in great anguish and pain yet the Lord still loved him. He rescued the king from the pit, meaning from Sheol and death. Literally the words read, "you have loved my soul from the pit." The Hebrew words emphasize God's action in saving Hezekiah. He loved him out of the pit of his illness not just he saved him because he loved him. It is a dramatic phrase describing God's love as action not feeling.

The most significant insight the king has gained however is of the Lord's forgiveness. The Lord has "put all my sins behind your back." This is similar language to Psalm 103, which says the Lord removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. Micah 7 says the Lord casts our sins into the depths of the sea. Both passages are vivid pictures of the Lord's forgiveness. Hezekiah sees the Lord take all his sin or guilt and toss it behind his back. The NIV reads put all my sins behind your back. That implies a more gentle action than the Hebrew verb declares. He throws them or tosses them behind his back, meaning he removes them from his sight. The implication is he no longer views them or even looks at them. We are forgiven! It is possible that Hezekiah believed his illness was a result of some sin he committed and the Lord was judging him for it. This was a common viewpoint in the Old Testament and was directly linked to the Lord's statements in the Torah about blessings for obedience and punishments for disobedience to his covenant and law. Even so the point of Hezekiah's statement is he experiences his healing and deliverance as the Lord's forgiveness.

In verses 18-19 Hezekiah describes another benefit of his healing: only the living praise God. Hezekiah expresses the current understanding of death among the Hebrew people. There was no developed belief in life after death in Hezekiah's day. Isaiah hints of it; see chapter 25, but nothing fully realized. It was not until centuries later that the Lord led them to a deeper knowledge of heaven and eternal life. In the New Testament those ideas are fully formed. But for Hezekiah, death was a shadowy existence. There was no Paradise side of Sheol, only Sheol, the place of the dead under the earth. Once there one is cut off from the people. No longer can you go up to the temple and join the procession celebrating the Lord and what he has done. It is the living, Hezekiah says, who praise God.

Hezekiah then adds fathers tell their children about the Lord's faithfulness, something the dead cannot know or do. This is such an ironic statement because the son of Hezekiah who followed him on the throne of David was Manasseh, the most wicked and ungodly king in Judah's history. It was largely for the sins of Manasseh that the Lord decided to end the reign of David's line and judge and destroy Jerusalem. Hezekiah obviously failed to impress upon his young son how good and faithful the Lord was and to instill faith in the young prince.

From an historical perspective, Manasseh had little chance to be faithful to the Lord. He was only twelve when he ascended the throne. He reigned the longest of any king of Judah, 55 years, and during all of his reign he was a vassal of the Assyrian Empire which reached its
greatest strength and extent during his reign. If Judah was going to survive Manasseh could not make waves. Even so, he did not do just enough to appease Assyria and stay as faithful to Yahweh as he could. He embraced paganism wholeheartedly, even to the point of sacrificing his own infant son on the altar of Topheth in the Hinnom Valley to the south of Jerusalem.

Hezekiah's statement that he told his children about the Lord's faithfulness becomes an indictment upon him given what followed with Manasseh. He was a good and godly king but failed in his task of discipling his son. That coupled with his pride in chapter 39 sowed the seeds of Judah's eventual fall to Babylon!

The king reiterates his faith in the Lord in verse 20. He will save his people and they will praise him at his temple all the days of their lives. Worship is the proper response to God's deliverance and grace.

38:21-22 - Some versions place these verses after 38:6 which would follow the order of 2 Kings 20. Most versions follow the Hebrew text and place them here.

These two verses provide context and verification of Hezekiah's illness and the Lord's deliverance of the king. When Isaiah comes to the king after Hezekiah's prayer for healing, he tells the king to use a poultice or cake of pressed figs and put it on the boil. This was a folk remedy at the time and God used it to help Hezekiah recover. Medically it might have drawn the puss from the wound but it hardly could have dealt with the more likely infection in Hezekiah's blood. God healed the king. The treatment prescribed by Isaiah was merely the catalyst.

Verse 22 recounts Hezekiah's question to Isaiah needing confirmation that his prayers were being answered. The sign of the shadow of the sun going backwards ten steps follows the king's question. The eventual sign reinforces the fact that the Lord healed the king. He didn't recover by simple natural means or by a fig cake! God did it!

Chapter 39:
39:1-4 - Merodach-baladan was at times the independent king of Babylon during Hezekiah's reign. At other times he was a vassal of Assyria and ruled Babylon on their behalf. Historical records show he was constantly plotting and scheming to throw off the Assyrian yoke. He was finally exiled by Sennacherib soon after his invasion of Judah in 701. The timing of the visit of the envoys of Babylon is probably not coincidental. While Merodach-baladan could have had genuine concern for King Hezekiah and sent his ambassadors to see how the king was doing it is also quite possible that he was also looking for western allies in a plot to throw off the Assyrian yoke. Neither 2 Kings 20 nor Isaiah say that was the reason for the Babylonian's visit but it would dovetail with what we know of Merodach-baladan and also explain why Hezekiah shows the ambassadors all his treasuries. He might have been trying to impress them in order to join with their intrigue against Assyria.

Isaiah shows us another reasons Hezekiah brags about all his weapons and treasures: his pride. For all he did in reforming Judah and moving away from the worst of their paganism Hezekiah still had a heart that was full of pride and vulnerable to flattery. The Babylonian ambassadors succeed in puffing up the king. He shows them all he has in return.

Isaiah comes and asks him where the envoys were from and what they wanted. Hezekiah tells him they came from Babylon and he showed them all his treasuries. There is nothing he had they didn't see. Hezekiah was so glad for the attention he doesn't see that maybe showing a foreign power all his treasures was not a good thing. Rather than simply thanking them for their
concern and being hospitable he takes them on a tour of the palace and Jerusalem. He is not thinking clearly!

39:5-8 - Isaiah receives a word from the Lord that speaks to Hezekiah's attitude but even more importantly to the future of Judah and David's line through Hezekiah. Isaiah says the days are coming, meaning sometime in the future, when everything that Hezekiah has, all that he showed the emissaries from Babylon, will be carried off to Babylon as captured booty. There will be nothing left of all the treasures he and his ancestors have accumulated. Furthermore, some of his own sons, meaning offspring Hezekiah will father and be related to, will become eunuchs in the court of the king of Babylon. The word eunuch can mean court official as well as a male who has been castrated. In the ancient Middle East not all court officials were eunuchs but most eunuchs were court officials.

This prophecy was fulfilled in 597 when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured Jerusalem and took King Jehoiachin captive along with the royal family and most of the officials and chief priests. Several years earlier in 603 Babylonian raids had taken members of the royal family captive to Babylon. Among them were several young men, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, who became officials and advisors in Nebuchadnezzar's court. See Daniel 1. In 586 Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem, besieged it and in July of that year captured the city, taking everything of value back to Babylon. He tore down Jerusalem's walls and burned the temple to the ground. Isaiah's prophecy was literally fulfilled.

Hezekiah replies to Isaiah that God's Word to him is good because the horrific events of which Isaiah has spoken won't come true in his day! Hezekiah will live out his days in peace and security or reliability. In other words God's Word to him is good because it won't happen in his lifetime! Too bad for my future family, but I'll be safe! Hezekiah's attitude is selfish and short-sighted. For a man with such great faith and devotion to the Lord to say such things shows character flaws in Hezekiah that are veiled in other reports about him in Scripture. Even the best of us have our faults.

For Isaiah this Word from God carried other consequences. If this was around 702 before Sennacherib's invasion, then it would be 116 years before this prophecy would be completely fulfilled. We do not know when Isaiah died but presumably it was sometime during the reign of Manasseh. For the rest of his life Isaiah would carry the burden of his knowledge of the future of his people and his city. One wonders when he saw Manasseh descending into the worst idolatry and wickedness Judah had ever seen, so opposite of his father, whether Isaiah could sense the reasons behind the Lord's Word to him. It must have grieved him deeply. Yet it was probably during this time as things grew darker around him and the certainty grew of the future judgment of his people that the Lord gave him the greatest part of his prophecy. God used him not to speak any longer to his own generation but to the generation that would experience the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of his people. That makes chapters 40-66 even more meaningful and incredible.

Isaiah 40-66 Introduction:

Isaiah 40 marks a major turning point in Isaiah's prophecy. We turn suddenly from the days of the fall of Israel and King Hezekiah's reign in Judah to the Jews in exile in Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem. The time is right before the coming of Cyrus the Great of Persia, 160 years after Isaiah! Isaiah lived during chapters 1-39. Chapters 40-66 are all in the future for him. Yet the Lord used the great prophet to speak to his humbled, wounded people in a way that no one
else could. In Isaiah 8 the Lord had told Isaiah's disciples to hide away his prophecy for the right time. None of them at the time he wrote could have foreseen what God's plan was.

Chapter 39 ends with the dark prediction of Babylon carrying away everything in Jerusalem to Babylon. Chapter 40 begins in the time after that terrible judgment upon the nation of Judah. The great prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel had tried to guide their people through the calamity of 586 and the destruction of Jerusalem. They had preached judgment and told the people exile was coming. All their prophecies came true. In July of 586 the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem after an 18 month siege, captured the city and a month later tore down its walls and burned the temple of the Lord to the ground. King Zedekiah was hauled off to Babylon in chains where he died. The cream of the country's leadership was taken into exile and the nation of Judah ceased to exist. The temple was in ruins and the priests were either dead or in exile. The worship of the Jewish people at the temple of the Lord was torn away from them.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel said God had not abandoned the Jews and that he would bring them back to their land and give them a New Covenant that would restore them. They were still his people. But they needed more reassurance. In their grief and shame, the exiles in Babylon who were the leaders of the people were asking difficult questions. Has the Lord abandoned us? Are we still his people? Do we still have a purpose? Is Yahweh really as great and powerful as we thought he was? Perhaps the gods of Babylon are stronger. Were all God's promises to us about a coming king who would save us empty and meaningless? What will happen to us? How can we be the Lord's people in a pagan land?

Into this situation the second part of Isaiah's prophecy came like a thunderclap. The long preserved message kept by his disciples for a century and a half was finally revealed. As John Bright observed in his book, The Kingdom of God, this is the height of the Old Testament. It is as if Isaiah saw through to the final implications of Israel's understanding that Yahweh is the one and only God, the Creator of all. Through soaring poetry we see the God of Israel, not as a small impotent god, but as the Lord of history itself. He is so great he even calls Cyrus his servant. For God has a purpose; he is about to save his people. He will bring them back to the land like a new exodus, as great as the first one. In these chapters Isaiah will explain how God's chastisement of his people has prepared them for a new role in the world; his servant. Even more so, he will introduce us to a special Servant whom the Lord will send who will die for the sins not only of Israel but of the whole world. These chapters are the climax of the Old Testament. They look forward to the New Testament and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it is fitting that Isaiah should be given this prophecy. He had unfailingly spoken to the people of his day and the kings he knew about their sinfulness and their need to repent. The first part of his prophecy ends with a dark prediction of the fall of Judah and the coming of the Babylonians. It must have grieved him greatly that all that he had spoken was going to go unheeded and the people would fall into the grossest idolatry so that God had no choice but to send them into exile and destroy their nation.

Yet God was not finished with his people and the Lord gave to Isaiah the greatest message of hope and grace in Israel's prophets. Isaiah would not see it happen but a new Israel would emerge from the ashes of the ruins of Jerusalem. God would give them a renewed mission to the world and send them a Servant-Leader who would fulfill all his promises. Isaiah would die before judgment came and Jerusalem fell but he died knowing the Lord still loved his people and had a purpose for them. Isaiah died in hope and that is the greatest legacy he left the Jews: hope. More than any other prophecy in the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles quote this second section of Isaiah. It is to that section that we now turn.
**40:1-2** - Isaiah 1 began with an indictment of Israel's sin. Isaiah 40 begins with a declaration of pardon. Written to the exiles who had experienced the fall of Jerusalem it must have been news too great to believe. God was offering comfort to his people. He was offering them sympathy and consolation rather than judgment and anger. God still loved them. He had not forgotten them.

God desires to speak tenderly to Jerusalem, the ruined city. Literally the Hebrew words mean speak to Jerusalem's heart. The whole tenure of Isaiah's message has changed. This is no indictment of Israel's sin; no call to repentance. This is a call or a summons to tell Judah and Jerusalem that her punishment is over. The NIV reads declare to her that her hard service has been completed. The ESV reads cry to her that her warfare is ended. The word for warfare or hard service means a term of military service, like a soldier whose enlistment is up who has seen one battle after another in hard campaigning. He is free now to go home. The implication is the Jews can go home too!

The Lord is no longer going to judge Judah's sin because he has forgiven it. Her iniquity has been paid for. God has paid it. In fact she has received a double portion of punishment. God recognizes and sympathizes with his people. He understands the jarring pain and suffering they have gone through. Here it is as if Isaiah comforts his future colleague Jeremiah and his deep expression of suffering in Lamentations. God knows the sorrow Jerusalem has seen. He knows what he has put her through. But now the time of punishment and suffering has ended. A time of restoration and peace is coming! The Lord himself has declared it!!

**40:3-5** - Isaiah hears a voice in the desert, or the wilderness, crying out to prepare the way for the Lord. Make a straight path in the wilderness. The picture is of the coming of the king and the people straightening out the road to get ready for his coming. They prepare for the king's arrival. Isaiah tells his people the Lord is coming; prepare the way!

This verse is used in all four gospels to refer to the ministry and message of John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah. *Mark 1, Matthew 3, Luke 3 and John 1* all quote the verse. Matthew, Mark and Luke refer to it as a fulfilled prophecy proving John was the Elijah Prophet that Malachi said would come before the Messiah. In fact Mark couples this verse in Isaiah with *Malachi 3:1* which says God will send his messenger before him to prepare the way. *John 1* says that John the Baptist identifies himself as the one calling out in the wilderness to prepare the Lord's way. Jesus reinforces that identity in *Luke 7* saying John is the messenger of the Lord whom he will send; the Elijah Prophet. All four gospels see John's message as one of preparing for the Lord's coming. Isaiah calls the people to get ready for the Lord's coming to them to bring a new exodus out of Babylon and back to the Promiseland. The gospels declare John the Baptist is the Elijah Prophet who prepares the way for the greatest coming of the Lord to his people; the sending of his Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

In ancient times when a great king would come into a land the people would try and repair the roads so the king would have as smooth a journey as possible. It would be like the City of Spokane repairing all the potholes on the streets so the president could have a smooth ride into the city. Isaiah describes a similar process yet on an unimaginable scale. The king of the universe, Yahweh Almighty is coming. The land is being prepared so the way will be as smooth as possible. Every valley will be lifted up and every mountain and hill brought down or humbled. Uneven and rough ground will become a level plain. The way of the Lord to Jerusalem will be made into a level plain. In the context of *Isaiah 40* it means the entire way from Babylon where the exiles live to Jerusalem where the Lord is going will be level ground. In any time let alone Isaiah's time that is an impossible task for human beings to accomplish!
Isaiah describes a public works project of immense proportions. Why such extravagant preparations for the coming of the Lord? His glory, meaning wealth, power, honor and presence, will be revealed. All flesh, people and animals, shall see it. The Lord himself has declared it. When God comes to rescue the Jews and bring them out of captivity the world will be changed in preparation and his glory, his very person and presence, will be revealed for all to see.

The New Testament affirms that God's glory and person were fully revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He came to lead not just the Jews but the whole world out of the captivity of sin and into the freedom of God's forgiveness. John 1 says: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Paul says in Colossians 1: For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. Hebrews 1 says: The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. Revelation 1 says: Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

40:6-8 - The Lord through Isaiah answers the exiles' questions. How can Yahweh bring us back to our land? Can we believe him after everything that has happened to us? In verses 6-8 Isaiah reminds his people that God's Word never fades. His promises can be trusted. In verses 9-31, all the way to the end of chapter 40, Isaiah paints a picture of who God is. He is the Creator of all, the Lord of History, and the God of Israel. They have nothing to fear!

Isaiah repeats the words “all” and “cry” in verses 6-8 that he uses in verses 1-5, which ties both sections together. He hears a voice telling him to cry out or announce something. He asks what shall he cry. The voice says that all flesh, meaning animals and people, is like grass. Its glory or literally hesed, meaning covenant love or steadfastness, is like the flowers in the field. It fades or withers. Human beauty, glory, love or steadfastness does not last. Isaiah uses Hebrew poetry to great effect in verse 7. Literally the Hebrew words read: withers the grass and fades the flowers when the breath of the Lord blows. The word for breath is ruach, meaning wind, breath or spirit. God governs his creation. Human beings may do wonderful things but they do not last. They are like the grass in the field. Jesus used that same image in Matthew 6 to encourage people to trust in God to provide and not be anxious.

Isaiah calls the exiles not to trust in the political situation in the Middle East. Babylon was crumbling and Persia under Cyrus was on the rise. Trust in God's Word. It never fades. It stands forever! God has promised he will rescue his people. They can believe that promise no matter what the circumstances. We can today too! Peter quotes these verses to describe the ultimate manifestation of the Word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 1:23-25. The trustworthiness of God's Word is a major theme in this second section of Isaiah. See Isaiah 55 and God's faithful promises to David.

40:9-11 - Isaiah continues to answer the exiles' doubts and questions by focusing on who God is. There is some discrepancy in the translations between the NIV and the ESV in verse 9. The ESV translates the Hebrew as Jerusalem and Zion proclaiming good news to Judah. The NIV sees Isaiah called to proclaim good news to Jerusalem and Judah. The Hebrew can be taken both ways though the ESV's translation is the more literal. Yet in context the NIV's translation makes more sense. Isaiah has already been told by the Lord to cry out and proclaim the Lord's coming and the trustworthiness of his Word. It makes more sense to see the Lord now calling him to proclaim good news to Jerusalem and Judah.
Isaiah is told to proclaim "Behold your God!" God is coming to save them and Yahweh is powerful enough to accomplish it. His Word is reliable and he keeps his promises.

Isaiah then gives two contrasting pictures of the Lord. First, he comes in power. He is the one who rules over all. He is the Lord of History. Kings and kingdoms answer to him and he is the one who lifts them up and brings them down. To the ears of the exiles this was good news for they felt powerless against Babylon. Yet God who had allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed, rules over even Babylon and can destroy it.

Isaiah confirms this when he says the Lord is coming and his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him. There are two sides to the Lord saving the exiles. He will reward his faithful remnant of Judah, rescuing them and saving them and he will pay back Babylon for their oppression. Jeremiah spoke of this in Jeremiah 50-51. God had used Babylon to punish Judah but they too were answerable to the Lord for their evil actions in murdering and destroying Jerusalem. All nations are accountable to the Lord God. God will free his people and judge Babylon at the same time!

The second picture Isaiah gives of God is a tender one and is focused on the exiles. God will come against Babylon as the Lord of History and will pay them back for what they have done. To his people however, the Lord will come like a shepherd. The remnant of his people is his flock. He will gather them like a shepherd gathers the lambs. He will hold them close to his heart. The words mean he will hug them and cuddle them like a shepherd cuddles the young lambs when they are newborn. It is a picture of great gentleness and love. In fact Isaiah says the Lord will lead those who are nursing their babies and care for them. God will watch over his vulnerable people to carry them home. He knows they are weak with little power. To the great empires he will show his might but to his people, the exiles, he will be gentle and kind. Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd of God's people in John 10. The image speaks of the care, compassion and tenderness of God for us. In the exodus from Egypt Israel had to fight and God fought for them. In the new exodus from exile his people are only a remnant and he will care for them tenderly like the Good Shepherd he is.

In verse 12 Isaiah begins a description of the Lord that lasts through the end of chapter 40. His purpose is to show how great and incomprehensible God is so that the exiles will not doubt God's ability to bring them home and protect them.

Isaiah asks the exiles if anyone has measured how much water the Lord can hold in the palm of his hand. This is obviously symbolic language as God does not have a hand because he is spirit. The underlying question Isaiah asks the exiles in these verses is how big is your God? Have you measured how wide the span of God's hand is so you can understand how he marked off the heavens? Isaiah points to God as the Creator of the universe, a God beyond our comprehension. The Lord is not the little god of a little nation. He is the Creator of all, the one and only true God!

Have any of the exiles measured the dust of the earth in a basket. The Hebrew word for basket is translated measure in the ESV. Normally the word is translated third or one third. It likely refers to a dry measure of some sort that was one third of a larger common measure. What that larger measure is we do not know. Isaiah's readers must have been familiar with his term. From a human point of view the question is non-sensical. No human being is great enough to measure all the dust of the earth! That is impossible for man to do but not for God. He even knows how much the mountains weigh! Isaiah paints a picture of the Lord weighing out the
mountains of the world on a balance scale. This is language very similar to Job 38-42 when God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind.

Isaiah asks in verse 13, who has understood the mind of the Lord. The word translated understood means in context to grasp or comprehend. Isaiah asks the exiles, do any of you comprehend the Lord's mind? Literally the Hebrew reads Spirit or ruach for mind. Have any of you been his counselor and given God advice? Paul quotes this verse in the great doxology at the end of Romans 11 describing how incomprehensible the Lord is. Isaiah makes the same point to the exiles.

He continues asking, who did the Lord consult for advice. Who taught God the right thing to do and the right way to act? Who taught the Lord knowledge and showed him wisdom and the just way to proceed? Isaiah's point is that no one taught God anything! He is the Lord! He is above every human situation and no problem is too great for him. Nothing stumps him so he is at a loss for what to do. In every situation he knows the right thing to do so his purposes are accomplished. When we are at a loss and helpless to proceed God is not!

Isaiah's description of God highlights his omnipotence, his all-powerful nature, and his omniscience, his all-knowing nature. God has declared he is for the Jews. They are his flock and he is their shepherd. He is going to bring them back home because their time of punishment is over. God has determined to do this. Why should the exiles be afraid of the Babylonians or even the Persians? The Lord is for them!

40:15-17 - If God shows great favor to his people Judah, he considers the Gentile nations as nothing. These verses are in marked contrast to other places in Isaiah, namely chapters 11 & 60, where God says he will bring the nations to himself through the Jews. Here in chapter 40 Isaiah focuses on the Lord's choice and love of Israel. They are his alone and he chose them out of all the nations. Therefore they are precious to him. Isaiah is not saying the Lord does not love the Gentiles. He is contrasting a human point of view with his perspective. Judah and especially the exiles are a little people and great nations like Babylon and Persia are seen as the most important nations in the world. But not for God; he values the Jews above all peoples!

The Gentiles are a like a drop in a bucket or from a bucket to the Lord. The picture is of a leather water bucket with a tiny drip coming from its spout. Compared to all the water the bucket holds the drip is nothing.

Isaiah then shifts metaphors. The nations are like the left over dust on a set of scales. The dust is so small it's not even measurable. One does not take the dust into account when one is weighing out coins or something else of value. Babylon thinks Judah is of no value, especially the exiles. It has taken everything of value Judah had and fattened its treasuries with the spoils. God says Judah is more valuable to God than Babylon can fathom and the great empire is like dust on the scales that people don't even measure. The Gentiles have it all backwards!

All the forests of Lebanon would not suffice for fuel for the altar fires that the Lord deserves. If one would sacrifice all the animals of Lebanon it would still not be enough. God deserves worship from the Gentiles beyond anything the pagan nations of the world can imagine. He is the Creator to whom they owe life and before whom all are accountable, not the dead idols they worship.

Isaiah says God accounts or regards the nations and all their wealth and power as nothing. They are less than nothing and worthless to him. Once again Isaiah is not saying God does not love the Gentiles. He is contrasting the worth God ascribes to Israel his people with the Gentile nations who do not know him and who do not worship him. Isaiah points to relationship as of the
highest value to God not worldly power and wealth. These are as nothing and the Lord is not impressed! The same holds true for our world and our lives today. God values those who have a relationship with him above all the powerful, wealthy and "important people" in the world. He desires all to come to know him through a relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

40:18-20 - In verses 12-17 Isaiah declared the greatness of God and showed how far he is above the creation and the nations. Now he sarcastically compares the Lord to the idols the Gentiles worship.

Who or what is like God? With what image will you compare him? Isaiah describes the process of making an idol. Someone too poor to bring a regular offering chooses a tree that does not rot. He cannot afford an animal for sacrifice yet he spends what little he has to build an idol to worship! He brings it to a skilled craftsman who shapes it. Then another craftsman covers it with gold and hangs silver chains upon it, dressing it up to look impressive. In the end the person who commissioned the idol is left with a wooden statue covered in gold that will not fall over but is lifeless and dead. Isaiah's implied question to the idol worshipper is: Is this the best that you can do? You want to compare this dead statue that can't move to the Lord God Almighty!

In the context the man who commissions the idol is probably a Gentile, a person belonging to the nations Isaiah has said are nothing to the Lord in verses 15-17. It is also possible that Isaiah indicts his own people. Before the fall of Jerusalem the Jews practiced rampant idolatry, thinking the gods of Babylon, Egypt, Moab, etc. would save them. His indictment of their behavior shows how illogical and irrational idolatry is! Paul shows the underlying rebellion, selfishness and spiritual blindness of people who descend into idolatry in Romans 1.

We need to remember however that the New Testament has an answer to Isaiah's question in verse 18. To whom will you compare God and what likeness or image will you compare him to? John 1 says Jesus is the Word of God incarnate and we saw his glory as the One and Only Son of God. Colossians 1 says Jesus is the image of the invisible God and in him dwells all the fullness of God. Hebrews 1 says the Son, Jesus, is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. The New Testament answer to Isaiah's question is the Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate. God's answer is not a dead idol that cannot move but the living Son of God become human for us! He is the image of God come to earth so we can see him. And he alone is able to save us from sin and give us eternal life with God!

40:21-23 - Isaiah asks the exiles a series of rhetorical questions. Do they not know who God is? Have they not listened to the Law and the Prophets? Do they not sing who he is in the Psalms? Is it not obvious from creation?

Who is God? He is the one who sits above the "circle of the earth". The Hebrews pictured the earth as flat with the sky or heavens above it like a dome. That image is what Isaiah refers to here. The Lord lives or dwells above in heaven. He does not live on the earth. In fact the people of the earth or the dwellers of the earth, same word in Hebrew, are like grasshoppers to him. They are tiny. Isaiah may be referring to the report of the spies when they came back from scouting the land of Canaan in Numbers 13. They said there were giants in the land and they seemed like grasshoppers to them. Isaiah says that is how God views us: grasshoppers!

The Lord stretches out the heavens or the dome of the sky like a curtain. The word for curtain implies a veil or a thin curtain of fabric. He spreads the heavens like he is pitching a tent. Isaiah says that is where the Lord dwells or lives. He repeats the same word for the third time from verse 22. The point is God dwells above where we do not. We dwell or live on the earth.
The Lord rules over heaven and earth and he also rules over human history. He causes princes to be nothing, meaning he has the power to bring them down even as he established their rule in the first place. Isaiah says God can reduce the rulers of this world to nothing. The word for nothing is the same word Genesis 1 uses to describe the earth in the beginning. It was without form and void, or nothing. The exiles may think the King of Babylon is the one who rules over them or they may put some hope in the new King of Persia, Cyrus the Great. God is the one who raises up and brings down rulers. They are as nothing to him. What he does in creation he does in human history as well. The exiles have nothing to fear. God is for them and he is in charge!

40:24 - Isaiah compares the great nations and rulers of the world to plants in the field. Someone sows the seed or plants the shoots and they have barely taken root before the Lord blows on them. The wind dries them up and they wither. In Israel the dry desert wind comes from the east over the Golan Heights into Galilee. It is called the sirocco and plants are in danger of drying out when it blows too much. That is the picture Isaiah paints here. God blows the sirocco of his will and the nations dry up, wither and are blown away by the winds of history. Yahweh is Lord of the nations and they come and go by his design and at his will. Babylon will be carried away like stubble on the wind. A new nation will arise because God has ordained it: Persia. The exiles have nothing to fear.

40:25-26 - Isaiah now turns to God's power in creation, especially with the stars. To whom will you compare the Lord? The question focuses on the gods of the nations, the idols Isaiah has already exposed as dead.

Isaiah invites the exiles to look up at the sky. Who created the stars? The word for create is the special Hebrew word bara, which means to create out of nothing. It is used exclusively of God in the Old Testament. God created the stars with the Word of his power. See Genesis 1. "He brings out the starry host one by one." This is a picture of the stars appearing in the night sky. At twilight there are only a few, and then as the evening darkens more and more appear. Isaiah says the Lord calls all of them to appear by name. He knows all the stars, and even the ancients without modern telescopes could see there are stars beyond count in the night sky. God knows them all because he created them!

By his might and strength they were created and not one of them is missing. They appear in the night sky night after night. The Hebrews like many ancient peoples could plot the constellations and watch them shift during the night over the seasons of the year. They may have increased their knowledge of the stars in Babylon as the Babylonians paid special attention to the stars. Yet even a cursory observation showed them that the stars are consistent. They may shift according to the seasons but patches of sky are not blank one night and full of stars the next. Centuries later mariners would learn to navigate by the stars precisely because of their consistency.

Isaiah is moving toward a conclusion about the exiles' situation and God's power. The Lord is Lord of History and controls the nations. He is Lord of Creation and controls the stars. He is not a dead idol but the Living God! He is more than able to bring the exiles home and end their captivity. That is what Isaiah will describe in the rest of chapter 40.

40:27-31 - The Lord is the Lord of history and the Lord of creation so why do the exiles speak as if God does not know what is happening to them? Why do they talk as if their situation is beyond God's ability to do anything about? That is the meaning of the well-known questions in verse 27.
Israel talks as if the Lord doesn't care about their situation as if he is a judge that doesn't know the facts of their case.

Isaiah answers the exiles' questions or grumblings about God by pointing to the Lord's greatness. "Don't you know? Haven't you heard?" The Lord is the everlasting God, meaning he has no limits as to time and space. He is the one who created out of nothing the entire earth, which is the meaning of the phrase, "the ends of the earth". The Lord does not grow weary or tired. In good Hebrew fashion Isaiah emphasizes the concept by repeating two words which mean the same thing, grow weary or tired. The Lord's understanding is unsearchable; meaning no one can grasp how much he knows. The idea that therefore God has somehow forgotten about the exiles or doesn't know their situation is ludicrous! He is Yahweh their God! His wisdom and power are beyond imaging!

Isaiah then applies that conclusion to the exiles' situation in verses 29-31. God not only is powerful he gives that power to those who hope or wait on him. Isaiah uses the repetition of certain Hebrew words to great effect in these verses. He repeats words like faint, grow weary, power and might. He contrasts youths or young men with those who hope in the Lord or wait for him.

The Lord gives the same strength and power he used to create the universe to those who are faint or exhausted. To those who have no strength God provides his strength. Isaiah highlights the strongest and most energetic among the people, young boys who have lots of energy and young men, meaning those who are at the height of their physical prowess. Even they grow tired and exhausted and run out of energy. There are limits to the strength and stamina of even the strongest among them.

Isaiah gives his conclusion. Those who hope, that is wait in confident expectation for the Lord to act, they will renew their strength. The word is translated renew in almost all translations but in other contexts it can mean exchange or put on new clothes. In other words when one hopes in the Lord he exchanges the exhaustion one feels for his strength and energy. The Lord gives his strength to his people who trust him. When they are filled with his strength they are able to do what they cannot do on their own power. They can run and not grow weary and keep walking and not grow exhausted.

Isaiah uses another metaphor, that of soaring on eagles wings or mounting up on eagles wings. The picture is of a great eagle thrusting its powerful wings and taking off in a bound. If the theme of a second exodus is in Isaiah's mind then this image points back to the first exodus when the Lord told Moses in Exodus 19 that he brought Israel out of Egypt on eagles' wings.

One curious note, in the Law of Moses in Leviticus 11 the eagle is listed as a "detestable bird." The Israelites were not to eat it nor touch their carcasses because they were carrion eaters and considered unclean. Yet the Lord uses the powerful image of a mother eagle carrying her young in Exodus and of the great bird taking off here in Isaiah 40. Even though the eagle was considered an unclean bird its strength and power was still to be respected.

Think of the exiles and their situation. They are spiritually and emotionally exhausted. They are at the limits of their own power. They have lost hope that the Lord will ever rescue them. Plus, even if they are allowed to go home the journey is daunting. See Ezra 1 & 2. Isaiah tells them the Lord is about to lead them on a new exodus journey to rebuild his temple and he will give them the strength to complete the task. Jeremiah in Lamentations 3 had discovered the same truth when he realized in the midst of his grief that the Lord's love and mercy were new every morning. He concluded, "therefore I will hope in him." The Lord will supply all the strength the exiles need to go home and rebuild the Lord's house in Jerusalem!
Isaiah’s message to the exiles is also a message to us today. There are times in life when we too are exhausted and have no strength to carry on or do what must be done. That is when we need to put our hope and trust in the Lord. He will give us his strength and his power to keep going. We will discover a new energy that does not fail even when we have none. It is like his peace that Paul says in Philippians 4 comes to us when we ask. We don't know how it comes but we experience it none the less. God can do in us what we cannot do ourselves. It is one of the great gifts of his grace to us when we need it most; his supernatural strength.

Chapter 41:
41:1-4 - Isaiah introduces a new image in this chapter; the image of a courtroom. However, it is not Israel who is on trial but the nations, the peoples of the world, the Gentiles. The Lord says be silent or be still to the islands or coastlands. Frequently this word is used to describe the territory of the Phoenicians. However given the context and Isaiah's description of Cyrus the Great of Persia in the following verses this also refers to Cyprus, Crete and the coastlands of Greece and Asia Minor.

God tells the nations to approach him in silence. This is similar to Habakkuk's saying in Habakkuk 2:20 that the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.

The Lord tells the people to renew their strength, using the same words Isaiah used in chapter 40 describing what God does for those who hope in him. It is said with great irony because the nations of the world, especially the pagan Greeks, would hardly be asking the Lord for strength and hoping in him. They are on their own and wholly unready for their encounter with the living God!

God says let them approach. The phrase in Hebrew is similar in meaning to what a judge would say today to lawyers in the courtroom; would counsel approach the bench. God says now let them speak because the Lord is going to hear their case and make his judgment. The nations are on trial before the Lord of history!

God asks a question of the nations. Who has stirred up the nation or power in the east? He is referring to Cyrus the Great of Persia although his name is not mentioned by Isaiah until chapter 44. The second phrase of verse 2 is difficult. The NIV reads: calling him in righteousness to his service. The ESV reads: whom victory meets at every step. The ESV's translation comes closest in literal meaning to the context but the problem is the word it translates as victory is the normal word for righteousness which is how the NIV translates the word. There is no consistency in the translation by other versions which makes the phrase difficult to interpret. The idea seems to be God has called this king from the east and he has success in whatever he does. This is all the Lord's doing as he has called Cyrus to his service and given him victory wherever he goes. That victory is the righteous act of the Lord of history.

The Lord has handed over kings to this new power. Nations are subdued before him. Cyrus came on the scene in 559 as the new king of Persia. Ten years later in 549 he conquered his father-in-law's kingdom of Media and founded the Achaemenid Empire of Persia which lasted until Alexander the Great conquered it in 326 BC. Cyrus followed his conquest of Media with the conquest of Lydia in Asia Minor which was followed by a drive through Assyria in 547. His General Gobryas captured Babylon in 539 and a year later Cyrus issued his decree allowing the Jewish exiles in Babylon to return home and rebuild their temple. Cyrus would fulfill all that Isaiah prophesied he would do!

No one would be able to stand against Cyrus' armies. He turned his enemies to dust Isaiah says and kingdoms fell to him and were blown away like chaff in the wind. Cyrus conquered
territory the Persians had never held before and he had success with each new campaign. He established the greatest empire the Middle East had yet seen, far greater than either Assyria or Babylon! It stretched from the Aegean Sea in the west to the Indus River in the east.

The Lord asks, who has done this? Who has called generation after generation of kings and nations to rise and fall? Isaiah points to the actions of the Lord because people instinctively know that a mere human could not accomplish all that Cyrus and the Persians have done. He must have had help from God himself. Isaiah answers his question with a declaration that he will repeat several times and that expresses the full implications of Israel's faith in Yahweh as the one and only God. The NIV translates the last phrase to emphasize that the Lord is with each successive generation. The ESV translates it closer to the meaning of other statements by Isaiah in the following chapters that the Lord IS the first and the last. He was there in the beginning and he will be there in the end. See Isaiah 43, 44 and 48. John in Revelation 1 & 22 uses the same statement and uses it first of God the Creator and second of Jesus the Son, showing Jesus is God himself. The Good News Bible translates the phrase "I, the Lord, was there at the beginning, and I, the Lord, will be there at the end." I think the GNB expresses Isaiah's thought well. God is eternal and he alone is Lord of history!

41:5-7 - The Lord summons the pagan nations to appear before him for judgment. They come in fear trying to encourage one another, trusting their own resources and pagan gods to help them. Thus people tell one another to be strong! Those who make idols, the craftsman and the goldsmith; they look at their work and say it's good. Then they have to put more nails in the idol so it will stand up and not fall over.

Isaiah's sarcasm is in full bloom in this passage. He shows the exiles how ludicrous the pagans are when it comes to dealing with Yahweh of Hosts! They try and build up one another's courage as if their strength will suffice. They put their trust in an idol they themselves have made and that they have to reinforce so it will not fall over. This is going to help them face the Lord of History? Isaiah is trying to help the exiles see that they put their faith in the living God who is Creator of all while the pagan nations that rule over them at the moment put their faith in their own power and in their dead idols. Their pagan gods are a deception, an illusion. They cannot help them because ultimately the idols come from them and their own human power. Israel's faith is in the God who made all things who gives his power to his people especially when they are weakest, Isaiah 40:27-31.

This is a lesson we need to remember as well. The Lord is our strength and we don't have to fear any power in this world. We may have to suffer for our faith but God is truly in charge and he will see us through.

41:8-10 - In the preceding verses Isaiah described the fear and weakness of the pagan nations when they have to face God. From the world's point of view the pagan empires have all the power and Israel is nothing. They are weak and vulnerable and have little value. But in God's eyes they are his chosen one.

God names Israel his servant and chosen one. The word for servant can mean slave or bond servant like doulos in Greek, however it can also mean servant or helper who is not a slave. That definition fits the context best because God calls Israel the offspring of Abraham my FRIEND! That hardly fits the idea of a slave one bought and that can be sold.

One important thing to note in this passage is that all the verbs and pronouns are singular, as if God is speaking and reassuring a single person and not a people. For instance the word for
descendants in the NIV or offspring in the ESV is literally seed, singular, in Hebrew. Isaiah may be speaking to the community of the exiles but he speaks to them as a singular person, the chosen servant of the Lord. As he reveals more about the Lord's servant in the coming chapters it becomes clear that he is speaking of the one Servant of God who is the Lord Jesus.

God took Israel from the ends of the earth; he called them from its farthest corners. This can both describe Abraham in the beginning in Genesis 12 and also the exiles that have been scattered far away from the Promised land. Luke in Acts 2 says when the remnant of God's people is gathered at Pentecost they come from all over the world.

God calls Israel from far away but he also names him his servant. They or he is God's servant because he chose them. He has not cast them off. They are still his chosen one, his people. This speaks directly to the doubts and questions of the exiles. Are we still God's people? Does he still love us? Has he forgotten us? The answer is an emphatic "NO!" Israel is the chosen servant of the Lord.

God encourages them to not be afraid because "I am with you!" This is God's favorite promise in the Bible. He says it over and over to many people throughout the Scriptures, including Jesus in the Great Commission in Matthew 28: "I will be with you always!" Israel has nothing to fear because he, God, is with them! The word for dismayed means fear but it is pointed to the future as if one is full of fear because of what may happen. Israel need not fear the future for God is with them.

He will strengthen them. The word pictures a plant that as it grows becomes stronger whose stems harden and are able to withstand the elements better. God will help them and uphold them with his righteous right hand. The word for uphold means to grasp. The Lord himself will hold their hand and see them through like a father holding the hand of his child, protecting them but also helping them overcome any obstacles.

That is the picture Isaiah gives of God helping his people, his servant. The nations quake in fear because they must face the Lord with their own resources and their impotent idols. Israel can face even an uncertain future with the certain knowledge that they are God's chosen one, his servant. They do not need to fear because the Lord himself will hold their hand and see them through.

41:11-14 - God tells Israel their status among the pagan nations will change because they are his chosen servant. The Babylonians had attacked and captured Jerusalem because Zedekiah had rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. They were angry with Judah and they shamed and disgraced the Jews in the worst possible way. Now Judah's enemies will be shamed! Remember the Middle East is a shame-honor based culture so public humiliation is the worst possible situation. One's guilt and shame is there for all to see; it can't be hidden. Now Judah's enemies will be humiliated before the world! Those who have opposed Judah and the Jews will be brought down and be as nothing. Isaiah is speaking of Babylon, at the time of Jerusalem's fall the greatest power in the Middle Eastern world! They will be made as nothing. When Cyrus and the Persians captured Babylon in 539 the Neo-Chaldean Empire collapsed never to regain its power.

God says the Jews will look for those who waged war against them but they will not be there. You will not find your enemies. Historically this refers to Babylon because a few centuries later the Persians under Haman tried to wipe out the Jews. See the Book of Esther.

Why will history turn around for the Jews? God is the one who holds their right hand, like a father holding his child's hand. He will guide them and help them. The word for help means to support, give aid and render assistance. It is the same root word God uses for Eve in
Genesis 2 describing her as Adam's "helper." The Lord will help them therefore they do not need to be afraid any longer. As the old saying goes, "Help is on the way!"

The NIV places verse 14 with verse 13 while the ESV places it with the following paragraph. God tells Jacob not to fear. He calls him "you worm". It is an unexpected and seemingly derogatory phrase but it points to Israel's insignificance. They have felt like a worm because of their shame and low standing among the nations. They were exiles! Now the Lord is with them. He will help them and redeem them. God will use Cyrus to free them from exile but their real Redeemer and Helper is the Holy One of Israel! Therefore they have no need to be afraid! As Paul says in Romans 8, if God is for us who can be against us!

41:15-16 - God will enable Israel to overcome any obstacle in her path. Isaiah uses the image of a threshing sledge or sled. It was a wood sledge made of heavy boards that had an upturned front and underneath was lined with stones or something sharp, in this case sharp metal teeth. The sledge was pulled over the grain and the weight of the boards allowed the teeth to separate the grain from the husks and stalks. The chaff was then tossed into the air and the heavier grain kernels fell to the threshing floor while the husks and stalks blew away. This is how Israel threshed its grain.

Isaiah says Israel will thresh the mountains and crush them. The hills will be like chaff and blow away with the wind. In Isaiah 40 he cried out to make the mountains level because the Lord was coming. In Isaiah 25 God spoke of his mountain being the highest of mountains representing his kingdom, and on it he would feast his people in the Messianic Banquet. Isaiah may be using the image of a mountain here to describe pagan governments or powers that have oppressed Israel in the past like Babylon. Now with God's power and help Israel will crush them like a threshing sledge crushes the grain stalks. They will be blown away by the Lord's power. God will enable Israel to overcome any obstacle!

The nations will be afraid of God's power through Israel. But Israel will rejoice in the Lord. The word for rejoice means to be filled with joy but also to shout aloud or make joyous shrieks like the women in Uganda do with their tongues when they are celebrating.

41:17-20 - God will give Israel strength and power to overcome her enemies. He will also provide for them when they are helpless. Isaiah describes the poor and needy, those without power and resources. They search for water when they are thirsty but find none. They are at the end of their energy to go on but the Lord will answer them. The word in Hebrew can also mean respond. God is going to do something about their situation! Just when they need him most God will not forsake them; he will not turn away from his people and their need.

What will the Lord do about Israel's need? He will make rivers flow on the barren heights and cause springs to open in the valleys. There are many places in Israel, especially to the east of Jerusalem near the Dead Sea where the mountains are totally bare with no vegetation on them. The only time water ever comes there is during a thunderstorm but there are no rivers on those barren heights. God will cause rivers to flow. In the Valley of En Gedi along the shore of the Dead Sea the end of the valley is dry and barren. It is only as one walks deep into the canyon that you come to the spring with its waterfalls. Isaiah says even in the barren valleys there will be springs. God will cause water to come where there is none. The wilderness or desert will be full of pools of water and the dry cracked ground will become springs. God will provide water to his thirsty people. God will supply their needs when there was no hope of them being able to supply their needs on their own.
Isaiah says in the wilderness God will cause trees to grow. The wilderness often refers to the Judean Wilderness between the Jordan River and the mountains to the east of Jerusalem like the Mount of Olives. It was the area where Jesus was tempted, between Jericho and Jerusalem. It is an extremely dry, barren and rocky wasteland with very little vegetation of any kind. Isaiah says God will cause trees to grow there; cedars like the forests of Lebanon. There will be cypress and pine trees, olive trees and acacia growing where no trees had grown before. God will change the land itself to provide for his people's thirst. They will know and understand that God himself has done this. No natural processes or circumstances brought about this miraculous transformation. God did it for them! The Holy One of Israel has created this! The word for create is the special Hebrew word bara, which is only used of God and which refers to him creating things out of nothing. See Genesis 1.

41:21-24 - The Lord once again directs the pagan nations to put their case before him. They are to bring their evidence and arguments to the Lord, Jacob's king. In other words the pagan nations are to show the Lord in his courtroom why they are able to tell the world what will happen in the future. They are unable to accurately forecast events which becomes clear in the following verses.

The Lord invites the pagan nations to bring in their idols in order to testify what is to happen. God commands them to tell of or explain the former things so that God, his heavenly court and the exiles of Judah may understand them and know what will happen next. In other words explain the past and why it happened the way it did. Then God says now explain the future. Tell us what is to come so that we may know that you are gods. God taunts the idols and demands that they reveal past and future if they are gods. Then in the most sarcastic phrase of the passage he says, "Do something, whether good or bad!" Prove you are gods and that we should fear you and be dismayed! Isaiah's implication is the idols just sit there doing nothing because they are dead.

God's conclusion: you are nothing, less than nothing! Anyone who chooses to follow you and worship you is an abomination or detestable! The word for detestable is the same word used in the Law of Moses for immoral acts or things that are unclean and abhorrent before God. The NLT translates the word filthy. God is revolted by those who worship idols! Why? They are nothing. They cannot move or act or explain or teach or reveal what is to come. Isaiah's conclusion is they are good for nothing because they are nothing! Only the Lord is able to tell what is to come and to explain why things have happened the way they did. If the exiles want answers they must turn to the Lord. The pagan idols of Babylon or even Persia will tell them nothing!

41:25-29 - In verses 25-29 the pronouns change from first person singular in verse 25 & 27-29, to third person plural and second person plural in verse 26. Isaiah's literary structure implies a dialogue between God, the exiles and the pagan nations or idols.

The Lord says he has stirred up one from the north and east who will conquer kingdoms like a potter treads the clay. This is a reference to Cyrus who began his reign as king over Media-Persia in 549. It is difficult to know exactly when this second section of Isaiah's prophecy was published and read by the exiles but presumably it was before Cyrus' conquest of Babylon and his decree in 538 to release the exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Lord's temple. Isaiah describes him as coming from the north and east relative to Jerusalem. He does not yet come from Babylon.
The Lord says he calls on his name. One needs to take this statement in light of Isaiah 45:4 which says the Lord calls Cyrus by name even though he does not know him. Also Ezra 1 says Cyrus issued his decree for the release of the exiles and rebuilding of the temple in the name of the Lord. Persian inscriptions show Cyrus often issued decrees in the name of the gods of a people he had conquered as a diplomatic tool to entice their loyalty and respect. Isaiah may be acknowledging that practice here. It is doubtful that Cyrus was literally a worshipper of Yahweh.

In verse 26 Isaiah changes perspective to a plural one, to probably reflect the exiles. The people ask who told us of this from the beginning, meaning what was going to happen. Who prophesied all these events like their exile so that the people would acknowledge the accuracy of the prophecy? No one did. None of the idols the people of Judah thought were strong and powerful and even more powerful than Yahweh were able to tell the Lord's people what was to happen. They didn't even speak! They are dumb and silent because they are nothing!! This was especially shaming to the pagan nations and their idols because divination was a huge part of many pagan religions, especially that of Babylon. They spent tremendous effort trying to discern the future and the Lord says they are totally incapable of doing it!

Verses 27-29 shift back to the Lord speaking to the exiles again. The Lord declares he was the one who told Israel of these events, namely that the exiles would be coming home.

The Lord says he was the one who gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good tidings. This is one who proclaims good news, namely the return of the exiles from Babylon. In chapter 40 the Lord tells Isaiah to declare good news to Jerusalem and that is probably what he is referring to here. If that is the case then the Lord confirms Isaiah's prophecy and that he wrote the words the exiles now read a century and a half before they were born! Isaiah is the bringer of good news to God's people in exile.

God then exclaims when he looks to the pagan idols to see if any of them have something to say there is no one who speaks. No idol has any counsel for the Lord's people and no one answers when he questions them. Why, because they are false, deceitful, and untrue. The ESV translates the word as delusion but the other major versions translate the word as false. Their works are nothing. Their idols of cast metal are wind and confusion or empty wind. The word for wind is ruach which can also mean spirit. It is possible Isaiah intends a double meaning here. The idols are empty wind but they also lack any spirit. Their words, their deeds and their spirits are empty because they are dead! Israel does not need to pay any attention to them. They need to listen to the Lord!

Chapter 42:

42:1-4 - This is the first of the four so-called Servant Songs in Isaiah. Many scholars also include a fifth in 61:1-3. The four are 42:1-9, 49:1-9, 50:4-11, & 52:13-53:12. Jewish interpreters have seen the Servant as the ideal Israel or a personification of the nation and God's mission for it. In Jesus' day the rabbis saw the Servant as a quasi-Messianic figure that the Lord would send to bring forgiveness and justice to the world. Some linked him to the Messiah but he remained separate from the Messiah by most rabbis. Jesus however, claimed to be the Servant and paired him directly with his Messianic mission. The apostles, following Jesus' teaching, interpreted the differences between the Servant and the Messiah as the differences between Jesus' first and second comings. The Servant Songs describe his mission as suffering Messiah who will die for the sins of the world. Some Messianic prophecies also fit his first coming. Other Messianic prophecies describe his Second Coming in glory. Jesus was the first and only Jewish rabbi to combine the prophecies of the Davidic Messiah, the Suffering Servant in Isaiah and the heavenly
Son of Man in Daniel into one figure and then claim to be that person! All three pictures in the Old Testament describe the Lord Jesus and his mission.

The Lord introduces us to his Servant. He is the one the Lord upholds and his chosen one in whom he delights. The word for uphold means to hold one's hand and support and to lift up. God has chosen his Servant and he delights in him. The word means to take joy in and to be well pleased with someone. That same language God the Father uses at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist in Matthew 3, Mark 1 & Luke 3. "With you I am well pleased." It is also at his baptism that Jesus is filled and endowed with the Holy Spirit. He descends upon him like a dove, gently alighting on him. God says he has put or given his Spirit to his Servant. Isaiah prophesies about the coming of the Lord Jesus and his baptism in these verses!

It is also important to note that Isaiah has already prophesied about the coming of the Messiah who will also be specially endowed with the Spirit of God and will bring justice and righteousness to the world. See Isaiah 9 & 11. In many ways the Messiah and the Servant are similar.

The Servant will bring justice to the nations or the Gentiles. The word for justice can also mean judgment in the sense of judging fairly in a court case. In context it means fairness in a dispute; the removal of all partiality especially toward the rich against the poor. The Servant will be a champion for those who never get justice, the poor and disadvantaged. He will bring this justice not just to Israel but to the nations! The Servant's mission will be to the whole world and not just for God's people Israel.

The Servant however will not be a warrior. He comes in gentleness and humility. He will not shout out or raise his voice in the streets, meaning his proclamation will be gentle and quiet not forceful or confrontational. Elijah and Jeremiah are examples of prophets who shouted out their messages in the streets. The Servant will be different. The Lord Jesus taught in the synagogues and when his healing gathered crowds he taught them often sitting down as a rabbi would. In other words most often he taught as a rabbi rather than boldly proclaiming and shouting in the streets as a prophet.

His gentleness will be noticeable. Isaiah uses two pictures to illustrate the Servant's actions and then repeats the words for emphasis. He will not break a bruised reed. A reed looks strong but is hollow and thin and therefore easily broken. A smoldering wick for an oil lamp he will not snuff out. The Servant will come with compassion on the hurting and the broken. He will not hurt them further but bring healing and justice to them.

He will faithfully bring forth justice to the earth. The Servant will be true to his mission just as God is true to his promises. In that, his faithfulness will be like God's faithfulness. There may be also a hidden picture here of Jesus' cross. The word translated bring forth can also mean to carry something from one place to the next. Jesus had to "bring forth" his cross from the Fortress Antonia to Golgotha. It was on the cross that he established God's justice for the sin of the human race, not just for Israel but for all the nations of the earth!

The Servant will not falter or grow faint. This is the same word Isaiah uses to describe the smoldering wick or faintly burning wick. The Servant will not be discouraged which is the same word used to describe the bruised reed. The Hebrew words repeat in reverse order from verse 3 with the statement about faithfully bringing forth justice sandwiched in between. This is a chiasm in Hebrew. The Servant will not injure or harm others and he himself even if he is harmed in his mission will fulfill it. He will be faithful. Jesus asked in John 12 if he should ask the Father to save him from this hour. His answer was no, for this was the reason he came into the world that he might be lifted up and draw all people to himself.
God's Servant will establish justice in the world and the coastlands or the islands will hope in his law or teaching. His teaching and instruction, Hebrew torah, will spread to the Gentiles and they will hope or wait in him. Torah here is probably not the Law of Moses because it is the Servant's instruction and teaching. The word for wait or hope is the same word Isaiah used in chapter 40 to describe those who wait or hope in the Lord. It means to wait expectantly or hope.

42:5-9 - This section of the Servant Song is framed by two statements by God concerning who he is. First, the Lord is the Creator. He is the one who created the heavens and the earth. He stretched them both out like a blacksmith hammers a piece of metal into a sheet, which is the image of the Hebrew words here. The word for create is the special Hebrew word bara, which is only used of God and implies his creation out of nothing. He used no raw materials to create the universe. He simply spoke his creative Word and it came into being!

Everything that lives on the earth God made. He gives breath and life to all people. This language reflects Genesis 1 & 2, the poem and story of God's creation that begins the Bible. God creates the heavens and the earth and then populates the earth with all manner of creatures. The climax of that creation is the making of human beings. The words Isaiah uses are similar to Genesis 2:7 and the creation of Adam. God breathed (ruach) into Adam the breath (neshamah) of life and Adam became a living being. Here God gives breath (neshamah) to everyone and spirit or life (ruach) to all people.

In verse 6 God once again speaks to his Servant as all the pronouns in verses 6-8 are singular. God is speaking to the Servant and not to the nation of Israel. The Lord himself has called or summoned the Servant. He has called him in righteousness, meaning both the Lord's call is righteous and the Servant's mission that God gives him is righteous. He is to act in righteousness. Yahweh himself will take him by the hand and keep or guard him. The word for take by the hand means initially be strong, having the ability to accomplish a purpose and the resolve to see it through. It can also mean to take hold of someone, in this case by the hand. The picture is of God holding the Servant's hand and pulling or bringing him along with him. It is a picture of guidance and equipping for a purpose. God is going to see that the Servant completes his mission!

The Lord will give the Servant to the people as a covenant, meaning a relationship or pact with them. The Servant is God's gift to his people that will fulfill the Lord's covenant purpose for Israel. The word “people” here is singular, meaning one people and in the context almost certainly means Israel. God has not forgotten his covenant people or his purpose for them. He will send the Servant to fulfill that purpose and to keep his covenant with Israel. However, this covenant comes to Israel by grace. The Servant is God's gift to them. There are no conditions as at Mt. Sinai in this covenant. Furthermore, though the Servant is a gift for Israel expressing God's covenant purpose with them he is also to be a light to the Gentiles. Isaiah's language reflects not the covenant at Mt. Sinai but the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12. God will use the Servant to bless not only Israel but all the nations of the world. God will fulfill his covenant with Abraham to bless the whole world through Abraham's descendant (singular) in the person of the Servant!

God further describes the Servant's mission. He will open the eyes that are blind and bring the prisoners out of the dungeon. He will rescue those who sit or live in darkness. One can take these phrases literally in which case they probably refer to the rescue of the exiles, though very few of them were imprisoned in the dungeon in Babylon. Or one can take them figuratively
applying to the Gentiles which fits the context. The Gentiles are blinded by idolatry and trapped in their sin. They are imprisoned by idols and ignorance of the Lord. The Servant will rescue them and cause them to see. He will free them from the demonic forces that enslave them. Isaiah tells us that the Servant's mission is spiritual not political. He will save people not through military conquest but with his sacrifice and proclamation.

These verses Jesus applied to himself in Luke 7 & Matthew 11. Some disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask him if he was the one John had prophesied would come, meaning the Messiah or should they expect another. Jesus used this passage and also Isaiah 61 to describe the evidence that he was the Servant-Messiah not the conquering Messiah. He told John's disciples to tell John what they see and hear. The lame walk, the blind see, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news preached to them. Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of Jesus. It was a call for John to be faithful and not doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, but he was also the Servant of God in Isaiah! He would bring the people out of their prison of sin and death and even be a light to the Gentiles!

Verses 8-9 close out the prophecy with another statement from God about who he is which brackets the prophecy about the Servant and his mission. God declares his Name, Yahweh, the Lord, the name he revealed to Moses at the burning bush and so to all of Israel. He is the jealous God who gives his glory to no other, implying no other person or god. The word for glory means honor, wealth, respect, status or weight. The Romans called it gravitas. God is the only God therefore his honor is unique to him and he shares it with no one. The implication in this passage is that God will show himself to Israel and to the world in saving his people and he will receive all the credit. He will not allow anyone else to say they had a hand in Israel's rescue from exile. God did it! He will not allow people to say some pagan idol, a man-made god, had anything to do with God's plan and carrying it out.

Isaiah has already said the idols can't even tell what has happened in the past let alone what will come in the future in 41:22-23. Now the Lord repeats that thought. The former things have come to pass. New things God now declares. The Lord will declare the future to his people and to the world. He is going to rescue the exiles! He is sending his Servant! Before these events even happen he will tell them. The word for tell is the normal word for hear but in a different Hebrew verb form that means cause to hear. The events will spring into being like plants grow in the spring. God's future is coming and he is telling Israel before it happens so they will know he is the Lord God!

42:10-13 - Isaiah calls on the peoples of the earth to sing a new song of praise to the Lord. Sing it from the ends of the earth or the edge of the earth. The Hebrew people like many ancient peoples viewed the earth as flat with edges in some distant place. The point Isaiah is making is not geographical here but spiritual. Something has changed; a new thing is happening because the Lord is coming to rescue his people and show his glory on the earth. Not only will the Jews praise him but all peoples will praise him. This call to sing a new song because the Lord will show his glory to the nations is related to 42:8-9 where God says he will not give his glory to another and he will now declare new things.

Isaiah calls those who go down to the sea and all that fills it to sing to the Lord. If one lived in Jerusalem one would literally have to go down to the sea. Technically this could refer to the Dead Sea or the Sea of Galilee but the context says this is the Great Sea or the Mediterranean. All that fills the sea refers to the fish and creatures of the sea and not people. The
people are the inhabitants of the coastlands or islands. This usually refers to the Phoenician peoples or the Greeks, those who live near the coastlands and sail the Great Sea for trade.

In contrast Isaiah calls those who live in the desert to praise God with a new song. He calls the inhabitants of Kedar to sing, which would be the Arab tribes as Kedar was a son of Ishmael. Isaiah refers to those who live in Sela and calls them to sing for joy. Sela literally means a rocky crag or cliff and the LXX translates the word as petra, rock. Because of this many scholars believe this is referring to the valley and cliffs around Petra which was settled at this time but only became the city most people know of today when the Nabatean Arabs captured it and rebuilt it in the 300's BC. Other scholars dispute the location and claim the name refers to another site in the Jordan Desert. Either site is possible and in the larger context Isaiah is referring to the dwellers of Edom and its cities. He calls the desert people who live on the heights to sing and shout for joy to God.

Let all people whether they live by the sea or in the desert praise God and give him glory, honor, or weight. This is the same word and concept God refers to in 42:8. Let the nations declare the Lord's praise.

Why, because the Lord is about to march out like a mighty man, a great soldier and military leader ready for battle. Isaiah says he will stir up his zeal, which is related to the concept of jealousy and passion. Once again this refers back to 42:8 where the Lord says he will not share his glory with another, especially an idol. The Lord will show himself mighty against his foes. Who are his foes? The enemies of Israel were the great powers of the Middle East and their gods who claimed they were greater than Yahweh. From a New Testament perspective God's foes are the demonic powers led by Satan. The word for “show oneself mighty against his foes” is a curious word for Isaiah to use for God. It literally means to show oneself arrogant and overbearing. It can mean to vaunt oneself over against others. Isaiah is referring to the Lord's jealousy against all who would rob him of his rightful honor and not saying the Lord is arrogant or prideful. It is clear from the context of the Servant Songs and from the example of Jesus in the New Testament that in fact the Lord is the humble God. However, when it comes to idols and the demons that stand behind them (see 1 Corinthians 10) the Lord is a jealous God who will not share his glory with any power that tries to exalt itself above him. He is ready to show himself mighty and when he does the nations will be so overwhelmed and impressed they will sing a new song of praise for all that the Lord has done and for whom he has shown himself to be.

42:14-17 - The Lord now speaks to Israel directly in verses 14-17. He has kept silent and restrained himself for a long time. The implication is he has not acted but held back. How long a time he has kept silent is unclear because God had sent his prophets to Jerusalem before and after the exile, especially Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Isaiah himself was tasked with speaking to the exiles. Perhaps the silence is referring to the long time between Isaiah's first message to Judah in Hezekiah's day and now the second part of his message to the exiles a century and a half later. It is unclear. The long time could also be the time of the exile, the 50 plus years from the capture of King Jehoiachin to the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus of Persia.

God has kept silent but now he will cry out. The image he uses is a shocking one. In 42:13 the Lord comes like a mighty warrior and raises the battle cry. Here Isaiah says the Lord will gasp and pant like a woman in labor. His cry will be the moan or loud cry of a woman giving birth. It is also a cry of pain. Is the Lord in pain until he can come and rescue his people? That is the implication. The image could also be related to the "new thing" the Lord will do for his people. This image is a unique description of Yahweh and his love for Israel!
In his crying out the Lord will lay waste the mountains and dry up the plants on them. He will turn the rivers into coastlands and dry up the wetlands. Turning the rivers into coastlands relates to drying up the pools or swamps and probably means drying up the rivers too. What once was the channel of a river with flowing water is now dry land. The images here are of a massive cataclysm: earthquake, fire, drought and natural disaster. They are eschatological in nature. When the exiles came home from Babylon one could perhaps say there were political upheavals in the ancient Middle East but no natural disasters. Either this is figurative language or Isaiah is pointing to some kind of ultimate fulfillment in the time of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. I think it is figurative.

The Lord will lead out his people from captivity. They are blind in their sin and shame but he will lead them in a way they don't know. He will guide them and the image implies holding their hands as they walk along, like a sighted person leading someone who is blind. God will turn the darkness to light before them. These are the things he will do and he will not forsake them or leave them. The exiles often doubted whether God still loved them or cared for them. When he brings them home and rescues them there will be no more doubt. The Lord loves his people! He will save them.

As for those who had trusted in idols to save them or have been tempted to abandon the Lord and worship the gods of Babylon and Persia, they will be utterly put to shame. The words imply they will be greatly humiliated. In a shame-honor based culture this is the worst thing that could happen. The exiles had been humiliated when Jerusalem fell and they had been taken to Babylon. Now all those who said abandon the Lord because the gods of Babylon are greater; they will be the ones humiliated and publicly shamed! They have worshipped the "no gods" who can do nothing and say nothing. Only the Lord can rescue his people!

42:18-22 - This is the second time in the second half of Isaiah that he refers to Israel as God's servant. He personifies them as a singular person, the Lord's servant or messenger but it is clear from verses 24-25 that he is speaking of the people as his servant and not the Servant of the Lord who will come to save the people as in 42:1-9.

God calls Israel to hear and see but they are deaf and blind. They do not understand. They are God's people, his servant to the world and his messenger. The Hebrew is malachi which can mean angel but in this context means messenger. It is the name of the last prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi.

The Lord asks who is as blind as the Lord's committed one. There is some controversy about the particular word used here. In its current form the NIV translates it committed one. The ESV translates dedicated one. An alternative note reads, "as the one at peace with me." This is from an alternative pointing of the Hebrew vowels which then renders the word as shalom, peace, rather than shalem, to be complete. The verb form used here means to be repaid or receive recompense or payment. Literally Isaiah says Israel is the one who has received payment from the Lord. This goes back to the language of chapter 40; she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

The problem is Israel may be God's servant and she sees many things but does not understand them. Her ears are open but she doesn't hear. Because her understanding is limited Israel is not able to carry out God's mission for her. It pleased the Lord to make known his Law and show it to be glorious. He did this to show himself righteous. He had told Israel how they must live and act and warned them if they did not obey him he would respond and punish them. The conquest of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews were the consequences of their
disobedience. Isaiah implies his people should then have known why all these things happened to them. They have become a people who have been conquered, plundered and looted. They have been imprisoned and trapped in holes from which they cannot escape. No one has come to rescue them and send them back home. Israel is in a helpless situation.

42:23-25 - The Lord asks his people if anyone will listen to him. Does anyone understand why all this tragedy has happened to Israel? Will anyone among his people pay attention in the future?

God rehearses again the reasons behind Israel's exile and captivity. It was the Lord who allowed Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem, destroy the temple and take the Jews into exile. He did it because they had sinned against the Lord and violated his covenant. They would not obey him or follow the Lord's ways. He had warned them what would happen if they did not obey. They disobeyed so he poured out his anger and judgment upon them.

The most frustrating part for the Lord is despite all of his judgment his people are still ignorant of the situation. They still do not understand. Instead of saying we have sinned and repent they question whether the Lord loves them or if they are still his people! God's discipline has not yet brought them to repentance. Think of the great prophets the Lord sent to Israel from the time of Isaiah: Isaiah, Micah, Jonah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Ezekiel! Despite all their prophetic preaching the Jews still did not understand even though the Lord told them what was happening.

The miracle is the Lord rescued them from exile and sent Cyrus to send them home even though they still did not fully acknowledge their sin and the reasons behind the calamity. Daniel’s great prayer of national confession in Daniel 9 is a great watershed moment in the history of his people. Daniel understands and confesses the people's sin just before Cyrus allows the Jews to go home. I don't think his prayer is an accident in God's design. It shows what one person who has insight into the Lord's will and plan can do for the sake of an entire people!

Chapter 43:
43:1-4 - Isaiah contrasts Israel's ignorance of her sin and the Lord's punishment in 42:18-25 with God's continuing love for her and his desire to save her and redeem her despite her sin. "But now", marks a turning point in Isaiah's message. The Lord reminds Israel that he created them and formed them as a people. He uses the names Jacob and Israel paralleling them. The names also remind the people of their faith journey with God. Genesis 25-35 tells the story of Jacob, the scoundrel and how God changed his name and identity to Israel, one who contends with God. All throughout those chapters there is a battle in Jacob as to which name will define him; the old liar and scoundrel or the new name God has given him. It is a metaphor and parable for our spiritual journey with the Lord Jesus between our old sinful natures and the new nature the Holy Spirit grows in us as we cooperate with him.

Even the two words for created and formed, though synonyms and used in parallel, are subtle reminders of God's work in us. “Created” means to create out of nothing. “Formed” means to form in time and to use that which already exists to create something new. God created Israel from nothing. He built a people from a wandering sheep herder. He used their circumstances and slavery to forge them into a special people, his own people, and made a covenant with them. All of us are like Israel. God created a son or daughter out of a rebellious sinner, someone who was dead to him; something out of nothing. He then shapes and molds us
through the circumstances of life to become the person he desires us to be. Isaiah's insight here is profound!

One would think the exiles would have learned the lesson well from the fall of Jerusalem when they were living in Babylon. Isaiah 42 tells us they did not. God, their Creator, reminds them that he loves them anyway and has a plan for them. He has not abandoned them; he has redeemed them. The verb for redeemed means delivered or saved. Despite their sin God still loves them and is with them.

This is a great lesson for us as well. We think our sin stops God from loving us and because of it we are unable to reach him. It does separate us from him but God comes to us as a sinner in need of his redemption. He makes the first move and comes to us. His love compels him to act on our behalf even when we are caught in sin and are rebelling against him. Israel had rebelled against God and he had punished them according to his covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. The Law was clear as to the consequences of their disobedience. But as James 2 says, mercy triumphs over judgment. Before he had made a covenant with Israel the Lord had made an everlasting grace-covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The Lord loves his people for the sake of Abraham so he will not abandon them. He will save them! He called them by name. He created them, formed them and knows them. Despite their present circumstances they no longer need to be afraid.

Verse 2 is one of the great promises of God's presence and help in all the Scriptures. God does not promise we will never go through difficult circumstances. He promises to be with us in those circumstances and bring us through them. When you pass through the waters I will be with you. He is the anchor that holds in the flood and he will not let us go. We may be immersed in the flood waters and it will be a terrifying experience but the flood will not overwhelm us. We will not drown for the Lord is with us! When we walk through the fire we will not be burned. God does not say it will not be hot but we will not burn up. We will feel the heat and experience it but it will not consume us! What a tremendous promise this is for us. Even in the worst of circumstances God will not abandon us. He will be with us and if God is for us who can be against us (Romans 8)?!

Verses 3-4 remind Israel why they can trust God's promise to be with them even in the flood and the fire. He is the Lord their God. He is the Holy One of Israel, their Savior. The word for savior means deliverer or rescuer. In Isaiah 53 he will tell them the Servant will rescue them from their sins. Here Isaiah says God will rescue them from their exile.

The next lines in verse 3 are startling in their implications and also present theological difficulties. God says he gives nations as ransom for Israel. He names Egypt, Cush, meaning Sudan, and Seba, which is listed as a son of Cush and refers to Arab peoples living in the Arabian Peninsula. What does Isaiah mean? If one takes his language literally then God is paying ransom for Israel and exchanging other nations as payment. The problem is who is he paying? He has already declared he is the Holy One of Israel and is the Lord of History and nations. To whom does God owe anything? One has to take Isaiah's language poetically. God loves and values his people so highly he would even give up other Gentile nations that he loves in order to save Israel! Isaiah stretches that concept even further in chapter 53 when he says God will hand over his beloved Servant to die for the sins of the people. The New Testament affirms that the Lord Jesus is God's Servant and his One and Only Son, and God gave him up to death in order to save us because he loves us!

Why would God ransom nations to save Israel? Isaiah answers the question in verse 4. They are precious to him, meaning they are costly and of high value to God. They are honored,
meaning they carry weight with the Lord. It is a word Isaiah uses frequently of God and the
honor due him because of his holiness. God sees Israel; sinful, rebellious, blind and deaf Israel,
as honored in his sight! Why, because he loves them! The word for love Isaiah uses means to
have great affection for someone based on a close relationship with them. This is not hesed,
God's covenant love but ahab, his affectionate love. Israel may be flawed but God loves them
anyway. He's crazy about them and he will not give them up but will save them. His love and
affection are so deep that Isaiah uses the scandalous picture of the Lord himself paying ransom to
someone in order to get them back!

The Lord will give men, literally adam meaning mankind, in exchange for Israel and
people, plural meaning nations, as ransom or in exchange, the same Hebrew word as above, for
Israel's life. The whole structure is a chiasm:

I give Egypt for your ransom,
    Cush and Seba in your stead.
    Since you are precious and honored in my sight;
    and because I love you.
I give men in exchange for you,
    and people in exchange for your life.

The point is in the middle. The Lord's loves his people; they are precious and valuable to him!

43:5-7 - In the final verses of this section Isaiah reaffirms God's call of Israel and because of that
call they have no reason to be afraid. He begins by reiterating the great promise. They do not
need to fear because the Lord is with them. The exiles had frequently questioned whether the
Lord had forgotten them or abandoned them. Isaiah reminds them that is not the case. God is
truly with them even though they have passed through the flood and the fire. God speaks and
says he will bring his children, literally seed, and gather them up. There are no specific
indications as to where the Lord is going to take them but the assumption from other parts of
Isaiah's message is the Lord is going to bring them back to the Promised Land. He speaks to the
north and commands it to give them up and to the south and command it to not hold them back.

In Hebrew thought the east is the cardinal direction, the first direction by which people
orient themselves. It is the direction of the sunrise. West is the direction of the sunset. Facing
east, north is therefore on one's left and south on one's right. The ancient Israelites did not have
compasses as yet nor did they orient themselves to the north as we do. Ancient Phoenician
mariners could navigate by the stars by this time but Israel was a desert people. Plus, being far
enough south the position of the sunrise and sunset did not change as much with the seasons as it
does further north like in Europe or North America.

In the immediate context of Isaiah's day God is speaking about the return of the exiles to
the Promised Land. The difficulty is Isaiah's description of God bringing them back from the four
points of the compass. They had been scattered, the vast majority to Babylon. A few had fled to
Egypt but that community did not survive. See Jeremiah 42-44. It is possible Isaiah is referring
to those who fled to Egypt when he speaks of the Lord bringing back those who are in the south
and west; however that is doubtful because of Jeremiah's prophecy and the history of the Jews
who fled to Egypt after Jerusalem’s fall. Isaiah could simply be poetic here as he has in other
passages, speaking of the Lord bringing back his people from every direction. Another
possibility is this passage has a double meaning, in that Isaiah is looking far into the future way
beyond the exile to a time when the Lord will literally bring his people from every point of the
compass back to the Promised Land. If that is the ultimate fulfillment of this passage then it is an
eschatological prophecy that refers to the return of the exiles in the time of the Messiah. Two interpretations are possible if that is the case. First, this refers to the gathering of the remnant at Pentecost in Acts 2 when the Lord pours out his Spirit on the gathered remnant of the Jews. Luke describes them as coming from all over the earth. The second interpretation refers to God bringing his people back to the land in preparation for the return of the Lord Jesus. If that is the case then one must conclude that the Jews returning to the modern state of Israel from all over the world is somehow related to God's ultimate plan for them.

The Lord identifies who his are people in verse 7. They are all those who are called by his name. They are those he created out of nothing and formed and made from the offspring of Abraham and Jacob, the 12 tribes of Israel. Isaiah repeats the words called, created, formed and name; the same words he used to describe Israel in verse 1 at the beginning of this section. They tie the whole section together literally. Ultimately this passage can refer to us as Christians today who are called by the Lord's name. He formed us out of sinners who were spiritually dead and separated from him. He made us part of his people by grafting us into Israel, making one new people out of the two. See Romans 11 and Ephesians 2.

43:8-9 - God has demonstrated his calling to Israel and his love for them. Now he will show that to the world because they are to be his witnesses that Yahweh alone is God.

God says bring out the blind and deaf ones. They have eyes and ears but they don't see! These are the Lord's witnesses? Isaiah reminds his people that it is solely by God's grace that they are his people. It is not because of their merit and their deeds that God chose them. It is because of his love. See Deuteronomy 7. Isaiah pictures a court or gathering at the city gates where everyone assembles to hear an important case. God leads out his witnesses; blind and deaf Israel!

The nations gather to testify themselves. There is no way God can win his case! They gather and the question is put before them. Which of you foretold all that Yahweh has done with his people? Who here proclaimed that all of this would come to pass? Tell us the story if you know it! Bring your own witnesses to prove that you knew what God was doing all along so that the rest of the people can affirm the truth of your testimony. For all their military might, vast wealth and political power none of the nations can show that they understood God's plan and predicted this is exactly what he would do! None of them foretold his punishment of his own people and now his rescue of them from exile! Their gods are impotent. Israel looks blind and deaf but the truth is the gods of Babylon and Persia are the real blind and deaf ones. They are dead but the Lord is the living God! When all the witnesses were brought out and the nations gathered to testify no one would have foreseen that their testimony would not stand and the testimony of blind and deaf Israel would carry the day! God shows himself to be the true God and shames the nations! Paul says something similar in 1 Corinthians 1; God has chosen the weak to shame the strong so that there will be no doubt. The Lord alone is God! This is Isaiah's conclusion in verses 10-13.

43:10-13 - You are my witnesses! From a pagan standpoint it makes no sense for God to use Israel as his witnesses. Pagan religions were all about power depending on a quid pro quo system with the gods. Yahweh has punished Israel. He allowed them to almost be destroyed and now he wants them to witness to his greatness?!

But Israel is the Lord's chosen servant. Here the servant is corporate Israel. In other passages in Isaiah 40-66 the Servant is an individual whom God endows with his Spirit who has
a special mission to save his people. See Isaiah 42 and especially Isaiah 53. Jesus told the disciples after his resurrection and before his ascension that they were his witnesses to the world in Acts 1. His disciples, his church, have taken up Israel's mission to be God's chosen servant to bear witness to the world. Their witness will be centered on Jesus Christ and the salvation God offers through him.

God says he has chosen Israel as his servant people that they may know and believe in him and understand that the Lord is God and there is no other. Yahweh is the Lord and he alone is the savior, the one able to save Israel. Save in the context here means more than just save Israel from her current predicament. Isaiah will show how God alone can save Israel from her sins.

God is the one who revealed himself and the future, who saved them from slavery and from their enemies. He alone proclaimed what he would do through his prophets. God, not some foreign idol which Isaiah describes as "strange god" saved them. Israel can testify to all these things. They are the Lord's witnesses that he is God.

Verse 13 begins with a difficult phrase in Hebrew. Literally it reads "from the day." The ESV translates it "also henceforth". The NIV reads and "from ancient days." The NASB translates "from eternity" which follows the LXX. The NLT also follows the Septuagint and translates the phrase "from eternity to eternity". The point seems to be God has been and will continue to be the one and only God. Israel has seen this in its history and they will continue to see it in the future. No one has the power to remove Israel from God's care and salvation. Who can reverse what the Lord God has done? No one can for Yahweh alone is God!

As John Bright observes in his wonderful book, The Kingdom of God, Isaiah carries Israel's monotheism out to its logical conclusion. The Lord alone is God and all the pagan gods are nothing. They are impotent dead idols. God is the Creator and Lord of History and the people of Israel are his witnesses!

43:14-17 - The Lord reminds Israel who he is, their Redeemer, the one who saves them. He is the Holy One of Israel. Holy when applied to God means unique, pure, and divine in contrast to everyone and everything else. It is like saying the one and only pure or righteous one. Isaiah reinforces the title Holy One by talking about the Lord being the one and only God; there is no other God but him.

He is going to send to Babylon and bring out all the Babylonians. They will flee like fugitives from the city, like refugees. The Lord will cause them to flee south to the Persian Gulf and take ship in their trading fleet in order to escape. The very ships Babylon used to trade with the world that they are so proud of will be their means of escape from the power that is coming, namely Cyrus of Persia. The ones who captured Jerusalem and took Judah into exile will be forced to flee themselves.

How can God do this? He is Yahweh their Holy One, the Creator of Israel and their King! Yahweh, God's Name points to his uniqueness. I AM, or I Am who I Am. He is eternal, the one who was and is and is to come as John says in Revelation 1. He is the Holy One, the unique, pure one and only God. He is the Creator of Israel, the one who made a people out of one man, a wandering nomad named Abraham. Abraham and Sarah were past their childbearing years yet Yahweh caused them to have a child who was Isaac. Out of Isaac came Jacob and out of Jacob came the twelve tribes of Israel. The Lord is their King. He is their ruler. Long before Saul became king and the line of David was established as king over Israel the Lord was their King. Isaiah piles name upon name, and title upon title to show who God is and why he is able to do
what he is about to do. The Jews doubted his love and his power. Yahweh is about to show them both!

The Lord reminds them of the first time he saved them from the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Pharaoh had sent his chariots and army to chase down the escaping slaves and bring them back to Egypt. But the Lord made a way through the Sea and Israel crossed over. When Pharaoh's chariots tried to chase after them the Lord allowed the waters of the sea to return and all Pharaoh's chariots, his mighty army, was destroyed. They were drowned never to rise again. They were extinguished like a lamp wick that is snuffed out. Israel was saved.

43:18-21 - Isaiah contrasts God delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt with the "new thing" he is about to do. It's almost as if God says, "If you think that was good wait till you see this!" The Lord says forget about the former things, the things of the past. Don't ponder them any longer. I am doing a new thing. It's coming, don't you see it? It springs forth or sprouts up like a tender young shoot from the ground.

What is this new thing? The Lord will make a way or a path in the desert. He will make streams in the wilderness so his people may have water when they cross. In other words they will cross difficult territory that they should not be able to cross but God will provide a way and water so they will be able to do so. Even the wild animals will give him praise, the jackals and the owls. The word for owl literally means "daughter of greed" and the ESV translates it ostrich. The NIV translates it owl. The point is they are unclean birds that the Hebrews were forbidden to eat as were jackals because they ate carrion. God says even the unclean animals give God honor because he provides water in the desert to give water to his people. The picture is of the desert creatures drinking the water the Lord has provided for his people as a side benefit for the animals.

God provides the water and the way for his people to travel because he formed them. He chose them because he loved them and desired a relationship with them. Their purpose was to tell or declare his praise to the world. God is going to save his people once again only this time from exile in Babylon. It will be as great as or even greater than the exodus from Egypt. It will bring the Lord praise when he does it.

Isaiah's implication is as the people are reading his message God is already at work. If this second half of his prophecy was kept until the later part of the exile then the Jews are reading Isaiah's words as Cyrus is gathering his armies to lay siege to Babylon. Their deliverance is at hand. God's new thing is springing up! Don't they see it?

43:22-24 - God's attitude towards Israel is he loves her and is going to do a new thing; rescue her from exile. He has a purpose for her still even though she is flawed.

Israel's attitude towards God however is she has stopped calling on him. She is weary of him or tired of worshipping and obeying God's commands. Isaiah employs a play on words in these verses, using weary and burdened to speak now of God and now of Israel.

There is a time or context issue in these verses. Exactly to what is Isaiah referring? This part of his prophecy was given for the exiles in Babylon to speak to their situation even though it was written a century and a half earlier when the temple was still standing. The exiles could not bring their sacrifices to God because there was no temple to which they could bring them. Is God indicting them for that? Or is Isaiah looking back to even his day when Israel had stopped obeying God and their worship had become a burden to him because of their disobedience? They had disconnected their worship from their obedience which the Lord never intended. See Isaiah
I think the Lord is reflecting on their past behavior and the reasons they are in exile. They stopped obeying God and had paganized their worship. God had never stopped loving them or desiring a relationship with his people. Israel had started treating the Lord like a pagan God and stopped desiring a relationship with the one who created them.

They stopped honoring him with their worship. God did not weary them with sacrifices or incense. Yet they did not bring him anything of value as an act of worship. Instead Israel burdened the Lord with their sins. They wearied him with their offenses against his Law. They gave God minimal worship and expected the Lord to be appeased so that their sins would be forgiven and they could go about living their lives as they pleased rather than living to please the Lord!

We are in danger of doing the same thing today. When we treat going to church and serving in a ministry or giving an offering as an appeasement to God so he will give us what we want, we treat the Lord as a pagan God just like Israel did. When we forget his love and what he has done for us and don't desire a close, loving relationship with him we are doing what Israel did. When we do that Jesus is not Lord of our lives. He is our servant whom we want to do good things for us and when tragedy strikes we get mad because "God didn't come through for me!"

43:25-28 - The Lord God, the Holy One of Israel is not some pagan idol who can be appeased by a few sacrifices! He owes us nothing. We owe him everything for he created us! God forgives us not because we have earned it but for his own sake because he loves us and wants to be gracious to us.

The Lord reminds Israel that he has the power to judge and to forgive them. In fact he not only forgives Israel he blots out their sins; meaning he destroys them so they are no longer in existence. When God forgives us it is as if we had never sinned! This is Isaiah's version of justification like in Romans 5! God does not remember our sins; it is as if they never happened. He told Israel in Jeremiah 31 that he would make a New Covenant with them and would remember their sins no more. That New Covenant was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, God's Servant!

The Lord then challenges Israel as if to say, you don't believe me that you sinned and I have forgiven you? Let's review the past and argue together what happened. Present your case for your innocence. This is the language of the city gates, the court in ancient Israel. Argue your case before the elders of the people. Only this time argue your case before the Lord God of Hosts!

Your first father sinned, meaning Jacob. The first of your people was a scoundrel and a liar. See Genesis 25-35. Then your spokesmen rebelled against the Lord. Spokesman refers to all who mediated for the people: priests, prophets and even officials and kings. Their leaders followed in their first father's footsteps. They all sinned and led the people in rebelling against God too!

Verse 28 is a difficult verse because of the context and timing. Verse 25 implies that God has already forgiven Israel all her sins, the ones she committed when she violated God's covenant, worshipping idols and living in wickedness. These are the sins Isaiah spoke against in his ministry during Ahaz and Hezekiah's time. Verses 26-27 speak of God reviewing Israel's past sins like a trial. The evidence is overwhelming against them. Verse 28 speaks about God's judgment against Israel for those sins. The problem is the timeframe of verse 28. Has the judgment already occurred? The verb tenses in Hebrew are imperfect, implying something that is occurring, that is not yet complete. Yet Isaiah is speaking to the exiles after they have
experienced the destruction of Jerusalem and have lived in Babylon for at least 55 years. I think God is referring back to what has been done and not forward to what will occur.

God will punish or has punished his people for their sins. He will disgrace the dignitaries or the princes of the temple. This is referring to the Levites and the priests. The word for disgrace is most often used to refer to something unclean and defiled. In other words God will defile the ones who are constantly vigilant about what is clean and unclean in the temple. According to the holiness laws in Leviticus they will be unable to perform their duties because they will be unclean! He will shame them and humiliate them.

Most importantly he will give Jacob over to destruction. The word in Hebrew is herem. It refers to something that is totally devoted to the Lord and handed over to destruction and slaughter. The inhabitants of Jericho were herem to the Lord in Joshua 6, as were the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15. The Lord will hand over Israel to utter scorn by the nations. The northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed as a nation in 721 by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed as a nation by the Babylonians in 586. In that sense Isaiah could say they had been handed over to destruction. However, Isaiah also speaks of God preserving a remnant of his people in order to carry on his promise to Abraham and to keep his covenant with Israel even though they broke it. Isaiah is writing to that remnant in exile in Babylon. They have not been totally destroyed as the word herem implies. One must take Isaiah's words in verse 28 poetically and not literally. The nation was destroyed but a remnant whom God graciously forgives survives. I think this is the meaning of these verses.

Chapter 44:
44:1-5 - At the end of chapter 43 Isaiah had described the Lord's judgment on Israel, consigning the nation to complete destruction, herem in Hebrew. "But now"; Isaiah uses the conjunction to great effect. The Lord is doing a new thing. He names Israel as his chosen or preferred one among all the nations. Jacob is his servant, tied to the Lord like a bondservant or a slave. The word implies ownership. It is similar in concept to Paul's favorite description of himself as a servant or bondservant of the Lord Jesus.

God had spoken a word of judgment against Israel, promising to wipe them out because of their sin. Now he declares a word of hope and grace to them. He made them and formed them in the womb. The Lord will help them so they do not have to be afraid. The word for helper means to give aid or assistance to someone who needs it. The noun form of the word is used to describe Eve in Genesis 2 as the "helper" of Adam. The word is frequently used of God as our helper.

God has chosen Jacob and he names him Jeshurun which means upright one. This is in complete contrast to 43:26-28 which describes Israel as stubborn, rebellious and sinful. It is one thing for God to forgive Israel her sins it is another for him to call her "upright one"! It points to a complete transformation of the people by the power of God. On her own Israel was not and could not be upright. But by God's power she could be! Isaiah shows us that the new thing God is going to do has nothing to do with Israel's efforts to be obedient and righteous. It is accomplished by God's grace alone and his power.

That is confirmed by verse 3. Isaiah once again uses the image of streams appearing in a desert where there is no water. Then he says the Lord will pour out his Spirit upon your offspring and his blessing on your descendants. All major translations take offspring and descendants as both plural and in parallel. They are certainly in parallel but in Hebrew offspring is singular and descendants is plural. The Lord says he will pour out his Spirit on your (Israel's) seed or
offspring, singular. When that happens God's blessing will be poured out on your (Israel's) descendants, plural. It is certainly possible that Isaiah means that offspring and descendants are meant to be taken together in parallel and that the blessing of God is his Spirit poured out in his people.

There is another possibility. Paul argues in Galatians 3 quoting Genesis 12:7 that God made a promise to Abraham and his "seed", singular, to give him the land of Canaan and to be a blessing to the world. The word for seed or offspring is the same Hebrew word Isaiah uses here in 44:3. Paul says the "seed" is Christ. From a New Testament perspective Isaiah prophesies the coming of the "seed of Abraham" upon whom the Lord will pour out his Spirit. That will lead directly to the descendants of Jacob receiving the blessing of God, meaning his Spirit. This is the work of the Lord Jesus accomplished at Pentecost when the Spirit of God was poured out on the gathered remnant of the Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah.

There is also a link between the Messiah Isaiah speaks of in chapters 9 & 11 who will be endowed with the Spirit of the Lord and the Servant of God in the Servant Songs of chapters 40-66 who will also be specially endowed with God's Spirit to carry out his mission to die for the sins of the world and especially the sins of God's people. The Holy Spirit is the link between the Messiah and the Servant. Jesus and the apostles demonstrate that they are one and the same person which describe two different parts of Jesus' messianic mission and explain the gap between his first and second comings.

For Isaiah the blessing of God in the pouring out of his Spirit on his people will cause them to flourish and grow. They will be like the grass that springs up from the ground or the willows or poplars that grow by the flowing streams.

In verse 5 Isaiah shows how God's renewal of his people creates a new attitude towards the Lord. They had been sinful and rebellious toward him. Now they will say, I am the Lord's. They will write on their hands "the Lord's" and call themselves Israel. They will confess they are the Lord's people! Many had denied Yahweh in the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon now they will claim him as their Lord and God. They will even mark themselves on their hands. It is unclear if this is some sign of ownership by God of the person like a mark that designated someone as a slave. It is possible but unknown.

44:6-8 - Verse 6 begins a section that goes all the way to 44:23 which contrasts the Lord God and idols. Isaiah reminds Israel how great the Lord is and how powerless idols are to accomplish anything. This is all done in the context of the Lord declaring he is going to rescue the exiles from their captivity in Babylon and bring them home again. Only God can do this!

Isaiah begins with four names and titles of God that he has used already: Yahweh or Lord, the King of Israel, his Redeemer and the Lord of Hosts, Yahweh Sabaoth in Hebrew. There can be no doubt as to God's identity, power and relationship with Israel.

God says I am the first and the last, besides me there is no god. First and last in context describe the members of a set as if the Lord is listing all the gods that exist. He is the first in the list and the last in the list. There are no other gods in the list because the Lord is God alone! This is the heart of Israel's monotheism and was unique in the ancient world. All other nations around them were polytheistic pagans. The Lord does not compete with the gods of the nations for glory and worship because all the rest of the pagan idols are no gods at all! He alone is God. John in Revelation 1 & 22 quotes the Lord Jesus using Isaiah's language of first and last indicating that the Lord Jesus is God!
God asks who is like me, let him proclaim it. Let this other god declare his works and lay out before the Lord what has happened in history since the Lord established his "ancient people". Then let this no-god declare what is going to happen, what is to come. God knows the challenge will go unmet because no pagan idol can do this. Only the Lord God Almighty is capable. Israel needs to finally understand this and believe in the Lord's power to save them!

God tells Israel not to be afraid, to remember that the Lord had told them what was to happen long ago by his prophets. Isaiah's very prophecy is a testimony to God's power. The words that the exiles are reading from Isaiah were written a century and a half before their time! The Lord says the exiles are his witnesses! They can testify to the truth of God's Word to them.

Isaiah closes this section with a question from the Lord and his answer which is a statement of fact. Is there a God besides me the Lord asks? Are there any other gods who are real and true that can compare with the Lord? The answer is an unequivocal NO! There is no other Rock besides Yahweh. The title of the Rock is given to God by Jacob in his blessing of his twelve sons in Genesis 49. Jacob calls God the Rock of Israel. The word for rock means a stone, often a massive stone or a crag. Moses uses the title extensively in his song in Deuteronomy 32. It is an image that points to God being solid, unmovable and permanent. God cannot be moved and is able to withstand any storm and tempest that the exiles face. Jesus used that image at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 when he told the parable of the wise man who built his house upon the rock. When the wind and the floods came the house stood because it had been built upon that rock. The Lord alone is God!

Isaiah now contrasts the exiles that Yahweh has chosen and who believe in him with those who make and worship idols, namely the great pagan nations around Israel including Babylon who had conquered them and taken them into exile. From the world's perspective Israel is nothing and Babylon has all the power and prestige. Isaiah reveals the spiritual reality of the situation and shows the exiles what is happening from God's perspective. Idol worshippers are nothing and are publicly shamed for their stupidity.

In verses 9-11 Isaiah begins his scathing critique by focusing first on the stupidity of the craftsmen who fashion the idols. They are not to be respected because they are nothing. The word is the same one Genesis 1 uses to describe the earth in the beginning. It was formless and void or nothing. In other words there is nothing to them! These things they make with their own skill are worthless. They profit them nothing. It is all empty! Those who would bear witness to their greatness and the respect they deserve from people are blind. They don't see or know the truth of the matter. They are so blind they don't understand their own shame and the shame of those who make the idols.

Isaiah's indictment of the idol makers' shame is worse than we understand with our western viewpoint. The Middle East is a shame-honor based culture, not a right-wrong based culture as in the west. The greatest thing one tries to avoid in that culture is shame, meaning to be humiliated, disgraced and suffer the disapproval of all around you. Thus one works to not "lose face". Isaiah shows the exiles the true nature of the idolatry of Babylon which the exiles were tempted to emulate and Judah had practiced before Jerusalem had been destroyed. From the Lord's perspective the idol-makers should be ashamed of themselves!

Isaiah sarcastically asks in verse 10, who does this, shapes a god which can profit him nothing? We would say today, "Are they just dumb or what?" The idol-maker and all his kind or all like him will all be put to shame. They are not to be respected or emulated or praised. They
are nothing but men, Hebrew *adam*. They are nothing more nor less than human just like the exiles.

Isaiah calls them all to stand together and give their testimonies. In the end they will be terrified and brought down in infamy or the deepest shame and disapproval people can give them. They are blind and stupid. In verses 12-20 Isaiah will show the exiles why the idol-makers deserve the exiles' derision.

44:12-17 - This section from 44:12-20 is one of the greatest sarcastic descriptions of idols and how they are made and worshipped in the entire Bible. Isaiah uses his considerable wit and insight to ridicule those who make and bow down to pagan idols in order to show the exiles how ludicrous it is to trust in them over against trusting in Yahweh, the living God.

He begins by describing two men, one a craftsman in iron or a blacksmith and the other a craftsman in wood or a carpenter. The blacksmith takes a tool, heats it in the coals of his fire and begins to shape an idol with his hammer. Using his own strength he forges it. There is nothing supernatural about his forging. He is doing this on his own power. Yet he will claim the idol is his god. He works so hard at it that he becomes hungry and thirsty but he doesn't stop to eat or drink. He becomes faint, meaning he is weary and exhausted. He uses up all his strength to make this idol.

The carpenter stretches out his line and with his marker makes an outline in the wood of what he wants to make. He takes his chisel and roughs out the shape. He uses his compass to further refine his shape. He makes an idol in the shape of a man, in Hebrew *ish*. He shapes his idol to reflect the glory, honor and beauty of mankind, in Hebrew *adam*. He does all this so he can put his wooden man-shaped idol in a shrine dedicated to it, a house in which it can sit.

How does he come to make this idol? Isaiah goes back further than the carpenter's shop. The craftsman goes out to the forest and cuts down a cedar tree or perhaps a cypress or oak tree. He has let it grow among the trees in the forest because he has had his eye on this particular tree for some time. Perhaps he has planted the tree and nurtured it and the rain has helped it grow. In other words the plan for this idol has been in his mind for a long time. Like the blacksmith there is nothing supernatural in this process. This is wholly a human project done with human planning, ingenuity and skill. There is nothing divine about it.

The tree can be used for many things. In fact it is good for fuel for his fire. The carpenter cuts down his tree, uses some of it to make a fire. In the fire he bakes bread and with the part of the tree left over he makes a god from it! He fashions it with his tools. And then even though he knows he has made this thing of wood he bows down to it and worships it.

Isaiah sums up what the carpenter has done in verses 16-17. In these verses he is at his scathing best. Half the wood from the tree he uses to build a fire. He roasts his meat over the fire, eats it and is satisfied. He warms himself by the fire and declares his pleasure over it. He sees the fire he has made. With the rest of the wood he makes an idol, his god, bows down to it, prays to it and asks it to deliver him for the piece of wood that he has fashioned is his god! He asks the piece of wood to save him: unbelievable!

44:18-20 - Isaiah summarizes his critique of idols and those who worship them. The idols are metal or wood made by human craftsmen that are dead. They don't know nor can they discern anything because they are dead things. Their eyes can't see because the craftsman has plastered them over. They are blind to the world yet people appeal to them for insight and guidance! They cannot comprehend anything that is going on around them. This is an idol.
Yet those who worship them don't stop long enough to think through what they are doing or what they are believing. They are blinded spiritually because they are so deep in their rejection of the one true God who created them. They would rather worship and serve a lie than worship and serve their Creator! They are incapable of seeing what they have done. They took the piece of wood, burned it in the fire, baked bread in its coals, roasted their meat over it and ate it. Then they make an idol from what is left over. Isaiah uses the word detestable or abomination for the idol. The word describes what God thinks of their actions and the result of their actions, the idol they have made.

They don't ask the question, shall I make a detestable thing from the leftovers? Shall I bow down to a block of wood? The word for bow down means to worship, to literally bow one's head to the ground in submission. It describes the physical act of worship. Isaiah sarcastically points out these people are worshipping a dead block of wood and they think it will help them! They are deluded!

Isaiah describes the idolater as feeding on ashes. The word means to fellowship with or in some contexts to pasture or graze. They are like sheep who have been led to a pasture of ashes which will not nourish them and are so deluded they think what they are eating is good. The idolater's heart is deluded and it misleads him. The word is related to repenting or turning aside. In other words he is so deceived his heart is beyond repentance. He cannot turn back because he is so lost in his delusion. He can't save himself nor ask the penetrating question; "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?" Paul in Romans 1 logically outlines what Isaiah states poetically. Those who follow idols have believed a lie. They have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of birds and animals and reptiles. God has therefore handed them over to their delusion. Claiming to be wise they have become fools. They have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than their Creator! Isaiah and Paul's conclusion is that idolatry is bankrupt and leads in the end to destruction.

44:21-23 - Isaiah finishes this whole section in these verses by returning to the positive, to the Lord and Israel. He tells Israel to remember these things. Remember carries with it the idea of responding to the things one recalls, the events of the past one is to remember. Take appropriate action God is telling Israel. "These things" could be all the Lord has done in Israel including the exodus and the exile but in context it more likely refers to the futility of idols and how it corrupts and blinds the pagan nations around them. They are blinded and deluded by their idols. Remember that Israel and act accordingly!

Why should Israel remember? God has made them and they are his servant. It was the Lord who took a group of slaves and out of them created a people for himself. It was the Lord who made a covenant with them and bound himself to them though they were not his equal. They have always been his servant but he loves Israel.

The last line of verse 21 expresses God's love and commitment to his people regardless of their commitment to him. He tells them to remember him, recall what he has done and act upon that. Then he reminds them that he will never forget them. The ESV captures the Hebrew words better when it says: "O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me!" The word for forget is exactly the opposite to remember. It means not to recall something and act accordingly. God will never fail to remember his people and act upon their behalf! "Remember" is a command to Israel. Whether they obey God's command is up to them. He reminds them however that he will never forget them. They may have forgotten him and failed to obey him and keep his covenant but the Lord will never forget his people.
How much does God love his people? He has swept away their sins like the sun sweeps away a cloud or the morning mist. At first one cannot see through it and it hangs on the ground so one cannot see the sky at all. Then the sun burns through it and suddenly the mist itself is gone. The word for swept away literally means to destroy or wipe out so that what is destroyed is no longer in existence. God has swept away our sins so that they no longer exist! That is the true meaning of his forgiveness! We not only no longer bear our sins God destroys them so that they no longer even exist!

God then calls all creation to celebrate, sing and shout for joy over what he has done for Israel. The verb in the first and last lines of verse 23 is a perfect verb in Hebrew meaning the action is already accomplished. The exiles have not yet gone home to Israel from Babylon but God sees it as already accomplished. It is a done deal!

He calls the heaven to shout for joy for the Lord has done it! He commands the lower parts of the earth to sing. This could refer to under the earth, the underworld even though the NIV translates it as meaning the earth below the heavens. Mountains can shout for joy and the trees of the forests will sing. The Lord has redeemed Israel and in that he will display his glory or honor.

From God's perspective his redemption of his people from exile has already taken place. The exiles are still waiting for it to happen but it must have stirred them when they read these verses. When will it come? How will the Lord save us? In the last section of chapter 44 Isaiah lays out a remarkable and specific prophecy that declares to Israel exactly how God plans to rescue them from Babylon and send them home.

44:24-28 - Isaiah outlines in a series of statements who God is, what he has done and will do. If idols are nothing and cannot see or know or do anything then the God of Israel is the Creator of all things. If one asks the question who is Yahweh, verses 24-28 give Isaiah's answer.

He is Israel's Redeemer, the one who saved and rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He formed them in the womb, meaning he made them a people when they were few in number. Isaiah may also be referring to the miraculous conception and birth of Isaac when Sarah was barren and beyond her childbearing years and Abraham was an old man. He could do that because he is the Creator of heaven and earth. He stretched out the heavens and the earth like someone pitching a tent or a blacksmith hammering out a sheet of metal. He did this by himself with no one to help him. Even though this is poetic language Isaiah gives us a great insight here. The angels did not help the Lord create the universe. There were not many gods who created everything as a joint project. God alone created all things. John's language about the Word in John 1 reinforces the idea that Jesus is God because only God created the universe. When Paul says all things were created by and through Jesus he is saying Jesus is God and that the One God created everything. The New Testament reveals to us that God is three in one but there is still only one Lord God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth!

Not only is God the Creator he is also the revealer. He foils the signs of the false prophets. One sees this in Jeremiah and his battle with the false court prophets who kept trying to tell Judah they would never be conquered by the Babylonians or that King Jehoiachin would return quickly from exile and prison in Babylon. Jeremiah predicted the exact opposite and the Lord thwarted the false prophets and confirmed Jeremiah's words. See Jeremiah 23-29. Isaiah says God is the one who makes fools of the diviners, those who try and predict the future through omens and signs. The Babylonians were famous for practicing divination. They were also famous for a priestly class of astrologers and wise men called the magi. Daniel became the chief
of the magi by God's guidance and grace. See Daniel 1-4. Isaiah says God overthrows the wisdom of the wise and turns it into nonsense. He is so powerful and intelligent he makes fools of the greatest scholars in the ancient world. It is nothing to him!

In contrast he confirms and carries out the words of his prophets. When God speaks through his prophets that he is going to do something he does it. The Word of God through the prophet is confirmed by the action of God in fulfilling his Word. When Isaiah or Jeremiah or another of the prophets predicts God will do something in the future God does it. He fulfills it. God says in Isaiah 55:11 that his Word never returns to him empty but always accomplishes the purpose for which he gave it. Israel can trust the Word of the Lord through his prophets even when they predict something which seems impossible. They need to remember God is Creator and Redeemer and nothing is impossible for him.

It is in that context that Isaiah reveals what God wants to do with the exiles and Jerusalem. The Lord himself now declares Jerusalem shall be inhabited once again. Think of the condition of the city when the exiles heard Isaiah's message. The temple was a smoking ruin, its great bronze columns were gone and only a few stones remained of the walls. The gates and walls of the city had all been torn down by the occupying Babylonian army. The king's palace, all the official buildings and all the great houses had been destroyed and burned as well. The only people who lived in the city were the poorest of the poor because it wasn't safe to live in any more. There were no walls for protection. Almost a century later when Nehemiah's brother Hanani returned from Jerusalem he described the plight of the exiles living in the city as desperate. They were living in great trouble and disgrace even though the temple had been rebuilt. The walls were still broken down! See Nehemiah 1. To the exiles the prophecy of a rebuilt Jerusalem seemed almost a fantasy. How could it happen?

The Lord through Isaiah says the cities of Judah will be rebuilt. This too seemed impossible because when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land for the second time in 587 before he laid siege to Jerusalem he reduced all the fortified cities of Judah to rubble. How will the Lord accomplish this? Isaiah says God is the one who says to the "watery deep" be dry. This is a veiled reference to the drying up of the Red Sea during the exodus from Egypt. God could dry up the sea. He will even dry up the rivers or streams. Why is that significant? Babylon was built on the banks of the Euphrates River. Its great twin, the Tigris River, was nearby. Anyone traveling back to Jerusalem had to cross at least one of those great rivers. God says he will dry them up and make a way for his people.

But the Jews were still exiles in the land of Babylon. They were not allowed to go home. They were captives. How were they to be freed? God has a plan. Just as he used the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser and Sargon to carry out his judgment upon Samaria and Israel and Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to carry out his judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, so now God will use another pagan king to execute deliverance for his people. He has chosen Cyrus of Persia as his instrument of freedom for his people. Cyrus was the king of the Medo-Persian Empire based in modern day Iran who had already subdued all the territory to the north of Babylon including the territory of Lydia in Asia Minor. When Isaiah's message was read to the exiles Cyrus had already turned his attention to the south and Babylon. Incredibly God calls this pagan king my shepherd. In chapter 45 he will call him my anointed one, in Hebrew messiah! Cyrus will fulfill the Lord's purpose for his people. He will decree that Jerusalem shall be rebuilt and the temple of the Lord shall be restored. Isaiah had already told the exiles in chapter 40 that Yahweh is the Lord of History. He raises up and tears down the great princes of the world as he chooses. He is the Creator! Raising up Cyrus of Persia to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem is a
small thing for the Redeemer of Israel. Isaiah's words were fulfilled in 538; a year after Cyrus' troops had taken Babylon. He decreed that the Jews exiled in Babylon could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord and that furthermore he would help finance the project! See Ezra 1. God fulfilled the Word of his prophet Isaiah to his people!

Chapter 45:

45:1-3 - The Lord now addresses Cyrus the Great of Persia. This must have shocked the exiles as Cyrus is a pagan king who was conquering everything in his path. He would build a greater empire than the Assyrians and Babylonians combined! Why was the Lord addressing him? Isaiah reminds the Jews that the Lord is the God of history because he summons Cyrus by name! He even calls him his anointed one, messiah in Hebrew!

It is the Lord who has raised up Cyrus. He grasps him by his right hand. In the context the word means to grasp or to take hold of. In most places however the word means to be strong or victorious. By using this word Isaiah is sending a message to the Jews; Cyrus is going to conquer Babylon! The Lord will help him subdue nations before him. He had taken Media in 549 and Lydia in 547, subduing all of Assyria along the way. Assyria was still Babylonian territory at the time. In 539 his general Gobryas entered Babylon having diverted the Euphrates River in a tremendous feat of engineering so his troops could enter the city through the river culverts. 17 days later Cyrus entered the city as a conquering hero because he would restore the worship of the Babylonian gods which the last king of Babylon had abandoned. One year later in 538 he issued his decree allowing the Jewish exiles to return home and rebuild the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. See Ezra 1-3.

Cyrus' meteoric rise to found the greatest empire of his day Isaiah says is the Lord's doing in order to fulfill his plans for his people and to keep his promise to the exiles to restore them! Cyrus would disarm kings and take cities. The Lord goes before him like he went before Israel when they conquered the Promiseland. He has chosen Cyrus and called him by name. Cyrus is the Lord's anointed to fulfill the Lord's purposes for his people and for history!

Isaiah continues to describe Cyrus' conquests, breaking down city gates, going through obstacles and looting the treasure troves of kings. Even the mountains will be no obstacle for him because the Lord will level them. Isaiah in poetic language accurately describes Cyrus' conquest of the Middle East. Nothing stood in his way. His military might and shrewdness were no match for any of the powers of the time. By his death his empire stretched from the Aegean Sea to the Indus River. His son would conquer Egypt and his grandson even invade Greece. The dynasty he founded would rule the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean for the next two centuries until the conquests of Alexander the Great of Macedonia.

Isaiah says the Lord is helping Cyrus so that Cyrus himself will know this is the Lord's doing. This is also a message to the Jews that God is in control of history and especially their history. He raises up kingdoms to judge them like Assyria and Babylon just as he raises up kingdoms to rescue and restore them like Cyrus and the Persians. "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes" as Psalm 118 declares!

45:4-7 - The Lord through Isaiah continues to declare his choice of Cyrus and the purpose behind that choice. For the sake of Israel he has chosen the Persian king. This became clear to the exiles when Cyrus issued his decree to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Lord's temple.
God calls Cyrus even though he does not know him. God can use anyone for his purposes and cause them to do what he wants in order to fulfill his will. In Ezra 1 which cites Cyrus' decree he names Yahweh as the Creator of heaven and earth. However, it is clear from Isaiah's description that Cyrus is being diplomatic and inclusive, speaking as if he knew Yahweh when as Isaiah makes clear in these verses he did not.

In verses 5-7 Isaiah declares the Lord's broader purpose in choosing Cyrus: so that the world may know that Yahweh alone is God! Twice in these three verses God says, *I am the Lord and there is no other*, meaning there is no God but Yahweh. All the other pagan gods of the nations are false. They are dead idols that have no life. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 that behind all idols stand demons and those who worship idols worship demons. If there is any spiritual power in the pagan gods it comes from the demonic and not from God. But demons are corrupted angels they are not God!

God alone is Lord of History and he has chosen Cyrus to carry out his plan to release his people from their captivity in Babylon and rebuild his temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus does not know the Lord and even though he will issue his decree in the name of the Lord that is only for political purposes because Cyrus' policy was to respect the gods of other nations in order to build loyalty through tolerance and not coercion like the Assyrians or Babylonians. Cyrus may think he is the power in the Middle East but the true king is the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel!

The Lord has chosen Cyrus as his instrument so that all the nations from the east to the west may know that the Lord is God alone and there is no other. Isaiah frames Cyrus' rule and his decree to release the Jews in light of the inescapable conclusion of Israel's faith. If the Lord is the Creator and Lord of History then he is truly in charge of all things and even Cyrus, the greatest ruler the Jews had ever seen is answerable to Yahweh and only does his bidding.

God is Creator. He is the one who forms or creates light and darkness. He brings prosperity; the Hebrew word is *shalom*, peace, or disaster. The Hebrew word can mean evil or wicked but Isaiah is using poetic language to contrast good and bad events. We know from the rest of Scripture that God is not the author of evil. He does not create evil but he does allow it to exist for his own purposes. In the context of Jewish history calamity probably refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Lord's temple by the Babylonians. Prosperity or *shalom* refers to the blessing God wants to pour out on his people when he frees them and leads them back home. He wants to bless them. It is the Lord who does all these things because he alone is God!

45:8 - Verse 8 stands alone like an interlude between two sections. Isaiah has been speaking about God raising up Cyrus of Persia to free the Jews from exile. Verses 9-13 speak to questioning God's sovereignty in history and his choice of a pagan king to rescue Israel. Verse 8 is like Isaiah took a step back in order to gain a larger perspective of God's plan for his world.

God calls on the heavens to rain down righteousness. The words describe a gentle rain that waters the earth not a cloudburst that threatens everything with a flash flood. This is the kind of rain that the farmers in Israel looked for in the rainy season to water their crops and get the ground ready for planting. This rain will water the earth with righteousness or justice. God calls for the clouds to rain down his righteous will for his world.

When the rains come then the earth can bring forth the flowers and the plants that spring up. That is the image Isaiah uses of the earth opening up and bearing fruit. The word for spring up or bear fruit in the ESV is the same word *Genesis 1* uses to describe the earth being fruitful. God calls the earth to be fruitful and multiply with salvation and righteousness. They go together because when God brings his salvation then his righteous will and his justice is evident in the
world. This picture comes to its climax in the Scriptures in the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 19-20. His coming brings salvation to his people and righteousness to his world! Isaiah tells us that the ultimate fruition of God's plan to save his people and his world sprouts up or springs forth from his choosing Cyrus to work through to release his people from exile. The historical fact is if the Jews had not been released they would have disappeared as a people and there would have been no Jewish nation or Jews in the Holy Land when the Lord was ready to send his Son into the world. Jesus would not have been born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth. God's using Cyrus sets in motion events that will culminate in the birth of his Son. It is exactly as Paul says in Galatians 4: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

As if to emphasize God's sovereignty in human history the Lord declares, I, Yahweh, have created it. The word for created is the special Hebrew word only used of God bara. It implies God creates out of nothing. There are other Hebrew words that speak of God using what is at hand to make things but bara speaks to God's creative power and word. It is the word used in Genesis 1 that says in the beginning God created (bara) the heavens and the earth. There were no raw materials which God used to create the universe. He simply spoke and the universe came into being; creation ex nihilo, out of nothing. Isaiah says God's salvation and righteousness will come to the world in the same way.

45:9-10 - Isaiah now shifts back to Israel and her questions about God's plan and if he is going to able to execute it. Isaiah declares Israel needs to stop questioning God and his ability. They are like clay pots or even worse potsherds complaining against their maker or the potter. They question God about what he is making as if they had a right to question him. They are clay pots! This is the second time Isaiah has used the image of the pot questioning the potter's wisdom; see Isaiah 29. Jeremiah used this same image in Jeremiah 18 to portray God's sovereign right to do with Israel as he please because he is their Creator.

The argument is ludicrous, as if the pot complained you didn't put handles on me! The last phrase of verse 9 is difficult. The NIV actually reads the most literally when it says, "he has no hands." The ESV interprets the context and reads, "your work has no handles." The Good News and NLT both interpret the meaning as the pot telling the potter he doesn't know what he's doing. The point is when Israel questions the Lord about using Cyrus or disbelieving his promise that he will rescue the exiles they are in no position to question the Lord or his actions, as if they knew better than God what should happen! He is the potter and they are clay pots!

In verse 10 Isaiah shifts metaphors. Israel's complaining and doubts about God are like a child complaining to its father that he or she was born. "What have you begotten?" Or saying to its mother; "What have you brought to birth?" In other words the child is questioning why it was born and why it is the way it is! None of us has any control over being conceived or born. Those decisions are completely out of our hands and in the hands of our parents and God himself. We didn't create us; God did. The same is true for Israel. Isaiah says to Israel: stop your irrational complaining and doubting the Lord's purpose for you. Stop doubting whether God knows what he is doing or is able to carry out his plan for you. He is Yahweh, the one and only God!

45:11-13 - God continues to address the exiles or it could also be the pagan nations around Israel, telling them he has both the right and the power to accomplish his purposes as he sees fit. He is the Holy One of Israel, their maker. Isaiah uses the imperative form in Hebrew to
emphasize the Lord's sarcasm in the exiles demanding answers from Yahweh. Are you questioning me concerning my children, demanding answers from me about what is to come? God reminds them that he made the earth and stretched out the heavens. This is the language of Genesis 1, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The Lord commands all the starry host. The word for host is the same as in the title Lord of Hosts, saba in Hebrew. Isaiah uses a word play in verses 11-12 to emphasize the ridiculousness of the exiles demanding answers from the Lord. In verse 11 he asks them if they will give orders or command the Lord about his own creation. Then in verse 12 he reminds them that he created all the stars and commands them or marshaled all the host. The word for command, give orders or marshalled is the same word in Hebrew. The exiles are commanding the one who commands all the stars to give them answers about what is going on!

God says it is he who has stirred up or raised up Cyrus. The ESV follows the literal Hebrew which simply reads “he”. The NIV interprets the language and inserts Cyrus to clarify the meaning of the verse. God in his righteousness has raised up this pagan conqueror to do his bidding. It is the Lord who has paved the way for Cyrus to conquer the lands of the Middle East. This is God's doing and plan. He has done this because God has chosen the Persian king to rebuild his city, Jerusalem, and to set the exiles free. The Lord has ordained it and has done it. He made no deal with Cyrus. No wages were exchanged or bribes given. There was no quid pro quo with a pagan king. The Lord has done this in his righteousness working out his purpose for his people in whom he sees fit. He is the Creator and the Lord of History. Jerusalem will be rebuilt. The exiles will be freed and go home. The Lord has decreed it!

45:14 - Isaiah momentarily looks far ahead to God's salvation of Israel and not just Cyrus' decree to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem. Someday Israel will conquer rather than be conquered. In that day the wealth of Egypt and the Sudan, or Cush will be theirs. All the great trade goods of Egypt Israel will possess. "Those tall Sabeans" will also come to the Jews. Seba was a son of Cush in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10. The Sabeans are thought to be related to Seba. Scholars are not entirely certain where they lived but the best evidence suggests southern Arabia across from the horn of Africa. They would have been spice traders and very wealthy. It is possible the Sabeans are related to Sheba and the Queen of Sheba who came to Solomon in 1 Kings 10. She was from an area in Ethiopia. If that is the case the Sabeans would be tall black Africans!

Isaiah says they will come over to the Jews in chains and bow down to them and they will be yours. He implies some sort of conflict in which the Egyptians switch sides and become Israel's slaves. They bow down and surrender to the Jews because they realize God is with them and they now understand that there is no other God but God.

The great question as one looks at this verse is how and when is this fulfilled? From Isaiah's day onward this has yet to be fulfilled. Perhaps it has been partially fulfilled in the spread of the gospel in Egypt and Africa. Thus the peoples of that region have come and submitted to the one true God. But they have not come to the Jews and surrendered to them as their slaves. Either Isaiah is being completely poetic in describing a time when the nations of northeastern Africa come to God or he is looking ahead to the time of the Lord Jesus' return and the total victory of the Lord and his people. The difficulty with that is there is little other mention of nations surrendering to the Jews as slaves. Isaiah will expand on the idea of the Gentiles coming to God in chapters 60-62 which Paul will quote in Romans 15 to show how the gospel was fulfilling the prophecies of the time of the Messiah.
45:15-17 - Verse 15 begins with a difficult phrase. God is the God who hides himself. The word means to conceal oneself so one cannot be known. In Isaiah 1 the Lord said he was hiding himself from Israel and not listening to their prayers. God reveals himself in creation according to Isaiah 40 & Romans 1. However, that natural revelation is not enough to build a relationship with God. He must reveal himself in a personal way in order for that to happen. I think that is what Isaiah is speaking about in verse 15. Unless the Lord reveals himself to us personally he is hidden from us and we cannot know him.

In contrast those who make idols will be put to shame, humiliated and disgraced. They will all be disgraced. In the shame-honor based culture of the Middle East this was the worst possible outcome. Idol worshippers thought they were coming into contact with their gods and building a relationship with them. The truth is they are no gods and the true God they do not know because he has not revealed himself personally to them because their hearts are turned to idols. As a consequence they will all experience deep shame and disgrace!

But Israel the Lord will save! The word means more than just deliver or rescue from danger. God will save them and bring them into a right relationship with him. He will not hide himself from them but reveal himself. The salvation, the right relationship he brings, will be an everlasting one. It will last into all eternity. The Lord will reveal himself to his people and establish an eternal relationship with them so that they will never be shamed and disgraced. This was accomplished through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel, their Savior and ours!

45:18-19 - In verse 18 Isaiah once again describes who God is; he declares his identity as the Creator. The Lord is the one who created the heavens and the earth. He is God. There is no one like him. He established the earth, meaning he built it and formed it. It was not a result of some cosmic battle like the Babylonian creation legends declared. Genesis 1 says God spoke and the universe came into being. He created all things by his powerful creative Word.

What's more Isaiah says he did not create the earth to be empty, without form and void. He created the world to be inhabited. Psalm 115 says God gave the earth to mankind. Isaiah gives us a profound insight about this planet. It was designed as a home for us, for humanity! We are the crown of God's creation and this planet was meant as the setting for God's plan for the human race to play out. We are not an accident of evolution. Human sin has marred God's perfect home but the earth would not be better off without human beings. We have not completely spoiled the planet by our presence. On the contrary, our very presence completes the purpose of the world! God will one day set all things to right and by redeeming the human race he will redeem the earth as well. That fact is confirmed in Revelation 20 in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ and also the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22, which comes down from heaven to a new earth and there the Lord will dwell with his people forever! The Lord made the earth as the home for mankind and ultimately his home as well because he wants to live with his creatures!

The fact that the Lord alone is the Creator of all things reinforces Isaiah's ultimate conclusion. God is the Lord alone and there is no other. He again states one of the chief premises of this latter section of Isaiah. God alone is God. All the pagan idols the exiles have been tempted to believe were stronger than the Lord are no gods at all!

Verse 19 declares the Lord's personal revelation to Israel. God did not speak his Word in secret, from some land of darkness where Israel could never hear or understand him. He did not say to his people seek me in vain as if he did not mean for them to have a relationship with him.
The Hebrew word for vain is the same word as in verse 18, empty. It is the word used in Genesis 1 when it describes the world in the beginning as formless and void, empty. The Lord wanted Israel to know him. He speaks what is true and righteous because that is his character. He revealed himself to Israel because he wanted a relationship with them. If he had not and had hidden himself Israel would never had found him or known him. It was Israel who turned away from God and hardened their hearts towards him. Paul says in Romans 1 that God as Creator put enough of himself in his creation so that people would know he exists but unless he reveals himself to us personally we cannot know him because of our sin. We cannot reach God from our sinful human state. God has to reach down to us. That is what Isaiah is saying in verse 19. The ultimate revelation of God and who he is came to us through his One and Only Son, Jesus Christ, who also paid for our sin so that we could have an eternal relationship with our Creator and God!

45:20-21 - Isaiah speaks to the exiles and calls them the fugitives or refugees from the nations. The title describes the plight of the Jews at the time. If they had not been carried into exile in Babylon, many others had fled Judah to Egypt or other places to escape. They are no longer dwelling in their homeland. They are now people without a country. God tells them to gather together in one place. He is about to do something wonderful!

In the second half of verse 20 Isaiah turns to describe the nations to whom the Jews have fled or been carried into exile. They worship their wooden idols. They keep praying to gods that are powerless to save them because they are dead pieces of wood! It is possible that Isaiah is describing Jews who have turned to idols away from the Lord but I think it is more likely he is describing the pagan nations in whom the Jews now live. After the fall of Jerusalem they were tempted to see the pagan gods as more powerful than Yahweh, as if the Lord was defeated by the gods of Babylon. Isaiah consistently shows how the exile was all God's plan to punish and judge his people but his covenant with them still stands. Now he will move to save them from exile and bring them home. It is not because Yahweh is weak that these things have happened to them it is because Yahweh is the Lord of History and even the nations obey his bidding.

Isaiah calls the pagan nations to present their case before the Lord and the exiles. Present your evidence, plot your strategy. Did the pagan gods know this was all going to happen? Did they foresee the destruction of Jerusalem, the exile and then the return of the Jews to their homeland? Did any of them foretell this? The Lord is the only God who knew all this and had foretold it through his prophets. By the time the exiles were reading the second part of Isaiah's prophecy Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Habakkuk had all been declaring the Lord's Word to Judah. They had foretold these very events just as Isaiah had. Only God could do this! Only Yahweh is great enough and all-knowing enough to so accurately foretell the future. No other god could do this because there is no other God but the Lord! He is the righteous one and the Savior of his people! The exiles have nothing to fear and they can trust the Lord's Word to them. They are going home!

45:22-25 - This is a remarkable closing section of this portion of Isaiah's prophecy. He has declared the greatness of God and the futility of idols. He has declared that he will save Israel and those who worship idols will be disgraced. But now the Lord expands his salvation and his desire for salvation to the nations and even to those who have railed against him!

God calls all the earth, the ends of the earth to turn to God and be saved. The word for turn implies repentance because the Hebrew word means to turn around or go in a different
direction. God tells the pagan nations of the world he is their only hope for salvation! They need to repent and believe in the one and only God!

The Lord has sworn an oath by himself that will not return to him empty. It will accomplish what he has declared. See Isaiah 55 for a similar passage. Isaiah's language of God swearing an oath by himself points to the reliability of God's Word. One swore an oath to a power greater than oneself; in Israel to Yahweh. In pagan nations one would swear an oath to the chief pagan god of that nation. One swore an oath to verify the truth of the statement and the commitment to carry out the promise one made. There is no one greater than the Lord so he swears by himself to verify his intention to fulfill his Word. Here he states his oath has gone out in righteousness and will not return to him empty. Every knee will bow and every tongue swear allegiance to the Lord! Paul quotes this verse from the LXX in Philippians 2 to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and show how he is God and has the name above every name. God says someday every person in the world will acknowledge the Lord alone is God!

Someday people will declare that only in the Lord are there righteousness and strength. They will understand he alone is God and he alone is righteous. Israel's mission to bear witness to the nations that God alone is God will have borne fruit. Isaiah doesn't tell us the circumstances of when this will happen only that it will. We know from the New Testament that at Jesus Second Coming not only Israel but the entire world will finally acknowledge his Lordship!

God says all those who used to rage against God will come and bow down to him. They will be put to shame and shown to be guilty before the Lord of rejecting him. The implication is that some of the Gentiles will bow down in faith and worship. The rest of the Gentiles will be forced to bow down and acknowledge that God alone is Lord and they were wrong to doubt him and rage against him. There are atheists today who are full of anger and vitriol towards anyone who believes in God and they ridicule that belief. God says someday they will be forced to bow down and be ashamed of their unbelief when the Lord shows himself.

The pagan nations doubted the power of Yahweh. They will be ashamed. Israel however will be saved. Isaiah says they will be found righteous or justified before God. This is the same word Paul uses in Romans 5 and Galatians 3 to describe God's saving work through Jesus Christ. Isaiah looks forward to that day and says when it comes all of Israel will rejoice or exult in God!

Chapter 46:

46:1-2 - Isaiah continues the contrast between the idols of Babylon and the pagan nations versus the power and compassion of Yahweh. He paints the vivid picture of two of the chief gods of Babylon as idols that are so huge they are a burden to the weary refugees fleeing from Babylon. Bel in the Canaanite pantheon was Baal and in Babylon was the title given to their chief god Marduk. Nebo (or Nabu) was his son and the god of learning. These idols were often paraded through the streets of the city in processions. Isaiah sees a time when the "procession" will be people fleeing the great city. They will put the huge idols on carts pulled by oxen or other beasts because they are too heavy to be carried by people. They bow down or stoop low means they will lie flat and not stand upright. The idols are a burden for the people to carry yet they will not leave them. They cannot rescue or save the people of Babylon from what is coming yet they insist on taking them with them. Bel the king of the gods is helpless and Nebo, the god of learning, has no wisdom to give! Isaiah, in these two verses, shows us the futility of idols and the delusion that people are under that worship them. The same is true for people today who worship something other than the Lord God their Creator.
46:3-4 - Isaiah completes the contrast between Bel and Nebo, the gods of the Babylonians and Yahweh in these verses. The pagan idols are made by human hands and are so helpless and dead they have to be carried along on ox carts because they cannot move on their own. The dead idols will be no help to the refugees of Babylon when they are forced to flee their city when it is attacked. In contrast the Lord addresses the remnant of Israel, the exiles. He created his people. He is the living God who has known them from the time of their conception. He will carry them and lift them up even to their old age. They have nothing to fear. Isaiah uses three different verbs in Hebrew all of which have a similar meaning, to bear or carry a burden. Yahweh will carry his people and save them, unlike the idols of Babylon which the exiles were tempted to worship and believe were more powerful than their God. Bel and Nebo are nothing. The Lord is the Creator and Savior of Israel! They do not need to fear. He will accomplish what he has promised.

46:5-7 - Isaiah continues his polemic against idols, asking the exiles to compare Yahweh to the pagan gods. As in verses 3-4 in verse 5 uses several Hebrew verbs that all basically mean the same thing; to compare and to be like or equal to, and then he repeats them in parallel. The first and the last verb, to compare or be alike, is the same word in Hebrew. The point is what pagan god is like the Lord?

Isaiah then repeats a theme he has used already, that of someone making an idol that cannot move or see or think because it is dead. He uses the example of a pagan who pays money to a goldsmith to make an idol and then he falls down and worships it. He knows it was made and he knows he paid the money to make it but nevertheless in his delusion he still bows down to it. It has to be carried to its place and set down. It can't move on its own and if one cries out to it for help it does not answer; not because it doesn't want to but because it can't. It's dead! The idol cannot save anyone from trouble. It is impotent. The word for save is yasha, from which the name Yeshua or Joshua is derived. No idol can save Israel, but Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts is their Savior! Someday he will come to them in the person of Yeshua Ben Joseph and save them from their sins!

46:8-11 - The exiles are told "remember this". That could refer to what Isaiah has said in the preceding verses about the impotence of idols but in the context it probably refers to remembering that the Lord had predicted through his prophets, including Isaiah, all that had befallen the exiles. God calls them to remember, stand firm or fix it in their minds and recall to mind that God alone is God. He calls them rebels! The ESV translates the word transgressors but I think the NIV captures the meaning better. The exiles are in Babylon precisely because they have sinned and rebelled against God. They did not stop the downward slide of Judah into idolatry and wickedness. They allowed Manasseh and the other kings to lead the country astray. After Josiah's death they returned to their idolatry and did not stay faithful to Yahweh.

The Lord reminds them that he alone is God. There is no other God like him because there is no other God! He is the one who declares the end from the beginning because he was there in the beginning and he will be there in the end. He is the Eternal One. He made known what was going to come to pass not through divination or astrology as the Babylonians mistakenly practiced but through his powerful Word declared by his prophets. The Lord declares to the exiles that his purpose will stand and he will accomplish all that he has declared, including their rescue even though they have been rebellious against the Lord.

The Lord summons a bird of prey, literally a vulture or carrion bird but in context it is more likely a raptor or eagle of some sort. He summons a great bird of prey from the east, a man
from a far off country who will fulfill his purpose. He is speaking of Cyrus of Persia who will conquer Babylon and the entire Middle East and allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

The last phrases of verse 11 are some of the most powerful in Isaiah about God's sovereignty and power. "What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do!" When God speaks his Word it is always fulfilled. He sees to it! The Lord keeps his promises but even more importantly he carries out his plans. Nothing will thwart the will of God. We can trust that and bank on it!

46:12-13 - Isaiah concludes this section with a reminder to Israel that it is not because of their great faithfulness that God is going to rescue them from exile but because of the Lord's salvation and purpose for his people.

He says listen up, Hebrew shema as in Deuteronomy 6, you stubborn-hearted people. The word for stubborn literally means stallion or bull and normally is translated mighty. Here in context it means a heart that refuses to change or stubborn. God calls Israel bull-hearted! They are far from righteousness. They may have been chastened by their exile but they are not a holy, faithful people yet. This proved itself in their behavior once they returned from Babylon. God still had to send them his prophets to remind them to be faithful to him along with Ezra and Nehemiah to bring them back to the Lord.

Israel may be far from righteousness but God is going to bring his righteousness near to them. It is coming and is not far off. His salvation will not be delayed. Even as the exiles were reading Isaiah's words to them Cyrus was preparing to invade Babylon or perhaps had already captured the city. His decree was not far off! The Lord will grant or put his salvation in Zion. The word for salvation is related to the word for Messiah. In the context the Lord's salvation is his rescue from exile but in the larger context of history his salvation is the sending of his Son, Jesus Christ. They will see the Lord's glory even as John declared in John 1 that the disciples had seen "the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father full of grace and truth."

Chapter 47:
47:1-4 - Chapter 47 begins a taunt against Babylon which describes the Lord's judgment against her for destroying Jerusalem along with the Lord's temple and killing so many of God's people. Even though God used them to exact his punishment and justice against Israel that does not excuse their brutality and idolatry. The Lord will hold Babylon accountable just as he had Assyria and Egypt and all the nations before her because the God is the Lord of History and the only God.

God invites the virgin daughter of Babylon to come sit in the dust. Isaiah portrays her as a beautiful young woman who is now put to public shame. She used to sit on a throne and be worshipped and adored. Now she sits on the ground without a throne like a beggar. The nations will no longer see her as tender and delicate. Her beauty will be destroyed.

God tells her to take a millstone and grind flour. That is something she has never had to do. Other conquered peoples did her work for her and she took advantage of them. Now she will be exploited as she did to other nations including Judah. She will be stripped naked, her veil ripped off and her legs exposed. She will have to wade through the streams herself, the many river channels around Babylon. To be publicly uncovered and exposed was a great shame in that culture. A woman did not show off her naked body to anyone except her husband. Only a prostitute would do such a thing and she was the lowest on the social scale for a woman.
Babylon's nakedness will be exposed and she will be publicly shamed and humiliated. Remember, this is a shame-honor based culture and public shame was the worst possible punishment, especially for one who had been so high and mighty.

The reason this will happen to Babylon is because the Lord is taking out his vengeance upon her for all she did to his people. This passage is similar to Jeremiah's judgment on Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51. The prophets are consistent. God used pagan nations to carry out his judgment upon Israel but that did not exempt those nations from God's moral standards or excuse their brutality and wickedness. God holds all nations to account and all will have to answer to him for their behavior. As if in reminder Isaiah adds that the one who will shame Babylon is Israel's redeemer, the Lord of Hosts. He alone is the Lord of History! The gods of Babylon whom they thought were so powerful are nothing. Babylon will answer to the Lord for its conduct.

47:5-7 - Because of Babylon's behavior God now commands her to sit in silence and go into or be in darkness. Her reign is over. She shall no longer be called the mistress or queen of kingdoms, meaning the greatest kingdom of the earth. Her shame will be exposed and she will dwell in darkness not light.

The Lord was angry with his people and allowed Babylon to conquer them and profane his sanctuary. The word is related to ritual cleanliness or holiness. It refers to the Babylonians destroying the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. They were pagan Gentiles and entered the holy places to sack them and despoil them. The Lord gave the Jews into the hands of the Babylonians. He was carrying out his purpose to punish the Jews for their disobedience. The prophets had foretold it was going to happen. Yet when it did, the Babylonians did not restrain themselves but in their pride oppressed God's people beyond what the Lord had intended. They showed no mercy and even imposed great burdens on the aged ignoring their needs.

The Lord holds them accountable for their behavior. He uses history to judge pagan nations just as he used the Babylonians to judge Judah. In her pride Babylon thought she would rule forever. Who was like her? Her power and wealth led her to stop evaluating her own behavior. This is the danger for all great and powerful nations. The Lord warns her that she should have reflected on her behavior and realized her responsibility. But she did not. Babylon did not take to heart the Lord's warnings. She ignored whatever conscience she had and pursued aggression and violence to enhance her wealth and power. God declares her time is at an end!

47:8-9 - God outlines the consequences to Babylon of their pride and sin. In her arrogance she thought nothing tragic would ever happen to her. Babylon had grown so rich and powerful that she believed that what had happened to Nineveh or the Hittites would never happen to her. The ESV translates the first title of verse 8, "you lover of pleasures." That is a rather tame translation. The Hebrew word means voluptuous, so the NIV translates it "you wanton creature." The image is of a seductive and beautiful woman, who exudes sensuality. Babylon was a seductress. Isaiah puts in her mouth words that Yahweh has said about himself: I am and there is none besides me. Perhaps this phrase more than any other tells us about the level of the pride of Babylon. She declares she will never know the loss of her children or the grief of being a widow; things the Jews had experienced in full measure as had most of the peoples that Babylon had conquered.

God says otherwise. She sits securely in her pride and the word means confident but it can also mean naivety. Babylon is foolish because she has exalted herself above everything even the Lord God Almighty! Isaiah had prophesied to Judah in the days of Hezekiah in chapters 13-
14 about Babylon's fall and spoke of her pride. She had tried to exalt herself to the level of God. Now he repeats that theme to the exiles. In one day judgment will come upon her in full measure. She will suffer loss and grief in full measure. In spite of all her magic spells and sorceries in which she trusted she will fall. The Lord God will do this. John uses almost these same words in Revelation 18 to describe God's judgment upon Babylon-Rome, who supports the antichrist, the beast. The point is the judgment will be sudden and complete.

From a historical perspective, Cyrus the Great of Persia entered the city in 539 as a hero. He did not destroy Babylon but kept it as a center of commerce and pagan worship. Yet Babylon never again rose to power and prominence. Alexander had designs of reviving it but died there of malaria before he could carry them out. Today, the desert has consumed it and Babylon is but a ruin buried under the rubble of the centuries, just as God's prophets had said would happen. See Jeremiah 50-51.

**47:10-11** - Verses 10-11 are an extension of the themes in verses 8-9. Babylon felt secure or trusted in her wickedness and evil. She thought it was more powerful than any gods. Isaiah exposes the delusion of evil, thinking it is powerful like the dark side of the force in Star Wars. Evil and wicked people crave power and experience some power in evil but they mistakenly believe it is more powerful than good, because they leave God out of the equation!

Since they believed evil is more powerful than any god they falsely believed they were accountable to no one. "No one sees me." That is the thought of many a person caught in their wickedness. Sin blinds us to the truth that we are all accountable to God and even if our deeds are hidden from other people they are not hidden from God. He knows everything we do and think. Evil is a delusion!

Babylon prided itself on its wisdom and knowledge, which was often derived from magic and occult arts alongside the more noble pursuit of observation and the wisdom of experience. The Magi were the greatest learned men in Babylon and the Persians incorporated their learning into their empire to advise them. Daniel, a Jew, rose to the highest position in the Magi of Nebuchadnezzar's court and later Cyrus'. But he stayed faithful to the Lord and did not practice the occult arts to gain his wisdom. That was why the other Magi were so jealous of him and sought to bring him down. The wisdom and knowledge of the occult is a counterfeit to the true wisdom of the Lord God. Babylon trusted in the false wisdom of divination and sorcery and it led her astray. The Hebrew word normally means to return but in context it means to go another way, or veer off the correct path.

All their wisdom led the Babylonians to declare that they were the greatest power of all. Isaiah repeats the same phrase he used in verse 8, "I am, and there is none besides me." Those are words only Yahweh is able to truly speak because he is God alone and there is no other. The occult combined with sin leads one to the ultimate delusion: I am God! That is exactly Satan's temptation to Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3: "You will be like God!" Human beings have believed that lie and been swallowed up into that delusion ever since.

God however is the one truly in charge of history and nations. An evil or disaster is coming against Babylon she won't be able to manage. All her sorcery, magic, incantations and divinations will prove helpless to stop it. Cyrus the Great of Persia is coming and he will conquer Babylon. No spell or conjuring will stop him. In fact the Magi will not only be powerless to stop him they will seem incompetent by their inability to cast a spell that will halt his advance. God is going to humiliate all the magical powers! A calamity will fall on them for which there is no answer. The ESV translates the phrase in verse 11, "for which you will not be able to atone." The
NIV reads, “that you cannot ward off with a ransom.” The Hebrew words means to atone for or propitiate something, to cover over. In context I think the NIV captures the sense of Isaiah's words. This is not to atone for some sin as the ESV implies, this is to appease the gods or the powers somehow in order to alter events. There is no evidence the Babylonians practiced human sacrifice but in other cultures, especially Pre-Columbian cultures in Central and South America, human sacrifice was used to ward off some calamity. That is the sense of the words here, minus the human sacrifice. In other words, their pagan religious rituals won't work!

The most humiliating part will be that no one saw this coming! For all their learning and magic arts through divination which was supposed to give them reliable knowledge of the future, the Babylonians won't see this coming. No Magi will tell the king of the disaster that will befall them. No diviner will read the omens and warn the king. They will be oblivious until the calamity strikes. God will see to it. They believed the delusion of the occult and sin and now they will pay the consequences and find out just how impotent the occult arts really are.

How deep were the Babylonians into the occult to divine the future? Ezekiel 21 records King Nebuchadnezzar coming to a crossroads and in order to determine which fork to take he casts lots with his arrows, trying to figure out by which way they fall the correct direction to take. He consults his idols, meaning the household or personal gods he has brought with him. He will kill an animal and look at its liver trying to tell by the nodes in the liver the correct direction. This is the kind of foolishness that bound the Babylonians. Isaiah declares their delusion in the power of the occult will be their undoing. It will utterly fail them when the Lord of History sends his judgment against them.

47:12-13 - Isaiah continues his indictment of Babylon taking aim in these verses at the magi and the counselors of the king. He invites them to keep performing their magic spells and sorceries that they have done again and again for years, since they were young. The word for sorceries relates to invoking the power of spirits to perform tasks for the person doing the incantation. It is related to demonic powers and black magic. Isaiah exposes the true nature of Babylonian magic; it was demonic.

He mocks their Magi saying they should keep doing what they have always done because maybe this time they will succeed. His words are similar to the recovery definition of insanity. Keep doing something over and over expecting different results each time. Their spells fail but they keep going back to them again and again thinking this time they will succeed and give them what they want. They are deluded and insane!

The king's counselors keep giving him the same advice again and again and it has only worn them out. Babylon was famous for its class of counselors which were often astrologers, people who charted the stars thinking they could foretell the future. It was a belief based on the idea that the stars in the sky affected events and people on the earth and is an ancient belief. The Magi in Babylon wielded great power through their astrological charts and predictions. Here Isaiah mocks them, yet in Matthew 2 God uses their very interest in the stars to draw these pagan scholars to the birth of the Jewish Messiah and their true King.

In verse 13 Isaiah mocks their ability to foretell the future through charting the stars. They were respected and held in awe by the people and the kings in Babylon yet they will not see the disaster that will come against them. For all their great learning and power they will fail because they do not know the Lord God Almighty maker of heaven and earth!

There is great irony in Isaiah's prophecy here because at the time the exiles are reading this prophecy from Isaiah written a century and half before, one of the chief Magi is Daniel, a
Jew and fellow exile. Daniel rose to prominence in Nebuchadnezzar's court because of his talent in interpreting dreams that God gave him. See Daniel 2. There is no evidence in the Book of Daniel that he used astrology though it is likely he learned all about it in his training to be a Magi. Daniel stayed faithful to God and God used him to speak to Nebuchadnezzar and to Belshazzar and even Cyrus the Great who conquered Babylon. He was a true wise counselor who spoke God's wisdom to the king not an astrologer or practitioner of black magic and sorcery.

47:14-15 - Isaiah continues the theme of verses 12-13. The Magi and the astrologers are impotent to stop the disaster that is coming. In fact they will not even foresee it. They are like stubble in a field. When a fire comes it burns up quickly. It has no power to stop the flames just as the astrologers have no power to stop what the Lord is going to do through Cyrus.

Isaiah continues in the last part of verse 14 to use the metaphor of a fire but he shifts it to a fire that keeps people warm instead of a destructive fire in a field. This fire gives no warmth in the cool of the evening. One looks for a fire with which to warm oneself and finds nothing. In other words all the astrologers and Magi of Babylon in whom the king and the people have trusted are worthless! They have been worthless all along, even from of old, but the people have not realized it.

The last section of verse 15 is a vivid one. The NIV translates, "each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you." The ESV translates, "they wander about, each in his own direction; there is no one to save you." Literally the Hebrew words read "each to his own east they wander." Isaiah paints a picture of each astrologer pointing in a different direction and saying that is east and then going that way expecting the king and the people to follow. But they are all going in different directions! Each of them thinks they are going the right way but all of them are wrong! Therefore none of them can save the Babylonians from what is coming because they don't know where they are going!

The picture is a vivid one and chillingly applies to our day. Emotions and relativism have triumphed in our culture and especially in the media and the academic world. People have abandoned God and his Word as the moral standard. Our culture is like Judges 21:25: In those days Israel had no king; everyone did what was right as he saw fit. When that happens there is no guidance upon which people can rely because everyone is saying my way is the right way, I feel it. They are like the astrologers of Babylon; everyone had their own version of east! One cannot live life that way or hold a society together. All you get is moral chaos which is what is happening in America today. There are still a few things that everyone agrees on like don't murder and don't molest children but there is no moral glue to keep that from changing. We are dependent upon people's feelings to keep the worst of evil and chaos in check. Unless something changes we will suffer the same fate as Babylon. A disaster will come which we will not foresee and which we will be powerless to stop. We will tear ourselves apart morally and it will be our own fault. There will be no one else to blame but ourselves because we have abandoned God and substituted moral directions that don't work!

Chapter 48:

48:1-2 - Isaiah shifts his focus from Babylon and its futile worship of idols back to Judah and Israel. They are called by the Lord's Name yet they are faithless. All of this points to God's grace to them. The Lord will bring them back to the land and save the exiles not because of their obedience and faith to him but because of his gracious promise to save them and for the honor of his Name.
Isaiah addresses his people Israel and specifically the tribe of Judah or the nation of Judah. The ESV reads "who came from the waters of Judah" while the NIV interprets the phrase, "who come from the line of Judah." The Hebrew literally reads waters and in the context probably refers to the waters of birth and the womb. The NIV's translation is therefore not out of bounds.

Judah swears by the Lord's name and confesses the God of Israel but they do not swear in truth and righteousness. They are wayward and false. They claim to be citizens of the Lord's city, Jerusalem, but fail to keep his covenant. They say they rely on the Lord or depend upon him yet they do not and often have worshipped the pagan idols which Isaiah has shown them are no gods at all.

48:3-5 - God tells the exiles that he has declared long before the events that have happened to them, namely the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and their exile. He spoke through his prophets about what he was going to do. Isaiah himself is exhibit A of this because Isaiah writes this prophecy in the 700’s even though it applies to the exiles in Babylon in the 500's! God declared his purpose and his judgment upon his people for their idolatry and disobedience long before he brought it to pass. The people ignored him. So suddenly he acted. The people of Judah in their stubbornness and their faithlessness doubted the Lord would ever do what the prophets were telling them. Plus, in Jeremiah's day the official theology of the court and the temple was fueled by false prophets who deceived the people, who kept telling the people and the king that Jerusalem would never fall because the king was of David's line and the Lord's temple was in the city.

The Lord knew however how stubborn and stiff-necked they truly were. He describes their neck as iron and their forehead as bronze, meaning hard and unyielding. When we are deep in our sin God needs to break us down in order to bring us to repentance. His "breaking" of Israel and Judah had to be severe enough to wake them out of their idolatry and corruption of his covenant with them. The Lord was patient but after seven centuries of calling them to repent through his prophets his patience finally ran out. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians became his hammer to shatter their pride and spiritual blindness. It was the most painful thing they had ever suffered and it almost crushed them as a people. But God had a purpose and used Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Habakkuk to communicate his ongoing love and purpose to his people to help them survive the exile. Through these great prophets Judah's faith remained intact and God's people weathered the storm.

Isaiah says God judged them suddenly for their pride and stubbornness because he knew if he did not their idolatry would have attributed the events of the exile to the idols they were worshipping. He had already shown them how futile and lifeless pagan idols were. Now he shows them how they are utterly incapable of both predicting the future and carrying out God's judgment. They are powerless to affect the events of history let alone declare ahead of time what is going to happen! God however not only is powerful enough, he did it! They witnessed it.

48:6-8 - In verse 6 Isaiah shifts his focus to the future yet keeps the same underlying theme of God's greatness and Israel's inability to know or see what is to come. He challenges them to admit that they did not see the calamity of Jerusalem's fall and their exile even though God told them it would happen. This is perhaps an indirect dig at the official theology which the false prophets proclaimed which kept saying Jerusalem would never fall because the king was from David's line and God's temple was in Jerusalem. They divorced God's promises from their
behavior under God's covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. They thought because God had promised David a son to always sit on his throne and that the Lord had sworn his Name would always dwell in the temple that nothing bad would ever happen to Jerusalem. They forgot his more ancient promises and declarations of consequences for disobedience under his covenant. Now he chides the exiles for stubbornly refusing to acknowledge their sin and pride.

Isaiah then reintroduces a theme he declared in chapter 43. The Lord is about to do a "new thing". They have not foreseen it nor have they imagined it because the Lord has hidden it from them. God says these new things are created now and not long ago, meaning they are not something God has stored up but things he is creating as they read them. The word for create is bara, which in Hebrew is related to God creating the universe out of nothing and always has the Lord as its subject. The word implies an ongoing creation of God in history and has profound implications for our understanding of God's actions as Creator. The Deists of the late 18th century believed God had created the universe like a machine. He started it then left it to run on its own, like a watch that was wound up. They did not believe God intervened in his creation he just began it. The whole concept of miracles and God as Lord of History is denied in their viewpoint. But Isaiah says something totally different here. God created the world but he still is active in it today. He is still creating. He truly is Lord of History because it is his history and he is free to intervene or change the course of it as he chooses to carry out his purposes, including those for his people Israel and us his church today. God not only created the universe he continues to create and shape events and things even now. Hebrews 1 speaks of his sustaining the universe by the Word of his power but Isaiah's insight goes even further. He still creates and intervenes today! Miracles become possible and even expected because God is an active Creator in his universe!

God says he has hidden these "new things" from the exiles because in their rebellion they would try and claim they knew about God's plans all along. In fact they have never known nor have they imagined them. Their ears have been closed to God's Word otherwise they might have perceived God's heart and understood his plan. But from the beginning they were rebels and would not listen or obey God. The word for rebel means one in open defiance of the one in authority, in this case the Lord God of Israel! It goes back to Jacob's heritage as a liar and a scoundrel and Israel's rebellion in the wilderness at the golden calf only months after God had brought them out of Egypt. Israel is a sinful, rebellious people yet God chose them for his own anyway, just like he chose us!

48:9-11 - Why even put up with them? Even after Jerusalem has been destroyed and they have spent decades in Babylon in exile they are still tempted to worship the gods of Babylon as if they are stronger. They still deserve the Lord's punishment for their sin! Yet God will not punish them. Why, for the sake of his own Name. The Lord will restrain himself and delay his wrath for his own praise and honor. The word for wrath is a vivid one. It means literally nostril or nose. One has the picture of someone breathing heavily out of their nose in frustration and anger, huffing and puffing. God may be frustrated with them. The exiles may deserve his wrath over their sin and stubbornness yet he will delay pouring out his anger on them. He will not cut them off. The word for cut off is related to the word for making a covenant, literally to cut a covenant. There was always a sacrifice involved when a covenant was made. Thus literally the Hebrew reads to cut a covenant. God will not reverse the covenant he made with Israel by "cutting them off."
The Lord has refined them in the furnace of affliction or suffering. He has tested them through the experience of the destruction of Jerusalem and their exile. Yet he says not as silver which is curious because the metaphor he uses is exactly that, the refining of metal in a furnace. Sometimes the Lord allows suffering into our lives in order to refine us and test us to see if we have matured. We always need to remember when we are going through a painful time that the Lord's purpose with us is to make us more like Jesus not to make us happy. We focus on the pain and our unhappiness so we are tempted to think the Lord no longer loves us and wants to punish us. God however is refining us so we are more like him. The exiles were feeling some of those same feelings and thoughts. They forgot that God had chosen them for his own to reflect him and to carry out his purpose in the world. God was refining them so they were better able to fulfill his design for them.

They deserved his wrath for their sin and idolatry. They received his grace. God explains why in verse 11. He loves them but it is for his own person and Name that he will not destroy them. He gives them grace. God will not allow his Name to be defiled and disgraced. For his own sake he has refined the exiles and will not destroy them but will rescue them. The Lord then shares a profound insight. He will not give his glory to another. God will not share his worship, his honor, his status as the one and only God with another. As he said in Exodus 20 the Lord is a jealous God! The reason this becomes such a significant statement is that in the New Testament the Father seeks to lift up and glorify the Son, Jesus Christ. The Father gives to Jesus the Name above every name in Philippians 2. The Son seeks to glorify the Father and the Father the Son. See John 12 & Revelation 5. The point is God will not share his glory with anyone or anything else yet he readily shares it with his Son, Jesus. Unless Jesus himself is God then the Lord has violated his own word in Isaiah. This is another way the Bible shows us that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the One and Only God who shares his honor and glory with no one else!

48:12-13 - God tells Israel to listen up and hear what he has to say. He declares who he is; the first and the last. The words mean the first and last in a series and can also be interpreted as the beginning and the end. This is precisely how John uses it in Revelation 1 & 22; only in Revelation the Lord Jesus uses those phrases to describe himself. John's message is clear. Jesus is God. Jesus is Yahweh of Hosts!

The Lord is the beginning and end of creation, he alone is the Creator. There was no cosmic battle between the gods and the forces of chaos to create the world. The Lord himself laid its foundation and spread out the heavens like a tent. The Lord formed the sky and all the stars by his own power. He summons or calls them, meaning the stars, and they all stand together. The image is that of a group of people who stand up together because one in authority has come into a room or place. It is similar to a judge entering a courtroom and all stand up when the bailiff says, "All rise!" The stars do that for God because he created them! Isaiah shows Israel that the Lord is the Creator and so has not only the power but the authority to shape history according to his own purposes. He is in charge and they can trust him. He created Israel just as he created the heavens and the earth.

48:14-16 - The overall message of this section is clear but the Hebrew words present some challenges in translation. The ESV tries to be as literal as possible but ends up being clunky in its reading. The NIV fares much better. The other difficulty is that Isaiah changes perspective several times in rapid succession, now speaking to Israel, now to idols, now to Cyrus and even to the Servant who is coming.
God calls Israel to gather together, all of them. This could be just the exiles or all of the people of Israel. He asks them a question: which of the pagan gods, the idols, has foretold "these things"? These things are the Lord's deliverance of the exiles through Cyrus the Great of Persia. The point is none of the idols the Jews have been tempted to worship have been able to foresee what the Lord is going to do. They haven't foretold it long ago like Yahweh has nor have they predicted what is about to happen. This continues Isaiah's persistent theme in these chapters of the impotence of the pagan idols.

Isaiah shifts focus in the second half of verse 14 to Cyrus of Persia. Isaiah has already alluded to Cyrus in chapter 41. Here he calls him the Lord's ally or the one the Lord loves. Cyrus will carry out God's purpose against Babylon. His strength will come against the empire of Babylon and defeat it. God himself has spoken and has called Cyrus! He will succeed in his mission, which from God's perspective is the liberation of his people from exile and allowing them to go home and rebuild his temple in Jerusalem.

God repeats the command to draw near and listen to him as in verse 14. He declares that from the first announcement he has not spoken in secret. The first announcement is probably one of Isaiah's prophecies of restoration or it could be others of the prophets. God has declared what he is going to do and when it finally is fulfilled he will be there. The Lord is reassuring the Jews that he truly is the Lord of History and they have nothing to fear from the events about to unfold. The Babylonians may see chaos and fear all around them with the Persian invasion. Israel needs to see the hand of their God!

The last line of verse 16 is significant and difficult to interpret at the same time. Someone other than the Lord is speaking and says, "And now the Sovereign Lord has sent me with his Spirit." There are several possibilities. This could be Cyrus himself speaking but even though Cyrus is called God's ally and servant he is never mentioned as endowed with the Lord's Spirit. This could be Isaiah himself speaking, affirming his prophetic ministry and the Spirit of God behind it. This is a better possibility. The third possibility is the most intriguing. This is the first time the Servant of God who is coming to save his people speaks. He will speak in the first person in 49:1, 50:4 & 61:1. It means that even as God is sending Cyrus to deal with the Babylonians God is working on something deeper and greater for his people and even for the whole world. He will send his Servant who will save them not from exile but from their sins! This is just a hint, but it is a significant hint nonetheless.

48:17-19 - The Lord contrasts his faithfulness and grace to Israel as their Redeemer with their unfaithfulness for not hearing and obeying his commands. The Lord is the Holy One who teaches them through his Word and his Law how to live. His Word teaches them what is best for them. But Israel continually rejected his Word and Law. They willfully went their own way like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, determining what would be right and wrong for them. God tells them there has been a cost for their disobedience and stubbornness. The Lord had told them the blessings that would have happened to them if they obeyed his Law in Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 28. He summarizes those blessings here by saying their peace (shalom) would have been like a river and their righteousness like the waves of the sea, meaning it would have overflowed in their lives to the nations around them and blessed everyone. Their people, offspring, would have been like the sand on the seashore and God's promise to Abraham would have been fulfilled many times over. Now they are a handful of exiles and many of their fellow Israelites have been killed in the wars and exiles that God used to judge them. Their name would never be cut off, meaning there would have been no threat from the Lord to destroy his
people entirely because of their sin. The exiles have lived under that threat for all their time in Babylon. Sin runs the risk of nullifying everything that God wants to do in us and through us. Fortunately, God's first inclination is towards grace and forgiveness. He is holy and will not allow sin to go unpunished but he is also full of love and grace and in Jesus took the punishment our sins deserved upon himself so he could forgive us. In the chapters ahead Isaiah will reveal one who is to come, the Servant of the Lord, who will accomplish that mission.

48:20-22 - This chapter or section concludes with a warning to the remnant of Judah in exile to flee Babylon. Get out now! Yet this is joyful news because God is going to redeem his people from their captivity. Announce it to the ends of the earth, meaning declare it so that the nations may know what God is doing. The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob. He had sent them into exile to punish them for their sins but now he is saving them.

   Isaiah remembers how the Lord gave Israel water from the rock in the desert. He provided water for the people to drink. See Exodus 17 & Numbers 20. God took care of the people in the desert when they fled Egypt. He will take care of them now when they escape Babylon to return to the Promiseland. See Ezra 1 & 2 for how God cared for the exiles as they returned to Jerusalem.

   Verse 22 closes out the entire section and is in marked contrast to the tone of joy and the promises of verses 20-21. All throughout this chapter Isaiah has contrasted the Jews who are faithful to God or who have repented and those who persist in their idolatry and wickedness. Isaiah declares that there is no peace, *shalom*, for the wicked. He will repeat this line in chapter 57. Faithful people find *shalom*, peace, and the Lord's provision and protection. The wicked, those who worship idols and spurn God's commandments, find no peace. The irony is they worship idols and go their own way morally because they do not believe that God's way works or is the best. They seek their own way of living because they are convinced God cannot help them or that he will restrict their freedom. They think sin will satisfy them but they are living in a delusion. Sin cannot satisfy the heart of human beings that was made for relationship with God. Only the Creator can bring us peace. Paul says in Romans 5 that now we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ because we have been justified by faith. We all sin but it is in repentance and turning back to God that we find peace and security in God. The wicked refuse and so keep searching for something else to fill that relational hole in their hearts and keep sinning thinking wickedness, pleasure or something else will satisfy them. They end up living a lie because they will never find peace apart from the One who made them. Isaiah's declaration serves as a warning to any of the exiles who refuse to repent and turn back to God. And it serves as a warning for people today.

Chapter 49:

49:1-4 - This is the second of the Servant Songs in Isaiah. Various lengths have been given for its outline but it goes at least to verse 6 and the New Bible Commentary has it continuing to verse 13 because of God's description of the salvation the Lord will bring which is related to the Servant's mission. There are also profound prophetic themes related to Jesus and his life and mission.

   The song is addressed to the islands or coastlands and to distant nations far away. That in itself tells us the Servant's mission is more than just to the Jews. The Servant declares that from the womb the Lord called him and knew his name from before his birth. In Luke 1 Gabriel announces to Mary that the child will be named Jesus. God tells Joseph in a dream in Matthew 2
the same thing. God tells Jeremiah in his call in *Jeremiah 1* that he knew him before he was born and called him to be the Lord's prophet. The Lord knows the Servant in the same way and sets him aside for his purpose from conception.

God will make his mouth like a sharp sword which is an image related to the Word of God and the mission of a prophet of the Lord. Paul says the Word of God is a sharp two-edged sword in *Ephesians 6*. *Hebrews 4* declares God's Word is a sharp sword and in John's vision of the Lord Jesus in *Revelation 1* and at his Second Coming in *Revelation 19* Jesus has a sharp sword coming out of his mouth. The Servant will be God's prophet who will declare his powerful Word.

However, he will not be revealed right away. The Lord will hide him and conceal him for a time. Isaiah implies that the exiles may not see the Servant immediately. His mission is for a future time when God chooses to reveal him to Israel and the nations. That fits with Jesus' mission because it would be 540 years before Jesus would be born and another 30 after that until he began his ministry and is revealed as prophet, Servant and Messiah.

God declares his Servant is Israel and in him he will be glorified. The interpretation that makes the most sense of the context is that the Lord's Servant will emerge from the people of Israel. He will save his people but he is not his people personified. All the pronouns in this section are singular and not plural, pointing to an individual. Some have tried to say the Servant is simply Israel personified but that interpretation falls apart in 49:5-6. Isaiah describes part of the Servant's mission will be to save Israel and to bring them back to God. The Servant cannot be Israel personified and be God's instrument to save his people at the same time. Isaiah tells us the Servant comes from Israel but is not Israel. The Lord Jesus is Israel's Messiah and as he says in *Matthew 15* that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. But he is also the Messiah and Savior of the nations and his mission was to bring forgiveness of sins to all who would believe in him. This is what he declares in *Luke 24* after his resurrection when he commissions his disciples and gives them their mission.

God will be glorified or honored through the Servant and his mission. God affirmed Jesus at his baptism as his beloved Son in *Mark 1* and in *John 12* God the Father declares he will glorify his Name through the work of Jesus the Son. Paul says in *Philippians 2* that the Lord Jesus will receive the Name above every name to "the glory of God the Father."

Verse 4 however, appears to express the doubts of the Servant, questioning whether anything he has done has been worth it. This verse begins to hint at the suffering and rejection of the Servant and the appearance of failure in his mission. Isaiah will flesh that theme out further in chapter 53. Yet it is God himself who will reward him for his work and what is due the Servant is in the Lord's hands alone. He will not seek human honor and reward. *Hebrews 12* says for the joy that was set before him Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame. Paul says in *Philippians 2* that because Jesus submitted himself to the Servant's role even to death on the cross that God has exalted him far above every name or power in heaven and earth.

49:5-7 - The Lord speaks to his Servant directly. He formed him in the womb to be his Servant and gave him his mission. The Servant's divine purpose is to bring Israel back to God, to gather them to himself. The word for gather is frequently used to describe the harvest. Jesus said to his disciples in *Luke 10* that the harvest was plentiful but the laborers were few. He then sent out the 72 in mission to preach the gospel.

The Servant says he is honored in the eyes of the Lord and the Lord has become his strength. At his baptism in *Mark 1* and his Transfiguration in *Mark 9* Jesus was affirmed by the
Father as his Beloved Son. The world may despise him but the Lord loves him and will exalt him. See Philippians 2.

God says it is too small a thing or too trivial a thing that his Servant should restore the tribes of Israel to God, the ones God has kept safe or preserved, meaning the exiles or the remnant of Israel. God will also give the Servant to be a light to the Gentiles. The word for “make you” means to give as a gift. The Servant will be God's gift to the human race. The word for salvation is yeshua, which means Savior or salvation and is Jesus' name in Hebrew, Joshua. Simeon refers to this passage when he prophesies over Jesus at the temple when Mary and Joseph bring him to be circumcised in Luke 2. Paul uses this verse in his sermon to the Greeks and Jews who had gathered to hear him and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13. Paul also uses the concept in the theme verse to Romans in Romans 1:16-17. Salvation through the Lord Jesus is given first to the Jews and then the Gentiles for Jesus is the Savior of all! Jesus himself commanded his disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth in Acts 1:8.

The Lord continues to address his Servant in verse 7; however the tone of this verse gets darker and hints at rejection and suffering for the Lord's Servant. God restates the frequent titles for himself that Isaiah uses consistently throughout his prophecy. He is the Redeemer of Israel and the Holy One. He addresses his Servant and declares that he will be deeply despised and abhorred by the nation. Since the word for nation is singular in this context it seems likely Isaiah is referring to the nation of Israel. God is saying his Servant will be hated by the very people he is meant to save! This is born out in the Gospels in the opposition of the Jewish leaders who hand over Jesus to the Romans to be crucified.

The Lord's Servant is the servant of rulers. This is a curious phrase and implies that the Servant would perhaps be a member of a royal court or a servant in a royal court. It could also simply mean he is subject to rulers and under their authority. From a prophetic standpoint this makes the most sense, as Jesus was subject to the rule of Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate who eventually condemned him to death.

The Servant might be the servant of rulers and his people hate him but he will one day be exalted above them all. Kings will bow down before him because the Lord is faithful to his Servant and will exalt him before the Gentiles and before Israel his people. Paul uses this concept in his hymn to Jesus in Philippians 2. The Lord Jesus takes on the form of a servant and becomes obedient to God even to death on a cross. Therefore God raises him up from death and exalts him above every other name or power on earth so that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ, the Servant of God, is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. God is faithful!

49:8-13 - The rest of chapter 49 deals with the return of the exiles and captives of Israel to the Promiseland. It is clear from these verses that Isaiah sees not just the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon but the whole people of Israel from all the places to which they have been scattered. This would include the northern tribes of Israel that had been dispersed in the Assyrian conquest. History sees them as "the ten lost tribes of Israel" but the Lord knows exactly where they are and who they are. This section of Isaiah agrees with the visions of Ezekiel 36-40 where Ezekiel sees a reunited Israel not just a restored Judah.

The pronouns in verse 8 are all singular and there is some confusion as to whom the Lord is speaking. Is he still speaking to his Servant or to all of Israel as his people? In a time of favor or good will the Lord will answer. In the day of salvation he will help them. Paul quotes this
verse in 2 Corinthians 6:2 as fulfilled to declare that now is the time of salvation in Jesus Christ which the Lord spoke of in Isaiah 49. God has guarded or kept his Servant and he will make him or give him as a covenant to his people. Jesus said he came to establish the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 at the Last Supper in Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11. Isaiah says this covenant will restore the land that has been made desolate. The inheritances of the Lord's people that have been stripped from them and taken from them will be re-established. This was partially fulfilled in the return of the exiles but its ultimate fulfillment awaits the return of the Lord Jesus and his Kingdom.

The Lord will call to those who have been in prison and in darkness to come out and be free. King Jehoiachin was put in prison by Nebuchadnezzar in 597. He was freed after 37 years in 560 by Evil-Merodach, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, and sat at the king's table for the rest of his life. He never returned to Judah. The exiles might have viewed the king's release as a sign that the Lord was fulfilling his Word through Isaiah. Yet Isaiah is speaking of something much greater and deeper. He is speaking of the release and freedom of his people from sin and oppression.

Isaiah describes God caring for his people as they journey home, back to Jerusalem. He will feed them and give them water in the desert as he did when they escaped from Egypt during the Exodus. Isaiah frequently describes the return of the exiles as a new exodus. The miracle of the return will be as great as the escape from slavery. The exiles have little power and few resources yet the Lord will protect them and guide them. They have a long journey home yet God will watch over them. The image is of a shepherd caring for his sheep. Even on barren hills where there is no food, they will find pasture. Where there are no paths through the mountains the Lord will make one. They will not hunger or thirst nor will the sun burn them or the desert wind harm them. These are all images of extraordinary protection because the Lord will have compassion on his people to save them and not to judge them. Isaiah is declaring the time of judgment over. Now is the time of the Lord's salvation.

His people will come from afar, not just from Babylon, but from north, west and from Aswan, in southern Egypt. The phrase "from Aswan" is unclear, but the NIV uses the Dead Sea Scrolls. The ESV uses the Masoretic Text which reads, "from the land of Syene" which is otherwise unknown. The picture is of God's people who have been scattered all over the Mediterranean world and not just Babylon. This includes Assyria and Armenia, Greece and the islands around Asia Minor plus Egypt to the borders of the Sudan (Aswan). Isaiah is describing the return of all of Israel not just the exiles of Judah in Babylon.

Verse 13 is a song of praise celebrating what God will do as he rescues his people. Isaiah calls heaven and earth to sing and rejoice. He calls the mountains to burst into song because the Lord has rescued his people. The words mean to shout with joy or exult with shrieks of joy and celebration. I think of the celebration of the crowd at a Seahawks game when the Seahawks score a touchdown or make a great play. People shout and celebrate at the top of their lungs. They jump up and down with enthusiasm. That is what Isaiah invites heaven and earth to do.

The reason is because the Lord will comfort his people, his afflicted ones. He will have compassion on those who have been beaten down by the fall of Jerusalem and the exile. Isaiah declares that the tide has turned. God is finished punishing Judah for her sins. Now he is going to bring them home. This echoes the opening words of chapter 40. Tell Judah that she has received from the Lord double for all her sins. Now God will comfort them and heal them. He will bring them home!
49:14-18 - Verse 14 expresses the Jews' doubts and questions about God's love for them. Jerusalem was in ruins and they were in exile in Babylon. God had forgotten them and abandoned them. What else were they to think? But the Lord reminds them of his love. Isaiah uses the Hebrew word for forget four times in verses 14-15. The word does not mean forget as in not remember a set of facts or information. Rather there is a relational component to the word. It implies abandonment, walking away from someone, and not caring anymore whether they live or die. Judah thinks God has forgotten them! The Lord asks can a mother forget her infant son who nurses at her breast? The obvious answer is no, of course not for her motherly instincts are too strong. She will have compassion on the child she has borne. God then says, even if a mother could abandon and forget her baby I will not forget you! God has engraved Jerusalem on the palm of his hands. The word normally means to carve in stone. Here it refers to someone marking or even tattooing something on their palm. Jerusalem is ever in God's thoughts!

Isaiah then describes a remarkable process. Jerusalem's sons hasten back to her while the ones who destroyed her and tore her down leave. The sons of Jerusalem refer to the exiles, while those who laid waste to her are the Babylonians. Soon the exiles will return and rebuild the Lord's temple and the walls of the city itself. Cyrus will issue his decree in 538 and Zerubbabel will lead the exiles home! Isaiah tells the exiles to lift up their eyes. Look up because all Jerusalem's sons are gathering together. They are coming to Jerusalem to restore her. God then says Jerusalem will wear them like a necklace a bride wears at her wedding. John in Revelation 21 describes the New Jerusalem prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The necklace brides wore in Hebrew weddings often represented their dowry or personal wealth they brought to the marriage. Isaiah describes Jerusalem as wearing her children as her wedding necklace. There were only a few exiles that came home with Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple. The New Jerusalem of Revelation is filled with a multitude beyond count from every tribe, language and people of the world; the church! Isaiah's vision points to God's ultimate reality for his people. They will be with him forever in the New Jerusalem!

49:19-21 - Isaiah continues to describe a renewed Israel. They were ruined and destroyed by the Babylonians and sent into exile. Yet a day will soon come when the land will be too small for all the people! Their captors, the Babylonians, will be far away, implying the Jews will be back in Jerusalem and no longer in Babylon. In fact the children born in their captivity, their bereavement, will say to their parents, this place is too small for us, give us more land! The word translated too small means literally to be bound up, or restricted. The exiles will even wonder where all these children have come from! They were barren and grieving the loss of their children. They were alone, but now their children are complaining about too little land in which to live!

Isaiah's picture points to God restoring the people not just the land. The Lord will make them fruitful again. Many had been killed during Jerusalem's fall and their subsequent exile to Babylon. The Lord will replace them with new children, so much so the land will be too small! God had promised Abraham descendants like the sand on the seashore. The exiles had seen their people almost wiped out. Now God would renew his promise and remake his people. From an historical standpoint the people did return under Zerubbabel in 538 to rebuild the temple. Ezra and Nehemiah led more exiles home a century later. However, their population was small compared to the peoples around them. Only Jerusalem and its immediate territory were resettled. The New Testament sees Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled in the church of Jesus Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles have been grafted into Israel by faith in the Messiah Jesus.
See Romans 11. John in Revelation 7 sees a multitude beyond count from every nation, tribe and people. God's people will be renewed not by natural birth but by being born from above, being born again in Jesus Christ!

49:22-23 - God's renewal of his people will be so great that it will be like a complete reversal of fortune. The circumstances they have experienced in conquest and exile will be completely reversed. This will be all God's doing. He will call or beckon to the Gentiles to come to him. He will lift up his standard or battle standard to the nations, just as Messiah will do to call the Gentiles to himself in chapter 11. They will come. In fact rather than send the Jews into exile forcing them to march away from their homes a long distance, the Gentiles will bring the sons and daughters of Israel home again. They will carry the young as they do their own children. Kings, who before attacked the people and enslaved them, seeing them as a conquered people inferior to their own nation, they will treat the Jews like their own children. They will be foster fathers to the Jews. Queens will be like their nursing mothers, like a wet nurse for the infants of Israel. These images are upside down with the history of the Jews.

The Gentiles will come and bow down and submit themselves to the Jews even to licking the dust at their feet. The image is one of complete surrender. When this happens and God's people are not a nation to be conquered but a people to be honored by the nations of the world, then they will know that the Lord is God and those who hope in him will never be disappointed. They will not be put to shame. The word for hope or wait is the same word Isaiah used in chapter 40 when he said those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. All of this God will do for his people. It will be completely by his grace from him and for them.

49:24-26 - The Jews may have a hard time believing what Isaiah says to them that Gentile kings and queens will be like parents to them and bow down to them. So the Lord asks them a rhetorical question. When warriors have conquered a city can someone in the city take back the plunder they have captured? When a fierce king has captured a city can someone rescue the captives that king has taken? The obvious answer is no! The conquered people are in no position to fight back. That was the Jews. Babylon had conquered them and they had no strength to retake Jerusalem or free their exiles.

God says that will all change because of what he is about to do. The captives of the warriors will be rescued and the plunder retrieved from their conquerors. The impossible will become possible because of what the Lord will do! God says he will contend with those who contend against you and he will save their children. This echoes language from God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12. God will bless those who bless Abraham's descendants and curse those who curse them. He will keep his promises to them.

He will save their children because he is their Redeemer. The exiles had to wonder what was going to happen to their children. Would they ever be able to live in the Promiseland? Would they see Jerusalem or return to it? Would they even live so that the people of Israel would continue? God says yes they will because he will save them.

As for their oppressors, those who conquered them, namely the Babylonians, God will cause them to eat their own flesh and become drunk on their own blood. This is a picture of famine due to a siege, just as those in Jerusalem turned to cannibalism in order to survive the starvation in the city when the Babylonians attacked. It is also a sign of supernatural intervention on God's behalf, because cannibalism was universally condemned in the ancient Middle East. God will cause Israel's enemies to defile themselves!
When this comes about, when God saves his people then all the nations, literally all flesh, will know that the Lord is Israel's Savior and Redeemer. The Mighty One of Jacob is the one true God! God's actions in history to save his people from their exile and captivity will be a sign, not only to Israel that he is God, but to all the nations as well. Isaiah once again relates God's actions to not just Israel but to all the peoples of the world. What happens to Israel affects the nations and concerns them intimately!

Chapter 50:
50:1-3 - One of the chief complaints or doubts of the exiles was that God had abandoned them and they were no longer his people. Part of that complaint was a refusal to accept responsibility for their own sins and violation of God's covenant with them. Isaiah answers those complaints in these verses.

God asks the exiles where is there certificate of divorce. He acknowledges their parents' generation was the one sent into exile by saying "your mother". Many of the exiles had been born in Babylon and had never seen Jerusalem yet they longed to go back because it was their home. God says there is no evidence that he has divorced the Jewish people. There is no certificate canceling their marriage. In a backwards way God acknowledges his relationship with Israel was like a marriage. See Hosea 1 and Jeremiah 31 and Ephesians 5 in the New Testament. In both the Old and New Testaments God describes his relationship with his people as a marriage. He is their husband and they are his wife. Isaiah asks them if God has divorced them where is their legal certificate of divorce. Simply feeling like God has abandoned them does not qualify. God had made his covenant with Israel in written form in his Word. Isaiah rightly notes that there is no written certificate that the covenant is broken.

Isaiah then uses another metaphor. If the covenant is broken to whom did the Lord sell them into slavery? Which of the Lord's creditors does he owe money and so had to sell Israel to pay off his debt? The notion is of course ludicrous because God owes no one anything. He is the Creator to whom everyone owes life and breath!

Why then was Judah sent into exile? It was her own sin and rebellion that was the cause of God's judgment against them. Isaiah uses the language of "your mother" which points to their parents' generation but also "your sins" which points to their own. No one was innocent. None of the exiles are without fault. All have sinned and God was fully justified to destroy Jerusalem and send them to Babylon. His punishment for their sin is just. Yet his covenant with them still stands. In fact if anyone has abandoned the covenant it is Israel! This is what Jeremiah 31 says; it was Israel that broke the old covenant not God.

God asks if I was the one who abandoned you why when I called to you did no one answer? Why when I sent my prophets to you to call you back to me did not one come? If you are so faithful why didn't you respond? Judah didn't respond because Judah was unfaithful. That is Isaiah's point!

Some of the exiles in their depression and doubts had begun to suspect that Yahweh was impotent to do anything about their predicament. The gods of Babylon were stronger than the Lord God of Israel, the Creator and Holy One! Isaiah expresses those doubts in the last half of verse 2. God asks rhetorically if his hand is too short or too weak to bring them back. Perhaps he lacks the strength to act against the great empire of Babylon. The words meaning "too short" in Hebrew are a repeat of the verb meaning to be short. It literally reads "was my arm short short?"

The obvious answer to the Lord's question is of course not. Isaiah has spent considerable time in this whole second section of his prophecy in showing Judah how great and powerful the
Lord is. He is the Creator and has the power to dry up the sea and the rivers and leave the fish rotting in the sun if he so chooses. He can cloth the heavens in blackness and make the sky dark like sackcloth. This is probably a picture of a Middle Eastern thunderstorm coming from the Mediterranean blowing over the mountains of Judah down to the Jordan Valley. In the rainy season these storms are cloudbursts which fill the cisterns of those who live in the hill country and deserts of Judah. God is the Almighty and there is no question whether he has the power to rescue the exiles. They need to lay aside their doubts and questions, acknowledge their sin and rebellion and repent!

50:4-6 - Verses 4-9 are the third Servant Song in Isaiah. The first song emphasized the gentleness of the Servant in his mission; the second his mission to restore Israel and be a light to the Gentiles despite people's rejection. Here in the third song the emphasis is on his faithfulness to do God's will in the midst of suffering and rejection. The purpose of his suffering is not yet explained but will be in chapter 53.

The song begins with a different title for God that is out of the ordinary for Isaiah. He uses Adonai Yahweh, Lord God, to emphasize God's sovereignty and authority. God has given the Servant "an instructed tongue". This is a difficult phrase. The ESV reads, "the tongue of those who are taught." The NASB reads "the tongue of disciples" which is perhaps the most literal reading. The NLT reads "given me his words of wisdom." The NRSV reads "the tongue of a teacher". Literally the Hebrew words are "the tongue of disciples" or "the speech of learners." Isaiah implies that the Servant has learned wisdom and speech from God and will be himself a teacher of God's wisdom. The image is of the Servant being a channel or conduit of God's wisdom to the people.

There is a purpose to the speech or teaching of the Servant. God has given him the knowledge of how to help or sustain those who are weary and beaten down. In Isaiah's context the exiles certainly qualified! Jesus in Matthew 11:28 fulfills Isaiah's words when he says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." The Servant's words have power to heal and give strength to those who have none!

Morning by morning, or every morning God wakes him up or rouses him to listen to the Lord and teach him. The words imply a daily process or learning and obedience by the Servant with God. Hebrews 5:8 says even though Jesus was the Son he learned obedience through suffering. Isaiah expresses the mystery of the eternal Son who became human and learned to follow God as a human. He had the character of God yet was also fully a man and as a man chose day by day to follow God. Isaiah's words also imply a close personal intimacy between the Servant and God, a close communication which results in the Servant being exactly in tune with God's Word and will.

The Lord opened his ears, meaning taught him his will and the Servant did not rebel against it. In fact he did not hesitate to do what the Lord wanted him to do in order to fulfill his mission. That meant he submitted to those who beat him. He offered his cheeks to those who would pull out his beard. This was a way of greatly insulting someone and publicly shaming and humiliating them. In the Middle East one would avoid shame at all costs but the Servant surrendered himself to it. He did not turn away from people who spit on him and shamed and disgraced him. The Lord Jesus showed he was the Servant of the Lord during his trial and crucifixion. The Jewish and Roman guards hit him, mocked him, spit on him and shamed him yet he did not turn away or resist. He submitted to their cruel torture. See Mark 14, Matthew 27, Luke 22 & John 19. It is difficult for me to understand how anyone reading this prophecy and
then reading the gospel accounts of the crucifixion can reject Jesus as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. He is the Servant of God! He suffers in obedience to the Lord and the mission he has given him. As yet Isaiah has not explained the reason for his humiliation and suffering. He has shown the Servant will redeem Israel and bring the Gentiles to God but has not directly linked his suffering to that larger mission. That will change in chapter 53.

50:7-9 - The Servant's enemies may beat him and insult him but he knows the Lord will vindicate him against his accusers. The Lord God (Adonai Yahweh) helps him, meaning he comes to his aid. The root of the word is the same as in Genesis 2:18 where God said he would make a helper fit for Adam because it was not good he should be alone. The Servant knows the Lord is on his side therefore he will not be disgraced. It may seem like it but he knows it is his relationship with God that defines him and not what people say about him or even how they act towards him. Ultimately what God says about him matters.

Therefore he has "set my face like flint". The word for flint refers to a hard quartz-like rock that does not crack. The Servant hardens his will to accept the attacks, insults and beatings of his enemies. He knows ultimately he will not be put to shame because God will vindicate him. Hebrews 12 says for the joy that was put before him (the resurrection) Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame. Now he is seated at God's right hand on high.

God is near him, meaning near relationally not just spatially. He is close by and will help the Servant and vindicate him which means the Lord will acquit the Servant of all the charges against him. He will see that he is shown to be not guilty.

The Servant then asks if God is so near to him who then will dare bring any charges against him? Let us face one another. Let us stand before the Lord and you bring your charges against me. That is the Servant's message. He asks who his accuser is and the word for accuser is baal, meaning lord or owner. Isaiah makes a subtle point; the Servant is Yahweh's. No one else has a claim of ownership or lordship over him. So who would be foolish enough to bring him before the judgment seat of Yahweh himself and dare accuse him of some shameful and sinful act? The Sovereign Lord helps me the Servant says, once again using Adonai Yahweh in Hebrew and repeating the verb to help. Who will declare the Servant guilty? Anyone who tries will wear out like a moth-eaten garment. It is a futile endeavor.

Paul uses Isaiah's words about the Servant to reinforce Christ's justifying work in us and God's love for us in Romans 8. If God is for us then who can be against us? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? Christ Jesus, who died, who rose again, who is at God's right hand interceding for us? No in all these things we are more than conquerors through the one who loved us. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! The Servant knew it and we should believe it and know it as well!

Isaiah shows us how the Servant's faith in Yahweh and God's help and vindication enables him to endure the suffering that his enemies will inflict upon him. He knows God is his ultimate judge and it is what God says about him that matters in the end. God will vindicate him and his suffering will not be in vain.

50:10-11 - These verses form a response to the third Servant Song. Isaiah calls those in Israel who do not know the Lord or fear him to turn to the Lord and trust in him. Even more he calls them to obey, literally hear, the voice of the Lord's Servant. Those who walk in darkness who have no light he invites to rely upon God and to trust in the one who gives light. Those who walk in darkness are like those in Galilee in Isaiah 9 upon whom the light of the Messiah will shine.
Now it will be the light or the voice of the Servant. He will speak and they will hear and obey. Isaiah is speaking to the people of Israel here and the Servant is definitely an individual. This cannot be Israel personified as some rabbis argue because the Servant is separate from Israel!

Verse 11 is a profound statement about the dangers of following one's own way morally. Isaiah warns those who light their own torches and walk by their light that they will receive only pain from abandoning the Lord and his Servant. In the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 Eve and Adam chose to write their own morality apart from God and it resulted in sin and death. God is the only true source of light and righteousness. When we try and light our own way it will only bring us pain. Isaiah indicted the moral relativism of our day and shows how it is bankrupt and will result in people's destruction not their freedom. The light they think they are walking by is false and will only lead them down into more darkness. It will destroy them because their morality is separate from the one who made them and who has the absolute right to set what is light and darkness, right and wrong for the human race. Our culture is sowing the seeds of its own destruction!

Chapter 51:
51:1-3 - The first part of this chapter from verses 1-8 are three songs or poems which give three reasons to have faith in the Lord. They are invitations from the Lord to his people through Isaiah. The first and the third song begin with the verb to listen or hear (shema in Hebrew). The second begins with a different verb which also means to listen or pay attention and is a synonym.

The first song is in verses 1-3. The Lord invites those who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord to listen to him. Jesus in Matthew 5 in the Beatitudes said those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be blessed because they will be satisfied. Here the Lord invites his people to consider the rock from which they were hewn, Abraham their father and Sarah their mother. The Lord is often called the Rock of Israel in Isaiah; here Abraham is the little rock, their father. He was but one when God called him yet out of him came many because God blessed him. From the one couple, Abraham and Sarah came all the people of Israel. Who would have believed it when God called them?

The Lord comforts Zion and will have compassion on her ruins or waste places. The Lord is the God who renews his people. He will make Judah's wilderness like the Garden of Eden. This recalls Isaiah's vision in chapter 35 about the desert being renewed when the Messiah comes and the people coming to Zion with singing and joy. Isaiah uses the same image here in chapter 51. Where now Jerusalem is a deserted ruin, there will come a day when joy, celebration and singing will be found in her. The people will rejoice and give thanks because of what God has done.

51:4-6 - The second invitation to faith is in verses 4-6. It too begins with an invitation to listen or pay attention. The Lord calls his people to "pay attention and listen up". His Law will go out from him and his justice will become a light to the nations. Law in Hebrew is torah. God's Law or teaching and his justice are not only for his people but also for all peoples. It is light because it is truth!

It is coming soon. God's righteousness draws near speedily. God's arm, literally arms, will bring justice to the nations. The New Testament declares that the Lord Jesus fulfills Isaiah's declaration. By his cross and resurrection he has reconciled us to God and God's justice against human sin is satisfied. From a strictly historical perspective it was over 500 years until Jesus came on the scene, but from God's perspective it is soon!
Isaiah calls Israel to look up at the heavens and down at the earth. We normally think these things as permanent because they are always here. Yet the heavens will vanish like smoke. They will dissipate and be no more. The earth will wear out like an old garment that is no longer useful. Isaiah tells us that this creation has an expiration date. It will eventually wear out. Paul says in Romans 8 this creation is marred by sin and waits longingly for the revealing of the children of God, the resurrected people of God. John tells us in Revelation 21-22 that God intends to re-create the heavens and the earth so that all the consequences of sin and death will be wiped out. Isaiah speaks of this in Isaiah 65. Now the inhabitants of the earth die or drop like flies or gnats. We have a limited lifespan because of sin. But in God's time of salvation we will have eternal life. It will last forever and his righteousness will never fail! The exiles wondered when God would rescue them and would it last. Isaiah assures them that when God's salvation comes it will be forever. His salvation will be beyond the reach of historical events because it will be from the Lord! The Lord Jesus now reigns from heaven at God's right hand and nothing in this creation can separate us from his love. See Romans 8.

51:7-8 - The third stanza of this section also begins with "Hear me", from the Hebrew verb shema. God speaks to his faithful people, those who know his righteousness and have his Law in their hearts. He tells them not to be afraid of the reproach of men, meaning their attempts to shame and dishonor you. Don't be afraid of their insults and taunts. Why, because they are mortal. Eventually they will all die and the moths will eat them up like old clothes and the worms will devour them. They will not last! As for the Lord's righteousness that they pursue and love, it will last forever! God's salvation is permanent and lasts from generation to generation. In other words Isaiah is telling the exiles the reproach of the Babylonians and the pagans around them is only temporary. Bear it because the Lord's salvation is eternal. Long after the pagans will be devoured by worms the people of Israel who delight in God's Law will live. Isaiah doesn't directly say they will live forever, but the implication is the Lord's salvation will be forever and those who know him will live forever. This is eternal life!

51:9-11 - These verses begin a section of Isaiah that continues all the way through 52:12. It is tied together with four calls to the Lord and the Jewish exiles to get ready to leave, three of which begin with the verb awake, awake or rouse yourself in 51:9, 51:17 & 52:1. The final call is in 52:11 and uses the verb depart, depart. In other words the time for preparation is over and the time for leaving Babylon and returning to Jerusalem has come. This section uses the image of a second exodus and sets up the fourth Servant Song in 52:13-53:12 which will outline the price to be paid by the Servant to free Israel from her bondage. Isaiah will point to the deeper truth of the bondage of human sin and the price to be paid to bring forgiveness to all people.

Awake, awake is the command given to the "arm of the Lord!" Interestingly all the nouns and verbs in this verse are feminine. The noun for arm of the Lord is feminine. The arm of the Lord is asked to dress itself with strength. Isaiah is calling on God to prepare himself for a great work of power and grace. This work of the Lord's will be like what he did in the past when he freed his people from Egypt and defeated Pharaoh's chariots at the Red Sea. The Lord cut Rahab to pieces and pierced or wounded the dragon or sea monster, in Hebrew tanin, possibly the crocodile. Rahab is another name for Egypt in the prophets, see Isaiah 30:7, and sometimes represents the dragon of chaos in ancient Near Eastern myths. The point is God wounded it severely so that his people could go free. Isaiah will use the same verb, to pierce or wound in 53:5 to describe the piercing of the Servant for our sins.
The Lord was the one who dried up the Red Sea so his people could cross on dry ground. He made a road in the depths of the sea so that his people, the redeemed could cross over. This was all the Lord's doing and Isaiah is calling on that same Lord to come now and rescue his people from their exile in Babylon.

Verse 11 is a direct quote of Isaiah 35:10, the final vision of the first part of Isaiah. Isaiah foresees a great miracle, the desert blooming and a highway of holiness leading to Zion, Jerusalem. God's people will be on it and they will return and know joy and gladness in the presence of the Lord because he will dwell with his people. John uses that same picture in Revelation 21-22 to describe the New Jerusalem. By quoting something he had written in the first part of his work Isaiah ties together this second section of his prophecy with the first. He shows they are not separate works but one book in two parts speaking to two different times and situations.

51:12-16 - The message of this section is straightforward. The exiles have nothing to fear because the Lord is about to rescue them. They need not fear any man, especially those who oppress them because all men are mortal and will die. But the Lord is the Almighty one who made heaven and earth. He will soon release them from their prison. He has put his words in their mouth to testify to the nations. The Lord shelters or hides Israel in the shadow of his hand and says to them that they are his people. Isaiah's message is clear. Don't be afraid the Lord is about to rescue you!

What makes this section difficult to interpret are the changes in the pronouns throughout. In verse 12 Isaiah says God comforts you plural. Then asks why are you afraid of mortal man, where the you is feminine singular! Yet the first verb in verse 13, to forget, is masculine singular as are the rest of the pronouns of the passage and the verbs when they refer to Israel! In the larger context of the passage Isaiah is referring to Israel personified as a singular person. However, I cannot explain the shift from masculine plural, to feminine singular to masculine singular in the passage. Isaiah has his reasons and fortunately the pronoun shifts do not change his message. God will rescue his people and they don't need to be afraid any longer of those who have captured them and oppressed them.

51:17-20 - Verse 17 begins the second section that starts with the cry, "Awake, awake!" This time it is given to Jerusalem. In fact all the pronouns and verbs in this section are first or second person feminine singular. The city personifies the people of Israel.

Jerusalem has drunk the cup of the Lord's wrath down to the dregs, or the bottom of the cup. It is a goblet that makes people stagger as if they were drunk. The word for wrath literally means venom, like snake venom that can kill. It can also mean wrath and anger over sin, specifically God's wrath and anger.

Jerusalem has suffered. In fact there is no one to lead them out of the calamity she has experienced. Jeremiah expressed his sorrow at the fall of the city in Lamentations. Isaiah gives us insight into the double disaster that occurred. Not only did Judah's enemies attack and destroy the city, but during that time Judah needed strong leaders to guide the people in the worst crisis they had ever faced, yet the only leaders they had were incompetent and weak. This is borne out by Jeremiah and II Kings. It almost seemed as if the last kings of Judah were bent on destroying the country and kept rebelling against the Babylonians when it was suicide to do so.

Isaiah asks, who can console the city? She has experienced ruin, destruction, sword and famine. Then he paints a horrible picture of the aftermath of God's judgment. Her streets are
littered with the dead. The city is like an antelope caught in a hunter's net. It struggles to get out but it is hopelessly entangled. It is all a sign of the wrath and rebuke of the Lord God over their continual rebellion and sin.

51:21-23 - This “awake” section turns at verse 21. It has described the discipline of the Lord to his people. God has given them the cup of his wrath to drink and they have paid the price for their disobedience and rebellion; the destruction of their city. As in verses 17-20 the pronouns in verses 21-23 continue to be feminine singular. Jerusalem is personified as God's people, Israel.

God tells Jerusalem the time for her judgment has passed. The Lord himself, the Lord who defends his people, will take away the cup of his wrath towards them. The word for defend means one who contends in a lawsuit, or a defense attorney! Romans 8 says Jesus is our defender before the throne of God and he never loses a case!!

God says Jerusalem shall never again drink the cup of the Lord's wrath. In fact God will put it in the hands of their oppressors or tormentors, namely the Babylonians. He will give it to those who have made the Jews bow down to them and humiliate them, who they allowed to walk over them. His wrath is about to pour out on Babylon just as it was poured out on Assyria.

From an historical perspective, Jerusalem was not conquered and destroyed again until the Romans took the city and tore down Herod's temple in 70 AD. Was Isaiah wrong to say it would never be judged again? From a theological viewpoint one could say under the Old Covenant Isaiah was correct. Jerusalem would never be destroyed again and lasted intact all the way into Jesus' day and beyond. However, if one looks at it from the standpoint of the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God in the New Covenant, then Jerusalem once again drank the cup of God's wrath because she refused to accept as Messiah the one who drank the ultimate cup of God's wrath against human sin as her Servant and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 52:
52:1-2 - Isaiah or the Lord gives the third and final call to awake in this whole section going back to 51:9. In the first "awake" the people called on the Lord's mighty arm to wake up and save them. The second awake was given to Jerusalem to tell her that her judgment from the Lord was finished and she would no longer have to drink the cup of God's wrath. In fact he would give it to her enemies to drink. Here Isaiah speaks or more likely God speaks and tells Jerusalem to wake up. The pronouns continue to be feminine singular through verse 2. Isaiah has already shown only the Lord's strength and grace can save Jerusalem from her judgment and captivity. Yet here God tells the city to put on her own strength and garments of splendor. The irony is she had neither. When this part of Isaiah was given to the exiles Jerusalem was in ruins and the temple of the Lord was a smoking hulk. God tells her to shake the dust off and get up. “Be seated” implies sitting as an elder or leader in the city gates. There were no more city gates. All her elders were either in exile or dead! Is God mocking Jerusalem? I don’t think so. I think he is telling them the Lord will give her the strength to do what she cannot do on her own. That is a theme that is repeated again and again in the Bible. God gives us through faith the strength to obey him and be transformed. It is not of our doing but a gift of his grace. By his grace Jerusalem will be restored and rebuilt.

Furthermore the uncircumcised and defiled or unclean will never again enter the city. I think God is referring to her Gentile conquerors, the Babylonians. I don't think Isaiah is implying that a Gentile will never enter Jerusalem again, especially when you consider other passages in
Isaiah that speak of the Jews and Jerusalem being a light to the Gentiles to attract them to God. See Isaiah 49.

God tells Jerusalem to free herself from the chains around her neck, something she was too weak to do on her own, but God will give her the strength to do it! She has been a captive. She will go free and return to the city, the "holy city."

52:3-6 - This marks the beginning of a new section that is indicated by a change in the pronouns. In these verses they are masculine plural and not feminine singular. God is speaking to his people directly and not personified as the city of Jerusalem.

God says you were sold for nothing and will be redeemed without money. There was no transaction between the Lord and Babylon or any other nation or pagan god. God did not make a deal to have his people taken into exile. He used Babylon in his sovereignty to carry out his justice against his people. The same will be true of his redemption of them when he brings them back to the land. There will be no quid pro quo with a pagan land. God owes no one anything for the freedom of his people. He will simply accomplish it! Peter in 1 Peter 1 will give new meaning to bought without money when he will declare that we were bought with a price not with silver of gold but with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, a lamb without blemish. The price will be paid but in blood, the Servant's blood not money. Isaiah will expand on that idea in the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Several times in their history Israel had been oppressed. They went down to Egypt and lived as aliens and strangers there and the Egyptians oppressed them so that God had to rescue them from slavery in the exodus. Isaiah says lately the Assyrians have oppressed them. That was happening when Isaiah wrote his prophecy in the 700's. The north kingdom was destroyed by Assyria and they invaded Judah and destroyed many of her cities while attacking Jerusalem. In God's sight it is "lately". To the exiles in Babylon it was a century and a half before.

Yet now God sees another time his people have been taken away for nothing; the exile in Babylon. Once again the Lord has used the Babylonian captivity to discipline his people for violating his covenant. What has been their response? Their rulers continue to mock God, or an alternative translation says wail; the idea being complain and lament. Isaiah observes that all day long the Lord's name is constantly blasphemed or despised. The implication is that for the leaders and rulers of Judah the exile has not taught them anything! Paul uses this verse in Romans 2 to indict the Jews who have God's Law and show how that even with the Law they continue to sin.

The Lord says there is a day coming when his people will know his Name. They will know when he redeems them from captivity that it was the Lord alone who foretold it and did it. He used Babylon and other pagan powers like Persia to accomplish his purposes but they are merely tools in his hands. The Lord alone will accomplish their redemption and they will know it! He will show himself to his people once again!

52:7-10 - In the preceding verses God has demonstrated the unworthiness of his people to be saved. They deserved his discipline. The passage turns at verse 7. God in his grace and love for the Jews will save his people despite their sins. They will hear the message of salvation and they will see the mighty arm of the Lord to save them. The Lord's salvation will be so evident that all the nations will see it as well and marvel.

The first step in God's salvation is to send a messenger to announce its coming. How beautiful it will be! He will come and bring good news over the mountains. I think of the sight of
Jerusalem coming over the Mount of Olives. Jesus came over that same mount down into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He came riding on a donkey to symbolize peace in fulfillment of Zechariah 9. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10 to emphasize that the preachers of the gospel are sent by God into the world to proclaim his good news.

The messenger will be seen by the watchmen on the wall and they will hear him proclaim good news of peace-shalom, happiness, literally good, and salvation. The word in Hebrew for salvation or Savior is yeshuah, the Hebrew form of Jesus. Is this coincidental? I don't think so. In context Isaiah means salvation for the exiles but from a New Testament perspective he points directly to the one who will bring God's salvation and peace, Yeshua, Jesus!

The messenger proclaims, "Our God reigns!" The Lord God Almighty is king and he rules, he reigns. He is able to accomplish his salvation for his people. This looks forward to Jesus and the apostles’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God!!

The watchmen on the walls of the city sing and shout for joy because they see the Lord's return to Zion. They see it with their own eyes. Think of the situation. The exiles are living in Babylon. Many of them were captured at Jerusalem's fall. They saw the Babylonians breach Jerusalem's walls. They saw them burn the temple and the city to the ground. Their last image of Jerusalem was of the city on fire, the smoke rising and the temple collapsing. In Ezekiel 10, Ezekiel, the prophet to the exiles, sees the glory of the Lord rise up from the temple and depart to the east. The Lord was leaving his temple and his city!! Now Isaiah says the watchmen will see the Lord return! No wonder they shout for joy. Someday, we will see the Lord Jesus return to this earth and we too will sing for joy because our Lord comes!

The ruins of Jerusalem are invited to burst into songs of joy. When the exiles left Jerusalem it was a ruin. It would be another century before Nehemiah's mission to rebuild the walls of the city. When the exiles returned under Zerubbabel in 538 to rebuild the temple the walls of Jerusalem and most of the buildings in the city were still in ruins. Isaiah makes the stark contrast between the ruined city and the people's joy and singing over what the Lord will do or is doing.

Why do they sing? The Lord has comforted his people. The word for comfort is the same word Isaiah uses in 40:1 to begin the second section of his work written to the exiles in Babylon. The time of punishment and judgment is passed. The time of the Lord's salvation has come. Now God will comfort, console and show compassion to those who have suffered exile and disgrace. He has redeemed Jerusalem, bought her back from her ruin and destruction. Jerusalem here is representative of the Jews as a whole just as in Isaiah 51:17-52:2.

Isaiah declares that it is not just to Jerusalem that the Lord has shown his salvation. He has bared his holy arm or will lay bare his holy arm before all the nations. The ESV translates the phrase as if it has already been accomplished. The NIV takes it as certain but yet to be. The point is all the earth, even to the farthest reaches of the earth, will see the salvation of the Lord. Once again the word for salvation is the Hebrew word yeshua, which in the Greek of the New Testament is translated Jesus. In the time of the exiles the Lord's salvation will be seen as the return of the exiles to the Holy Land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. In the New Testament the Lord's salvation will be through the death and resurrection of God's One and Only Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus himself gave his disciples a command to be his witnesses beginning in Jerusalem and moving out to "the ends of the earth" in Acts 1:8.
This last stanza of the section returns to the repeating of the first command only instead of awake, awake, Isaiah says depart, depart. In Hebrew there is a play on the sounds of the first three words, depart, depart, go out: seru, seru, se'u.

The exiles are told to leave Babylon. They are to touch no unclean thing, which would have been difficult because almost anything they touched would have been ritually impure because of all the pagans around them! They are to come out of Babylon and be pure, especially those who carry the vessels of the Lord. That refers to the temple vessels which Nebuchadnezzar captured and carried off to Babylon as booty. In Daniel 5 Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson who was ruling Babylon as regent at the time, held a party for his nobles and brought out the Lord's temple vessels from which his guests could drink. This defiled them so much a huge hand appeared in the banquet hall and wrote on the wall words of judgment which Daniel interpreted. Daniel 5 says that very night the Persians came and killed Belshazzar and took the city of Babylon. Ezra 1 describes the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy when the priests among the exiles were able to carry the vessels of the Lord back to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

In Revelation 18:4 John hears a command from the Lord to his people to come out of Babylon-Rome. God commands them to do this so that they will not share in her sins or the plagues that are about to come upon her as judgment from the Lord. This is a re-statement of the theme of separation and holiness that is used throughout the Bible. We are to be IN the world but not OF the world. More and more today as Christians God is calling us to "touch no unclean thing, come out from it and be pure." We cannot compromise with cultural attitudes that diverge from God's Word and Law. We are to be a "peculiar people."

The exiles will return to Jerusalem but this second exodus will be different from the exodus from Egypt. There they fled in haste but this time they will not go as if fleeing danger. Literally the Hebrew words read: "In haste you shall not leave, in flight you shall not go." The Lord himself will go before them and the God of Israel will be their rear guard. In Exodus 14 the angel of the Lord protected the rear of the Israelites from Pharaoh's pursuing chariots. In Numbers 10 Dan was the rearguard of the clans of Israel. By the exile Dan as a tribe has been lost as well as all the tribes except Judah and Benjamin, the tribes that made up the nation of Judah. There were some families of the northern tribes that maintained their genealogy, see Luke 2, but the tribes themselves were absorbed into Judah or lost in the exile to pagan lands during the Assyrian Empire. The point is Dan was the rearguard but now the Lord himself will go before them and behind them to protect them. The exiles have no power and are few in number. But they will go under the protection of the Lord! No harm shall come to them. They will be going home!

How will all this be possible? How will God forgive their rebellion and save them? Isaiah will explain it all in the next section, the fourth Servant Song and the heart of the second half of his prophecy. In many ways it is the greatest prophecy of the Old Testament.

This fourth Servant Song is in a very precise literary poetic form. There are five stanzas of three verses each with the third stanza being the center. The stanzas are 52:13-15, 53:1-3, 53:4-6 (the center), 53:7-9 and 53:10-12. The two outside stanzas concern the exaltation of the Servant while the middle stanza focuses on his vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the people.
The first stanza focuses on the surprising exaltation of the Servant at the completion of his mission. This theme is repeated in the last stanza in 53:10-12. Thus the two outside stanzas repeat and anchor the middle. This is a classic chiastic structure with the point in the middle.

In verse 13 the Lord is speaking, describing his Servant. He will act wisely or prosper, meaning be successful. Given the poetic context prosper seems the best translation to me, yet both meanings of the word are possible. The Lord's Servant will be raised, or lifted up and highly exalted. Isaiah uses three words that all have similar meanings to clearly describe the Servant's exaltation. Paul echoes this prophecy in Philippians 2 when after the cross the Lord Jesus is raised from the dead and given the name above every name.

His exaltation however is a complete surprise to people because of who the Servant is and how he has been treated. Many, including kings, will see him exalted and be shocked because they had seen him suffering and were horrified at him. His appearance was so disfigured or mutilated as to not even look human anymore. The best visual example I can think of is Mel Gibson's portrayal of Jesus in the movie The Passion of the Christ. Gibson portrayed Jesus' beating, scourging, mocking and finally crucifixion as mutilating him almost beyond recognition. The Gospels list all of these things happening to Jesus during his arrest, trial and crucifixion yet we tend to downplay what that must have done to his face and body and how disfigured he must have been. Isaiah, 700 years before his suffering, saw it and foretold it.

The result of the Servant's horrific suffering will also be a surprise. He will sprinkle many nations or startle them. There are two different translations of two Hebrew words which have the same root and vowels but mean two different things. It is quite possible that Isaiah intends the double meaning here in verse 15. One is sprinkle and the other is startle. In the Hebrew poetic context startle makes sense because the next line is "kings will shut their mouths because of him." That directly parallels startle while sprinkle does not. The Good News, NRSV, RSV and NLT all translate the phrase startle. The LXX translates the Hebrew with a Greek word that means be astonished or marvel. The NIV, NIV84, NASB and ESV translate the word as sprinkle. Sprinkle is a sacrificial term in the Old Testament. Moses "sprinkled" the blood of the covenant on the people in Exodus 24. The High Priest was to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement. Ezekiel says in Ezekiel 36 that God will bring all the exiles home from the nations to which they were scattered and will sprinkle clean water on them and they will be clean. Sprinkle is linked to atonement which fits the larger context of the passage and the purpose of the Servant's suffering and mission. As noted above perhaps Isaiah deliberately uses a word that can be taken in two different ways both of which can work in the passage.

If sprinkle is the proper word it should also be noted that the Servant cleanses many nations. His purpose is global and not just for Israel. For that reason kings will shut their mouths in astonishment at him. They won't be able to speak because they are so surprised at what he has done. Isaiah says that what they were not told they will finally see and what they have never heard they will finally understand. The prophecies of the Servant-Messiah, including this remarkable passage in Isaiah, were given to Israel not the Gentiles. But when the Servant is finally exalted then even the Gentiles will learn what he has done. That concept parallels exactly what happened with the Gospel! It describes the apostles' mission to the Gentiles in the Book of Acts, especially that of Paul!

53:1-3 - The second stanza details the appearance of the Servant and how people evaluated him. There was nothing in his appearance that attracted people to him. He would not have been
among the beautiful people or made the cover of People Magazine in our day. Because of that, Isaiah asks who has believed our message. Who would have guessed that the power of God would be revealed in his Servant? There was nothing in his appearance that would have led people to believe this man was sent from God or was anyone significant!

Isaiah says the Servant grew up before the Lord like a tender shoot or a root in dry ground. The word root is a key word. In Isaiah 11:1 & 11:10 Isaiah names the Messiah the "Root of David". The line of David would appear like it had died out yet from the stump of Jesse would emerge a king who would be endowed with the Spirit of the Lord to establish God's eternal kingdom, a kingdom to which even the Gentiles would come and belong. Now here in chapter 53 he calls the Servant a "root". His choice of words is not accidental. The word root links the Messiah of chapters 9 & 11 with the Servant of chapters 42-53.

The Lord's Servant was not physically attractive. He was not majestic or beautiful in his appearance. If people were attracted to him at all it was not because of his looks. It is interesting to note that artists often portray Jesus as handsome and attractive in either a rugged sort of way or a gentle, almost feminine way. Isaiah says the Lord's Servant was not attractive at all. His words don't necessarily mean he was ugly or deformed. They imply he was plain and ordinary. He would not stand out in a crowd. Isaiah 52:14 speaks of his being marred beyond recognition but that refers to his suffering and death not his general appearance. It is also interesting to note that none of the Gospels give a physical description of Jesus. Based on Isaiah's prophecy we could say he was plain and ordinary looking; nothing special. How like God to be incarnate in a plain looking man so that any attraction to him would be because of his character and God's presence in him and not at all because of his human looks!

The Servant will be rejected by people. They will turn their faces away from him because they will despise him and show little regard for him. The implication is the Servant will be alone. Jesus was alone in his arrest, trial and crucifixion. One of his disciples betrayed him; his closest follower denied he even knew him and all of his disciples fled him when he was arrested. No one came to his defense at his trial. Everyone turned away from him and rejected him. The Jewish religious leaders were determined to kill him and be rid of him.

Isaiah says the Lord's Servant was "a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering." The ESV translates the famous phrase as the King James did, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." The Hebrew words are more nuanced than those translations. “Sorrows” literally means physical pain or more generally anguish, grief and emotional pain. The word is plural so in context probably means both physical and emotional pain. Grief means literally illness or sickness or a wound from an injury. It can also mean affliction or trouble from some grievous evil. Isaiah says the Servant was familiar with suffering and grief. The Hebrew verb is yada which means to know or experience. The Servant won't just know about suffering, pain and grief he will experience them. Isaiah's words point to a person who suffers physical, mental and emotional pain. He will be wounded and beaten down. This is a startling portrait of what happened to Jesus throughout his life but especially during his Passion. He was the Servant of the Lord who experienced suffering, evil, pain and grief. He did it all for our sakes.

When the Servant suffered people turned away from him; they hid their faces from him. People held him in contempt and did not value him or consider him worth anything. At Jesus' cross the religious leaders taunted him demanding that if he was the Messiah that he come down from the cross and save himself and them. One of the thieves crucified next to him ridiculed him. The soldiers who crucified him gambled for his robe and before that had beaten and mocked him putting a crown of thorns on his head. Jesus' crucifixion fulfills Isaiah 53!
53:4-6 - The center stanza of Isaiah's fourth Servant poem answers the question, why. Why did the Servant have to suffer? The answer is one of the greatest prophecies in the entire Old Testament and certainly in the Book of Isaiah. He did it for us to bear our sins.

Isaiah observes that the Servant took up or bore our infirmities or our pain, illnesses, wounds or afflictions. It is the same word translated sorrows in 53:3. To bear something or take up something means to lift it up to carry it. He has carried our sorrows or our pain and anguish, which is also the same word as in 53:3 which was paired with sorrows. To carry means to pick up and drag something along or bear its weight. This simple couplet describes Jesus bearing his cross! He carried his own cross to Golgotha until he could no longer bear its weight and Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service to help him. Jesus bore the weight, pain and anguish of our sins on the Via Dolorosa, The Way of Suffering, from the Fortress Antonia where he was judged by Pontius Pilate to Golgotha, Calvary, where the Romans crucified him!

As the Servant was bearing our pain, grief and anguish people did not see he was doing this for us. They did not perceive that God's plan of salvation was being fulfilled in the Servant. No, they thought God was punishing him for his own sins! People concluded that God himself was punishing the Servant, striking him down, and afflicting terrible punishment on him. What else were they supposed to think? No one suffers like this without having done something horrible. He must be guilty. Like Job's friends people judged the Servant guilty and deserving of the punishment and pain God was obviously pouring out in him.

Verse 5 is the turning point and the center of the stanza. The Servant was being punished not for his own sins but for ours! Isaiah uses the concept of vicarious sacrifice from Israel's sacrificial system and applies it to the Servant. His death will pay for the sins of the people. He will be as John the Baptist said of Jesus in John 1, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

The Servant was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The word for "pierced" means to pierce through with something sharp which results in a wound. The Servant was pierced or wounded for our rebellion and sin. Transgressions points to the breaking of a standard but the emphasis in the Hebrew word is on rebellion and the rebellious nature of human sin. He was crushed, meaning a great weight was placed upon him which resulted in a great wound or even death. The crushing of the Servant was for our iniquities, which emphasizes our guilt before a holy God. Applied to Jesus he was nailed to a cross, taking our place to pay the price for the rebellion of the human race. All the guilt of humanity was placed upon him and he bore it for us. When that happened it crushed him. One can hear the pain of our guilt Jesus bore on the cross when he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!"

The just punishment for human sin he bore so we would not have to. The result was peace with God. Paul affirms this startling fact in Romans 5 when he says since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah says with the Servant's wounds or injuries we are healed and made healthy again. The Hebrew poetic form of verse 5 points to sin and not disease, even though the verb for heal in other contexts does mean healing from disease. All of verse 5 speaks of sin and the punishment for it that the Servant bore. Verse 6 also refers to human sin and that God put all the punishment that we deserved on him to pay the price so we could be forgiven. Plus in the only place this passage is quoted in the New Testament, Peter in 1 Peter 2:23-25 speaks of the Lord Jesus' sacrificial death for our sins. He includes the line "by his wounds we have been healed" as referring to the forgiveness of our sins through the cross of Christ and his death for us. Some Pentecostals like the Healing Rooms divorce the line that says, "with his wounds we are healed"
without context and use it to justify the doctrine that Jesus' death on the cross has resulted in our healing from all disease. They then go even further and press it to mean that Christians don't have to be sick because "by his wounds we are healed!" The problem is it completely takes that line in verse 5 out of its context and pushes it to mean something it does not say. Healing is possible but not guaranteed in the New Testament and certainly Jesus and the apostles healed as a sign of the Kingdom's presence. But Jesus' atonement on the cross has nothing to do with physical healing. Isaiah 53:5 is all about the Servant's death which paid the price for our rebellion and guilt before God. The healing of which Isaiah speaks is related to the burden of guilt we bear for our sins. We have been forgiven and are now at peace with God because of what the Servant has done for us. To take it any other way is a violation of the text and very bad exegesis!

Verse 6 completes the middle stanza and summarizes our sin and what the Servant has done for us. The verse begins and ends in Hebrew with the phrase "we all" or "us all", tying it together poetically. We are like sheep, or literally a flock of sheep and goats that have wandered off or deliberately gone astray. The image is of individual sheep that have separated themselves from the flock which is odd and dangerous behavior. This is reinforced by the line "each of us has tuned to his own way." We have all chosen to wander away from the Lord. Isaiah describes our sin as deliberately choosing to wander away from the Lord and seek our own path. This picture reinforces our sin as rebellion against God. The Lord is our shepherd and we have chosen to separate ourselves from him.

God could have rightly judged us but instead he lays on the Servant all of our iniquity or the burden of our guilt for sin. The Servant takes the punishment we deserved. The word for "laid on" is a difficult word to translate. Our English translations imply God placing the burden of our sins on the Servant. That translation is implied by the rest of the context in verses 4-5. However, the word in Hebrew has a different meaning. It means to intercede for, which is how it is translated in verse 12. It can also mean to cause something to happen or to make someone encounter something, which is the sense of the word in context here in verse 6. The NASB trying to be as literal as possible translates the phrase, "the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him." The idea is the Lord has caused the Servant to encounter the full weight of our sin and guilt. In other contexts and forms the word means to strike or make an impact upon. The word picture is of a shocking encounter with our sin. It dealt a fatal body blow to the Servant, paying the price for our rebellion.

There is also another sense of the word as well. It some contexts it means to intercede or speak on behalf of another or to intervene on their behalf. As noted above this is the sense of the word in verse 12. Verse 6 makes clear that the Lord was the one that caused the Servant to encounter our sin. But the word suggests that the Servant accepted the burden willingly. He intervened for us. Isaiah chose a rich and complicated word to complete this central stanza of his most important Servant poem. That word mines the depths of the love of God for us in the person of his Servant, Jesus Christ.

53:7-9 - This stanza describes how the Servant went to his death. It contrasts with the second stanza which describes his rejection in life. The Servant was oppressed and afflicted but he remained silent. Isaiah vividly describes his arrest or capture and subsequent death as like a lamb led to the slaughter. He was silent even though he was being violently killed. The phrase, "did not open his mouth", in the first and last lines of verse 7 ties the whole verse together. The Gospels report that Jesus refused to give a defense at his trial either before the Sanhedrin or
Pontius Pilate. He answered only a few of their questions and remained silent through most of the ordeal.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. The word for judgment means to decide in a legal case, to render a verdict. Isaiah says the Servant will be condemned but it won't be a fair trial. It will be a trial that seeks to destroy him, that is unjust. That is exactly what happened to Jesus. The Sanhedrin's proceedings were not according to their own legal procedures and included false witnesses that could not agree on what Jesus said or did. Pilate then condemned him unjustly as well, admitting that he could find no fault in him. Finally he handed Jesus over to be crucified because he wanted to appease the Jewish leaders and the crowds who demanded Jesus' death.

There are considerable differences among the various translations concerning the rest of verse 8, however, the overall meaning of the sentence remains the same. The NIV reads, "And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken." That translation follows the LXX. The ESV gives another way to interpret the text. It reads, "And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?" There are other possibilities as well but one sees the differences in the examples given above. Despite that, the basic message is the same. Who even considered or thought that the Servant's violent death was a sacrificial death for the transgression or rebellion of his people? Paul comments in 1 Corinthians 1 that Jesus' cross is a stumbling block to Jews because the Law said anyone who was hung on a tree or crucified was cursed of God. The Jewish leaders could not see that Jesus' death was a vicarious one for his people. He was being killed because he was a danger to their power. They had to be rid of him. They never even considered that their condemnation of Jesus and convincing Pilate to crucify him was exactly the plan of God for the salvation not only of the Jews but of the entire human race!

Isaiah says when the Servant, who was innocent, was dead they assigned his grave with the wicked or guilty. In other words they buried him like someone who was sinful and wicked. In fact Isaiah qualifies that phrase by saying he was buried with a rich man. The NIV reads "with the rich" and takes the phrase as plural following the LXX. However, the Hebrew text and the Dead Sea Scrolls read as singular, "a rich man". It was Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, who went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Joseph placed Jesus' body in a new tomb that his family owned and sealed it with a great stone. Jesus was buried but not in his own tomb but in a borrowed one because there was no burial place for him as he was an executed criminal.

The last line of verse 9 confirms the innocence of the Servant. His death was unjust because he had committed no violence. The word means violence that results in destruction, terror and ruin. It implies violence without moral restraint. The Servant did not act in a violent way in carrying out his mission. It is interesting to note that the word for violence in Hebrew is hamas, which is the title of the Palestinian terror group that rules the Gaza Strip today. In Arabic the word means zeal.

The Servant did not act in any violent way nor did he lie. There was no deceit in him. He did not tell falsehoods and he did not act violently. He was innocent and did not deserve the unjust violent death of his oppressors. Jesus also did not act violently or practice deceit in proclaiming the Kingdom or fulfilling his mission. In fact he rejected violence especially in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Jewish and Roman authorities had him arrested.
This fifth and final stanza returns to the theme of the exaltation or victory of the Servant. This stanza of the poem is told from the viewpoint of the completion of the Servant's sacrifice and mission.

Why did the Servant have to suffer and die? It was the Lord's will. The Lord himself has led the Servant to offer up his life as a guilt offering, meaning a sacrifice that removes guilt from people. In this case, the guilt offering was for all the people of Israel and even the whole world.

This is unique in Israel's history because even after the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel animal sacrifices continued to be offered to make atonement for sin, including guilt offerings. No one foresaw a human being offered up for sin. And even if he was how was a human life capable of paying for all the sins of Israel and even the world? The Servant is human but he also has to be something more! The Gospels tell us Jesus offered his life on the cross for the sins of the world. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the God-Man who could vicariously stand for all of us but also who was able to take all of our guilt and sin upon himself because he was God.

Verse 10 however points to an even more profound event. After his life is offered up as a guilt offering the Servant shall see his offspring, his seed, and shall prolong his days, meaning he will live a long life. The Lord's will shall prosper in his hand, meaning he will have long life and success. The startling implication is that after the Servant dies he will live again! This is a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection!

Verse 11 continues the theme of the Servant living again after his sacrificial death. After, or as a result of his suffering, the Servant will see the light and be satisfied or content. The NIV follows the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls in adding the word light or light of life. The ESV and several other translations follow the Masoretic Text and do not include the word light. Given the Hebrew view of death that once one dies and one's soul descends into Sheol, the place of the dead, one is in darkness and shadows, declaring the Servant will once again see the light points to resurrection. The language of this stanza and the whole poem clearly implies that the Servant has died in giving his life as an offering for sin. There is no sacrifice that justifies anyone without a life in payment. Leviticus 17 declares that the life of a creature is in the blood and the Lord gave Israel the shedding of blood to make atonement for themselves and the people in the animal sacrifices of the Tabernacle-Temple rituals. Hebrews 9 declares that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. The Servant shed his blood and died to procure forgiveness for his people.

What's more he not only procured forgiveness he justified all those who had knowledge of him. The word in context means more than just know about him but know him relationally. Here Isaiah is in synch with Jeremiah and his prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. The Lord will make a New Covenant with Israel not like the Old Covenant which they broke. They will all "know the Lord" and he will "remember their sins no more." The Servant will justify many; make many righteous before God, when he bears their iniquities. Paul says in Romans 3 that the righteousness of God is given to us who believe in Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice for us on the cross. It is given to us by faith not works and through it God justifies us freely by his grace. This is the Gospel in Isaiah and the great prophet looks forward to the time when God will save his people and unite them with him through his righteous Servant whom he will send! Here in Isaiah 53 the Old Testament and the New Testament become one through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The final verse of the stanza, verse 12, declares the Servant's exaltation and victory just like 52:13-14. Because the Servant has suffered unto death and offered himself as a sacrifice for
the sins of many, God will grant him a place among the great. He will allot or give him a portion with the great. An alternative reading of this phrase reads the many which is how the ESV translates it. The Hebrew word can mean much, many or great. The next line is "he will divide the spoils with the strong." The word for strong can mean in other contexts a throng or multitude but that is a rarer meaning. In context it most likely means strong. The two words great and strong are parallel. One could translate them many and multitude but the couplet doesn't make as much sense. The image is of a victorious soldier who because of his might in battle gains a share of the battle plunder because of his actions. It is an odd image given the rest of the Servant poem until one reads the next lines.

God will give the Servant a victor's share of the spoils because he poured out his soul or life unto death. The meaning is clear; the Servant sacrificed his life for others. One cannot read these words and conclude he only suffered greatly but did not die. His suffering killed him! Furthermore, his suffering was done for the transgressors; for sinners. The word translated transgressors means rebels; one who is in open defiance of authority. This is the most profound insight into sin in the Hebrew Bible. Sin is rebellion against our rightful Creator and against the Lord God who made a covenant with Israel like a husband with his wife. They are in open rebellion against God and the Servant stood with them. He was counted as one of them. Isaiah says he bore their sins, the sins of many. Paul says in Romans 5 that God shows his love for us in this that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. He says in 2 Corinthians 5 that God made Christ to be sin who had no sin so that we could become the righteousness of God. Jesus Christ was innocent of any sin but suffered as if he was guilty. He was numbered among the rebels who deserved death just like Isaiah said the Servant was counted. He bore our sins on the cross so we could be forgiven.

The last line implies an ongoing ministry of the Servant, that of interceding for sinners. The Hebrew verb is in the imperfect tense which implies ongoing action. Most of the other verbs in this poem are perfect verbs in Hebrew implying completed action. Paul in Romans 8 says Jesus lives in heaven to make intercession for us before the Father. Hebrews 7 says the Lord Jesus, our great High Priest, is always interceding for us. Paul adds in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit whom the Lord Jesus gives us when we trust our lives to him also intercedes. Isaiah points ahead to the ministry of intercession in heaven that the Servant, Jesus Christ the crucified and risen one, will do for us! His prophecy even includes the on-going work of the Servant!

The Servant died for us bearing our sins. Therefore God has exalted him and given him a place among the great. This theme Paul will echo in the great hymn to Christ in Philippians 2. The Lord Jesus gave up his power and privilege in heaven and took on the form of a Servant. He was obedient to God even to death on the cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a Name above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!

The last stanza of this fourth Servant poem not only prophesies about the Servant's death and vicarious sacrifice for our sins, it also prophesies about his exaltation by God after his death. The only way to make sense of the poem concerning that exaltation is to understand it to mean that God raises the Servant back to life. Thus in this one prophecy Isaiah outlines the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth. He and he alone is the only one who has perfectly fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy! Jesus is the Servant-Messiah of God!

Chapter 54:
Isaiah returns to describing Jerusalem and the people of Israel in this chapter. If chapters 51-52 were about God's judgment on Jerusalem for her many sins and then the Lord's rescue of her, chapter 54 is all about God's salvation of his "wife", his people. In between these chapters is the fourth Servant Song. Isaiah's literary structure points to the Servant's mission as the reason for Jerusalem's hope!

God invites the barren one who never bore a child to sing which is strange because being barren was a cause for mourning not rejoicing! The Lord tells her why she is to sing. More are the children of the desolate woman than the one who is married with a husband. This is a description of Jerusalem at the time of the exile. Isaiah captures the feelings of the exiles in Babylon. Jerusalem was deserted and desolate. Her people were either killed or scattered. How would she ever be settled again? How were the Jews as a people ever to recover? The Lord had almost destroyed them through the Babylonians.

God then uses a curious image to describe his people. He recalls the wilderness when Israel dwelt in tents in the long years in the desert. A whole generation was wiped out in the desert and a brand new generation was birthed. God says enlarge your tents. Stretch out your tent curtains and strengthen your tent stakes. Make more room because you are going to grow again as a people. You will spread out to the right and the left, meaning the south and the north. The reference to direction is based on facing east towards the sunrise standing in Jerusalem. If one faces east then one's right is south and one's left is north. Before the exile Judah had shrunk as a nation to not much more than the territory around Jerusalem. Now God says his people will expand once again. Their children will possess the nations around them and settle the cities that are now uninhabited. When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah he laid waste to all the great fortress cities of Judah and the surrounding territories including Moab, Ammon and Philistia. Only Edom was spared because it was his ally. If the exiles go home they will find all the once thriving cities of the Holy Land deserted and in ruins. God says you will resettle them as you spread out. You will fulfill God's promise to Abraham to make Israel as numerous as stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore.

54:4-8 - God encourages Israel not to be afraid anymore. They have suffered great humiliation and shame in the exile which in their shame-honor based culture was the worst possible outcome. Now the Lord calls them to put away their shame and forget it. They will no longer be disgraced. They had become like a widow cast away from everyone. They will remember that disgrace no more. Why, because the Lord is going to call them back to the land and back to himself.

Isaiah describes Israel's relationship with the Lord God, their Redeemer. He is their husband and they are his wife. There are other places in the Old Testament where God describes his relationship with Israel like a husband and wife, most notably in Hosea 1 & 3 and in Jeremiah 31. The New Testament picks up this theme and expands it in the concept of the Body of Christ, the church. She is the Lord Jesus' bride. See Ephesians 5 and Revelation 19. The Lord is more than just their king and they his subjects. His relationship with Israel is like a marriage of husband and wife. It is permanent, and intimate in nature. This is the kind of fellowship and relationship God desires for his people. He is their husband, their Redeemer, the God of the whole earth. They need not fear rejection, disgrace or shame anymore.

The Lord calls her back to fellowship with him. Just for a moment Israel was like a young wife deserted in her youth. She was grieving and abandoned; but no more, because with the deepest compassion God will bring her back. He will renew their marriage. God for a brief time was angry with her because of her sin, but no longer. Her time of shame and punishment is over.
With everlasting kindness and compassion the Lord will take her back. God in his holiness and justice had to punish Israel for her wonton rebellion and sin. But God's heart and character is always towards love and compassion. He is a God who is full of mercy and forgiveness. The time of Judah's exile is over. The time of her restoration has come. The Lord will accomplish this!

54:9-10 - God knows the doubts the exiles have about whether God will keep his promise after the trauma of Jerusalem's fall and the temple's destruction. Part of that is related to the false official theology that predominated in Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasion. Jeremiah continually deals with trying to expose it and denounce it. See Jeremiah 7 and his temple sermon as a classic example. The official theology was based on a false confidence in two of the Lord's promises to Israel. First, as long as there was a king from David's line sitting on David's throne Judah was safe. Second, the Lord had told Solomon that his Name would dwell in his temple forever. As long as the Jews had the temple then Jerusalem was safe. The problem was they divorced those promises from God's covenant with them at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19-20. If there were any vestiges of that official theology among the exiles then they would have had doubts about whether God's promise of restoration would be permanent.

With those thoughts in mind verses 9-10 take on more urgency for the exiles to whom Isaiah now writes. God reminds them that in the days of Noah after the flood God made an everlasting covenant with the survivors that he would never again flood the earth and destroy all life. He says the situation with the exiles is like those days. The Lord has sworn, meaning he has sworn a solemn oath that he will not break, to never again be angry or filled with wrath over the Jews.

He will not rebuke them again. How solid is this promise? The mountains may be shaken and the hills removed from their places but the Lord's steadfast love will not be shaken. His covenant of peace will never be removed. Isaiah uses Hebrew repetition to intensify the Lord's promise. The mountains may be shaken but God's steadfast love will not. The word for shaken used in the couplet is the same word. The hills may be removed but God's covenant of peace will never be removed. The word for removed in this couplet is the same word. In other words God says the mountains and the hills are permanent and so is my steadfast love and peace towards you. The word for steadfast love in Hebrew is hesed, which means God's covenant love. Peace is shalom, wholeness. God has love or compassion for his people not wrath and judgment.

From a New Testament perspective how should one take the Lord's promise? Certainly the events of 70 AD and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple could be taken as a sign of God's wrath against the Jews for rejecting Jesus as their Messiah and failing to recognize his sacrifice on the cross as the end of the necessity for animal sacrifices. Yet as Paul argues in Romans 9-11 God saved a remnant of the Jews who believed in Jesus as their Messiah. In fact even today there are Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. God offered the Jews a New Covenant in Jesus which fulfilled Jeremiah 31 and the prophecies of the Messiah-Servant in Isaiah but many Jews refused to recognize him. Yet some did and because of their faith they now have eternal life in Christ. God's covenant of love and peace will never be taken from them. In Jesus God's eternal promises through Isaiah have been fulfilled.

54:11-14 - Isaiah contrasts the Jerusalem the exiles know, ruined and abandoned, with the Jerusalem the Lord will build for them, beautiful and secure. Now it is the afflicted city lashed by storms and not comforted. Jeremiah in Lamentations 1 cries out in grief that no one
understands the sorrow he feels or can comfort him and his city. That is the situation the exiles know.

But the Lord will rebuild Jerusalem. Isaiah pictures an ideal city built of precious stones that is impregnable and beautiful beyond comparison. John in Revelation 21 uses Isaiah's picture to describe the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven that will be the Lord's eternal dwelling place with his people.

The description of the walls and foundations of the city uses Hebrew words for stones that are often uncertain in their meanings. The NIV has the best translation while the ESV uses unfamiliar English words that make its translation difficult to read and understand. God will build the renewed Jerusalem with stones of turquoise. An alternative which the ESV and other translations use is God will set the stones in antimony. Antimony could refer to a hard mortar that was black that did not wear out. Antimony was normally used in eye makeup and was a black paste, like the Egyptians used in their eye makeup. The word can also mean turquoise which pairs best with the second half of the couplet which speaks of the Lord building the foundations with sapphires or lapis lazuli, both deep blue stones. Turquoise is also blue.

The walls or battlements of the city will be made of rubies and the gates of sparkling jewels. The ESV translates rubies as agate and precious jewels as carbuncles. The word translated precious jewels is unclear in meaning but most often refers to sparkling crystal. Carbuncle is an arcane word that sometimes refers to bright red stones but by most translations is rendered as crystal. Why the ESV chose carbuncle is puzzling. The point is the city will be magnificent and its walls and gates so hard that they will be impregnable as the precious stones are harder than the normal limestone of Israel with which many buildings are built in the Holy Land.

The city will be beautiful and strong but even more important will be the security of the people who live in the Lord's Jerusalem. The Lord himself will teach the children of the city. The language is similar to Jeremiah's description of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. In the New Covenant no one will have to teach their neighbor to "know the Lord" because all the people will know him or have a relationship with him and he will remember their sins no more. Isaiah says the Lord himself will teach the children of the city and great will be their peace or shalom. Shalom means more than the absence of conflict and includes the idea of wholeness and blessing. In Nehemiah 1 when Nehemiah's brother returned to Susa, the Persian capitol with news of Jerusalem he said the people lived in fear because the walls of the city were still torn down. There was no security from their enemies. In the Lord's Jerusalem her children will live secure from the threat of any attacks from their enemies.

The people of the Lord's Jerusalem will be established or built in righteousness. Tyranny will not threaten them and they will not have to fear anything. Tyranny could mean an attack by a hostile power from outside but also refer to a despotic ruler who oppresses the people. The people of the Lord's Jerusalem will never have to fear another Assyria or Babylon again! They will never come near the city. The Lord has promised it. John in Revelation 21-22 pictures the fulfillment of Isaiah’s vision in the New Jerusalem.

54:15-17 - These verses illustrate how the situation has radically changed between God and his people. The Lord had made it clear through his prophets like Isaiah that he had sent Assyria and Babylon to judge Israel and Judah because of their rebellion and sin. Now however the Lord will bring them back to the land and renew them. He will protect them from all their enemies.
If anyone tries to attack them the Lord says it is not his doing. He did not send them. In fact whoever attacks Israel will be defeated. They will surrender to the Jews.

God says he created the blacksmith who forges weapons of war. He created the destroyer to work havoc and execute his righteous judgment. Yet now no weapon the blacksmith makes or the destroyer wields shall prevail against them. Anyone who seeks to accuse the Jews among the nations God's people will refute. The word means to declare guilty and render judgment. The idea is a pagan nation tries to accuse Israel of some atrocity but God's people will turn it around and demonstrate it is that nation that desires to commit the atrocity. God promises this is the inheritance of his people, their portion from the Lord. He will vindicate them because the time of his judgment has passed. Now comes the time of renewal.

In modern times since the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 this theme has re-occurred again and again. Every time a nation has attempted to attack Israel, often with overwhelming force and numbers, that nation has suffered a defeat. It makes one wonder whether God's promise to the Jews through Isaiah is still operating today. From a longer historical perspective the promise was not fulfilled, especially with the Romans who destroyed Judea in 70. However, the attack in 70 was certainly related to the Jews rejecting Jesus as Messiah and the continuation of the temple rituals which were now null and void because of Jesus' death on the cross. Is God fulfilling his promise to them again by bringing the Jews back to the land and protecting them? Are we nearing the return of the Lord Jesus and the forming of Israel and return of the Jews are precursors to that event? The possibilities are intriguing but the answers to those questions are not clear.

Verse 17 can also apply to us today in the context of spiritual warfare. God provides his people his truth and no lies of the enemy will prevail against us. Jesus told the disciples in Luke 21 that before his coming again they will be hauled before kings and governors seeking to destroy them. But the Lord himself will give them wisdom that none of their adversaries will be able to refute. Paul in Ephesians 6 describes the armor of God that can withstand all the attacks of the enemy. The armor describes God's truth that he gives us that protects us and defeats spiritual evil. Isaiah's promise is comforting for us today as well as in his day.

Chapter 55:
55:1-5 - This whole chapter is one of the great invitations from God to his people to enter into relationship with him. My Disciples Study Bible notes on this chapter list ten things that it tells us about God's call to salvation and how it applies to evangelism. First, God calls all to receive his free grace, v.1. Second, only God's salvation truly satisfies, v.2. Third, all can have new life as nations and people come into the new covenant, vv.3-5. Fourth, God warns everyone to seek him while he can be found, v.6. Fifth, the human response must be one of true repentance, v.7a. Sixth, pardon and forgiveness are wonderfully possible, v.7b. Seventh, God is above all, but he can still be experienced, vv.8-9. Eighth, God's Word is powerful and will do its saving work, vv.10-11. Ninth, great joy erupts everywhere when people come to salvation, v.12. Tenth, fruit that glorifies God is the everlasting result of effective evangelism, v.13.

Verse 1 begins the section with a fourfold invitation to come. The verbs are all invitations but in the imperative, spoken as commands from God because he speaks his Word to people everywhere who need his salvation. Isaiah uses the metaphor of food and drink to describe our need for God. To everyone who thirsts God calls them to come to the waters and drink. To one who has no money for bread, he calls them to come and buy wine and milk without price and without money. From a human standpoint that makes no sense because how can you buy
something if you have no money to pay for it? Isaiah is describing God's grace. It can accomplish for us what we cannot do on our own. Jesus uses this idea when he invited the woman at the well in John 4 to come and drink from the water he could give her and she would never thirst again. In John 7 Jesus quotes this verse when he invites anyone who is thirsty to come to him and never thirst again. He did this at the climax of the Feast of Tabernacles during the water ritual where the priest dips a pitcher into the Pool of Siloam and takes it to the temple to be poured out. Jesus gives the same invitation that God gives here in Isaiah 55!

God asks his people why they keep spending or weighing out their money for things that are not bread and working for things that do not satisfy. Isaiah stays with his metaphor of food and drink for salvation. This is a brilliant indictment of idolatry and seeking after things to fill the emptiness in our lives that only God fill!

The antidote is to listen to God and pay attention to his Word. Isaiah intensifies God’s command and invitation by repeating the word listen; literally, listen, listen! The word for listen or hear in Hebrew is shema, the same word used in the great confession in Deuteronomy 6, Hear O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one! If they will listen to him the Lord will feed them good things that will satisfy their souls and they will live. He will make with them an everlasting covenant; his faithful or steadfast love, Hebrew hesed, promised to David. Isaiah shows us that God's plan for the salvation of his world involves his covenant with David. He has already spoken of the Messiah's work in chapters 9 & 11. Now he links the Messiah with the Servant of God he has spoken of in these later chapters who brings forgiveness and salvation.

God declares he has made David, or the Messiah, a witness to the nations about him; one who will lead and command the peoples of the world. This is fulfilled especially in Revelation 19 & Matthew 24 at Jesus Second Coming in glory.

Verse 5 is curious because the pronouns which have been mostly plural up to this point suddenly shift to singular. Is the Lord speaking to David here or is he speaking to Israel as a whole? It is difficult to tell. The pronouns suggest he is speaking to David, yet the context implies he is speaking to the Jews. It makes the most sense to take this verse as speaking to the Jews and Isaiah uses the singular in order to amplify the idea that his people are one and he wants to save and bless them all. If that is the case then this could also be a reference to Persia, a nation that they do not know who will allow the Jews to return home. The NIV translates the word as a plural, “nations”, but the Hebrew is singular. The other possibility which fits the context better is that since David is a witness of the Lord to the nations, the Jews will summon or call nations to them and tell them about the Lord. God has glorified Israel and the nations will come to them to learn about the Lord's glory. God gives Israel the privilege of speaking God's invitation to the nations to come to him and find salvation. This is an evangelistic verse. Paul saw his own ministry as an apostle to the nations as fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. See Romans 15.

55:6-9 - If verses 1-5 are the Lord's invitation to the needy and the hurting, verses 6-9 are his invitation to the sinner to come to him in repentance. This is Isaiah's declaration of the gospel. Jesus invited sinners to come to him and be saved by his grace and love. Our response to his invitation is to repent. Repentance is an essential part of our faith in God.

God calls the wicked and unrighteous, namely sinners, to seek him while he may be found and call upon him while he is near. The implication is God has set a time for his offer of salvation. He has come near to us to save us but the offer will not stand forever. Paul says in Galatians 4 that when the time had fully come God sent forth his Son to save us. He says in 1
*Timothy* 2 that God desires all to be saved but there is only one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus. *Hebrews 10* says Jesus appeared the first time to forgive sinners but will appear a second time to save those who wait for him. *2 Peter 3* says the Lord is patient and does not want anyone to perish but to repent. *Revelation 19* declares that the Lord Jesus will return one day to totally defeat Satan and all who follow him. Paul sums it up best when he says now is the day of salvation in *2 Corinthians 6*. The New Testament confirms Isaiah's declaration. God offers salvation to sinners but his offer has limits according to his plan for the salvation of the human race.

God calls the wicked to forsake or abandon his way or path. The word also implies a journey toward a destination. In the sinners case it is a journey towards hell! God says stop and turn around. Get off the path toward eternal destruction and turn toward the path of eternal life! Repentance means to change our path in life and change our thinking. Isaiah's language reflects Jesus' call to repent and believe the gospel because the Kingdom of God is near and God offers his Kingdom to all who will heed his call and repent. God offers forgiveness and mercy to the repentant sinner because he is full of mercy and compassion. He is ready to pardon those who come to him with a humble heart.

How is God able to do this? His ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts higher than our thoughts. Isaiah uses the same words for God's thoughts and ways as he does for the sinner. God is transcendent and so much greater than we are. His love, plans, and abilities are beyond our comprehension. Isaiah expresses the profound mystery of God's love for sinners and his desire to see them saved and reconciled to him.

**55:10-11** - God can accomplish the forgiveness of sinners because his Word is powerful and accomplishes what it declares. Isaiah uses the analogy of the rain and snow that fall from heaven. They don't go back into heaven but water the earth resulting in the plants sprouting and growing so that people have seed to sow and bread to eat. The same is true for God's Word. It does not come back to him but accomplishes what he desires and fulfills the purpose for which he sent it. When God decrees something it is accomplished.

Isaiah is speaking here of God's decrees or prophetic Word, like at creation when he spoke and the universe came into existence. He is also speaking of his prophetic promises and declarations. They will be fulfilled! If God says the exiles will come home and he will renew Israel it will be accomplished.

The gospel is both an invitation which carries a contingency of whether it will be accepted or not and God's decree of salvation. It carries the power like his creative Word to accomplish what it declares; salvation for the sinner who accepts God's offer of forgiveness. In one sense the gospel is both conditional, God's invitation to the sinner, and unconditional, his decree of salvation for the sinner who accepts his invitation. It does not return to him empty but accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it. That's why the preaching of the gospel is part of the gospel!

**55:12-13** - Isaiah now describes a picture of what the Lord's salvation will look like. The people will go out in joy and be led forth in peace or *shalom*. The two verbs describe both movement of their own volition, they will go out, and being led by the Lord, be led forth. Joy and peace will be the hallmarks of God's people from now on. This is in marked contrast to the grief and captivity of the exiles.
When God saves his people even nature will rejoice. Isaiah paints a picture of the mountains singing and the trees clapping their hands because of the rescue of God's people. This is obviously symbolic yet even Paul in Romans 8 hints at nature itself celebrating the redemption of God's people in the resurrection. What will nature be like when the curse of sin is completely removed from the earth? We have no idea. Perhaps we will hear the music of the mountains and the trees!

In verse 13 Isaiah may be looking back to Genesis 3 and the curse on the ground because of human sin. God said because Adam sinned, the ground will now bring forth thorns and thistles and human beings will constantly fight the weeds in order to grow their crops. Isaiah says in the time of God's salvation instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree. The word for pine tree in the NIV is translated various ways to refer to any number of trees. The ESV uses cypress. Other translations use the juniper. It could refer to trees that are aromatic and useful rather than the thorn bush which is simply a nuisance plant. The same is true for the briar. The word is parallel with thorn bush and means almost the same thing. Rather than the briar patch God will cause the myrtle tree to grow. The myrtle was a common evergreen shrub.

The transformation of even nature when God saves his people will be a sign or a banner that will point to the Lord's Name and glory. It will never be destroyed. The ESV reads not be cut off. The word can also mean to be cut down. The picture is of the Lord's banner or battle flag standing on a high hill as a sign of the Lord's presence. That banner will never be cut down. God will triumph and bring glory to his Name when he saves his people. Even nature will be transformed. Isaiah has already spoken about that picture in chapter 11 in his description of the Messiah's Kingdom. John in Revelation 21-22 shows us a redeemed creation made whole again for God to dwell with his people forever in the new heaven and earth.

Chapter 56:
56:1-2 - This final third part of Isaiah was written to the exiles yet is difficult to place in context. It shifts from speaking of the temple and its sacrifices to Israel's behavior that brought on the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in the first place. At times it appears the temple is standing and Jerusalem is settled as in 56:1-8. Yet at other times as in 63:7-64:12 the land is devastated and Jerusalem and the temple are in ruins. It is easy to see how some liberal scholars declare this section Trito-Isaiah, a third Isaiah prophet speaking to after the exile and different from the other sections of the prophecy. There is however no need to postulate a Trito-Isaiah since God is fully capable of revealing to his prophet the circumstances of his people's future. This section summarizes much that Isaiah has declared in both sections of his prophecy. It looks forward to the salvation the Lord will bring his people, including a rebuilt temple but it also recalls to their minds their sin and the reasons for his judgment in the first place. In that it is a fitting climax to the entire book.

The Lord says his salvation and righteousness will soon be revealed. It is coming. People need therefore to maintain justice or fairness and do what is right. Salvation in Hebrew is yeshua, which is the Hebrew form of Jesus' name. Paul said in Romans 1 that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ! John the Baptist called people to repent because the Kingdom of God was near and Jesus called people to repent and believe the gospel because the Kingdom was at hand. Jesus said in Matthew 6 to seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness and God would provide all you need. One could take these verses as a veiled prophecy of the coming of the Lord and what people need to do in order to get ready for the coming of God's salvation in Yeshua-Jesus, the Messiah!
In Isaiah's context the exiles need to seek righteousness and practice justice because God is about to rescue them from their exile. They will be faced with a choice. Do they return to the Lord and live as he has called them to live or when they return to the land and begin worshipping again at a rebuilt temple will they fall back into their former disobedient and pagan ways and incur God's wrath again.

Isaiah says the man who maintains justice and practices righteousness will be blessed. The word for man is a generic word that simply means human being. God is speaking to both men and women here. God calls the righteous to keep or guard his Sabbath. Before the exile Israel constantly profaned and desecrated the Lord's Sabbath by bringing him worship in the temple that was devoid of an obedient and righteous life. They would disobey God all throughout the week and even worship pagan gods and then come to the temple on the Sabbath, offer praises and sacrifices and think God was appeased and happy with them. Isaiah warns them to repent and turn back to God again. When they return and worship at a new temple keep the Sabbath and obey the Lord. Let their worship of Yahweh be in sync with their lifestyle and obedience of Yahweh and his commands. Isaiah calls the people to obedience.

56:3-5 - Isaiah singles out two special groups of people who were excluded from worshipping in the temple; foreigners or Gentiles and eunuchs. The Lord says let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord ever say that God will separate him from his people. The word for "bound" means to bind in a relationship. God says that Gentile who has a relationship with the Lord and is bound to him in worship and obedience will always be part of God's people!

God speaks to the eunuch who according to the Law of Moses could not enter the temple if he was a priest and offer sacrifices. He would defile the altar and the sanctuary. See Leviticus 21. That law was expanded in Deuteronomy 23 to forbid any eunuch from entering the temple. The eunuch sees himself as a "dry tree", meaning someone who cannot have descendants. But God says those who keep his Sabbaths, please the Lord and hold fast to the Lord's covenant to them he will give a memorial and an everlasting name that shall never cease or fail, which is the meaning of the word cut off in the context. Their name will be better than sons and daughters that physically they can never have!

When the salvation and righteousness of the Lord is revealed even Gentiles and eunuchs who by the Law were excluded from the Lord's temple, they will be included into his covenant. Luke in the Book of Acts shows how the Lord Jesus fulfills Isaiah. In Acts 8 Philip shares the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch and he is baptized. In Acts 10 Peter shares the gospel with the household of Cornelius the Roman centurion and they receive the Holy Spirit and are baptized. God's covenant expands to now include those that previously had been excluded. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

One other observation from this passage needs to be made. The Hebrew phrase in verse 5 for a memorial and a name is yad vashem. That is the name for the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. The name is taken from this verse. In the Children's Memorial the names of the million and a half children who were murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust are read and remembered. All around the grounds of the memorial are trees planted to honor the Righteous of the Nations, Gentiles who aided the Jews to escape the death camps and who saved many lives. Their names are given on a plaque below each tree. In the last part of the memorial there is a huge circular room with folders of every known victim of the Holocaust and all the information the Israelis can find on that person. Isaiah says God will give them an everlasting name that shall
never be cut off. Yad Vashem is designed to remember the names of all of those who were slaughtered. They have been given a memorial and a name that will always be remembered.

56:6-8 - Isaiah writes about God's acceptance of the eunuchs who worship him in verses 4-5. Now he writes of the Lord's acceptance of foreigners or Gentiles into the Lord's covenant. The Lord says any foreigner or someone belonging to a foreign land that has a relationship with the Lord, meaning they serve him, love him and bind themselves to him, will be accepted by the Lord. This is in marked contrast to other places in the Old Testament which exclude the foreign born from God's temple and worship. See Deuteronomy 23. God says foreigners who keep his Sabbath and who worship the Lord and hold fast to his covenant are acceptable to God.

The Lord will bring them to his holy mountain, meaning Jerusalem or the Temple Mount, and he will bring them joy in his house of prayer. God calls his temple a house of prayer. Foreigners' burnt offerings of praise and their sacrifices to make atonement God will accept on his altar. This implies the temple will be rebuilt and the nations will come to worship the Lord when he renews Israel.

God says his house shall be a house of prayer for all the nations! Isaiah takes God's covenant with Israel out to its full implications. There was always an evangelistic component to God's covenant, especially in the covenant to Abraham. Israel was to live in such a way before the nations of the world that they would want to come and worship Yahweh. Isaiah has already shown in chapter 11 the Messiah will draw the nations to God. The Servant will do the same in chapter 42. Isaiah reinforces those themes here and calls the Lord's temple not just a temple for Israel to worship Yahweh but for the nations to worship him!

Jesus quoted this verse when he cleared the temple courts of the moneychangers during Holy Week in Matthew 21, Mark 11 and Luke 19. He was incensed because the Sadducees' demands for temple coins to purchase acceptable animals for the sacrifices put a barrier between people and God. It kept the Gentiles from coming to the Lord rather than opening the door to them. God wanted to save all peoples not just Israel. By quoting this verse Jesus also pointed to the greatest purpose of the temple, especially after his sacrifice on the cross. It was to be a house of prayer not a place of sacrifice. The sacrifice was to be given and the veil torn in two that separated the Most Holy Place. The way would be open to God because sin would be paid for. If the Jews had accepted Jesus' sacrificial death would the temple have become the Lord's "house of prayer for the nations"? We will never know.

God says in verse 8 he will gather the exiles of Israel to himself. That has been a major theme of the whole second half of Isaiah. God says he will also gather others besides the exiles. That implies the Gentiles; those Gentiles who will accept God's covenant with them through his Messiah-Servant Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 10 that his sheep know him and hear his voice and that he had other sheep not of this fold, meaning not of Israel, that he would gather to himself. If he was referring to Isaiah's statement in verse 8 then that means at least twice in his ministry Jesus quoted this passage as describing his mission and that he was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies of the Gentiles coming to God through Jesus as Messiah-Servant of God.

56:9-12 - Isaiah indicts Judah's leaders, their "watchmen" or "shepherds". The timing of this prophecy is crucial for understanding to whom Isaiah is referring. Context suggests he is speaking to the leaders of the exiles or those who are leading the Jews after they have returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Another possibility is that he is referring to the leaders of his own day during the destruction of the north kingdom Israel by the Assyrians. It seems most
likely that he is referring to the leaders of the exiles and those who led the return under Zerubbabel. The problem with that view is that in Haggai and Zechariah both Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, are spoken of in positive terms. He is probably referring to the other officials and priests who led the exiles in the return. God had to send Haggai and Zechariah to motivate them to finish the temple and complete their work. Later he sent Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem and to revive the people's faith in God. It is possible that Isaiah is looking at the quality of the leadership of Judah up to the time of Nehemiah, almost a century after the return in 538. This view has its own problems as well but the precise time is difficult to pin down.

Whatever the exact time, Isaiah says the leaders of Judah are worthless. They leave the people vulnerable to attack. He even invites the wild animals to come and devour them. They are worthless watchmen who will not warn the people of danger. They are blind and have no understanding of the situation and the danger. In fact they are like mute dogs that cannot bark! They sleep all the time and dream. The word for dream is very picturesque as it literally means a dog with its tongue hanging out and panting like they will do when dreaming!

Yet these "dogs" are insatiable. They never have enough. Nothing satisfies them. Isaiah describes leaders who care nothing for the people they lead and their welfare. They only care for themselves and what they can obtain through their position.

The tragedy is that these leaders are acting just like the leaders of Israel and Judah in Isaiah's day when the Lord judged them for their sinful behavior. That is why he says they are shepherds who lack understanding. They cannot see they are repeating the same mistakes their forefathers did which resulted in God's judgment and exile in the first place. They all turn to their own way, each seeking their own gain. This reflects Isaiah's description of our sin in Isaiah 53; we are all like sheep who have turned our own way. It also reflects the language of Judges 21, where everyone did what was right in their own eyes. The leaders have abandoned God and his Law as their moral guide. They only seek their own pleasure. That is reflected in verse 12 where Isaiah says all they desire is to party and get drunk. Let's get wine and drink our fill of beer, they say. The word for drink our fill means literally to drink until one is drunk. They seek pleasure and their own needs above all else. They have abandoned their responsibility to God and to his people. What's more they have lost the ability to think about the consequences of their actions for those they serve. They are consumed with getting drunk and escaping, thinking tomorrow will be just like today or an even better party, an even better high. They are like alcoholics and addicts who can only think of the next high and are consumed with escaping their life, their pain and their responsibility. They are altogether reprehensible. It is as if the leaders of the exiles of Judah have learned nothing from their experience of tragedy and God's judgment.

Isaiah's description of Judah's leaders is a chilling picture of leaders or people today who think only of themselves and their personal gain. His picture of those living to get drunk, people who are lazy and only think of the next high is a picture of the addict today and the terrible consequences of their selfishness and addiction. His words should serve as a warning to us and our society today.

Chapter 57:

57:1-2 - In the midst of Isaiah's indictment of Judah's ongoing idolatry and wickedness comes these remarkable verses. People often wonder why God allows his righteous people, people who live to obey him and worship him to suffer and be killed or martyred. Isaiah gives us one reason God allows this. The Lord wants to spare his righteous from further suffering. Judah looked at
the question of why the righteous die along with the wicked and saw no sense in it. No one understood what God was doing. Isaiah says God takes the righteous, gathers them to himself to spare them from evil.

Isaiah shows a growing sense that death is not the end of life for those who know God. The Jews up till Isaiah's day believed that the grave or Sheol, was a shadowy existence if it was existence at all and that death was the end. There was no developed concept of eternal life with God after physical death. When one died, one was dead and gone. That is why children are seen as such a blessing because one's line could be carried on in one's progeny.

Isaiah hints in verse 2 that there could be something more. The righteous enter into peace or shalom. They find rest in death. Sheol in the Old Testament is not a place of peace. Isaiah says the Lord gathers the righteous to himself to bring them peace in death and spare them from further evil in this world. The Lord takes his people to himself not to punish them but to spare them. This only makes sense and is a good thing if the peace God gives the righteous in death is more than Sheol, the shadowy realm of the dead in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In the New Testament Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 that when we die we are away from the body and present with the Lord. Before Jesus' return the spirits or souls of God's people are personally present with the Lord until they are resurrected along with those alive at his coming. See 1 Thessalonians 4. The New Testament expands on Isaiah's understanding.

57:3-6 - The behavior Isaiah describes in these verses is very similar to the behavior of Israel and Judah in Isaiah's day or in Manasseh's day who followed King Hezekiah. Jeremiah speaks of similar rampant idolatry in Jeremiah 2 to describe the idolatry of the last days of Judah. Is Isaiah looking back to the sins of Judah's past or is he accusing the exiles and those who have returned to Jerusalem of going back to their idolatrous ways? It is difficult to tell. If the returning exiles had regressed and gone back to their Canaanite idolatry and fertility rites then this is a sad situation and they have learned nothing from the discipline of the Lord through their exile. No wonder Isaiah speaks harshly to them!

He calls them the sons of a sorceress, and the offspring of adulterers and prostitutes. He accuses them of mocking God and sticking out their tongues at him. They are a brood of rebels and full of lies and deceit. Jesus accused the Pharisees of being children of the devil in John 8, saying the devil is the father of lies.

Verse 5 describes their idolatry and adultery through fertility rites that people would practice on any high hill or under a large tree like an oak. Cult prostitutes would be available in such places and men would go and have sex to deposit their "offering" to the goddess, usually Asherah or Astarte, the consorts of Baal. It perverted sexuality and destroyed marital sex. It was one of the greatest reasons God judged Israel and Judah, destroying Jerusalem and sending the Jews into exile.

Their idolatry is so perverted that they sacrifice their children to Molech. King Manasseh built an altar in the Ben Hinnom Valley called Topheth upon which he sacrificed his infant son. Jeremiah rails against such a practice in Jeremiah 7, saying it never entered into the Lord's mind to do such a thing! Had the returning exiles taken up the practice again? If so then they have learned nothing!

God says their portion will be the idols they build among the smooth stones of the river valleys or wadis. Those who revert to their perverted idolatry will inherit nothing of God's promised salvation. God asks in light of their behavior should he relent in his judgement against them? He is justified in his punishment of their rebellion and spiritual idolatry.
Given the words here it appears Isaiah is flashing back to the sins of Israel and Judah which led to their destruction. He reminds those who have returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Joshua the reasons why God judged them in the first place. This makes the most sense of the text. The people had abandoned the Lord and turned to rampant idolatry.

57:7-10 - In 57:3-6 the pronouns are masculine plural. Isaiah is speaking to the nation as a whole. In 57:7-10 they shift to feminine singular. He is still speaking to Israel but his depiction is now of an adulterous wife or a prostitute. God often paints Israel as his wife in the Old Testament. See Hosea 1-2, Jeremiah 31 or Isaiah 54.

Verses 7-10 continue the theme of Israel's rampant idolatry and betrayal of God. She has made her bed on a high place, a place of pagan worship. She went up to offer sacrifice not to the Lord but to pagan gods. Deuteronomy 6 commanded the Israelites to put the Lord's great command to love him on the doorposts or doorframes of their homes. Those may still remain but inside the door she has put her pagan symbols. On the outside she appears faithful but inside her heart is given to other gods. This is a powerful picture of the hypocrisy of Israel's idolatry.

She has made her bed with the pagan gods and invited them to her bed to commit adultery with her. She loves them and not the Lord! The last phrase of verse 8 says you have looked on their nakedness. Literally the Hebrew word means hand but it can refer to someone's genitals which is why the NIV and ESV translate the word nakedness. She has exposed herself and seen her idol lover as well. The picture implies an idol that is of a sexual nature.

Verse 9 is difficult. The more literal ESV reads you have journeyed to the king with oil. The Hebrew word for king is melech. Given the context the NIV reads you went to Molech, the god of the Moabites to whom King Manasseh offered child sacrifices. The problem with using the literal translation is the context. What king is Isaiah speaking of here? The only king the exiles knew was the king of Babylon and later of Persia. Is he referring to those pagan kings? The NIV using the context as a guide changes the vowels to read Molech pointing to Israel's pagan worship. Remember, the original Hebrew is written with only the consonants. The vowels are supplied by the person reading the text which makes it open to interpretation depending upon the context. The LXX does not read king or Molech but you multiplied your fornication with him.

The next line of verse 9 describes Israel as trying to be enticing to the king or Molech. She has put on more of her perfumes to draw him in. God's people desire a pagan god more than they do Yahweh of Hosts!

She has sent ambassadors to faraway lands looking for her lovers, her false gods and idols. She has even descended to the grave itself or Sheol. This is probably a reference to trying to contact the dead or spirits through divination which was strictly forbidden in the Law of Moses. See Deuteronomy 18.

Israel's idolatry is so bad she lives under a powerful delusion. Her worship life is wearisome with all of her idols yet she did not come to the conclusion that life is hopeless and full of despair. She refused to say it and continued worshipping her idols. Somehow she found new strength not from God but from her own stubbornness. Israel didn't grow faint or get sick. Isaiah is probably being sarcastic in saying she didn't grow faint or sick. He means physically because spiritually Israel was dying! Her idolatry was out of control.

As I conclude these verses, I come back to the question of setting. To whom is Isaiah addressing these verses? It seems unlikely that whoever finally edited Isaiah's prophecy took an oracle from Isaiah's day about the idolatry of Israel in Isaiah's time and put it in the middle of the
section which applies to the exiles and their return without any indications in the context that suddenly Isaiah was speaking again to his own day instead of a future time. Yet, if he is speaking to the exiles and their return this is a depressing section because it shows that in so many ways the exiles had learned nothing from their experience in Babylon. They would return to their idolatry and sin despite Isaiah's declaration of God's miraculous rescue of the exiles from Babylon. One must remember however, that a century after the return when Ezra came on the scene in Jerusalem he found a community that was far from the Lord even though they had the temple and its sacrifices once again. The Old Testament ends with Malachi attacking the complacency of the faith of the Jews, going through the motions of worship and sacrifice yet living as if God had not commanded them to be holy. Given those realities should we be surprised that the exiles would return to the flagrant idolatry of their ancestors. We are sinners and without God's Holy Spirit in us we will return to our sin and never change!

57:11-13 - Isaiah completes God's indictment against sinful Israel. He asks whom they feared so much that they lied to God. They feared an idol more than they feared the living God who rescued them and made a covenant with them! They did not remember the Lord nor pondered their behavior in their hearts. They were so far gone in their idolatry that their consciences were seared where they no longer saw their sin.

God wonders whether because he was silent so long that they lost their fear of the Lord. Was it because the Lord withheld his judgment from them that they thought nothing would happen? This could refer to the long period when God sent his prophets to them but withheld his judgment. That is difficult however because God uses the word kept silence. The prophets were certainly not silent during their ministries! Isaiah may also be referring to the later Persian time after the return and on into Nehemiah and Ezra's missions. Once Zechariah and Haggai completed their ministries and the temple was rebuilt there was not another prophet in Israel for another century until Malachi. It is difficult to know the silence of which Isaiah speaks.

If the Jews had thought that God was not going to judge them again they were wrong. He will expose their righteousness or their unrighteousness. He will make their deeds known and show how wicked they truly are. Their deeds will not help them before God. Their good will not outweigh their bad and they will stand guilty before the Lord. This is what Jesus continually did with the Pharisees. They considered themselves righteous but Jesus exposed their spiritual pride and sin for everyone to see. He showed they were guilty before God. See Matthew 23.

Isaiah says when God exposes their sin their collection of idols will not help them. They are impotent to deliver them. A wind, a mere breath will blow and carry them away. Idols are no help before a holy God!

However, the one who turns to the Lord, who takes refuge in him will inherit the land and have a place on God's holy mountain. This is a phrase Isaiah uses several times in his prophecy. See Isaiah 11, 56 & 65. It refers literally to the Temple Mount or Mt. Zion in Jerusalem and figuratively it refers to his Kingdom or government. Those who repent and turn to the Lord will have a share in the Lord's Kingdom! They will possess the land even though they are exiles and have been driven from it. God is able to save and deliver them.

57:14-16 - Isaiah contrasts the faithful to God and the wicked in this section. If 56:9-57:13 expressed God's judgment against the wicked then this section, 57:14-21 expresses God's comfort and forgiveness for the repentant.
Verse 14 echoes 40:1-5, prepare the way; build up the highway for God's people. Isaiah uses the same words, prepare and way. God says remove any stumbling blocks or obstacles in his people's way back to him. God is ready to forgive and bless after a time of judgment. This section more easily relates to the time of the return of the exiles to Jerusalem.

God identifies himself in verse 15. He is the high and lofty one that is above all things and all peoples. He is above all so-called idols and the pagan gods Isaiah speaks about in 57:3-14. The Lord lives forever; he is eternal. The ESV translates the phrase, "who inhabits eternity." Isaiah 66 says heaven is God's throne and earth is his footstool. Stephen in his speech to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7 used this concept. God does not live in a temple built by humans. He dwells above. God is not tied to his creation; he lives in eternity, above us and beyond us. His life is outside our frame of reference. This universe is his creation not his home! He is eternal, forever.

His name is also Holy. Isaiah has used the name, the Holy One of Israel, many times in his prophecy. Now he simply shortens it to Holy. Holy means God is unique; he is pure and superior morally to any creature. He possesses essential divine qualities in contrast to that which is human. He is Spirit and not flesh and blood. He is all-together righteous and sovereign. There is no other God besides the Lord. All those things are included in the Name Holy.

God is high and holy and he also dwells in a high and holy place. Isaiah doesn't say heaven but that is implied. This simply repeats the line before it in a different way.

The more important idea is in the next three lines. The Lord also lives or is with those who are contrite or lowly in spirit; namely the humble. Contrite means repentant, sorry for one's sins. God is with them. He lives in them in order to revive them. He is high and holy yet the Lord lives with the humble. Isaiah shows us the mystery of God's character and being. He is high and exalted. He is holy and jealous for his own glory. Yet he is also the humble God, who is for the lowly in spirit. He humbled himself when he became a man and was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Isaiah describes a fundamental tension in the character and being of God that the Bible shows us. Majesty and humility exist in him side by side. God lives with the humble because they are like him!

In verse 16 God tells his people that he will not always accuse them or bring charges against them. He knows their sinfulness yet he also longs to forgive and be in fellowship with them. Their sin grieves him and causes God anger yet Isaiah also knows that the Lord's anger will destroy the people he created. Their spirit will grow faint as will their lives, or the breath of man. This is another tension Isaiah describes in the character and being of God. He is holy and cannot tolerate sin but he is also merciful and gracious and desires to forgive. God is holy and God is love; the two sides to the essential being and character of God. He cannot be one without being the other. Isaiah's great insight in his prophecy is that when the Servant of the Lord comes and offers his life for sinners the love of God and the holiness of God will both be satisfied. The love of God and the holiness of God will meet in the cross of Jesus Christ, the Lord's Servant.

57:17-21 - Isaiah completes this section with a statement of God's determination to forgive the wicked and bring them peace. The Lord was angry with mankind because we kept on sinning despite the Lord's punishment and discipline for sin. This is especially seen in the history of Israel and Isaiah's day. God's wrath was justifiably poured out on human beings because of their willful rebellion and greed. God punished them but they kept on sinning. He turned away from them but they did not turn to him.
Verse 18 states a remarkable fact. God desires to forgive and heal the sinner. Paul says in Romans 5 that while we were still sinners Christ died for us because God loves us. Isaiah says despite the unrepentant sin of his people God will heal them and restore them. Isaiah plainly declares that God’s forgiveness has nothing to do with our merit. We do not deserve forgiveness and restoration but God gives it nonetheless to the sinner. God will heal. God will restore and comfort those who mourn over his judgment. God will create praise on the lips of sinners and bring peace, shalom, to those who are far and near. Paul in Ephesians 2 says that Jesus brought peace to Jew and Gentile alike, those who were far from God and those who were near. He did it because God had purposed it. God will heal the disease of sin in his people and even include the Gentiles in his grace.

The wicked however will find no peace. Those who refuse God's offer of forgiveness will be like the churning, tossing sea. Its waves never rest but only toss up mud and mire. As Paul says in Romans 8 those who live by the sinful nature cannot please God. The only fruit they will bear in their lives is chaos and evil. The implication is that forgiven sinners, those who accept God's healing will bear peace and wholeness, as Hebrews 13 says, the fruit of lips that praise God's Name.

Chapter 58:
58:1-2 - God calls Isaiah to declare his people's sins and rebellion. He calls him to shout it out like a trumpet sounding. The word for trumpet here is shophar, or ram's horn. This was used in the temple ceremonies and was not the silver trumpet used to sound assembly of the tribes in the wilderness.

God says his people want to seek him out. In fact they do it daily. They are very religious, wanting to know God's ways. Yet they do not live like it. They are not righteous in their actions and have turned away from God's commands. They have the form of religion but their hearts are not in relationship with God.

Isaiah's description sounds like the people in Jeremiah's day. They were diligent in performing the temple rituals but their behavior was selfish and rebellious against God. They had paganized their religion with Yahweh. This is also similar to the behavior of the people which Ezra discovered. They faithfully came to the newly rebuilt temple to offer sacrifices to God yet they had disobeyed God and had intermarried with the pagans around them. They religiously observed the rituals of their religion while at the same time ignoring the commands of God for righteous behavior. Isaiah is told to call them out and expose their hypocrisy.

We are in danger of the same kind of behavior today. People think by going to church, giving, serving somewhere in a ministry and being religious they are pleasing God and he will bless them. Yet there is no obedience, no character transformation and no righteous living. As Pastor Dave has said they come to church on Sunday and act all spiritual and then live like hell the rest of the week! That is what the Jews were doing who had come home to Jerusalem whom God had rescued from captivity.

58:3-5 - Isaiah focuses on one of the Jews’ most popular religious activities; fasting. They complain that they have fasted and humbled themselves before the Lord but God doesn't even take notice! The Lord's answer is that they fast only for themselves. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 said the religious leaders of his day did the same thing. They fasted to be noticed so people would think they were more spiritual and closer to God than they actually
were. Isaiah says the Jews fast but it doesn't change their behavior or attitudes. They still exploit their workers. They still quarrel with each other and fight each other.

Fasting, abstaining usually from food for a set time, is supposed to help a person come closer to God by exposing sinful attitudes or desires. It usually accompanies some other spiritual discipline like prayer. One fasts to bring one’s body and desires under God's control and submit them to him. God’s charge against the returned exiles is they fast on the outside, but inwardly they surrender nothing to God. Their fasting results in nothing but an outward show of religious devotion, but their behavior never changes! They are just as sinful and wicked after they fast as they were before!

God says if this is their fast he will not listen to their prayers. Outward religious show does not please God. He sees right through it. It is not acceptable to the Lord. They may humble their bodies by wearing sackcloth and spreading ashes. They may bow down their heads in outward humility but God sees their hearts. Nothing has changed for them. He wants righteous behavior not outward religious rituals that do nothing! The same is true for us today!

58:6-7 - God says the fast that he chooses for his people is one that results in social justice to the poor and oppressed. God wants his people to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke. The images suggest prisoners or those who have been held captive in some way. The context suggests the captivity could be political but it is more likely economic. Isaiah is speaking about the poor who have little resources. This would have been exacerbated in the exile and during the return. Those who came home from Babylon had the support of Persia and the money to travel under Zerubbabel. But they would have found people who had stayed in the land who would have been the poorest of the poor. The infrastructure of the nation had been almost totally destroyed. Hunger, shelter, and simple survival would have been huge obstacles to overcome. God calls the returning exiles to help those who do not have the means to help themselves.

God says to share your food or bread with the hungry and provide for the wanderer who does not have shelter. The ESV translates the phrase "bring the homeless poor into your house." When you see someone who is naked clothe them. Do not turn away from your own flesh and blood. This reinforces the idea that God is speaking to the returning exiles about the poor in the land. The problems are obvious for those with eyes to see. Don't go to the newly rebuilt temple and perform all your religious rituals yet ignore your Jewish brothers and sisters who are homeless and hungry among you! Let your fasting inform your behavior.

Jesus in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25 uses these same images. When his people help the hungry, the homeless and the naked they are helping Jesus because God cares for the poor. Our moral behavior is judged by how we treat those who are poor and oppressed. At Southside the Food Bank, holiday dinners at Mid-City Concerns, Christ Kitchen, Cup of Cool Water, the Union Gospel Mission and shelters, all of these ministry projects are not just feel-good agencies to which people can give. They are critical in our witness to the community. True lifechange and spiritual growth in our people will increase our sensitivity to the poor around us and lead us to get involved in helping. That is the spiritual fast God desires for us!

58:8-10 - Isaiah says when God's people show concern for the poor, the hungry and the homeless among them then their light will break forth like the dawn and their healing will quickly appear. The word for break forth literally means to split open or burst open. Isaiah implies that Israel's witness to the nations is ready to shine like the sun suddenly coming up over the horizon but the
people need to obey God and allow their religious practices to inform their behavior. Not only will they shine with God's light when they do but their healing as a people will grow rapidly. God desires for his people to be whole again. He desires them to come back to him and have a relationship with him based on love and obedience not ritual and pagan-like worship. When they truly love and serve the Lord their righteousness, his righteousness, will go ahead of them and the Lord's glory will be their rear guard. The picture is of a king or an army with the heralds in front proclaiming the king's coming and the king's guard behind him serving to protect him and be his rear guard. God will be close to them and protect them. Even more importantly their righteousness will be clear for the nations to see. Their mission was to be a witness to the world of Yahweh and his greatness, to draw the nations to God. Now, if they will turn back to the Lord and love and obey him the Lord will help them complete their mission!

When they are faithful they will call out to the Lord in prayer and he will answer them! Before the exile they had prayed to the Lord in their idolatry and the Lord would not hear their prayers. See Isaiah 1. Now everything will be different.

Isaiah returns to the Lord's call to the Jews to treat people with justice and mercy. If they do away with oppression, the "pointing of the finger", meaning judgment and constant criticism of others and of malicious talk, God will renew them and heal them. If they help the poor and needy in their midst and work to satisfy their needs then their light will rise in the darkness and their night will become like the day. Their moral and spiritual darkness will lift and the Lord will prosper his people even as he promised to do when he made a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19. They will be his people and he will be their God and the world will come to know Yahweh through their life and witness.

Isaiah counsels us as well today. Pointing fingers and attacking people is rampant in our culture, especially on social media. This is not God's way and he will not bless us as a nation nor will he bless us as a church if that is the way we treat one another or other Christian brothers and sisters or even the society at large. A judgmental attitude does not draw people to God. One of help, mercy, and care for the downtrodden does.

58:11-12 - Isaiah continues to outline the blessing of obedience to God and bringing their religious actions in line with their behavior. The Lord will guide the Jews always. He will satisfy their needs even in a sun-scorched land. Think of the Judean Desert or the Negev. It is a most inhospitable place yet God says he will provide for them. He will strengthen their frame, or make their bones strong, meaning give them health and well-being.

The Jews will be like a watered garden and like a spring that does not fail. Contrast that picture with the sun-scorched places. God will prosper them when everyone else will falter. I think of today in Israel where the Israelis have learned how to grow fresh tomatoes in the salt water of the Dead Sea. I think of the many farms and irrigated land down the Jordan Valley.

Then God promises that the Jews will rebuild their ancient ruins and raise up the age-old foundations again. In context Isaiah is speaking of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. They were built long ago in an ancient time. Yet even for the exiles they had only been destroyed some 70 years or more. Isaiah may have in mind the construction of the second temple under Zerubbabel which was dedicated in 515 which the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to finish. He may also be referring to Nehemiah and his mission to Jerusalem a century later to rebuild the broken walls of the city. When the walls were rebuilt and security was once more restored to the city the population of Jerusalem grew because now it was safe to live there. Zerubbabel and Nehemiah fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy.
58:13-14 - To wrap up this entire section and chapter Isaiah returns to the motif of the Sabbath and the blessings that will come if the Jews keep it faithfully. These two verses are a series of conditional "if-then" statements.

If the Jews will keep their feet from breaking the Sabbath, literally turn back your foot, and from doing as they please on the Lord's Day then God will bless them. God calls the Sabbath in verse 13 "my holy day" and "the Lord's holy day." The Sabbath was designed, Jesus said, for man and he was Lord of the Sabbath. Here Isaiah teaches us that the Sabbath is God's day, a day designed for us to focus on our relationship with the Lord and worship him.

Isaiah says the Lord desires us to delight in the Lord's Day and honor it. The fourth commandment in Exodus 20 says to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy by doing no work on it. The word for delight is often related to the delights of a young woman, who is soft and pleasing to the touch. It is a word that denotes pleasure and enjoyment in something. That is the attitude God calls his people to have about the Lord's Day! Do we take pleasure in it and delight in worshipping the Lord on his day?

Isaiah clarifies how we can honor the Sabbath when he tells the Jews they are not to go their own way and do as they please and speak idle words on the Sabbath. In other words the day is to be dedicated to the Lord, doing what he wants and not what we want. It is a day to honor him and build our relationship with him. In Hebrew the words translated talking idly are simply the word for speak repeated twice, talk, talk.

God says if his people will do all these things then they will find joy or delight in the Lord. He will lift them to the heights or cause them to ride the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of their father Jacob. God promised the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 5 that if they kept his commandments then he would bless them and they would prosper and live long in the land he was giving them. That is essentially what the Lord tells the returning exiles here. He will bless them in the land if they will honor his Sabbath Day. How do we do that as a church and a nation today?

Chapter 59:

59:1-2 - If chapter 58 outlined the benefits of righteous living before God chapter 59 outlines the devastating results of our sin. The problem is briefly laid out in verses 1-2, then Isaiah describes in verses 3-15 the consequences of sin and what it produces in us, in our relationship with God and our relationships with others. Finally in verses 15-21 Isaiah outlines the Lord's response to his peoples' sin.

These two verses state clearly what Paul reiterates in Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. Isaiah clearly states that our sins separate us from God. The returned exiles may have wondered when the Lord would prosper them again. Why didn't he put down their enemies like the Samaritans who opposed them? See Ezra 4-5 & Haggai 1. Isaiah reveals it is not because the Lord is too weak or he is hard of hearing and doesn't respond to their prayers. Yahweh is not impotent to save them! It is their sins which have put a barrier between the Lord and his people.

The word the NIV translates separated implies something that repulses like when one tries to touch the same poles of two magnets. God is repelled by our sin and it causes him to withdraw and put space between us and him. When we sin our relationship with the Lord is damaged. That is why we need to confess our sins, not to earn God's forgiveness but to restore our relationship with him by acknowledging our sin and apologizing to the Lord for hurting him and others. That is the meaning of the phrase, "your sins have hidden his face from you." God
turns away from our sin because of his holiness. He does not stop loving us but our sin puts a strain on our relationship with him. The result is a distance between us and God.

Furthermore our sin affects our prayers. Sin causes God to turn away from us and put distance between us and him. That hinders our prayers. Until we face our sin and confess it to him the Lord will not hear. Isaiah said the same thing in chapter 1; Israel's sin had led God to stop answering their prayers. He has turned away from them and will not listen until they repent. In classic Reformed-Presbyterian worship the opening hymn of praise is followed by the prayer of confession. Only then does the worship service move on to the prayers of the people. This is an acknowledgement of exactly what Isaiah is writing about here. Our sins separate us from God and put a barrier between us. We need to confess them in order to restore our relationship with God then we can pray to him and he will answer. Confession is God's gift to us to restore our relationship with him when we have damaged it by sinning. It is not a condition of our forgiveness because we are justified completely through our faith in Jesus Christ. Confession restores our fellowship with our Heavenly Father.

59:3-8 - Isaiah describes the behavior of sinners. Their hands are stained with blood and guilt. The word translated stained is normally translated defiled and refers to ritual purity. However, in context it can also mean stained as the NIV takes it here. The image is a powerful one because blood-stained hands do not easily come clean. The evidence is plain for all to see. The shedding of blood implies violence and murder. II Kings 21:16 says King Manasseh shed so much innocent blood in Jerusalem that he defiled the city from one end to the other. The innocent blood II Kings refers to is the blood of children he slaughtered at the altar of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, including his own infant son. It is quite possible that Isaiah had Manasseh in mind.

Those far from the Lord and lost in their sins speak lies and they mutter wickedness. The word for mutter refers to someone mumbling under their breath. Sin leads to lying because sin is fundamentally a denial of the truth of God that he is the standard for all conduct. He is the Creator and has the absolute right to define what is morally right and wrong for his creatures. Satan denied that and tried to exalt himself as God and be his own standard. His temptation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 was designed to get them to do the same thing. It was a lie. Jesus said in John 8 Satan has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning and he called him the Father of Lies.

Sinful, depraved people deny justice for those who are oppressed. They go to court on a pretense and have no integrity when they argue a case. Their arguments are empty and based on lies. They do not care if justice is served but only care for their own ends. This describes so much of what one sees today in frivolous lawsuits and the threat of lawsuits. It is not about justice but about gaining money or power by any means necessary.

The result is the wicked conceive trouble and birth evil. Isaiah describes people who are so far gone in their sin that nothing good comes from their motives and actions. Genesis 6 describes the condition of humanity before the Flood and states that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. Isaiah saw the same thing in his people! We are seeing something similar in many people in America today!

Isaiah uses a vivid image to picture wicked people and their influence. He says they hatch viper eggs and spin a spider's web. When snakes lay eggs they lay many more than just one. The picture is of evil multiplied. If one eats one of the eggs they die. They are not food to sustain life but poisonous. If one tries to crush an egg an adder or viper is hatched and threatens the one who
crushed the egg. In other words there is a very grave danger from evil people. Their offspring might look good but they are a threat to life itself.

The same goes for their webs. Isaiah's picture implies that the webs look strong or good enough to use to cover oneself but they are not. They are cobwebs that are so thin they are useless for clothing and will not cover anything. People who try and use what evil people make to cover themselves will only be shamed and embarrassed. They are lies and are traps to ensnare people in their wickedness like a spider trying to trap a fly in its web.

All the deeds of those who practice evil are evil. Their actions are wicked and violent. They bear no good fruit. In fact evil people run to sin. They rush to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil, their ways are evil. Their speech is evil. Isaiah paints a picture of people who are so far gone in their sin there is no good left in them at all. To be around them and fellowship with them or cooperate with them is to be sucked into their deeds and plots. One puts oneself in danger if one does not stay away from them.

Ruin and destruction mark their ways. They do not know the way of peace or shalom. They might entice others with their lies but inwardly they do not know peace. Inwardly their souls are in turmoil because sin only produces ruin and darkness. Their ways are unjust and one will find no justice following them nor any hope of finding peace in one's life. Paul in Romans 3 uses Isaiah's picture to describe sinners, that none of them are righteous, not even one.

59:9-11 - Isaiah continues to outline the consequences of sin and straying away from God. There is a change however in verse 9. From 59:2-8 he has described evil people and what they do. Now the pronouns change and become first person plural and not third person. In verse 9 he includes all of the Jews in his description of what happens to a people when they are far from God. Righteous people are caught up in the consequences of a sinful people too.

Justice and righteousness are far away and they cannot reach them. Isaiah uses a literary device in verses 9-11 to tie all of the verses together. The verb for far away is the first word in Hebrew in this section and it is the last word in the section as well. When a people have abandoned God as a culture then justice and righteousness deteriorate among them. They cannot be reached nor can they reach that society as well. There comes a time when evil triumphs and so affects a society that even good people can no longer turn it around. Only a great repentance and revival can bring them back to God.

The righteous look for light but all they see is darkness. They live or walk in deep shadows. The word is literally night or blackness. The ESV translates it gloom. People are so affected by the evil around them they have hard time living in the light at all. They are like blind people groping for the wall; like people who have no eyes. The picture Isaiah paints is of people who can no longer see the light. At noon they stumble along as if it is twilight when one can barely see. Those who at least want to do good are like dead men in strength compared to those who desire to do evil.

Isaiah says "we" all growl like a she-bear and moan mournfully like a dove. The picture is of either a loud grown and growl like a bear or the soft mournful cry of a dove. Both express pain and grief. Why do they growl or moan? They hoped for justice but found none. They are waiting for salvation but it is far away, the same word as began the whole stanza.

Hidden in this last line is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus. The word for salvation in Hebrew is yeshua, which is Jesus' name in Hebrew. The people wait for Yeshua but it, he, is far away. It would be seven centuries from the time Isaiah wrote this, five from the time of the exiles before a baby is born in Bethlehem to a poor carpenter from the line of David who named his son Jesus,
Yeshua. Isaiah said more than he knew to a people who longed for their Messiah to come, the one who would bring the Lord's salvation!

59:12-15a - These verses conclude Isaiah's picture of the sins of the Jews and how far away from God they have turned. He continues to use the first person plural and include all his people in his confession.

Their offenses, literally rebellions, have multiplied in God's sight. It is not one simple sin but many and they are growing, multiplying every day. They testify against the people. Worship to appease God does nothing because the people's behavior declares the truth of the position of their hearts. They are far from God.

Their rebellion and sin is so great they cannot escape it. It is ever with them. They know their iniquities. That is the irony of sin. At some level we all know the truth about our behavior but we deny it and because sin at its heart is rebellion against our Creator that rebellion and stubborness keep us from repenting.

Isaiah summarizes their sin. They commit rebellion and treachery against the Lord. Treachery can also mean denying God. The word for deny literally means to cringe. It can mean to lie and disown. The next line completes Isaiah's idea. They turn their backs upon God. They turn away from the one who made them, saved them, forgave them and wants to forgive and save them again. But instead of repenting they turn away from him.

They foment rebellion or revolt from God and oppress others. When one denies God's love and refuses to love God in return one will not love one's neighbor. We will oppress them! What is birthed in their rebellious hearts instead are lies. Love and truth disappear from among them because sin is anti-love and anti-truth.

Isaiah's final description is chilling. Justice is driven back and righteousness stands at a distance. Truth has stumbled in the streets or in the city square. Honesty or integrity cannot enter into the square where people would fellowship and conduct their business. Truth is nowhere to be found and whoever shuns evil, whoever turns away from evil and tries to live a righteous life becomes prey to those who hate God. They are attacked and literally plundered. The word is used of looting and plundering a conquered enemy or city. In other words justice, righteousness, truth and integrity are so rejected by a rebellious people that someone who tries to live God's way is attacked and victimized. They are singled out as the enemy!

Isaiah's picture is so profound for us today. One can see in our culture that we are going the same direction which Isaiah outlines in his day. Truth, integrity, justice and righteousness have been shoved to the fringes of our culture. Evil, lies and rebellion dominate. Those who seek to live godly lives are ridiculed in the public square and seen as an enemy to be silenced and even destroyed. Now more than ever God's people need to stand firm for the values of God's Kingdom. We need to model them in the hopes of turning some people back to God and as a witness to the rebellion and sin of American culture! God help us because these attitudes are what led the Lord to judge Judah and we are doing the same thing they did!

59:15b-19 - Isaiah now shifts his focus from the sins of Judah and God's people to the Lord's response. He is displeased or better, appalled that there was no justice, no one who would intercede for his people to turn them to the Lord. In Ezekiel 22 it says the Lord looked for someone who would stand in the gap on the wall so he would not have to destroy Jerusalem but he could find no one. Isaiah uses a similar idea here. This is an indictment on the moral and
spiritual leaders among the Jews. There was no one who could step forward and save God's people.

So the Lord acted on their behalf instead! God worked salvation for his people. His own righteousness sustained him. Isaiah tells us that unless God intervenes and saves us we will perish in our sin. As Paul said in Romans 3 there is none righteous, no not one. No one seeks after God. He said it is in the gospel that the righteousness of God is revealed apart from the Law. God saves us when we cannot save ourselves!

The Lord puts on a breastplate of his righteousness and a helmet of salvation. He puts on garments of vengeance or he puts on vengeance as a uniform. The word for put on clothes here was used as a military term. The Lord wraps himself with zeal or passion as his cloak. Paul uses Isaiah's picture along with the Roman soldier to whom he was chained as a template to describe the armor of God in Ephesians 6. The armor is the Lord's armor. He not only puts it on himself to prepare for battle and judgment he gives it to us to fight the enemy!

God comes to bring his wrath against his enemies according to what they have done. In 59:2-15a Isaiah has described the deeds of a sinful people who have refused to turn away from sin and back to God. His people are not exempt from his wrath and retribution for their wickedness if they will not repent. That was clearly demonstrated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon! God will repay those who opposed him. To those who do not repent and continue to defy his authority and reign he will exact justice and give rebellious sinners their due.

Isaiah says God will repay the coastlands for their deeds. However, the whole passage turns in verse 19. The Lord's coming will cause the Gentiles, those who live from the east to the west to fear the Lord and give honor to his name. He will come, like a pent up flood, a rushing stream driven along by the breath or wind of the Lord. The word in Hebrew for wind or breath is ruach, which can also be translated Spirit. The Lord is about to unleash a raging flood of his vengeance upon the sinners of the world. However, as Isaiah 53 has already shown us that raging flood of retribution for sin will be poured out on his Servant. God will pour his righteous wrath for human sin and rebellion on his innocent Son, Jesus Christ. Christ will die for sinners and take their punishment upon himself so that they will not have to bear it. Thus even the Gentiles will fear and honor the Lord!

59:20-21 - Isaiah reinforces God's desire to save his people and even the Gentiles in these two verses. This is a like a mini New Testament. A Redeemer, a savior will come to Zion, one who rescues Israel from sin. He comes to those in Jacob who will turn back or repent of their sins. The word for sins here is actually singular and means rebellion. That is an apt description of Isaiah's catalogue of Israel's sins in chapter 59. They have rebelled against the Lord but there is hope for salvation if they will turn from their rebellion and come back to the Lord. They cannot save themselves but God will send his Redeemer to save them so that their repentance will result in salvation. Isaiah has already described that Redeemer and his mission in chapters 9 & 11, and in the Servant Songs of chapters 42-53. When Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God in Mark 1 he said the way to enter was to repent and believe God's message. God saves us by his grace but the way we enter into that salvation is repentance.

But there is more! God says he will make an everlasting covenant with his repentant people. He will not only save them from their sins he will give them his Spirit to be with them forever! God's Spirit that was upon Isaiah as his prophet the Lord promises will also be on his
children and their descendants forever. They will all be prophets filled with his Spirit. His Word and Spirit will be with his people for all time.

This is different than the typical way the Holy Spirit comes on people in the Old Testament. He would come to a specific person for a specific task and a specific time. He did not come to all the people of Israel. He could come upon someone and then leave as he did with King Saul. Moses in Numbers 11 lamented that God did not put his Spirit on all his people so that they would all be prophets. Here Isaiah says God will fulfill Moses' desire. Since this verse is immediately following verse 20 and the prophecy of the coming of the Redeemer it follows that the Spirit is given in the time of the Redeemer's coming to those who will repent. This is exactly what Jesus taught the disciples in Luke 24 and Acts 1. See also John 15-16, and 20. The Holy Spirit coming on all God's people is the climax of the first coming of the Messiah or the fulfillment of the mission of the Servant. The human race has been redeemed and now the Spirit is given. He is the guarantee of the resurrection of all and the first installment of the life of the Age to Come. At the Second Coming of the Messiah he will gather his people, defeat Satan and evil once and for all and usher in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. This is the already-not yet program of the New Testament. Isaiah prophesies the first part of that program here in 59:20-21.

Chapter 60:
60:1-3 - In 59:20-21 Isaiah had focused on all of God's people. Now he focuses specifically on Zion or Jerusalem. The verbs in verse 1 are feminine singular. It is also possible that Jerusalem represents Israel and God's people. He looks forward to the day when God's glory and light will appear in Jerusalem and the city or the people will shine with the Lord's presence. This passage was taken as Messianic by the rabbis of Jesus' day.

Arise or stand up, get up and shine because your light has come. The city is told to shine with the glory of God. His light has come to Jerusalem. The glory or honor of the Lord has risen upon Zion like a sunrise. These verses reflect passages in the gospels, especially John. In John 1 he says the disciples had seen the Lord's glory in the presence of the incarnate Word who dwelt among them. In John 8 Jesus says he is the light of the world. In Luke 2 Simeon praises God as he takes the infant Jesus in his arms saying the child shall be a light to the Gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel.

The Lord's glory and light will come to Jerusalem at a time when darkness covers the earth and thick darkness or a thick black cloud covers the nations. Jesus in John 8 says whoever follows him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. The darkness Isaiah speaks of here is the lack of the Lord's presence and glory. The nations have no light either morally or spiritually because they do not have the Lord.

Isaiah says the Lord will arise on Zion and his glory will appear over her. This is speaking of Jesus who is God incarnate who shows his glory and light. When he comes to Jerusalem the nations will come to its light. Kings will come to the brightness of Jerusalem's rising. This passage could be taken in an already-not yet manner. When Jesus came to Jerusalem the Lord's glory and light entered the city as Isaiah prophesied. However, when the majority of the Jews rejected him as Messiah and Lord the city did not shine out to the nations. Instead God's glory was hidden except for those who knew the truth, namely Jesus' disciples. At his Second Coming however, John says in Revelation 22 that the kings of the world will bring their glory into the city to honor the Lord Jesus who dwells there with his people. The ultimate fulfillment
of Isaiah's prophecy awaits the Lord's return in glory. In the meantime the nations come to his light through the preaching of the gospel. Isaiah's vision is fulfilled provisionally.

60:4-7 - Isaiah continues to describe the results of the Lord's glory coming to Jerusalem. He tells the people to lift up their eyes and look. He told the exiles to lift up their eyes and look at the heavens in 40:26. There he asked them to look at the stars the Lord created and note that not one was missing. Here he tells the Jews to look all around them because the nations are coming to Jerusalem and they are bringing home their sons and daughters. Their daughters are being carried like a parent carries their child on their hip. When the nations come to Jerusalem's glory and her children come home then when they look and see what is happening their hearts will swell with joy. Their faces will be radiant. The word translated throb in the NIV is literally to tremble and is normally associated with a fear response. Here however their hearts will "tremble" with joy. Their hearts will expand which the NIV translates as swell with joy.

Not only will the nations come and bring Israel's children home but they will also bring with them their riches. John echoes this in his description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 22. The wealth of the seas will come to them, meaning the seafaring peoples will bring their treasure into the city. This is most likely the Phoenicians of Tyre, Sidon and Carthage. They were the sea traders Israel knew best. Not only would the nations' wealth come to Jerusalem by caravan it would come to them by sea.

Herds of camels will cover their land from Midian and Ephah. Midian was a desert tribe inhabiting northwestern Arabia and sometimes the Sinai. Midian was descended from Abraham's second wife Keturah and Ephah was their firstborn son. They were camel herders. The picture of camel herds covering the land is twofold. It literally could refer to large camel herds which would have been a sign of wealth but the Midianites were also traders. The image of the large herds points to so many caravans they cover the land. This is another picture of the wealth of the nations pouring into Israel.

Sheba is in southwestern Arabia or in southern Sudan. Sheba was a grandson of Abraham and Keturah and brother to Dedan who is related to the Arab tribes of Arabia. Sheba is also mentioned as a son of Shem in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and as a son of Cush in the Genesis 10 as well. The Queen of Sheba brought gifts to Solomon in I Kings 10. She is traditionally seen as ruling over a people in Ethiopia or the Horn of Africa. Here Sheba is probably related to the people in the Horn of Africa because they were involved in the spice trade. Isaiah says the people of Sheba will come to Jerusalem with gold and frankincense which in Old Testament times came from that area. The Magi in Matthew 2 bring gifts of gold and frankincense along with myrrh to the baby Jesus. They were from Persia or Babylon yet frankincense and gold were considered gifts fit for a king. Isaiah says the caravans from Sheba will bring wealth to Zion but even more importantly they will proclaim the praises of the Lord. The blessing of Abraham will be extended to all these peoples who were related to Abraham!

All the flocks of Kedar and Nebaioth will be gathered to Jerusalem. Kedar was the firstborn son of Ishmael and Nebaioth was Kedar's firstborn son. They represent the Arab tribes who were most often shepherders. Isaiah says the rams of the Arab's will serve the Jews and their flocks will be acceptable offerings on the Lord's altar. God will bring honor or glory and splendor to his house, meaning his temple.

The Midianites and Sheba were related to the Jews through Abraham. The Arabs were also related to Abraham through Hagar Sarah's handmaiden. The wealth of the nations would come to Jerusalem, from the farthest seafaring peoples to those who were closest in relation to
the Jews, like the Arabs. This is a fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham that he would make of Abraham a great nation through his son Isaac and that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. Ultimately God's covenant is fulfilled in "Abraham's seed" the Lord Jesus Christ. The blessing he would bring is forgiveness and eternal life with God. Isaiah's picture of a renewed Jerusalem to which the nations will come to worship God is also a fulfillment of that covenant. John in Revelation 21-22 shows us the New Jerusalem where the wealth of the kings of the nations flows into the city. The Lord Jesus and his people dwell there and the nations are healed. In Isaiah's vision sacrifices are still given at a renewed temple. In John's ultimate vision there is no need for a temple or sacrifices anymore because the Lord Jesus is the temple; his throne and presence are with his people. He is the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world and there is no more need of animal sacrifices. Isaiah's vision is not yet complete. It needs the fulfillment that comes through the life, death, resurrection and Second Coming of Jesus Christ!

60:8-9 - Isaiah continues to describe the homecoming of the Jews to a renewed Jerusalem. He paints a picture of the ships of Tarshish leading a flotilla of trading ships bringing back the children of Israel from the "islands" or "coastlands". That is a term in the prophets that usually describes the islands and coastlands of Greece, Italy and points to the west of Israel. For the Jews they were mysterious and exotic because one had to travel in ships which they did not do often. Tarshish represents these trading nations and was probably far to the west perhaps in Spain or it could even be Carthage.

Isaiah says the islands look to the Lord or hope for the Lord. Even the Gentile nations at some level desire a relationship with God. They have substituted idols and false gods for that desire but it is still there in all of us.

The ships bring back God's people to Jerusalem and they bring the wealth of their trading, silver and gold. They bring it to the honor of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. This is one of Isaiah's favorite titles for God and ties the book together because Isaiah uses it throughout his prophecy. The nations add their wealth to the holy city but it is God himself who has made her beautiful or endowed her with splendor.

Having been to Jerusalem many times I can attest to the fact that there is a powerful feeling when one sees the city for the first time. I felt as if somehow I had come home. Biblically Jerusalem is the site of our forever home as God's people. It will be the capital of the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus with his people. Presumably the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven will rest at the site of the ancient city. John in Revelation 21-22 describes it as beautiful beyond description with gates made of a single pearl and streets paved with gold, clear as glass. Isaiah is looking forward to that heavenly city where God will finally dwell with his people.

60:10-12 - The tone of these verses is different than 60:1-9. Here the emphasis is more on the nations serving Israel as the spoils of God's salvation for his people. Gentile nations will rebuild their walls, probably meaning Jerusalem. Their kings will serve Israel rather than Israel being a conquered or vassal state of a foreign empire. In a provisional way this passage was fulfilled when Nehemiah led a group of exiles to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. He was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia who agreed to finance the operation and provide whatever Nehemiah needed to complete the project. He "served" Nehemiah. See Nehemiah 1-6. In the larger context of Scripture and history however, these verses have not yet been fulfilled.
John in Revelation 22 gives us the ultimate picture of the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision in the New Jerusalem.

God says in his wrath over Judah's sin he struck them and punished them. But now in his favor or grace he will have mercy and show them love. Isaiah is speaking to the exiles in Babylon and to those who have returned home to Jerusalem. God has allowed him to look forward a century and a half to the time of the exiles. That is the only historical context that makes sense of these verses. In Isaiah's lifetime no foreign king would rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. In many ways this is an eschatological picture of God's city. That is confirmed in John's vision in Revelation 22.

John borrows heavily from verse 11 for his description of Jerusalem in Revelation. The gates of the city will never be shut by day or night. Ancient cities shut their gates for protection to keep their people safe. Isaiah's picture says the Lord will keep the city safe day and night. It will never be threatened. Furthermore the kings of the Gentile nations will bring their wealth into the city. They will be led in a process or a triumphal process into Jerusalem. The picture in Revelation 22 is of the kings bringing their treasure in worship to God into the city. Here in Isaiah 60 the sense is closer to the kings bringing their wealth into the city in tribute, as if they have been conquered. Isaiah's picture is one of subjugation. John's picture is one of salvation and worship. Yet in verses 1-9 Isaiah clearly speaks of the salvation of the Gentiles through the Jews and their witness to the nations.

Verse 12 recalls the language of God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12; whoever blesses you I will bless and whoever curses you I will curse. Isaiah focuses on the consequences of opposing Israel. The nation that will not serve the Lord's people Israel will perish. It will be utterly ruined or destroyed. Both the ESV and NIV translate the last phrase of the verse using the word utterly. In Hebrew the line literally reads destroyed, destroyed. It simply repeats the word. The point is God will take vengeance on the nations that do not serve, protect or cooperate with his people Israel. Those that do not he will destroy. One could make a good historical case that the Lord has continually fulfilled this promise throughout history. Israel has been conquered and its people scattered many times from Isaiah's day till the present time. Yet none of the nations who conquered or persecuted the Jews has survived. God watches out for his people even when they stubbornly rebel against him. When the Lord Jesus returns he will finally and utterly defeat all those who have opposed the Lord and his people Israel. See Revelation 18-20.

60:13-14 - Isaiah continues to describe the blessings and benefits of God's salvation for his people. The glory or splendor of Lebanon will come to Jerusalem. The pine, fir and cypress will all be there. Today there are a few trees around Jerusalem but it is not a forested area like the mountains of Lebanon. When King Solomon built the temple from 967-960 he brought cedar trees from Lebanon in a trade deal with King Hiram of Tyre to Jerusalem to furnish the inside of the temple. Isaiah may be thinking of Solomon's actions in describing the renewed Jerusalem. The trees from Lebanon will adorn the place of the Lord's sanctuary, meaning a renewed temple of the Lord. The Lord says he will glorify or bring honor to the place of his feet. The temple of the Lord was often viewed as the footstool of the Lord on earth as he was seated in heaven. See Psalm 99 & 132. The Ark of the Covenant is also referred to as the Lord's footstool in 1 Chronicles 28. Isaiah is clearly referring to the Lord's temple in verse 13.

Not only will the Lord's temple be beautified but Israel's enemies will come and bow down before them in a sign of submission to them. Those who despised them and oppressed them will come bowing down at their feet. This is a complete reversal of Israel's history. The
great empires of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon forced the Jews to bow to them. Now they will bow down to the Jews and submit to the Lord's people. Deliverance from their enemies was one part of the Lord's promised salvation to his people as part of the Messiah's coming and the Day of the Lord.

The nations who now submit to God's people will call them the City of the Lord and Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah says God's people will be so identified with Jerusalem that the nations will call them by the city's name. John in Revelation 21-22 gives us a picture of a renewed heaven and earth and God's permanent dwelling place with his people, the New Jerusalem. He borrows heavily from Isaiah's vision here in chapter 60 for details of the new city. From a New Testament perspective, Isaiah's prophecy points to the final dwelling place of God and his people.

60:15-16 - Isaiah reminds them they have been forsaken and hated among the nations. No one travels through the land. Trade was an important part of ancient Israel's economy, being the pathway between Mesopotamia and Egypt. If no one was passing through the land then their economy would have ground to a halt and the people would have been in great distress. As for being forsaken and hated the story of the Jews as a people throughout their history from Isaiah's time until today reflects Isaiah's statement. Even today in our so-called modern world anti-Semitism still is rampant around the world and people irrationally hate the Jewish people. However, Isaiah says when the Lord saves Jerusalem and rescues his people everything will be different. God will make them the pride and joy of all generations or of all the peoples. He will transform them from a hated, forsaken people to one that brings joy from age to age forever. Isaiah then uses an image of an infant nursing at its mother's breast. The curious thing is literally the words are “nurse at the breast of kings” which is impossible. The NIV in order to avoid the confusion reads: “Israel will nurse at royal breasts”. Israel shall drink the milk of nations, while the ESV's more literal translation reads, “you shall suck the milk of nations”.

Isaiah says when all of this occurs and Israel's fortunes have been transformed then they will know that the Lord alone is their Redeemer and Savior. He is truly the Mighty One of Jacob. God will restore his people and show himself to them and to all the nations as God alone and Savior alone.

60:17-18 - Isaiah continues his description of Israel and Jerusalem in the time of the Lord's salvation for them. He gives four examples of the Lord giving them greater benefits, trading up for better things. He will replace bronze with gold; silver for iron; bronze for wood and iron for stones. The first example, gold for bronze, reverses the shame of the days of King Rehoboam in I Kings 14. During his reign Shishak, Pharaoh of Egypt, sacked Jerusalem and took the golden shields Solomon had made for the king's guard. Rehoboam had bronze shields made to replace them. They were still shiny but worth far less. The Lord will reverse that shame and replace that which is bronze in the city with gold! Iron was valuable as material for weapons but as coinage or in jewelry or utensils it was not shiny whereas silver would have been much more valuable. One couldn't make an iron mirror and an iron plate for the king's table would have been drab. Silver was greater and more valuable. Bronze was stronger than wood as a building material and would not burn. The same is true for iron replacing stones. Stones could be chipped and carved. Iron withstood attack much better. In each case the exchange is for something greater, more valuable and stronger. God will improve Jerusalem!
In Isaiah's day the people had experienced the oppression of the Assyrians. In the exiles' time they had gone through the conquest of the Babylonians and the subsequent exile in Babylon. They had known oppression. In the time of the Lord's salvation their governor will be peace and their ruler righteousness. The ESV translates the words more literally as overseers and taskmasters. It makes the image more negative than the NIV. The point is where Israel was ruled with oppression now they will experience shalom and righteousness. There will be no taskmasters to drive them as slaves as in Egypt. They will be free and their own character, that is the Lord's character will rule over them.

Violence will no longer be heard in the land. I think Isaiah is referring to the sounds of battle and the horrible sounds of the sacking of the city when Jerusalem fell. That is borne out by the pair of words that describe the aftermath of violence; ruin and destruction. The people living in the Lord's land and in the New Jerusalem will never again experience these things. John says all that is sinful, violent and evil will be banished from the New Jerusalem, the permanent home of God and his people in Revelation 21-22.

In the city the very walls will be called Salvation and the city gates Praise. Salvation in Hebrew is yeshua, the name of Jesus in Hebrew. The Lord Jesus will be the salvation of his people and praise will be their response to him.

60:19-22 - Isaiah finishes his description of the New Jerusalem in the time of the Lord's salvation. The images he uses John borrows extensively to describe his vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22, the ultimate home of God and his people.

The city will not need the sun or moon because the Lord will be its everlasting light. Nature itself with the rising and setting of the sun and the waxing and waning of the moon marking the months will no longer be needed. Verse 20 hints at even death being eliminated because their sorrow will end. The word for sorrow refers to rituals of mourning for the dead like our funerals or memorial services. They will cease which implies death will cease. That is confirmed in Revelation 21-22. Death will be no more in the New Jerusalem!

The character of God's people will change as well. They will no longer be rebellious and sinful but all of them will be righteous. They will naturally follow the Lord. This is fulfilled in the work of the Holy Spirit in us in sanctification when we are transformed into people who reflect the character of Jesus. God's purpose is to conform us to the image of his Son. See Romans 8:29. In Romans 8:4 Paul says when we live or walk in the Spirit we will fulfill the just requirement of God's Law. We will be righteous! John says that only the righteous will be in New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. Nothing impure will enter the city.

Isaiah declares that God's people will possess or inherit God's land forever. God will keep his promise to Abraham to give his children the land of Israel as their inheritance in Genesis 12. Both the Millennial Kingdom of the Lord Jesus and the New Jerusalem fulfill God's promise in Revelation 20-22. Inheriting the land also implies safety and security. They will wander no more. All their exile will end. God's people will be home!

All of this is the Lord's doing. The redeemed Israel is the shoot he has planted. The word for shoot or branch Isaiah applied to the Messiah in Isaiah 11 and also to God's Servant in Isaiah 53. Now he applies it to his people. The New Testament is clear. It is through faith in God's Messiah and Servant Jesus Christ that one becomes righteous and part of God's people. See I Peter 2, Galatians 4 & Ephesians 1.

Though God's people are small and considered nothing by the world yet they will grow into a mighty nation. That is the meaning of Isaiah's picture of the least becoming a thousand and
the smallest a mighty nation. Jesus said in *Matthew 13 & Mark 4* that the Kingdom of God was like a mustard seed. It was the smallest of seeds but it grows into the largest of shrubs. Paul said in *1 Corinthians 1* that God chose the most insignificant things in the world to shake those in power. He chose the smallest of people to shame the greatest. Now the world sees us as nothing. But in God's time we will rule with him!

Isaiah closes out his picture of a renewed and redeemed people and Jerusalem with a profound promise. "I am the Lord; in its time I will do this swiftly." All of this will take place in God's time not ours. But when God's plan comes to fruition it will happen swiftly. The word for time in Hebrew is translated in the Greek LXX as *kairos*, which means event time not *chronos* the normal passing of time. Paul says in *Galatians 4* that when the *kairos*-time had fully come God sent forth his Son born of a woman to redeem the human race. God has fixed a day when he will send his Son once again as *Hebrews 9* says, to bring salvation to all those who await him. God has declared his plan for us and nothing will stand in the way of his fulfilling his promise! God will do it!

**Chapter 61:**

61:1-2 - Isaiah begins a new section describing the salvation of his people and a renewed Jerusalem or Zion. Verses 1-2 are in the first person singular. The question is who is the speaker? Is it Isaiah himself or someone else? There are three times Isaiah writes about the Spirit of the Lord coming upon or anointing someone in his prophecy. He never says that about himself. Given the context it seems highly unlikely Isaiah is referring to himself here in verse 1. He says the Messiah will be anointed by the Spirit in *Isaiah 11*. He says the Servant of the Lord will be anointed by the Spirit in *Isaiah 42*. The best option is to see these verses describing the Servant of the Lord. There is however another possibility. These verses refer to the Messiah AND the Servant. That is how the Lord Jesus applied them in his message in the synagogue at Nazareth early in his ministry. He read this passage and claimed in *Luke 4*, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing!" By Jesus' day this passage was seen as a Messianic passage. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. The context however points strongly to the Servant of the Lord. Jesus may have deliberately chosen this passage because it pointed to both figures in Isaiah's prophecy. He could then claim he was the Messiah and the Servant, which he did and which indeed he was! Isaiah says the Spirit of the Lord is upon his Servant because the Lord has anointed him. The word for anointed is the root word of Messiah, the anointed one. I do not think that is by accident. Isaiah is deliberately being vague about whether this is the Messiah or the Servant just as Jesus was when he applied this passage to himself.

The Spirit anoints the Messiah-Servant to preach or announce good news to the poor or afflicted. Jesus used this idea when he told John the Baptist's disciples to go tell John the poor have the gospel preached to them in *Luke 7*. He often singled out the poor as the recipients of the gospel. From Isaiah's standpoint the exiles who returned to Jerusalem were not poor but the conditions in which they labored to rebuild the temple and live in a city that was not safe certainly taxed their resources. When Nehemiah came to them in 445 he found the people beaten down by their opposition and conditions in Jerusalem much worse than he had imagined. They could easily be described as afflicted or poor in need of good news! See *Nehemiah 2-4*.

God sends his anointed Servant to bind up the brokenhearted which certainly describes the exiles. Jeremiah's great poem of grief in *Lamentations* exposes the pain the Jews felt about the destruction of their home. Nehemiah is torn with grief when he hears the condition of Jerusalem from his brother in *Nehemiah 1*. God will send his Servant to bind up their wounds. A
broken heart speaks not just to physical wounds but spiritual and emotional as well. Jesus came to heal all of our wounds not just physical ones as he did through his healing miracles. He often linked forgiveness and our need for it with a physical healing. See Luke 5 & 7.

The Messiah-Servant will proclaim or announce freedom to the captives. In Isaiah's context this speaks to the exiles who were allowed to go home in 538 by King Cyrus the Great of Persia. It could also refer to King Jehoiachin who was released from his Babylonian prison by King Evil-Merodach in 559 after thirty-seven years in prison. See Jeremiah 52 & II Kings 25.

The people in Nazareth might have identified themselves as captives of the Romans and wanted Jesus to be the one who led them in a war to drive the Romans out of Judea and Galilee. Jesus rejected that idea in Luke 4 and they tried to kill him for it. Jesus applied being bound or a prisoner to the woman in Luke 13 with the withered hand and said Satan had bound her for 18 years. The New Testament sees those bound or possessed by Satan or demons as prisoners to be released by the power of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The LXX translates this phrase recovery of sight to the blind. Luke quotes the LXX in Luke 4 when Jesus reads this passage in the synagogue at Nazareth. When John's disciples come and ask Jesus if he is the Messiah or should they expect another in Luke 7, Jesus refers back to Isaiah 61. He declares the blind receive their sight but he does not say the prisoners are set free. Was he quoting the LXX? The scroll he read in Nazareth was probably not the Greek Old Testament but the Hebrew or perhaps a Targum, an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew. Either way Jesus clearly states that he is the one who fulfills Isaiah's prophecy. He is the Servant-Messiah.

That becomes even clearer in verse 2. The Servant-Messiah comes to proclaim or announce the year of the Lord's favor. This is sometimes referred to as the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. Every fiftieth year the debts of all the Israelites were to be cancelled and if they had been forced to sell their ancestral land they would receive it back. If they had become a slave to another Israelite they were set free. This was the Law's method of insuring that the portion of the Promised land granted to each Israelite family would stay in that family. However, there is no evidence in the Old Testament that Israel ever practiced the Jubilee. It is unlikely then that Isaiah is referring to that here.

A more likely meaning of the phrase is the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord in the prophets has a two-fold meaning. It is the time of salvation for God's people and the time of retribution and judgment upon the enemies of the Lord and of his people. Isaiah uses both ideas here in verse 2. He says the Servant-Messiah has come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God. That matches the two-fold meaning of the Day of the Lord. See Isaiah 35 & 60.

When Jesus quoted this passage in Luke 4 he purposefully leaves off the phrase the day of vengeance of our God. At his baptism and temptation he had accepted his mission as Servant of God and dying on the cross that would be the centerpiece of that mission. He would fulfill Isaiah 53. The Jews saw Messiah's coming as fulfilling both parts of the Day of the Lord at the same time. God would save them and take vengeance on their enemies, especially in Jesus' day the Romans. By only quoting the first half of Isaiah 61:2 Jesus purposefully tells them he comes first as the Servant of God to die for the sins of the world. The day of vengeance of our God awaits his Second Coming. See Matthew 24 and Revelation 19. The Jews never combined the Messiah of David and the Servant of the Lord into the same person. Jesus was the only Jewish rabbi who did and then claimed to be both! By quoting this passage in Luke 4 the way he did
Jesus clearly establishes the already-not yet pattern of the New Testament and shows that there will be a first and second coming of the Messiah-Servant of God.

61:3-4 - The last line of verse 2 belongs to these two verses or is a bridge between the promises of verses 1-2 and verses 3-4. The Servant-Messiah comes to comfort all who mourn and to grant grace and favor to all who mourn in Zion. The exiles mourned over Jerusalem. One only has to read Psalm 137 or Lamentations to understand this. Jesus in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 singles out those who mourn and says in the Kingdom of God they will be comforted. Jesus will fulfill Isaiah's prophecy by bringing God's Kingdom.

Isaiah details what God will give those in Zion who are devastated by its destruction. God will give his people "a crown of beauty" instead of ashes. The word the NIV translates "crown of beauty" is from the verb to beautify or glorify. It means to make beautiful. The noun refers to a turban or headdress, a linen cloth wrapped around the head and not a metal crown worn like a king or queen. The ESV translates the word "a beautiful headdress." The turban is contrasted with ashes. There is a possible play on words here in Hebrew. The word for beautiful turban in Hebrew is pe'er. The word for ashes is e'per. Isaiah may be contrasting the turban or headdress worn by a bride or groom with the ashes someone smears on them when they mourn. One is a symbol of joy and celebration, the other a symbol of grief and loss.

That is reinforced by the next contrast; the oil of gladness instead of mourning. Oil was used to anoint someone often as a sign of blessing especially to show God's presence. Esther was prepared with the oil of myrrh and other perfumes and spices before she came to the king in Esther 2. The Psalmist head is anointed with oil in Psalm 23. The bride anoints herself with fragrant oils for her husband in Song of Songs 4. Contrast that with mourning or more literally the ceremony of mourning which would have included wearing sackcloth and putting ashes on one's head to show grief.

God will give his people a garment of praise instead of a spirit if despair. The ESV translates the phrase a "faint spirit." The word means to be dim or dark and thus faint. The metaphor continues the contrast between joy and grief, rejoicing and mourning.

God's people will be transformed and called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor or glory. The word for glory can also mean beauty and is related to the word for the crown of beauty.

The oaks of righteousness may be referring to the great tree of Moreh outside of Shechem where God first appeared to Abraham and where he built an altar to the Lord when he came into Canaan in Genesis 12. In Deuteronomy 11 it refers to the great trees at Moreh outside Shechem. Most importantly it was at Shechem and the tree or oak of Moreh that Joshua gathered the Israelites to renew their covenant with God after they had conquered the Promiseland in Joshua 24.

The word in Hebrew translated oaks can mean a terebinth or even a great tree so it is difficult to tell the exact nature of the species. There is a species of oak tree that grows in the hill country of Israel that is probably the tree to which Isaiah is referring.

Isaiah is saying Israel will be the Lord's planting and they will be oaks of righteousness representing the Lord rather than pagan gods. He called Israel his planting or vineyard in Isaiah 5 but when he looked for righteousness he found only sin. Here in Isaiah 60 the Jews will be not a vineyard but oak trees. A vineyard takes several years to bear fruit and finally stops bearing. An oak tree lives a lot longer and can stand for centuries. Furthermore these trees will be trees of righteousness that will glorify the Lord or display his splendor. When people see them they will
give God praise and honor. God’s purpose for his people will be fulfilled when the Messiah-Servant comes. They will no longer stray from him or fail to produce but instead will be as sure and steady as oak trees! Their witness will be as at Shechem in Joshua’s day. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"

At that time the ancient ruins will be rebuilt and the places long devastated will be restored. The NIV translates the Hebrew verbs in this verse as: rebuild, restore, and renew. All of this restoration will not just be in Jerusalem. It is the ancient ruins, the devastated places, the ruined cities devastated for generations that will be repaired and restored. Isaiah foresees the whole country that had been devastated by the Assyrians and the Babylonians being restored. Over time this prophecy was partially fulfilled. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem under Artaxerxes I of Persia in 445 to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Over the next centuries during the Persian era many of the other ancient cities in Israel were rebuilt and re-occupied so that by Jesus’ day much of the country was restored. However, the Romans devastated the country during their invasion in the Jewish War and completely destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. Even today there are still "ancient ruins" being unearthed and explored by archeologists. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will be in the New Jerusalem when God will provide a brand new eternal Jerusalem as the home of his people.

The underlying theme of Isaiah’s prophecy in this verse is restoration. That which was destroyed and ruined will be rebuilt and restored. Isaiah describes ruined cities but the spiritual meaning of his images is the rebuilding and restoration of Israel and ultimately the church of his Messiah-Servant Jesus Christ.

61:5-7 - In the "year of the Lord's favor" he will restore the fortunes of Israel. The nations will serve Israel and Israel will serve them as priests and ministers of the Lord. The nations will be their servants tending their flocks and working their fields and vineyards.

Isaiah says when God restores Israel they will finally fulfill the mission God gave them at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19 to be a kingdom of priests to him and a holy nation. The apostles declare that the church of Jesus Christ, composed of Jews and Gentiles will take up and fulfill Israel's mission. 1 Peter 2 quotes Exodus 19 and says the church is now God's people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

It would be easy to see these verses as God saying when he saves the Jews the nations will serve them and be their servants just like they had been the nations' servants. But that misses the point of being priests to the Lord. The whole nation will be priests before God not just the Levites. A priest interceded for the people and was the bridge between the people and the Lord. Israel will serve the nations by taking up the role of priests for them.

Just like the Levites received the peoples’ tithes in Numbers 18 & Deuteronomy 18 so now the nations will bring their wealth to the Jews to be used by them. John in Revelation 22 saw the wealth of the nations pouring into the New Jerusalem. God will bless his people while they bless the nations as priests of the Lord.

God's people the Jews had been shamed and humiliated before the world. They had lost the land the Lord had promised them. It had been stripped from them and they had been sent into exile. Now the Lord will bring them back and fulfill his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Instead of shame they will receive a double portion, a double inheritance. Rather than disgrace the Lord will bring them joy, even everlasting joy! Isaiah's prophecy was provisionally fulfilled when the Jews returned from exile under Zerubbabel in 538. The true "double portion" however is the Kingdom of God brought to us through the work of our Messiah-Servant Jesus Christ.
Peter in 1 Peter 1:4 says that through Christ we have received an "inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you." John's image of the New Jerusalem come down from heaven to the earth in Revelation 21-22 paints a picture of the eternal inheritance of the people of God. God will wipe away all tears and banish mourning forever. We will see his face and reign with him forever.

61:8-9 - Why will the Lord save his people and restore them to their land? He loves justice and hates robbery and wickedness or iniquity. Even though he used the Assyrians to judge Israel and the Babylonians to judge Judah yet those nations acted wickedly and stole from God's people. The Babylonians took the temple vessels to use for their own dinner parties. See Daniel 5.

We need to remember today that God loves justice and doing right. He hates robbery, stealing and acting wickedly towards others. The word for robbery is slightly different from the word for steal in the eighth commandment in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. However, the meaning is the same. Stealing someone's property like their car, breaking into someone's home and taking things to get money for drugs, shoplifting, robbing a store or bank, even cheating on one's taxes; all these things the Lord hates! They are wicked and he will bring justice to those who do them.

God is faithful and so he will reward his people. The word means recompense or just due, pay-back. Depending on the context one can take it as reward or punishment. Here in Isaiah 61 the Lord wants to reward his people and give them justice against those who took from them. In Isaiah 40 he said they had received from the Lord's hand double for all their sins. Now is the time for justice and salvation against the pagan nations not punishment for Israel's sins.

How will he bring justice to them? He will make an everlasting covenant with them. They shall be known or recognized among all the nations of the world as the Lord's people; a people he has blessed. God has made an everlasting covenant with the Jews, the New Covenant through the death and resurrection of the Servant-Messiah, Jesus Christ. See Jeremiah 31. Jesus acknowledged this during the Last Supper with his disciples when he shared the final cup of the Passover meal and changed the words of the ritual in Luke 22. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you." That everlasting covenant is now also available to the Gentiles even as Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 11, 56, & 60. Paul in Romans 1 said the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first and then to the Greeks or the Gentiles.

God will bless his people. The history of the Jewish people is a testimony to his faithfulness. Despite centuries of persecution and exile from their land yet the Jews have prospered wherever they have gone. Today we see the Lord's blessing of his ancient people in the modern State of Israel. The Jews are coming home to their land and the Lord is blessing them. They will know his ultimate blessing when their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns from heaven to gather all his elect, both Jew and Gentile into his Kingdom. See Matthew 24 and Revelation 19.

61:10-11 - This stanza closes out the entire chapter. In the opening verses the Messiah-Servant speaks about the mission he has been given from the Lord to bring salvation to his people. In these closing verses the pronouns are once again singular. It is possible the Servant-Messiah is speaking again but it is more likely that this is a representative of the people, an individual Israelite or someone representing the nation. He summarizes what God has done for him and by
analogy for the whole people. It is also possible that Isaiah himself speaks here representing all of Israel.

This is a song of praise and joy. He delights in the Lord. Isaiah repeats the word for delight in order to emphasize it and magnify it. He delight, delights and so delights greatly! God's salvation brings him great joy.

God himself has clothed him with garments of salvation and righteousness. Paul in Romans 13 says to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. In Colossians 3 Paul says to put on the new self in the Lord Jesus. God is the one who changes our character and makes us righteous before him and before people.

God's righteousness that he puts on us is like a bridegroom putting on his wedding turban or a bride adorning herself with her wedding jewelry. John in Revelation 19 says at the wedding feast of the Lamb that his people are granted fine linen garments to wear which are the righteous deeds of the saints.

God will no longer keep silent for Jerusalem's sake. If the nations thought the Lord had abandoned his people they are greatly mistaken. He will give her a new name so that her righteousness and salvation will shine out to the nations like a blazing torch. Isaiah hints at that new name in the verses that follow. The kings of the world will see Jerusalem's restoration with the implication being they will praise God because of it. See Isaiah 61. John picks up this theme and completes it in his vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22. In it he gives us the final picture of the Lord God living with his bride, his people, in their new eternal home free from sin, death and suffering.

Chapter 62:
62:1-2 - These verses begin another section on Jerusalem and her salvation from God. They emphasize what the Lord will do for her and his relationship with her. The city becomes a personification for the people of Israel, especially in verses 3-5 when God describes his relationship with the city as a marriage. This reflects language in the New Testament in Ephesians 5 and Revelation 19 between the Lord Jesus and his people, his church, the bride.

62:3-5 - Isaiah continues his description of Jerusalem with a focus on the relationship the Lord has with his city and his people. Jerusalem will be a beautiful crown or a diadem in the hand of the Lord. The picture is of the Lord holding the city in his hand like a king would hold a crown. Is Jerusalem the Lord's crown? Isaiah implies it.

In verses 4-5 he intensifies the image. Jerusalem had been deserted and abandoned. In Isaiah 6 in his call the Lord said Isaiah was to keep prophesying until the land and the houses were deserted and forsaken. By the time of the exiles both the north and the south kingdoms had been destroyed and Jerusalem was in ruins. It was deserted and desolate. No more; now it will be called Hephzibah, which means my delight is in her. Ironically Manasseh's mother's name was also Hephzibah. Isaiah may be pointing back to the most evil king in Judah and showing how everything will now be different when the Lord saves his people. The land will be called Beulah which means married. Isaiah reinforces the new names of Jerusalem and the land saying the Lord
delights in Jerusalem and the land will be married. The city and the land are representative of his people.

In verse 5 Isaiah reinforces the image of the Lord as the husband of his people. The section is about Jerusalem yet the city is representative of God's people just as the New Jerusalem is representative of the Lord's people in Revelation 21-22. Isaiah's language is somewhat confusing in that he says Jerusalem's sons shall marry the city yet the section paints the city as the bride and the Lord as her husband. In the second half of the verse Isaiah reverts back to his original picture and says the Lord will rejoice over Jerusalem like a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

John has the same fluid language in Revelation 19-22. In Revelation 19 the church is his bride. Yet in Revelation 21-22 the New Jerusalem is the bride adorned for her husband the Lamb, the Lord Jesus. The city is the dwelling place of God and his people.

The underlying point of the entire passage is the intimate relationship God has with his people. He is their husband and they are his wife. The Jews were tempted to believe that the Lord had divorced them but in Isaiah 50 he asks the Jews "Where is your mother's certificate of divorce?" In Isaiah 54 the Lord says he is Israel's husband. Here in Isaiah 62 Isaiah says that the marriage between God and his people will be restored like it was when they were wedded. It is a profound image of intimacy and relationship. He is the Lord God, the Holy One, yet Israel is not his slaves but his wife! This picture moves all throughout the prophets and into the New Testament as well. See Hosea 1, Jeremiah 31, Ephesians 5 and Revelation 19, 21-22. God's people are made up of men and women but all of us are the Lord's bride, his wife. It is a picture of the deep, passionate love God has for his people and points to the Lord's zeal in saving us and preserving us for himself.

62:6-7 - In verse 1 God said he would not be silent for Zion's sake till her righteousness shines out to the nations. Now Isaiah calls his people to not be silent. The Lord spoke to the nations. Isaiah calls his people to speak to the Lord on Jerusalem's behalf. These two verses are a remarkable statement about prayer.

The difficulty of this section is determining who is speaking. Verse 6 begins with the Lord saying he has posted watchmen or guards on the walls of Jerusalem. Yet verse 7 speaks of the Lord in the third person and must be Isaiah speaking to his people.

These verses give us a profound insight into prayer. The Lord has posted watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem. He has called people to this task. The Lord calls us to prayer. Even though God's ultimate will cannot be thwarted yet he calls people to pray for it because he wants us to partner with him to bring about his will on the earth. Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 to pray "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." He taught his disciples to pray for the coming of God's Kingdom and the doing of God's will. In context not everyone in Jerusalem was a watchman yet there were some God posted to that task. God calls certain people to be intercessors even though he calls all his people to pray. Some have a special ministry of prayer because God calls them.

Isaiah says the watchmen will never be silent day or night. The picture is of the watchmen crying out the status of Jerusalem. Constantly telling everyone what is happening. Isaiah invites us to constant prayer. Prayer is not an activity we do once in a while when we feel like it. Prayer is to be constant because the work of prayer never stops! The watchmen are always on duty!
The next two lines give us an extraordinary view of prayer. Isaiah says, "You who call on the Lord give yourselves no rest and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem..." The ESV translates the phrase, "You who put the Lord in remembrance..." The NRSV says, "You who remind the Lord, take no rest, and give him no rest until..." The Good News Bible captures the meaning the best when it translates the phrase, "They must remind the Lord of his promises and never let him forget them. They must give him no rest until he restores Jerusalem..." Isaiah teaches us that intercessors are to keep praying and never stop until God does what he said he was going to do. The idea of giving God no rest is not to pester him until he relents like a pesky two year old wanting a cookie. God tells us we are to keep praying, keep asking God to carry out his will until we get an answer. When we ask God for what he wants and not what we want he does not object to our continual prayers for him to act!

Jesus' parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge in Luke 18 teaches a similar lesson. The widow kept coming back to the judge who didn't fear God or people until he gave her justice for her case. Jesus said, "Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell he will see that they get justice and quickly (Luke 18:7-8)." Jesus teaches the same lesson as Isaiah. Remind the Lord of his promises and keep reminding him until he does what he said he was going to do. The amazing thing is God doesn't get angry with us when we pray that way. Isaiah's point is he wants us to pray that way! Jesus reinforces the lesson in his parable in Luke 18!

What had the Lord promised about Jerusalem? He would make it shine with his righteousness and the kings of the earth would see the Lord's glory. See Isaiah 62:1-2. Here in verse 7 Isaiah says keep praying until the Lord establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. John saw that vision of Jerusalem in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22.

62:8-9 - The watchmen are to pray and remind the Lord of his promises to save Jerusalem. Isaiah then declares that the Lord has sworn an oath by his right hand and mighty arm, meaning he has sworn an oath by himself. Since there is no other God but God when he swears an oath or makes a promise he swears it by himself so that his people will know he means what he says. He told Abraham after he had obeyed God and was ready to sacrifice Isaac that the Lord had sworn by himself to give the land to Abraham's descendants in Genesis 22. This language is frequent in the Old Testament. His right hand and mighty arm go back to the exodus and the language of Deuteronomy 6, the Lord brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Isaiah is purposefully reminding the Jews that the return from their exile and the salvation of Jerusalem will be a second exodus.

In the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 God warns the Israelites if they disobey him then he will hand them over to Gentile nations who will destroy them. Specifically he says you will plant your grain and others will eat it. You will harvest your grapes and others will drink your wine. Now the Lord tells his people the time of those curses is over. Never again will others come, invade their land and take what they did not plant. Their enemies will never again feast on Israel's grain as spoils of war and conquest. Jerusalem will be safe and its people secure! God promises those who harvest their grain will eat it. And those who gather the grapes and make new wine will drink it. Together they will praise the Lord in his sanctuary. Think of the exiles to whom this section of Isaiah is written. Those who had been born in Judah and taken captive had experienced exactly what Isaiah writes about. They had planted their grain and the Babylonian army had eaten it. They had seen the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem and burn the Lord's temple to the ground. God's promise to them in these verses speaks of a new time, a
renewed time when they will be safe from their enemies and their relationship with God will be renewed. They will worship him again in Jerusalem! These promises echo those the Lord gave to David in his covenant with him in II Samuel 7. In the days of the king who will come, the Messiah, these things will be fulfilled.

62:10-12 - The Lord calls his people to come to Jerusalem and experience his grace and salvation. He calls his people to pass through the gates of the city and he calls others to make the highway into the city or the ramp up to the gates ready. It is possible that he is telling the nations to prepare the way. This is very similar language to Isaiah 40 when Isaiah declared that the Lord was coming to save the Jews. It is also a repeat of Isaiah 57 when God called for the nations to prepare the way for his repentant people to come to him.

The Lord says raise a banner or a signal for the nations to call them to Jerusalem to prepare the way. Isaiah said in Isaiah 11 that the Messiah would be a banner for the nations to bring them to God. In Isaiah 49 God said he would raise a banner to the peoples to signal them to bring his people back home. Now all that will be fulfilled. Isaiah implies by using the same language again that the return to Jerusalem and the final salvation of his people all happens when the Messiah comes.

Verse 11 says God has made a proclamation to the ends of the earth so that all may hear it. The proclamation is announced to the nations yet is about the Jews. Tell the Daughter of Zion that their Savior comes! The Lord is bringing with him his reward for his people. He will set things right again. John quotes the Lord Jesus using these same words at the end of Revelation 22. He will bring his reward with him for his people.

In 62:2 God promised Jerusalem would be called by a new name. Now he reveals that name or names. The Jews and Jerusalem will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord. They will no longer be a people exiled and despised. They will be Sought After and the City No Longer Deserted. In chapter 60 Isaiah said the light of God's people will shine out to the nations and they will come to the Jews so that they can know God. Israel's new name reflects that time. When God saves us he changes our identity. He gives us a new name! Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5 that if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation, a new creature. The old has passed away and the new has come. Isaiah expresses the same thought but with different words.

Isaiah declares that the destiny God gave Israel in Exodus 19 at Mt. Sinai is now fulfilled. They will become the kingdom of priests and a holy nation to the Lord. Peter says in 1 Peter 2 that destiny is completed in Jesus Christ for his church is now the Lord's people, the king's priests and a holy nation. The salvation and identity that Isaiah promised would come when the Messiah came has come in Jesus Christ!

Chapter 63:

63:1-2 - This section expands the phrase in 61:2, to proclaim the year of our Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God. Most of chapter 61 and all of chapter 62 expanded on the salvation of God or the year of the Lord's favor. 63:1-6 expands on the day of vengeance. Salvation and vengeance or justice, describe the two sides of the Day of the Lord in Isaiah and all the prophets. The Day of the Lord is related to the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. Compare Isaiah 11 and Isaiah 24.

The prophet or someone else asks who is coming from the southeast from Edom and Bozrah. Edom was the hereditary home of the descendants of Esau and was southeast of Jerusalem. The settled territory of Edom was on the heights above the Arabah Valley south and
east of the Dead Sea. Bozrah was a fortress city of Edom that guarded the King's Highway, the main caravan route that went along the highlands from Elat on the Red Sea up through Edom, Moab and Ammon to Damascus. Bozrah was on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Arabah north of Petra and south of the Dead Sea. Edom had been conquered by David and Solomon and was part of Israel's empire. The history of Edom from the death of Solomon all the way to the Assyrian conquests is one of rebellion, re-conquest and rebellion again. It finally gained its independence in Isaiah's lifetime during King Ahaz's reign. It was an ally of the Babylonians in the siege and sack of Jerusalem. The little prophecy of Obadiah calls on God to judge Edom for its betrayal of the Jews and its hatred towards them.

Isaiah describes the Lord as coming from Bozrah with garments that are stained red like someone who has been treading a winepress. Edom can also mean red in Hebrew and Esau was described this way at his birth in Genesis 25. Some have tried to link Bozrah with the Hebrew word for winepress but that is dubious. There is however the play on words with red and Edom in these two verses.

God comes robed in splendor with the implication that he has delivered his judgment against Edom. He speaks in righteousness meaning he fulfills what he has promised and does what he has decreed. See Isaiah 45 & 55. The Lord is mighty to save his people and judge Israel's enemies.

Isaiah asks God why his garments are red, like someone who treads a winepress. The Lord's answer comes in 63:3-6. John will use this picture of the Lord treading the winepress of God's wrath with his robes dipped in blood in his picture of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 19. It is the Day of the Lord, the deliverance and salvation of God's people his church, and the final defeat of the antichrist and the forces of evil and Satan.

**63:3-6** - Martin Luther called God's wrath his mysterious work because it is so different from his forgiving love. It is an expression of his absolute holiness and purity and his abhorrence of sin. These four verses express that side of the Day of the Lord. In Revelation 15 John sees the holy of holies in heaven right before the seven last plagues are poured out on the earth. The temple of God in heaven is so filled with the glory and presence of God no one could enter until the plagues were finished. In Revelation 19 John pictures the Lord Jesus returning to earth to defeat the armies of Satan and the antichrist. John uses the words from Isaiah 63, that the Lord Jesus will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God. John uses images from Isaiah to describe God's final wrath against sin.

Isaiah describes the Lord speaking in these verses about his wrath. He treads the winepress of his anger and wrath alone. No one from the nations helped him. Only God is able to be holy enough and just enough to judge human sin. Plus all sin is ultimately a sin against God. David understood this in his psalm of repentance in Psalm 51. Against you and you only have I sinned and done what was evil in your sight. God's wrath may be his mysterious work but thank God he is the one to do it because no one else could be just and righteous enough to carry it out!

Verse 4 expresses the paradox of the Day of the Lord in the prophets. The day of vengeance was in God's heart because the year of his redemption had come. The Day of the Lord is both judgment against the nations and a sinful human race and salvation for his people. That is why the cross is a prefiguring of the Day of the Lord and the final judgment. It is both salvation for all who believe and judgment for human sin.

Isaiah says God looked but there was no one to help him to carry out his wrath. There was no one to help. No other human being was fit to participate in pouring out God's wrath for
human sin because as Paul says in Romans 3, all have sinned and fall short of God's glory! In Revelation 15-16 powerful angels assist God in executing his wrath against a sinful human race. God is not talking about angels here in Isaiah 63. He is speaking about the nations. They are all sinful and idolatrous and have turned away from him. He alone works salvation for his people. He alone tramples down the nations in his anger.

Isaiah ends this section with a chilling picture. In his wrath God pours their blood on the ground. God's first desire is that all should repent and turn to him and be saved. See I Timothy 2 & II Peter 3. But for those who refuse the Lord's grace and forgiveness there is left only his wrath. The Lord will not be mocked. He alone is holy!

63:7-9 - These verses begin a new section in Isaiah that goes from 63:7-64:12. It is a prayer written in the form of a lament like the Psalms. Isaiah's prayer calls on the Lord to act because Jerusalem is in ruins and the temple has been burned down; see 64:10-11. This is obviously written to the exiles since they were the ones who had experienced Jerusalem's destruction. More liberal commentators would say another "Isaiah" wrote these words because the prayer sees Jerusalem and the temple as destroyed which they were not in Isaiah's day.

Isaiah's prayer begins by recalling the kindnesses of the Lord to his people. The word for kindnesses at the beginning and end of verse 7 in Hebrew is hesed, which refers to God's unfailing covenant love and kindness to Israel. The prophet remembers all the good things God did for his people, all the things he did that are worthy of their praise. They all flowed from his mercy, compassion and love for them.

God chose them for his own and hoped they would not be false to him or be unfaithful to him. He saved them. Isaiah is probably looking back to the exodus from Egypt in these verses. Verse 9 begins with a wonderful picture of God's love for his people. When they were distressed he was distressed. Three times in his prayer Isaiah will call God our Father (63:16 twice and in 64:8). God's admission of his love and concern for Israel here in verse 9 reflects his relationship with his people as their father. Earthly parents are like our Heavenly Father when we are concerned for our children. When they are sick or face difficulties we are concerned and troubled ourselves. That is how God was with Israel. He loves them!

The angel of his presence, probably meaning the angel of the Lord, saved them. Isaiah's picture recalls the angel of the Lord going before Israel in the wilderness with the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. Even more dramatically in Exodus 14 the angel of the Lord protects them from the Egyptian chariots while the Lord causes a wind to blow back the waters of the sea so the people may cross it on dry land. God saved them because he loved them and had compassion and mercy on them. He lifted them up and carried them to safety. Isaiah recalls the Lord's words to Moses in Exodus 19 when God made a covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."

63:10-14 - Isaiah looks back to the days of Moses when the Lord saved his people and brought them across the Red Sea to safety and freedom. He looks back at those days and asks where that Lord is. Why, because Israel rebelled against God. They came into the land and abandoned him for idols. As Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah all said they committed adultery with pagan gods and rejected the Lord who was like their husband. See Hosea 1 and Jeremiah 2.

Isaiah says Israel rebelled against the Lord. They grieved his Holy Spirit. Paul uses this idea in Ephesians 4:30 and it points to the highly relational nature of sin. Sin is more than simply
breaking a law or rule. It does carry a legal component but the Hebrew conception of sin is highly relational. Sin is rebellion not only against one's rightful Creator but also for Israel against her husband. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit, meaning it causes him pain. When we sin God hurts! Every sin we commit is a loss he suffers because it separates us from him. This is why David in *Psalm 51* said against the Lord only had he sinned. Of course we sin against people when we hurt them but ultimately our sin is committed against God himself.

Isaiah says the Lord's Holy Spirit is grieved. One does not grieve a power or energy. Only a person can grieve or be hurt and suffer a loss. Only a person can feel pain. An energy or force cannot. Therefore Isaiah says the Holy Spirit is a Person. The New Testament expands that understanding which led to the doctrine of the Trinity, one God yet in three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Israel rebelled and disobeyed God so God became not their Savior but their enemy. He fought against them using the Assyrians and the Babylonians to judge and discipline them for their rebellion.

Verse 11 is a difficult verse. The Hebrew literally reads "then he remembered the days of old." The ESV translates it that way. Most other major translations read his people recalled or remembered the days of old, the days of Moses. It makes the most sense to read it that way but the literal Hebrew is a third person singular; he. I think the NIV and the other translations are correct. After their time of judgment, as in the exile, Israel remembered the God who had saved them in the time of Moses. It was the Lord who shepherded them through the sea and away from Egypt. He brought them out once before could he not do so again? He set his Holy Spirit among them when he gave his Spirit to the 70 elders along with Moses in *Numbers 11*. Plus his Spirit was present among them in the cloud that came down on the Tabernacle and the pillar of fire and cloud that guided them through the wilderness.

God showed his mighty power to them when he caused the waters to part and the children of Israel walked across the Red Sea on dry land. Isaiah says the exiles ask where that God is. They crossed over the sea bed like a horse in open country and like cows coming down from the hills to the valley. The Spirit of the Lord gave them rest, meaning he brought them to safety and freed them from the pursuing Egyptians. They could now rest and relax. God did all that to save them but also to glorify his name and show himself mighty to the nations.

Isaiah recalls how God saved Israel from the Egyptians who were seeking to destroy them. In the next few verses he is going to ask God to save them again from their exile.

It is important to note that Isaiah is recalling what the Lord did for his people but three times in these verses he specifically sites the Holy Spirit as being the primary actor in the Lord's salvation of Israel in the exodus. Clearly the Lord acted through his Spirit and the Holy Spirit is often the primary actor in God's dealings with his people. It is the Spirit who interacts with us. The difference between the Old and the New Covenants is now the Holy Spirit can actually live in us because of what Jesus has done for us through his cross and resurrection. See *Acts 2* and *Romans 8*.  

63:15-17 - Isaiah prays that God would look down from his heavenly throne and see his people's situation. God's throne is holy and glorious but his people are not.

He asks what has happened to God. Where are the Lord's zeal and might? The word for zeal or passion is the same word Isaiah used in the great prophecy of the birth of the Messiah in *Isaiah 9*. The zeal of the Lord of hosts would bring about the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah asks, where is that zeal? Where did it go?
He observes that the Lord's tenderness and compassion are withheld from Israel. The word for tenderness is a compound phrase that is rare. Literally it means the commotion of the loins. The ESV translates it "the stirring of your inner parts." It means tenderness, love and affection, a desire and yearning of the heart. The NIV translates the phrase "tenderness". Compassion is related to the word in Greek which is splagxna, which means a stirring in the bowels, a gut level reaction to something. The two words point to the Lord's tender love for his people. Isaiah doesn't see it anymore. What has happened?

Isaiah reminds the Lord that he is Israel's Father. The word is ab in Hebrew which is close to the Aramaic abba used by Jesus in the New Testament. He is more than Israel's progenitor he is their papa, their daddy, the father who loves them. That relationship will not change even if Abraham would not know them or Israel (Jacob) would not acknowledge his people. God is their Father! The Lord is their Redeemer from of old or ancient times. Isaiah looks back to not only the Patriarchs but also the exodus and God's rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Since that time there have been many other incidents when God has saved his people. Isaiah wonders where God is now that God's people are in exile and Jerusalem is destroyed.

Verse 17 expresses the mystery of God's sovereignty over against our free will. Isaiah has admitted in 63:10 that his people have sinned against the Lord and grieved his Holy Spirit. Now he looks at the other side of the equation and wonders why God has caused Israel to wander from the Lord's ways, meaning both their relationship with God and obedience to his Law. Why does God harden their hearts so they do not fear and revere their Heavenly Father? This issue of human free will and God's sovereignty is first raised in Exodus 7-11 during the ten plagues in Egypt. Sometimes Exodus says Pharaoh hardened his heart towards God and other times it says God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Which is true? Exodus says both. Paul references the tension in Romans 9. Isaiah may be stating the thinking of the exiles or his own thinking about why Israel is rejecting God rather than a clear theological statement about God's sovereign choices. The difficulty we have with his statement is that it seems as if Israel had no choice in the matter; they were already predisposed to sin and rebel because God had decreed it that way. If that is true then repentance is not possible. Other Scriptures even in Isaiah clearly state the opposite, not the least of which is Isaiah's great call to repentance in Isaiah 1:18, "come now let us reason together..." The best we can do is declare that the Bible affirms both sides of this mystery and refuses to take away God's sovereign choice to govern his creation as he sees fit and our free choice to love him in return and choose him.

Isaiah closes out verse 17 by boldly asking the Lord to turn around from his rejection of Israel. The Hebrew is in the imperative mood though it expresses more of a wish with God than an outright command. Isaiah tells God, change your mind Lord! Save us!

63:18-19 - The Hebrew of verse 18 is difficult. The NIV reads, "For a little while your people possessed your holy place." The ESV reads, "Your holy people held possession for a little while." An alternative note in the ESV reads, "They have dispossessed your holy people for a little while." The problem is the verb translated possessed. It can also mean dispossessed. The parallel line of the verse highlights the fact that Judah's enemies have trampled down the temple. All major translations follow the NIV's reading and the main reading of the ESV. The difficulty is the historical context. Israel and then Judah held Jerusalem and the temple since the time of Solomon, ~950 BC. The exiles to whom Isaiah writes are in Babylon from 597-538 BC. For 400 years Judah held possession of the temple and Jerusalem. That can hardly be called "a little while". However, if one takes the verb in the alternative reading it makes more historical sense.
Babylon held Jerusalem and trampled on the temple for 48 years, a little while. The verse would then mean that Israel's enemies, namely the Babylonians, dispossessed the people from their inheritance and destroyed the temple for a short time. That is exactly what happened!

Isaiah notes that because of Judah's captivity and the temple’s destruction, it is as if the Lord's ancient people never knew him or ruled over them. They might as well have been a pagan nation. That is what the calamity of the exile felt like to them. The NLT captures the sense of the verse when it says, "Sometimes it seems as though we never belonged to you, as though we had never been known as your people."

Chapter 64:

64:1-2 - There is a slight textual discrepancy in these two verses. In the Hebrew Bible 64:1 is included as part of 63:19. In our English Bibles it is included in chapter 64.

Isaiah longs for God to act as he did in the days of the exodus when the Lord did "awesome things" (v.3). He calls on God to "rend the heavens and come down." The verb in Hebrew means to tear open or rip open something. Isaiah implies that heaven is normally closed to human beings. It is the abode of God where we cannot come. If one thinks of the dome of the sky or the firmament of Genesis 1 it separates the earth from the sky. Isaiah calls on God to rip it open and come down to save his people. Tear the sky open so that the mountains shake or tremble at the Lord's presence. Isaiah wants to see God come down on behalf of his people and show himself mighty before the nations that have oppressed Israel so that they shake and tremble like the mountains in an earthquake. In other words do awesome things again God for your people's sake because we cannot save ourselves!

Isaiah's image certainly applies to Jesus' Second Coming but there is another application as well, perhaps even more profound. The LXX translates the verb for rend with anoigo in Greek, which simply means to open. Matthew's gospel describing Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3 says the heavens were opened (anoigo) and the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove. The voice of God the Father then came from heaven and declared that Jesus was the beloved Son of God with whom the Lord was well pleased. Mark's gospel uses a different Greek verb than anoigo in describing Jesus' baptism in Mark 1. The word he uses means to tear open or rend. The heavens were torn open and the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove and the Father's voice comes from heaven approving his Son. I think Matthew and Mark have Isaiah's prophecy in mind at Jesus' baptism and purposefully use the same verbs in Greek to describe the heavens tearing open and God coming down. However, the Lord doesn't come with an earthquake and the fire of judgment. He comes with the Holy Spirit and gentleness. Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God but he is also the Suffering Servant of Isaiah who will come non-violently to die and save his people from their sins. Isaiah calls on the Lord to tear open the heavens and come down to show himself mighty before the world. The gospels tell us God did, in Jesus of Nazareth at his baptism and then his death and resurrection!

64:3-5 - Isaiah reminds God of past times when God came down and the mountains quaked at his presence. This is probably a reference to God's appearing on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19 when the Lord descended on the mountain and there was a great cloud of smoke on its summit and the ground shook because of the presence of the Lord. In fact it was so great the people begged Moses to go up onto the mountain rather than go up themselves. Isaiah says part of what made the Lord's presence so awesome was that the people were not looking for such a spectacle, including parting the Red Sea and rescuing them from the Egyptian army.
Isaiah declares an amazing historical fact. Since ancient times no one has heard or seen any God besides the Lord who has rescued his people as God did. All the pagan peoples of history have had to tie natural or historical events together coincidentally and say their gods did something great. Only the Lord has intervened in a powerful and miraculous way on behalf of Israel so that no one could say his actions were mere coincidence. Isaiah's conclusion is the Lord acts on behalf of his people even when they aren't looking for it.

The Lord helps those who are glad to do right, who live righteously and remember his ways. Isaiah acknowledges that his people continued to sin against God and his justifiable anger was stirred up against them. He exclaims, "How can we be saved?" The NLT reads, "We are constant sinners; how can people like us be saved?" In other words, we are sinners and have not lived as God has commanded us to live. We have rebelled against him so why should he save us? What hope have we? The only hope Isaiah and his people have is the love of God for sinners! See Romans 5:8.

Note: There are some textual questions about this text based on the LXX translation. The NRSV reads, "because you hid yourself we transgressed." The verb in Greek in the LXX is an aorist verb, meaning point action, meaning to wander, lead astray or deceive. The Good News notes that the Hebrew words are unclear in this passage. The majority of translations translate the phrase as the NIV does, asking the question who can be saved. The discrepancy is based on the LXX. It seems best to do as the NIV has done and follow the Hebrew Masoretic Text.

64:6-7 - Isaiah brings his description of Israel's sinful condition to a climax. He paints a picture of their helplessness before God because of their sins. His description is similar to Paul's series of quotes in Romans 3 to describe the human condition before God. Paul strings together quotes from the Psalms but the meaning is very similar to Isaiah's here in chapter 64.

The whole people of Israel have become like one who is unclean. The word refers first to ritual purity but also means moral uncleanness as well. The purity laws in the Law of Moses were designed to communicate God's holiness and Israel's sin. See Leviticus 11-22. The closer one came to the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle or the temple the more ritually pure one had to be. This related to all of life and it was a constant reminder in Israel that a holy God dwelt in the midst of an unholy, impure people. Isaiah says none of them are clean; they are all unclean and unholy.

He uses a vivid description of what they believe are their righteous acts before God. They are like "filthy rags." The ESV translates the phrase, "a polluted garment." Literally the phrase refers to the rags a woman would use during her menstrual period. They would become soiled with her menstrual blood and be discarded. Isaiah says that is how God looks at our righteous acts before him. It points to the utter fruitlessness of any efforts of ours to gain access to God based on our own righteousness.

Isaiah says our sins cause us to shrivel up like a withered leaf which is blown away in the wind. Any righteous act of ours is so insubstantial it blows away with the slightest breeze. We have nothing with which to stand before God!

What's more our sins have led us to turn away from God and stop seeking him. There is no one who calls on the Lord's name to save. Isaiah says no one "strives to lay hold of you." The ESV translates the phrase, "who rouses himself to take hold of you." The Hebrew word translated strives or rouse gives the picture of someone so lazy that can't even get up! That's what sin does to our desire to seek God. It takes too much effort. I just want to lay on my spiritual couch and "veg"!
Israel can't even bring herself to move to seek after God so the Lord has hidden himself from her. He has turned away from his own people because of their sin. In fact Isaiah says he has made them waste away because of their sins. The word for waste away is another vivid word picture. It describes the process of smelting silver or gold ore in a furnace. The dross “wastes away” as the pure metal is refined. Isaiah's implication is that though God has hidden his face from them and he is smelting them in the furnace of his judgment and discipline yet there is a purpose behind their exile and suffering. He still wants a righteous, purified people for himself. The conclusion is clear however, God may be punishing them and turning away from them but their sin and their sin alone is the cause. We can't blame anyone else but our own stubborn pride and sinfulness when God is far away. As an old devotional once said; "If God seems far away, who moved?"

64:8-12 - Isaiah closes his prayer with an appeal to God to forgive and act on behalf of his people. He has confessed their sins before God and admitted that the Lord was totally justified in punishing Israel for their sins. Now he repeats a theme he began in 63:16 and for the third time in his prayer calls God “our Father.” Jesus will also use that theme in the first line of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, "Our Father in heaven." God is Israel's Father but he is also their maker. Isaiah reprises an image he used in Isaiah 45:9 of God as the potter and Israel as the clay. All God's people are the work of his hand. He created them, chose them and saved them. They would not be a people at all accept for the Lord's actions. Isaiah doesn't say just the exiles in Babylon are the work of the Lord's hand but all Israelites wherever they may be. Historicly the exiles in Babylon and the peasants left in Judah were the chief survivors of the Babylonian invasion. A small group fled to Egypt with Jeremiah to escape in Jeremiah 41. Others might have fled elsewhere but few survived. Isaiah says they are all God's people, the work of his hand. This is the first of three "alls" Isaiah uses in these verses.

Isaiah begs the Lord not to be angry beyond measure or as the ESV translates the phrase, "terribly angry". It is as if he is saying they can't take anymore, please Lord stop! He asks the Lord to look at them, meaning notice them and understand what is happening to them. The Hebrew is not phrased like a question but it reads as if Isaiah is asking how long will you punish us for our sins. We are your people, all of us! This is the second of the three "alls" in this passage.

Isaiah now shifts from the people's sin and God's punishment to focus on that which has caused them the greatest pain. Jerusalem is in shambles. It is a desert and a desolation. Their temple, the Lord's temple, is a smoking hulk, burned to the ground. All that the Jews have treasured, meaning that which they have highly valued, it all lies in ruins. This is the third "all" in this section. Jeremiah described his people's grief in Lamentations. Psalm 137 also expresses the pain of the exiles in Babylon when they remember Jerusalem. The physical destruction of Jerusalem and the temple points to the mental and emotional anguish of realizing that it was the Lord who had done this even though they brought it on themselves by their disobedience and idolatry. It must have grieved Isaiah greatly to look ahead and know what was coming and how horrible the Lord's judgment would be on his people. For Jeremiah who lived through it, it nearly broke his heart.

Isaiah finishes his prayer crying out to God to rescue his people from their exile and pain. He asks, after all of this destruction will you hold yourself back? He expresses the underlying question of the exiles; do you not love us anymore? We are your people and you are our Father! Will you still, after all of this, keep silent? Will you keep punishing us?
Isaiah has already proclaimed in earlier chapters like chapter 40 that God is coming to rescue the exiles. In his prayer in 63:7-64:12 he expresses the current pain and thinking of the exiles when they first hear of Isaiah's prophecy. They want to believe God is going to rescue them but suffering and grief hinders their faith in the Lord's promise. It is often so with us as well. Pain and grief numb us to God's goodness and make hope difficult to embrace.

Chapter 65:
65:1-5 - The last two chapters of Isaiah look forward to the fulfillment of his prophecy, the coming of the Messiah, and the salvation not just of the remnant of Israel but also of the Gentiles. There is a contrast all throughout these chapters between what happens to those who reject God and those who come in faith and humility to the Lord. The remarkable thing as Isaiah closes out his prophecy is that he declares God will offer salvation for even the Gentiles, which opens the way for the New Testament.

In context verses 1-5 are speaking to a rebellious Israel, people who have turned away from the Lord and worshipped pagan idols. However, the Hebrew words will allow for the first part of verse 1 to describe the Gentiles and the second part of the verse to describe Israel. This is how Paul interprets it in Romans 10:20-21. The ESV tries to soften the translation by reading, "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me." The NIV reads, "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." Since Scripture interprets Scripture, following Paul's interpretation, Isaiah in the first part of this verse is describing a Gentile nation coming to the Lord. In the second half of the verse he turns back to Israel and begins a description of their sin and rebellion against God.

They are a nation that did not call upon the Lord even though he revealed himself to them, telling them "Here I am!" The Lord has continually held out his hands to them but they are an obstinate, stubborn people who walk in ways that are not the Lord's, literally "not good". The ESV translates the word "devices" while the NIV reads, "imaginations." Isaiah means they follow their own ways and plans and not the Lord's.

Israel continually provokes the Lord, meaning they constantly make him angry because even though he told them they were not to worship idols or sacrifice to them they do it anyway! They offer sacrifices in "gardens" which probably refers to oak or tree groves on the high places and not a formal garden near a palace. Isaiah is most likely referring to sacrifices to Baal and Asherah which would have involved cult prostitution to ensure fertility. This was often done not in a temple but on a high hill near a sacred tree or tree grove. Their actions make God furious including burning incense on brick altars that were also set up on the high places. Moses had commanded them in Deuteronomy 6 to worship the Lord alone and no others. Jesus quoted that passage in his temptation by the devil in Matthew 4.

Isaiah continues his polemic against Israel and her idolatry in verses 4-5. The Lord is continually angry with them because they sit among the graves or tombs and spend the night performing secret rituals. These are most likely divination rituals, trying to communicate with the dead in order to divine the future. The Law of Moses strictly forbids Israel to practice such occult arts. See Leviticus 19-20 & Deuteronomy 12 & 18. They even eat pig's meat and fix soup or stew made with unclean animals. Unclean here refers to animals that were most likely sacrificed to idols. These Israelites totally ignore the Lord's dietary laws about clean and unclean animals and then they brag about how holy they are! Stay away because I am too holy for you! The Lord says these idolaters make him so mad it is like smoke coming out his nostrils and a fire inside of him that never goes out!
Isaiah's description in these verses is very similar to Israel's practices in his day, during the reign of King Ahaz of Judah and later King Manasseh, the most evil idolatrous king in Judah's history. These verses could be an indictment upon the exiles or a summary of God's charges against a sinful idolatrous people that includes all of Isaiah's prophecy, not only in his day but also in the days of the Babylonian exiles. If that is the case then the exiles are in danger of doing the same things people in Isaiah's day did for which God destroyed Jerusalem. Have they learned nothing?

65:6-7 - Verses 6-7 express God's holiness and his fury over sin, especially in his rebellious people who are called by his Name. In Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 28 God declared what he would do if Israel broke their covenant. Those consequences are often called the covenant curses. The prophets would often refer back to them in warning Israel to repent. Here Isaiah says the chance for repentance has passed. It is written in the Lord's Law what he would do and now he is going to do it. He will pay back a sinful nation for their rebellion and disobedience. The word for “pay back” means to repay or give recompense. God's holy justice and punishment is what their sins deserve. God will be silent no more. For five centuries he had sent his prophets to warn Israel what would happen if they disobeyed him. Time's up!

God says he will repay into their laps what they deserve. The ESV translates the phrase "indeed repay". That is trying to express the Hebrew which literally reads "I will repay, repay!" Isaiah doubles the word for emphasis. God will pay back Israel for their own sins and the sins of their fathers or ancestors. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had quoted the proverb about the parents eating sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge (Jeremiah 31 & Ezekiel 18). The saying captured the complaint of the exiles who said God was not fair. Our parents sinned and we get the punishment. Jeremiah and Ezekiel taught that each generation will bear the consequences of their own sin. Part of the problem was the generation of the exiles tried to pass off the punishment they were experiencing from God as their parent's fault rather than God's discipline for their own sinful rebellious ways. Isaiah here emphasizes both; God holds all generations accountable. He refers back to the Lord's statement in the second commandment in Exodus 20, that God is a jealous God and will punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations but will bless to a thousand generations those who love and obey him.

Isaiah focuses on the core sin of the people of Israel: idolatry. The Lord had commanded them in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 not to worship any God besides the Lord nor to make idols and worship them. The first four commandments were the God commandments showing Israel how to love God with all their heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6). The last six commandments were the people commands, showing Israel how to love their neighbor as themselves (Leviticus 19). Jesus said these two great commandments summarized all the Law of Moses. The profound insight Isaiah and the other prophets give us is that when we violate the God commands, when we stop loving God, we will inevitably stop loving people and will violate the people commands. This is why God was so focused on idolatry with Israel. Plus, idolatry violated the fundamental relationship God had with his people; he was their husband and they were his bride. See Hosea 1. Idolatry was like adultery!

Isaiah says because Israel offered sacrifices on the high places, all the mountains and the hills, God will measure their payment in full into their laps for their sin. The word translated payment is frequently translated wages. Paul in Romans 6 says the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God through Jesus Christ is eternal life. Isaiah says the wages God will pay a sinful
Israel is punishment and discipline. In the next section he will lay out the gift of life he wants to give his faithful remnant.

65:8-9 - Isaiah shifts his focus from the sins of his people to the remnant of Israel God will save in 65:8-16. He begins with a metaphor from the vineyard, to which he had compared Israel in chapter 5. Sometimes the workers in the vineyard would find a cluster of grapes that seemed spoiled but would still find juice in some of the grapes. They would say don't destroy it there is still some good in it. The ESV translates the word for good as blessing. The Hebrew literally reads blessing. The picture relates to the remnant. The bad cluster of grapes is Israel but the remnant is the good juice or new wine left in the cluster. God says don't destroy it.

There is a possible curious reference to Psalms 57-59 in the words "Don't destroy it." The introductory notes in those Psalms say they were all written by David and were to be sung to the tune of "Do Not Destroy." The introductory notes were added later and were probably notations used in the second temple after it was completed by Zerubbabel. However, the tune "Do Not Destroy" must have been current among the returning exiles. It is possible that is was a song or tune sung by the harvesters in the vineyard as they were harvesting the grapes in the fall. If that is the case then the song points to Isaiah's meaning. God is saying don't destroy the good grapes in the bad cluster. Save them.

That idea is reinforced in verse 9. God says he will bring forth descendants from Jacob, namely people from Judah who will possess the Lord's mountains. The mountains to which he is referring were probably Mt Zion and Mt. Moriah. The main part of Jerusalem was built upon Mt. Zion and Mt. Moriah above Mt. Zion to the north, was the site of Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple. The Mount of Olives to the east of the city could also be included in the Lord's mountains but that is only because of the New Testament where it became the site of Jesus' ascension and will be the location of his Second Coming (Acts 1). In the Old Testament it was most often the site of a pagan high place and idolatrous worship. However Zechariah 14 says it will be the location of the Lord's coming in glory to save his people. Isaiah says the Lord promises to rebuild his people through a remnant he will save and to them he will give Jerusalem. They will dwell there again! This prophecy was fulfilled in the return of the exiles under Zerubbabel in 538 and the dedication of the Second Temple in 515. See Ezra 1-6.

65:10-12 - These verses continue the contrast between Jews who are faithful, namely the remnant of Israel and those who chose idolatry and evil over against God. There is also a play on words in this passage that simply does not come out in our English translations.

For the remnant of Israel, for those whom the Lord rescued, the heights above the Jordan and even the Jordan Valley near Jericho will become pastureland for their flocks. Sharon normally refers to the coastal plain from Joppa to Carmel. But it can also refer to the Golan Heights and the plateau above the Jordan Valley to the mountains of Moab. It was often called Gilead and Bashan. The Valley of Achor meaning trouble is first mentioned in Joshua 7 as the site of the sin of Achan for keeping some of the booty of Jericho rather than dedicating it to the Lord. The most probable location is one of the wadis to the west of Jericho that empty into the Jordan Valley near the city. That is a very dry and hot area because it is near Jericho and the Dead Sea which is 1200 feet below sea level. When the Lord brings his remnant back to the land Bashan and Gilead and the wadis around Jericho will be fertile pasture for their flocks. In other words the land will be transformed! See Isaiah 35 where the desert will become a wetland when the Messiah comes and God saves his people. The heights of Sharon and the Valley of Achor
were both places where the tribe of Gad settled after the conquest of Canaan. They asked Joshua and the Lord permission to settle in the Transjordan because there was ample pasture for their flocks. Traditionally this had all been land belonging to the Ammonites and Moabites. God allowed it and gave them that land.

The play on words comes in verses 11-12. These verses contrast the fate of those in Israel who reject the Lord and who abandon Jerusalem as their place of worship. These are Israelites who have worshipped pagan Canaanite gods. They have set the table for Fortune for a sacrificial meal, and filled their cups with wine for Destiny. Fortune would later be a Roman god but in Isaiah's time it was a Canaanite deity, in Hebrew Gad. Destiny is Meni. Gad means "good fortune" which is what his mother Leah named him in Genesis 30. The irony is the people of Gad have now abandoned the Lord and are worshipping idols with the same name as their ancestor Gad. Along with Fortune they worship Destiny, Mani, and their destiny, Hebrew mana, will be the sword. They will all bow down to the slaughter. The picture is not of people dying in battle but captives kneeling down or bowing to the ground and their captors slaughtering them with the sword like ISIS has slaughtered their captives.

Why is the Lord doing this? He called them but they didn't answer. They would not listen to him, Hebrew shema, the same word used in the great command in Deuteronomy 6; Hear O Israel the Lord is one! Instead they did evil in the Lord's sight worshipping idols that are no gods and choosing what displeased the Lord.

65:13-14 - The Lord continues to speak to those from verse 11 who, "forsake the Lord and forget his holy mountain." He contrasts them with the Lord's faithful servants.

The Lord's servants will eat and drink but the sinful will be hungry and thirsty. In other words they will not have enough. The servants will rejoice and sing for the joy in their hearts. The sinful will be put to shame and be humiliated. They will cry out in anguish and wail because their spirit is broken. Jesus also contrasted those who belonged to God's Kingdom with those who rejected it as in Luke 6 or the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25.

65:15-16 - Isaiah finishes his contrast between the faithful remnant of God's people he will save and all those who have been part of his people who have rejected him and lived in disobedience. In verse 15 he continues to speak to the disobedient. They will leave their name behind as a curse to the faithful. Name here refers to their legacy. Zechariah 8 says the names of Judah and Israel have become a curse among the nations. In the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 the Lord says the name of God's people will become a byword or a proverb of what will happen to an unfaithful people. This is the legacy with which the faithful remnant will have to live. As for the unfaithful and disobedient Isaiah says the Lord God or Yahweh Adonai, will put them to death. The exiles had directly experienced God's judgment on an unfaithful Judah. The people of Judah in Isaiah's lifetime had experienced God's judgment upon the unfaithful northern Kingdom of Israel.

God has another destiny in mind for his faithful remnant. He will give them another name, a new name. Isaiah implies their new name will separate them from the curse of their unfaithful people. If deception, lies and deceit marked the behavior of sinful Judah then God's remnant will speak truth. Any of the remnant who invokes a blessing in the land will swear by the God of Truth. The Hebrew word translated truth is "amen". It means surely it is true. Jesus used the phrase frequently when he said, "Truly, truly I say to you." Literally the phrase was "Amen, amen I say to you." See John 14 for an example. Amen was used as an exclamation
of affirmation in the Psalms by the congregation. See Psalms 41, 72 & 89. Isaiah literally says God's faithful people will bless others and swear an oath of truth by the God of Amen, the God of Truth. Jesus said he was the Truth in John 14.

Everything will be different for God's faithful people because he will forget the past troubles of Judah and Israel. They will be hidden from his eyes. God will forgive his people their sins. Unlike us when God forgives he also forgets. Jeremiah said in the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 that God will remember their sins no more. Jesus invoked Jeremiah 31 at the Last Supper, claiming his sacrificial death on the cross would usher in that covenant and God would forgive and forget the sins of his people. See Luke 22 & 1 Corinthians 11.

65:17-19 - This section on the new heavens and earth answers the question why Israel's past sins will be forgotten and remembered no more. The reason is God will create a brand new heaven and earth and the former things will not be remembered or even come to mind. God is going to change reality and create a brand new one for his people!

This passage and its idea appear at least twice in the New Testament. First in 2 Peter 3 which says we await a new heavens and earth where righteousness lives and in Revelation 21 & 22 where John uses Isaiah's image to describe God's final reality for his people. He will create a new heaven and earth where all vestiges of sin, death and suffering will be no more; where God and his people will live forever in joy.

The great difference between Isaiah's vision and John's is that in Isaiah the new earth is a place where people live long lives and enjoy them. There is no clear concept of the resurrection life of the New Testament. This has led many to speculate about what Isaiah was writing. Is this about the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah or is this the true new heaven and earth of Revelation 21-22? The best answer may be both and it is John who clarifies the exact nature of the end. Isaiah merely glimpses it and God reveals only a portion of it in terms he could understand. There are hints in the Old Testament that there will be resurrection and eternal life but nothing fleshed out and concrete. That is certainly the case here.

God will create a new reality where Jerusalem's sin will be remembered no more. The word for create is the special Hebrew word bara, which means creation out of nothing and is only used in the Hebrew Bible with God as the subject. This is wholly the Lord's doing. When he creates all the sin, disobedience and punishment Jerusalem and God's people have committed and gone through will not even come to mind. This reflects Jeremiah's language in the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31. God will remember their sins no more.

Verses 18-19 continually use two Hebrew words to express God's new reality for Jerusalem. They are the words translated be glad and rejoice. They occur no fewer than six times in these two verses; sometimes as verbs and sometimes as nouns. Isaiah's overall meaning is clear. All the pain, shame and punishment Jerusalem had to endure for her sinful disobedience to Yahweh he will wipe clean and it will never be remembered again. The returning exiles who rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple only experienced a little of what Isaiah was speaking. It would be clear to them that Isaiah's great vision of a new heavens and earth was far into the future and only the coming of the Messiah would bring it to fruition. See Isaiah 65:24-25.

Joy and gladness will be so dominant in the new heavens and earth that the sound of weeping and crying will not be heard in it at all. In fact never again will it be heard. All cause for grief and suffering will be removed. John sees this as one of God's ultimate gifts to his people in the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21. All crying, death, mourning, suffering and pain will be forever removed from God's people.
One other distinction between Isaiah's vision and John's should be noted. Isaiah says God will create a new “heavens” while John says God will create a new heaven. Perhaps no distinction should even be made however it is there. In the Old Testament the heavens are the atmosphere above us and the stars in the sky. They are also the dwelling of God and the angels. The concept of heaven as the dwelling of God beyond our universe is not clearly developed in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is not only the dwelling of God and his angels it is also the eternal home of the Lord's saints after they die where they will be with him forever.

Why do Isaiah and John in Revelation declare that God will create a new heaven besides a new earth? I think it is because even heaven has been marred by sin because it experienced the rebellion of Satan and his demons. See Revelation 12. God creates a new heaven and earth where all the effects of sin and death are removed forever. In his new heaven and earth all the evidence of the rebellion of his angels and human beings will be wiped away. It truly will be as 2 Peter 3 says the dwelling of righteousness.

65:20-23 - Isaiah continues to describe the reality of the new heavens and earth God will create for his people. One must remember that for most of the Old Testament life after death with God was not a concept people understood. Therefore long life in this world was seen as God's great gift to human beings. Someone who died young had been cheated out of God's gift. The shadowy existence of Sheol was the most Israel understood about whatever might happen to a person after death. Only in a few places in the Old Testament is resurrection hinted at or eternal life with God in heaven for his people. See Daniel 12. It isn't until the New Testament that we see the development of the idea that God's people will be personally present with him in heaven forever after our physical bodies die.

With that context in mind Isaiah paints the best possible picture of life in the new heavens and earth. Parents will no longer experience the tragedy of an infant dying while still a child. No one will die young. Everyone will live out their span of life to the fullest. They will all be like Abraham. Genesis 25:8 says, "Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people."

Isaiah says someone who dies at a hundred years old will be thought a youth! The next line in the verse is difficult. The NIV reads, "He who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed." There is an alternative reading that says, "The sinner who reaches a hundred shall be considered accursed." The ESV translates the phrase literally and reads, "The sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed." The problem in the translation is the word normally translated sinner which in Hebrew literally means to miss the mark. The difficulty with the ESV’s translation is it may be literal but it does not completely match the poetic line before it about someone dying a hundred years old being thought of as a youth. The NIV tries to match the first line of the couplet and ignore the word for sinner or miss the mark. I like how the NRSV translates the phrase, "and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed." The NRSV uses the word normally translated sinner in its most literal translation for missing the mark and then matches that concept with the first line of poetic couplet. Their translation makes the most sense.

Isaiah then changes the picture and uses the reverse of the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28. God had warned Israel if they disobeyed him he would destroy them and send them into exile. Someone else would live in their houses, eat their crops they had planted and take their wives and daughters for their own. Isaiah says in God's new heavens and earth that will no longer be true. They will build houses and live in them and plant vineyards and enjoy their
fruit. No one shall ever take what was theirs away from them again! Their lifespan shall be like a tree, meaning they will live a long time, far longer than is normal for a human being to live. God's chosen people shall long enjoy the work of their hands because no one will take it from them. The Hebrew word for “long enjoy” literally means to wear out. The implication is they will make things and live so long that what they make will wear out long before they die!

All their work will not be in vain, meaning someone else will plunder it. No mother will bear a child doomed to grow up in misfortune. The Hebrew word literally means sudden calamity or terror. They will live securely in the land the Lord gave them just as he had promised to David in 2 Samuel 7. Isaiah does not mention the Messiah here but the new heavens and earth are clearly part of the Messiah's Kingdom.

One interesting concept needs to be mentioned. I realize that Isaiah's picture of God's new heavens and earth is painted using the best possible ideals of Israelite life including security and long life in the land. It certainly differs from John's vision of the eternal home of God with his people in Revelation 21-22. However, in Isaiah's vision God's people still work. They build and plant and harvest in perfect conditions. The question arises in what sense will we as God's resurrected and redeemed people work in the either the Millennial Kingdom of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 20 or especially in God's new heaven and earth in Revelation 21-22. I can't answer the question but it poses intriguing possibilities about work in eternity. We were created to work by God. See Genesis 1-2. Does that now stop in eternity? I don't think so but our work has been so marred by sin it is almost impossible to conceive what redeemed work for God's people would look like. It is something to ponder.

65:24-25 - In Isaiah 1 God had said he would no longer listen to the prayers of his people because of their sin and hypocrisy. They kept all the outward forms of worship without any inward devotion to God. Now in the new heaven and earth everything is different. They have been reconciled to God and even before they call out to God in prayer he will answer. Like Daniel in Daniel 9 God will answer their prayers before they finish speaking to him. Jeremiah spoke of a similar change when he prophesied in Jeremiah 7 & 11 that God would no longer listen to Judah and told Jeremiah not to pray for this people any longer because of their sin. Yet in Jeremiah 29 in his letter to the exiles Jeremiah said that now that their punishment is over they will call on the Lord and he will listen to them and answer them. If they seek him they will find him. Isaiah shows us in the new heavens and earth God’s relationship with his people is close and intimate.

Verse 25 is a partial reprise of the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:6-9. Isaiah repeats the first line of verse 6, the last line of verse 7 and the first two lines of verse 9. By reprising the prophecy in Isaiah 11 which described paradise conditions on the earth in the Kingdom of the Messiah, Isaiah directly ties the Messianic Kingdom with the new heavens and earth. In other words the new heavens and earth are created when the Messiah comes. By quoting the verses again Isaiah also ties together the first and second half of his prophecy.

The middle line of verse 25 recalls the judgment upon the serpent in Genesis 3. That passage also prophesied that the "seed of the woman" would someday crush the "head of the serpent." That is the earliest prophecy of the coming of the Christ, the Messiah, in the Old Testament. I do not think its mention is accidental here in Isaiah 65. Isaiah points to a new reality where paradise conditions exist upon the earth and our ancient tempter is defeated.

No one shall hurt or destroy on God's holy mountain, which is probably Mt. Zion, a symbol for Jerusalem. Pain, suffering, invasion, death will be no more in God's new heavens and
earth. He will make a new Jerusalem where his people will dwell in safety and shalom. John will complete Isaiah's vision in his prophecy of the new heaven and earth and the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22. The pinnacle of that vision will be God's people dwelling and ruling with him forever. They will see his face and live! See Revelation 22:4.

Chapter 66:

66:1-2 - In this section from 66:1-5, Isaiah contrasts true worshippers of God and those who go through the rituals of the sacrifices yet whose hearts are far from God. I have called this paganizing their religion in that they treat Yahweh like a pagan god thinking their religious rituals will appease him so they can get from God what they want and live however they choose.

God challenges this view through his prophet when he asks where they will build him a house where he can rest. He reigns in heaven and the earth is his footstool. The Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies was sometimes seen as the footstool of God on earth. By the time of the exile however it had either been destroyed or taken as treasure and as far as we know was not in the second temple built by Zerubbabel. All the materials one would use to build God a temple he has made. How then can one truly build him a house? Stephen used these verses to challenge the religiosity of the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. The majority of the Sanhedrin at that time were Sadducees, who held only to the Torah as Scripture and who wanted to keep the status quo with the Romans because it helped them keep the temple functioning which was the base of their power. Thus they practiced all the sacrifices yet their hearts were far from God. Stephen challenged them directly and they were so incensed by his words they stoned him to death!

God tells us to whom he is drawn: the humble and the contrite in spirit or repentant in spirit. Peter says in 1 Peter 5, quoting Proverbs 3, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” God is drawn to the humble person because he himself is the humble God! Jesus said he was gentle and humble in Matthew 11. Paul in Philippians 2 says Jesus humbled himself and took on the form of a servant and became obedient even to death on a cross. God is jealous for his glory. See Exodus 20 & Isaiah 42. Yet he is also humble and acts humbly through his Servant Jesus Christ. God is drawn to the humble in spirit because they are like his Son!

There is another reason God is drawn to the humble. They tremble at his Word, literally meaning full of fear or fearful. In context Isaiah means the repentant in spirit hold God's Word as their highest standard and want to obey it. They hold it in awe and fear lest they disobey it. When they sin they repent and listen to God's Word in their lives. One could summarize Isaiah's picture of the person God looks to as a person who is humble, repentant and obedient to his Word. That has nothing to do with temples and rituals. It has everything to do with attitudes and actions that please God!

66:3-4 - These verses stand in contrast to verse 2 which describes one in whom God delights; the humble and repentant in heart. In scathing language Isaiah paints a picture of those in Judah who have the outward actions of the religious but the inward heart of the rebellious. They have paganized their religion so thoroughly that God rejects them. They think by their sacrifices and religious rituals God is appeased and pleased with them as if all he wants is ritual. These verses are reminiscent of Isaiah's indictment of Judah in Isaiah 1.

How does God view someone who performs a religious ritual but whose heart and behavior are far from God? Isaiah says they are like a murderer, one who kills a man. They are like someone who snaps the neck of a dog. Their sacrifice of a lamb, all according to practice might as well have been the sacrifice of a dog, an unclean animal according to the Holiness
Codes of Leviticus 11-12. Such a sacrifice would be an abomination to God. Whoever comes offering a grain offering to God with a heart far from him might as well offer pig's blood to God! This would be unthinkable in Israel, yet this is how God responds to the religious whose hearts do not reflect their worship. The final description is someone who comes offering incense or frankincense they are like one who invokes an idol for a blessing! Frankincense was the incense used as the base to make the special incense used in the temple rituals. See Exodus 30. God views those who come to worship today in the very same way. They are an abomination to him. He wants a repentant and humble heart!

God says they have chosen their own ways rather than God's. Their hearts take pleasure in their abominations. Therefore God will choose for them harsh treatment to either judge them or bring them to repentance. He will bring all they fear upon them. Judah feared an attack from the BABYLONIANS but the closer God's judgment came the more they worshipped their idols along with the Lord thinking God would rescue them. They finally received what their behavior warranted. See Jeremiah 52.

Why did God punish them? Isaiah repeats again the refrain from 65:12. He called but no one answered. He spoke but they did not listen. Instead they chose what was evil in God's sight and chose that which displeased him. The repeat of the reason for God's punishment ties the two chapters together and shows Isaiah is still contrasting those who follow their Lord with their whole hearts and those who merely perform religious rituals but whose hearts are far from God. They have separated their behavior from their ritual. That is the essence of the paganized worship of Yahweh. Unfortunately people still do the same thing today in the church!

66:5-6 - God reassures those who "tremble at his Word." God has not forgotten them nor has he ignored those who spurn the Lord and are hypocrites in their religiosity. God recognizes his faithful remnant is hated by these people. The tragedy was they were the majority and not those who were faithful. In fact, except for a few times in their history, those who committed idolatry and treated the Lord like a pagan god were always the majority in Israel and even Judah. They have excluded the faithful from worship or power and influence. The word can mean excommunicate. Jeremiah was persecuted for speaking the truth in the Lord's name to the court prophets and the priests who refused to see their own sin and the fallacy of their official theology. They had a king from David's line sitting on the throne of David. The magnificent temple of the Lord where the Lord had sworn his Name would forever dwell dominated Jerusalem. God had saved them before. Nothing would happen to them. They were safe. How dare Jeremiah and others even think to speak out against the temple saying the Lord would destroy it! See Jeremiah 7, & 26-28.

The last lines of verse 5 need to be read with great sarcasm. These are the words of those who hate God's faithful people. "Let the Lord be glorified that we may see your joy!" In 5:19 Isaiah quotes this same group of people saying, "Let him (the Lord) be quick, let him speed his word that we may see it." In other words, the rebellious majority had so abandon their faith in Yahweh and put it in foreign idols that they dared God to act, believing he would do nothing. They had begun to believe the idols of the nations around Israel and of Babylon were greater than the Lord. God would not save them because he was weak. The gods of Babylon were stronger because they had subdued Judah. God had abandoned them. They would not even entertain the idea that their sin had caused God to allow the Babylonians to defeat Judah. He was judging them for their rebellion!
That is the meaning of verse 6. Their taunts of the faithful are like the religious leaders' taunts of Jesus on the cross in Mark 15 & Luke 23. If he's the Messiah let him come down from the cross and we'll believe. He saved others he can't save himself! Sinful Judah taunts God and God now responds. These words capture the setting of July 586 when the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem, sacked the city and destroyed the temple. Isaiah asks, what's all the uproar in the city? What's that sound from the temple? It is the sound of the Lord repaying his enemies for all they deserve. God was patient with them, giving them time to repent, sending them prophet after prophet but they would not humble themselves before him. It is a terrible thing when the patience of God runs out and he shows only his holiness to those who will not repent. Isaiah captures that moment for Judah here in Isaiah 66. John captures the ultimate moment of God’s judgment in Revelation 16-20.

66:7-9 - Jerusalem had been sacked. The temple was in ruins. The people were either dead or carried off into exile. Their nation as a nation had ceased to exist. What was to happen to the Jewish people? Had God truly abandoned them? Were they still his covenant people? These are all the questions with which the exiles were wrestling.

Isaiah prophesies and tells them God will form them anew. It won't take a long time, in fact it will be in a moment. It will come about totally by an act of God's grace and power. It will be as if a woman gave birth but never had to go through labor. Before any of her labor pains she had already given birth to a son. Isaiah asks, "Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things?" The re-forming of the Jews will be a miraculous thing. A country or a land will be born in a day, a nation brought forth in a moment. God will do it!

The exiles will doubt whether it can happen. God asks if a woman starts labor and never delivers a baby. Does God close up a woman's womb right at the point of delivery? No, those things never happen. God will see this through because he has a purpose for the Jews and Jerusalem!

One can understand the context of Isaiah's words to the exiles but the fulfillment of his prophecy did not come with the return of Zerubbabel or even with the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah. The ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's vision will only come with the resurrection of all of God's people at the return of the Lord Jesus. As 1 Corinthians 15 says we will all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. It is then that all believers will be miraculously changed and be formed as a resurrection people in a moment. There will be no more long slow gradual change but an instantaneous one. It will not be a process of pain and labor but a shout of joy and a work of God!

66:10-11 - Isaiah calls the exiles to rejoice in Jerusalem. His implication being Jerusalem will be rebuilt again and restored. All those who love Jerusalem rejoice with her and be glad for her. The ones who had mourned her will now be filled with joy for her. Psalm 137 captures some of the sadness and grief of the exiles over Jerusalem's fall as does Lamentations 1. It is almost impossible for us today to understand the shattering grief the exiles felt over the destruction of their city.

Isaiah then uses a vivid image to describe the fullness of their joy over Jerusalem's renewal. They will nurse at her breast like a nursing infant until they are satisfied and filled. They will "delight in her overflowing abundance." The NASB translates it more literally in saying, "That you may suck and be delighted in her bountiful bosom." The NLT captures the meaning of the passage best as it uses Isaiah's image rather than trying to soften it; "Even as an
infant drinks at its mother's comforting breasts." Isaiah pictures Jerusalem as the exiles' mother and they as nursing infants. In 66:12 he will describe the Lord as a mother who comforts them. The point is they had been beaten down with grief and pain but they will rejoice again because the Lord will restore their city!

**66:12-13** - Isaiah continues his picture of God's people living in a renewed or ideal Jerusalem. There is some discrepancy among the translations over various words in this passage but the overall meaning is clear.

The Lord will extend peace to Jerusalem like a river and the wealth or glory of the nations will flow into her like a flooding stream. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom* and some translations use peace, while others use prosperity. Both translations are possible. The word translated wealth can also mean glory. The NRSV translates the phrase, "I will extend prosperity to her like a river and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream." This fits the context the best. The word for river often refers to the Euphrates, which is sometimes simply called The River. It would have been the most powerful and deepest river in the Jewish mind even more so than the Nile because the Euphrates actually formed the northern boundary of the Promiseland even though Judah did not possess it. The words for flooding stream can mean a flash flood in a dry wadi. That image the Jews would know from experience. There were many wadis that flooded in the rainy season in Israel, especially in Galilee and along the eastern slopes of the mountains that flowed into the Jordan Valley. If that is the case then Isaiah's picture is one of overwhelming power and wealth suddenly coming upon Jerusalem that could not be stopped. This is the Lord's doing alone. The Jews did not bring this about on their own.

Isaiah then shifts the picture of the Jews in Jerusalem to a mother and child. When the Jews return to God's rebuilt city they will nurse and be comforted like a mother comforts her child. Isaiah already used this image in 66:11. He expands it in 66:12-13. They will not only be comforted and nurse they will be carried on her arm. The ESV and other translations use hip, which is closer to the Hebrew meaning. The word can also mean side. The picture is of a mother carrying her child on her hip or alongside her.

The child, the Jews, will be dandled on her knees. I do not know why the NIV chose the word dandled which is a seldom used word. The Hebrew word means to play with or bounce. The image is of a mother playing with her child, bouncing it on her knees or lap and the child giggling with joy! That is what God will do with his people!

He will comfort them, meaning to express sympathy and to console them. The Jews were filled with grief over Jerusalem's fall. The Lord like a mother will comfort and console them. He will nurse them like a mother showing love to them. He will carry them along on his hip and play with them in his lap. They will laugh and forget their grief in the love and affection of the Lord.

All together it is a remarkable picture of God's love for his people. It is also a bold image for Isaiah to use. He has already described the Lord as their father in *Isaiah* 64. Now he uses images that describe God as their mother. Yet in 66:10-11 he describes Jerusalem as their mother. The focus of Isaiah's pictures may be fluid but the meaning is not. God is going to bring them back to his city and comfort and heal them from their grief. Then he is going to shower them with blessing. Like the New Jerusalem in *Revelation* 22 the wealth and glory of the nations will flow into God's redeemed Jerusalem.

**66:14-16** - The NIV has verse 14 paired with verses 15-16 while the ESV has verse 14 paired with verses 12-13. Verse 14 says when the Jews see the restoration of Jerusalem and the
salvation the Lord will bring to his people they will rejoice. They will flourish or grow like the grass of the field, meaning they will expand rapidly again. The hand of the Lord will be known among them. The expression "the hand of the Lord" is one Exodus and many Old Testament books including Isaiah use to describe the power of God working to save his people. The Jews will see the power of God working to protect and save them once again but to their enemies he will show his wrath and fury.

God will come on behalf of his people to save them and to execute judgment on the nations that have opposed his will and have oppressed his people. This is language similar to the Day of the Lord language in Isaiah 13 & 24. God will come with fire. His chariots will be like the desert whirlwind. The image is similar to 2 Kings 2 when Elisha saw his master Elijah taken up into heaven by a chariot of fire and a whirlwind. God will bring down his judgment on the nations with fire. Deuteronomy 4 & 5 speak of the Lord addressing Israel out of the fire of his presence. Hebrews 12 says our God is a consuming fire. 2 Peter 3 says the elements will be destroyed by fire in the Day of the Lord. Revelation 16 says the 4th bowl of God's wrath will be fire on the earth. Finally Satan and the armies of the nations will be destroyed by fire from heaven in Revelation 20 and then the last judgement will come.

God will slay his enemies with his sword. In Isaiah's prophecy of the Lord's judgment upon Edom in Isaiah 34 he describes the sword of the Lord striking the Edomites in judgment. When the Lord Jesus returns in Revelation 19 John describes him as having a sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth that represents the Word of the Lord. He will slay his enemies with his Word, his sword. Paul describes the Word of God in Ephesians 6 as the sword of the Spirit. Hebrews 4 says the Word is sharper than a two-edged sword. Isaiah uses the figure of the sword of the Lord here as symbolic of his mighty Word that accomplishes what he purposes. See Isaiah 55. In this case it is the judgment of the nations who have been his enemies and the enemies of his people.

66:17-18 - Isaiah continues the contrast he began in chapter 65 between those who rebel against God and worship idols and the faithful remnant of his people who worship the Lord alone. From 66:17 to the end of his prophecy in 66:24 he will declare the fate of both groups.

Verse 17 can be tied in with 66:14-16. God pronounces judgment on those who take part in pagan rituals and idolatry. He reprises a description of this group of people from 65:3-5. These people ritually purify themselves in order to take part in abominable pagan practices. They go out to their gardens or oak groves on a high place where idols were worshipped, probably Baal and Astarte or Asherah. See the notes on 65:1-5. The one in the midst is probably their leader in their pagan rituals. Ezekiel observes some of the elders of Judah following Jaazaniah worshipping idols in the temple itself in Ezekiel 8. That is the kind of ritual to which Isaiah refers. Not only do they "purify" themselves they eat that which the Lord had forbidden, pig's meat, mice or rat meat and "the abomination". The NIV softens the translation to read "other abominable things." The NRSV reads "vermin". One gets the picture. They think they are "pure" yet they are unclean before the Lord. He says they will meet their end together. Judgment is decreed for such people.

The Hebrew in the first part of verse 18 is difficult. The NIV reads, "And I, because of their actions and imaginations am about to come." The ESV reads, "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming." The NLT reads, "I can see what they are doing, and I know what they are thinking. So I will gather..." Most English translations follow the LXX and the Syriac which include the word to know. The Hebrew lacks it. The Hebrew also literally reads
"it is coming". Most translations once again follow the LXX and translate the clause with God as the subject, "I am coming."

The overall meaning is clear no matter how one translates the phrase and the NLT has captured its essence. God knows what they do and their thoughts and hearts. He sees them. One would think that means judgment as in verse 17. The surprise is what comes in the next phrase. The Lord will gather all the nations and peoples who practice such things and they will come to him and see his glory. One could take that as see his glory and be terrified because he will judge them. But as we shall see Isaiah turns not to judgment for the pagan nations but to grace. They will see his glory and proclaim him. Isaiah will prophesy next of the Gentile mission of the apostles in the New Testament!

66:19-21 - These verses are a remarkable bridge between the Old and New Testaments. The setting is eschatological, in that it takes place in the "new heavens and earth" of verse 22 or at the least in the time of the Day of the Lord, the time of salvation and judgment in 66:1-18.

God says he will place a sign among them. The "them" is either the nations of the world or the surviving Jews in the Day of the Lord. The context suggests the "them" are survivors of the Jews or the remnant, whom the Lord will send to the nations far away to proclaim the glory of the Lord. The other alternative is that "them" refers to survivors of the nations after the Lord has gathered them to see his glory in verse 18. That creates more difficulties than if the survivors are from the remnant of the Jews. Perhaps one can take it both ways.

Isaiah does not specifically say what the Lord's sign is. Jesus tells the Pharisees in Matthew 12 that to his generation of Jews only the sign of the prophet Jonah will be given. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and nights. Symbolically Jesus was in the earth or the tomb three days and nights before he was resurrected. Literally it was on the third day. Symbolically it was three days and nights like Jonah. He was dead but then he was alive again. Isaiah 11 says the Messiah himself will be a sign to the nations. Clearly the New Testament sees Jesus as God's sign both to the Jews and to the nations. When God's sign is given the survivors are sent out by God.

The mission of the survivors is clear. The Lord sends them out to nations far away from Israel who have not heard of the glory of the Lord. They are to declare it and proclaim it among those nations. Isaiah lists many of them. Tarshish represents a seafaring trading nation perhaps in western Spain or even Carthage. Libya, Hebrew Pul, is in North Africa, while Lydia was expert in the bow. There is some debate about the location of Lydia, Hebrew Lud. Historically Lydia was an empire in central Asia Minor. Some linguistic data suggests it may refer to a people in North Africa. Most translations take it to mean the Lydians in Asia Minor. Tubal is an area in Central Asia Minor or further north, and Greece, Hebrew Javan, is the Greeks of mainland Greece rather than Greeks who settled around the Mediterranean Sea. The distant islands or coastland most likely represent the Phoenician peoples who founded colonies across the Mediterranean including Carthage in North Africa. This list of nations describes peoples mostly to the west of Israel across the Great Sea (the Mediterranean).

Isaiah says God will send Jewish missionaries from the remnant of Judah across the sea to the west to tell the nations about the glory of the Lord! This entire section describes the Gentile mission of the New Testament. The time frame is eschatological because it is in the time of the new heavens and earth. No wonder Paul saw his mission as fulfilling the eschatological promises of the Messiah's coming. This may also help explain his understanding of Romans 9-
11, because part of the promise of those verses is the nations bringing back the Jews to God. See Romans 15.

These verses also help us to understand the already-not yet time-frame of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is risen! The Holy Spirit has been given to all of God's people. Forgiveness is proclaimed and the New Covenant is established. The Gentile mission has begun. All of these things are signs that the Kingdom of God has already come. Yet, every knee does not bow and every tongue does not confess Jesus as Lord. Satan is still at large in the world. Jesus reigns in heaven at God's right hand but he does not yet completely reign on the earth. We await his Second Coming to fulfill his Kingdom.

In the meantime the Jewish missionaries will help convert the nations to the worship of God. That is what the Book of Acts is all about! Not only will the nations come to God but they will bring back the Jews from all across the world to Jerusalem. They will present them to God as tribute to a king or as sacrifices acceptable to God. They will be sacrifices that are pure and holy like the grain offerings of Israel brought to the temple in ceremonially clean vessels.

Not only will the nations bring the Jews back to Jerusalem but from among the nations God will select some to be priests and Levites or assistants to the priests! This is a remarkable prophecy. It says Gentiles will become priests to God! Isaiah sees a time when the covenant with Aaron will be expanded or set aside and even Gentiles will be able to be priests of God ministering to the Lord and to the people. Peter saw this fulfilled in 1 Peter 2 9-10 when he said: "But you are a chosen priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Paul says in Ephesians 2 that God has forged one new people out of the Jews and Gentiles setting aside the ancient hostility and making peace through Christ. John says in Revelation 1 that God through Jesus has made us a kingdom of priests to serve God the Father.

These verses serve as one of the great prophecies of the New Testament era. They describe God's purposes for the Gentile mission of preaching the gospel to the nations. I do not believe it is accidental that Isaiah writes them at the end of his remarkable prophecy. They look forward to the coming of the Messiah of which he prophesies and to the mission of the apostles whom the Messiah will send out to the nations! See Matthew 28, Luke 24 & Acts 1!

66:22-24 - Isaiah's final words of his prophecy emphasize once again the contrast between those whom the Lord has saved, who have believed in him from all nations and those who have rebelled, whom the Lord has judged. God gives his people, both Jews and Gentiles a promise. They will endure before the Lord, just as the new heavens and new earth God will make will endure, so will their name and their offspring endure. His people will continue forever. Isaiah is still hinting at eternal life with God but his theology is not fleshed out as it is in the New Testament. See John's prophecy of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21-22. However, Isaiah makes his point. God's people have no need to fear God will somehow reject them again or punish them. They are his people and will continue before him. Offspring implies children and perhaps the birthing of new generations after the previous one dies out. This is also implied in Isaiah's description of the new heavens and earth in chapter 65. However, given the New Testament's teaching about eternal life and resurrection for those who love God, we can safely conclude God gives Isaiah a glimpse of the eternal Kingdom of God with his people.
That Kingdom will be eternal. That is the meaning of from one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another. God's promises will endure forever to his redeemed people. His people will consist of all the nations who come and bow down or worship the Lord. The new moons and Sabbaths mentioned here do not refer to the keeping of the Jewish ritual sacrifices but to the continual passage of time without end.

Isaiah ends his prophecy with another group of people, those who will suffer God's eternal punishment. The redeemed people of God from all nations will go out, probably from a redeemed Jerusalem, and look upon the corpses of all those who have rebelled against God. Their fate is in marked contrast to the Lord's people. First of all they have not been buried. This would have been shocking and shameful to the Jews of Isaiah's day as well as ours. They are corpses so they are dead yet there is the implication from Isaiah that they continue to suffer. "Their worm will not die nor will their fire be quenched." The maggots that eat their dead flesh will never die. They will continually feed on their corpses. Their dead bodies will be burned in a fire that never goes out. Jesus quoted this verse to describe hell in Mark 9:48. Clearly Jesus saw Isaiah's words as a description of eternal punishment for the wicked that rebel against God. He also refers to eternal fire in describing hell in the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25. John uses the image of a lake of fire that burns eternally with brimstone or molten sulfur to describe the place of eternal punishment for all those who rebel against God in Revelation 20-21. The New Testament expands Isaiah's vision of the wicked outside the redeemed Jerusalem to include an actual place of eternal punishment: Hell.

Isaiah's description of the eternal punishment of those who rebel against God is a dark way to end his prophecy. His words are a sobering reminder of the cost of not only rebelling against God, which we all do, but of rejecting God's gracious offer of salvation in his Messiah-Servant. Those who receive the gift of forgiveness through God's Servant-Messiah will be with the Lord forever in his new heavens and earth. Those who reject it will be cast outside, suffering pain and torment. This is the contrast of the Gospel. It is free to accept it but there is a terrible price to pay to reject it! In that Isaiah, perhaps more than any other Old Testament prophet, paves the way for the New Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.