

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

ISAIAH AND US

We do not come as strangers to the prophecy of Isaiah. One of the best-known and most-loved books of the Bible. Passages sung in Handel's Messiah: **40:1–5**, (the whole chapter was an early inspiration to me), **7:14, 40:9, 60:2–3, 9:2, 6, 35:56, 53:3–6, 8, 52:7**. Other passages that have been significant to me: **55, 49:5–6, 28:23–29, 62:6–7**.

ISAIAH AND JESUS

Apart from Isaiah being one of the most quoted books in the New Testament, there is a most significant statement in John 12:37–41. This refers not just to Isaiah's vision in ch. **6**, but to the whole book. Hence Isaiah has been called 'the Old Testament evangel (gospel or good tidings)'.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

'The vision' **1:1**. The whole book, not just ch. 6. 'Vision' is a communication by God of His word (see 1 Samuel 3:1, Numbers 12:6–8, Exodus 33:18–34:28). Hence **1:2a, 10, 18a, 20b, 24a, 2:1**. God does not just overwhelm us with the revelation of His being and glory; He speaks to us intelligibly, and relates with us in that speaking.

8:16–22 gives us some idea of how the book came to be written and put together, among a gathering of disciples, in the context of alternative fruitless words prevailing at that time. **38:1–6** is an example of how the word of the LORD came to Isaiah at specific times. Always given by God, not dreamed up or surmised by Isaiah.

ISAIAH THE SON OF AMOZ

We know nothing of Isaiah the prophet outside of the Book of Isaiah, apart from 2 Kings 19–20, which are reproduced in Isaiah 36–39, and a couple of mentions in 2 Chronicles. We get glimpses of Isaiah the person and prophet at work in **7:3–4, 8:1–4, 16–18, 20:1–6, 37:1–7, 21ff, 39:1–8**. And, of course, in **6:1–13**, which will warrant closer study. A man, with his family and group of disciples, totally committed to the ministry of the word of the LORD. Not because he had adopted it as a cause, but because that word came to him, and humbled him, and he trembled at it—**66:2**.

JUDAH AND JERUSALEM

1:1 A city prophet, in the royal court, contrast Amos 7:14–15, Micah 3:9–12 (Micah, with a more rustic feel, was a contemporary of Isaiah—see Micah 1:1, and compare Micah 4:1–5 with **2:1–5**—God giving the same message from both directions: city and country-side.)

The promise to Judah: Genesis 49:10. The promise of Jerusalem: Deuteronomy 12:5–7, 2 Samuel 5:6–12. The promise to David: 2 Samuel 7:8–16. Isaiah and his contemporaries were

heirs to these promises of God. But God had also said 1 Kings 9:3–9. This is what Isaiah saw coming, and it was into this situation that he spoke the word that came to him and to all the people from God.

UZZIAH, JOTHAM, AHAZ, AND HEZEKIAH

1:1. Uzziah (Azariah) 792–740 BC: 2 Kings 15:1–7, 2 Chronicles 26. See **6:1.** Jotham 750–735 BC: 2 Kings 15:32–38. Note also 29–31. These (Syria/Israel and Assyria) occasioned the two great crises that confronted Judah in Isaiah’s time. See also 2 Chronicles 27. Ahaz 735–715 BC: 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28. Hezekiah 715–686 BC: 2 Kings 18–20 (compare **36–39**), 2 Chronicles 29–32. Following Hezekiah came Manasseh 697–642 BC: 2 Kings 21:1–18. Note 24:1–4.

ONE ISAIAH, OR THREE?

Not a question we should have to answer, but one raised by critical scholarship of the Bible over the last 150 years. Wellhausen (1869) first popularised the notion that Genesis and other books of the Old Testament are compilations arising over time from different stages of Israel’s history and religious development. Duhm (1892) applied this in a thorough-going way to the Book of Isaiah. Much of this was based on the nineteenth-century rationalism, still widely current, that refused to believe there could be such a thing as predictive prophecy, and a penchant for fragmenting the Scriptures on a humanistic basis rather than seeing them as a God-given whole. Scholars have noted that chapters **40–55** appear to relate to the period of the Babylonian exile 597–538 BC (Cyrus is mentioned by name in **44:28** and **45:1**—see 2 Chronicles 36:22–23), two hundred years after Isaiah the son of Amoz, and so have postulated an exilic prophet, or prophetic school, called Deutero (Second)-Isaiah, and then have attributed chapters **56–66** to a post-exilic Trito (Third)-Isaiah. This (with variations) has become almost universally accepted in most twentieth-century commentaries, and was assumed as a matter of course in my own theological training.

The question is, is it possible that Isaiah of Jerusalem could have foreseen the rise and fall of Babylon, and the exile and return of Israel? The principle in 2 Peter 1:21 would indicate that he could (compare P T Forsyth, writing in the early 1900s in ways that comport directly with the church in our own day). Especially if the prophecies of eg Deuteronomy 28:63–66 and 1 Kings 9:6–9 were extant in Isaiah’s day. In my own reading I discovered chapter **13** well and truly ensconced in first Isaiah. Only to find that the commentators say this must be a later interpolation. But then there is **39:5–7**. Note Isaiah himself does not put any time on this.

Recent scholarship, under the influence of people like Brevard Childs (‘canonical criticism’), is swinging back to a more holistic and integrated approach, and a healthy respect for the complete text as we have received it. Alec Motyer, in his full and reputable commentary *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), gives good grounds for seeing the whole book as the work of one author:

- From the earliest extant texts of the Book of Isaiah (Qumran, 100 BC) there is no break in the text between chapters 39 and 40.
- A single author is quite capable of writing in different literary styles (eg *Bright Bird and Shining Sails*, *Angry Heart and Tranquil Mind*, *The Day of the Spirit*, and *Tall Grow the Tallow-woods*—all by Geoffrey Bingham!)
- Passages such as **57:3–9**, **65:2–5** refer distinctly to the pre-exilic situation—Isaiah still writing to his own day.

- The landscape assumed in chapters **40–55** is still very much that of Palestine rather than Mesopotamia, eg **40:16, 41:18–19, 44:3, 14, 23, 49:1, 5.5:12–13**
- Babylon is predicted **43:14, 47:1, 48:14** and **48:20** in very general terms, not according to later historical detail, and the exile and the fall of Babylon are described in pictures that do not necessarily reflect the later actual experience, eg **42:22, 51:14, 46:1–2, 47:1–5, 52:11–12** is very much from outside Babylon.
- The prophecy of **39:1–8**, appearing to negate all Isaiah's previous predictions, would have *required* him to seek further outworking of God's purposes, particularly through such an atonement as we find in **52:13–53:12**.
- The six main principles of chapters **1–39**:
 - the LORD as the Lord of history
 - supreme over idols
 - the promise of a remnant
 - the reconciliation of God and sinner on the basis of atonement
 - the vision of the restored Zion, and
 - the Davidic Messiahremain the chief concerns developed in chapters **40–55**.

THE MESSIANIC HOPE

Motyer gives his own helpful three-part analysis under this heading:

- the King (chapters **1–37**)
- the Servant (**38–55**)
- the Anointed Conqueror (**56–66**).

THE MESSAGE OF ISAIAH

Faith in God and the sureness of His promises. See **28:16, 30:15**. This is not just private and personal, but national, over against political and militaristic alternatives. Ahaz refused it (**7:1–12**), and opted for alliance with, and subjugation to, the growing power of Assyria. Hezekiah heeded the message, and saw its power (chapters **36–37**), but forgot it in his foolish and prideful courting of the up-and-coming political and military power of Babylon, before the descent into the darkness of his son Manasseh's reign. Both succumbed to a 'do-it-yourself salvation' based on personal endeavour. Faced with the apparent failure of his message in the impending doom of God's people, Isaiah was shown for the nation, as he had already discovered personally, that God Himself effects atonement even for those who have sinfully denied faith. So 'nothing shall be left' **39:6** is followed by 'comfort my people' **40:1**, and the promised return and restoration, effected through the atonement of the Servant. Even so, Isaiah foresees that the redeemed still remain morally and spiritually unchanged, and no less dependent upon faith as they wait for God to bring in full and final salvation and righteousness for the whole creation in chapters **56–66**. So the powerful theme is faith in God's grace and nothing else from beginning to end.

A PRELIMINARY TASTER—1:1–5:30

Isaiah's call comes in **6:1–13**. The first five chapters are like an author's preface, in which, using words which came to him after his call, Isaiah sets out the situation into which he was called to speak. We recall the promises made regarding Judah, Jerusalem and its king, and the

actual events and attitudes of the reigns in which he prophesied. Three sections give parallel pictures:

- 1:1-31** National rebellion against God, giving rise to national calamity, religious falling away, and social collapse, with the promise of atonement.
- 2:1-4:6** A vision of Zion as the centre of God's law, of peace and of righteousness for the whole world, contrasted with its present national, religious and social disintegration.
- 5:1-31** God's full and abundant care for His vineyard Israel, and the woes that come upon injustice and disobedience.

UNNATURAL CHILDREN—1:2-31

- 1:2-3** God's covenant with the whole creation, and His special relationship with Israel, are all of a piece. See Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1, Jeremiah 31:35-37, 33:19-26. So the creation is here called upon to witness against the unnaturalness of Israel's stance and behaviour.
- 4-8** The charge against Israel, and the consequences: incurable sickness, failure of care, and helplessness in the onslaught of invasion.
- 9** The survival of a remnant occurs only by God's mercy and intervention. This is God's forbearance.
- 10-17** Jerusalem in its iniquity is equated with Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 13:13, 18:21, 19:1-29), as the religious hypocrisy of Jerusalem is denounced.
- 18** Yet even within the God-given worship were elements pointing to the possibility of total transformation, if only they would receive it. God becomes especially intimate in His speaking to Israel at this point.
- 19-20** The options are made clear.
- 21-23** A lament over the condition of Jerusalem. Compare Deuteronomy 24:17-22.
- 24** Cannot just say, 'God hates the sin but loves the sinner'.
- 1:25-26** Yet the judgements are cleansing judgements, leading to forgiveness, justification, and the restoration of true (Davidic?) leadership. Somewhere in there, not yet spelled out, is the need for a human obedient Servant and Saviour, if God's justice and righteousness are to mean anything more than divine game-playing.
- 27-28** For God's redemption is utterly consistent with His righteousness. He meets His own righteous claims, when we have failed to do so, and we respond accordingly.
- 29-30** His action exposes the shame and dryness of the false worship in which they have indulged (see 2 Kings 16:4).
- 31** Those who trust in their own works will find that these very works are their undoing.

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD—2:1-4:6

- 2:1** A distillation of what was given to Isaiah to say about Judah and Jerusalem (see above on **1:1**). Jerusalem as the locational focus of the covenant (see eg Psalms 2, 87, 122), comes through strongly in Isaiah, leading to the vision of Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 11:10, 15-16, 12:22-24, Revelation 21:1-22:5.
- 2-5** Compare Micah 4:1-5. Commentators ask whether Isaiah got it from Micah, or Micah got it from Isaiah, or both got it from somewhere else. Maybe God gave it to each of them, in their differing perspectives!

- 2–3** A marvellous picture of Jerusalem and its temple as the centre of the world, to which all nations flow, from which the law and word of God goes out.
- 4** Here is the settlement of rivalries between nations, and the coming of peace (compare **9:4–7**). These words are on the United Nations building in New York.
- 5** This vision of Zion is not just some far-fetched hope, but a present reality, in that this “light of the LORD” is already present there (compare 1 Kings 10:23–24); hence Isaiah’s ministry directed towards other nations from Jerusalem eg chapters **13–35**, and the vision of **49:6**). That present reality is being disastrously ignored by the present inhabitants, which makes the situation extremely poignant.
- 6** They have opted for false words, after the ways of the idolatrous nations, which makes them incompatible with the God who has claimed them for His own.
- 7** False dependence on wealth and military might.
- 8** Indulgence in idolatry.
- 9** These demeaning false dependencies cannot be approved or condoned by God. They can only be judged.
- 10–19** So the inevitable judgement must come. Those who know the deadly curse of pride and self-sufficiency will welcome such judgement. Note the highly poetic structure of this oracle, common in Isaiah. Sometimes the most deeply-felt prophecies come out in the most highly-structured way (eg The Lamentations of Jeremiah). Perhaps because God Himself is poetic in His being!
- 20–21** For it will mean the end of such idolatry.
- 22** But what is left for one who has faced the living and life-giving God in this way?
- 3:1–7** Detail of the judgements that actually come on Jerusalem and Judah: a frightening loss of the necessities of life, a crisis of leadership, and the breakdown of ordered relationships in society.
- 8** All this has come about as a result of speech and conduct that defy the present ever-watching LORD.
- 9** Compare Romans 1:32: the nadir of the catalogue of evil—perverse moral insensitivity.
- 10–11** The prophet cries out to correct this gross misapprehension.
- 12–15** The LORD makes a charge in court against the people and particularly their leaders.
- 12** This is not to discredit the women and children. It highlights the failure of the men appointed to rule, and God’s judgement on them. Nevertheless, the arrogance of the women is also a contributing factor (see below v. **16–24**).
- 3:14–15** The male leaders are taken to task for greed and social injustice (contrast Leviticus 19:9–18, Deuteronomy 15:7–11—the barometer of covenant-keeping).
- 16–24** The women come under judgement for their self-adorned arrogance, foreshadowing invasion and the sacking of the city.
- 25–4:1** The city falls, with loss of life equivalent to six men in every seven. In a reversal of the due ordering of marriage (see Exodus 21:10), the women are left to have to fend for themselves, even while seeking to place themselves in some kind of marriage relationship to acquire a modicum of dignity.
- 4:2–6** A return to the true nature of Zion, redeemed by the LORD’s cleansing judgement (**4**), inhabited by a holy elect people (**3**), under the rule of the true Messiah (**2**,

compare **11:1–3**), in terms reminiscent of Exodus 13:21–22, and anticipating Revelation 7:15–17 (**5–6**).

THE LORD'S VINEYARD—**5:1–30**

- 5:1–7** The parable of the vineyard. Compare Psalm 80:8–19, Mark 12:1–12, John 15:1–17.
- 8–23** Six woes follow, delineating the ‘wild grapes’ of the sins of Judah:
- 8–10** Accumulation of other peoples’ property (contrast Leviticus 25:23–34) will lead to desolation and low productivity (1 bath = 6 gallons/27 litres, 1 homer = 10 ephahs).
- 11–17** Drunkenness and sensual indulgence (see Proverbs 31:4–9) bring on shallowness, deprivation, humiliation and death. God’s righteous judgement will leave only ruins, over which animals roam.
- 18–19** People come under bondage to ‘the deceitfulness of sin’ (Hebrews 3:12–13). Disregard of God gives rise to callous unbelief.
- 20** This is the ultimate hardening of perversity (compare Romans 1:32, Mark 3:22–30).
- 21** This all comes from insistence on human autonomy (see Genesis 3:6, 1 John 2:16).
- 22** Thus human achievement is reduced to drunkenness and perversion of justice.
- 24–25** This moral rotteness does not leave the created order unaffected (See Leviticus 18:26–28), and natural disaster (earthquake?—see Amos 1:1, Zechariah 14:5 ‘in the days of Uzziah’) ensues, under the hand of the LORD.
- 26–30** The final grim prospect of invasion and devastation—by Assyria, Babylon, or whoever—is unrelieved by any light on the horizon, ending Isaiah’s sobering preface with a question: when God has done all, when forbearance is expended and wrath must come, is there mercy still, or has it come to an end? Is there yet any hope for God’s defiled, rebellious people?

This presentation, in chapters **1–5**, of the situation in Jerusalem and Judah, and the grievous question it poses, acts as the backdrop to Isaiah’s call and ministry, as set out in the rest of the book.

THE CALL OF ISAIAH—**6:1–13**

- 6:1** ‘In the year that king Uzziah died’: about 740 BC, see 2 Chronicles 26:16–23. Perhaps Uzziah’s leprous unclean state at the time of his death, as a result of his presumptuous pride, was a sign of the state of the nation (see v. **5**). What more could God have done (see **5:4**)—is there any hope?
‘the Lord’ is not described (see 1 Timothy 6:16); only the appurtenances of His reign and power.
‘high and lifted up’: used later of both the Servant (**52:13**) and the eternal God (**57:15**).
‘the temple’: the dwelling-place of God, and the place of sacrifice.
- 2** ‘seraphim’: angelic beings, literally ‘burning ones’—the impression their ministry (v. **6**) left on Isaiah.
‘six wings’: face—not to look into the hidden things of God (see Deuteronomy 29:29); feet—not to choose their own path; flew—to do God’s bidding (their ears remain uncovered to hear His word!).

- 6:3** ‘Holy’: brightness and separatedness—God’s ‘total and unique moral majesty’ (Motyer). God’s name is described as ‘holy’ in the Old Testament 59 times—more often than all other words put together—33 in Isaiah, 26 elsewhere. P T Forsyth:
 Do let us take the holiness of God centrally and seriously, not as an attribute isolated and magnified, but as God’s very essence and nature, changeless and inexorable...by holiness is...meant...the whole concrete righteousness of existence, self-sustained at white heat. For our God is a consuming fire...The holiness of God is a deeper revelation in the cross than his love; for it is what gives his love divine value...Even a loving God is really God not because He loves, but because He has power to subdue all things to the holiness of His love, and even sin itself to His love as redeeming grace. (*The Cruciality of the Cross*, 1910, New Creation Publications Inc. 1984, pages 205, 159, 60).
- Threefold repetition: superlative emphasis. This alone is capable of filling the whole earth, and actually does so, at all times. This is why everything happens.
- 4** Compare Psalm 114:7, Deuteronomy 4:11. Preventing visibility and access to God, on the grounds of moral incompatibility.
- 5** ‘Woe’: ruin, and the silence of disaster and death. ‘Not the consciousness of...humanity in the presence of divine power, but the consciousness of...sin in the presence of moral purity’ (H H Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*, SCM 1956, p. 60). We are more ready to be overwhelmed by God’s power than we are willing to be shamed by God’s purity.
- ‘unclean lips’: untruth and falsehood—the root sin, compare Romans 1:18–25. Isaiah acknowledges his own personal sin in the context of the corporate sin of the nation—he is one with his people in their guilt.
- ‘the King’: never mind Uzziah, or Jotham—the LORD is the true King in Jerusalem.
- 6** ‘burning coal...from the altar’: a sign of God’s wrath, from the place of atoning sacrifice. See Leviticus 6:12–14, 17:11. God forgives sin, never by ignoring or condoning it, but only ever by judging the sinner, in the atoning sacrifice provided by Him.
- 7** This at once removes the guilt (‘the inner reality of the deviant nature’) and covers the whole cost and just requirements of the sin (‘the specific instances of shortcoming’—Motyer). By the action and word of the Lord. Isaiah can now live and speak the truth, with cleansed lips.
- 8** He is also able to hear clearly, even though the Lord is “high and lifted up”—Isaiah is made privy to the LORD’s inner counsels.
- ‘I...us’: God consulting with His royal self among His hosts. The New Testament associates this passage with the Lord Jesus (John 12:41) and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25), and Christian understanding sees here a reflection of the full revelation of the thrice-holy Triune God.
- Isaiah, by his God-given cleansing, is also able to respond as a worthy emissary of the Holy God, with the message already burning within his being. If he can be forgiven and cleansed by God in this way, then there is hope for God’s unclean people, and he longs to tell them that.
- 9–10** But the message and task is the strangest one ever given to any prophet. The effect of the word will be to *close off* people’s outer and inner faculties of receptivity and understanding to the word of God, and to seal their doom. Note the emphatic pattern of v. **10** (common in Isaiah): heart, ears, eyes; eyes, ears, hearts. How can this be? Does this mean that Isaiah was to deliberately veil his meaning? On the contrary, Isaiah obeyed this injunction by speaking the word, time and again, as simply and as clearly as possible, in a plain, systematic and

reasoned way. Such that he was later accused of acting like a kindergarten teacher (see **28:9–10**)! Motyer (p.79):

if hearers are resistant to the truth, the only recourse is to tell them the truth yet again, more clearly than before. But to do this is to expose them to the risk of rejecting the truth yet again and, therefore, of increased hardness of heart. It could even be that the next rejection will prove to be the point at which the heart is hardened beyond recovery. The human eye cannot see this point in advance; it comes and goes unnoticed. But the all-sovereign God both knows it and appoints it as he presides in perfect justice over the psychological processes he created (*cf.* Ex. 4:21). It was at just such a point that Isaiah was called to office. His task was to bring the Lord's word with fresh, even unparalleled clarity, but in their response people would reach the point of no return.

So it was Isaiah's sorry task to be instrumental in and preside over the terrible processes of the hardening of people's hearts under the impact of the word of God. These verses, then, are not spoken in callous cynicism ('O, no one will ever listen!'), but belong to a particular point in time in God's action. Nevertheless, this process can happen at any time in history, and is terrible to watch.

See further the hardening of Pharaoh's heart: Exodus 4:21, 7:2–5: God said that He would harden Pharaoh's heart. First Pharaoh hardened his own heart: Exodus 5:2, 7:13–14, 22–23, 8:15, 19, 32, 9:7. Then God confirmed him in his stubbornness, and carried out his good purpose through that: Exodus 9:12, 34–35 10:1–2, 20, 27, 11:10, 14:1–8, 30–31. Hence Romans 9:14–18. God will never harden a heart that is soft towards Him. And even the hardening process will serve God's good purposes of love for the whole world.

See also Jesus in Mark 4:10–12, after telling the parable of the sower, about hearing the word of God. Even though in his own teaching he deliberately spoke in a way everyone could understand: Mark 4:33–44 (*contra* Barbara Thiering and others). John uses these words from Isaiah to sum up the whole of Jesus' teaching ministry John 12:37–43 (contrast Jesus' own relationship with the Father in v. 44–50). Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 and Acts 28:23–28.

6:11–13 Isaiah asks and is shown what will be for the duration of his ministry and beyond: devastation, deportation, desolation, and exile; then the revisiting of those who are left, with further working over. But again, with the note of promise and hope: the 'holy seed', or 'seed of holiness'—the Messiah (**11:3**) and the offspring of his holy action (**53:10–11, 54:1**).

THE KING AND HIS PEOPLE—7:1–11:16

Following his general introduction, and the account of his powerful personal call, Isaiah records two specific sets of prophecy to Judah (**7:1–9:7**) and to the northern kingdom of Israel (**9:8–11:16**), relating to the King and his people.

THE WORD TO JUDAH—7:1–9:7

7:1 About 735, see 2 Kings 15:36–16:20 and 2 Chronicles 28 esp. 5–7, the remarkable happening of 8–15, and 16–21. Under pressure of the growing power of Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, Judah's northern neighbours Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel were putting pressure on Judah to join them against Assyria, and invaded Judah. Ahaz asked for Assyria's help against them, and so brought

the stronger power of Assyria into control of the whole region. Thus Ahaz was the one who finally sacrificed Judah's independence, and brought Judah and Jerusalem under subjugation to foreign powers for ever thereafter—a real turning-point. And Isaiah was there.

2 'house of David' significant here, in light of the promise of 2 Samuel 7. Should not have been phrased in this way.

3 'Shear-jashub' means 'a remnant will return'. A message of both disaster and hope: there will be such devastation that only a remnant will return, but God will be so faithful (compare 1:9) that there will be a remnant that does return. So sure is Isaiah of the word that has come to him that he is prepared to put it in embodied form in the naming of his first-born son, presumably at the command of the LORD (as with his second son, see 8:1–4). Ahaz would have been aware of this.

'conduit': Jerusalem's water supply came from outside the city via open channels, making it very vulnerable to attack and siege. (The underground water tunnel, still there today, was not put in until Hezekiah's time, see 2 Kings 20:20.) Even so, Isaiah counsels passive trust in the LORD as the nation's defence.

7:4 'Be careful to *do nothing*'! Particularly not to enter into alliance with Assyria (see 2 Kings 16:7–9) against the spent forces of Syria and 'what-name' the son of Remaliah of Israel.

5–6 A determined attempt to bring an end to the royal line of David, against God's promise of 2 Samuel 7.

7–9 These nations are only as strong as their unbelieving heads, and God will see to it that they do not prevail. Whereas the head of Judah is Jerusalem and the head of Jerusalem is the son of David to whom God's promises have come.

'sixty-five years': Samaria was destroyed by the Assyrians and its inhabitants deported in 721 BC, and in 671 BC Esarhaddon, successor to Tiglath-pileser, brought foreign settlers into the area of the northern kingdom. From that time on, then, unlike Judah two hundred years later, any survivors of Israel would have no land they could call their own, and would be finished as a people—a very specific and accurate prediction.

'If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established': the whole crux of Isaiah's message. Ahaz is urged to simple trust in God's promises, rather than salvation by human works of politics and alliances.

10 It seems Ahaz did not respond accordingly to Isaiah's message of v. 4–9. So another message comes to him from God with such urgency that Isaiah's name is not even mentioned as the intermediary through which it would have come—this is a message direct from God to Ahaz.

11 God is prepared to move heaven and earth to give Ahaz a sign of His faithfulness to the son of David.

12 Ahaz clothes his refusal in false piety. There is a sin of putting the LORD to the test in an unbelieving way (Psalm 95:9, Hebrews 3:7–19). But when the LORD Himself tells you to ask for a sign, the believing thing to do is to act on that. Here Ahaz decisively exposes his unbelieving heart, and in that action passes the point of no return (see above on 6:9–10) for himself and those for whom he is responsible.

13–15 God will still give Ahaz a sign, but now it will be a sign of judgement.

'Immanuel' meaning 'God with us' is the expected son of David promised by God in 2 Samuel 7:12–14, and spoken of in Psalms 2, 45, 110 and other places

(see **9:6–7, 11:1–10**). As far as Ahaz and Isaiah are concerned, this one could come at any time. The sign is that when this one comes he will now, as a result of Ahaz’s refusal to trust God, eat the food of poverty (see v. **22**). God would have done anything for Ahaz to ensure that it would be otherwise, and the coming of this one could have been glorious. But God’s people from now on will be a devastated and subjugated and oppressed people, and Immanuel will be born into that, and will share it with them. This turns out to be the case, as in Luke 2:1–7.

14 ‘a young woman’: Hebrew *almah*, meaning ‘virgin’. This verse is taken in Matthew 1:23 to refer to the birth of Jesus as the Messiah over seven hundred years later. A number of scholars having difficulty in accepting the virginal conception of Jesus, and the whole matter of predictive prophecy, have sought to dissociate Isaiah 7:14 from the birth of Jesus by saying that *almah* actually means ‘young woman’, not necessarily a virgin as such, and that Isaiah was referring to some local event closer at hand. Various theories are propounded, such as that ‘Immanuel’ was actually Hezekiah, or Maher-shalal-hash-baz, or a whole rash of babies produced by faithful Israelite women. This has been sufficient for some translators to translate *almah* as ‘young woman’ rather than ‘virgin’. Motyer, in an exhaustive survey of explicit uses of *almah*, concludes that the correct translation here is really ‘virgin’, and that *almah* is never used of a married woman. So could it be that Isaiah was prophesying the coming of the Messiah as it actually happened over seven hundred years later?

7:16 Note that Isaiah puts no time on this. What he is saying is that by the time Immanuel has reached the age of discretion, these two kings will have long since ceased to be a threat.

17 An even worse plague than Syria and Israel—the full might of Assyria itself—is now promised to Ahaz as a result of his foolish action (see 2 Chronicles 28:19–21).

18–19 Total catastrophe will follow. From now on Judah will be swarmed upon by foreign nations. Egypt, Israel’s former slave-driver, will never be any help to them against other enemies.

20 They will be shamed by conquest and captivity.

21–25 Those who remain will not be able to benefit from agriculture, but will be reduced to living only by what can be got from one or two domestic animals and wild bees—the food of poverty and oppression (see on v. **15**).

8:1–4 ‘Maher-shalal-hash-baz’ meaning ‘speed-spoil-haste-booty’ signifies the relentless on-rushing onslaught of the invading enemy. Uriah the priest is mentioned, not very favourably, in 2 Kings 16:10–16, and this Zechariah, according to 2 Kings 18:2, could have been the king’s father-in-law—indicating the circles in which Isaiah moved. The certified prediction of this boy’s birth, and the calling of Isaiah’s wife ‘the prophetess’, point to the sureness of this word of God enfolded in the son to whom they give birth. He takes up in the immediate present the function earlier attached to the coming of Immanuel in **7:16**, thus freeing that unspecified prophecy to be applied to ‘the latter time’ (see **9:1**). Tiglath-pileser took much of Israel’s territory in 733 BC, and Damascus fell in 732 BC, before this child would have been able to say its first words. Samaria fell finally in 721 BC (see 2 Kings 17).

5–8 ‘the waters of Shiloah’ was the little stream that flowed from Gihon spring, where the kingship was passed on from David to Solomon (1 Kings 1:33–34, 45), into

Jerusalem as the city's vulnerable water supply—a sign of their need to trust God and His promises for their protection and well-being. Instead of this, they have opted to trust what appears to be the more reliable and abundant supply of the king of Assyria, which will overtake them like a flood. To choose the world's ways is to be overwhelmed by them.

Ahaz may have had every political skill, logic, the harvested results of diplomatic experience—all 'the facts of the real world'—but when the people of God operate by 'what stands to reason' rather than what proceeds from faith, when they seek safety in the resources, policies and powers of the world—the king of Assyria instead of 'the King, the LORD Almighty' (6:5)—the things they trust guarantee their calamity. (Motyer p. 88)

What a message is that for our church today, and for our nation and world!

'...your land, O Immanuel': the land is only ever said to belong to the king, Israel as a whole, or the Lord Himself. So Immanuel is no ordinary personage. But when he comes to his land, it will be ruined as a result of unbelief, and there will be nothing for him to inherit there except suffering and loss at the hands of a foreign power (as in Mark 10:33–34).

9–10 Nevertheless, by the same token, neither will any of the nations that come against God's true people finally stand, no matter how much they gather themselves and plot together (see Psalm 2), because in Immanuel *God is with us!*

11–12 So Isaiah is told that the little conspiracy and alliance that terrified the people (**7:2**) is not to be feared by him and those with him—the remnant of the faithful.

there is a distinction between the secularised, politicised professing people of God and those, within that people, who turn to him with repentance and faith, who look to his word and obey it. (Motyer p. 92)

We do not always get that distinction right when we try to apply it to others. The important thing is to know where we stand, and to be consistently faithful in that. (There are a number of frightening 'conspiracy theories' current in some Christian circles today that may be safely discounted by those who know the sovereign God.)

8:13–15 God alone is to be our fear—the one we take utterly seriously in deep respect and loving obedience. For those who do this He becomes a sanctuary, a holy place of protection; for those who do not He is an offence, a stumbling-block and a snare—to those both in Israel and Judah, and eventually to Jerusalem itself.

16 This makes it all the more important to secure, preserve and attend to the authentic word they have received from God against subsequent additions or tampering, especially in adverse circumstances, such as they may have been exposed to, say, in the dark reign of Manasseh later on. This goes strongly against the presupposition of much modern scholarship that the text remained fluid and changeable in the light of events over decades or even centuries.

17 Having this sure word of God will fortify them to live through the calamities that they know will now follow from Ahaz's refusal to live by faith in God. They will not be immune from these calamities themselves, but through these dark times in which God 'will hide his face' from His people, they will wait in patient expectation of His promises.

18 Thus this little prophetic family will be an embodied and continuing message from God among the people, whatever happens, and a sign of God's abiding presence.

19–22 This true word from God far surpasses the false forbidden alternative words that people seek out to set their hopes on (see Deuteronomy 18:9–22, Leviticus 19:26,

31, 20:6, 27, and Manasseh 2 Kings 21:6). This false word will lead them only to ruination and doom.

- 9:1** Their faithful waiting will be rewarded with the fulfilment of God's promise, emerging first in the very territory first subjected to Assyria's heel, in 733 BC. No definite time is set: it will be 'in the latter time', following 'the former time' when the devastation occurred. Even if it has to wait another seven hundred years or more for its complete fulfilment, as in Matthew 4:12–17, Luke 1:79, yet the light at the end of the tunnel is so sure to the prophet that he can speak of it as if it has already happened! And the disciples can carry this hope into the future. 'Galilee of the nations': a hint that the time of hope will include the nations as well (see Matthew 28:10, 16–20).
- 2** 'darkness': see **8:22**. The darkness of judgement gives way to the light of God's favour. This is an act of God (see Genesis 1:3, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Psalm 23:4).
- 3** The remnant of the few gives rise to the saving of the many (see **54:1**, Luke 13:23–24, Revelation 7:9). The era of Solomon is recalled (1 Kings 4:20)—the only king to rule truly on David's throne over a united kingdom, with pictures of rejoicing at God-given harvest and conquest, which the people themselves have done nothing to bring about.
- 4** Recalling the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, and the conquest of the Midianites under Gideon (by a burst of light in the darkness—Judges 6–8)—both manifestly actions of God, while the people stood by.
- 5** The disposing of the accoutrements of war (compare **2:2–4**), and so the coming of peace. (A startling reading for Christmas services, but one which matches the truce held between the trenches on Christmas Day during the First World War.)
- 6** Verses **4** and **5** give the reason for the rejoicing in verse **3**, and verse **6** gives the cause. The very coming of this one, even before he has done anything, secures the victory and the peace.
- 'a child is born' of human parents (though see on **7:14**), 'a son is given' of royal dignity (see verse **7**) from God.
- 'government': princely executive authority is shouldered by this one (compare **22:22**), releasing the burdened shoulders of verse **4** (compare John 12:27, 14:1).
- 'his name': a God-given birth-name, compare Solomon/Jedidiah (2 Samuel 12:24–25).
- 'Wonderful Counsellor': with supernatural wisdom (compare Ahithophel 2 Samuel 16:23, Solomon 1 Kings 3:9, 12, Luke 11:31), capable of sustaining an everlasting kingdom.
- 'Mighty God' (compare **10:21**): as in Immanuel, 'God with us' (**7:14**, **8:8**). Psalm 2:7 and 45:6 accord divine status to the king, but nowhere so explicitly as this. Motyer (p. 104) effectively counters various attempts to downgrade this status on linguistic grounds.
- 'Everlasting Father': not used of kings but used of God in His concern for the helpless (Psalm 68:5), and His saving care and discipline of His people (Psalm 103:13, Proverbs 3:12, **63:16**, **64:8**, see **11:4**). His rule will be according to the pattern of God's Fatherhood (see Ephesians 3:14–15). Only an everlasting ruler can guarantee total security.
- 'Prince of Peace': not just the peace of forgiveness, but the *shalom* of fulfilled well-being, in goodwill and harmony, untroubled by conflict, in favour with God. This one lives in this peace of God himself, and as Prince administers it to his people (see John 14:27, 20:19–21, Ephesians 2:14).

- 9:7** ‘the throne of David’: here we see that the ‘son’ of verse **6** is none other than the Messiah promised to David in 2 Samuel 7. The ‘sign’ rejected by Ahaz in **7:10–16** will be wonderfully fulfilled in the future. But how can a son of David be ‘Mighty God’ and ‘Everlasting Father’? Jesus raises this question in Matthew 22:41–46. The answer is given in **11:2, 10** (compare Revelation 22:16): he comes from David, but is also the one from whom David himself comes.
- ‘government...peace’: a rule without exploitation—rather, the sharing of his own fulfilment (see on verse **6**).
- ‘righteousness’ is right principles, and ‘justice’ is right implementation and right practice. And the rule, spreading out over the whole earth, is endless, as promised to David.
- ‘zeal’: God’s jealous love that will not be content to allow His people to belong to anyone else.

THE WORD TO ISRAEL—9:8–11:16

Even though Isaiah is in the southern kingdom of Judah, the word of God’s prophet comes equally to the separated northern kingdom of Israel, since the covenant and the promises of God still pertain to the whole of God’s people. But God has a special way of dealing with Israel that is different from His treatment of Judah. 2 Kings 17 tells the story: Assyria invaded the northern regions in 733 BC, Damascus the capital of neighbouring Syria fell in 732, and Samaria the capital of Israel fell in 721 BC. The southern prophet Isaiah joins his voice to the earlier northern prophets Amos and Hosea (from 760 BC on) to serve God’s notice on Israel.

HIS HAND IS STRETCHED OUT AGAINST ISRAEL—9:8–10:4

He begins with a four-stanza prophetic poem with a repeated refrain (in verses **9:12, 17, 21, 10:4**, compare **5:25**).

- 9:8–12** Ignoring the issues.
- 8–9** “Jacob...Israel...Ephraim...Samaria”: different names for the northern kingdom.
- 10–12** They think the worst is over, and they can recover. But the LORD thinks differently.
- 12** “his hand is stretched out still”: elsewhere used of God’s redeeming action (eg Exodus 6:6), here it signifies the LORD’s determination to make a full end of those who have finally rejected His word.
- 13–17** Failure in leadership (compare 3:1–15).
- 13** The only safe place when running before the wrath of God is to run into Him (compare Psalm 2:10–11).
- 14** “head and tail”: from one end to the other.
“palm branch and reed”: high and lowly.
- 15** False prophets were like the tail wagging at the whim of the dog.
- 16** Both are to blame, for both have had the word of God widely spoken to them, and have rejected it. (eg see Amos 7:10–14)
- 9:17** “fatherless and widows”: things are really bad when the Father of the fatherless and the Husband of the widow (Psalm 68:5) no longer cares for them.
“every one...every mouth”: without exception (compare Romans 3:9–18).

- 18–21** Self-imposed mutual destruction, brought about under the action of God. Under pressure of trouble, people nearby turn on each other.
- 20** “his neighbour’s flesh”: Hebrew literally “the flesh of his arm”—to devour your neighbour is to eat up yourself.
- 10:1–4** Legal oppression and exploitation: those who seek to secure their own advantage at the expense of others will be left without protection or security.

ASSYRIA, THE ROD OF MY ANGER—10:5–34

- 10:5–15** Assyria, the unwitting agent of God’s wrath in the due destruction of Israel, will nevertheless himself have to answer to God for his godless and merciless arrogance. One of the most powerful passages in the Bible describing the action of God in history and the accountability of all the nations before Him. (Compare John 19:11 and Acts 2:23, where what happened to Jesus is clearly in the hand of God and in His plan of strong love, but Judas and Pilate and the others are also fully responsible for what they have done.) Assyria was the closest thing in the ancient world to the ruthless Nazi war machine of the 1930–40s.
- 5–6** “my...I”: all of this is under the initiative, control, and empowering of God Himself. The outstretched hand (**10:4**) finally falls.
- 7–11** But this is done in anything but a spirit of pious submission on the part of Assyria.
- 10** “idols”: empty “no-gods”—this outcome is brought about as a result of the worthlessness of false worship.
- 12** “I will punish”: God Himself pronounces the doom on Assyria through His prophet. The turning-point will come when Assyria comes up against the LORD’s sanctuary in Zion, after performing God’s necessary humbling of Judah and Jerusalem (see chapters **36–37**).
- 13–14** Assyria sees itself in the position of an invincible god, and attributes its unresisted advance to its own power and cleverness, rather than by the appointment of the LORD.
- 15** The true position of Assyria in relation to the sovereign LORD.
- 16–19** The reducing of Assyria to a remnant (see **37:21–38**).
- 17** The judgement originates from Israel, and the LORD’s faithful and jealous love for His covenant people (as in Genesis 12:3).
- 20–23** The remnant of Israel.
- 20–21** Threatened with the expansion of Assyria, the northern kingdom of Israel had turned for support to their long-time enemies the Syrians (see **7:1–2**, 1 Kings 20). In this time they will turn to the LORD.
- 22** “though...only”: may be a mistranslation—could mean the “remnant” will be as many as the sand of the sea, as promised to Abraham (Genesis 22:17, see Revelation 7:9).
- 23** This is because the consummation that the LORD will make as sentencing Judge and cleansing Redeemer (see **6:5–7**) in the midst of the history of nations will be “overflowing with righteousness”.

- 24–34** The immediate implications for Jerusalem, in the face of the coming Assyrian onslaught.
- 26–27b** See **9:4**.
- 27c–32** A poem envisaging the advancing march of the Assyrian enemy through the towns north of Jerusalem right up to the capital itself.
- 33–34** At the very moment that the Assyrians are at the height of their conquering power, they will be brought to judgement. The one who has been the axe (verse **15**) will have the axe turned on him, like clear-falling the mighty forests of Lebanon, by none other than the LORD Himself.

THE ROOT AND THE OFFSPRING OF DAVID—11:1–16

Two evenly-balanced poems bring the glorious hope to bear out of this scene of the devastation of Israel’s enemies and of Israel herself.

THE COMING OF MESSIAH—11:1–10

- 11:1** No date is given: this is an expression of the ever-present hope (see Genesis 3:13, 12:7 “offspring” see Galatians 3:16, Genesis 49:10, 2 Samuel 7:12–16).
“the stump of Jesse”: Jesse was David’s father. The stump is the royal house of David after it has been cut down, ie at a time when there is no longer any king sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem. Isaiah had foreseen this in **6:11–13**, and predicted it in **7:9**. When everything else has come to an end, and all wrath is fulfilled, God will still be faithful to His promises.
“a shoot...a branch...out of his roots”: he comes from Jesse rather than David, so he is seen as a new son of Jesse, ie a new David. Yet he comes from the root of Jesse, or is actually the root of Jesse (**11:10**). So this one who comes from David’s family is also the one from whom David himself has come (compare Mark 12:35–37, Revelation 22:16). Such must it be with the one who is Immanuel (**7:14**), “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father” (**9:6**).
- 11:2** In Isaiah the Messiah is the one on whom the Spirit of the LORD rests (see **42:1**, **59:21**, **61:1**, compare John 1:32–34).
“wisdom and understanding”: wisdom is a general sense of what is right and true, understanding is insight into particular situations.
“counsel and might”: counsel is the ability to plan well with good strategy (see David’s counsellors Ahithophel and Hushai in 2 Samuel 16:15–17:23), and might is the military or other strength to carry it through.
“knowledge and the fear of the LORD”: knowledge is truth grasped and applied in life; in the Bible it is also intimate personal relationship (eg Genesis 4:1): so knowledge of the LORD is close relationship in love with God. And fear of the LORD goes with that: it is that which takes the reality of God with utmost moral seriousness, in obedience, conduct, loyalty, and worship (see Genesis 20:11, Exodus 20:29, Nehemiah 5:9, 15, Psalms 2:11, 5:7). It is the basis of true kingship (2 Samuel 23:1–7), and the beginning of all wisdom (Psalm 111:10).
- 3a** So it is little wonder that his special delight is in the fear of the LORD. This is his inner disposition, that, unlike his predecessors on the throne of David, is matched consistently with his outward bearing and actions.
(Later translations used a different word to translate the first occurrence of “fear” in verse **2** as “godliness”, thus making ‘seven gifts of the Spirit’, later enshrined in a confirmation prayer based on this passage, which thus saw confirmation as a

participation in the ministry of the Messiah in the end time! True and attractive as this is, the ‘seven’ gifts of the Spirit here are endowments brought by the Spirit in three pairs of two.)

- 3b–5** Thus his judgements will come, not from outward appearance or hearsay, but from the heart of God’s all-seeing justice and goodness and fairness and consistent faithfulness to His covenant, which gird his very being.
 “rod of his mouth...breath of his lips”: the sentence of judgement which he pronounces by speaking the word of God’s truth (see John 12:47–48, 15:1–4, Mark 8:38, Revelation 19:15).
- 6–9** Eden is restored in the new creation (see Genesis 1:27–31, 2:8–17, 3:1–24, Luke 23:39–43)
- 6** Old hostilities are reconciled, and human dominion is restored.
- 7** ‘Nature red in tooth and claw’ no longer applies, as all the animals return together to plant-eating.
- 11:8** The curse is removed, and the enmity between the serpent and the seed of the woman is no more. Security and freedom betoken the new age.
- 9** This comes not from the old Eden, but from the new Jerusalem, spreading out to encompass the whole earth with that intimate relationship with God for which we have been made (compare Revelation 21:1–22:5, 7:15–17.)
- 10** Reverts to the kingly figure of **11:1**, unfurling the banner of his rule, and forms the bridge with what follows.

THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE—11:11–16

- 11:11** “In that day”, linking with verse **10**, places all this in the end time.
 “a second time”: the first time was the rescue of Israel from Egypt; this second time will be the redemption of God’s people from all the nations of the world.
 “Assyria...Egypt”: the two great powers that flanked the holy land—Israel’s ancient and contemporary enemies.
 “Pathros...Ethiopia”: regions beyond Egypt.
 “Elam...Shinar”: regions beyond Assyria. (The use of “Shinar”, the ancient name for Babylon, indicates a dating of this prophecy prior to the rise of Babylon as a significant power, and prior to the exile two hundred years later, against some scholars who see this as part of a ‘prophecy’ after the event.)
 “Hamath”: the far northern regions.
 “coastlands of the sea”: the far western end of the Mediterranean.
- 12** The LORD will be faithful to His promises of both judgement and blessing: as He has driven out and scattered His people, so He will bring them back, no matter how far they have gone. (The ultimate fulfilment of this is spoken by Jesus in Matthew 24:29–31.)
- 13** The rankling antagonism between the northern and southern kingdoms will be laid to rest, as they are united in allegiance to the one king, as in the days of David and Solomon (see 2 Samuel 5:1–5, 1 Kings 4:1, 12:16–24, compare Ezekiel 37:15–28).
- 14** The conquest of all the traditional enemies of Israel signifies the coming of the reign of the Prince of peace, fulfilled by the submission of the nations to the gospel (see Acts 15:12–18, Romans 15:15–21).
- 15–16** In a new figurative dividing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:13–31), and a new crossing of the River (Joshua 3:7–4:14—this time the Euphrates River, not just the Jordan), God removes all obstacles to a world-wide return to Himself.

THE SONG OF SALVATION—12:1–6

As the song of Moses and of Miriam followed the rescue from Egypt (Exodus 15:1–21), so this song follows the world-wide redemption (compare Revelation 15:2–4). It also harks back to chapter 6, as Isaiah’s personal response to the salvation he experienced there, rounding off this whole section.

- 12:1** Note once again that both the anger and the comfort are from God. This is not God’s capriciousness, but His determination to press right through His wrath to propitiation on our behalf, to effect reconciliation, not on the basis of our willingness to have Him but on His desire to have us (see 1 John 4:9–10). This is highly securing.
- 2** God’s salvation of us, or God Himself being our salvation, brings faith, and the end of fear (compare 1 John 4:16–19), strength (as in 6:8), and song, as here. This is Isaiah’s own personal testimony and praise. Isaiah then, as in all his prophecy, turns this personal experience to the hope of all God’s people.
- 3** “water”: as in Exodus 15:22–27, 17:1–7 (compare John 4:1–15, 7:37–39).
- 4** The community of the redeemed joins Isaiah in his song of salvation. Thanks for salvation gives rise to constant dependence on God in prayer (compare Psalm 32 esp. verse 8), and the joining in with the proclaiming of His being and actions as sovereign among the nations.
- 12:5** Echoes Exodus 15:1, but the scene is greatly enlarged: not just the shores of the Red Sea, but the boundless realm of the whole earth.
- 6** The address is feminine singular, to the new Jerusalem as the bride, ecstatically rejoicing in the immediacy of her exalted Bridegroom and Husband, the Holy One, the King, the LORD of hosts.

GOD, ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS—13:1–27:13

In the previous section, we have seen hints that the LORD’s rule extends beyond Israel to cover the whole earth (**9:7, 11:9, 10–16**). It is the LORD who determines the life of nations besides Israel: see **8:4, 9:9, 10:5–19, 33–34**. In this next collection of prophecies from various times, Isaiah now goes on to show God’s sovereign rule over all the nations, to serve his purpose of holy love for the whole world, focussed on the nation of Israel. This is consistent with the vision and promise of Genesis 10 and 12:1–3

This section consists of two series of five oracles each, followed by a series of songs and revelations. These three series match up with each other in structure and content to underline the message (from Motyer):

Babylon 13:1–14:27	‘Wilderness of the sea’ (Babylon) 21:1–10	The desolate city 24:1–20
Philstia 14:28–32	Dumah ‘Silence’ (Edom) 21:11–12	The LORD in Zion 24:21–23
Moab 14:1–16:14	Arabia (‘Evening’?) 21:13–17	The great feast 25:1–12

Damascus/Ephraim 17:1–18:7	‘The valley of vision’ (Jerusalem) 22:1–25	The city of God 26:1–21
Egypt 19:1–20:6	Tyre 23:1–18	The final gathering 27:1–13

The first series refers specifically to various nations, the second series is more circumspect, and the third has general application. Babylon and allusions to it head up each series. God’s people occupy fourth place in each series, surrounded by nations from the north, south, east and west. The final one in each series speaks of the nations coming from far and near. (This pattern may just be discerned and imposed by the predilection of the commentator, but it seems time and again Isaiah himself had an eye and feel for this kind of detail. Compare the three series of seals, trumpets, and bowls in the Book of Revelation.)

THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON—13:1–14:27

- 13:1** “oracle...saw”: the word of God brings vision, knowledge and understanding—see above on **1:1** under “The Book of Isaiah”.
 “Babylon”: in Isaiah’s time a small but up-and-coming province of the Assyrian Empire under Merodach-Baladan—see chapter **39**. Isaiah already knew that the destruction predicted for Jerusalem (**1:24–26**, **3:18–4:1**, **5:24–30**, **6:11–13**) would not finally be carried out by the might of Assyria (**10:12–34**). After the visit of the envoys from Babylon in 702 BC (**39:1–7**), the final antagonist is identified. Isaiah begins this section with God’s victory over this arch-enemy (even though, unknown to Isaiah, this was not to take place until 539 BC. See above under “One Isaiah, or three?”). Knowing this, Isaiah then needed to know how the issue of the promises of God regarding David’s family and Jerusalem was to be addressed. This prophecy is part of that answer.
- 2–3** God himself has his armies in place awaiting the signal to enter and take the city. “my proudly exulting ones”: as with Assyria (**10:5–34**), God employs the arrogance of the conquering army to his own ends, even if He disapproves of their arrogance and will call them to account for it.
- 13:4–16** The scene enlarges to depict “the day of the LORD” (verse **6**, compare Amos 5:18–20), the day of final judgement. Yet, as with the apocalyptic teachings of Jesus (eg Mark 13), the final judgement at the end of time, and the specific judgement upon the city in history, are all of a piece, and cannot be separated out. The truth is that the ‘end’ is always just this far above our heads, and ready to break in upon us at the appointed times. Any judgement in history is a manifestation of God’s final judgement upon all humanity. But this final judgement Christ has now borne in his own flesh on the cross, for all who believe (see John 5:24, Romans 8:1–4).
- 17–22** So the end will come upon Babylon, at the appointed time, as it surely did in 539 BC.
- 14:1–2** This will be for the vindication of Israel, in fulfilment of God’s ancient promises. Note how people of other nations will be incorporated into the destiny of Israel, either as fellow citizens, or as captive slaves. (Compare the final victory of Christ in Philippians 2:9–11.) Or it could be that those who have willingly joined themselves to the Lord’s people will be glad to be of service to them in the kingdom of grace and peace that spreads over the whole earth (Motyer).

- 3** “rest”: removal of the curse of the Fall, full security of homeland, effective redemption from slavery—the “sabbath rest” of Hebrews 3–4.
- 4–23** The “taunt [*or* true saying] against the king of Babylon”: A masterful poem. Examination of the words used verify it as the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem, and of pre-exilic origin (Motyer p. 143, note 1), despite attempts by some scholars to characterise it as a ‘prophecy after the event.’ This prophecy has specific historical reference to the king of Babylon who fell finally in 539 BC, but goes beyond that to encompass all oppressors of history, and the universal reality in every age, from ‘Babel’ of Genesis 11 to the ‘Babylon’ of Revelation 17–18, of a grasping and oppressive world-system in league with evil powers, and beyond that to the power of evil that controls it—the fallen angel Satan.
- 4–8** Relief, peace and joy come over the whole world when the LORD lays the tyrant low.
- 9–15** The scene moves to Sheol, the place of the dead, as the Babylonian tyrant arrives there (compare Ezekiel 32:17–31). In the Bible, death is not the end; we still remain ourselves, in a changed state and place. In Sheol, in the Old Testament, we can still be recognised as ourselves. But existence there is diminished in weakness (“shades”), with a loss of earthly powers and status—it is ‘the great leveller’. The dead there await the fullness of the resurrection, revealed in full in the New Testament.
- 11** The grisly reality of death puts paid to earthly self-indulgence in pride and pleasure.
- 12–15** “Day Star”: Canaanite mythology knew of the morning star which attempted to usurp rule over heaven and was subsequently demoted. This becomes a picture here of the pride and fall of the king of Babylon. It has also served for many reading this passage as a picture of the fall of the accusing angel Satan (“Lucifer”, compare Revelation 12:7–12)—the power behind his throne. Here supreme arrogance is met by total ruin, as of some fallen god.
- 16–20a** The taunt over the fallen giant continues from an earthly point of view. He has no memorial or family tomb—his dead body is heaped up ignominiously with all the others slain in battle.
- 20b–23** The LORD himself guarantees that this oppressive reality will not be perpetuated.
- 24–25** To guarantee that all this will be so, even long after the lifetime of those who first heard it, the LORD gives Isaiah a verifiable prophecy that they will see fulfilled in their own day: the end of Assyrian power as it comes against Jerusalem in 702 BC. As they see this come to pass in their own time, so they can be assured of the truth of all that God has said through Isaiah regarding the times to come.
- 26–27** Thus the sovereignty of God over all the earth and over all history is underlined: His purposes are sure.

PHILISTIA AND ZION—14:28–32

- 28** “the year that king Ahaz died”: (compare **6:1**) 715 BC. Ahaz was the one whose refusal of the way of faith and liaison with Assyria brought the end of David’s family as an independent sovereign dynasty and signalled its demise (chapter 7). Perhaps neighbouring Philistia, on the coastal regions to the west, although Israel’s traditional enemy, had sent a message of condolence to Jerusalem, and was making overtures to the new king Hezekiah with a view to a possible alliance against Assyria (see verse **32**: “messengers”). Various Philistine cities were involved in anti-Assyrian uprisings in 734, 720, 711, and 705–701 BC. How was

- Israel to respond? This oracle came in reply. Ahaz may have been faithless, but God remains faithful to His promises (compare Romans 3:4: “Let God be true, though every man be false”).
- 29** “the rod which smote you”: David, and his successors, now under the thumb of the Assyrians. But the Philistines are not to gloat over this demise of their former conqueror. For, like Moses’ rod (see Exodus 4:1–5, 7:8–12), the rod of David will turn into a darting poisonous serpent to them, and they will not survive (**30b**).
- 30** But God’s “firstborn” son (see Exodus 4:22–23) Israel, poor and needy though he be, will be preserved and cared for, while God puts an end to the Philistines, root and branch.
- 31** All the Philistine cities will suffer from the Assyrian invasion, as the army marches in step steadily southward, stirring up a great cloud of dust as it approaches.
- 14:32** So what answer is to be given to the messengers from Philistia? The same answer that Isaiah has been giving all along—the sure promise of God. Israel will not need Philistia’s help, and will not succumb to Philistia’s fate.

GOD WEEPS FOR MOAB—15:1–16:14

Moab, alongside the Dead Sea to the south-east of the land of Israel, was related to Israel through Abraham’s nephew Lot (see Genesis 19:30–38 for Moab’s disreputable origins), and to David through his great-grandmother Ruth (see Ruth 4:13–22). For this reason it may have sought refuge in Israel from the depredations of the Assyrians (**16:1–4a**). Even though it could be this way, Moab’s pride is its downfall.

- 15:1** Ar on the northern border of Moab, and Kir at the centre, are laid waste “in a night”: the devastation of the country is sudden and complete.
- 2** “Dibon...Nebo...Medeba”: widespread devastation or perhaps the northward movement of the refugees, as they seek some comfort from their religion at the shrines on “the high places”.
- 3** Grief and sorrow from war casualties strike into every home.
- 4** These three cities are even further north. Even the hardened soldiers are reduced to tears.
- 5–9** The LORD himself joins in the weeping.
- 5–6** The towns and water-courses and landscape of Moab is no less well known to the Maker of all.
- 7** He sees the refugees pitifully trying to carry away all their life’s possessions.
- 8** He hears their weeping and wailing.
- 9** He sees the river of blood shed in battle. Yet He weeps even as He undertakes to pass further devastating judgement on Moab, as a judge might weep for a murderer as he passes the necessary sentence on him.
- 1–4a** The leaders in desperate panic (reflected in the rhythm of the short Hebrew lines in the poem) send tribute to Judah in an appeal for asylum, especially as the women are so vulnerable in this suffering.
- 4b–5** An assurance is given (from the LORD?) that Judah and David will be the centre of right government (as in **11:1–3**), and thus a refuge for all the nations.
- 16:6** But Moab has no heart or intention to submit to the LORD or to Israel’s king, and this is the reason for the continuing judgement that will ensue (see Genesis 12:3).
- 16:7–11** So the weeping recommences, even more loudly, as the LORD calls upon all to join Him in this fierce sorrow.

- 7 “raisin-cakes”: perhaps meaning all the local delicacies are cut off. Or maybe these were offerings in false worship to other gods (compare Jeremiah 44:19).
- 8–10 Famed national produce and honour among the other nations are stripped away.
- 11 God’s compassionate inner being is racked in agony for this prideful nation, in more than just a token way.
- 12 Over the futility of his unavailing false religion. (Do we share God’s agony for the heathen for their hopeless attempts at alternative religion?)
- 13–14 The final word on Moab comes, making the foregoing general predictions very specific.

DAMASCUS AND EPHRAIM—17:1–18:7

The background to this is 2 Kings 16:1–9, **7:3–9**. Damascus was the capital of Syria (Aram), with whom the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) had entered into an alliance against the southern kingdom of Judah. This oracle signals the destruction of both, and of God’s continuing purposes for them, and for the whole world. Damascus fell in 732 BC and Samaria, the capital of Israel/Ephraim, in 721 BC (2 Kings 17:1–23). Yet the judgements of God are with a view to people returning to God.

- 17:1–2** The bustling city of Damascus will become devoid of population, and its ruins will be left to the flocks of sheep, with no one to frighten them away.
- 3** Ephraim, too, will be caught up in this destruction. Its alliance with ungodly Damascus will give it no security, and Ephraim’s defection from its high calling as the people of the LORD will prevent it from ever bringing any blessing upon Syria. God alone is their “fortress”. Yet, just as God has promised a remnant to Israel (“the glory of the children of Israel”), so too the Gentile nation Syria will, amazingly, be included in the world-wide remnant of the people of God. This now becomes a recurring theme in these chapters.
- 4–6** The first of three sections (“in that day”, see verses 7, 9) that depict what will happen when the demise of Israel (“Jacob”)/Ephraim takes place. First the country wastes away from within, then outside forces come to “harvest” it, and to glean the pickings, until very little is left. The “Valley of Rephaim”, south of Jerusalem, was where the poorest people gleaned what was left over after the harvest.
- 7–8** The effect of this will be a cleansing from idolatry and a return to the Lord: to the One who made them, rather than the things they themselves have made. Note how people seek to make their own way to God in a self-reliant way by setting up altars, seek to draw on god’s power from themselves by setting up the Asherim poles, and seek to cajole God’s favour with offerings of incense. In the face of the reality of God, these will cease to satisfy. Note how the prophecy has now risen above its specific historical setting to be more generally applicable.
- 9–11** God is more reliable than any “strong city”. Desolation comes as a result of not trusting in the saving God alone for provision, protection and strength. By some kind of garden magic the people seek to influence the powers that be to work in their favour. But this brings only a harvest of incurable pain.
- 12–14** Though Assyria is not mentioned by name, these verses reflect the widespread disruption caused by the expansion of the Assyrian empire, and the ill-fated siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701 B.C (chapters **36–37**). But it embodies principles as to who controls the affairs of world history in every age. The restless antagonism of the nations against God (see Psalm 2:2:–6) is likened to the

surging of the seas (compare **57:20**, Revelation 17:1–2, 15), but their disappearance is like a vanishing dust-storm.

14 Compare **37:36**, **10:16–19**.

18:1–7 In 715 B.C. an Ethiopian called Piankhi gained control of Egypt and sought to form alliances with surrounding states against Assyria. Isaiah had already established that this worldly ploy was of no avail in the case of Syria and Ephraim/Israel. Prophetically, he redeploys the ambassadors as messengers of the LORD, with a message for the whole world! He bids them look to the LORD, who in a most self-possessed way presides over all the affairs of nations as He does over the processes of nature. The outcome of His decisive action will be an all-time peace, as the nations from far and near bring tribute to the LORD (as in Revelation 21:22–27).

EGYPT AND THE WORLD UNDER GOD—19:1–20:6

Confronted by the power of Assyria, after the collapse of Syria and Ephraim/Israel, Judah and Jerusalem were tempted to turn to an alliance with the other great super-power, Egypt, Israel's ancient enemy, who had anti-Assyrian ambitions, for help and support. Isaiah, with his message of dependence alone upon the utterly reliable LORD of all the earth, warns against the folly and uselessness of depending upon Egypt (compare chapter **31** and **30:6–7**), and goes on to present a breathtaking vision of God's people being extended to include even the great world powers at present opposed to God's rule.

19:1–15 The collapse of Egypt.

1–4 As the LORD brings His presence to bear on mighty Egypt, the power of the 'gods' and the self-sufficiency of the people are shown up for what they are not, giving rise to internal dissension and civil war, loss of morale, purpose and direction, the resorting to false religion, and political tyranny.

5–10 Economic disaster, as the Nile River, the life-blood of Egypt, is afflicted.

11–15 Confusion and stupidity reign among those in power, brought about by the LORD, of whose wisdom and purposes they are utterly ignorant, until there is nothing that anyone, high or lowly, can do.

16–25 The healing of Egypt. Just as verses **1–15** majored on the LORD's smiting of Egypt, so these verses concentrate on His healing of Egypt (see verse **22**), and its incorporation into the people of God.

16–17 The fear of the Lord (compare v. **1**): as at the time of Sennacherib, there is an acknowledgment that Judah lies at the centre of the holy God's purposes of love and favour.

18 One language and one Lord. In contrast to the disunity and confusion of v. **2**, there is the unity of one language and one worship in Egypt. But it is the language of the land of the people of God, and the worship of their God YHWH. If five specific cities are referred to, we do not know which they are.

19–22 Reconciliation with God (contrast v. **3**). An altar of witness in the land of Egypt (compare Joshua 22) testifies that the people of Egypt belong no less to the God of Israel. They will find that they have a real and effective relationship with God in prayer. They, like the Israelites, will have a direct revelation of God, and will be able to respond fully in worship and service. Far from being under a hard taskmaster (v. **4**), they will find themselves in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, as His true children.

- 23** Highway for unity. No longer under oppression, Egypt will be united with its ancient enemy Assyria in the worship of Israel's God!
- 24** In place of the "spirit of confusion" (v. **14**), Egypt will be in the blessing of God, together with Assyria; one with Israel as "my people", "the work of my hands", "my heritage". The astonishing audacity of this pronouncement prefigures the cleansed and holy unity of all nations in Christ: see Ephesians 1:10, 3:4-6, Revelation 21:22-22:2.
- 20:1-6** How are Isaiah's hearers to know that God will bring such an unlikely thing to happen? At this point in his collected works Isaiah relates a real incident that demonstrated the Lord's power over the nations in their own day. About the time of the fall of the nearby Philistine city of Ashdod to Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) in 711 B.C., in which once again Egypt failed to come to the party, Isaiah was acting out a prophecy he had been given for those in Jerusalem who were scheming to make an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. For three years he walked naked and barefoot in the royal court. In such a way are prophets called to live out their message in their lives, often at great personal cost (eg Hosea 1:2-3, 3:1-2, Ezekiel 4:4-8, 24:15-27). It was a way of saying that this is how Egypt, on whom they were looking to depend, would end up. For three years the schemers and all they were trying to do would have been inescapably confronted by this word of the Lord in the person of Isaiah. The prophecy was borne out in their own time by the defeat of Egypt by Assyria at the battle of Eltekeh in 701 B.C.

GOD, ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS—THE SECOND SERIES—21:1-23:18

Chapters **13-27** consist of three series of five oracles each, dealing with God's actions among the nations with regard to Israel. The first series, chapters **13-20**, mentioned specific nations by name, though rapidly expanded to present a world vision, as it traced God's fulfilment of His promises in all the earth. This second series, chapters **21-23**, while still naming some of the nations, is more circumspect, and focuses more on unrelieved judgement and the coming of darkness.

'THE WILDERNESS OF THE SEA' (BABYLON)—21:1-10

Verse **9** tells us that this relates to the fall of Babylon. The final fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. at the hand of Cyrus, alluded to in chapters **13-14**, naturally comes to mind. But there were a number of other times Babylon fell, at the hand of Assyria: 710 (Sargon II) and 702 (Sennacherib), in response to the rebellion of Merodach-Baladan; 689 (Sennacherib again—these all during the reign of Hezekiah in Jerusalem); and 648 B.C. (Assurbanipal). Elam and Media (v. **2**) were around at this time, mostly as allies of Babylon against Assyria, though Elam was off the scene by 639 B.C., a hundred years before the fall of Babylon to Cyrus. This prophecy seems to fit best the fall of Babylon to Sennacherib in 689 B.C., especially as this was a particularly devastating one (see verses **3-4**), compared with which Cyrus's takeover was relatively peaceful. This prophecy perhaps comes from the time in chapter **39**, when Isaiah is attempting to dissuade Hezekiah from entering into a relationship with the up and coming power of Babylon, which he has been shown is doomed from the start, that Israel might not be caught up in its demise (compare **52:11**, Revelation 18:1-4, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

- 21:1** Pictures of successive dust storms over the Negeb desert to the south of Judah bring to Isaiah's mind another desert area further east by the Persian Gulf: the site of Merodach-Baladan's Babylon.
- 2a** The message is that, contrary to the hopes and schemes of the Babylonians and their allies, Assyria is still going to continue its plunder and destruction unchecked.
- 2b** Isaiah 'listens in' on the envoys from Merodach-Baladan as they seek to convince Judah to join the alliance with Elam and Media, with the promise, made by every prospective new government, of better things to come.
- 3-4** But the prospect that comes to Isaiah is one of shock and horror and appalling devastation, which the prophet feels personally, that Israel could get caught up in if it goes down that way.
- 5** Meanwhile the leaders in Jerusalem, regardless of this, settle the deals with feasting and sabre-rattling speeches.
- 6-9** But Isaiah can be no part of this, for he has been given the exacting calling and responsibility to be God's watchman, day and night, to announce what is really coming—the terrible fall of Babylon.
- 10** So he makes a heart-felt appeal to Judah not to bring yet more suffering upon itself, but to turn and rely solely on the God who has made them His own. So again, on the larger scale, God's people are not to get caught up in the ways and pleasures of the doomed world-city, that seeks to organise its life without regard to its Creator.

DUMAH 'SILENCE' (EDOM)—21:11-12

- 21:11** 'Seir' is the nation of Edom (the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother), south-east of Judah. A lone Edomite seeks prophetic counsel from Isaiah, pictured still on his perch as a watchman (see v. **6-9**).
'what of the night?': we are in darkness—what is going to happen? will it ever end?
- 12** Isaiah's answer does not hold out a lot of immediate hope: the darkness will end, but then more darkness will descend. I cannot tell you when the end will be. It could be a long time. You will have to wait, as I do, and come back later if you want to find out more. Isaiah speaks out of his experience of protracted watching and waiting through dark times, though he knows that the end is sure in God's good purposes. The end will come; the end is not yet (compare the tension in Mark 13:5-6, 28-33). Patient waiting it out is required. So there are times when mature counsellors will not raise false hopes, nor settle on some half-way outcome. There are times when there is not a lot that can be said. So the title 'Dumah'—the land of silence (compare Psalm 94:17, 115:17)—reflects the tone and mood of this poetic oracle.

ARABIA ('EVENING?')—21:13-17

- 21:13** 'Arabia' with a slight change could be translated 'evening'. Or perhaps it is a play on words: the Arabs meet their eventide.
- 13-15** Dedan and Teman were Arab regions hundreds of kilometres south-east of Judah between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Well and truly Gentile regions. This area was caught up in the disruption of the to-ing and fro-ing of armies in the Assyrian times. Here refugees rendered homeless by the clashes of a distant

battlefield seek ministrations among their own kind. The date could be the campaign of Sargon II against these tribes in 715 B.C., or the subduing of them when they joined Merodach-Baladan's rebellion in 703. Moab sought refuge briefly in Judah in **16:1–7**, but refused to come under Israel's God and His king. No less are these Gentiles able to receive any more than temporary help from their own people. The nations of this world are not able finally to solve their own problems or guarantee their own security.

16–17 For the LORD, who commands all these things, and has chosen Israel as the pivot of His actions among the nations, tells His prophet what is to be in a very short while with regard to these regions. Once again, as in **16:14**, a specific event is prophesied within a definite time-scale ('hireling' is one on a fixed contract, not with permanent employment, ie it will come to a definite termination), to bear out the truth of the longer-term predictions.

'THE VALLEY OF VISION' (JERUSALEM)—**22:1–25**

The self-sufficient self-reliance of this-worldly security—in city, individual and family life—is condemned in Jerusalem.

22:1–14 The city.

1–2a 'valley of vision': an allusive title to Jerusalem (see verses **4–11**), though it is not mentioned by name. The strong impression given to Isaiah, so different from that embraced by the people is of the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4).

'tumultuous city': a picture of celebration and self-congratulation, perhaps at the completion of the engineering defence marvels of verses **8–11**, before the invasion by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.

2b–3 What Isaiah sees coming to Jerusalem in the future is very different. Fulfilled in the events of 597 B.C. (see 2 Kings 25:4).

4 Isaiah is incapable of joining in their celebrations, as they are incapable, in their present condition, of understanding his grief or participating in his mourning (compare Ecclesiastes 7:2).

'the destruction of the daughter of my people': a touching and affectionate way of speaking about the city of Jerusalem. Compare Jeremiah 8:21, 9:1, Lamentations 2:11, 4:10.

22:5–7 The siege and destruction of Jerusalem is envisaged.

'the Lord of hosts has a day': compare **2:11**.

'Elam...Kir': Isaiah came to know that Babylon, not Assyria, would be the final destroyer (see chapter **39**). Elam, beyond the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was at that time an ally of Babylon. Kir is an unknown region, perhaps near the Caspian Sea. The picture is of armies from afar surrounding Jerusalem for the final showdown, and may have ultimate reference to something wider than just the historical Jerusalem (see **17:12–14**, **13:4–16**, Revelation 20:7–10). Though here, characteristically in this section, there is no mention of any relief.

8–11 The Jerusalem water supply was notoriously vulnerable under attack (see on **7:3**), and the defence measures taken by Hezekiah are well-known, and remain in part to this day (see 2 Kings 20:20, 2 Chronicles 32:2–4, 30—also written from a prophetic perspective, which sets no great store by such things). Isaiah sees these things in the context of the actions of God (**8a**, **11b**). Jerusalem is looking to these things, rather than to God and His promises and purposes concerning Jerusalem. Perhaps the very vulnerability of Jerusalem and its water supply were

intended by God to engender a perpetual attitude of faith and dependence. Reliance on their own security measures achieved nothing to ensure Jerusalem's ultimate safety in the end, and was not what saved them from the threat by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.

'you broke down the houses to fortify the wall': defence spending can be very costly and debilitating [\$1000 million a day worldwide (1984–85 figures). 'For the cost of the MX missile system, 50 million malnourished children could be fed, 65,000 health care centres and 340,000 primary schools could be built.' (*War and Peace*, Discussion Paper No. 1, Social Issues Committee, Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Anglican Information Office, 1986)].

12–14 Rather than exultation, there should have been repentance and turning to the LORD. Instead there was escapism into shallow pleasure and partying that sees no future beyond the present and no reality beyond the flesh (compare 1 Corinthians 15:32). Isaiah knew personally that there can be forgiveness where there is repentance (**6:5–7**). To ignore God and one's own condition before him, to see no need for repentance, is the unforgivable sin. (This becomes even more sharply focussed in the presence of Jesus and our personal response to him, see Mark 3:28–30.).

22:15–25 An individual, a family, and the nation.

15–19 Shebna the steward mirrors the self-serving attitude of Israel, which trusts itself rather than the LORD. Individual judgement foreshadows the judgement that will come on the nation.

15 'over the household': an important position, virtually prime minister or chancellor of the exchequer (see 2 Chronicles 26:21).

16 As well as surrounding himself with the trappings of power ('splendid chariots' verse **18**, compare Absalom, 2 Samuel 15:1, in the light of the warnings in Deuteronomy 17:14–16, 20:1, 1 Samuel 8:10–12), Shebna sought to make a memorial name for himself in history by preparing for himself a magnificent tomb (compare Genesis 11:4, Habbakkuk 2:9, Haggai 1:2–4).

17–18 The tomb will never be used, for Shebna will die in a foreign land, presumably as a prisoner of war at the hands of the Assyrians.

19–25 The fall of Shebna and the rise of Eliakim.

19–21 When the two next appear together in chapter **36**, Eliakim already holds Shebna's former position, and Shebna has been demoted to secretary.

22 In charge of everything that opens and shuts (compare Revelation 3:7).

23–25 Eliakim's family will move in and take advantage of his position ('nepotism'—jobs for the boys, and girls!—an abuse that is unsustainable). They will fall, and so will the nation that looks to anyone but God for its security and salvation (compare **2:22**, Jeremiah 17:3–8).

TYRE AND SIDON—23:1–18

Tyre, on the coast north of Israel, was the merchant capital of the Mediterranean, with great wealth and power gained through trading by sea. Tyre had good relationships with kings David and Solomon of Israel (around 1000 B.C.) and, on a commercial basis, had helped to build the temple in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 5:1–12, but also 1 Kings 9:10–13). However, Tyre was also a corrupting influence on Israel's religion, through the marriage of Solomon with Sidonian wives and his worship of their goddess Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:1–5, still there in the

reign of Josiah 620 B.C. 2 Kings 23:13), and the evil influence of the Sidonian princess Jezebel, married to Ahab king of the northern kingdom of Israel (874–853 B.C.), who almost successfully substituted the worship of Baal for that of YHWH (1 Kings 16, 18). Nevertheless, there is a hope that Tyre, despite its preoccupation with profit at all costs (see Amos 1:9), will have an honoured place among the nations in the enlarged Israel (Psalms 45, 87), and freely place its wealth at the disposal of God’s people, as here in v.18.

- 23:1** Tyre is mentioned by name. Despite the allusive nature of this series of oracles, these things are happening to real people.
 ‘Tarshish’: a far-off place, possibly Tartessos in Spain, probably associated with mining and treatment of minerals, which served as a major source of Tyre’s wealth.
 ‘Cyprus’: ships on the way home learn that there is no home to return to.
- 2–3** The merchants whose trading routes reached far and wide now stand immobilised by shock and dismay.
- 4** The sea, the ‘mother’ of Tyre and its wealth, has been rendered childless by military invasion, and is unable to replace those who have been lost.
- 5–7** Those in the far reaches and colonists in the trading settlements who cashed in on Tyre’s commercial activities are now deeply deprived, since this proud ancient power is removed.
- 8–9** All this is in the purpose of the King of kings and Lord of lords, to bring down all oppressive and self-sufficient pride.
- 10–11** Those regions held in check for the purposes of Tyre’s profiteering are now released.
- 12** Reduced to the status of a refugee, Tyre now will find no place to settle.
- 13** This difficult verse could be saying that it would be Babylon, not Assyria, that finally devastated Tyre ([N]RSV, GNB). The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar began a wearing 13-year siege in 586 B.C. (described prophetically in Ezekiel 26–28), but Tyre did not finally fall until 332 B.C. to Alexander the Great. It may make more sense to see here a prophetic reference to the Assyrian Sennacherib in Isaiah’s own time laying waste to the mainland around Tyre and Sidon in 701 B.C., which did irreparable damage to Tyrian trade. So the reference here to the Chaldeans may well be saying to Tyre (as in NIV), Look at what the Assyrians are doing to Babylon (see on 21:1–10 above), and do you think you will escape?
- 14** compare verse 1. This lament brackets the oracle, reminding the Tyrians that their security will be gone.
- 15–18** ‘seventy years’: from 701 to the decline of Assyria in 630 B.C., Tyre remained in military and economic subjection, but then was able to reassert its former trading dominance. Isaiah predicts her return to glory, and still sees her as a ‘harlot’ at the financial beck and call of all the nations (compare ‘Babylon’ as a commercial world power in Revelation 17–18). But he also foresees a time when all her rich resources will be made available—freely this time—for the kingdom and the people of God (compare Jesus in Matthew 11:21–22).
 ‘dedicated to the LORD’: literally ‘holiness to the LORD’ as in on the high priest’s turban in Exodus 26:36–38. Foreshadowed in **2:2–4**, **45:14–25**, and **60:1–14**, this is finally fulfilled in Revelation 21:24–26.

SONGS OF TWO CITIES—THE THIRD SERIES—24:1–27:13

In this series of songs Isaiah rises above the particular historical circumstances to set out the issues of world history and the place of God's people in the course of all that. He focusses on the pictures of two cities, representing a world of human evil seeking to live from itself apart from God, and the divine gathering of God's people.

THE DESOLATE CITY AND THE REMNANT OF GOD'S PEOPLE—24:1–20

- 24:1–3** 'the earth': this prophecy has to do with more than just Israel and specific nations: it sees and draws out the universal implications, and intimates the end of all things as we know them.
- 2** Every aspect of human life—religious, domestic and commercial—is under threat (compare Luke 17:26–30, 1 Corinthians 7:29–31).
- 1, 3** This will be by the word and action of the LORD.
- 4–6** The reason is given in **5b**. Human moral transgression gives rise to environmental pollution, and the creation's repugnance at evil (see Genesis 3:17–19, Romans 8:19–23, Leviticus 18:24–30). But deeper than that is human rejection of the 'everlasting covenant' relationship with God that lies at the heart of God's creative and redemptive activity, as spelled out to Noah (Genesis 9:8–17), Abraham (Psalm 105:7–11), Moses (eg Leviticus 24:5–9), David (2 Samuel 23:1–7), and with regard to the coming Messiah (**55:3, 61:1–9**, see also Jeremiah 31:31–37, 33:19–26). This brings horrific consequences (see Leviticus 26:3–45, Deuteronomy 11:26–28, 27:11–29:1), yet in God's grace and faithfulness to His covenant there are still some remaining.
- 7–12** The song of the doomed city (compare **5:11–12, 22:1–2, 12–14**) is stilled, and its joy taken away. It is shown up as 'the city of chaos' (*tohu*, as in Genesis 1:2—unformed, without order, meaning, or purpose. See also the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9, and Jeremiah 4:22–28). This is the ultimate progression from **13:1–22** and **21:1–10**, which is capped off in Revelation 17–18.
- 13–16a** The 'few' in verse **6** become a gleanings from God's harvest, a great multitude coming in from 'the ends of the earth'. They come to 'give glory...to the name of the LORD, the God of Israel', not to any other gods. They sing a very different song: 'of glory to the Righteous One'. 'The incoming remnant are primarily aware of the righteousness of the God who has saved them. In other words, his saving mercies are grounded in the satisfaction of his justice, not in the expression of his love'! (Motyer)—it is the satisfaction of the conscience that enables us to rest in His love.
- 16b** Meanwhile the prophet feels deeply in his own person the wasting effects of human treachery and sin (compare **21:3–4, 22:4**).
- 17–20** For the earth will be 'rent asunder' under the weight of human rebellion ('transgression' verse **20**), and there will be no escape (compare Amos 5:19, 9:1–4).

THE LORD IN ZION—24:21–23

- 21** Divine judgement is announced upon rebellious powers celestial and terrestrial.
- 22** Punishment will come 'after many days', so there is still a period of waiting. Compare 1 Peter 3:18–20, 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6–7.

- 23** In the midst of this darkness a light appears, so brilliant as to outshine the sun and moon—it will be God Himself as King in Jerusalem! (compare Revelation 21:22–22:5).

THE GREAT FEAST—25:1–12

The Lord now brings the rescued nations to be His people in Zion. The ‘songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One’ (24:16), that they sing as they come, are spelled out, and the glorious outcome is described. The proud self-reliance of Moab (16:6) and the inadequacy of Gentile collective security (21:13–17), of the corresponding oracles in the first two series, are replaced by the rewarded waiting for the salvation that comes from God (verse 9).

- 25:1–5** This song begins, as did 12:1–6 (compare 6:8), with an individual voice, which swells into the communal song of the saved.
- 1** ‘wonderful things, plans formed of old’: compare ‘Wonderful Counsellor’ (9:6)—actions of God, beyond human reach, according to God’s wisdom, which is utterly reliable (see also 44:6–8).
- 2–3** This refers to the worldly ‘city of chaos’ (disorder, meaninglessness, see 24:1–12), whose ruins the pilgrims pass through on their way to the true city of God (compare Hebrews 11:8–16, 1 Peter 1:1–5).
- 3** ‘strong peoples...cities’: should be singular. Even though they do not trust in God, the ‘strong’ and ‘ruthless’ people of this world, who have sought to make their own way without reference to God, will still be brought to respect and fear God (compare Philippians 2:10–11: ‘every knee shall bow...every tongue confess’).
- 4–5** ‘poor...needy’: (compare 10:1–2) those who have been oppressed and deprived at the hands of the ruthless. God is more than equal to any kind of threat, and the raucous and fearsome song of the ruthless appears to be effortlessly stilled when God comes with relief (compare Revelation 20:7–10).
- 6–10a** The great feast spread by the hand of God, in direct contrast with the scant fare that the nations are able to scrape together for themselves (21:14). Prefigured by the covenant banquet in Exodus 24:1–11.
- 6** ‘wine on the lees...well refined’: the wine is so rich and well-matured that sediment has formed, but this has been carefully filtered out.
- 7–8** This is no ordinary feast, for it comes about as a result of the universal removal of death and sin, and God personally attends to healing the griefs of each individual who comes. Death as curse is removed (see Genesis 2:17, 3:19, 22–23, Romans 3:23, Hebrews 2:14–15, Revelation 21:3–4). In contrast with the cyclical Canaanite nature religions, this is a one-for-all event. This is the feast Jesus was looking to as he approached his own death and resurrection (see Matthew 26:26–29).
- 9** ‘this is our God...this is the LORD’: personal experience matches objective reality.
- 10a** God’s hand is on Zion for blessing.
- 10b–12** The prideful refusal of Moab to come under the secure sovereignty of the LORD (16:6) prefigures the destiny of all who attempt to keep themselves afloat and make their own security. This refusal matches the ‘unforgivable sin’ of 22:12–14.

THE CITY OF GOD—26:1–21

We now see the true city to which God will bring His people. It is clear that it has been built and secured by God Himself. So access to it is only by faith in Him. It is God who brings them into it, and who destroys the false city of self-pride. The inhabitants of the true city, in this interim time of waiting, are still aware of God's judgements in all the earth, the strong resistance of those who refuse God's way of faith, and their own ineffectiveness in the face of all this. They look to God's promised victory over death to bring life even to the lifeless peoples of the doomed city. Meanwhile they count themselves secure in God as the final judgement is unrolled.

- 26:1** 'strong city': not just for the time being, but literally 'a city of strength'—as a foundational attribute. This because it is God who 'sets up salvation' as its surrounds and defences.
- 2–4** 'righteous': not those who are sinlessly perfect (see verses **16, 18**), but those who are in a right relationship with God by faith in what God has done, is doing and will do (compare Genesis 15:5–6, hence **7:4, 9b, 28:16, 30:15**, and Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, 3:20–30, 4:1–25, Galatians 3:6–14, Hebrews 10:35–11:40). So access to the true city of God and participation in its life is fully and simply by this faith.
- 'faith': literally 'faiths', implying amplitude and fullness.
- 'perfect peace': literally 'peace peace'—thoroughgoing, as distinct from false or disturbed peace (compare **57:19**, contrast **57:21**, Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11).
- 'mind': signifies mindset or whole attitude in life (contrast Genesis 6:5). Hence repentance in the New Testament is the Greek *metanoia*, literally a 'change of mind' or heart attitude in life.
- 'stayed': a constant steady purposefulness which is an attribute of God (Psalm 111:7–8 'established') and a gift to human creatures (Psalm 112:6–8). Even the staying of our mind on God comes and is sustained from Him rather than from ourselves. For in Him is 'an everlasting rock'—He is the essence of dependable steadiness of purpose.
- 26:5–6** 'the lofty city': compare **2:12–17, 24:10, 25:2**—the world organised without or in opposition to God. Isaiah is now talking almost wholly in principles rather than geographical locations.
- 'poor...needy': (see **25:4–5**) here emphasising the inability of those made victorious by God to wreak this victory for themselves.
- 7–9** Still in the world, though not of it (compare John 17:14–15) the righteous-by-faith know that it is God's own righteousness that enables them to walk in this way of right relationship towards the goal for which they long (compare Psalms 63:1, 107:7).
- 'judgements': (verses 8, 9) may mean God's commands and pronouncements, or God's moral actions, or both. As the people of God live according to God's commandments, or submit to God's disciplinary actions, there is a powerful witness in the earth.
- 10–11a** The refusal of the wicked to know God (see **6:9–10**, Romans 1:18): God shows them favour (as in Matthew 5:45), and they do not learn (Romans 1:21–22); God is straightforward with them, and they seek perverse ways (as in Ecclesiastes 7:25, Titus 1:15), God performs His mighty actions, and they do not see (Luke 16:31).

- 11b** ‘Let them see’: possibly better translated ‘They will see...!’ (as in Philippians 2:10–11, Matthew 25:30—the final clear distinction between God’s people and God’s enemies, as in 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10). Isaiah personally knows what that ‘fire’ can do: **6:6–7**.
- 12** The righteous-by-faith know that salvation and all that follows from it is of the Lord, and they themselves are incapable of it. Compare John 3:27, 21.
- 13–15** ‘other lords’: other governing nations, and their idols, against whom God has won great victories in Israel’s history, such as Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Ammon, and Assyria. The one who does something is the one who gets the glory for it—in this case God alone, for the sake of His own name (see Ezekiel 36:22–23).
- 16–18** At the same time, God’s people are painfully aware of God’s needful judgements upon them, and of their own ineffectiveness, in that, despite their calling and promised potential, they have made little headway in helping to bring the ungodly to their senses.
‘poured out a prayer’: has the sense of barely being able to whisper (compare Romans 8:26). Recalls the time of the Judges.
- 19** Yet there is hope that God will bring even those nations under judgement into His light and life. This verse most likely refers back to the inhabitants of the doomed ‘lofty city’ in verses **5–6**. It may refer figuratively to new birth (as in John 3:3–10, Ephesians 2:1–10). But in the light of God’s defeat of death at the world-wide gathering of **25:6–9**, it also looks towards full bodily resurrection (compare Job 19:25–27, Daniel 12:2, John 5:24–29, 8:51, 11:25–26, Luke 20:27–38, Acts 23:6–8, 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 5:1–5, Revelation 20:11–15).
- 20–21** ‘shut your doors’: contrast verse **2** ‘open your gates’. God’s people are to be secured during the final judgement and exposure of all evil by God, which here has overtones of the Flood (Genesis 7:1, 16) and the Passover in Egypt (Exodus 12:12, 22–23).
‘iniquity’: inward secret sins. ‘blood shed’: outward flagrant crimes. All will be exposed, and ‘the earth’, God’s structurally sound creation, will no longer be able to keep it hidden, but will actively co-operate with God’s morally purposive action (as in **1:2–3**, **24:5** Leviticus 18:24–30).

THE FINAL GATHERING—**27:1–13**

We come now to the final song in the third of the three series of oracles that began in **13:1**. As in the companion oracles (see **19:24–25** and **23:18**), this closes in **27:12–13** with a prophecy of the gathering in of God’s people from as far afield as Mesopotamia and Egypt.

- 27:1** ‘Leviathan the fleeing serpent’: pictured as a monster flying through the air; ‘Leviathan the twisting serpent’: pictured as a snake coiling on the earth; and ‘the dragon that is in the sea’: the monster of the deep. Compare **24:21–22**, where God brings punishment upon the natural and supernatural forces in heaven and earth. ‘Leviathan’ (see Job 3:8) signifies the dark and unruly powers that seek to disrupt and destroy, over which we have no control. For the land-lubber Israelites—see 1 Kings 9:26–28, 22:48–49—and in Canaanite mythology) this was symbolised particularly by all that is unknown and threatening about the sea (though seafarers themselves are no less wary of the ‘dragons of the deep’). The fact that there are such ‘monsters’ as the hippopotamus and the crocodile (which is how ‘Behemoth’ and ‘Leviathan’ are sometimes translated in Job 40 and 41) feed

these conceptions. But their knowledge of God's control over the waters in creation (Genesis 1:2, 6–10, Psalm 104:5–9, Job 38:8–11, Psalm 107:23–32), and in their rescue from Egypt (Psalm 74:12–14, **51:9–10**), enabled them to see these dark and horrific forces as not more than a part of God's creation, fully subject to the Creator-Redeemer (Psalm 104:24–26, Job 40–41), and objects, as here, of his ultimate conquest. Here identified with the 'serpent' of Genesis 3:1–15, and so with Satan and his minions in Revelation 12–20. See further Ephesians 2:2, Luke 22:3, 53, Colossians 2:13–15, Revelation 10:1–3.

- 2–6** The song of the vineyard—compare **5:1–7**.
- 2** 'In that day': this is now the end-time, when a restored Eden fills the whole earth. 'A pleasant vineyard': compare **5:1**: 'on a very fertile hill'.
- 3** 'keeper...water it...guard it': compare **5:2**. God holds nothing back in His loving-care for His people.
- 4** 'I have no wrath': contrast **5:2c–7**. All wrath is now ended, and its purposes achieved. Compare **40:2**, Galatians 3:13–14, Romans 8:1–4.
- 4–5** 'thorns and briars': God would still be willing to take on any enemies in the cause of His people. (See also Genesis 3:17–18, Matthew 27:29.) Yet even these fierce and hurtful enemies may come and take refuge in the living God (as Moab could have in **16:4–5**) and be at peace with Him—such is His appeal and the power of His redemption.
- 6** Thus Israel as God's people will encompass all nations and fill the earth with fruitfulness (compare Psalms 67, 87).
- 7–11** God explains how this will come about: through a wonderful removal of sin (compare **25:7–8**) and a devastating victory over the evil world-city (see **24**).
- 7–8** God has never dealt with Israel as fiercely as He has with Israel's enemies (eg Egypt at the Red Sea, or Assyria in **37:36**). He has never made a full end of Israel, as He well might have. Instead He has used the scattering of exile and captivity to discipline them strongly.
- 9** This is an instance of God's forbearance, which is given to lead to repentance (see 2 Peter 3:9). God's forbearance is not to be confused with God's forgiveness, which can only come about by a full atonement being made. But God's forbearance, as here, leads us on to God's total forgiveness, 'the guilt of Jacob will be expiated...the removal of his sin' (see Romans 3:23–26), and can be for us a sure sign of its coming (as in 2 Peter 3:15).
- 9b** This will be the end of false worship—of false ways of seeking God's strength and favour—for God's own way of bringing His favour and strength to us judges them all. Indeed, once full atonement has been made, sacrifices of any kind will not be necessary for this purpose, and altar stones will become a redundant item.
- 27:10-11** 'fortified city': people's attempts to secure themselves in the alternative evil world city have come to nothing, as deserted ruins, where even the trees do not survive. This matches the barrenness of hearts that have refused to see and accept God's true way of repentance and forgiveness unto life, and so have placed themselves outside the mercy of the One who formed them of clay and breathed His life into them (see Genesis 2:7, 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10).
- 12–13** Compare 19:23–25.
- 12** 'from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt': the boundaries of the land promised to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 15:18) and occupied by David.

‘trumpet’: as on the day of Jubilee, for release from slavery and return to homelands.

‘land of Assyria...land of Egypt’: from beyond the borders of Israel, the extent of the known world, to include Gentile nations, even from the lands of the past and present oppressors of God’s people.

‘lost...driven’: the harassed and helpless sheep are brought to the fold of Israel (as in Ezekiel 34:12, Matthew 9:36–37, John 10:16, Ephesians 3:4–6).

GOD ACTING IN HISTORY—28:1–37:38

After a section in which Isaiah has made some amazing predictions which would have seemed most improbable to his hearers—that the great and oppressive imperial powers of Egypt and Assyria will end up as part of God’s people (**19:24–25, 27:13**)—the prophet now sets out ways in which his predictions were strikingly fulfilled, in an interim way, in their own time, by the direct action of God. This is to encourage the hearers in hope regarding the more far-reaching aspects of Isaiah’s prophecy. (Just as in our own day we could point to the remarkable and unexpected collapse of Soviet communism, in answer to many decades of concerned prayer, to encourage belief in God’s sovereignty over all human affairs now, and in the ages to come.) We have already seen other specific prophecies which served in this same way, relating to Assyria **14:24–27**, Moab **16:13–14**, Egypt **20:1–6**, Kedar **21:16–17**, Shebna and Eliakim **22:15–25**, Tyre **23:17**. God never leaves Himself without prophetic witness (see Amos 3:7)! The broad principles are set out in chapters **28–29**. In **30–32** Egypt and Assyria are mentioned by name, and placed side by side with the coming kingdom of the Messiah. In **33–35**, these specific acts of God set the pattern for God’s saving actions in the end-time, and in **36–37** the actual historical fulfilment is related as grounds for present hope in these promises yet to come.

THE ‘SURE FOUNDATION’—28:1–29

28:1–6 A prophecy relating to the destruction of Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel (‘Ephraim’ verse **1**), which happened in 721 B.C. in Isaiah’s own day (see 2 Kings 18:9–12, 17:6–23) is generalised to show the replacement of false pride and indulgence with God’s true trust and rule.

1 ‘Woe’: compare **6:5**. The first in another series of six ‘woes’ (**28:1, 29:1, 15, 30:1, 31:1, 33:1** (compare **5:8–23**—things are still the same).

1, 3 ‘proud crown’: Ephraim’s false and complacent trust in its own self-sufficient predominance; contrast verses **5–6**, where the LORD Himself and His rule is the true trust and dependability.

‘drunkards...overcome with wine’: pride and complacency give rise to irresponsible over-indulgence—as was the case before the fall of Samaria (see Amos 6:1–8).

‘fading flower’: the party is over.

2 ‘one who is mighty and strong’: Assyria is not mentioned here by name, as Isaiah sets out the general principles of God’s actions in history. Prideful complacent revelry is swept away as in a flood (eg literally in Katherine, Northern Territory, Australia in 1998).

28:3–4 ‘like a first-ripe fig’: the way the new-season fruit is gobbled up. Behind this may also be the reminder that the first-fruits belong to God (Deuteronomy 26:1–11)—emphasising this again as an action of God.

- 5–6** God is the true ‘crown’ of His people—their true trust and dependency—and His rule is just and right. The perishable wreath is replaced by the imperishable (compare 1 Corinthians 15:50–58).
 ‘him who sits in judgement’: a hint of the coming king, who rules with a right judgement in all things (**11:1–5**).
 ‘the gate’: the place of judgement, and the focus of the city’s defences in war.
- 7–8** As in Ephraim before the fall of Samaria, so also in Jerusalem in Isaiah’s day (see **5:11–12, 21–23, 22:8–14**), those who rule and make decisions are swallowed up (‘confused’) by what they swallow, and prophets and priests are incapable of giving a clear word and right judgement.
- 9–10** Isaiah is scorned by these drunken leaders for the elementary simplicity of his message (see on **6:9–10** above)—like teaching ABC to kindergarten children. In keeping with his commission, Isaiah is simply setting forth repeatedly in a systematic way the truths of God’s revelation. Their repetition in the Hebrew mocks it to sound a bit like ‘goo-gar’ baby-talk.
- 11–13** So, if they will not understand and accept what is quite plain, then they will be taught a lesson—through the unintelligible language of foreign invaders coming upon them in judgement!
 (Quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:21–25, in a discussion on the use of ‘tongues’, where, consistent with Isaiah, he draws a distinction between those who want to hear, to whom the word comes prophetically, and those who refuse to hear, to whom the word comes in judgement as unintelligible sounds.)
- ‘rest...repose’: Isaiah’s consistent call to faith and trust in God and His promises as the nation’s true security, even in the midst of the pressures of international politics, is the message they have been mocking and denying. (Compare Matthew 11:29.)
- ‘backward’: contrary to their thinking, this is not the way of progress.
- 14–22** Their political alliances will be broken against the sure rock of faith in God and His promises.
- 15** ‘covenant with death’: a veiled reference to their attempted alliance and security pact with Egypt against Assyria. Would they have called it that? Probably not, any more than they would have admitted to ‘lies’ and ‘falsehood’. They certainly felt that this alliance would secure them against the ravages of conquest and death. Yet in reality it was the signing of their own death warrant.
- 16** A key verse in Isaiah about the way of trust, relating to God’s promises concerning Jerusalem as the place of His habitation, and the royal house of David as the eternal guarantee. As in **7:3–9**, see also **30:15–16**.
 (Taken up in the New Testament, in connection with Zechariah 3:9 and Psalm 118:22–23, with reference to Jesus Christ: Romans 9:31–33, 10:9–11, 1 Corinthians 3:11, 1 Peter 2:4–8. See also **8:13–14**, Mark 12:9–11.)
 ‘foundation’: still hidden underground (compare 2 Corinthians 5:7).
 ‘haste’: panic, rushing around. (Compare Luke 10:38–42.)
- 17** ‘justice...righteousness’: against which injustice and unrighteousness are seen to be deficient and wrong.
 ‘hail...waters’: compare **28:2, 8:6–8**.
- 18–19** Compare verse **15**: their security pact will no longer preserve them from death. Day after day its worthlessness will be shown up. Unlike the time of the Passover, it will afford them no protection by day or by night.

- ‘message’: compare verse 9. They have foolishly exchanged a message of rest for a message of terror.
- 20 If you make your own bed (as an alternative resting-place) you must lie in it. But all our own efforts give rise to nightmarish inadequacy.
- 21 ‘Perazim...Gibeon’: the site of great victories by David over the Philistines—see 1 Chronicles 14:8–17.
 ‘strange...alien’: by contrast, the LORD will now be turning against His people, rather than fighting for them.
 (Even more strange and alien is God’s work in the cross, by which He withholds not His own Son, and lays our iniquity on Him—see 53:6, 10, Romans 8:32, 1 Corinthians 1:23.)
- 28:22 If they persist in their mocking, they will lock themselves into that bondage, and succumb to the coming destruction. Even so, this is an appeal for even the scoffers to desist and come to repentance. Not to prevent the calamity, for it is already decreed, but as the only way to prepare for it (compare Psalm 2:10–11).
- 23–29 The chapter began as a prophecy concerning Ehpraim/Israel and its capital Samaria, destroyed by the Assyrian Army in 721 B.C., but with the implication that Judah and Jerusalem were in a similar condition. These verses possibly address the question as to whether the same fate will befall Jerusalem at this time? The answer is given in an oblique way, that emphasises the appropriateness of all God’s sovereign actions in history.
- 23 Words of wisdom are to follow—compare eg Proverbs 1:20–23.
- 24–25 Ploughing (= the action of judgement) is not an end in itself, but is with a view to the crop and the harvest. The farmer knows what he is doing—and so does God.
- 26 Yet it is not that God is like the farmer: it is the farmer who has learned or discovered all this from God, revealing Himself in His creation (see Romans 1:19–20).
- 27–28 All grain has to go through the threshing process, but there is an appropriate and measured treatment for each kind of grain.
- 29 Again, this displays the nature of God, the ‘Wonderful Counsellor’ (9:6). The implication, in answer to the question, is that God will do exactly what is fitting for Jerusalem, according to His wise purposes of holy love.

JUDGEMENT AND DELIVERANCE IN ZION—29:1–24

- 29:1–8 These verses clearly bring to mind the events of chapters 36–37, the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib in 701 B.C. and the last-minute deliverance, and so may have originated in a prophecy a year or two before that. But in the present setting these events are nowhere mentioned by name. Rather, Isaiah is once again setting forth principles by which God acts towards His people.
- 1 ‘Ariel’: ‘hearth of God’, referring to the altar of sacrifice in the sanctuary, where the fire burned continually. The place where the animal, representing the sinful offerer, is burned up (see 33:14), and, as such, the place of grace and favour to the released and forgiven sinner. Isaiah personally knew it as both (6:4–7). Here it is a fitting cryptic allusion to Jerusalem (‘Zion’ verse 7).
 ‘year to year...feasts’: the passage of time, and the routine celebration of the religious festivals will not stave off the impending judgement.
- 2–3 The siege of the city and the distress it causes will be God’s own action against it (compare 2 Chronicles 36:15–21. See also 10:5–15, Acts 2:23). In every event we

- are personally confronted by God. Motyer: 'We live by faith, not by working the system'!
- 'like an Ariel': a place where the consuming fire of God's holy love burns—in judgement and deliverance (see verses 5–8).
- 4 This calls forth prayer, however weak and feeble (compare Psalm 130:1, Romans 8:26–27, 37:14–20).
- 5–8 Deliverance comes from the Lord in a sudden and by no means uncertain manner. (Compare 37:36–38, but also the constant use of 'immediately' in Mark's gospel, and the final denouement in Revelation 20:7–10.)
- 6 Expressions of God's supreme control over all the elements of His creation, and of His great power.
- 7 The fearsome threat becomes like a dream to those who were threatened.
- 8 The purposes and ambitions of the threatening powers become like a lost dream to the threatening powers. God and His purposes are the true waking reality.
- 9–14 Physical judgement and deliverance of the city (verses 1–8) is now paralleled by spiritual judgement and deliverance. Remember 6:9–10: the repetition of the message from God to those who do not want to hear and obey it may precipitate the final hardening of hearts against it. Thus this is an action of God through His word. Those who have lived through a mighty act of God in history still may not see it as such, and will come up with their own alternative explanation. Yet even from this parlous condition the Lord undertakes to deliver them.
- 9 In 28:7 their confusion and inability to discern the words and actions of God were brought about by over-indulgence in wine. Here the root cause is identified as something deeper: a determination not to see or understand. The second half of the verse should read: 'they are drunk...they do stagger'.
- 10 Those who by their own choice refuse to hear or see will in God's judgement be made incapable of seeing and hearing. (Compare 1 Kings 22:1–23, where God sends a lying spirit into the false prophets to tell Ahab what he much prefers to hear and so to entice him to his death.)
- 11–12 So the message has become like a sealed book handed to two types of people: those who can read, and cannot be bothered opening it, and those who cannot read, and cannot be bothered trying to learn how to.
- 13 Compare Matthew 15:1–9, where Jesus quotes this verse. Formal religion and morality can be a deadly way of keeping oneself at arm's length from God.
- 14 God's 'wonderful and marvellous' deliverance from this terrible state entails first of all the removal and rendering ineffective of the alternative human explanations and understandings. This in itself is a great liberation, though a highly unsettling one. This is enlarged upon in the next 'woe', verses 15–24.
- 15–24 God's 'marvellous' works against those who seek to make their own arrangements in life apart from God, against the blindness and deafness that entails, and the injustices that issue from it, will amazingly issue in wisdom and teachableness.
- 15 Although they probably would not see it this way themselves, those who habitually live as if they are accountable only to themselves are depicted as being intent on attempting to hide themselves in the dark from the all-seeing eye of the LORD.
- 16 In this they are reversing the role and position of the creature and the Creator, as the creature denies or passes judgement on the Creator (a perennial phenomenon,

- compare Jeremiah 18:1–12, Romans 9:20–21). God’s position, creative action and wisdom are all called into question.
- 17** Regardless of this, God’s actions will cause a complete turn-around. What is regarded as wild and natural will be transformed into a garden, compared with which the results of cultivation by human hands will be regarded as a wilderness. So God’s renewal of the whole creation (see Romans 8:19–23, Revelation 21:5) will far outshine all human efforts to create our own ‘Eden’.
- 18** Contrast verses **9–11**. The judgement of inability to see or understand will be reversed.
- 19–21** The fortunes of the humiliated and needy (compare **10:2**) are reversed over against those who have oppressed them by pitiless and scornful evil intent, and in false manipulation of the justice system by false accusation, intimidation of witnesses, and groundless judgement. Legal processes sometimes are only as good as publicly-held values. But here the practitioners of false justice will be no more, and their victims will have cause for great joy and exultation in God.
- 22–23** Harking back to the time when God ‘bailed out’ Abraham from the wrong ways of the nations into covenant-relationship with God, the LORD now gets Israel to look towards its fulfilment. The patriarch Jacob, fearfully grieving over his wayward offspring, is pictured as being heartened to see them now bringing glory to the holy name of God and honouring Him in their midst, for the awesome work of salvation by which He has caused them to be there with Him.
- 24** And what appeared to be an intractable judgement on those who were spirited and complaining in their opposition to God will be removed and transformed into godly wisdom and teachableness. Isaiah does not say here how this will come about, simply that God will do it. But see eg Ephesians 5:8, 1 Corinthians 2:12–13, Acts 17:11.

THE RELIABILITY OF GOD—30:1–33

After setting out the broad principles in chapters **28–29**, Isaiah now addresses the specific instances of the alliance with Egypt (**30:1–7**), and the Assyrian invasion (**30:27–33**). Between these, he speaks of Judah’s refusal to hear God’s word, and the consequences of that (**30:8–17**), and at the same time reiterates God’s gracious promises regarding the time to come (**30:18–26**).

- 30:1–7** Israel seeking an alliance with Egypt (see also chapters **19–20**).
- 1** ‘Woe’: the fourth of six ‘woes’ (see at **28:1**)
 ‘rebellious children [lit. sons]’: harks back to **1:2**.
 ‘a plan, but not mine’: compare Proverbs 16:25, also 1–3, 9. Not from God.
 ‘a league [better: a covering], but not of my spirit’: not under God’s protective covering. These two failings, in the face of God’s word to the contrary, are seen as a deliberate setting out to ‘add sin to sin’.
- 2** The abandoning of God for—of all places—Egypt!
- 3** For what happened when Israel was last in Egypt? Slavery and genocide.
- 4–5** Pharaoh’s machinery of government may look impressive and strong, but there is nothing there that can bring any advantage—only shameful loss and defeat.
- 6–7** Why ‘the beasts of the Negeb’? These are the poor pack-asses and camels, laden with Israel’s wasted money that will bring no return from useless Egypt. The delegation’s attempt at secrecy, by avoiding the main route, ironically means they

retrace the route of the exodus, through the harsh and hostile wilderness. What a reversal!

‘Rahab’ (see on **27:1** and **51:9–11**): the toothless dragon already defeated by God.

8–17 This ill-advised attempt to curry favour with Egypt against Assyria is symptomatic of Israel’s deeper problem: the refusal to hear the word of the LORD, and to trust Him in his covenant promises. Once again (as in **6:9–13**) Isaiah is to make this, and its consequences, inescapably clear.

8 Perhaps referring to the message to come in verses **12–15**, the ‘tablet’ is a public placarding of the announcement, and the ‘book’ is a record for the future. Being a prophetic word from God, it will not only be proved true in the immediate future; it will also have significance beyond the prophet’s own time (which is why we are reading it now!) and into eternity, ‘as a witness for ever’.

9 ‘rebellious children, lying sons’: compare **1:2, 20, 30:1**.

10–11 Isaiah parodies their unspoken attitudes: refusing to hear the prophetic word, they seek out a message that they think will keep things going smoothly as they are—trifling things that make no moral demands (compare 2 Timothy 4:3–4).

‘the Holy One of Israel’: it is the holiness of God, at the heart of Isaiah’s experience and message, at which they take deepest offence.

12 The one whose word they have despised is the very one they must now hear from. Note that the alternative to trust and reliance on the LORD is trust and reliance on oppression and perverseness—the end of all humanly-devised morality.

13 Judgement comes from within: the unsustainable nature of what they have attempted.

14 It also comes from outside: the Lord’s determined and fierce opposition to that which will not profit the ones He loves.

15 Isaiah’s central message of faith (see **7:9, 28:16**), which they have rejected, is reiterated from the same Holy One of Israel.

16 Their resort to the alternative—military action—will turn out very differently from how they expect. Thinking to pursue their enemies, they will find themselves pursued! (Compare Matthew 26:52.)

17 The covenant blessing of Leviticus 26:8 is reversed, and the curse of Deuteronomy 32:30 comes true.

‘flagstaff...signal’: signs of people who have been here but are no more. The nation has come to an end.

30:18–26 After such a total and dismal failure of human-based enterprise, we might expect to hear, ‘And fair enough too.’ But, typical of Isaiah and the God he speaks from, it is into this condition of total failure that God speaks his message of promise and hope, and out of it He brings his reality of victory and restoration.

18 ‘Therefore’: following verses **13–14** and **17**. Not ‘in spite of this’. God’s actions in judgement are always with a view to His gracious, just and merciful purpose of great blessing, and of a piece with it. So the fact that God is taking the trouble to bring judgement is a sure sign that its recipients are well and truly in His sights for blessing, and are on their way to it. The fact that God finds it necessary to bring judgement at this time means that He must wait to bring the coming blessing until the judgement is complete, and the faithful must wait with Him (compare **8:17**, where the faithful remnant wait trustfully through a time of disfavour and darkness).

- ‘justice’: exactly the right decision and action at the appropriate time.
- 19 ‘people in Zion’: those who have held to the foundation stone in **28:16**. In the promised time there will be no more weeping and no more waiting: the answers to prayer will be ever-present and immediate.
- 20 In the meantime, adversity and affliction are their food and drink. In that time their food and drink will be prosperous and abundant (verse **23**). Both are from the Lord.
- ‘will not hide himself’: the time of disfavour will be over for ever. The revelation of God will be fully before them.
- 21 The time of refusal to hear will also be over. There will be a voice behind as well as vision before. Speaking and hearing will be immediate, according to need. Direction will still be needed: the redeemed remain potential sinners, no less dependent on God than they have ever been, but now gladly so, and wonderfully preserved by Him from all danger and sin.
- 22 The response to this is the total renunciation, in abhorrence and detestation, of their former attachment to idols, for that which is so much better: adoration of God alone Compare 1 Thessalonians 1:9, Acts 19:18–20.
- 23–24 Spiritual blessings of verses **20–21** are matched by physical blessings also, as the curse is lifted off the creation, and the other creatures participate freely in the benefits of the ‘liberty of the glory of the children of God’ (see Romans 8:19–21).
- 25 At the time of God’s victory over all that is ‘lifted up and high’ (**2:17**) in the worldly ‘city of chaos (**24:10, 25:2**), there will springs of flowing water even on the peaks of the arid mountains, that were previously defiled by false worship (compare Ezekiel 36:8–12).
- 26 ‘the hurt’ brought about internally by their own sin, and ‘the wounds’ inflicted by the LORD in righteous judgement, are now fully healed by Him who shines in glory more brightly than sun or moon (compare **24:23**, Revelation 21:23, 22:5).
- 27–33 As a foretaste of this, and as a demonstration of the Lord’s sovereignty over all nations and happenings in the present age, the threat of Assyria, despite the failure of Israel’s fearful and faithless seeking of the Egyptian alliance against it, will be brought to nought (as in chapters **36–37**).
- 27–28 A series of powerful images, reminiscent of the time of the exodus but going far beyond it, denote God’s holy nature and character as the righteous and thoroughgoing judge of the nations in the interests of His chosen people.
- 29 The gladness and celebration, surpassing even that of the passover, of the people who seek the LORD as their one security, lie at the centre of His purposes.
- 30 The punishment of Assyria (see **10:15–19**) will be no less fierce than the plagues which came upon Egypt at the time of the exodus.
- 31 This will be the shattering of the power of Assyria.
- 32 The one who was the rod in the hand of God against Israel (see **10:5–6**) will himself come under God’s beating, while the people see it and rejoice.
- 30:33 Indeed, the king of Assyria, in coming up to Jerusalem, is unknowingly coming to his own funeral pyre, which has long been prepared, and will be ignited, by the Ruler of all the ages.

RESCUE, REPENTANCE AND RENEWAL—31:1–32:20

These two chapters speak of transformation as a work of God. It includes putting paid to false help and establishing the true help, the turning of hearts to God, the defeat of enemies, the rule of a king in righteousness and justice, and the despoiling and renewing of the earth.

31:1–5 False help and true help.

1 The fifth ‘woe’. Faced with the threat of Assyria, the temptation was to form an alliance with Egypt (see chapters **19–20**, **30:1–7**).

‘horses...chariots...horsemen’: the doomed strength of Egypt (Exodus 14:6, 9), about which Israel should have known better (see Deuteronomy 17:16)! The God who conquered Egypt, who has called them to rely on Him alone, present in their midst, is not even consulted.

2 ‘he is wise’: God’s wisdom is very different from that of those who consider themselves wise in the ways of worldly security (compare 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:16). In this instance, the wisest thing to do is to bring disaster on such ill-considered and ill-fated plans.

‘his words’: true to His covenant promise, God judges the wicked and perverse foolishness of those who do not take Him at his word, and any help they may seek that is not Himself.

3 Humans and the creatures they rely on are flesh, needing to be enlivened (as in Genesis 2:7); God is spirit, and the One from whom all life comes (see John 4:24, 6:63). A movement of God’s hand will bring both Judah and Egypt, in their unholy alliance, to an end.

4 ‘the LORD said to me’: a significant utterance.

‘As a lion’: despite the shouting of the despised Egyptian ‘shepherds’, nothing will deter God from seizing Zion as his prey.

‘fight upon’: really means fight against, as in **29:1–4**. (Compare 1 Peter 4:17.)

5 ‘Like birds hovering’: by sudden contrast, as in **29:5–8**, the picture changes to God’s subsequent promised deliverance.

6–9 Repentance and rescue from the Assyrian foe.

6 The appropriate preparation for this promised deliverance is a turning to God as profound as their turning away has been despicable. (Compare Matthew 3:1–3.)

7 On comparison with **2:19–20**, this must refer to ‘the day of the LORD’, the eschatological event. Whatever we are faced with in the present, the ultimate question of where we stand before God is primary.

8–9 But as always in the Scripture, the ‘day of the Lord’ is always in close association with the immediate crisis (compare Mark 13:5–37). The destruction of the Assyrian threat is predicted, as it actually happened in chapters **36–37**.

9 ‘fire...furnace’: (compare Hebrews 12:29) Israel is ‘indwelt by the God of fiery holiness’ (Motyer). Neither Jerusalem nor its enemies can escape the implications of that.

32:1–8 The new king and his transformed people. Compare **9:1–7**, **11:1–10**.

1 ‘righteousness’ is the inner principle, ‘justice’ is the outworking practice. Note that the king does not rule alone (compare Daniel 7:14, 18, 22).

2 ‘each’: could refer to the princes, or singly to the king. There is protection from every danger, and refreshing provision for every need.

3–4 Contrast **29:9–11**. This would be nothing short of a miracle.

- 5–8** Compare **31:2**: true godly wisdom will prevail.
‘fool’: the one who sits loose to moral and spiritual values (as in Psalm 53).
‘knave/scoundrel’: works with devious deception to promote his own advantage at the expense of others. A society of fools gives rise to many scoundrels. But God will bring transformation to both.
- 32:9–14** Compare 3:18–4:1. The complacent women, who presume that their ill-founded security will always remain undisturbed, are called to account. Their fondness for the fruit of the vine will be visited by deprivation, and the loss of beauty, society, and all home comforts, to be replaced with shame, captivity, and wasted desolation. Verb forms are masculine, perhaps indicating that the attitudes adopted by the women are shared by all.
- 15–18** The gift of true Spirit from God (refer **31:3**) ushers in the contrasting transformation of the creation and its inhabitants, and a return to the abiding covenant relationship of faith that lies at the heart of Isaiah’s message (verse **17**, refer **7:9b**, **28:16**, **30:15**, brought about by the righteousness and just action of God (ultimately fulfilled as in Romans 3:21–26, 5:1–11!).
- 18** ‘My people’: those who have responded to the call of **31:6** and **32:9**, of repentance and hearing the word of the Lord.
- 19–20** The fall and the rising of many (see Luke 2:34).
- 19** Compare **2:9–19**, **10:18–19**, **33–34**, **24:10**, **26:5–6**.
- 20** Compare **30:23–25**. The blessing of God, bringing fulfilment and the enjoyment of timely right action.

GOD’S SAVING ACTION IN THE END-TIME—33:1–35:10

In this over-all section on God acting in history (chapters **28–37**), chapters **28–29** have set out the broad principles, and **30–32** have specified God’s action with regard to Egypt and Assyria in Isaiah’s day, and linked this with the coming kingdom of the Messiah. On the basis of this, chapters **33–35** set out God’s saving actions in the end-time. Zion is saved from the destroyer to be filled with the Lord’s goodness in **33:1–6**, and the judgement of the peoples follows in verses **7–12**. **30:13–24** and **34:1–17** are declarations to the whole earth concerning Zion and her king, and the final overthrow of all the nations. Chapter **35** is a wonderful prophecy of the restoration of the whole creation and the return of the redeemed to Zion.

- 33:1–12** Destruction and salvation.
- 1** ‘destroyer...treacherous one’: Assyria’s ruthlessness and unscrupulousness (see 2 Kings 18:13–18) is seen as the model of what will happen to all such peoples in the end: they will more than meet their match.
- 2** Meanwhile the faithful look to the One who alone is their strength and safety day by day.
- 3–4** For at the movement of the Lord, the threat of opposing nations will be dispersed, and the ‘battle’ will be over almost as soon as it has begun (compare Revelation 19:19–20).
- 5–6** This rousing action of the Lord is simply the manifestation of how He always is: ‘exalted...on high’. He then fills Zion with all the attributes of His own being: inner righteousness, and the practical justice that flows from it, his faithfulness and reliability, rich stores of saving and healthful welfare, particularly much-

- needed wisdom and knowledge. Even the ‘fear’ of the Lord, by which God is seriously reckoned with in honour and obedience, is a gift from God’s rich storehouse for those who love Him.
- 7–12** Following verses **1** and **3–4**, the judgement that comes to the opposing peoples is pronounced.
- 7** ‘valiant ones...envoys of peace’: a picture perhaps drawn from the realisation that Hezekiah’s overtures to Assyria have been ineffective to prevent the onslaught (see **37:3**).
- 33:8–9** As a result of this faithless and amoral lack of human concern on the part of the enemy, normal activities cease, and the natural order perishes (in the outworking of the curse of Genesis 3:18; see Romans 8:20).
 ‘Lebanon’: a forested region that had always been covered with great trees.
 ‘Sharon’: noted for great beauty; ‘Bashan and Carmel’: famed for their fertility.
 Note the reversal of this desolation in **35:1–2**.
- 10–12** Typically, this is the very situation in which God will move against those who are set against Him and his purposes.
- 10** ‘arise...lift myself up...be exalted’: a threefold rousing.
- 11–12** ‘chaff...stubble’: their worthless evil brings its own empty consequences.
 ‘breath...fire’: their sin has in it the seeds of their own destruction.
 ‘burned to lime...burned in the fire’: God’s judgement ensures their doom.
- 13–24** A proclamation to the world regarding Zion’s people and their king.
- 13** ‘far off...near’: (compare Ephesians 2:13, 17–18) the summons extends to the nations.
 ‘what I have done’: compare ‘the mighty works of God’, Acts 2:11.
- 14** ‘sinners in Zion’ become acutely aware of the presence of the holy God in their midst. The burning coals are there on the altar (see **6:6**) requiring a cleansing and a change of heart if the sinners are not going to be consumed by them in judgement.
- 15** Compare Psalms 15, 24. If the people are to participate in the healing and forgiveness of verse **24**, they must also face the rigour of God’s law.
 ‘speaks uprightly’: compare **6:5**.
 ‘shakes his hands’: has already determined the impossibility of ever receiving a bribe.
- 16** ‘on the heights’: with the Lord, in a secure position, with full provision.
- 17** ‘the king in his beauty’: compare Psalm 45:1–2. This is obviously the anointed Messiah. Yet this king is identified as the LORD in verse **22**.
 ‘a land that stretches afar’: a large kingdom, with plenty of room to move in freedom.
- 18–19** ‘the terror...the insolent people’: (compare **28:18–19**) the arrogant enemy, who counted his chickens before they hatched (as in **36:4–10, 13–20**), will be an absent memory.
 ‘people of an obscure speech’: recalls the threat of foreign invaders of **28:11–13**, now passed.
- 20** This new Jerusalem will be imbued with the peace which the present Jerusalem has rejected (see **30:15, 32:18**).
 ‘appointed feasts...tent’: indicate gladness at the presence of the Lord ‘tabernacling’ among them, secure and right.
- 21** ‘broad rivers and streams’: (compare Genesis 2:10–14) a return to an Edenic state, with abundant provision for fullness of life.

- ‘no galley...stately ship’: (compare 1 Kings 8:26–28, 22:48–49) may indicate safety from attacks by seafaring invaders, or the absence of any need to depend on commerce from foreign parts, as the Lord provides all that is needed on the spot.
- 22** All of this depends entirely on God’s actions in right judgement and saving rule.
- 23** ‘Your tackle hangs loose’: in contrast to verse **20b**, present Jerusalem as a ‘ship of state’ is hopelessly at sea, with nothing to save or commend it.
 ‘even the lame’: yet even this crippled vessel will be brought home to share in the spoils of victory. See also 2 Samuel 5:6–8, Matthew 21:14.
- 24** Sickness and sin (the two are not unconnected, see eg Deuteronomy 28:58–61) will no longer be a feature of the new Zion, since the people will have been ‘lifted up’ (literal translation) with regard to these things (compare John 12:31–33).
- 34:1–17** An announcement to the whole world of the final demise of all the nations. **33:1–12** set the scene for both salvation and judgement. Salvation was taken up in **33:13–24**. Now we turn to judgement. While it has to do with all the nations, it focuses particularly on the nation of Edom (verses **5, 6**,). Descended from Esau, who was in rivalry with his brother Jacob from before they were born (see Genesis 25:23, Malachi 1:2–5, Romans 9:10–13), Esau became one of Israel’s traditional enemies (Psalm 60:8). Hostilities continued (Amos 1:11–12) right down to the time of Jerusalem’s conquest in 586 B.C., when Edom’s taunting and brutal enmity reached its nadir (Obadiah 10–14, Psalm 137:7). David was the only one who was able to conquer and subdue Edom. So Edom came to signify the final enemy at the time of the coming of the Messiah (**63:1–6**, Ezekiel 34:23–24, 35:1–15).
- 34:1–2** As this is an announcement of the doom of all nations, so all nations are called upon to hear it.
- 3** This is a picture of universal slaughter, that defiles the whole landscape (compare the graphic equivalent in Ezekiel 38–39). Unredeemed sinners (those not included in **33:24**) cannot finally escape with their lives.
- 4** The whole universe is affected. This is the end of the world as we know it. Compare 2 Peter 3:10–13.
- 5–6** This is seen as a direct and personal action of the Lord, one-to-one. The language of sacrifice, and the blood and the fat which belong to the Lord (see Leviticus 3:16–17, 7:23–27), helps to make clear what is required of sinners at the hands of the holy God.
- 7** ‘wild oxen’: nothing will be spared.
 ‘mighty bulls’ literally ‘mighty ones’: may indicate that all along Isaiah is using animal terms as symbolic of powerful rulers.
- 8** ‘a day of vengeance...year of recompense’: compare **59:18, 61:2, 63:4**. God takes up Israel’s cause, which is His own. The ‘year of the LORD’S favour’ is always accompanied by the ‘day of vengeance of our God’. The day is with a view to the year, which outlasts it.
- 9–10** The landscape of sinners is turned into an irredeemable waste, emptied of human habitation.
- 11–15** To emphasise the absence of human rule or life or activity, it is specifically given over to the animals.
- 11** ‘confusion...chaos’: matching the unformed and disordered state of the beginning of creation in Genesis 1:2, compare Jeremiah 4:23.
- 13** ‘thorns...thistles’: left with nothing but the curse, compare Genesis 3:18.

- 14 'satyr [goat-demon]...hag': may be nothing more than wild goats and night creatures. But these names speak of a fearful descent into darkness.
- 16–17 'seek and read from the book of the LORD': may not be a reference to any extant prophecy, but simply a figure of how all of this will happen according to the precise and predetermined will and action of God.
- 35:1–10** The return to Zion.
- 1–2 Contrast **32:9**. Transformation, blossoming, and rejoicing. The curse of Genesis 3:18 (see **34:13** above) is reversed.
- 1 'be glad [*lit.* of them]': we are not told who 'them' is until verses **9–10**: 'the redeemed...the ransomed'. So all this joy in nature has to do with the return of the people God has rescued. See Romans 8:19–23.
- 2 'the glory': (compare Romans 8:21) comes as a gift, as God brings into His glory those He has redeemed, and with them the whole new creation, and so fully manifests His glory. Motyer: 'If these words are to be differentiated, *glory*...is inherent value, weightiness of worth, and *splendour* [majesty]...is the outward token of majesty and dignity' (p. 274)
- 3 Compare Hebrews 12:12–15, 22–24. Encouragement is needed for the people of God in this time of waiting, in view of what is to come.
'hands' denote action, and 'knees' the ability to stand upright.
- 4 'heart' denotes inner conviction and strength.
'Be strong, fear not': compare Joshua 1:6, when about to enter the promised land. The people are told what is already theirs, and are called upon to believe it—to believe in Him who still considers Himself theirs, despite their weakness.
'Behold your God': compare **25:9, 40:9–10**.
'vengeance...recompense': compare **59:18**.
- 5–6a** Compare **29:10–12, 30:9–10, 33:23b**. This signifies the complete openness and ability to respond that was not there before. It is couched in terms that foreshadow the complete redemption/resurrection of the body (Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 2 Corinthians 5:4), prefigured by the healing miracles of Jesus in Matthew 11:5, Luke 7:22.
- 6b–7** 'waters': as in **30:25, 33:21**. See also **43:19–21, 44:3**. Recalls Exodus 17:1–6, Numbers 20:2–13, but goes beyond this to show how God will transform, reverse and restore the devastated situation.
- 8 'a highway': we are still not yet told who this is for.
'the Holy Way': open to all those who have been made holy by God and so fit to travel along this way.
'unclean...fools': those who have not availed themselves of God's provision for cleansing and sanctification.
- 9a** The way is safe from threatening beasts.
- 9b–10** 'the redeemed...the ransomed of the LORD': 'redeemed' will now be used another twenty-three times in Isaiah. The word posits a redeemer, a relative who is willing to take up the cause of the helpless (Leviticus 25:25, Ruth 3:12, 4:1–6), or avenges one who has been killed (Numbers 35:12). There is great joy in the renewed city at such a mighty deliverance (see **26, 33:20–24**, compare Revelation 21:1–4).

HISTORICAL DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN FAITHFULNESS—36:1–37:38

This passage corresponds with 2 Kings 18:13–19:37, with some variations, by which the priority of neither passage can be established. It would appear that both Isaiah and the later writer of Kings had access to similar records, and each used the material for their own purposes. We are also told that Isaiah's writings included accounts of the reigns of kings under which he served (see 2 Chronicles 26:22, 32:32). The writer of Kings has retained Isaiah's order in relating Hezekiah's sickness after the removal of the Assyrian threat, when in fact it occurred before (see **38:6**), which Isaiah used in this way to introduce the Babylonian envoys and the prophecy of the exile (chapter **39**), before chapters **40–55** that follow from that. Thus it appears that Isaiah's version of these events was well-known by the time the Books of Kings were compiled.

Isaiah's reason for incorporating this account at this point in his prophecy is to give a concrete historical instance of God's faithfulness to His promises concerning Jerusalem and the royal house of David, to underscore the dependability of God in regard to the amazing prophecies that still awaited fulfilment, to encourage the faithful through more dark and difficult times (compare 8:16–17).

- 36:1** 'fourteenth year': 701 B.C., assuming Hezekiah served as co-regent with his father Ahaz from 729 until he acceded in 715 B.C. Isaiah omits reference to the treachery of Sennacherib in response to Hezekiah's tribute in 2 Kings 18:14–16, though he has referred to it in **33:1**. Isaiah's concern is to focus on the practicality of faith in God in the midst of a complex and perilous political situation.
- 2** 'Lachish': by the time Sennacherib occupied Lachish, he had removed all opposition in the region, and Hezekiah was isolated.
- 3** 'the conduit of the upper pool': the very place where Ahaz's refusal of the way of faith, over thirty years earlier, had set these terrible events in train (see **7:1–17**). 'Eliakim...Shebna': note that Shebna has already been deposed, and Eliakim has taken his place, as prophesied in **22:15–21**.
- 4–5** 'the great king': the arrogance of the king of Assyria which was to prove his downfall (see **10:12–19**).
'confidence': in rebelling against the king of Assyria, see 2 Kings 18:7. Isaiah's words of confidence and reliance upon God, rejected by Israel, are now echoed in mocking tones by this foreign power, as predicted in **28:9–13**.
- 6** 'Egypt, that broken reed of a staff': bears out Isaiah's prophetic estimate of Egypt's dependability, see **19:1–20:6**, **28:15**, **30:1–7**, **31:1–4**.
- 36:7** Here the Rabshakeh (perhaps deliberately) misconstrues Hezekiah's reforms of 2 Kings 18:4.
- 8–9** Israel was reliant on Egypt for the supply of horses (see **31:1**). But the Lord had forbidden them to go that way.
- 10** Had the Rabshakeh or his spies picked up on the prophecies of Isaiah (eg **10:5–6**)? If so, he here turns the word of God to his own political advantage. But it cannot be used that way (see **10:7–19**).
- 11–20** The Rabshakeh goes over the heads of the Jerusalem leaders, who wanted him to speak with them in the commercial/diplomatic Aramaic language, to address the whole populace in their native Hebrew. He graphically reminds them of the likely effects of a prolonged siege, with the failure of food and water supplies. He attempts to undermine Isaiah's message of reliance upon the LORD to deliver

- them (as in **30:15, 38:6**). He sugar-coats Assyria's brutal policy of the deportation and relocation of whole peoples, to keep them in subjection. But he makes the fatal mistake of likening the LORD to other gods of the nations (contrast **40:18–25**). This will prove to be his downfall (see **37:6, 16–20, 23–27**).
- 21** The people have been counselled wisely not to engage in argument or rebuttal with the Assyrian. The wisdom of God far surpasses the wisdom of this world, and is incomprehensible to it. There are times when to engage with the world's logic is to sink to the same level (compare 1 Corinthians 1:18–25, 2:7–8, Matthew 7:6).
- 22** 'clothes rent': a sign of mourning and penitence.
- 37:1** Hezekiah participates in the signs of sorrow, mourning and repentance, and turns to the LORD as Jerusalem's only hope.
- 2–4** Acknowledging Israel's utter helplessness, he calls upon Isaiah to pray to the LORD who has been mocked in this way.
- 5–7** Isaiah's response with a word from the LORD is immediate, and consistent with all that he has said before. A sovereign act of God will remove the threat (compare 1 Kings 22:19–23, 2 Thessalonians 2:11, Revelation 20:9).
- 8–9** The divinely inspired rumour causes the king of Assyria to move north to secure his territory.
- 10** Hezekiah's reply must have made it clear that his reliance was utterly on the LORD alone. Egypt is not mentioned this time (contrast **36:6**). Hezekiah has now come to a clarity and uprightness of faith, resting on the promise of **38:6**.
- 11–13** The king bluntly asserts Assyria's destructive power, the helplessness before it of the gods of the other nations, and implies that Hezekiah will not survive as king.
- 14–20** Hezekiah does not panic (see **28:16**), and this time calmly prays his own prayer, which is a model of how God is to be honoured as sovereign and powerful, the faithful creator, living and active, the one and only deliverer.
- 21–35** Made aware of this by God, Isaiah replies with a word from the LORD. This direct answer underscores the point that believing prayer is the most practical course of action in dealing with the harsh political realities of this world, doing what could not be achieved by military might, diplomatic negotiation, or payment of money. Yet this does not come as a result of pressure put on God by prayer. All this action is predetermined by God (verse **26**). Prayer is God bringing us in to participate with Him in His ongoing purposes.
- 22** 'virgin daughter': still untouched. Assyria's mockery is met by Jerusalem's scorn.
- 23–25** The offence against God is the taking to oneself the prerogatives of God, as if you were on your own, and forging your own way.
- 25** Such is the king of Assyria's inflated impression of himself, that he thinks he can block off the great river Nile as easily as a farmer closes off a small irrigation channel with his foot.
- 26–29** All the actions of Assyria, however brutal and devastating, have been the actions of God, planned long before, as a rider on a great horse. Nothing of Assyria's arrogance and hatred of God goes unnoticed by God, however, and God can turn him back, as he brought him out.
- 29** 'my hook in your nose': the way the Assyrians used to lead their own prisoners.
- 30–35** God turns from Assyria to address king Hezekiah.
- 30** A sign of God's sustaining and restorative favour will confirm the truth and finality of this action.

- 31–32** This will prefigure a time of peaceful security and prosperity for the nation. Isaiah already knows that the nation is ultimately doomed (**6:11–13, 39:6**), yet in the meantime Hezekiah’s faith will be rewarded.
- 32** ‘a remnant...a band of survivors’: an important theme in Isaiah—see **8:16–18, 24:14–16a, 35:10, 43:21**.
- 33–34** The proposed siege is called off by the LORD. It does not happen.
- 35** While this comes in answer to prayer, it is essentially from God’s own nature, and in keeping with covenant promises made long before.
- 36–38** The fulfilment. (Compare **10:16–19, 24–27, 33–34, 14:24–27, 17:12–14, 29:5–8, 30:19, 27–33, 31:5, 8–9, 33:1**.) Sennacherib never returned to Palestine, and was assassinated twenty years later in 681 B.C.

FORGIVENESS THROUGH THE SERVANT OF GOD—38:1–55:13

This is what Motyer takes to be the second of the three parts of the prophecy of Isaiah. The first part focussed on the reign of the coming King as promised by God to the house of David (esp. **9:1–7, 11:1–16, 16:5, 32:1–8, 33:1–24**), occasioned by the failure of its present incumbents, especially Ahaz, to live by faith in God’s covenant undertakings with Judah and Jerusalem and the house of David. The implications of this coming reign for all the nations round about were also spelled out. This part addresses what happens when the faithlessness of the nation brings God’s covenant judgement upon it, so that it appears that all hope is now lost, and the promises are in vain. This becomes necessary as Isaiah foresees the destruction and exile of Jerusalem and Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. Isaiah had been shown personally in chapter **6** how God’s grace of forgiveness and cleansing comes from the place of sacrifice into such a situation of utter lostness. He had seen that this is also the hope of the nation, and of the whole world (chapters **12, 25**). He now develops the implications and cost of this, and its glorious outcome, as this is revealed to him in the figure of God’s suffering Servant.

HEZEKIAH’S DELIVERANCE AND FAITHLESSNESS—38:1–39:8

Isaiah now goes back before the events of chapters **36–37** (see **38:6**) to introduce this whole part with the circumstances in which he was brought to foresee the coming destruction and exile to Babylon.

- 38:1** The prophecy is clear but, as we shall see, is found to be flexible in view of Hezekiah’s response.
- 2** ‘I have walked before thee in faithfulness and with a whole heart’: 2 Kings 18:1–8 and 2 Chronicles 29–31 show that Hezekiah was quite outstanding as a godly reforming king. But Hezekiah is mistaken in thinking that it is his good record that will commend him to God. For when the answer comes, it is simply the fact that he turned to God in faith with prayers and tears that prevails with God.
- 4–5** God, out of His own mercy, in keeping with the promise made to David, graciously extends Hezekiah’s life by another fifteen years, in answer to his prayer.
- 6** As an extra unasked-for bonus, God undertakes to save him and the city from the Assyrians (see chapters **36–37**). In keeping with prophecies already made, this is an unconditional promise that will not be revoked.
- 7–8** ‘the sign’: as in **7:10–17**, when the Assyrian threat was first brought to bear, so now, at its removal, God makes it clear that He is prepared to move heaven and

earth to bring about his promises to the house of David. Indeed, these promises are integral to the fabric of God's covenant with the whole of creation (see Jeremiah 33:19–26) and His saving purposes for all time (see Romans 1:1–6). We are not told how the shadow's movement was reversed—it may have involved some refraction of light in the atmosphere (as in Joshua 10:12–14?)—we are simply told that it happened. The account here, more abbreviated than in 2 Kings 20:7–11 (alluded to in **38:21**), emphasises that this is a sign that comes directly from God, and calls Hezekiah to stand well and truly in the way of faith in God alone.

- 38:9–20** Hezekiah's psalm of deliverance. This is not in 2 Kings: presumably Isaiah, possibly as court chronicler (see 2 Chronicles 26:22, 32:32), had access to Hezekiah's private papers. In the light of Hezekiah's later foolish faithlessness, it clearly shows that at this stage Hezekiah was fully aware of the great danger he had been in, his deliverance by God through prayer, and his own consequent commitments which sadly were not upheld.
- 10** 'the noontide of my days': any death before the full span of normal life is lived out (Psalm 90:10) is a cause for sorrow (see Philippians 2:27).
- 11** The greatest sadness is no longer being in this life with those we love.
- 12–14** Images of a tent being taken down, of cloth being cut from the loom and rolled up, of a lion attacking his prey, and of plaintive bird-songs, speak of the fragility of life, the finality of death, the sovereign judgement of God in determinedly bringing our life to an end, and the apparent feebleness of prayer.
- 15** 'he himself has done it': *contra* the Revised Standard Version translation, it would appear that this is the point at which the prayer has been answered. 'All my sleep has fled' (*RSV*) lit. in Hebrew 'I will walk slowly all my years': an undertaking to watch his step, to walk humbly, thoughtfully and carefully from now on.
- 16** 'by these things men live': a prayer that others will learn and benefit from what has happened to Hezekiah.
- 16c** lit. 'You have restored me to health and let me live.'
- 17–18** Hezekiah recognises that, in this instance, his untimely death would have been a judgement on his personal sin. Notwithstanding his 'good record', there must have been something in Hezekiah's heart that still was not pleasing to God (otherwise, given God's promise concerning the house of David and the city of Jerusalem, would the Assyrian have been allowed to come so close?). He sees that, if he had died in these circumstances, under God's wrath, with sin unforgiven, his death would not have been able to participate in thanks, praise or hope. His healing is even more, then, the forgiveness of his sins, and so a marvellous deliverance from fearful destruction.
- 19–20** Undertakings are made here to instill the knowledge of God's faithfulness into his children, and to look to that faithfulness alone to save him all his days. Sadly, none of these commitments were held to: Hezekiah's son Manasseh was the most ungodly and determinedly pagan king Jerusalem ever had, and the next chapter shows that, as in **22:8–11**, Hezekiah was still looking to things other than God for peace and security. The Old Testament scriptures are frank and realistic regarding both the good and the bad points of Israel's leaders (see eg also Asa in 2 Chronicles 14–16) in a very sobering way. 'These things...were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come' (1 Corinthians 10:11).
- 21** Gathers up points omitted in this account that are included in 2 Kings 20:7–11 (see above, verses **7–8**).

- 39:1** The year 702 B.C. Now comes the test, as to what is truly in Hezekiah's heart: whether he will stand only on the promise to the nation made in **38:6**, in the light of his personal deliverance and the great sign he had received. A decision made from an unguarded heart may give rise to fearsome consequences. Merodach-baladan, of the up-and-coming power of Babylon, was a rebellious thorn in the side of the Assyrian empire particularly in the years 722–710 and 705–702 (see on **13:1, 21:1–10**). His concern here is not just with the state of Hezekiah's health. No doubt the envoys were seeking the assistance of Hezekiah to join Merodach-baladan's rebellion, so that Sennacherib would be tied up on two fronts, and some of the pressure would be off Babylon. This Hezekiah was only too happy to do (see 2 Kings 18:7).
- 2** Thus his welcoming of the envoys from Babylon would have been his acceptance of their proposal. He foolishly goes further. He boastfully gives them a conducted tour of his entire kingdom's resources, no doubt to convince them that he was strong and wealthy enough to be considered among the 'big league' of Assyria and its rival power Babylon. It is a faithless, foolhardy and fatal act. No doubt the envoys took careful note of all they saw, and the records of these rich resources may well have still been in the Babylonian archives a hundred years later when Babylon became a conquering power under Nebuchadnezzar. This is asking for trouble.
- 39:3–4** Alerted by the word of the LORD (v. 5), Isaiah follows up this act which goes so clearly against all he has been given to say of faith in God alone and in His covenant promises to Jerusalem and the royal house of David, on which hinge all God's purposes and actions in history.
- 4** 'from Babylon': no less can God's people today get away with entering into dalliance with that world-system power that is called 'Babylon' in the New Testament: see Revelation 17–18, esp. 18:4–5, 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1, compare **52:11**.
- 5–7** Isaiah is shown in precise detail who will finally carry out the destruction of Jerusalem and the throne of David, that he has been called upon to prophesy (see **5:5–6, 13–16**). Though precise in detail, the time of the fulfilment of this prophecy is not given. It would have made sense at the time it was given, since even then Babylon was a power to be reckoned with. Isaiah himself was not to know (any more than he would have known the timing of what he was given to say to Ahaz in **7:14–16**) that it would wait for its fulfilment through the reigns of a number of other kings ('sons who are born to you' can refer to an unspecified number of generations) until 597 and 586 B.C. Merodach-baladan's rebellion failed at the hands of Sennacherib later the same year, and Hezekiah's rebellion brought the full might of the Assyrian army against Judah and Jerusalem, as we have seen. Even though Hezekiah reverted to simple faith at the last moment (when he had nothing else left!), and the city was spared at that time, as God had promised, nevertheless the double-minded lie in Hezekiah's heart had already done its damage, to bear its bitter fruit in years to come.
- 6** 'nothing shall be left, says the LORD': the thoroughgoing nature of this prophecy then raises the vital question, what then of the promises to Jerusalem and Judah and the house of David, on which the hope of all the nations rests? What will God do in the situation where, as a result of the faithlessness of God's people, all is now lost? Isaiah has found the personal answer in chapter 6, and he has seen its implications for the life of the nation (chapter 12) and for the whole world

(chapter 25). But on what grounds can this be so? This now occasions the prophecies which follow in chapters 40–55, and beyond, on the larger canvass.

8 Instead of prayers and tears, which would have been the appropriate response to this shocking revelation, as in 38:2, comes this perverse, self-congratulatory, unfeeling, and short-sighted response from Hezekiah. His ambitious desire to play politics in the big league has overridden all his concerns for true religion and simple faith in the holy and faithful covenant-God. Motyer: ‘When pride replaces humility, self-satisfaction replaces concern for others, and works replace faith then the die is cast and the kingdom is doomed. When the word of God is met with smugness instead of tears and prayers, the word proves its obduracy and accomplishes its grim purposes’ (p. 297).

‘COMFORT MY PEOPLE’—40:1–42:17

40:1–2 This is the point at which most modern commentators, since Duhm in 1892, say that a new section (chapters 40–55) begins, written by a later prophet or school of prophecy, during the Babylonian exile 597–538 B.C., whom they call ‘Deutero (Second)-Isaiah’. This is based on their refusal to believe that there could be such a thing as predictive prophecy, or that Isaiah of Jerusalem could have spoken in this way of events which turned out to be over a hundred years later (see **One Isaiah, or three?** above, p. 2). We have already seen there is good reason why Isaiah himself should have written this whole section, and its sequel in chapters 56–66, as the carefully-compiled and necessary continuation of his brilliant prophetic work. ‘Nothing shall be left’ of 39:6 is characteristically followed by ‘comfort my people’ of 40:1 (compare 1:27–2:5, 3:18–4:6, 6:5–7, 11–13, 8:20–9:5, 10:33–11:1, 24:12–16, 26:16–19, 27:10–14, 29:1–8, 30:15–26, 33:23–24). Judgement on unfaithfulness surely comes, but God and His promises remain, and will be fulfilled, after the people have forfeited them, by the LORD’s own hand.

40:1 ‘Comfort, comfort’: repetition means that this is an intense and heart-felt cry. This command is in the plural, addressed to three ‘voices’ in verses 3, 6 and 9. We stand again in the reality of 6:1–4, the LORD among His heavenly hosts, ‘the council of the LORD’, where the prophets hear His word (see Jeremiah 23:18, 22). But we hear a different message from 6:9–13.

2 ‘says your God’ (imperfect tense): ‘your God keeps on saying’.

‘Speak tenderly...cry to her’: not just to give kindly comfort, but as an appeal, courting her in love.

‘warfare’ *or* ‘time of hard service’: relating to the time of exile in Babylon (see 38:6–7, 43:14). Has the sense of hardship with a purpose. This time has now come to an end.

‘iniquity...sins’: the inner disposition and the outward acts of sin. The pardon is a very thoroughgoing one.

‘that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins’: sounds like Israel has suffered twice as much punishment from God as was due to her, and that this has paid for her sins sufficiently to bring pardon. But that makes no sense, and misconstrues the true meaning here. The passive ‘her iniquity is pardoned (*or* paid for)’ (compare Leviticus 26:41, 43) means the punishment of their iniquity has been accepted as satisfactory, by God. It occurs elsewhere in this passive form only with regard to the atoning sacrifices

in eg Leviticus 1:4. So the satisfactory payment is not something that has been taken out on Israel, but is something that has been effected by a sacrifice provided, as all true sacrifices can only be (see Genesis 22:13–14, Leviticus 17:11), ‘from the hand of the LORD’. This satisfactory payment will be seen to be that provided by God in the sacrifice of the Servant of the Lord (see **53:6, 10**). This is borne out by the use of the word ‘double’, which implies either a gracious and abundant pardon, or (meaning ‘folded double’, so that one side matches the other), an equivalent payment that fully matches what is required. Thus careful exegesis brings us from our false and distorted human way of viewing things into the heart of grace in the God-given sacrifice of the obedient Servant.

- 3–5** An announcement of God coming in glory (compare Deuteronomy 33:2). Picked up by John the Baptist in John 1:22–23.
 ‘in the wilderness...in the desert’: inhospitable terrain, that will be transformed by His coming.
- 3** ‘straight’: God will come surely and directly.
- 4** His coming will not be prevented or delayed by any obstacles.
- 5** ‘the glory of the LORD shall be revealed’: as in Exodus 33:18, 34:6–7—God’s covenant-faithfulness, true to His own holy nature.
 ‘all flesh shall see it together’: not just as observers, but as participants (see Hebrews 2:10).
- 6–8** The frailty of humankind under the judgements of God is contrasted with the durability and reliability of the word and promised action of God.
- 7** ‘the breath [Spirit] of the LORD’: the controlling factor in all things; see Psalms 33:6, 104:29–30.
- 8** In the face of our physical and moral failure, God’s promises will remain constant, and God’s word will do what it says (compare **55:10–11**)
- 9–11** An announcement of the action of God, ‘the arm of the LORD’, in sovereign rule, blessing and care.
- 9** ‘herald of good tidings’ [feminine]: probably not Zion/Jerusalem herself, but as in the first two ‘voices’, a messenger ‘to Jerusalem’ (verse **2**), in this instance a prophetess who, like Miriam (Exodus 15:20–21—and like the women from the empty tomb in the gospels?) announce and celebrate God’s already-accomplished victory.
- 9, 10** ‘Behold’: thrice repeated, as the excitement mounts: God is in view!
- 10, 11** ‘his arm’: (see **30:30, 33:2**, also **51:5, 9, 52:10, 53:1**, then **59:16, 62:8, 63:5, 12**). It is the arm of a ruler, a shepherd-king (as David was), which brings victory, reward, protection and loving care to His people.