

Understanding

Isaiah

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Lesson 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Prophets

I. The call and commission of the prophets of Israel

When we examine the various biblical accounts of the call and commission of each of the writing prophets, we must be struck, above all else, with the sovereignty and divine prerogative of the God of the prophets. There is no characteristic common to each of them other than the certain, inescapable, and unsought call of God. The prophets did not all come from a certain tribe, as did the priests. They did not pass the office from father to son. They did not of themselves choose the position and follow all the right steps to attain their goal. Instead, God sovereignly reached down and set apart persons from every background, walk of life, and social position to speak his very words to the people of Israel. When God called a prophet, he did not have the option to refuse. If God had chosen him, he would be a prophet for life. There is no example of any prophet genuinely called by God who ever left his office. God had chosen him before he was born, and he would never revoke his choice. This is important for us to realize, because at the outset of our study it emphasizes a sovereign God whose plans are certain and unstoppable, and whose grace moves him to reveal to the desperate world of mankind what those plans are, and how the world should respond. From the beginning, then, we should be less concerned with understanding the prophets themselves and more concerned with understanding the God of the prophets, and his all-inclusive plans for the world he created.

Before we look more specifically at Isaiah, let's take a brief survey of common characteristics in the divine commissioning of some of the prophets.

1. God commissioned prophets from every conceivable background:

- Amos was a shepherd and fruit-grower from a small, rural community in Judah (Amos 1:1)
- Hosea was a native of the Northern Kingdom, and the husband of a prostitute (Hosea 1:1-4)

- Micah was from Moreshath-Gath, in southern Judah, near the border of Philistia (Micah 1:1)
 - Isaiah was among the nobility of Jerusalem. Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was nephew to Azariah, king of Judah.
 - Habakkuk may have been a Levitical temple singer (Habakkuk 3:1,19)
 - Jeremiah was a priest from Benjamin (Jeremiah 1:1)
 - Ezekiel was a priest among the captivity in Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1-3)
 - Daniel was a high-ranking official in Babylon and Medo-Persia (Daniel 1:19-21)
2. The prophets' commission often began with a vision of God himself:
- Ezekiel was granted a vision of God on his throne, with his angelic attendants (Ezekiel 1:4-28)
 - Jeremiah was visited by the Lord, who touched his mouth to signify the giving of the prophetic message (Jeremiah 1:9)
 - Daniel saw the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13,14)
 - Amos saw the Lord standing upon the altar (Amos 9:1)
 - Zechariah saw visions of the Lord speaking with various angelic and human beings (Zechariah 1:13,20-21; 3:1-4, etc.)
 - Many of the prophets refer to the words of the Lord that they "saw," indicating a vision of God (Amos 1:1; Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1; 2:1,2;)
3. The prophets could not refuse the commission of God:
- Jeremiah attempted to excuse himself on the basis of age and lack of qualifications, but God rejected his attempted refusal, explaining that he had chosen him before he was conceived (Jeremiah 1:4-8)
 - Moses (the first major prophet in Israel's history) attempted to refuse God's call for similar reasons, but God rejected his excuses (Exodus 3,4); note also other common elements in Moses'

commission (vision of God, giving of specific words from the Lord, etc.)

- God set Ezekiel as a watchman in Israel, with the moral necessity to declare all of his words (Ezekiel 33:1-9)
 - Jonah attempted to flee from the Lord in order not to speak his words, and God went to great lengths to constrain him to give the message he had commanded him to give (Jonah 1-4)
4. When God commissioned a prophet, he gave him the exact words he wanted him to speak:
- God put his own words in Jeremiah's mouth (Jeremiah 1:9)
 - God made Ezekiel eat a written scroll; later he made him dumb, so that he could speak nothing but the very words of God (Ezekiel 2:8-10; 3:26,27)
 - Every prophet claimed to speak, not his own words, but the word of the Lord (Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:3,11,13,etc.; Obadiah 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Micah 1:1, et al)
5. When God commissioned a prophet, he often indicated that Israel would refuse to hear, but that this was also part of his plan, and should not discourage the prophet from speaking:
- Israel would refuse to hearken to Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:4-9)
 - Israel would fight against Jeremiah and his message, but would not prevail (Jeremiah 1:18,19)
 - The clear testimony of Jesus in the New Testament is that the people of Israel rejected and persecuted all the true prophets who were sent to them, culminating in their rejection of Christ himself (Luke 11:47-51)

II. The Central Themes of the Prophets

- A. The prophets enforce and apply the Mosaic law.

The prophets did not come up with a new, strange theology or way of looking at the world. Everything in the prophets' message is there to some degree in

the foundational work of the Pentateuch and other Old Testament writings. The prophets may become more specific in relating the meaning of God's law to the people, but there is nothing brand new in their prophecies. When the prophets denounced the sins of the people and pronounced coming judgment, they did so in strict accordance with the blessings and cursings of faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the covenant as recorded especially in Leviticus 26:1-39; Deuteronomy 4:15-40; and Deuteronomy 28:1-32:42. Understanding these passages will give us the necessary foundations for understanding the writings of the prophets. Involved in this application of the Mosaic law is both the cursing prophesied for unfaithfulness, and the mercy promised to all who walk according to its precepts. Leviticus 26, in particular, emphasizes both these elements that are found so often in the prophets.

Virtually every commandment given in the Pentateuch is used by the prophets to condemn and accuse the wickedness of Israel, and to pronounce coming judgment. Many prophecies refer to specific commandments which Israel had broken; for example, Hosea 4:2,3, which specifically refers to the third, ninth, sixth, eighth, and seventh commandments, and pronounces judgment on that basis. On the other hand, some passages refer to the law as a whole, and pronounce judgment because of a wholesale violation of all the commandments (Hosea 8:12,13).

B. The prophets emphasize God's eternal covenant with his people.

The prophets do not end with a message of cursing, promised as a retribution for unfaithfulness from the time of Moses. Their prophecies are also full of unconditional promises of hope, made on the basis of every covenant God had established. Some prophecies of hope even allude to many covenants in the same context, such as Ezekiel 37:24-26. Even though the people of Israel failed to observe the Mosaic law, the law, which came 430 years after the promise to Abraham, could not nullify the promise of God's eternal covenant (Galatians 3:17).

C. The prophets include every nation of the world in God's plans.

It was easy for the Israelites to assume that God was only concerned with them as a people; but the prophets clearly showed that God was actively governing in

the affairs of the entire world. God will both judge and show mercy to nations other than Israel. The prophets contain many denunciations of Gentile nations, but these are not specifically related to the law which was given to Israel. Instead, they are usually condemned for pride, idolatry, and violence (Isaiah 16:6,7; Amos 2:1; Isaiah 19:1); more particularly, they are often condemned for their mistreatment of God's people (Jeremiah 50:17,18). But beyond just condemnation, the prophets also give much hope to the Gentile nations, on the basis of the New Covenant, which will turn the Gentiles into true Israel, the people of God's favor (Isaiah 66:19-22; Amos 9:11,12).

D. The prophets' *central message* is the exile and restoration of Israel.

Central to understanding the message of the prophets is the idea of the exile (based on unfaithfulness to the law) and the restoration (based on God's continuing covenant of grace). The judgment of the exile is extreme, even to the point of God's casting off his people so thoroughly that they become "not my people" (Hosea 1:6-10). But the promise of the return is also extreme, so that those who were called "not my people" shall be called "my people." This restoration of true Israel involves God's creating a people for himself from every nation, just as Paul interprets this passage from Hosea in Romans 9:23-27. Hence, the promise of restoration extends beyond what happened when Cyrus sent the exiles of Israel back to Jerusalem. This was merely a type and a foretaste of the massive restoration that was yet to come in the time of Christ.

E. The prophets clearly display the centrality of Christ in every part of their message.

Not only is Christ the consummation of the prophets (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:19-23); he is also the fulfillment of all the prophecies. The prophets demand a curse for the breaking of the law: but they also prophesy that Christ would vicariously bear the curses of the law (Isaiah 53). They promise covenant blessings to God's people: but they recognize that only Christ could usher in all the covenant blessings (Isaiah 55:3-5). In fact, the presence of Christ himself among his people is the sole substance of what those covenant blessings are (Isaiah 9:6,7; Ezekiel 34:29,30). In addition, the central message of the prophets – the exile/restoration motif – is best understood when we view the work of the coming Christ in those same terms. God would

reject his people. But this rejection, extreme as it is, could never be sufficient to placate God's wrath against sin, and usher in a restoration of mercy. However, there are prophecies of a coming Messiah, who would likewise undergo rejection and exile. Because of his perfect righteousness, he would be a sufficient sacrifice to placate God's wrath and purchase his mercy so that an undeserving people would know the restoration of his grace. In other words, "The very process that the elect nation must undergo in exile and restoration finds its personalized expression in the sufferings and exaltation of this distinctive servant of the Lord".¹ Not only would Christ suffer exile, being "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted;" he would also be "exalted and lifted up, and made very high" (Isaiah 52:13;53:4). And not only would he win a glorious restoration for himself, but he would likewise purchase a worldwide restoration, that would affect the remnant of Israel, and all the nations, and even the very earth itself (Jeremiah 50:20; Joel 2:32; Isaiah 65:17-19). In light of the massive implications of the prophesied restoration, it becomes clear that, "Reconstitution of Israel in the land that underscores Jewish nationalism and builds walls of separation between them and the Gentile peoples cannot possibly qualify as the restoration depicted in the writings of the prophets".²

Introduction to Isaiah

I. Isaiah's call and commission

Isaiah was unusual among the prophets in that he was from the ranks of the influential and highly respected in Jerusalem. Tradition has it that King Azariah was his uncle. At any rate, he seems to be singularly at ease among the royalty of his day, and had ready access to the king's presence. His writing, as well, is one of the most highly polished and nobly-worded collections of prophecy ever written. Isaiah has a lofty and grandiose vision of the King of kings and his absolute rule over all the nations of the world throughout all of history. When one reads his majestic visions, it is hard not to feel that he has indeed seen the King, high and lifted up. The key passage describing for us Isaiah's call and commission comes from chapter six of the book of his

1 Robertson, O. Palmer. *The Christ of the Prophets*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004, p. 479.

2 *ibid.*, 492

prophecy. In this account, we find every element we have previously noted very clearly indicated. His commission began with a vision of God himself (Isaiah 6:1-4). Following this vision, Isaiah expressed his own inadequacy, but was not allowed to reject the office of a prophet; instead, God made him qualified by taking away his sin by Christ's sacrifice, and giving him the words he was to speak; thereafter, he was constrained to go out as a prophet (Isaiah 6:5-8). God then told Isaiah that he would harden Israel's heart so that they would refuse to hear him; but that this was in accordance with his plan of exile and restoration (Isaiah 6:9-13). In fact, Israel eventually rejected not only Isaiah's prophecy, but also Isaiah himself, and according to Jewish tradition, had him sawn in half during the reign of Manasseh (cf. Hebrews 11:37).

II. Major themes in the book of Isaiah

- The holiness of God (the Holy One of Israel) [6:1-4; 10:17; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19-23; 30:11-12,15; 37:23; 40:25; 41:14,16,20; 43:3,14-15; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 57:15; 60:9-14]
- The absolute sovereignty and active rule of God over all nations [10:12-16; 13:1-22; 14:12-27; 15:1-9; 16:6-14; 18:1-7; 19:1-17; 21:1-17; 23:1-18; 24:1-23; 29:16; 33:10-13; 37:20,24-29; 40:12-31; 41:21-29; 43:7-17; 44:7-20,24-28; 45:1-47:15]
- The coming Immanuel, who will cause the fall of Israel and the rise of the Gentiles [7:14-16; 8:8,13-15; 9:1,2; 28:16; 32:2-4; 40:3-5]
- The kingship of Christ [9:6,7; 11:1-5; 16:5; 32:1; 33:22; 41:21; 44:6]
- The suffering and sin-bearing of Christ (the Servant of the Lord) [42:1-7; 49:6-10; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-3]
- The conquering warfare of Christ [59:16-20; 62:1-2; 63:1-6]
- The wickedness of Israel, and her eventual rejection [1:2-8,10-17,21-25,28-31; 2:6-22; 3:1-26; 4:1; 5:1-30; 6:9-11; 9:14; 29:1-7; 30:12-17; 43:27,28; 59:1-15; 65:2-8]

- The gracious preservation of a righteous remnant [1:9,18,26-28; 4:2-6; 6:13; 10:19-22; 14:1; 17:4-6; 27:6,12; 28:5; 30:18-26; 32:15-18; 37:31,32; 40:1-2,10-11; 43:1-6; 49:22-26; 51:3; 54:7-8; 62:1-12]
- The future inclusion of persons from all over the world as the true Israel of God (as synonymous with the righteous remnant) [2:1-5; 11:10-16; 19:18-25; 27:13; 34:1; 45:22; 54:1-5; 55:1-3; 56:6-8; 60:1-16; 61:5-11; 65:1; 66:18-21]
- Zion (the Holy Mount, etc.) as the place where the true Israel of God will dwell with him in righteousness and peace [1:26-27; 2:1-5; 8:18; 10:24; 12:6; 14:32; 16:1; 18:7; 24:23; 27:13; 30:19; 31:9; 33:5,20-21; 35:10; 37:32; 40:9; 46:13; 51:11; 52:1-2,7-9; 57:13]
- The new creation in which perfect righteousness will dwell forever [11:6-9; 25:6-12; 35; 41:18-20; 43:19; 60:17-22; 65:17-25; 66:22]

III. Outline of the book of Isaiah

- A. Christ is the coming king of David (1-39)
 1. Christ will rule over Israel (1-12)
 - a. Israel is corrupt and must be cast off; only a remnant will be preserved, but a remnant that will come from every nation (1-5)
 - b. The God of Israel still reigns; this is all in his plan (6)
 - c. In Israel's worst calamity, Christ will come to dwell among his people; he will destroy every wicked person and be merciful to the poor and oppressed; he will make Zion the eternal dwelling place of the righteous (7-12)
 2. Christ will judge the world (13-35)
 - a. Christ will bring judgment upon every nation of the world (13-24)
 - b. Christ will recreate the world in righteousness (25-26)
 - c. No one will escape Christ's universal judgment (27-34)
 - d. The righteous will inherit the new earth (35)

3. Christ is already reigning over the world and bringing victory to his people (36-39)
- B. Christ is the suffering but victorious servant of the Lord (40-66)
 1. Preface: Christ will come and gather his flock (40:1-11)
 2. God is absolutely sovereign over all nations, kings, and idols (40:12-41:29)
 3. Christ is the appointed servant of God to accomplish his people's redemption (42)
 4. Christ is the only Savior and he will have mercy on his people; no idol or king can stand before God to demand mercy; neither can ethnic descent from Abraham lay claim to mercy; but Christ has graven his people's names on his palm, and he will win mercy for them with God (43:1-52:12)
 5. Christ will win mercy and healing for his people by taking upon himself their sins and suffering in their stead (53)
 6. Christ will spread the fruits of his sacrifice to the Gentiles, so that everyone who comes to him may drink freely and be satisfied (54-56)
 7. Christ will utterly destroy all the Jews who reject him (57-59)
 8. Christ will save all who trust in him, and lead men from every nation to the true Jerusalem (60-62)
 9. In the final judgment, Christ will come as a conquering warrior to destroy the world (63-64)
 10. Christ will gather a new people from those who had not sought him, recreate them as his true Israel, and create for them a new heavens and a new earth where they will live in peace forever (65,66)

Lesson 2: The Wickedness of Israel and Her Resultant Rejection

Introduction:

The first verse in the book of Isaiah is helpful in that it gives a historical setting for the prophecies that follow, and it specifies the immediate audience to whom the prophet was writing. We see by this information that Isaiah was the earliest of the major writing prophets (although not the earliest of any writing prophet – Jonah, Amos, and Hosea were likely earlier than Isaiah), and that his message had to do primarily with the southern kingdom of Judah (unlike that of Amos and Hosea). The period of Judah's history in which Isaiah would have been prophesying is marked by great changes: Uzziah and Jotham, although each with certain defects, were on the whole good kings; Ahaz was thoroughly wicked and corrupt; Hezekiah was characterized by a whole-hearted righteousness such as had not been seen in any king since David (II Kings 18:1-6). And if Isaiah lived to see Manasseh's reign as well, as Jewish tradition has it, then he also experienced the court of the most wicked king in Judah's history (II Chronicles 33:1-9). This extreme fluctuation in the outward appearance of godliness in Judah is an important backdrop to Isaiah's prophecies. It is striking that his essential message does not change throughout any change in Judah's kings. In Hezekiah's reign, as well as in Ahaz's, the people of Judah are denounced as corrupt, and certain judgment is prophesied (e.g. see Isaiah 58:1-8). The presence of a good king is not sufficient to change the people's hearts; but a coming king is promised who will do just that (cf. Isaiah 11:1-9; 42:1-7). This "Branch of David" forms the sole substance of the hope of God's people. They can no longer look back to their nationality, descent from Abraham, etc., to assure their hearts of acceptance with God. For that, only the coming King about whom Isaiah is diligent to prophesy will prove to be sufficient.

It is noteworthy as well that Isaiah's prophecies are addressed to Judah. Hosea has already proclaimed with great certainty that Israel would be cast off from being God's people (Hosea 1:6-9). Isaiah's prophecies extend this indictment to Judah, so that the entirety of God's people are emphatically brought under the impending judgment of exile. Isaiah would live to see this judgment actually brought upon Israel. Judah's exile was still more than a hundred years future, but Isaiah expressed with certainty and clarity that it was indeed

coming. A further reason for the emphasis of Judah in Isaiah's message is the central truth that the promised King of David would himself be from Judah. Judah as a nation would be cast off, and yet all was not lost: the hope of the entire world, the promised Christ, was to spring from this devastated nation and bring healing to all.

Before we move into verse two, and the remainder of chapter one, it will be in place to note the function of the first five chapters in the book of Isaiah. As you will remember from last week, Isaiah's call and commission come in chapter six. Are we to infer from this fact that the first five chapters are prophecies made before Isaiah's grand vision of God that we read about in the sixth chapter? That is possible, and has certainly been suggested by many reliable bible scholars, but it is more likely that the event of chapter six actually took place before any of the prophetic writings. Isaiah is not laid out in strictly chronological fashion; and, although we see many historical references in the prophecies following chapter six, there are none prior to it. This, coupled with the nature of the prophecies in the first five chapters, would suggest that this portion forms a sort of introductory preface to the book of prophecies as a whole: in this preface, we see all the major themes that would form the substance of the more specific prophecies later on in the book. Isaiah chapters 1-5 lays out a basic blueprint of the prophetic message of the book as a whole, a blueprint that will be elaborated upon in much more intricate detail in the later prophecies.

Textual Analysis:

1. Israel has enjoyed a privileged status as God's own people, the children of his fatherly care (1:2a)

Isaiah begins his denunciation of the people of Israel by approximating a courtroom setting, in which the heavens and the earth are called to the witness stand (cf. Micah 6:1-3). By God's calling all of his physical creation to testify, we are immediately struck with the self-evident nature of the case. What has happened has taken place before the open face of the heavens. We are struck further with the egregiousness of Israel's rebellion: all of creation responds unhesitatingly to God's commands; and yet Israel, who has received more favor

from the Lord than the rest of creation, has rejected his commands (note Exodus 4:2). This theme will be emphasized a little later in the text.

2. Israel has egregiously rebelled against her Maker in spite of her privileged status (1:2b-4)

God immediately expresses how great Israel's wickedness is, in that, even brute beasts know not to turn from those who show them loving care. The ox and the ass have enough understanding to go to the place where they will be able to find food. And yet Israel has been shown true food indeed, all that is necessary for spiritual life, and has turned aside. In this, they are stupider than all the creatures of the earth (cf. Jeremiah 8:7). This foolishness is rendered all the more serious by virtue of the fact that the One they have despised is, first, *the Holy One*; and second, the Holy One *of Israel*. Instead of being as sensible as cattle, and going to where the food is, they show themselves instead to be as stubborn as cattle, and "have gone away backward," as stubborn cattle pull back (cf. Hosea 4:16).

3. Israel has undergone severe chastisement for her transgressions, and yet has not repented (1:5-8)

Israel has only experienced sorrow in turning from their Source of life; and so the question is posed, "why would you turn aside further and undergo further chastisement?" "What is your goal in looking for more bruising?" "What is the attraction in forsaking comfort to follow the wounds and devastating plagues of rebellion?" There is no place left for God to smite his people that has not already been wounded, and yet they look for more chastisement. Their wounds are not bound up with medication, because they have turned from the only true Physician of the soul, the Sun of righteousness risen with healing in his wings (Malachi 4:2). So real and vivid is Isaiah's vision of the utter destruction of Jerusalem that he speaks of it in a way that emphasizes the immediacy of the crisis. Although Jerusalem had not yet been physically devastated as in this extreme description, the impending doom was certain and graphic. The booth in a vineyard and the hut in a cucumber garden were both small, lonely places in which a single inhabitant would watch for thieves. All of Judah would become like a tiny, isolated, lonely booth, open to the ravages of all her enemies.

4. The only factor standing in the way of Israel's absolute destruction is God's preservation of an elect remnant (1:9)

Sodom and Gomorrah are the outstanding Old Testament examples of God's utter destruction of the wicked. So great is the wickedness of God's people (themselves called Sodom and Gomorrah in the next verse), that they are very close to undergoing the same judgment. In fact, if it were not for a very small remnant upon whom God has decided to have mercy, all would indeed be lost. As Jeremiah later expressed, "It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed," that is, entirely destroyed in God's judgment (Lamentations 3:22). This preservation of a remnant continues to be of utmost doctrinal importance even to the days of Paul, as he elaborates upon the concept in Romans 9:27-29, and picks up the theme again in Romans 11:1-7. The only reason that the whole world is not condemned before God is that he has sovereignly reached down and plucked out a small remnant upon which to pour out his grace.

5. Israel cannot presume upon God's favor or willingness to listen on the basis of any national distinction, but on the basis of an internal righteousness alone (1:10-17)

Israel is called Sodom because God no longer sees her as anything but wicked and pagan. Israel can continue to carry out all the old prescriptions of worship that God enjoined upon her so long ago, but they will mean nothing more to him than Sodom's old pagan rites and rituals. Israel's sacrifices bring God no pleasure, her appearance at his temple is merely a trampling of his courts, her appointed feasts and sacrifices are altogether hateful to him. What will finally please God again is not a more elaborate or conscientious following of the ritual laws, but an entire change of heart. God will not be satisfied with them nor hear their prayers when the hands they lift up in worship are full of innocent blood. Until they have a heart of true love for their neighbors, especially the helpless and oppressed, God will not be their God anymore than He was Sodom's God.

6. This necessary internal righteousness is offered by God through a complete cleansing of sin (1:18)

It would be natural for even the true believers in Israel to lose all hope after the preceding indictment. God has brought the whole world under the condemnation of sin; however, Isaiah here assures us that it is not to cut off all hope, but to make us candidates for the absolute grace and forgiveness of God. It would be impossible for the Israelites to do in themselves what God has just said had to be done for his renewed favor. But God has seen this, and is therefore prepared to offer, as an absolutely free gift, the forgiveness and change of heart that is so desperately needed. As Paul would later express, “God has shut them all up in unbelief, in order that he might have mercy upon all” (Romans 11:32).

7. It is only those who actually receive this free gift of cleansing who will be preserved and enjoy prosperity; but those who rebel will be devoured (1:19-20)

Although the land would undergo destruction, yet those who were made willing and obedient would still be enabled to enjoy its blessings. To “eat the good of the land” here has to do with being sustained with the spiritual life that would come from Judah alone. As Christ later informed us, true life is to eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:53). Those who were still rebellious would be utterly destroyed.

8. On this basis, the prophetic outlook for Israel is utter and absolute destruction and rejection by God (1:21-25,28-31)

In light of the foregoing prophetic assessment, Israel’s future looks gloomy indeed. They cannot find favor because of their nationality or following of the ritual prescriptions of the law. Only a changed heart will cause them to find favor with God; and this will only come when they accept his free gift of grace. But their hardness of heart (as indeed is the case with all mankind) will cause them to reject God’s offer of cleansing. Hence the prophet takes up a lamentation over the condition of Israel in 1:21-23. Because of this wicked condition, God’s judgment upon them is certain, as we read in verses 24-25. Here God refers to those who were formerly his people as “my adversaries,” and “my enemies”. This is a striking and tragic address. In verses 28-31, God emphasizes the utter destruction of the wicked together with that in which they place their security. They looked for happiness and security in the groves of

trees which they used as the locations of their idol-worship. But God would make them like those trees when all water has been taken away. They will wither up and be utterly wasted. And when they are dried and helpless, they and their idols will perish together in an all-consuming fire.

9. In the midst of this prophetic picture of destruction and rejection is a diametrically opposed prophetic expectation for Israel which looks to a restoration that extends beyond any previous condition of blessing, and is characterized by a genuine, pervasive, reigning righteousness (1:26-27)

Verses 26-27 stand out in stark contrast to the passages immediately preceding and immediately following them. Although God would utterly destroy Israel, that destruction would not be absolute, but would actually prove to be the grounds for greater blessing, so that (as in verse 25) the destruction turns out to be nothing but a removal of dross. The destruction of corrupt Israel would facilitate the establishment of pure Israel, whose hearts are indeed righteous. Hence we begin to see two utterly opposed expectations for Israel: those who are outwardly Israel but inwardly wicked will be consumed; but those who are the “remnant” of Israel and inwardly righteous will be set up as the true Israel. Isaiah here begins to use the term “Zion” to indicate the “city” of those who are God’s people in heart and not merely in outward appearance. “Jerusalem” would be destroyed; but pursuant to this destruction, “Zion” would actually be established, and would continue as a place where righteousness reigns.

Points of Application:

1. If we are God’s children, we must look to him alone for sustenance, life, and happiness.

In Jeremiah 2:13, God condemns the people of Judah for committing two evils: “they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, to hew out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” How often do we, as the children of Israel, look to everything but God for our sustenance and satisfaction? Let us not be more brutish than cattle, forsaking God to search

everywhere else for our happiness. If we do, we must realize that even as God broke off Israel for unbelief, he will break us off too (Romans 11:20-21).

2. In proportion as we have received blessings from God, we are responsible to fear and obey him.

Israel's sin was so egregious because God had done so much for them. But we have experienced more blessings than they: as the author of Hebrews observes, "He who despised Moses' Law died without mercy on *the word of* two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy of punishment, the *one* who has trampled the Son of God, and who has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:28-29, MKJV).

3. No outward appearance of belonging to God, nor any ritual following of his prescriptions – attending church, tithing, praying, reading scriptures, etc. – will be sufficient to establish us as God's people.

If God rejected Israel from being his people because their hearts were not pure, he will also reject us if our religion is merely outward and does not spring from a regenerated heart.

4. The evidence of a changed heart consists largely of the love and compassion we show to our neighbors.

How can we believe ourselves to be God's children if, throughout the week, our lives are filled with gossip, maliciousness, envy, spite, and hatred towards one another?

5. The only way to experience a truly changed heart is to accept God's free gift of grace.

We must feast on Jesus and his perfect work in order to experience a change of heart. Christ is the life of his church. It is only as we continue to partake of his body and blood through a constant remembrance of what he has accomplished for us that we can grow and be nourished in our spiritual life.

6. Even in the midst of judgment and trials, God knows those who are his, and uses the means by which he destroys the wicked to purify and preserve his own children.

When God destroyed Jerusalem, he only purified his true Zion. So will it ever be with his children. We are citizens of his heavenly kingdom (Philippians 3:20), and he will bring us through every difficulty and cause us to flourish at last.

Conclusion:

In the first chapter of Isaiah, we already see many major themes laid out, themes which will be developed throughout the rest of the book. As we conclude the chapter, we are left with the question, “Of whom does the righteous remnant, which alone will be established as God’s true people, actually consist?” Next week we will examine this question in some detail as we look to the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 2.

Lesson 3: The Future Inclusion of all the Nations of the World

Introduction:

In the first chapter of Isaiah, we encountered some shocking prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem, God's chosen people for thousands of years. We discovered that, because Judah had been so rebellious, forsaking the God who had blessed her so richly, God was about to cast his people off, destroying them and avenging himself upon them as his enemies. And yet, in the midst of this gloomy forecast of destruction and exile, we encountered a few rays of hope: God would preserve for himself a righteous remnant, and he would restore Jerusalem so that in the latter days it would be called the faithful city, and a city of righteousness. Now, as we look to the prophecies of chapter two, those few rays of hope burst forth into one of the most beautiful prophecies ever recorded for us, a prophecy of hope and triumph in the latter days of the gospel. As we examine these new prophecies in detail, it is vital that we remember the preceding prophecies of chapter one, which lay a necessary foundation for what is to follow.

Textual Analysis:

- Isaiah 2:1

Just as the prophecies of the last chapter began with the indication that they were written specifically concerning Judah and Jerusalem, so these prophecies begin with the same acknowledgment. However, this is a vastly different Judah and Jerusalem that is being referred to. This is no longer the Jerusalem that was being cast off and left as desolate as a hut in a cucumber garden; rather, it is the restored Jerusalem, as was promised in verses 26-27 of the previous chapter. This Jerusalem would not cast off, but "established in the top of the mountains," simply because this is not the old, corrupt Jerusalem, but the renewed, righteous Jerusalem. It is vital to note the distinction between the future Jerusalem of righteousness and the present Jerusalem of corruption as we look into the various prophecies Isaiah has recorded for us.

- Isaiah 2:2

Notice that this is the Jerusalem of “the last days.” What is intended by this phrase? The last few days before the first coming of the Messiah? The last few days before his second coming? The days of a future, Jewish millennial kingdom after his second coming? Many periods of time have been suggested as the referent of this term; and how we understand it has a necessary impact on how we understand the whole prophecy. Fortunately, when we look to the New Testament, we see the common prophetic phrase “the last days” interpreted for us. It would be highly beneficial to examine this New Testament usage. Note the following New Testament references to “last days.”

Acts 2:16-17 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: “And it shall be in the last days, says God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (MKJV)

Hebrews 1:1-2 God, who at many times and in many ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, (MKJV)

I Corinthians 10:11 And all these things happened to them as examples; and they are written for our admonishment, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

I John 2:18 Little children, it is the last hour: and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come; by which we know that it is the last hour.

In all these passages, it is clear that the prophetic “end times” or “last days” began with the resurrection of Christ. This is important, for it tells us that this prophecy is a prophecy of Judah and Jerusalem in the time period after Christ rose from the grave and ushered in the long-awaited days of the gospel.

What then is to happen with Jerusalem (called here, “the mountain of Jehovah’s house”) in the last days? It is to be established above every other

city; it is to be a mountain towering over every hill. And by virtue of its great glory and splendor, it is to draw people from every nation of the world into itself. How is this being accomplished in these “last days”? Physical Jerusalem is not the most dominant world city. It does not attract all the nations to run after it. We must understand Jerusalem to be a different sort of place in the “last days” than it was in the days before Christ. Galatians 4:21-31 gives us much helpful instruction in how we are supposed to understand the “latter day” Jerusalem and its citizens. Notice what Paul is teaching here:

Galatians 4:22-27 For it is written: Abraham had two sons, the one out of the slave-woman, and one out of the free woman. But, indeed, he out of the slave-woman has been born according to flesh, and he out of the free woman through the promise; which things are being allegorized; for these are the two covenants, one indeed from Mount Sinai bringing forth to slavery, which is Hagar. For Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem *from* above is free, who is the mother of us all. For it is written, “Rejoice, barren one not bearing; break forth and shout, you not travailing; for more are the children of the desolate than she having the husband.” (MKJV)

There are many helpful truths in this passage: the one that is vital for our passage in Isaiah is the fact that there are now two Jerusalems. The physical Jerusalem is in slavery, still trying to win favor as God’s people through the Old Covenant which has been done away with. The “Jerusalem from above” is free. She is the mother of all those who are in the New Covenant (cf. also Hebrews 12:18-24). Similarly, in Philippians 3:20, Paul tells us that our citizenship is in heaven. So what is the fulfillment of this prophecy in Isaiah chapter two, that in the days of the gospel the mountain of Jehovah’s house would be established above all the hills, and all the nations would flow unto it? Is it fulfilled in the physical Jerusalem, which is in slavery with her inhabitants, or in the true Jerusalem, the mother of all of us who are God’s children by the gospel? The Jerusalem from above is the only fitting fulfillment of this prophecy.

- Isaiah 2:3

In this verse, we see the reality that, in the days of the gospel, persons from all over the world would come to the true Jerusalem, and would truly be taught by God. This is in accordance with the prophecies that, when Christ establishes the New Covenant, God himself will write his law on his people's hearts (e.g. Jeremiah 31:33); in fulfillment of this prophecy, Christ promised to send his Spirit to teach his people all the things that Christ himself had taught the disciples (John 14:26). This in fact he did, sending his Spirit who gave all believers an anointing, so that they know all things (I John 2:20).

In the last days, men will be motivated to come “to the house of the God of Jacob” because “out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” How is this being fulfilled? We have to recognize that today the church is the house of God, as we see, for example, in Ephesians 2:19-22, and I Timothy 3:15. The latter of these references is particularly important, for we see that, because the church is the house of God, it is also the pillar and ground of the truth for this world. Truly it is only from the true Jerusalem, our spiritual Zion, that the truth will go forth. This places much solemn responsibility upon us as inhabitants of Zion to ensure that the pure truth of the gospel is indeed echoing out from us.

- Isaiah 2:4

What will be the final effect of Christ's reigning from true Jerusalem? Ultimately, the reign of Christ will spread until it conquers the whole world. And eventually Christ will destroy his enemies and recreate the earth in righteousness for his people from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation to dwell upon it forever. This verse gives a foretaste of that final reality. Later prophecies, such as those of chapters 25 and 65 develop this theme of a new heavens and earth where Christ will reign over all the nations in peace. It is given here in this prophecy of Jerusalem of the latter days, because that is the final goal toward which we as a church are moving. As Christ explained to us in Matthew 24:14, it is necessary for the gospel to go out to every nation, and then the end will come. May Christ find us faithful stewards when he comes to establish his final glorious kingdom in the new earth!

- Isaiah 2:5

In addressing those who he just stated will be from every nation as “House of Jacob,” Isaiah is again emphasizing the fact the new “House of Jacob,” in the last days, will be from all the nations of the world. He encourages us to walk in the light, just as John the apostle gives us encouragement in I John 1:7. It is only those who walk in the light that are in fellowship with Christ – which is the essence of all the promised covenant blessings.

- Isaiah 2:6

Here, after giving such glorious prophecies of the end-time house of Jacob, Isaiah returns to the subject of the contemporary house of Jacob, whom God had cast off. Because they were just like the pagans, God would treat them like pagans: they would no longer be his people. Hence, when the promised restoration of Israel came, it would come from an entire world that was, without distinction, not God’s people. God would not just restore, but recreate his people Israel.

- Isaiah 2:7-22

Isaiah now catalogs the degeneracy and heathen-like qualities of the present Judah. Because they are not truly God’s people, the final establishment of Christ’s kingdom, when he comes in all his glory, offers no comfort to them, only utter terror. II Thessalonians 1:6-7 likewise indicates that when Christ returns in his glory, it will be to pour out flaming vengeance upon his enemies, but to give rest to those of us who truly belong to him. Verse 22 gives the summative statement for this passage. Although violent and wicked men seem to prosper on the earth, the time is coming when the Lord alone will be glorified, and fragile man will be seen to be of no account. The exhortation for us is that we recognize this now, and fear the Lord alone, not men who seem terrifying but will one day have to give an account before Christ our King.

Excursus [The Recreation of Israel as a Part of the Restorative Work of Christ]:

The motif of the restoration of Israel as involving more than a reconstitution to her former status, but an actual *recreation*, so that she is a new entity, is best seen in light of the new heavens and new earth motif. The work of the suffering Servant of the Lord is to be so all-encompassing that it will bring about a restoration, not just of Israel, but of the entire world-order. The atoning work of the Messiah will be so effective as to reverse all the effects of sin and the curse – physical as well as ethical and moral. The greatness and vastness of the work of Christ comes to fullest terms in the end of the book: chapter 65 gives us the fullest glimpse of the new heavens and new earth, recreated in sinless perfection through the triumph of the Messiah. Chapter 66 gives us the fullest glimpse of the recreated Israel. Here Isaiah is speaking to Jerusalem (verse 13); and, referring to the Gentiles whom God shall call as “your brothers,” he declares that he will call them from all nations and make them into priests and Levites to minister before him forever in the new earth (verses 18-23). The church of the present age is the first coming to fruition of this promised reality (e.g. Hebrews 12:18-24); but its final realization will only be in the new earth, where a multitude from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, will offer up spiritual worship to God for all eternity.

Points of Application:

1. Matthew 5:14 tells us that a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. If the mount of the Lord’s house is to be exalted above all the hills, we are responsible to be the light shining out from that city, showing forth Christ’s glory so that all the nations will be drawn to seek the true Jerusalem. If we do not show Christ on this earth, who will?
2. Are we as believers encouraging each other, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.”? God has so designed the body of Christ, that we are mutually dependent upon the encouragement of each other to aid us in our growth in grace. Let us not forsake the gathering together of ourselves as a church (Hebrews 10:25).

3. If we are to learn more of Christ, God himself must teach us; and furthermore, he must teach us through his law, and through the word of the Lord (Isaiah 2:3). We must never fall into either of two errors: first, we must never arrogantly suppose that we are able to learn more of Christ through our own efforts. For that, God himself must shine into the darkness of our hearts (II Corinthians 4:4-6). And second, we must never suppose that we can forsake the sincere study of scriptures; for that is what the Spirit of God uses to teach us (Proverbs 2:3-6).
4. If we would experience the heart of the covenant blessings (fellowship with God), we must walk in the light, because that is where God dwells (Isaiah 2:5; I John 1:7). “Light” implies the knowledge and understanding of the truth, which only comes as the Spirit opens our eyes to the Word. “Walking” implies, not just intellectual familiarity with the truth, but an acquaintance with the truth that changes the whole character of our lives, and evidences itself in how we conduct ourselves from day to day.
5. If God’s people proved themselves to be pagans in heart, God confessed that they were pagans indeed. If we would be God’s true Israel, we must be so in heart and lifestyle, and not in name only.
6. When we see the Lord as high and lifted up and gloriously reigning, and man as of no account, it is foolish to fear man instead of the Lord. God reigns over all; let us seek always to please him, and take no consideration of how men may rage against us.

Conclusion:

Although we have seen the degeneracy of Israel, we have also been comforted by the glorious state of her end-time restoration. In the next two chapters, the flow of thought is very similar. Israel is denounced for her degeneracy (chapter 3), but hope is given for a glorious restoration of a righteous remnant (chapter 4). If God permits, we will begin our next lesson examining the nature of the righteous remnant, prophesied in chapter 4.

Lesson 4: The Righteous Remnant

Introduction [Chapter 3]:

Chapter three begins a new cycle of prophecies in Isaiah's introduction. The prophecies of chapters three and four follow the same basic design as the prophecies in the first two chapters, only elaborating more explicitly on some of the themes already mentioned. Finally, chapter five rounds out the introductory cycles of prophecy, climaxing with an allegorical representation of God as the husbandman of a vineyard, and Israel as a vine that has been given every advantage, and yet has brought forth nothing of worth. Hence, there is a natural crescendo to Isaiah's introduction, the first two chapters laying a thematic groundwork which will be taken up again in the next two chapters, and which will then give way to a dramatic representation that drives those same themes home in a pictorial and confrontational manner.

It is of course impossible in a fifteen week course of study to walk through all sixty-six chapters of Isaiah verse by verse. Therefore, we will just mention the major themes of chapter three, by way of introduction, before dealing in more detail with the prophecies of the righteous remnant in chapter four. Then, we will touch on the themes of chapter five, in a brief interlude, before moving on to deal with chapter six in more detail, once again focusing on the nature of the remnant as dealt with in the latter portion of the chapter.

The beginning of chapter three emphasizes the certainty and pervasiveness of God's judgment. This theme gives way to a vindication of the promised judgment by cataloging the thoroughgoing iniquity of God's people (with just a glimmer of hope in the exceptional encouragement of verse ten). This catalog of Israel's degeneracy climaxes at the end of the chapter, in which her spiritual adultery is typified in the shameless customs of her daughters, who take every opportunity to pursue the immoral pleasures of their pagan lovers. The chapter concludes with this repulsive image of Israel madly pursuing her illicit love affairs.

Textual Analysis [Chapter 4]:

- The sad conclusion of spiritual adultery (Isaiah 4:1)

Chapter three describes in sordid detail the manner in which Israel's daughters sought pleasure and security in illicit love affairs, instead of finding their joy and comfort in God. The first verse of chapter four gives us a glimpse of the sad outcome of those whose lives are thus occupied only with earthly, sensual pleasures. The lovers of the daughters of Israel have thoroughly disappointed them. They have not provided them with love, comfort, prosperity, social status, or anything which they had sought in their embrace. Now, Israel's daughters are ready to forego all joy and prosperity, willingly agreeing to share any husband they could find with six other women, and even consenting to provide their own food and clothing. All the things they had hoped for have vanished away, and still they grasp madly after a husband to take away their reproach. Although this prophecy has immediate reference to the scarcity of men after the devastating wartime judgments of God, it is very fittingly placed at the conclusion of the description of the abominable lusts of Israel's daughters. They had sold themselves for pleasure and prosperity, and now, when all those things have turned out to be illusions, they continue to sell themselves in shame and reproach. Thus, all who pursue spiritually adulterous affairs, running after that great whore Babylon (the God-hating world system, cf. Revelation 17:1-2), will find themselves utterly let down, but still constrained to follow madly after those idols which cannot satisfy.

- The fruitful Branch and the righteous remnant (Isaiah 4:2)

If anyone should be tempted to utter despair at the conclusion of this gloomy prophecy, Isaiah now takes up again the hopeful theme of the righteous remnant. For this remnant, i.e. "those from Israel who have escaped," the prophetic expectation is utterly opposed to the immediately preceding expectation for the daughters of Jerusalem. Notice that the time reference is the same as in the preceding verse, "In that day"; that is, the period of the end times. In the latter days, there will be a remnant of grace which will be preserved in spite of the utter destruction of Israel as a whole. This preservation is seen in connection with the glorious "Branch of Jehovah," which will be filled with fruit in the latter days. What are we to understand by

this? Later references in Isaiah, as well as references in Jeremiah and Zechariah (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:9 and Zechariah 6:12), make it clear that this Branch is none other than the promised Christ, who would spring up from the root of David. So is the promised fruitfulness intended to signify literal fruit? The fact that the “Branch” is intended symbolically to refer to Christ makes it likely that the “fruits” are probably intended in a symbolical sense as well. Christ’s teaching in John 14 may give us a clearer sense of the intended meaning here. In this discourse, Christ declares that he is the one true Vine, and that only those who are in him bear fruit. Here in Isaiah we may also infer that the remnant will only be preserved to enjoy the benefits of the fruit of the Branch by being in Christ. These comely fruits, reserved for those who are in Christ, may be understood along the same lines as the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. Some people have seen the reference to the fruit “of the earth” as emphasizing that it was through Christ’s taking on an earthly body, dying, and being buried for three days, that he accomplished the peaceful and righteous fruits of the gospel (cf. John 12:24). At the least, this prophecy is speaking of a righteous remnant who alone will be benefitted by the coming of Christ, the Branch of Jehovah.

- The remnant of Israel will be holy (Isaiah 4:3)

The remnant who will enjoy the fruits of the coming Branch will be made utterly holy; those who are said to inhabit Zion will be those who are written among the living, that is, written in the Lamb’s book of life (as in Revelation 13:8. cf. also Psalm 69:28, Philippians 4:3, and Revelation 3:5; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15). The remnant will be holy, because the Branch of Jehovah will produce the fruit of holiness in them. As John Gill expressed it, “These are the persons to whom Christ appears beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely, who will be left, and remain in Zion and Jerusalem; by which is meant the Gospel church, or church as in the latter day; in which these shall continue, abide by the truths and doctrines of the Gospel, and the ordinances thereof, and persevere unto the end.”

- The Holy Spirit will produce this holiness in the remnant, by his work of sanctification (Isaiah 4:4)

Although Isaiah has just described the entire remnant of grace as “holy,” he now goes back to instruct us how this holiness is to come about. Yes, it will be the fruit of the Branch; but that fruit will be produced through the zealous transforming work of the Holy Spirit. God will purge the filth and blood-guiltiness of the daughters of Zion, that is, of the remnant, who alone will be called the true inhabitants of Jerusalem. He will do this through his Spirit, who was sent to convince the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). The Spirit will work as fire, consuming the dross of that which is worthless in the lives of the remnant, and producing a burning zeal for the Lord (cf. Matthew 3:11-12; Jeremiah 20:9; Psalm 39:3; Song of Solomon 8:6; Isaiah 10:17; Zechariah 13:9). All of the remnant of grace will be made holy because of the certainty of the Spirit’s sanctifying work (cf. Romans 8:29-31).

- God himself will be with all the remnant (Isaiah 4:5-6)

When God took Israel out of Egypt, he symbolized his presence, guidance, and protection by a pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13:21-22). In the latter days, every assembly of the new Jerusalem (Mount Zion) will have God’s presence and protection personally surrounding it (cf. Zechariah 2:5). The whole church under the new covenant (e.g. Ephesians 2:19-22), and each member of the covenant in particular (e.g. I Corinthians 6:19), is the dwelling place of God. God’s presence among us as the true inhabitants of Zion is the sole substance of our defense, hope, joy, etc. God with us is a shade by day, a hiding place by night, a refuge from the storm, and so on.

Interlude [Chapter 5]:

Chapter five concludes Isaiah’s first (thematic) introduction. This chapter begins with an allegory, representing the truths that he has been enunciating. Israel is as a vineyard, tenderly cared for and yet producing nothing but worthless fruit. Because of her worthlessness, the Vinedresser (God) will utterly destroy the vineyard. The first introduction concludes with the utter corruption of Israel, and hence her utter destruction.

Chapter six stands as a sort of second introduction. The first five chapters introduced the major themes of Isaiah; the sixth chapter introduces his call and commission as a prophet. At the conclusion of this second introduction, as well, the themes of the failure of Israel, her impending destruction, and the gracious preservation of a remnant, come once again to the forefront. After this second introduction of his commission as a prophet, Isaiah begins to relate his further prophecies, many of which have regard to specific historical occurrences.

Textual Analysis [Chapter 6]:

- A glorious vision of Christ (Isaiah 6:1-4)

Verse 1: Isaiah's call and commission as a prophet began with a glimpse of Christ high and lifted up, seated upon his throne. Anytime God is seen by a man, it must be specifically the second person of the Godhead, Christ, who is seen. John 1:18 tells us that no man has seen God at any time, but that the Son has revealed him. Later, Christ tells Philip that if anyone has seen him, he has seen the Father as well (John 14:9). Moreover, John 12:40-41 says specifically that, at the occasion of this vision, Isaiah saw Christ's glory, and spoke of him. In this vision, Christ is reigning on high, just as Isaiah would later prophesy of him that he would sit on the throne of David forever. The train of his robe, signifying his glory, fills the whole temple, which indicates the presence of God among men. So Christ, whose body was in truth the temple of God, was filled with all the glory of divinity. "In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

Verse 2: The seraphs "above" (a better translation would be, "around," or "in the presence of") the throne were diligent in ministering before the holy, almighty, reigning God. They covered their face to signify their humility, and that no created being can behold the full glory of God and live. With two wings they flew, signifying their quick and ready performance of every command of God, swiftly flying to accomplish his bidding and minister before him. The significance of the two wings with which they covered their feet has been understood in a variety of ways. Are they covering them in humility? To signify that they do not choose the way in which they will walk, but rely altogether on

the word of God? In order not to contract defilement from the earth beneath them? To shield them from human eyes, who cannot stand even the merest reflection of God's glory? Whatever the significance, the fact that these glorious creatures were humble and obedient servants who could not stand the full radiance of the glory of God must be strikingly obvious.

Verse 3: The entire scope of their quick and obedient ministry was to proclaim the glory of God. Many have detected a foreshadowing of the Trinity in this proclamation of the thrice-holy God. There may be some truth to this, but the predominant idea is that God is holy in the highest degree. The whole earth, not just the temple, nor yet the land of Judea, is full of the glory of God. All things were created for his glory (cf. Revelation 4:11), and with us, as with the seraphs, our sole duty is to proclaim in all our actions the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31).

Verse 4: The mere voice of a mere creature proclaiming the glory of God shook the doorposts of the temple: how glorious must God himself be, if a simple creaturely proclamation of his glory is so powerful! Some have suggested that the doorposts of the temple shook, signifying that the physical temple would soon be thrown down upon the arrival of Christ. The house was filled with smoke, a common sign of the presence and glory of God. Smoke signifies both opaqueness, as the mysteries of the Divine nature may never be fully probed; and terror, as the glory of God is an awe-inspiring and fearful thing for mere creatures.

- A reaction of insufficiency (Isaiah 6:5)

Upon seeing this glorious vision, Isaiah does what a mere mortal and sinful man must do: dissolves in terror of the Holy God. When Isaiah only glimpsed the King, Jehovah of Hosts, he was immediately at the point of perishing, and was greatly stricken with fear upon recalling his sinfulness and that of all mankind. If no man, being a mere creature, can see God and live, how much less can man the sinner stand before the thrice-holy God?

- The accomplishment of sovereign grace (Isaiah 6:6-7)

God knew of Isaiah's insufficiency as a creature and a sinner, and yet he did not cast him away. Instead he sovereignly applied to his life the work of Christ, to cleanse him and empower him for the ministry to which he had called him. The altar, here as in the rest of the Bible, signifies the sacrifice of Christ, which takes away guilt. God commands that the effect of Christ's self-sacrifice (signified by a coal from the altar) be applied to Isaiah's account, hence equipping him for God's call. Augustine rightly prayed, "Lord command what you will, and grant what you command." So Jehovah did with Isaiah. His lips are seen as the chief repository of his uncleanness, partly because, as a prophet, it is above all his lips which must be cleansed and dedicated to God; and partly because the fruit of the lips stands as a litmus test of the nature of the whole person. James tells us that if any man does not offend in word, he is a perfect man and able to control the whole body (James 3:2). Likewise, Christ admonished the Pharisees that the things which come out of a man, i.e., those things which he gives vent to through his mouth, show his defilement and the state of his heart (Matthew 15:18).

- A reaction of gratitude (Isaiah 6:8)

When Isaiah, having experienced the wonder of divine grace and forgiveness, now hears the call of the Lord, he can have no other response than to say, "Here am I: send me." He who has been forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47), and he who has tasted God's grace is delighted to heed his call.

- The divine commission and the basic prophetic message (Isaiah 6:9-13)

Verses 9-10: God here officially commissions Isaiah, and sends him to perform a task which may well have been the precise opposite of what he was expecting: to harden and blind the people through his preaching. God not only indicates to Isaiah that Israel would not hear; but more than that, he positively commands him to stop their ears, shut their eyes, and so on. Not through deception, by preaching to them a message of false hope, but by proclaiming the truth, which, because they were unregenerate, could not possibly be accepted by them. Thus it is sometimes God's will to use the message of the truth to harden the reprobate and bring them doubly under the condemnation of God's just wrath (cf. Romans 9:17-18; Romans 2:5). This passage is quoted

not less than five times in the New Testament (Matthew 13:13-15; John 12:37-40; Mark 4:11,12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:26,27), to indicate the identical purpose of Christ in speaking in parables.

Verses 11-12: God now indicates, in response to Isaiah's stunned questioning, the purpose of this inexplicable task of hardening: it was to issue in the utter desolation and casting off of Israel. God's purpose was to harden Israel so thoroughly that he must consequently cast them off. This must have been astounding to a descendant of Abraham; we know from subsequent revelation that this end was not without a further purpose, namely, concluding all men in unbelief so that he might have mercy upon all (Romans 11:32). And God, not willing to cut off from his chosen servant all hope, intimates the same point in the next verse, being,

Verse 13: The grammatical difficulties inherent in this verse should not obscure its basic meaning. The point intended is that, although the destruction would be thorough, so as to be signified by a tree which had been utterly cut down, yet even in this sad state there would be a remnant preserved. This remnant (a tenth) would be the "holy seed" of Israel, indicated in the analogy by the stump left where the tree had been felled. Although all hope would appear to be lost, yet the stump would still have life in itself, and would ultimately spring forth in renewed vitality and grow up into a new and more glorious tree. Compare Daniel 4:19-26 for a strikingly similar analogy. Christ is the holy Seed of Israel (Galatians 3:16), and so the analogy teaches us this truth: that all of Abraham's descendants would be corrupt, and would be cast off. Only, at the end of all hope, a Seed would arise who would be truly holy. This Seed would restore Israel's fallen estate, and cause her to grow up again in holiness to the Lord. In other words, the righteous remnant would ultimately be limited to Christ alone; but from this remnant of one righteous man would many sinners be justified and come to constitute the true Israel of God.

Conclusion:

At the conclusion of both of Isaiah's introductory sections (chapters 1-5 and chapter 6), the essential message with which we are left is this: Israel is thoroughly corrupt and must be thoroughly destroyed; only a righteous

remnant will be preserved; and that remnant is ultimately none other than Christ. And yet from this remnant, Israel will be restored and reshaped into a far more glorious, righteous, and holy people of God, a people among whom God himself dwells. In the next chapters we can see this basic message blossoming and taking on historical significance. In Israel's greatest historical catastrophes, a certain hope is promised on the basis of the coming Immanuel, God come down to dwell among his people, which is Christ.

Lesson 5: The Coming Immanuel

The Promised Immanuel, Israel's Hope (Isaiah 7:14-15):

The sixth chapter of Isaiah left us with an account of Isaiah's commission as a prophet, and a concise distillation of his essential prophetic message. As we move into chapter seven, we can begin to see how Isaiah reiterates and elaborates upon that same basic message in response to specific current events, addressing specific Jewish leaders. As pressing national events warrant, God sees fit to provide a more detailed glimpse of certain prophetic themes that he has already revealed to Isaiah: but no matter how much more detailed these later revelations are, they are still organically connected to, and in fact founded upon the kernel message laid out in the book's introduction. Although this method of development is not consistent throughout the book of Isaiah (many of his prophecies are laid out thematically, with no historical context given), yet it is probably fair to say that the progression of prophetism in Israel as a whole unfolded along those basic lines: as events related to the impending exile of Israel and Judah arose, God provided an inspired interpretation of those events that would place them in the context of the movement of redemptive history, and use them to point the way to the glorious future restoration that the Messiah would effect. This general characteristic of the development of Jewish prophetism is seen as clearly in Isaiah chapter seven as anywhere.

At the beginning of this chapter, we find Judah in a desperate situation: Israel and Syria have made a league against Judah and are attempting to destroy it; and King Ahaz, together with all the people, is terrified. In response to this situation, God sends Isaiah and his young son to meet Ahaz in the way with a comforting message: the plan of Israel and Syria will utterly fail, and the two nations opposing Israel will soon come to naught. In order to affirm the validity of his promise, God graciously invites Ahaz to ask for a sign of confirmation. Wicked Ahaz, hypocritically citing concerns founded upon a false piety, rejects the Lord's invitation. It is at this point that God takes upon himself to confirm his promise; which consideration leads us to our first text.

The sign that God unilaterally undertakes to perform is wondrous beyond any sign or miracle or mighty act of God throughout all of history. It is a sign that

will serve as the fulfillment and consummation of every great promise made to Adam and Noah and Abraham and Moses and David. It is a sign that embodies the very essence of the covenant blessings, holds forth the answer to the great paradox of Divine mercy, and stands at the heart of history as the pivotal moment of God's great work of redemption. It is the unfathomably deep and rich and comforting and awesome reality of God himself taking on human flesh and dwelling among his people. It is the sign of Immanuel, God with us.

The promise of the coming of Christ is here made more explicit than it ever had been before. He would be truly human, conceived of the seed of the woman (as prophesied in Genesis 3:15); and yet he would have no human Father, being born of a virgin. That God himself would be his Father, and that Christ himself would be God, is made clear from his name, Immanuel. And that, even though fully God, he would also be really human is emphasized in the following verse. He would eat butter and honey – his physical growth and human need for nourishment thereby established – until he became able to discern between good and evil – his intellectual and moral growth as a human thereby established. In other words, he would be fully God and fully man: and because of this, he would be fitted to fulfill the oft-repeated promise of God that he would dwell among his people – the promise at the very heart of the covenant of grace.

Objections to this understanding of the passage frequently arise at this point, so it would not be superfluous here to deal with them in brief. In the first place, some have said that, because the Hebrew word *almah* is broad enough in its range of possible meanings that it may be used simply to refer to a *young woman*; therefore, the sign promised has nothing to do at all with a virgin birth. However, this objection is without warrant for two reasons: first, given the context of God's proffering to Judah a miraculous sign, it is absurd to think that he could be referring to the fact of a young woman's giving birth. There is nothing miraculous or out of the ordinary about a young woman's conceiving that would make it a sign of confirmation, as God had promised to give. Second, and most tellingly, when Matthew later quotes this passage in his gospel, he chooses the word *parthenos* to translate *almah* – a word which invariably means *virgin*. And this of course under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In the second place, many have objected, “How can this be a sign, when it would not occur until long after Ahaz was already dead?” Those who object on that basis miss the nature of how this promise was to serve as a sign. It was to be a sign, one must remember, that Jerusalem would not here be destroyed. How could a believing Jew know that the Jews must not be utterly destroyed? Because the foundation of God’s covenant was that Messiah must be born of the Jewish line. “This is my sign that I will not permit Judah to be destroyed,” God says in effect: “I still have to fulfill my intention of sending a Redeemer, born of a Jewish virgin.” The promise of God born of woman, our Immanuel, is the foundation upon which rests every promise of God ever given (cf. II Corinthians 1:20). Therefore, this explicit prophecy of the way in which the Messiah would come, although meaningless to an unbeliever like Ahaz, would serve as an unshakeable confirmation to all those Jews who hoped in the Covenant. And it was indeed for *these* Jews (“you” is plural in the Hebrew), and not to Ahaz, that the sign was intended.

Finally, we have heard some object to our understanding because of the following verse, “For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that you abhor shall be forsaken by both her kings.” It would be no comfort and no sign to say that Syria and Israel would be forsaken by her kings before Christ was grown, they tell us, because that would not happen for several hundred years, by which time any king would obviously long have been dead. Although this may be a valid point, it assumes a connection between verse fifteen and verse sixteen which does not necessarily have to be there. By “the child” Isaiah may well intend his young son, Shearjashub. This in fact may be the reason that God commands him in verse three to take his son with him when he went to meet Ahaz. But the fact that this verse seems to be speaking of Isaiah’s son, or at least some young child at the time of the encounter, does not necessitate that the previous two verses must be about him as well. In fact, it is impossible that they should be about him: Immanuel is a title too weighty for anyone but Christ, fully God and fully man, to bear.

Immanuel, a Stone of Stumbling (Isaiah 8:13-15)

The remainder of Isaiah chapter seven indicates that, although utter destruction would not overtake Jerusalem (because of the coming of Christ),

yet Judah would be devastated so that only a remnant would be left. Although Syria and Israel would not be successful in their war against Judah, the very nation to whom Ahaz was looking for help would eventually cause massive difficulties as a far more successful enemy. Ahaz was looking for security in Assyria, and not in the Lord. But Assyria would soon decimate the people of Judah.

Chapter eight begins with another sign that Syria and Israel would pose no threat to Judah, because they would be conquered by Assyria; however, Assyria would also severely afflict Judah, as waters overflowing the land and reaching up to the neck, that is, to the very verge of utterly drowning it. The sign was to be Isaiah's son, named "Hasten to the plunder; rush to the spoil". As in the case of Hosea, the naming of the child had prophetic significance. The meaning here is that, before the child grew old enough to call upon his parents, Syria and Israel would be spoiled. At this point, the subject of Immanuel is again brought up in verse eight. The comforting promise of Immanuel would hold forth no comfort to Ahaz, who, because of his disbelief would be handed over to Assyria. And here we find, moreover, that Immanuel, although by his very nature a sanctuary for those who fear him, would rather be a cause of destruction than deliverance to the Jewish nation as a whole.

The prophecy of verses 13-14 drives home the blessed result of the Immanuel prophecy. Jehovah of hosts himself will be a sanctuary for those who sanctify him. He will be a dwelling place for those who ascribe all glory to his name. However, the common Jewish notion that, when Messiah came he would deliver all the Jewish people simply by virtue of their being descended from Abraham is here utterly undone. Unless they believe as Abraham believed, this chief corner stone of the habitation of God among men would be a stumbling stone to crush them for their unbelief. Christ quotes a parallel passage from the psalms (Psalm 118:22), applying it to himself and to how the Jews stumbled at his claims, to their own destruction (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10); and Peter quotes this passage from Isaiah, once again applying it to Christ (I Peter 2:4-8).

The remainder of the chapter gives us a glimpse of Immanuel speaking, saying that the children whom the Father would give to him would be a sign to Israel, but a sign at which they would stumble and hence be overcome with darkness.

This prophecy came true when God gave many Gentiles to Christ, a reality which, although often indicated in the prophets, yet served as a cause for stumbling to many of the Jews (cf. Hebrews 2:10-13).

Immanuel, the Light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1-7)

Although the promised arrival of Immanuel would have the adverse effect of darkness and stumbling for most of Israel, yet for the Gentiles as a whole, the result would be precisely the opposite. Accordingly, chapter nine opens up with one of the most comforting prophecies to the Gentile peoples ever recorded: although darkness would overtake Israel once again, as it previously had by the multiple afflictions of the Assyrian empire; yet this darkness would not be without hope, for it would be the occasion for a great light to spring forth to the hopeless, blinded Gentiles. This coming darkness is not without purpose: it is a concluding of all in unbelief, so that mercy might shine forth upon all by the advent of Immanuel (cf. Romans 11:32). This prophecy began to be fulfilled when Christ walked among the Gentiles of Galilee, causing the light of the gospel to dawn upon them (Matthew 4:14-17). In a broader sense, it is still being fulfilled even today, among us.

Verse three emphasizes the joy that would overflow to those whose eyes have been opened to the light of Immanuel. Although some translations render the second phrase, “not increased the joy,” the correct reading is most likely, “increased its joy.” In Hebrew, the word “not” is nearly identical to the word meaning “to it,” or “its.” In the context of the verse, only the latter reading makes sense.

In verse four, Isaiah compares the coming victory to be wrought by Christ with that of Gideon over the Midianites, because both of these victories are clearly shown not to be on the basis of human might, but by the miraculous power of God alone. Just as God delivered his people from their burdens and oppressions under Midian, so he will do again in a vaster and more glorious way when, through Immanuel, he delivers his people from the burdens and oppression of their sin. Verse five is a little more difficult, but it is most likely emphasizing, again, the difference between a victory in battle by normal human means and the victory that would be wrought by Christ. This would be no victory won by bloodshed and the tumult of battle, but would be as a fire,

utterly and unstoppably consuming all resistance. Christ's victory over the powers of darkness would be like a fire's consuming of dry tinder.

Finally, in verses six and seven, we have the promises of the coming Immanuel laid out in perhaps the most well-known prophecy of the advent of Christ in all of scripture. This passage is justly famous. It contains one of the fullest and clearest formulations of the person and work of Christ anywhere in the bible. An eternity of meditation would not exhaust the rich depths of meaning and Christological significance found in these two verses. Who Christ is – born as a man, and yet the Almighty God – fast gives way to what he was born for: to fulfill the promises of all the covenants, reigning forever upon the throne of David, the central figure in the great epic story of redemption for which God created all of history, the King whose kingdom will forever increase. God grant that we may rejoice at these glorious truths, and worship the King with grateful hearts of wonder and awe!

Lesson 6: The Shoot of Jesse, Christ the King

Introduction:

In our last lesson, we concluded by observing verses six and seven of Isaiah chapter nine, and considering the everlasting kingdom that Christ would be born to rule. This week, we will examine the nature of his kingdom in more detail from the prophecy contained in chapter eleven. But before we get into chapter eleven, it would be beneficial to trace the flow of thought in the remainder of chapter nine, together with that of chapter ten, as a sort of brief introduction to the material at hand.

The latter part of Isaiah chapter nine contains a judgment pronounced against Israel (the northern tribes) because of their pride, the deception of their leaders, whereby they cause the people to wander astray, and their cruelty and injustice to the weak and needy among the people. The agents of God's judgment against Israel would be Syria and Philistia, who, working together as bloodthirsty jaws (one on either side of the ten tribes), would devour Israel.

Chapter ten begins with a judgment announced in general against all who unjustly oppress the weak and needy. It is not only northern Israel's wicked rulers, but all who resemble them in these matters of pride, deception, cruelty, and injustice, who will certainly be judged by God. Verses five through nineteen extend God's judgment to Assyria, who, although used by God to work judgment against Israel, nevertheless stands deserving of judgment herself, being guilty of the same sins as those for which Israel was being judged. Assyria is described by the ridiculous picture of an axe attempting to wield the one who is actually wielding it. God is using Assyria as a man picks up an axe to fell a tree. It is absurd to think of an axe attempting to pick up a man and fell a tree with him, but that is exactly what Assyria thinks she is doing. Therefore, God will utterly destroy her as soon as he is finished using her to judge Zion (cf. verse 12). Although God is using Assyria to judge Israel, he is still the God of Israel, and when he has finished using Assyria, the Holy One of Israel will be as a fire consuming the nation of Assyria (verse 17). Finally, verses twenty through thirty-four bring again to the forefront the doctrine of the returning remnant. Israel was as the sand of the sea; but the destruction wrought by Assyria would be so complete as to leave only a small

remnant of this nation that had been so numerous. However, for this remnant, of grace, there would be no cause to fear Assyria's might. Just as God had miraculously preserved his people from Midian and Egypt, he would thus miraculously preserve his righteous few. Compare Romans 9:27 (and context) for further comment on this prophecy.

At the conclusion of chapter ten, we see Assyria effecting a great destruction, as though she were an axe felling all the great forests of the world. Is all hope then cut off? No, for there remains a stump of Jesse, and from this stump will spring forth the King of the ages, born to rule on the throne of David as God had promised so many years before. Which brings us to our lesson for this week.

The Shoot of Jesse [Isaiah 11:1-16]

This prophecy could not have been more precisely fulfilled than it was when Christ was born to Mary, of the offspring of David, and was supposed to be the son of Joseph, descended from the sons of David which did indeed sit upon the throne for many generations. At that time, the splendor of the Davidic line was indeed cut off to the very root, Mary being of no great fame or influence, and Joseph being but a poor carpenter, with no outward appearance of being royalty at all, and certainly not that line of royalty which should issue forth in a King who would rule the world for all eternity. We have already discussed the imagery of the Branch in lesson four, when we examined Isaiah chapter four. We may learn much of the nature of Jesus' kingly dominion from this prophecy. The following points are well borne out by the text:

1. Jesus would be the heir of David. (Isaiah 11:1)

Just as God promised to David that one of his descendants would sit upon his throne forever (II Samuel 7:16), we see that the Messiah would be from the root of Jesse, David's father, and hence would fulfill this promise made to David so long ago.

2. Jesus would exercise his kingly office by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Isaiah 11:2-3)

The reign of Christ would be submitted to the power of the Holy Spirit. His judgments would not be delivered on the basis of any arbitrary method of decision, but would be instructed by the Spirit of God. When Jesus began to proclaim the advent of the kingdom, his own testimony accords with this prophecy; hence, we read in Luke 4:18-21 that, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus read aloud the parallel prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2 (“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, etc.”) and proclaimed to the people, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears.” Later, when contending with the Pharisees, Christ proclaimed that his testimony was true and his judgment was just because he did not bear witness of himself, but whatever he heard, that he spoke (John 5:30-32). As the Spirit spoke to Jesus the will of the Father, Jesus passed judgment righteously and always in accordance with God’s will.

3. Jesus’ reign would be characterized by righteousness and faithfulness to the word of God. (Isaiah 11:4-5)

The product of Jesus’ Spirit-reliant reigning would be absolute righteousness, which would save the meek and poor but utterly destroy the wicked.

4. The final product of Jesus’ reign would be an absolute, worldwide state of peace. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Hence he is called “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Although the world has not yet seen the final effects of Christ’s reign, the outcome is sure. Jesus is still upon the throne, and he is slowly and certainly causing the effects of his great success to cover the earth. Every time the gospel is proclaimed, the peace that Christ died to accomplish is being further secured. The eventual outcome of this unstoppable tide of blood-bought peace is a restored earth no longer touched by the effects of sin, an earth covered by the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

5. The subjects of Jesus' reign would include persons from every nation as the one true people of God, who will dwell with him forever in peace and joyful fellowship. (Isaiah 11:10-14)

We read in verse ten that the Root of Jesse will be an ensign (a flag or banner for rallying around) for the Gentiles. Integral to Jesus' reign of righteousness and peace will be the task of gathering together the remnant of Judah – which is seen as coterminous with drawing in the Gentiles, who are seen as constituting, together with the dispersed of Israel and Judah, the true people of God (verses 11-12). There will no longer be fighting among God's people, but instead a love and unity, coupled with a sure triumph over all of God's enemies (here typified by Edom, Moab, and Ammon – verses 13-14).

6. This gathering of the subjects of Christ the King would take the place of the redemption from Egypt as the highest example of Christ's saving his people. (Isaiah 11:15-16)

The redemption of Israel from the land of Egypt had long been the ultimate illustration of God's sovereign deliverance of the people whom he had chosen to set his love and grace upon. Here, we see that this act, as mighty as it was, is in fact just a type and foreshadow of the truly ultimate work of redemption: Christ's saving and gathering his people from all over the world. Jeremiah 16:14-15 relates this same truth, looking ahead to the time when it would no longer be said, "As Jehovah lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, As Jehovah lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands where He had driven them. And I will bring them again into their lands that I gave to their fathers" (MKJV).

Conclusion: A Song of Praise [Isaiah 12]

The prophecy of Isaiah 11 is one of the most glorious and beautiful prophecies of Christ anywhere in the prophets: hence, it is fitting that, at its conclusion, the wonder of what has been related compels the people of God to burst forth in a song of adoration and praise; just as Paul, having spent eleven chapters laying out the riches of Christ's accomplishment, could not but break forth in wondering adoration of so wise and gracious a God (Romans 11:33-36). The only response we may have, as the people of such a wonderful Savior and King,

is earnest and sincere worship, breaking forth from our lips in songs of joyful praise. The foundational principle of Christ's reign is the salvation that he has wrought for his people. The essence of his kingdom is that it is a kingdom of redemption. Christ is our Savior-King, and all the Old Testament types of provision and kingdom-citizenship have their ultimate reference point in the realities of Christ's providing for us salvation and transferring us from the kingdom of darkness to make us citizens of his marvelous kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13).

Lesson 7: The New Creation: Christ's Ultimate Work of Restoration (Part 1)

Introduction:

We concluded our last lesson in chapter twelve, lifting up a song of praise for the coming Kingdom of Christ, a Kingdom that will bring all true inhabitants of Zion the everlasting joy and life that Christ is going to draw from the wells of salvation. This is the end and goal of the exile of Judah: the people will be cast off, and the throne of David will be overturned; but all of this judgment is only setting the stage for a glorious restoration of the throne and kingdom of David. When Messiah comes, he will restore what was lost – but not just restore, he will *recreate* the Kingdom and the City of David, transforming it into an eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace. His wrathful judgment of Judah will result in a greater mercy and more certain hope for those whom he chooses to deliver, restore, and make righteous (i.e. the remnant of grace). Thus of Judah, but what of the rest of the world? Does God have plans for them as well? As we move into chapter thirteen, we begin to see that God's sovereign rule does not stop with Judah. He also has certain plans for every nation of the world: and, as with Judah, his plans are first to pour out strong and wrathful judgment. But in the case of the Gentiles, as well, God's plans do not stop with judgment. Wrath will give place to a restoration of grace – a restoration that is indeed a recreation of the entire order of things. God's plan for Judah of judgment followed by recreative grace, is, on a broader scale, roughly equivalent to his plan for the world at large: God will pour out judgment that destroys every wicked person, but in the midst of his wrath he will call out an elect remnant to be made righteous. For this remnant of the nations, as with the remnant of Judah, there will be an eternal kingdom of righteousness and joy under the reign of Christ. But as the judgment of the nations gives way to mercy, the descriptions of the Kingdom take on a more universal characteristic: yes, Christ will reign in a restored Zion; but as is eventually made clear, this new Zion will be the heart of an entire new creation, in which will live forever a remnant preserved from every nation of the world. Today, we will examine Isaiah's promise of a new heavens and earth, beginning with chapter twenty-five; but first, we will trace the flow of thought in chapters thirteen through twenty-four – chapters that bring the entire world under judgment, and thus set the stage for the glorious, worldwide restoration of chapter twenty-five.

A Series of Oracles [Chapters 13-24]:

The portion of Isaiah comprising chapters thirteen through twenty-four is basically a series of *oracles*, or prophecies announcing coming doom and judgment. Chapter thirteen is an oracle of judgment against Babylon. Chapter fourteen begins with a promise of restoration for Israel, but soon moves into a further taunt against Babylon: many scholars see verse twelve and following as epitomizing Satan in the description of Babylon's wicked ruler. Chapter fourteen, verse 24 begins an oracle against Assyria; and chapter fourteen, verse 28 begins an oracle against Philistia. In chapter fifteen, we see an oracle against Moab; this same oracle is continued in chapter sixteen, with a brief refrain of hope in the coming King of the tabernacle of David, in verses three through five. Chapter seventeen is an oracle against Damascus, chapter eighteen an oracle against Cush, chapter nineteen an oracle against Egypt. Verses 16-24 of chapter nineteen promises a restoration that will include not merely Israel, but also Assyria and Egypt. Chapter twenty gives a sign of judgment against Egypt, chapter twenty-one is an oracle against Medo-Persia and Babylon, followed by oracles against Dumah and Arabia. Chapter twenty-two gives an oracle against Jerusalem, chapter twenty-three an oracle against Tyre and Sidon, and chapter twenty-four sums up the whole series with an oracle of judgment against the entire world, concluding with a brief glimpse of Jehovah still reigning on Mount Zion. In this way, the entire world is brought under judgment, and yet God's reign from Mount Zion continues steadfast: judgment has been fully wrought, and everything is in place for a restoration to go forth from Jerusalem and encompass the world.

Death Swallowed Up Forever For the Inhabitants of New Jerusalem [Chapters 25-27]

After concluding the whole world under judgment, Isaiah gives a glimpse of the future restoration of the entire world as God reigns forever from Mount Zion: death will give way to victory, the wicked will be destroyed, and the poor and needy will be saved and comforted with everlasting life and joy. The structure of this passage unfolds as follows:

- [Isaiah 25:1-5] A song of praise: God has utterly destroyed the wicked, but has provided everything necessary for the joy and life of the needy.
- [Isaiah 25:6-8] A glimpse of the worldwide consummation of Christ's work of redemption: God will swallow up the veil that covers the Gentiles, the reproach of his people, and even death itself, forevermore; he will provide a bountiful feast of fellowship with him from Mount Zion, a feast that will be attended by persons from every nation.
- [Isaiah 25:9-12] A joyful affirmation: God's people, who have long waited for his salvation, will be gladdened with eternal joy when his salvation finally appears; the enemies of the people of God will be utterly destroyed.
- [Isaiah 26:1-4] Another, more detailed, song of praise which will be sung by the redeemed: God's new city is Salvation itself, and his nation is the company of the justified, who will enter in by faith.
- [Isaiah 26:5-15] The inhabitants of every other city will be trampled by the poor and needy who trust completely in God. Although the rulers of the earth seem to have the authority to destroy God's people, in the end, God will destroy them and increase his nation who hopes in him.
- [Isaiah 26:16-21] Thus, the whole history of the kingdom of God on this earth is likened to a woman giving birth. Throughout the entire process, there is great pain and travail; but at the end, sorrow gives way to new life. In the same way, those who suffer as the nation of God will soon find their pain swallowed up in a new resurrection life. The wicked, however, will be punished with eternal death. Hence, the kingdom of Christ (as indeed Christ himself) will pass through death and sorrow into the light of restoration and resurrection to eternal life. The wicked will pass from seeming power to eternal death and shame.
- [Isaiah 27] In this chapter, God will destroy Leviathan (a personification of Satan), but restore Israel to his holy mountain at

Jerusalem. This restoration will include persons from Assyria and Egypt (and, by extension, every nation).

Conclusion:

The portion of Isaiah that we have been studying universalizes God's great plan of redemption. Salvation is of the Jews, as Christ told the Samaritan woman (John 4:22); and it is indeed necessary for judgment to begin at the House of God (Jeremiah 25:29; Ezekiel 9:6; I Peter 4:17). However, it is equally certain that neither judgment nor salvation will *end* with the Jews. When God first covenanted with Abraham to come down and dwell among a people that should come forth from him, as their God, he stated from the beginning that this blessing would go forth from Abraham to embrace all the nations of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). This in fact happened when Christ came to accomplish the promised redemption: there is no longer Jew nor Greek, but all who trust in Christ "are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:27-29). God's plan was for a Savior to come forth from Israel that would save the whole world, not just Israel alone. This truth – God's judgment and salvation extended to the whole world – hits at the very heart of the central message of the Bible. Christ is too great a King to be confined to Palestine alone; on the contrary, his Kingdom of Redemption must spread until it embraces every kindred, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 7:9-17). Just as we have seen in Isaiah, when we are given our last glimpse of the New (Restored) Jerusalem in Revelation, it is the City where God himself dwells, reigning in righteousness and joy over all the nations of the world (Revelation 21:1-4). This is the "end of the story," the goal of all redemptive history. This is what the promised Christ came to accomplish, the consummation of the great work for which all of history was planned – the work of the redemption and restoration wrought by Christ. These chapters in Isaiah, far from being old, musty prophecies concerning nations long since gone, have everything to do with us today. They tell us, once again, who we are, why we exist, and what is the great goal and end toward which we are laboring – a goal that Paul summed up as "Christ in [us], the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

Lesson 8: The New Creation: Christ's Ultimate Work of Restoration (Part 2)

Introduction:

The interplay between the worldwide judgment pronounced in Isaiah chapters thirteen through twenty-four and the world-restoration promised in chapters twenty-five through twenty-seven comes again to the forefront in the next cycle of prophecies, recorded in chapters twenty-eight through thirty-five. In this cycle of prophecies, we see God's judgment announced upon his people in the direst terms; but interwoven throughout, we encounter many encouraging glimpses of the coming King, and the restoration he will effect for his remnant of grace – a restoration that will grow until it encompasses the entire created order of things. This prophetic contrast appears in sharpest relief in the picture of the utter devastation of the earth in chapter thirty-four, set off against the picture of glorious worldwide restoration in chapter thirty-five.

Another Cycle of Judgment, Another Glimpse of Restoration [Chapters 28-34]

Chapters twenty-eight through thirty-four are roughly parallel to chapters thirteen through twenty-four, which we have already examined. This passage emphasizes the fact that God is indeed active in world history, bringing judgment upon his people because they do not fear him; however, all hope is not cut off; for the promise of a restoration – one that will turn the hearts of the wicked to God in sincerity – is again brought to the forefront. Chapter twenty-eight begins with an oracle of judgment against Israel; verse sixteen and following speak of Christ as a cornerstone who will be the strong and sure foundation for all who believe in him. A portion of this prophecy is quoted by both Peter and Paul (Romans 9:33; I Peter 2:6; Acts 4:11), who use it to explain why Israel has largely been rejected, whereas the Gentiles, in large part, have been accepted as the dwelling place of God. Christ also alludes to this truth in Matthew 21:42. Chapter twenty-nine contains a message of judgment for the City of David, because her inhabitants are insincere and deny God's sovereign rule over them. Therefore, they will be destroyed – nevertheless, hope is once again given on the basis of a coming restoration, which will change rebellious hearts to hearts of faith (verses twenty-two

through twenty-four). Chapter thirty brings Judah into condemnation for trusting in Egypt, but once again gives hope in the promise of a restoration. Chapter thirty-one announces a woe upon all those who trust in Egypt, but looks ahead to the time when everyone will cast away his sinful idols. Chapter thirty-two exults in the King who will reign in righteousness as a shelter for those who trust in him, but a terror to the complacent and godless. This chapter ends with a promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, which will bring eternal peace and prosperity to the people of God. Chapter thirty-three begins with a cry for mercy when God comes to judge the world; in his appearance, the sinners will be terrified, but those who love him will “see the king in his beauty,” and will be delivered from all effects of sin and the curse. Chapter thirty-four promises utter destruction for all the nations; and finally, chapter thirty-five looks ahead to a glorious restoration and recreation of this condemned world.

The Final Restoration [Chapter 35]

In this final restoration, everything barren, hurtful, and evil will be turned into fruitfulness, prosperity, righteousness and joy: at that time, “the ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10, MKJV). We are living in the days of the real fulfillment of these gospel-truths, but not their final consummation. Christ has fully accomplished every reality promised in these verses. He has given us many glimpses and tastes of the wilderness turned into a place of fruitfulness – is not this prophecy fulfilled every time a barren heart springs up with the gospel-fruits wrought by the Spirit as he applies the work of Jesus? He has set in motion the turning-of-the-barren-place-to-a-garden work of restoration that will grow until there is nothing left of the curse. But for that final effect of his great victory, we are still waiting. We are in the days of the already/not yet – Christ has already accomplished the fulfillment of the prophesied realities, but he has not yet seen the full effects of his completed work.

Excursus: New Heavens and New Earth in Isaiah 65:17-25

Isaiah’s final word on the future world-restoration of Christ comes, appropriately enough, at the end of his book. Before we conclude the lesson, therefore, it would be of benefit to examine this later prophecy. The world-

restoration theme finds its clearest essential formulation in chapter sixty-five, verses seventeen through twenty-five. In this distillation of the restoration message, we find that (1) this restoration is extensive enough to be called an entirely new creation; (2) this new creation demands, as its correlative, the utter dissolution of the old, so that it will no longer even come to remembrance; (3) this new creation is to be inseparable from joy – to be a part of it is to be one who rejoices; (4) this new creation includes a newly created Jerusalem; (5) in this new Jerusalem, God will not only dwell among his people, but rejoice in them – there will be no more cause for him to be angry, or to hide his presence from them; (6) this people will be newly created so that they will never sorrow, nor be subject to death; (7) and finally, this blessed state of God’s new people will be consonant with the earth as a whole – the wolf will be at peace with the lamb, and in fact nothing will harm or destroy life on God’s (restored) Holy Mountain.

Conclusion:

In many places, Isaiah’s prophecy gives us a glimpse of the final goal of world history. That final goal is the eternal display of the redeeming grace of the Son. Because his grace is great, the redemption that it effects must be great; hence, every part of creation and history find their ultimate meaning in the redemptive work of Christ. God’s people, God’s city, and God’s creation itself can only be understood when viewed in the light of their final form – a redeemed people dwelling in New Jerusalem in the new earth. There, sin, death, the devil, and the curse are all utterly overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Let us be as Abraham, walking upon this earth as pilgrims, whose citizenship exists elsewhere. Let us be looking for that city which has foundations, of which the Builder and Maker is God himself (Hebrews 11:10, 13-16).

Hallelujah, we are on our way!

Hallelujah, we are on our way to God!

From Egypt lately come,
Where death and darkness reign,
To seek our new, our better home
Where we our rest shall gain.

There sin and sorrow cease
And every conflict's o'er.
There we shall dwell in endless peace
And never hunger more.

*Jerusalem, our happy home,
Would God I were in thee!
Would God my woes were at an end,
Thy joy that I might see!*

We soon shall join the throng;
Their pleasures we shall share,
And sing the everlasting song
With all the ransomed there.

There in celestial strains
Enraptured myriads sing.
There love in every bosom reigns,
For God himself is King!

*Jerusalem, our happy home,
Would God I were in thee!
Would God my woes were at an end,
Thy joy that I might see!*

Anonymous Folk Hymn, from 1616

Lesson 9: The Incomparable Greatness of God

Introduction:

In Isaiah chapters thirteen through thirty-nine, we are struck again and again with the greatness of God's plans – plans that involve every nation of the world, and extend to the furthest reaches of time. When we have begun to realize the greatness of God's eternal plans and his mighty acts in history, we must be confronted with the question, "If the works of God are so great, how great must God himself be?". This question marks the shift in emphasis from chapter thirty-nine to chapter forty. We have already seen that every detail of world history has been perfectly planned out by God before the world began. We have seen that man's wickedness does not frustrate his designs, but that he turns even the most evil intentions of men to work out his own good and righteous purposes. We have seen that human might and wisdom and strength have no ultimate bearing on the outcome of a struggle; as Nebuchadnezzar would later be forced to confess, "[God's] kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His rule is from generation to generation. And all the people of the earth are counted as nothing; and He does according to His will in the army of heaven" (Daniel 4:34-35, MKJV). But if what God does is so glorious, who he is must be even more glorious yet. As we move into Isaiah 40, we begin to get a glimpse of the incomparable greatness of the God who "works all things according to his will" (Ephesians 1:11).

The Mighty Works of God [Chapters 36-39]

We left off last week with chapter thirty-five, exulting in the final goal towards which all history is moving. If God is purposing to bring the history of this wicked, depraved, miserable world to such a beautiful conclusion, he had better be able to rule actively over the might of this world's great empires. In Chapters thirty-six through thirty-nine, that is exactly what we see. These chapters are unique in the entire book of Isaiah, in that they are almost entirely historical narratives, not prophecies. But they are placed where they are for a fitting reason. They serve to underscore the fact, necessary in light of the unveiling of God's wondrous plans, that God does indeed rule in history. No worldly power is sufficient to hinder his purposes. The first two of these chapters relate the history of how the mighty empire of Assyria besieged

Jerusalem, so that all hope seemed lost. But Hezekiah trusted in God, and God came down by night and slew 185,000 soldiers, and sent Assyria skulking back home. God is sovereign over the strength of mighty armies. The next chapter relates how Hezekiah was struck with a sickness that God said was to be terminal. Hezekiah prayed for mercy, and God granted him fifteen more years. God is sovereign over sickness and death – the devastating effects of the curse. The last chapter relates how, through the foolishness of Hezekiah, Babylon saw all the great riches of the temple in Jerusalem. God told Hezekiah, through his prophet Isaiah, that Babylon would remember these riches, and would one day come and seize them all, and would lead Judah into captivity. However, this would not take place in Hezekiah's lifetime. God is sovereign over both the good and evil acts of men, using them both to carry out his purposes of judgment and mercy, according to his will. Hence, in these four chapters, we see in real, historical examples, that God really does practice his sovereignty in history in every way necessary to accomplish his glorious plan of the prophecy of Isaiah 35.

The Incomparable Greatness of God [Chapters 40-41]

It is fitting that perhaps the most glorious description anywhere of the surpassing transcendence and majesty of God begins with a prophecy of the coming Christ and the comforts of grace which he holds forth to all his people. God's glory is displayed in many ways – creation sings forth his praise every day. But the glory of God who spoke light into the darkness of creation is magnified many times over when he speaks the light of grace into the darkness of the human heart (see II Corinthians 4:6). The mighty work of redemption above all testifies to the glory of the grace of God (Ephesians 1:3-14). It is the everlasting display of the riches of his kindness, mercy, and grace (Ephesians 2:7; Romans 9:22-24). Thus, it is fitting that this great work of Christ be mentioned as the foundation of the Great description of God's glory. Hence, the first eleven verses of the chapter speak specifically of the character and work of the coming Christ, and the comforts that his church might derive from his advent.

The latter half of the chapter exults in the altogether transcendent and self-sufficient God, to whom it is a gracious condescension even to stoop to consort with mere creatures of the earth, possessing no needs in himself for

sacrifice or service, worship or fellowship. Because God is utterly self-sufficient, any fellowship we may have with him is the purest gift of grace. We are utterly dependent on him; he is dependent on no one. Our worshipful fellowship with him, enabled by Christ's mighty accomplishments of grace, is a sovereign gift, a gift that overflows to us in eternal and unspeakable joy, but that adds nothing to God. Why did God, who needs nothing, create us to worship him? I appreciate the comparison made by Jonathan Edwards: "Is it any defect in a fountain that it overflows?". God's creation was not out of any insufficiency, but out of a fullness and glory so great that he was pleased by creation and redemption to overflow in the beauty of his majesty for the satisfaction and everlasting joy of all peoples.

In Chapter forty-one, we see the incomparable greatness of God in his sovereign and historical accomplishment of his plan of salvation. He alone raised up Abraham, subdued the nations before him, preserved Jacob, raised some up, put down others, all for his own purposes of preparing history for the coming of Christ, who would accomplish redemption. This active sovereignty of God in the history of redemption is contrasted with those who foolishly trust in idols. Idols come about through the efforts of the very men who then bow down to worship them. How thoroughly different is the case of Abraham! He did not decide to conjure up a "god" who would then save him – on the contrary God sovereignly reached down and plucked him out, and said unilaterally that He would be the God of him and his seed after him. All of us who place our hope and security in the works of our own hands – the wealth or power or relationships we have sought after and attempted to heap up for ourselves – will be utterly undone. But those whom the One True God reaches down and purposes to save will be secure forever.

God's Mightiest Work of All: His Incomparable Greatness Revealed in Flesh [Chapter 42]

Chapter forty-two gives us the greatest display in all of history of God's greatness and incomparable glory. The greatest display of God's majesty came when God took upon himself human flesh and revealed the very nature of the Most High in a form adapted to men's weak eyes. Christ is the greatest display of the glory of God in all eternity. As we look into this great mystery, we see that this incomparable display of majesty is also the greatest display of

meekness and humility. Christ, when he came as the greatest King of history, to rule over the kingdom that would grow until it embraced all the earth in righteousness and peace, was to appear as a humble Servant of the Lord, who would not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick. In Christ meet together infinite greatness and infinite condescension. And in the meeting of the two diverse excellencies, God's glory shines in the highest degree. It is glorious that God called the worlds into existence by the Word of his power. It is glorious that he calls every fallen creature under the judgment of his righteous wrath. But it is more glorious by far that he determined to give grace to those same fallen rebels without at all minimizing his holy justice, and that he indeed accomplished, through Christ, this mightiest plan of all. On the cross of Christ meet the highest display of God's justice and the highest display of his free grace. Christ is the highest display of the incomparable greatness of God, and the work of Christ is the mightiest act of the sovereign God of all history.

Conclusion:

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who first gave to Him, and it will be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things; to Him be glory forever! Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36, MKJV).

Lesson 10: The Sovereign Grace of God

Introduction:

Our last lesson, taken from Isaiah chapters forty through forty-two, emphasized, first, the incomparable greatness of God; and second, the work of redemption to be carried out by the coming Servant of the Lord as the ultimate display of God's incomparable greatness. As the text moves into our next portion for study, chapters forty-three through forty-five, Isaiah continues this theme of the coming redemption which will be wrought by Christ. As we look into these chapters, we must be immediately struck with the greatness of salvation; but if that is all we come away with, we are missing the whole point of the text. Isaiah's explicit reason for exulting in the great salvation of our God is that, in an unmatched way, it reveals much about God himself. The basic reason for calling to mind God's great salvation is that it serves to confirm God's testimony of himself – "I, I am Jehovah; and there is none to save besides Me" (Isaiah 43:11, MKJV). God's greatest act, the salvation of his people, as well as every other work he has performed, was done "for [his] glory" (Isaiah 43:7). When we consider the nature of this great salvation, and meditate on the character of the great God it reveals, we must be overwhelmed, as was Isaiah who penned this text, with God's almighty *power*, and God's unfailing *grace*. In other words, as this text makes clear, salvation is, above all, the display of the sovereign grace of God.

The Promise of Salvation for Israel (Isaiah 43:1-44:9)

Chapter forty-three begins with an amazing prophecy of comfort and hope to Israel, the people of God: in spite of every conceivable difficulty and obstacle, they will not be destroyed, for God himself will be with them, sustaining, preserving, and helping them (cf. Romans 8:31-39). This would be a remarkable promise under any circumstances; but in the light of Isaiah's previous scathing denunciations of Israel's corruption, it is staggering. Immediately after revealing this great, saving power of God, lest anyone should suppose that it was something inherently desirable in Israel's nature that moved God to save them, the prophet makes clear God's reason for effecting this deliverance: his holy nature and free, elective grace. *Because* God is the holy LORD, he rejected many nations and chose to become the God of Israel.

Because he chose to set his love upon Israel, she has been honorable, and many peoples have been rejected for her sake. As God made clear from the beginning, it was his elective grace alone, not anything good in Israel, that moved him to set his love upon her (cf. Deuteronomy 7:7-9). Isaiah then speaks more exactly of the nature of this coming salvation: it will not be as when God redeemed his people out of Egypt; but instead, it will entail a restoration of a remnant of grace from an exiled people. God's power and grace will be seen more clearly in this restoration even than when he first called out his chosen people. And the purpose of this new, mightier salvation, would be nothing but the display of God's glory.

Isaiah then moves into a recounting of the blessings that this redemption would entail for God's people: healing, justification, and ultimately the knowledge of God. However, after this brief description of salvation's benefits, he begins again to declare the reason for it all: to display God's sovereign power. Our God is the only savior. His power cannot be contested. He has shown his sovereign power in his redemptive acts throughout world history, and he will show it even more fully in the time to come; ultimately, in the mightiest act of all – bringing true praise from the hearts of a rebellious people.

At this point, Isaiah establishes quite certainly the overwhelming need for this great salvation: Israel has been utterly corrupt. However, even this wickedness cannot frustrate God's saving power; for God will justify his people, overcoming their sinfulness and vindicating the power of his grace. This salvation will be applied through faith alone, as God's people acknowledge their guilt and inherited depravity, and the resultant judgment of God. Finally, as we move into chapter forty-four, Isaiah again declares that, instead of deserved judgment, Israel will be given salvation, when all true Israel is regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Exclusivity of God's Salvation: Idols Powerless to Deliver (Isaiah 44:9-20)

Just as we have noted several times before, immediately after Isaiah describes the greatness of God's coming salvation, he takes the opportunity to declare what we may learn of God himself from the fact of his mighty redemption.

Here, we see again that the Lord is the only God mighty to save. God is the first and the last, and beside him there is no god. All the idols of the earth, that men put their trust in, are vain and impotent. With the Lord alone is the strength to redeem, deliver, and save his people.

True Salvation Examined (Isaiah 44:21-28)

As the text moves again into a description of the salvation of the Lord, we are immediately instructed that its subjects are ultimately determined by the grace of God alone. In contrast with idolaters, who have been blinded (cf. Isaiah 44:18), God's true Israel has been formed and chosen by God. The end results of the salvation they will experience are the glorification of God, the redemption of his people, and creation-wide joy and singing. But the primary subject of this portion of the prophecy deals with *how* these blessed results come about. Throughout the rest of the chapter, Isaiah relates how every detail of God's all-inclusive plan of redemption has been decreed and will be carried out by the word of the sovereign Lord. God created the heavens and the earth, sent foolishness into the hearts of men, caused cities to be inhabited and rivers to be dried up, and even directed the actions of earth's greatest rulers all for the purpose of accomplishing his eternal plan of salvation. Everything in all of history has taken place for the purpose of accomplishing redemption (cf. Ephesians 3:9-12). What a mighty God we serve!

The Absolute Sovereignty of God Revealed in His Work of Salvation (Isaiah 45)

Isaiah forty-five may be understood as a manifesto of the ways in which salvation displays the absolute sovereignty of God. We see first that God rules over the hearts of earth's kings in order to accomplish his own gracious purposes (cf. Proverbs 21:1). For the good of his people, he directs the affairs of the world at large (cf. Romans 8:28). And he does these things, ultimately, so that his uniqueness and glory may be known throughout all the earth. The lesson that Isaiah's prophecies have been intent on teaching throughout these chapters finds its essential distillation in verse seven of chapter forty-five: God is the ultimate cause of everything that happens, whether good or evil. He alone rules, working everything after the counsel of his own will (Ephesians 1:11). He does this all, raising up the wicked for destruction, and his remnant

for gracious preservation, for his own glory (cf. Proverbs 16:4). This is the sovereign God of salvation. And as we see in the next verse, salvation is indeed the greatest display of God's absolute sovereignty.

Isaiah now takes some time to apply this principles he has been proving. If God is truly sovereign, then woe to him who strives against the Almighty Lord! Woe to the potsherd that should dare to call its Potter into account. Man's only right is to submit, obey, and praise his Creator. Proceeding, we find that the fact of God's sovereignty over all of his creation, throughout all of history, is certainly proved; and the ultimate example of this sovereignty is Christ's bringing redemption to his people (see verse 13) . In Christ, God's sovereign rule is summed up. We see, furthermore, that God hides himself from some and reveals himself to others as he pleases; that he has a determinate purpose for everything he does, and that his ultimate purpose is to extend his salvation, and thereby display his glory, to the ends of the earth. Ultimately, the purpose of God in salvation is to cause every knee to bow to Christ and every tongue to confess his name (Isaiah 45:23; cf. Philippians 2:5-11). Finally, we are reminded that righteousness is found in Christ alone. All the elect will be justified in him, and he will be their only ground of boasting (cf. Galatians 6:14).

Conclusion:

God's redeeming his chosen people through Christ Jesus our Lord is his greatest display of grace and power throughout all of history. It is, in fact, the very reason that the world was created. All eternity will not be enough to exhaust the riches of God's mercy, purchased for us by Christ on the cross. Oh, let us tremble and bow down before the Lord God Almighty, our Maker and Redeemer!

Lesson 11: The Overthrow of Babylon, God's Great Enemy

Introduction:

If Isaiah chapters forty through forty-five display the glorious greatness of God's mercy upon those whom he has chosen for redemption, then chapters forty-six through forty-seven display the glorious greatness of God's wrath upon his enemies. These two complementary truths, the free mercy and uncompromised justice of God, find their ultimate expressions in the different destinies planned out by God for the people he has chosen and for the enemies of his people. God's mighty work of redemption was designed, above all, to display the manifold greatness of God; and hence, both eternal, holy wrath and eternal, sovereign grace have their place in redemptive history. In the supreme display of his character, through Christ the Redeemer, God left us no excuse for viewing him as a wrathful God without compassion or as a merciful God who is willing to overlook sin. God is both holy – the righteous Judge against all rebels – and merciful – the God who forgives freely and completely. We may be certain that the greatest revelation of the nature of God is to be found exclusively in Christ's redeeming his people through his sacrifice of himself on the cross. But in order to magnify the vastness and the freeness of that redemptive grace, God purposed to demonstrate the full extent of his righteous wrath against all sinners by his reprobation and eternal punishment of the wicked. When we realize how severe God's wrath truly is, and recognize that we are by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3), then and only then can we appreciate the full extent of God's elective, saving mercy. The destruction of God's enemies is a cloth of blackest velvet, placed as a backdrop to set in more brilliant relief the dazzling splendor of the flawlessly cut diamond of free redemption (see Romans 9:22-24).

The scriptural representation of God and his people rejoicing at the destruction of their enemies (e.g. Psalm 2:1-5; Psalm 52:6-7) seems odd to many people today, and therefore deserves a word of explanation. The reason for this common perplexity seems to be twofold: first, the modern conception of God certainly tends to minimize the truth of his absolute holiness and wrath against sin. It would be a rare thing today to hear someone wonder, "Why would God be merciful when we are so sinful?", although this should be the most wonder-filled question in the heart of every one of us. On the other hand,

it is not uncommon at all to hear the question framed, “Would God really send someone to hell?” The assumption is, of course God will be merciful – why wouldn’t he be? His mercy is perfectly understandable, because our sins are not really that big a deal. They certainly don’t deserve eternal torment. Maybe some finite punishment in this life (or for a limited time in purgatory), but not an eternity in hell. This point of view has at its foundation a misunderstanding of who God is. He is infinitely holy; all sin is flagrant rebellion against him; and therefore, all sin deserves eternal punishment. It would be unjust of God to reward it with anything less. He will demand infinite satisfaction for all rebellion – either by pouring out wrath on an infinitely holy sacrifice (Christ) or by pouring out wrath for an infinitely long time (eternity) on sinners in hell.

The second reason that many today have a hard time understanding the saints’ rejoicing at the destruction of the wicked is that it seems to contradict Christ’s example and his commands to love our enemies (e.g. Matthew 5:43-45; I Peter 2:21-23). It is true that God gives his common grace to all men, and that he exercises much longsuffering and patience even toward those whom he will ultimately judge. It is true that we should follow this example of longsuffering, in particular the example that Christ displayed when he was persecuted by wicked men. Furthermore, it is true, that it will never be our place to exact vengeance upon our enemies. That is God’s prerogative alone, and we ought to leave all vengeance in his hands (see Romans 12:19). However, in the final judgment, when God vindicates his saints, avenges their blood at the hands of their persecutors, requires a just condemnation for their rebellion against himself, and destroys them utterly and eternally, there will be great rejoicing among God’s saints for this display of God’s righteous judgment. When we are oppressed and persecuted in this life, we ought to show much patience and humility, knowing that in the end we will be victorious over all who oppose us, through Christ our Redeemer.

Chapter forty-six begins with the first prophecy of Babylon’s destruction. Her idols, powerless as they are to save, will go into captivity. But unlike the idols who must themselves be carried, the true God will carry his own people to salvation. God will use Cyrus, of the Medo-Persian Empire, to bring down mighty Babylon (verse 11), as well as to deliver his people. Once again, we must observe that he is to do this for his own glory (verses 9, 13).

The Fall of Babylon (Chapter 47)

Chapter forty-seven is exclusively a prophecy of the coming destruction of Babylon. Although the immediate fulfillment of this prophecy came when the Medo-Persians overthrew Babylon, we must not overlook the typological nature of the prophecy. Babylon, more than any other nation, came to represent the great and worldwide enemy of God and God's people; and this great devastation that God brought upon her came to be the supreme example of God's judgment against the wicked. Hence, when we get a glimpse of the final overthrow of the wicked at the glorious return of Christ, the world system is symbolically referred to as Babylon (see Revelation 18). Just as the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity is a foretaste of the great restoration that Christ would ultimately accomplish, so the historical overthrow of the Babylonian nation is a foretaste of the great destruction reserved for all of God's enemies. As we look into this prophecy, we should keep in mind, "Thus will it be for all who oppose God in this life." May we fear the great, wrath-bearing God of the universe, and seek his free mercy in the arms of Christ our only Redeemer!

The chapter begins with the promise of Babylon's coming shame: by the power of the vengeance-dealing God, proud Babylon will be utterly put to shame. This is simply because Babylon is not the people of God; in fact, the same God who will thoroughly destroy Babylon will ultimately show himself to be true Israel's redeemer. Hence we see Babylon cast from prosperity into affliction; and at the same time, Israel, God's chosen people, will be drawn up from affliction to salvation. In the course of this description of coming calamity, Isaiah makes very clear the truth that God's judgment is not arbitrary or without cause. On the contrary, the reasons for this prophesied judgment are clearly laid out: Babylon is a cruel persecutor of God's people; she is proud, presumptuous, given to fleshly indulgences, trusting in no one but herself. She puts her confidence in witchcraft and sorceries, instead of in the God who governs history; she relies on human knowledge, and is utterly given over to humanism. Because of these things, God will pour out upon her his wrath, and so prove false everything in which she trusted. After she has undergone the wrath of the Almighty, God will show how foolish her hope really was: "Now," he mockingly commands her, "see if your sorceries can make you prevail." On the contrary, her whole foundation of confidence will be consumed as stubble

in the fire; and God alone will be shown the trustworthy foundation of all who hope in him.

Israel's Escape from Babylon (Chapter 48)

This display of God's judgment against Babylon would serve to confirm to his true people the necessity of trusting in him alone. Before this mighty overthrow, Israel was in many ways the same as Babylon: although they claim to trust in God, yet their claim is "not in truth and in righteousness". Because God is aware of Israel's hard-heartedness, he is announcing the overthrow of Babylon ahead of time, so that they might believe in him, when it actually comes to pass, and turn to him in righteousness. Israel is utterly undeserving of God's mercy: but for his own sake, he is going to these monumental lengths to bring her back to trust in him. Israel is no more deserving of mercy than Babylon. But because God has chosen her, to glorify his great mercy, he will be gracious to her in the end. Because of God's glory, and his glory alone, Israel will be delivered from Babylon and satisfied with the waters of salvation – even though she did not even thirst for them. The wicked, on the other hand (those whom God has not chosen to redeem, as Babylon) will never find peace.

Conclusion:

Just as God has chosen to redeem a people for the sake of his glory, so he has chosen to pour out his wrath upon a people, to display his glory in a different light. The glory of God's mercy will be beautifully and eternally displayed in his true Israel. The glory of his wrath will be shown in Babylon, his great enemy. God grant that we may trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, and become a part of his true Israel, the band of those who are redeemed from every kindred, tribe, people, and nation, the band of those who believe as did Abraham, and who are therefore Abraham's seed and the true Israel of God!

Lesson 12: The Vicarious Suffering of Christ

Introduction:

Isaiah chapter fifty-three (together with the last three verses of chapter fifty-two) is the clearest and fullest explanation of the gospel anywhere in the Old Testament. Not until Paul penned his epistles in the first century would the church have a more explicit and heartfelt treatise on the substitutionary atonement and vicarious suffering of Christ, on his humiliation, rejection, death, and subsequent glorification. Isaiah is perhaps the pinnacle of the Old Testament documents: in his prophecies we see Christ revealed more clearly than at any other time or place until his actual taking on of flesh to walk among us. If this is the case, then it is also undoubtedly true that chapter fifty-three is the pinnacle of Isaiah. May God fill our hearts with the wonder of seeing and savoring the beauty of Christ and his work of redemption as we stagger in awe before this most precious of prophecies!

Now, all this is not to say that Isaiah fifty-three is revealing something absolutely new: it is just driving back a little more of the misty obscurity surrounding what had been, from the beginning, the sole substance of divine revelation. God's first words to man, after his fall, signified nothing other than what we are seeing more precisely here in Isaiah – a conquering Messiah would be born of a woman to crush the Serpent and reverse the effects of the Fall; and although mortally wounded in the conflict, he would certainly triumph (Genesis 3:15). In a similar way, God's first acts after the fall of man set forth in picture form these same realities – hence, his slaying an animal to cover their nakedness, his driving them from his presence in paradise, but opening a way to seek his face through blood sacrifice, and so on. These redemptive realities form the very core of biblical revelation from that time on: the nature of God's promise made to Abraham, the circumstances surrounding his redemption of Israel from Egypt, the very exile and restoration that Isaiah so often speaks of, all find their meaning only in relation to the work that Christ would accomplish, so beautifully set before us in Isaiah fifty-three. And not only is this message, distilled to its central essence in our text, the substance of all biblical revelation; but furthermore, it was the certain understanding and only hope of all the true Old Testament Church, just as it is our only hope today. (cf. Job 19:25; Psalm 16:8-11, as quoted in Acts 2:25-31; Psalm 32:1-

2 as quoted in Romans 4:6-8). It is vital that we recognize this truth. To suggest anything less is to do despite to the centrality of Christ and his substitutionary sacrifice of himself upon the cross, for the sins of his people.

Before we get into a verse-by-verse analysis of chapter fifty-three, it may be helpful to summarize in brief the argument from chapter forty-nine (where we left off last week) until chapter fifty-two, verse twelve. In chapter forty-nine we immediately encounter Christ declaring his status as the chosen Servant of the Lord, and speaking of the discouraging fact that Israel as a whole would reject him. In response to this truth, God declares that it is too small a task for Christ to be a Savior to Israel alone: his glory must be displayed among all the Gentiles. Hence, after Israel's rejection, Christ would accomplish life, salvation, and healing for all the nations, and thus win greater glory for his name. Subsequent to this declaration, God assures (true) Israel that he still has not cast her off forever – no, he has engraved her name on his palms, and will never forsake her. God is the God of Jews and Gentiles, and he will form his true Israel from those whom he has called from every nation. He will deliver these, his covenant people, and destroy all their enemies. Chapter fifty tells us that Israel as a whole will not be rejected because God arbitrarily decided to put them away; rather, because they turned from him in their iniquity, even rejecting the Christ whom he would send. Christ here prophesies of himself that he would meekly undergo this rejection, humiliation and execution, and in the process would secure his own vindication and the justification of all who trust in him. This the saints are commanded to do. Chapter fifty-one tells of the comfort that God holds forth to true Zion, and exhorts the people to remember Abraham. If they would be accounted the true children of Abraham, and heirs of the promised comfort, they must believe as Abraham believed. On the basis of who God is, and as is clearly demonstrated by what he has done in history, final salvation is assuredly promised to the people of God, in spite of the most ardent difficulties that would come their way. Finally, chapter fifty-two speaks of the glorious times of blessing for the church of the future. God would freely redeem his people from captivity, the gospel would go forth, and the consequences of it would be salvation, joy, singing, and sanctification. How would all these glorious blessings come about? Through the work of the humbled and exalted Christ. Which consideration brings us to our text for the day.

Textual Analysis:

I. A general declaration: Christ will prosper and be exalted (Isaiah 52:13)

- The success of Christ (Isaiah 52:13a)
- His subsequent exaltation (Isaiah 52:13b)

II. An elaboration: Christ's success will come through humiliation and will result in the redemption of the nations (Isaiah 52:14-15)

- The astonishing fact: Christ's great success involves his incomparable suffering (Isaiah 52:14)
- The astonishing results: Christ will redeem the nations, bringing the fruits of his success to those who had not been awaiting him (Isaiah 52:15)

III. Further explanation: the great work of redemption examined (Isaiah 53:1-9)

A. The reaction to Christ's coming

- The typical reaction to Christ's coming will be unbelief (Isaiah 53:1a)
- The underlying reason for this is that man cannot come to Christ unless the power of the Lord draws him (Isaiah 53:1b)
- The overt reason for this is that Christ came in a humble and inglorious form (Isaiah 53:2)
- Therefore, instead of believing in him, men reject him (Isaiah 53:3)

B. The beauty of God's design: men's wicked rejection was accomplishing God's righteous plan for Christ: sin-bearing and vicarious suffering

- The sufferings of Christ should have been ours (Isaiah 53:4a)
- But it was God's plan for Christ to undergo them for us (Isaiah 53:4b)
- The great exchange: Christ receives the punishment for our sins, we receive peace and healing from his satisfaction (Isaiah 53:5)
- The need for Christ's substitutionary suffering: all God's people have rebelled (Isaiah 53:6a)
- The solution to our need: the sin of all God's people was put on Christ (Isaiah 53:6b)
- Christ's own willingness to accomplish the Father's design: he meekly underwent this substitutionary suffering without complaint (Isaiah 53:7)
- The extent of Christ's vicarious suffering: he was condemned even to death because of the sins of his people (but his contemporaries were largely ignorant of the significance of his death) (Isaiah 53:8)
- And not only did he die, but he died as a common criminal, although he himself was sinless and pure (Isaiah 53:9)

IV. The reason for redemption revealed: God's good pleasure (Isaiah 53:10)

- The Lord took pleasure in crushing Christ (this underscoring the reality of our abominable sins' actually being placed upon him) (Isaiah 53:10a)

- Christ was also pleased by this design: he willingly offered himself up (Isaiah 53:10b)
- Christ was successful in this design: he saw the seed that he had redeemed by his sacrifice of himself, and enjoyed the incorruptible life that he had won for himself and them (Isaiah 53:10c)
- God the Father was also successful in this design: his perfect will was accomplished (Isaiah 53:10d)

V. The results of redemption displayed: Christ's incomparable glory among the redeemed (Isaiah 53:11-12)

- The outcome summed up: Christ wins a unique glory, his people are given a free justification (Isaiah 53:11)
- The final conclusion: God will give Christ great glory, a people who are his, and authority over all the universe, because he has been fully successful in his task of redemption (Isaiah 53:12)

Conclusion:

God's people have always been a singing people. There is no better explanation of that fact than the truths we have just encountered in Isaiah fifty-three. The work of Christ on the cross, redeeming his people by becoming their sin and their curse, is the great theme of all the joyful songs of the saints – in Isaiah's day and ours. The reason Christians sing may be summed up as well as anywhere in the opening line of a favorite worship song: "I'm forgiven because you were forsaken." All praise to the King who bled for us!

Lesson 13: The Great Effects of Christ's Great Success

Introduction:

Jonathan Edwards, in his beautifully Christ-centered biblical theology, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, argues that all of history was planned out by God for the purpose of accomplishing his mighty work of redemption. Accordingly, he divides history into three basic epochs, demonstrating, “(1) That from the Fall of man until the incarnation of Christ, God was doing those things that were preparatory to Christ’s coming and working out redemption, and were forerunners and earnest of it. (2) That the time from Christ’s incarnation until his resurrection was spent in procuring and purchasing redemption. (3) That the space of time from the resurrection of Christ to the end of the world is all taken up in bringing about or accomplishing the great effect or success of that purchase”.³ In our last lesson we spent all of our time in Isaiah fifty-three, meditating on the actual accomplishment of redemption that should occur when Christ came to take on human flesh, suffer for our transgressions, and rise again victorious over death and sin. As we move now into chapter fifty-four, we see the necessary effects of Christ’s perfect victory, as Isaiah looks ahead to that third great epoch of redemptive history, in which the success that Christ has already accomplished grows and spreads until it embraces all the nations. This is the epoch in which we live today. And the reason we are still alive on this earth is to labor for the sake of our Savior, so that the effects of what he has done for us might overspread the earth. Let us, therefore, be intentionally applicational as we look for the Spirit to teach us the truths that he has for us in this text. Let us be continually asking ourselves the question, “How can I be involved in seeing these prophesied realities come to fruition?” We have no greater honor than to be laboring for the growth of the kingdom of Christ. And this honor is ours indeed, if in faith we seize ahold of the opportunity that God’s grace offers to us.

Christ’s Victory Flourishes (Chapters 54-55)

Chapter fifty-four begins with the command for those who were previously barren to rejoice at their great fruitfulness; because the tents of salvation were

3 Edwards, Jonathan. *A History of the Work of Redemption*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2003, p. 17.

about to be mightily expanded. In the days of mere shadows of redemption, the tabernacle of Israel was the tent in which God's presence dwelt. In the days of gospel-realities, God's presence, through the Spirit of the victorious Christ, would cover the earth, ushering the Gentiles, together with Israel, into blessed fellowship with God (cf. John 4:21-26; Ephesians 2:11-22). Paul explicitly relates this prophecy of her who was barren to the Gentile peoples, in Galatians 4:27. Isaiah goes on to affirm that, because of Christ's victory, his church would no longer have reason to fear; for God has married his people, and he will not divorce his wife. Christ loved his bride and gave himself for her; and therefore, we are eternally his (Ephesians 5:25-27). Even though, in the history of Israel, God cast off his people for a time, yet, when he receives them back again, he will nevermore put them away; this simply because the exile of Israel was a type of God's forsaking Christ. When God raised up Christ from the dead, the entirety of his wrath had been eternally exhausted. He will never again forsake his Son, because he was fully satisfied with his sacrifice. And so we, his church, who are in him, will never be forsaken either. What strong consolation Isaiah draws from these reflections! Just as in the days of Noah God promised never again to flood the earth, so because of Christ, God has promised never to forsake his people. His covenant is eternal and unbreakable (cf. Romans 11:29; Hebrews 6:16-20). Instead of being cast aside, the new tabernacle of God's presence (his Church) would be beautifully adorned forevermore. No enemy would be able to overthrow this dwelling place of God on earth: God, who made all men and governs the works of their hands, will not permit any weapon forged with the intent to destroy his Church to have success. This is all true only because the righteousness of the saints comes from God. When we trust in Christ's righteousness alone, we can never be moved!

In Chapter fifty-five, Isaiah issues the gospel proclamation that must follow the recognition of such marvelous gospel truths. All the ends of the earth are summoned, hungry, helpless and hopeless as they are, to drink the eternally-satisfying waters of salvation for free. How foolish it is to try to spend that which is not money to buy that which is not bread! But all of us, before the Spirit opens our hearts to the gospel, are laboring to do this very thing. We are attempting to earn our own notion of salvation (infinitely less satisfying than the true salvation offered in Christ) with our own price of good works – which can never have any bargaining power with God. Praise be to God that this

gospel call will be effective, so that men from every nation will come to Christ, who will be given to them as their true David, their gracious King for all eternity! Even though the wicked will never naturally forsake his ways, yet, because God's word is not like ours – it is always effective to accomplish his intent – when his gospel word goes forth, it will accomplish his purposes of spreading the effects of Christ's great success until all those whom the Father had given him from eternity come and fall before him. And then, the earth itself will be restored by his mighty work, and will once again be fruitful for all eternity.

A Call to True Religion (Chapters 56-59)

Beginning in chapter fifty-six, Isaiah exhorts the people of God to true religion. Only those whose inward hearts are characterized by true godliness will experience the great covenant blessings which Christ has secured for his people. Chapter fifty-seven underscores the seriousness of this command by relating the great terrors which are reserved for hypocrites and the rest of the ungodly. Oh, let us be humble before our God, that we may be among those whom God, for Christ's sake, will heal; and not among those whom he will appear to destroy utterly. Chapter fifty-eight emphasizes again how useless the mere outward appearance of religion is. The Israelites as a whole were intent to observe the feasts, fasts, and other ordinances of God's law. But their lives showed that they had no true knowledge of God: they did not help the poor and needy, and only afflicted themselves outwardly before God. But no one whose heart is not right before God can call upon him in peace. This prophecy was likely given in the days of Hezekiah's great revival. We would do well to learn that the outward appearance of religion – faithful attendance at church, following all the outward practices that are expected of Christians, and so on, are absolutely meaningless unless by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit our hearts have been awakened to Christ; and unless by faith in him we have been justified before the Father. Chapter fifty-nine relates the cause for God's seeming lack of hearing the pleas of his people: they are still in their iniquities. Oh, how hopeless is our condition until the gospel breaks through! For Isaiah goes on to relate what God accomplished when no one was able to stand as righteous before him: "And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor. Therefore His own arm brought salvation to Him; and His righteousness sustained Him. For He put on righteousness like a

breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head. And He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was covered with zeal like a cloak” (Isaiah 59:16-17, MKJV). This work of perfect righteousness, accomplished by God himself, in the person of the Lord Jesus, became the grounds for a covenant of pure grace. When we could not save ourselves, Christ saved us, even changing our hearts, and putting his words in our mouth.

Conclusion: Victory is Certain! (Chapter 60)

The ultimate conclusion of all this is that, even though no man may stand before a holy God in peace to experience all the blessings of a favorable relationship with him, yet, at the conclusion of history, a whole band of saints from all over the earth will indeed stand before him in just such a condition. This is because Christ accomplished for us what we could never have done ourselves. Human impossibility and helplessness plus Christ equals eternal triumph and joy in an eternity of fellowship with God upon a restored earth. Chapter sixty gives us another foretaste of the unspeakable glories of our eternal existence in the new earth. And this is all because of the great accomplishment of Christ, of which we read in chapter fifty-three. All praise to the Name above all names! The final outcome of Christ’s mighty victory may be seen in these words of the Lord to his true Zion, in Isaiah 60:21: “Your people also will all be righteous; they will inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, so that I may be glorified” (MKJV).

Lesson 14: The Return of the King

Introduction:

We are now moving to the final, consummative stage in Isaiah's grand vision of the advent and work of Christ. When we began the second major portion of Isaiah (chapters 40-66), we observed that God is eminently concerned with displaying his glory. We noted that the ultimate way in which he does this is through his mighty work of redemption. This work, we saw, would be perfectly accomplished by the coming of the Servant of the Lord, the long-awaited Christ. Then, when we got to chapter fifty-three, we learned something shocking: Christ would accomplish this mightiest of all works, which would display God's glory more clearly than it could ever otherwise have been seen, by being humbled and degraded. We noted that Christ, through his sufferings, would obtain redemption and eternal life for his people; and that the effects of his great success would spread until they covered the entire earth. Because of all this, Isaiah spends some time exhorting the people of God to true religion, and not just the outward appearance of it. Now, as we move into chapter sixty-three, we see unfolding one last great development in God's redemptive design. Christ will return a second time: but this time, he will not be in a state of humiliation – weak, despised, and as a lamb for slaughter. No, he will come as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as a glorious conquering warrior, whom no one can resist, and before whom the whole earth will bow in terror. Seeing that this return of the King is bearing down hard upon us, let us make sure that we are in his favor, and that he is coming to deliver us from our enemies. For if we should be found to be his enemies on that day, oh how great and eternal our torment will be! Let us bow before the King now, while we may still do so with joy, and not wait until we must bow with the anguish of knowing we must forever face his wrath.

Christ's first coming summarized, together with its later effects (Chapters 61-62)

Chapter sixty-one begins, once again, with the words of Christ. This prophecy is significant because it is the portion of scripture which Christ read and applied to himself at the beginning of his earthly ministry (Luke 4:16-21). In the prophecy, we have Christ proclaiming that the Holy Spirit has empowered

him for his ministry (cf. Luke 3:22) – a ministry of comfort, compassion, and healing to those who are afflicted by their sins; to such as these he will announce an acceptable year, that is, a year in which they might be pardoned, because God would pour out his vengeance against sin upon Christ, and bring forgiveness to those who trust in him. In this way, multitudes who had been bound by sin and the Devil would be freed; and thus Zion (the true Zion, God’s living church) would be repaired of all its afflictions and would flourish again. Through Christ, God’s true Israel would be a nation of priests, rejoicing and spreading the good news among the nations. That this prophecy is admirably being fulfilled in the Church today is made apparent by I Peter 2:9-10.

Chapter sixty-two continues with the same prophecy of the glorious and fruitful state of the Church in the latter days, that is, the days following the first coming of Christ. Through the church, the nations will see and rejoice in the glory of God; the land (signifying the place where God dwells among his people) will no longer be called “desolate,” but “Hephzibah,” which means, “My delight is in her.” It will no longer be called “forsaken,” but “Beulah,” which means, “Married.” Because of Christ, God will forevermore delight in his people, even rejoice in them as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride. For we truly are the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:6-8). And God himself will fight for his people in whom he delights, and so the final success of the Church over all her enemies is guaranteed.

Christ’s second coming announced, together with its results for his people and his enemies (Chapters 63-64)

In chapter sixty-three, we see a prophecy of the return of Christ, after the gospel has gone throughout the earth, and his church has been established in true righteousness. As soon as Christ appears in his glory, we find the church wondering in great joy and amazement, “Who is this who is coming...?” Not as though they did not know, but because of the greatness of their joy. For it is none other than Christ, coming to avenge his saints and pour out his fierce wrath upon all the enemies of himself and his church. Hence his raiment is red, probably soaked in the blood of those who have opposed him (cf. Revelation 14:18-20). This is the final work of the almighty Christ: all those who have called upon his name will receive mercy, for he has undergone the wrath of

God in their behalf. But those who oppose him will be utterly consumed, as Christ pours out the great wrath of God upon them for their sins, still unatoned. These will experience God's hot wrath for all eternity, when Christ comes to deliver justice to the world. Christ alone will judge the whole earth; all men will have to give an account before him and no one else: and if they cannot lay claim to the blood of Christ, nothing will save them. But for his people, the outcome will be vastly different. Christ's coming will be for their salvation, as may be seen by the typical history of the nation of Israel. In all of their distresses, Christ mightily delivered them. And so will he do for his Church forever, that is, for those who are truly his. That this is not a matter of physical descent is patently clear: Abraham cannot plead for deliverance for those who are descended from him. If one would lay claim to God's mercy, a greater than Abraham must be his father. The only one who can save is God; thus God himself must be Father to anyone who would lay claim to his grace. And God truly is the Father of those whom Christ has made his brothers.

The heartfelt longings expressed in chapter sixty-four are on the lips of all those who are Christ's, who suffer for his sake and long for him to return and deliver them. True Christians will ever be crying out, "Oh, that Christ would come, dissolve this old, sin-cursed earth, and create a new heavens and earth without sin, sorrow, or pain!" (cf. Revelation 22:17). The true Christian has a taste of the better world than this (e.g. Abraham, as recorded in Hebrews 11:10), and recognizes that no eye has seen the things which God has prepared for them that love him (Isaiah 64:4; see I Corinthians 2:9-10). The thought of the great joy that will fill the hearts of the faithful at Christ's return, and the great terror that will overwhelm all hypocrites, drives Isaiah to the truths of the gospel: our righteousnesses are not sufficient – they are as filthy rags – and hence, he turns to God in true repentance, and cries out for mercy. May we do the same.

Conclusion:

The day of the return of the glorious King is fast-approaching: oh, may we be found among those who have their wedding garments (Matthew 22:1-14), who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, who may rejoice with eternal joy at his appearing. If we are deceiving ourselves, if we have no true love for Christ, if we are not clinging to his cross for righteousness and acceptance with God,

we will be utterly undone when Christ comes back. We will be forever cast into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. O Christ, teach us to love your appearing!

Lesson 15: The Final Outcome

Introduction:

We have finally reached the conclusion of the book of Isaiah; which is a description of the conclusion and final goal of all of history. When Christ comes the second time, it will be the last great chapter of the world story, in which his great work of redemption will encounter the fullness of its necessary effects. In these chapters we see that Christ's great work of restoration will be so successful as to bring about a new order of things: a new and eternal heavens and earth, no longer marred by sin and the curse; and a new people, themselves fully and finally liberated from sin and the curse, so that with joy and purity of heart they may worship their Redeemer-King forever. Let us never lose sight of this ultimate end for God's people, this exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and hence grow weary in our well-doing. For we shall reap if we faint not (II Corinthians 4:14-18; Galatians 6:9).

A Brief Review

Before we get into our text, as it is our last time together in the book of Isaiah, let's take some time to review the major themes that we have thus far encountered. In the first chapter, we observed some foundational truths that would shape much of what followed in the rest of the book: Israel, God's chosen people, because of her egregious rebellion, would be cast off; however, because of God's great grace and faithfulness to his covenant, would not cast them off utterly, but would preserve a remnant of grace, whom he would cause to walk in his ways. From henceforth (as in actuality had always been the case) only those who had received free justification and whose hearts were made righteous could presume to call themselves God's people. Hence, although Israel as a whole would be rejected, God would always have his true Israel, a Zion comprising those who were genuine believers in Christ.

As we moved into chapter two, we saw that this true Zion would be formed of those from every nation on the earth. In contradistinction to corrupt Israel, whose end would be a curse, true, multi-national Israel would ultimately be made to inherit the new heavens and the new earth, in perfect peace, joy, and prosperity. Chapter three gives an explicit representation of the internal

paganness of Israel, and then chapter four takes up the theme of the remnant again. We saw a further development in this chapter: the remnant would only be holy and blessed because of their relationship to the coming Branch of David. Christ alone is the true remnant of Israel, who would be absolutely righteous, and merit all God's blessings; and all who are in this Branch, by faith, would by extension possess all his righteousness and all the blessings merited by that righteousness. Chapter five, gave us a summative analogy: Israel is as a vineyard, given every advantage, that only produced worthless fruit: therefore, it would be left waste.

Chapter six, probably the first vision of Isaiah chronologically, stands as a basic introduction to the whole. Isaiah is sovereignly chosen by God to see his face and proclaim his gospel. He immediately recognizes his unworthiness, and is made worthy by the sacrifice of Christ. He is then sent out with a message that would ensure the ongoing blindness, hardness, and rejection of Israel. However, this would not be the end of the story; although Israel would be cut down as a mighty tree, from that stump would spring up a new tree which would be utterly holy. Which prophecy is fulfilled in Christ, who arose from corrupt Israel, accomplished true righteousness, and caused a new Israel to spring up again – an Israel that, through faith in him, was holy indeed.

Chapter seven looks ahead more explicitly than ever to the coming Christ. He would be the very fulfillment of the covenant promises, being Immanuel, God with us. This assurance is given to the church as a certain hope in her severest difficulties; but the majority of Israel (as Ahaz) would reject this certain hope and look for salvation in other quarters. Hence Immanuel (in chapter eight) is called a stone of stumbling to Israel as a whole; but to those who believe, he is a sure foundation. Chapter nine continues this prophecy of Immanuel, providing us with one of the most precious descriptions of Christ anywhere in the bible; wholly God and truly man, come to establish his everlasting kingdom of righteousness. Chapter ten announces coming judgment on Assyria (for God will judge the whole earth, and not just Israel) and chapter eleven describes further the coming King, the righteous Branch of David. Chapter twelve sums up this portion with a song of praise, to be sung by the redeemed.

Chapters 13-24 announce God's judgment, in systematic fashion, on the entire world; then chapters 25-27 assure us that judgment is not going to be

the end. For God, in his mercy, would create for his remnant of grace a new heavens and earth, where they will worship Christ forever. Chapters 28-34 again take up the theme of God's universal judgment, bringing into condemnation the nations of the earth as well as all those who trust in them; and chapter 35 again looks ahead to the new creation, where righteousness and peace, through Christ, will triumph over sin and judgment. Chapters 36-39 give us a few historical accounts that illustrate the truths that God does indeed reign over history, bringing judgment upon the mightiest of nations and holding forth mercy to those who are truly his. This concludes the first major portion of Isaiah.

When we began the second major portion of Isaiah (chapters 40-66), we observed that God is eminently concerned with displaying his glory. We noted that the ultimate way in which he does this is through his mighty work of redemption. This work, we saw, would be perfectly accomplished by the coming of the Servant of the Lord, the long-awaited Christ. Then, when we got to chapter fifty-three, we learned something shocking: Christ would accomplish this mightiest of all works, which would display God's glory more clearly than it could ever otherwise have been seen, by being humbled and degraded. We noted that Christ, through his sufferings, would obtain redemption and eternal life for his people; and that the effects of his great success would spread until they covered the entire earth. Because of all this, Isaiah spends some time exhorting the people of God to true religion, and not just the outward appearance of it. Finally, as we moved into chapter sixty-three, we saw unfolding one last great development in God's redemptive design. Christ will return a second time: but this time, he will not be in a state of humiliation – weak, despised, and as a lamb for slaughter. No, he will come as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as a glorious conquering warrior, whom no one can resist, and before whom the whole earth will bow in terror.

A New Heavens and Earth [Chapter 65]

Isaiah sixty-five begins with another expression of the truth that we have seen so many times before. God had determined to call the Gentiles to himself, although they had not sought him; but Israel, for her stubbornness, would be cast off. Paul interprets this prophecy for us in Romans 10:20-21. The reasons for Israel's rejection follows: she is disobedient, idolatrous, and

“holier than thou”. These sins were all written before God, and he would avenge them. However, their destruction would not be complete, because God would preserve a remnant. Just as a vineyard owner, who is about to destroy his entire worthless vineyard, when he sees one cluster of grapes will at least save that much, so God will spare a small remnant whose latter end will be a blessing. These are God’s elect, the new seed that would come out of Israel, and are set in opposition to Israel as a whole, who forsake God’s holy mountain and are therefore marked out for slaughter. True Israel would eat, false Israel be hungry; true Israel rejoice, false Israel weep, and so on. Even the name of Israel – that is, the Israel who hypocritically supposed that they were God’s people even though they hated God – would be as a curse to true Israel. Because God was about to deal so harshly with these hypocrites, their name would serve as an element of a fearful curse, such as, “May the Lord destroy you as he destroyed Israel!” But how utterly different is to be the state of the true Israel! For them, God will create a new heavens and a new earth, in which sin, death, sorrow, and the curse will be forever done away.

Verse twenty is somewhat difficult. It seems to be speaking of the new creation, about which we know from other passages that there will be no death whatsoever (e.g. Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:1-5). So, this may be a literary device, speaking of the fact that death will afflict no one, so that, even if a man were to die at the good old age of a hundred years, he would be shown to be a sinner by the fact he had died at all. Where there is no sin, there is no death; and the hypothetical illustration of the end of one who is yet a sinner in the new earth (of whom there will really be none) serves to illustrate this truth. Or perhaps *premature death*, one of the great afflictions of this life, is here included with violence, sorrow, etc., as one of the things that will not afflict the new earth, and so the presence of death is not the point of the passage at all, but it is simply used as a way in which to teach that premature death will be put away. Another interpretation is that this is referring to the state of true Jerusalem before the new earth; which is less satisfactory, because the church in this world is spoken of as being often grieved by many trials, premature death and martyrdom being among them. Some see this prophecy as necessitating a future thousand-year millennial reign in which death will be alleviated to some degree, but not utterly overcome. This is unlikely because the context is specifically concerning the new earth, in which death will be completely done away. Besides, later texts such as II Thessalonians 1 make

clear that Christ's second coming will immediately result in the final state of things, and not in a better but still imperfect millennial state. A final possibility is that the contrary states of the righteous and the wicked, in the final order of things, is here being described. The wicked so often seemed to be long-lived and prosperous, but they are now seen to be accursed. But there will be no death or curse at all for those who dwell in the new earth. Perhaps a combination of thoughts is to be preferred: throughout the whole span of life, childhood to old age, death will have no more power in the new earth: death will not be in the new earth. And furthermore, if a sinner (speaking hypothetically) were to be found in the new earth, even there the curse would find him and destroy him: sin will not be in the new earth. Both death and sin will be put away forever.

A New Israel [Chapter 66]

Chapter sixty-six begins with a statement that sets true religion against the false hope of the majority of the Jews, who thought that they were doing good works that would cause God to be for them; and who thought that, having the outward appearance of religion, they also had the essence symbolized. How different is true religion! We cannot do anything to bribe or manipulate God, who made all things, and does things for his people out of pure grace (cf. Acts 17:24-25). And the outward symbols of religion, such as the temple, are not the true matters of religion, but merely symbols of better realities. The new earth, in which God himself will dwell among men, is the true fulfilment of the temple principle; because in the new earth, Christ, whose body is the temple, will be eternally present. And it is to this, and not to the physical building, that Israel should have been looking. On this basis, the true, inward matters of the heart are again shown to be of highest importance. Only those who are truly God's people, not just his in name and outward appearance, will be finally saved. The meek shall inherit the earth. Accordingly, Isaiah here comforts those who are truly God's: even though their so-called brothers, those who are Jews outwardly, persecuted them while giving lip service to God's glory; yet when Christ returns, he will vindicate those who are truly his, and punish all hypocrites.

In verses six and following, Isaiah looks ahead to the miraculous speed at which the false Israel will be cast off and the true Israel brought forth as a child.

This is most likely to be interpreted by the circumstance that, once Christ had accomplished redemption, God had no sooner cast off false Israel for rejecting their Messiah, than he caused to spring forth suddenly an entire new nation of Israel, a nation that was Israel indeed. Which occurred on the day of Pentecost, when above three thousand souls were suddenly drawn by the Spirit unto Christ, and made to constitute the new Israel, which should be from all the nations. The remainder of the chapter speaks of the vast growth of this new Israel. Persons from every nation would join her ranks, and would be constituted Israel's brothers, even priests and Levites. These, his true servants, would be formed into a new nation, just as the old Israel had been formed into a nation at Sinai; but God's enemies, who were his people in name only, but were inwardly polluted, would be made to feel the fury of his wrath. This new Israel would not be as the old Israel. Just as the new heavens and the new earth would abide forever, due to the successful redemptive work of Christ, so his new people would abide forever and inherit their eternal resting place in the new earth. The wicked, on the other hand, will perish in eternal fire.