**Isaiah Commentary**

**Isaiah Chapter 1**

Isa 1:1

**“in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.”** God raised up a number of prophets during Isaiah’s time, which was a tumultuous time for Israel and Judah, including when the Northern Kingdom of Israel was carried away by Assyria and its citizens were replaced by foreigners, who became the hated Samaritans of the New Testament. Prophets who were contemporaries of Isaiah include Hosea (Hos. 1:1), Micah (cf. Mic. 1:1). Amos likely was (Amos 1:1), as were Jonah and Nahum.

The book of Isaiah contains information about Uzziah (cf. 2 Chron. 26:22), Ahaz (2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chron. 28:1-27), and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chron. 29-32), but only mentions Jotham (2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chron. 27:1-9).

Isa 1:2

**“but they have rebelled.”** This verse, and many like it, highlight the fact that people have free will and can make the choice to serve God or not. God is not in control of what we do. God writes this verse with a tone of surprise and disgust. He had done so much for Israel and they had remained unthankful. Thankfulness comes from the heart and is something that we can control if we want to, which is why God can command us to be thankful (Col. 3:15).

Isa 1:3

**“Israel does not know.”** The Hebrew text of Isaiah 1:3 does not supply an object to the word “know,” and thus answer the question, “does not know what?” Instead, it simply states that Israel “does not know.” From the first phrase, that the ox knows “its owner,” an implied object is “does not know ‘their God.’” However, Israel is ignorant of more than just their God. They do not understand the things of God or their dire situation, so the simple phrase “does not know” is appropriate because it includes all the things that Israel does not know. Furthermore, the word “know” can also have the meaning of “consider,” and that is true also. Not only does Israel not know their God, He does not come into their minds in a meaningful way—they do not consider Him. Furthermore, Israel is a microcosm of the world, because most people do not give serious thought to God and the things of God.

It is a fact that most people are not hostile toward God, but instead, they are indifferent toward Him; they ignore Him. It is as if God does not exist. In that, humans are not as wise as the animals that God created. “The ox knows his owner.” The ox knows where his food and shelter come from, and he obeys the owner and receives his desired reward. Humans, on the other hand, though so much greater in intellectual capacity than an ox, strangely ignore what should be the most important and profound questions in life: “Where did I come from?” “Why am I here?” And, “Where am I going.”

We came from God, who created us for His good pleasure to fellowship with Him and with each other. We are here to love and serve God and each other, and in doing that we will find true fulfillment in life. The last question, “Where am I going,” totally depends on one’s own choices. Those people who are prideful and will not obey God or live in a godly way with other humans end up rejecting God and His offer of everlasting life, and so they will end up being annihilated in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). But for those people who obey God and get saved, the question, “Where am I going” is answered by, “To a wonderful place with wonderful people who will enjoy everlasting life together.”

No one needs to, or should, miss everlasting life. God, in His love and mercy, has made it available for every person to be saved through Jesus Christ. However, because natural people tend to ignore God and their future life, those people who have found salvation in Christ should do what they can to keep people who are not saved from staying at a level of awareness that is lower than the dumb ox that God created. As ambassadors for Christ, Christians must help people awaken from their lackadaisical state of mind and overcome their natural pride and rebellion and humbly come to Christ and get saved so they too can enjoy everlasting life in a wonderful place.

[For more on the wonderful future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1. For more on the unsaved being annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“feeding trough.”** The place where the food is placed. Also called a crib or manger.

Isa 1:4

**“a seed.”** “Seed” in this context means “offspring,” “descendants.” It is what the mature plant produces.

Isa 1:6

**“cleansed.”** The Hebrew is literally, “pressed out.” When a person is wounded or sick, often there is foreign matter in the wound that needs to be flushed out.

Isa 1:8

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the daughter of Zion,” but that is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem. The Hebrew is simply two words, “daughter” and “Zion” (בַּת־צִיּֽוֹן) but they are in construct so it gets translated into English as “daughter of Zion.” The problem with translating the Hebrew phrase literally as “daughter of Zion” is that in English a “daughter of Zion” is not Zion itself, but the female child of Zion. But that is not what the Hebrew means. The phrase is an idiom, and this is an example where a strictly literal English translation of a Hebrew idiomatic phrase can cause confusion. The Hebrew means “Daughter Zion.” Sometimes “Daughter Zion” is paired with “Daughter Jerusalem,” two phrases that refer to the same thing, for example, “The virgin Daughter Zion has despised you and ridiculed you. Daughter Jerusalem has shaken her head at you” (Isa. 37:22. Cf. 2 Kings 19:21; Lam. 2:13; Mic. 4:8; Zeph. 3:14; Zech. 9:9). Sometimes the word “virgin” is added before the word “daughter” (e.g., “virgin daughter Zion” (Isa. 37:22), and sometimes “virgin” is used with the country name without the word “daughter” because “daughter” is implied (e.g., Jer. 18:13, “virgin Israel”).

It was common in the culture, and shows up many times in Scripture, that cities and countries are referred to as being female. A city that supported other cities was referred to as a “mother” (2 Sam. 20:19). In Isaiah 47:7, Babylon thought of herself as the “queen mother” of cities, and therefore the most important city (see commentary on Isa. 47:7). In Jeremiah 3:6-11, the countries of Israel and Judah are portrayed as sisters who have both been unfaithful to their husband, God.

In Jeremiah 46:11, God uses the same idiom, “virgin daughter of Egypt,” to refer to Egypt as a virgin daughter, which in that context referred more to her inexperience and vulnerability. Isaiah 23:12 refers to the town of Sidon as “virgin daughter Sidon.” Psalm 137:8 refers to “daughter Babylon” (cf. Jer. 50:42), and in Isaiah 47:1 Babylon is called “virgin daughter Babylon.” There are many other times that cities or nations are referred to as women (e.g., Isa. 62:1-5; 66:8-11).

Here in Isaiah 1:8, Jerusalem (and by extension, Judah), is referred to as the “daughter” of God, a use of the figure of speech hypocatastasis that brings a lot of meaning and emotion to the verse. The phrase “Daughter Zion” is also spoken as “Virgin Daughter” (cf. Lam. 1:15; Jer. 14:17). As a daughter, a virgin daughter, God would have loved to have tenderly cared for her. She needed the protection and support of her father and her family. Daughters were generally carefully watched over because of their vulnerability, and also because the children that they would give birth to were the future of her society. Beyond that, as a “virgin daughter,” she would have been living at home, in the house of her father. That was certainly true of God’s people; they were under the care and protection of God, and He cared deeply for His virgin daughter. However, she refused His help and advice, and although she had a cultural and moral obligation to obey her Father and follow His ways, instead she spurned her father and did whatever she wanted, which resulted in her ruin.

[For more on the figure of speech hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2. For more on “Daughter Zion” and Israel as the Bride, see Appendix 12: “The Bride of Christ.”]

**“booth...watchman’s hut.”** The “booth” or “hut” is a reference to the biblical custom of guarding the crops. Between the planting season and the harvest, farmers and sometimes even homeowners with large gardens put up temporary shelters in their fields so they could guard their crops against thieves and pests. The booth or hut sheltered the watchman from the heat and wind. Family members would take turns manning these shelters, even spending the night there if the situation warranted it. The shelters were temporary and after the harvest, they were abandoned and soon fell into ruin. Eventually, they would simply fall down and fall apart. Here in Isaiah 1:8, God compares Zion to one of those huts—Zion is in a state of ruin. Eventually, the people of Judah so abandoned God that He abandoned them, and Judah was conquered by Babylon, and Jerusalem and the Temple were burned down.

In Lamentations, Jeremiah laments that God “has violently taken away his tabernacle [the Temple] as if it were *a booth* in a garden” (Lam. 2:6). Job says the house of the godless wealthy man will end up like a watchman’s booth (Job 27:18). Jonah built a temporary booth to shade himself from the sun while he watched Nineveh, waiting to see what would happen to it (Jon. 4:5).

If the fields were going to be farmed year after year, then sometimes the landowner built a watchtower that was meant to last and would not have to be built year after year. This kind of watchtower was usually built out of stone, and it was much more permanent and sturdy, and that is the kind of watchtower that is mentioned in Isaiah 5:2.

Amos prophesied about the same time as Isaiah (likely started before Isaiah started and ended before Isaiah ended), and Amos also spoke of David’s fallen “booth” (Amos 9:11), using the same word for “booth” (Hebrew: *sukkah* #05521 סֻכָּה) as Isaiah does. Judah was in ruins, but God says it will be restored.

[For more on the Messianic Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 1:10

**“Sodom...Gomorrah.”** Isaiah employs the figure of speech antonomasia (“name change”) to graphically describe how evil the people of Judah were—they were as bad as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who God destroyed by fire from heaven (Gen. 19:4-29).

[For more on the figure antonomasia, see commentary on Matt. 17:10.]

Isa 1:11

**“What are the multitude of your sacrifices to me?”** The people of Judah were very religious, but not at all godly. They offered many sacrifices, but they were a sham, they were not connected to obeying God from the heart. God does not appreciate insincere offerings.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Isa 1:13

**“worthless offerings.”** The priests and people were wicked and unrepentant, so their offerings were worthless. Offerings and sacrifices were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. Isaiah 1:10-19 is all about what God wants and what He doesn’t want from Israel.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

**“New moons.”** The beginning of each month, the new moon, was celebrated by special offerings and blowing of trumpets (Num. 10:10, 28:11-15; see commentary on Num. 28:11). In time, the Jews turned the new moon into a feast day (1 Sam. 20:5).

Isa 1:15

**“I will not listen.”** It is very important that God’s people realize that God does not hear prayers simply because people pray. Everyone sins, but some people are stubborn and unrepentant about their sin. A person’s heart must be right in the sight of God for the prayer to be effective. For example, if a man treats his wife badly it will hinder his prayers (1 Pet. 3:7). It is the prayer of a righteous person that accomplishes much (James 5:16). There are a number of verses that say God does not answer the prayers of the wicked (cf. Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; and James 4:3).

[For more on God not hearing the prayers of the wicked or honoring their sacrifices, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

**“Your hands are full of blood.”** The people’s actions in their day-to-day life showed that their supposed worship of God was insincere and hypocritical.

Isa 1:16

**“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean.”** There are several times in the Bible when God lists things He wants people to do, as He does here in Isaiah 1:16-17, and they are sometimes quite similar, but the heart is the same (see commentary on Mic. 6:8).

Isa 1:21

**“How.”** The word in the Hebrew text translated “how,” is the adverb*ʾekhah* (#0349 אֵיכָה) is usually translated “how,” but it means much more than that in this context. Leslie Allen writes that the word “traditionally belonged to the funeral dirge and introduced a contrast between a grim present and a good past. A chasm that bereavement had created. In Lamentations 1:1 it introduces such contrasts. It is a shriek, a scream. “Not the kind of scream that comes from fright, but the kind that comes from the deepest grief imaginable. It is a scream that comes when there are no words to express what you feel.”[[1]](#footnote-15241) The word *ʾekhah* opens the verses such as Isaiah 1:21, “How the faithful city [Jerusalem] has become a prostitute!” and 2 Samuel 1:19, “How the mighty have fallen.” So the word “how” is not to be understood forensically, as in the sentence, “How did you get to work today, by car or by bus?” It is to be understood more as a rhetorical question that has no answer and does not really expect one; the “how” is just an unanswerable expression of grief: “How did this tragedy happen? How, how, how!?”

Isa 1:23

**“nor does the cause of the widow come before them.”** The wealthy and powerful bureaucrats that ran the society in the time of Isaiah, and through most of history, were greedy, evil, and not interested in justice or what was right. As the bureaucracies grew in both Israel and Judah, the leadership was often associated with the royal family, or the military, or the priestly system, and ended up supporting one another in their evil endeavors. Over time the leaders acquired more and more land and gradually controlled the economy and legal system. As we see here in Isaiah 1:23, bribery and various other ways of getting “rewards” became commonplace. The result of the system was that the common people in the kingdom were terribly exploited. Widows and orphans, mentioned here in Isaiah, were especially vulnerable. Through excessive taxation, unfair treatment in the courts, and just plain bullying they eventually lost any land their family had and with it their rights as citizens. The covenant faithfulness and care for the poor and weak set forth in the Law of Moses was ignored and life would have been a drudgery for a large part of the population.

Evil leaders such as those mentioned here may seem to be doing well, but there will come a day when they are punished for their evil, as Isaiah 1:24 says. People who do not “fear the Lord” will discover to their dismay that for evil people, God’s justice was a thing to be feared (cf. Matt. 10:28).

Isa 1:24

**“get relief.”** Or “console myself.” God will get relief from His adversaries by taking vengeance on them.

Isa 1:25

**“slag.”** Slag is the mixed and impure residue that is left when metal is smelted and the pure metal is poured off. Here in Isaiah God uses the metaphor of purifying metals to describe that He will purify Israel and remove the impurities from her, the “impurities” being evil people and evil practices.

Isa 1:26

**“I will restore your judges as at the first.”** Isaiah 1:26 refers to the Millennial Kingdom, Christ’s future kingdom on earth. At that time, and sadly not before then, Jerusalem, and by extension Judah and Israel, will be governed by righteous people who love God. Verses such as Isaiah 1:26 show us that when Christ sets up his kingdom on earth, he will be assisted in governing the earth by people who have been faithful to him (see commentary on Jer. 23:4). The phrase, “as at the first” seems to refer to the early reign of David when the Davidic reign was considered ideal and the judges David set up were righteous men.

Here in Isaiah, we see how the hope for Christ’s Kingdom on earth was not just a vague idea, but a living hope that burned in the souls of people like Isaiah, and so verses about the hope would pop up seemingly without warning or introduction in all kinds of different contexts. Isaiah himself had wonderful revelations about our hope, the future Kingdom of Christ, and because of that, as we see here, he can quickly insert one aspect of it into the text and expect people to understand it. Prophecies of the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth as king appear throughout Isaiah, sometimes taking up a large number of verses at a time.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“After that.”** Jerusalem had been mostly run by ungodly kings and priests (although not all of them were), and that made life hard for the people. In the Messianic Kingdom, Jesus Christ will be king and reign in righteousness (Isa. 11:3-5), and he will restore godly judges and leaders. Then even the people will call Jerusalem, “City of Righteousness; Faithful Town” (which can also be translated: “City of the Righteous, Community of Faithfulness”). Thus, this verse is a testimony to the fact that if a society is going to be godly, the leaders must be godly, and in the Messianic Kingdom of Christ, they will be.

**“Righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God. In the Millennial Kingdom, Jerusalem will be called the “City of Righteousness” (or City of Justice) because people will do what is right to God and each other, and Jesus Christ will reign as king over the earth and the Law will go out from Jerusalem all over the world.

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right, see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

Isa 1:27

**“by righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God. People who repent will be redeemed by God’s righteous actions.

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right, see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

Isa 1:28

**“will come to an end.”** This English phrase is the translation of the one Hebrew word, *kalah* (#03615 כָּלָה), which has a large range of meanings that include “to stop, be at an end, be finished, be used up, vanish, perish, be destroyed, be consumed.” In this context of the Assyrian conquest, with the final future judgment in the background, “come to an end” refers to the destruction and then the extinction of evil people, which will ultimately occur in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Although English translations such as “come to an end” (NASV) and perish” (CSB, NET, NIV), are certainly understandable, many English versions translate *kalah* as “be consumed” (ASV, CJB, ESV, GNV, JPS, KJV, NAB, NLT, NRSV, RSV, YLT). This seems to be the specific meaning in the text because the context includes the wicked burning with no one to quench the fire (Isa. 1:31).

Isa 1:29

**“sacred oaks...gardens.”** Altars and idols were put in such places as under the shade of great trees and in sacred gardens. Often ritual sex was practiced there as well. In fact, the word “paradise” comes from a Persian word that means “pleasure garden,” and was the Greek loan word (*paradeisos*) used for “Eden” in Genesis 2.

Isa 1:31

**“The strong man will be like tinder.”** At the time of God’s judgment, human strength will not prevail against the power of God. The unsaved, whether strong or weak, rich or poor, or master or servant, will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and burn up. In this context, the strong man is strong but unsaved.

**“They will both burn together, and no one will quench them.”** At the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, the wicked people who are not saved will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and will burn until they are annihilated and exist no more. When the text says that “no one will quench them,” it does not mean they will burn forever, it means that no one will put out the fire until they are totally consumed (see commentary on Mark 9:48).

[For more information on the unsaved being totally annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more information on dead people being dead until they are raised at a resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the different resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more information on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 2**

Isa 2:2

**“the last days.”** Isaiah 2:2 is very similar to Micah 4:1 (Isa. 2:1-4 is very similar to Mic. 4:1-5). In this context, the “last days” are the Millennial Kingdom, although at the time Isaiah was writing God had not revealed that there would be a 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom followed by the Everlasting Kingdom. The Everlasting Kingdom will have a gigantic city that will come down from heaven and land on earth (Rev. 21, 22). Thus, Isaiah thought of the “last days” as one everlasting time, the Messianic Age; the Kingdom of Christ on earth. The reason that we know this prophecy in Isaiah is primarily referring to the Millennial Kingdom and not the Everlasting Kingdom of Revelation 21 and 22, is that in this kingdom God will be in a temple (“Yahweh’s house”) whereas in the Everlasting Kingdom there will not be a temple (Rev. 21:22).

In Isaiah, we see how the hope for Christ’s Kingdom on earth was not just a vague idea, but a living hope that burned in the souls of people like Isaiah, and so verses about the hope would pop up seemingly without warning or introduction in all kinds of different contexts. Isaiah had wonderful revelations about the future Kingdom of Christ, and because of that, as we see here, he can quickly insert information about it into the text and expect people to understand it. Sadly, as people began to teach and believe erroneous things about the future, such as that when good people die they immediately go to heaven and live there forever, the prophecies of the Millennial Kingdom began to be misunderstood. Today many commentaries written by scholars treat these verses about the future earth as only figurative language instead of taking them literally and using them to build an understanding of what the future life of all the saved people will be—a wonderful life on a restored earth.

Prophecies of the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth appear throughout Isaiah, sometimes taking up a large number of verses at a time. For example, Isaiah 2:2-4 is about the Millennial Kingdom, as are many other verses in Isaiah (cf. Isa. 1:26; 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 9:3, 4, 5, 7; 11:3-16; 12:1-6; 14:1-2, 30; 16:5; 19:18-25; 25:6-9; 27:6; 28:5-6; 29:17-24; 30:19-26; 32:1-5, 15-20; 33:24; 35:1-10; 41:18-20; 42:4; 44:3-5; 49:8-23; 51:3-6; 54:1-17; 56:4-8; 57:13, 18, 19; 59:19; 60:1-22; 61:4-9, 11; 62:1-12; 65:9, 13-25; 66:10-13, 18-24). This is an impressive list, and the references to the future Kingdom of Christ are throughout Isaiah and thus are an example to us about the importance of our future hope and how it should never be far from our mind.

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the chronology of the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the terrible death and destruction in the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on people being dead when they die and not alive anywhere in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“chief.”** In the Millennial Kingdom, not only will Mount Zion be the highest mountain, but it will be the “chief,” the most important mountain because the Temple will be on the top, and the city of Jerusalem where Christ will have his palace will be on the south side of the mountain, downhill and south of the Temple. That Jerusalem and the palace of Christ will be on the south side of Mount Zion is significant because in the biblical culture, “east” was straight ahead and so south was on the right and north was on the left. For Christ to be “at the right hand” of God as the prophecies state, he will have to live and reign south of the Temple where God dwells. Mount Zion will be the highest mountain in the world (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1; Ezek. 20:40).

**“all nations.”** In the future, people from every nation will come to Jerusalem to worship and to be blessed (Ps. 86:9; Isa. 56:6-8; Jer. 3:17; 16:19).

**“stream.”** The Hebrew word translated “stream” is *nahar* (#05102 נָהַר), to flow or stream, and it is related to the Hebrew word for “river.” When God is in His Temple in Jerusalem and Christ is reigning as king, the nations won’t just “trickle” into Jerusalem, they will come as a river of people.

Isa 2:3

**“And many peoples will come and say.”** Isaiah 2:3 is almost identical to Micah 4:2, except Isaiah says “peoples,” referring to people groups or nations, while Micah says “nations” (for information on this verse, see commentary on Mic. 4:2)

Isa 2:4

**“train for war.”** The Hebrew is literally, “learn war.”

Isa 2:6

**“For you.”** Here the subject abruptly switches from Israel to God.

Isa 2:8

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

**“worship.”** The Hebrew word translated “worship,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “bow down.” This verse could be translated the way it currently is, or “They bow down to the work of their own hands.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Isa 2:12

**“For there will be a Day of Yahweh of Armies.”** In this context, the “Day of Yahweh” refers to the Great Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon, and then the Day of Judgment for the unsaved.

Isa 2:18

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

Isa 2:19

**“People will go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the earth.”** This is specifically referred to in Revelation 6:15.

Isa 2:20

**“In that day.”** This is a common way of referring to the Day of the Lord, and this verse looks forward to the tribulation and Kingdom of Christ on earth. This prophecy is similar to Isaiah 31:7.

**“*each* person.”** The Hebrew word translated as “person” is singular. This will not be a collective action, but an action on the part of individuals. However, every person is involved, because later in the sentence, “that they made” is plural.

**“will throw away their idols.”** There have been various reforms throughout history when people tried to get rid of idols, but they have at best been temporary and very limited in location. Furthermore, when all the “superstitions” that make things (such as “lucky charms”) and actions (like knocking on wood) into objects or rituals of respect and/or veneration, it can truthfully be said that idolatry has never been eradicated from human existence since the fall of Adam and Eve. This will change when Jesus reigns as king on earth. There will be no more idols. God will get the glory He deserves and the Shema, “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone” (Deut. 6:4), will be realized on earth. Other verses also give the same message as Isaiah 2:20, that idols will be gone (cf. Isa. 30:22; 31:7; Zeph. 1:4; 2:11).

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”). On the Day of Judgment, every idol will be truly worthless. Only God can save and reward people.

**“to the moles and to the bats.”** Moles live in holes in the ground and bats live in dark places such as caves, out of the sun and out of sight. So when Christ rules the earth people will get rid of their idols, which they realize are worse than just worthless, they are evil lies. They have led people away from God.

**Isaiah Chapter 3**

Isa 3:4

**“capricious children will rule over them.”** This may have been literal, and capricious young men took over the rulership because the elder leaders had been killed or carried away captive, or the leaders might be being called children because of the way they behave.

Isa 3:8

**“rebelling before the eyes of his glory.”** This phrase is unique in the Old Testament and very powerful. “The eyes of” means to be in the sight of, or in the presence of. The people were rebelling openly, right before God’s very eyes. The word “glory” often indicates the presence of God. The phrase means that the people were rebelling against God right in His very presence, right where He could see it. So their rebellion was a purposeful, hard-hearted, rebellion against God and His ways.

Isa 3:16

**“Because the daughters of Zion.”** Isaiah 3:16-4:1 is a dual prophecy, and intertwines both the terrible fate of the women of Israel and the fate of the cities of Israel (Isa. 3:26). The Assyrians were very cruel, and most captives were treated badly. Women who were born into wealthy or powerful families lost all the finery that they were so proud of and many were enslaved and treated very badly (see commentary on Isa. 7:20).

**“mincing.”** The Hebrew word occurs only here and apparently means to walk with quick short steps, which would jangle one’s ankle bracelets.

Isa 3:18

**“the crescent necklaces.”** Crescent shaped ornaments, like the crescent moon, were used in ancient times to ward off evil spirits. It was quite common for women, especially young women, to wear the crescent moon as an apotropaic amulet to provide protection from evil and evil spirits, which is why it is mentioned here in Isaiah 3:18 as an ornament worn by women. Sometimes the crescent moon was also put on camels (see commentary on Judg. 8:21).

Isa 3:21

**“signet rings.”** A signet ring was a ring that was engraved with special letters and/or characters that identified the owner of the ring.

[For more on signet rings and cylinder seals, see commentary on Gen. 41:42.]

Isa 3:24

**“instead of beauty, shame.”** “Instead of beauty, shame” is a reading of Isaiah 3:24 in a Qumran scroll.[[2]](#footnote-15942) The Masoretic Hebrew text seems corrupted, and many versions translate the Hebrew of the MT as something like “branding instead of beauty” (ESV).[[3]](#footnote-31857) But getting that reading takes some creative nuancing, and there is no clear evidence that the noble women were branded by the Assyrians. The reading of the Qumran text makes sense. Both the MT and the Qumran text are very different from the Septuagint.

**“shame.”** The biblical culture, along with much of the ancient world, was an honor-shame culture. Tremendous value was put on having honor. Here Isaiah predicts that due to the sin of Israel, attire that gave the ancient wealthy women great honor would be stripped away and they would have shame instead of beauty. Women of every culture have paid attention to how they looked, and we see that here. When Jezebel heard Jehu was coming to Jezreel after just killing her husband the king of Israel and also Ahaziah the king of Judah, she “painted her eyes and adorned her head” (2 Kings 9:30). That did not keep her from being killed, but at least she died looking beautiful. Also, one of Job’s daughters was named “Keren-happuch,” which loosely translated means “horn of eye paint” (Job 42:14).

Isa 3:26

**“Her gates will lament.”** Isaiah 3:26 should not have been the last verse in the chapter, because Isaiah 4:1 actually closes the section and Isaiah 4:2 starts the next section. It would have been easier to see the full context of Isaiah 3:16ff if Isaiah 4:1 had been numbered as Isaiah 3:27. This is one of the places in the English Bible where the chapter break—which is man-made—is in the wrong place.

Isaiah 3:26 is evidence that this section of Isaiah (Isa. 3:16-4:1) is referring to both the literal women of Israel and the fortified cities of Israel, which were about to be conquered by the Assyrians (see commentary on Isa. 3:16). Although it has nothing to do with the Assyrian conquest of Israel in 722 BC, it is interesting that centuries later, the Roman Emperor Vespasian (ruled AD 69-79) had a coin minted that had his head on the obverse, and on the reverse was Judea, portrayed as a woman sitting under a tree mourning while a Roman (apparently an official of some kind, perhaps Vespasian himself) stood standing with a spear and sword, looking at her.[[4]](#footnote-17881) It was common in the ancient world to portray countries as women. The United States is often symbolized by “Lady Liberty” (derived from the Roman goddess Libertas, the personification of liberty).

**Isaiah Chapter 4**

Isa 4:1

**“Seven women.”** Isaiah 4:1 should have been the last verse of chapter 3 (thus, Isa. 3:27). The verse is the close of Isaiah 3:16-4:1, and Isaiah 4:2 starts the next section.

Isa 4:2

**“In that day.”** The phrase “in that day” has already been used in Isaiah in association with the Last Days and the time when Yahweh takes vengeance on the evil of earth and establishes righteousness (cf. Isa. 2:9-21, esp. v. 11, 17, and 20). In this case, “that day” refers to the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“the Branch of Yahweh.”** This refers to the Messiah, as it does in other places (Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Many modern interpreters disagree with that, but the biblical evidence supports it.[[5]](#footnote-29064) The first time the Messiah came, there was “no beauty that we should be attracted to him” and he was “despised and rejected by people” (Isa. 53:2, 3). But when he is present the second time, conquering and ruling the earth, he will be “beautiful and glorious” (Isa. 4:2).

**“the fruit of the land will be for beauty and for glory for those of Israel who have escaped.”** In the Millennial Kingdom there will be an abundance of food for the people (Isa. 25:6; 30:23-26; 32:15; 35:1-7; 41:18-20; 44:3; 51:3; Jer. 31:5,11-14; Ezek. 47:1-12; Hos. 2:21,22; Joel 2:18-26; Amos 9:13). There is no compelling reason not to see this verse as a simple promise that in the Millennial Kingdom the land will be healed and there will be plenty of food that will be an evidence that the people are blessed. However, since many scholars do not believe that Christ will rule on a renewed earth, many different interpretations have been set forth as to what the verse could mean. One of the more reasonable proposals is that “the fruit of the land” is a second reference to the Messiah, but there is no need for that interpretation and the Messiah is nowhere else called that.

**“those of Israel who have escaped.”** Those “who have escaped” is a phrase that refers to the remnant of Israel who believed and who will be alive in the Millennial Kingdom. Some of those people will have been in the Resurrection of the Righteous, while others will have been let into the Kingdom at the Sheep and Goat Judgment. References to people who have “escaped” being in the future Kingdom of Christ on earth occur in other places in the Old Testament as well (cf. Isa. 10:20; 37:31; Joel 2:32; Obad. 1:17).

[For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see Matt. 25:31-46 and the commentary on those verses.]

Isa 4:4

**“filth”** In this context, “filth” refers to menstrual blood.

Isa 4:5

**“a canopy.”** This is the same Hebrew word that is used for a marriage canopy, and implies the marriage and covenant of Yahweh via the Lord Jesus Christ to Israel and by extension to all the people who worship Him at that time.

**Isaiah Chapter 5**

Isa 5:2

**“watchtower.”** To protect the crops from pests and thieves it was the custom to build temporary booths or more permanent watchtowers in the fields. This was one of the more permanent watchtowers.

[For more on booths and watchtowers, see commentary on Isa. 1:8.]

Isa 5:8

**“add house to house.”** Wicked people accumulate houses and lands until there is no more room for the poor and righteous. Furthermore, often the wicked acquire those houses and lands by illegal and immoral means.

**“live alone in the midst of the land.”** The wicked grabbed more and more houses until they owned huge tracts of land and could live alone and as they pleased, and that also meant that the poor would be forced to be tenant farmers and live in housing provided by the landowner and live lives of toil and poverty. The Law stated that on the year of Jubilee the land acquired had to be returned to the original families (Lev. 25:10-13, 28-34), but in practical reality that never happened. The wicked landowners did not respect God’s Law, and the poor people did not have the means to force the wealthy and powerful wicked people to keep the Law.

Isa 5:9

**“Surely many houses will be desolate, even great and beautiful *ones will be* unoccupied.”** Isaiah lived in the time of the Assyrian conquest of Israel and the Assyrian destruction of much of Judah. The Israelites had consistently ignored or defied God, and that eventually led to the destruction of their country by the Assyrians and other outside people. The rich and powerful, who lived in huge houses on wide tracts of land were smug in their powerful and privileged position, but they lost all that and more when the Assyrians came.

Isa 5:10

**“ten-yoke vineyard.”** The term “ten-yoke” is a custom that refers to the amount of land that ten yoke of oxen could plow in a certain period of time. Unfortunately, we do not know how much land that is. We felt it better to leave the literal Hebrew “ten-yoke” than to say something like “ten-acre vineyard,” because that gives the reader the impression that we know the size of the vineyard, which we don’t.

**“six gallons.”** The Hebrew measure is a “bath,” a liquid measure that is about six gallons or 22 liters.

**“ten bushels”** The Hebrew reads, “homer,” which was a dry measure, but the exact size is unknown. The word “homer” is related to the Hebrew word for “donkey,” so it is assumed that a homer was originally a donkey’s load, and estimated to be about ten bushels, although other scholars estimate it at six bushels. An “ephah” is one-tenth of a homer, so if the homer is ten bushels, the yield of the field will be only one bushel, if the homer is six bushels, the yield will be about three pecks.

Isa 5:12

**“banquets.”** The Hebrew word can mean “drinking bout,” and it generally refers to a meal with wine.

Isa 5:13

**“will go...will be starving… will be parched.”** The Hebrew text uses the perfect tense for these verbs, portraying them as if the events had already occurred. This is the prophetic perfect idiom, portraying a future event in the past for dramatic effect and because the event will occur.

[For more information on the prophetic perfect, and how it influences our concept of salvation, adoption, redemption, and glorification, see commentary on Eph. 2:6 and 2:8. For more information on the prophetic present, see commentary on Luke 3:9.]

Isa 5:14

**“Sheol has enlarged her throat and opened her mouth.”** This is the figure of speech personification. Sheol is pictured as a woman who cannot get enough to eat, and many people are dying and thus becoming “food for Sheol.”

**“beyond measure.”** This continues the figure of speech personification. So many people are dying that Sheol has opened her mouth wider than can be measured so that she can eat all the dead people.

**and *into her* will descend.”** That is, into Sheol will descend the evil people of Jerusalem, which is also a “her” in this text.

**“dignitaries.”** The Hebrew is “splendor,” but in this context, it refers to the dignitaries, nobles, or leaders in Jerusalem.

Isa 5:20

**“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.”** Thinking what is “good” is “evil” and what is “evil” is “good” is what happens when people reject the Word of God (Isa. 5:24). God created the heavens and earth and humankind, and He knows what is actually “good” and “evil.” But the Devil and the people who follow his evil ways disobey and defy God. The wise believer studies the Bible and gets doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in living rightly from it (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In contrast, natural human desires are most often base and sinful. The human mind and conscience must be taught from God in order to be godly. The believer who is transformed by thinking and acting on the Word of God can discern what is good and what is not (Rom. 12:2).

Isa 5:21

**“and prudent in their own sight.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “and before their faces, prudent.” People often do not see themselves clearly, which is why having wise and honest counselors is very important.

Isa 5:24

**“sinks down.”** If you set fire to a pile of dry grass, as it burns up the grass on top sinks down into the flame until it is on fire and then consumed. This verse gives different illustrations of the destruction of the wicked, who will be consumed in the Lake of Fire until they exist no more. They will be like stubble or grass that the fire burns up, like a root that rots away, and like a blossom that turns to dust and is gone.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Isa 5:25

**“their dead bodies are as refuse in the midst of the streets.”** To not be buried was considered a terrible curse (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

Isa 5:27

**“nor will the belt of their waist be untied.”** This refers to the custom of a man tying up his long clothing so he could move more quickly. In the biblical culture of the Old Testament, both men and women wore long outer robes, with the man’s robe being slightly shorter than the woman’s robe. When men wanted to move quickly, they would take the bottom part of their robe and pull it up and secure it with a belt. This was called “girding up the loins.” 1 Peter 1:13 (KJV) says, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end….” (cf. 2 Kings 4:29; 9:1; Job. 38:3; 40:7; Jer. 1:17).

Isa 5:28

**“bows bent.”** The armies of the nations will come ready to do battle. Their arrows are sharp and their bows strung and bent.

**“like a windstorm.”** The chariot wheels move fast across the earth and stir up clouds of dust.

**Isaiah Chapter 6**

Isa 6:1

**“In the year that King Uzziah died.”** The text does not say that Uzziah had died yet, although he may have. But even if he was still alive he was an old man having reigned as king over Judah for 52 years, and signs of his deteriorating health would have almost certainly been evident. Uzziah was a godly king; not perfect, but generally a godly person (2 Kings 15:3; 2 Chron. 26:4). He is called both Uzziah and Azariah (cf. 2 Kings 15:1-7). We are not told why Isaiah got this vision the year Uzziah died, but there are several possibilities, and it could well be a combination of them. Since Isaiah was in Jerusalem, it is almost certain that Uzziah and Isaiah knew each other and may have been friends of sorts, and it is always difficult to lose a godly king, especially if they were friends. Also, although the next king, Jotham, turned out to be a godly king, it was not known exactly what would happen when Jotham took the throne, so there is always some anxiety when rulership changes. A vision of God on His throne in heaven would give Isaiah a firm confidence and hope for the future. Also, since Jotham was just taking over it may have been an important time for Isaiah to renew his efforts to call Israel and Judah back to God, and that certainly is what God called him to do in Isaiah 6. The connection between Uzziah and Isaiah seems to be evident in the text, because from a chronological perspective it could have said, “In the first year of Jotham.” The vision is connected with Uzziah, not Jotham the next king.

**“I saw the Lord.”** God showed Isaiah a vision of Himself sitting on His throne in heaven.

[For more on God revealing Himself in human form and becoming visible to people, see commentary on Acts 7:55.]

**“sitting on a throne.”** In Solomon’s Temple there is no throne for God, and in fact, there is no room for a huge throne. God would have been in the Holy of Holies, which means in the vision God gave Isaiah, the ark of the covenant had been removed and a throne was there instead. Interestingly enough, in the Millennial Temple described by Ezekiel (Ezek. 40-44). there is no ark of the covenant (Jer. 3:16). Yet God will live there like He always has (Ps. 110:1; 2 Sam. 22:7; Ps. 18:6; Isa. 66:6; Hab. 2:20; Ezek. 40-44).

**“the edges *of his robe*.”** The Hebrew is often rendered, “the train of his robe,” but there is no epigraphical (written) or artistic evidence (statues, bas-reliefs, or paintings) that robes in the ancient Near East had “trains” like a modern wedding dress does. The Hebrew word generally refers to the hem or lower extremity of the garment. Yahweh’s garment was so large that the edges filled the Temple.

**“filled the Temple.”** In this context in Isaiah, the Temple that Isaiah saw in the vision God gave him was God’s Temple in heaven. It can be confusing that God had a Temple in heaven (Isa. 6:1; Heb. 8:5; Rev. 11:19; 14:15, 17; 16:1, 17) and a Temple on earth (Exod. 25:8; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 23:25; 2 Chron. 29:6; 36:15), because in verses like Jonah 2:7 it takes some thought to determine which Temple is being referred to. In the case of Jonah, God’s Temple on earth is correct, there is no indication that Jonah ever expected to personally see God’s Temple in heaven.

Isa 6:2

**“Above him stood.”** God was sitting on this throne while the seraphim were standing and thus were “above” him. They must have been big and awesome creatures.

**“seraphim.”** We know almost nothing of these spirit beings. The Hebrew word translated “seraphim” likely means “fiery ones,” although it is possible the word comes from another root entirely and means something like “noble ones.”[[6]](#footnote-29850)

Isa 6:3

**“Holy, holy, holy.”** This triple repetition of “holy” is used by some people as evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity, but that is not the case. It is simply a triple repetition for emphasis, as is found in a few other places in the Bible (Jer. 22:29; Rev. 8:13; cf. 2 Sam. 18:33). The fact that the seraphim were speaking back and forth is worth noting. God apparently created many spirit beings that can talk, and thus, 1 Cor. 13:1 speaks of the languages of angels.

**“The whole earth is full of his glory!”** Even in its current fallen state, the whole earth is full of the glory of God. In this context, “glory” can also be a reference to power, and the earth shows the power of God in many ways.

Isa 6:4

**“The foundations of the thresholds shook.”** The text does not tell us why this particular area was singled out and described. It is possible that the Seraphim were sort of doorkeepers, so the area where they were shook.

**“house.”** The Temple was the “house” of God, and was often just called “the house.”

**“was filled with smoke.”** The Temple in heaven was filled with smoke. Smoke is sometimes associated with the presence of God, as it is here. In Revelation 15:8 God was in His Temple in heaven surrounded by his “glory,” the brilliant and often multi-colored light that surrounded Him, and from His glory came smoke that filled the Temple. When God came down on Mount Sinai shortly after the Exodus from Egypt, the top of Mount Sinai was enveloped in smoke (Exod. 19:18).

[For more information on the glory of Yahweh, see commentary on Ezek. 1:28.]

Isa 6:5

**“Woe is me! For I am ruined.”** Even the best humans are far below the holiness of God, and when a humble person sees God in His glory and holiness they immediately become conscious of how wretched they are and how short they are of God’s standard of holiness. When Isaiah saw God, he exclaimed he was ruined. When Abraham spoke with God, he referred to himself as being “dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). Similarly, when God confronted Job, Job took back what he had said and said he repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:6). When Paul spoke of his inability to live a completely godly life he said, “Wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24).

God knows how short of His holiness humans really are, and He extends grace and mercy, just as He did to Isaiah, so that we can be near Him and work together with Him. It is not humility but pride that says, “I could never work with God.” Pride has two sides: considering oneself better than one really is, and not considering oneself to be as good as God has made us in Christ. Both sides elevate human opinion above the truth. God made Christians acceptable and accepted in His sight through the work of Jesus Christ, and the humble person graciously accepts that and gets to doing the work God has called them to do. Isaiah accepted God’s cleansing and accepted God’s call for his life. We should too.

An interesting comparison can be made between atheists and believers from this verse. Both say “Woe is me, I am ruined.” Atheists do it and also cry about death because they have no meaning and no hope (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13). Believers say “Woe is me” out of a humble and honest appraisal of who they are without God and compared to God. However, God then graces them with joy, hope, and meaning when He brings them into His family and promises them everlasting life in a glorious place.

Isa 6:6

**“Then one of the seraphim flew to me.”** It seems that Isaiah was looking up and into the Temple, and now one of the Seraphim flew down to him.

**“the altar.”** The text is unclear about which altar the coal was taken from. Some scholars contend that it was the altar of sacrifice, because there was no cleansing from sin without the shedding of the blood of the sacrifice (cf. Lev. 16:14-19; Heb. 9:22). On the other hand, the Seraphim were inside the Temple and the smoke that filled the Temple was generally associated with the incense altar in front of the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16:12-13).

Isa 6:7

**”your sin forgiven.”** The coal came from the altar of sacrifice. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but God has always been merciful and allowed for a substitutionary sacrifice to atone for people’s sin, ultimately waiting for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice can fully atone for human sin. That Isaiah’s sin was forgiven after he was touched with a coal from the altar of sacrifice points to the necessity of having our sin forgiven via sacrifice and points to the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ.

Isa 6:8

**“who will go for us?”** Who God is speaking to is not specifically stated in this verse. God wanted to send someone to help Israel, so He asked for advice. Isaiah writes: “I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom should I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am. Send me!’” (Isa. 6:8). We should first notice the interplay between the “I” in “Whom shall I send,” and the “us” in “…who will go for us?” The text is showing that God is in charge, but He is supported by, and asking advice from, others.

The context shows that God is appealing to others who support Him in His desire to help Israel, and so the “others” in this context cannot be the full assembly of spirits, because some of them did not support Him. Given what we know about God’s divine council from other places in Scripture, it is logical that God is speaking to His divine council and asking them about who He could send to do His work.

[For more information on God’s divine council, see commentary on Gen. 1:26.]

We must also note that God is asking for someone to go, not picking someone and telling them to go. Believers have free will and to be of true service to God must desire to serve Him. God wants us to love God and want to serve Him; He does not want unwilling or even half-willing servants. People should want to serve God, after all, He is our creator and sustainer, but people are selfish and self-centered, and mostly want only what makes them happy at the time. But for those that do have a heart to serve, God will bless them now and reward them richly in the next life.

[For more on rewards in the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Isa 6:9

**“hear, yes, hear...see, yes, see.”** Isaiah 6:9-10 is a very solemn section of Scripture and a stern warning to those who value things in this life so much that they ignore or defy God. This prophecy occurs in whole or in part five more times in Scripture, for a total of six times (Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; and Acts 28:26-27), and this repetition greatly emphasizes how serious in God’s eyes it is when people continue in their stubborn refusal to believe and obey God. The Bible is clear that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and God does not want anyone to die (Ezek. 18:30-32; 33:11), but wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Nevertheless, if people choose death, God will honor their choice and allow them to die in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:13-15). The way it is quoted in Matthew 13:14-15, it follows the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text of Isaiah 6:10 reads, “Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy and shut their eyes,” while the Greek translation in the Septuagint reads, “For this people’s heart is grown fat, and their ears are dull of hearing.” For why the Hebrew would use the word “make,” see commentary on Isaiah 6:10.

This is a translation of the figure of speech polyptoton that occurs in the Hebrew text (cf. Gen. 2:16).[[7]](#footnote-23982) The figure emphasizes the fact that the proud and arrogant people were in fact hearing the truth and seeing God work, but were so hard-hearted that they would not (indeed, some of them could not) really hear what they were hearing or see what they were seeing.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Isa 6:10

**“Make the heart of this people fat​.”** In this context, the “heart” refers to the mind and thoughts. The student of the Bible must learn to think of the “heart” as the center of rational thought rather than the seat of emotion (see commentary on Prov. 15:21). So the phrase could be easily translated, “Make the minds of these people ‘fat,’” (i.e., unresponsive, dull, stupid, stubborn).

Note that God tells Isaiah to make the heart of the people fat. This is not God’s doing, God tells Isaiah to do it. But how could Isaiah make the people’s heart fat and their ears heavy and shut their eyes? He couldn’t. This is the idiom of permission. In this case, Isaiah is told to do something when in fact he can only stand by and watch it happen, (in scholarly jargon, “permit” it to happen). It is important to keep in mind when reading verses that say things such as God (or in this case, Isaiah) hardened someone’s heart, or covered their ears, or blinded their eyes, it is the people who actually did those things to themselves. God does not harden someone’s heart and then punish him for having a hardened heart, and Isaiah certainly had no ability to do that. Besides, that would be totally against the loving nature of God and his servants. Verses that say something such as we see here in Isaiah 6:10-11, or that God hardened someone’s heart, are written using standard Hebrew language and customs and are using the Semitic “idiom of permission. The “idiom of permission” is a name given by scholars to the particular Semitic manner of speaking in which someone is said to actively do what he only allowed to be done.

Why does the Bible say that God directed Isaiah to make the people’s hearts dull and close their eyes and ears if Isaiah does not have the power to do that? The idea behind the idiom of permission is that when the truth is spoken to someone then they have to make the choice as to how to respond, and that response can be openly seen. This is the same idea as we see in Romans when it says that without the law sin is dead. The law was good, but when the law came then “sin came alive” because now the person’s actions were clearly sin—breaking the law—and those actions would be obvious to everyone. Paul wrote in Romans, “When the commandment came, sin came alive, and I died. And I discovered that the commandment that was given for life actually resulted in death” (Rom. 7:9-10). So Romans shows us that people have sinful hearts, but it is when the law comes into the picture that people clearly go against God’s laws and sin. When the commandment comes and people break it rather than obey it, then they are clearly sinning, and furthermore, their sin and guilt become obvious.

So it is with the idiom of permission. God did not harden Pharaoh’s heart, but when God commanded Pharaoh to let Israel go, Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God, which also revealed the pride and arrogance in Pharaoh’s heart. Similarly, Isaiah’s prophetic word did not make the hearts of the people of Israel obstinate against God, but when Isaiah prophesied and gave them the Word of God they made the choice to ignore and defy it, and as Isaiah prophesied over and over, the people became more and more obstinate and disobedient, just like Pharaoh did. Isaiah’s prophetic word did not make the people’s heart fat and obstinate, but it forced the people to openly defy God and it certainly revealed their arrogant hearts. Thus, God’s command to Isaiah to “make” the people’s hearts fat is actually more like “speak the truth so that the people will have to make a choice between me and them, and any arrogance in their heart will be revealed.” Similarly, Jesus taught in parables so that his listeners would make the choice between God and themselves—would they make the effort to understand the parables or just go on their merry way—and the hearts of the people would be clearly revealed. Humble and godly people heard the parables and responded to them, while the arrogant and prideful people did not make the effort to understand them, which revealed the posture of their hearts (cf. Mark 4:11-12).

So God did not reach into Pharaoh’s heart and harden it (cf. Exod. 4:21), but He allowed Pharaoh to harden his own heart (actually, Pharaoh had free will and God could not stop him from hardening his heart). God asked Pharaoh over and over again to let His people go. Pharaoh refused. The more God asked, and the stronger God’s plague warnings became, the more stubborn Pharaoh became and he had to make his heart harder and harder to resist God. So God was only hardening Pharaoh’s heart in the sense that Pharaoh had to harden his heart to resist God’s appeals. The same is true of the Jews. Through the centuries God sent prophet after prophet to Israel, and Israel suffered consequence after consequence because of their unbelief. The more prophets God sent, the more Israel hardened itself against them. So in the Semitic idiom, God is said to have hardened Israel’s heart, closed her ears, and blinded her eyes, and God’s asking Isaiah to make the people’s hearts fat was just God asking Isaiah to do what many prophets before him had done, which was to speak the prophetic word and thus make the people choose between doing what they wanted or doing what God wanted.

God’s people are still doing today what God told Isaiah to do 2,700 years ago. God tells Christians to “Preach the word; be ready at convenient times and at inconvenient times; reprove, rebuke, *and* exhort with all patience and teaching. For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but having itching ears, they will pile up teachers for themselves, to suit their own desires” (2 Tim. 4:2-3). God’s people teach the truth to people, but just as in Isaiah’s day, most people will choose their own desires over the Word and will of God. The more Christians preach the word, the more the people will harden themselves against it and defy God. If 2 Timothy had used the idiom of permission it might have been written this way: “Go harden the hearts of the people and close their ears and eyes to the truth.” How would Christians do that? Actually, they are doing it every day. By preaching, teaching, and witnessing, Christians are forcing people to openly make the choice between God’s desires and their own desires. Sadly, as Paul prophesied to Timothy, people will not tolerate the truth but will pile up teachers who teach what they desire, what they want to hear.

Sadly, the history of the world is a history of people choosing their desires over God’s desires. Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Cain disobeyed God and killed Abel. Pharaoh disobeyed God and would not let Israel go. Israel disobeyed God and chose pagan gods over God, and on through history the pattern goes. The language and idioms change, but God’s call to believers has not. Believers are still charged to speak the Word of God to people and “harden their hearts” by forcing them to openly and clearly make the decision to choose themselves over God. Thankfully, however, many times that believers speak the Word to others, those other people believe and change. Believers have to be the salt and light in the world, a world that desperately needs us.

[For a more complete explanation of the idiom of permission, see commentary on Exod. 4:21. For more on why Christ taught in parables, see commentary on Matt. 13:13.]

**“fat.”** Here, “fat” is an idiom for insensitive, unreceptive, dull. Israel was “fat” when it came to the things of God. They were insensitive and unreceptive.

Isa 6:11

**“Then I said, “Lord, how long?”** Although Isaiah’s question asks for information, it is almost a plea for God to have mercy on Israel. Isaiah’s heart is that Israel would be saved, but he understands that just as Moses’ request to let Israel go caused Pharaoh to harden his heart and say “No,” so Isaiah’s pleas with Israel to turn back to God from their idols would only cause Israel to say “No” even more forcefully, and so Isaiah wanted to know how long Israel’s stubbornness would continue. Sadly, Isaiah did not get the answer he wanted. Israel would not change and eventually their land would be a wasteland and without people, and that happened with the Assyrian invasion and the deportation of the people of Israel into lands conquered by Assyria.

Isa 6:13

**“The holy seed is its stump.”** The stump is the seed, the offspring. After the tree is cut down, the stump is left; and after the majority of the people are killed or captured, the “stump” is left to propagate.

**Isaiah Chapter 7**

Isa 7:1

**“went up to Jerusalem to war against it.”** The date of the attack is not exactly known, but it would have had to have been between the time Ahaz became king (c. 742 BC) and the beginning of Assyria’s attack on Damascus, the capital of Syria (c. 734 BC). Assyria had been expanding its empire, and Syria and Israel no doubt felt threatened. It is not clear how attacking Judah would help that situation, but perhaps they did not want an enemy at their back while they were fighting Assyria, or perhaps they thought if they could depose Ahaz that the person they appointed king would then help them fight Assyria.

Isa 7:2

**“the house of David.”** Ahaz was of the line of David. The Davidic dynasty and the “throne of David” continued from David until Jehoiachin died in the Babylonian Captivity. It is not clear why the text uses “the house of David” here; it may be because God promised David that his house (dynasty) would continue forever, and had Ahaz repented and turned to God and caused Judah to do the same that God would have protected Judah like He did during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35-37).

**“his heart trembled.”** This is referring to the king of Judah, Ahaz. There is good reason Ahaz’s heart—and also the hearts of the people of Israel—trembled when he heard that Syria was allied with “Ephraim” (Israel). At this point in history, Israel and Syria were both larger nations than Ahaz’s country of Judah, and the fact that they had allied themselves against him ostensibly mean his doom and the end of Judah. In fact, Syria and Israel were so confident of victory in a war that they had already picked a person to be the new king of Judah, the son of Tabeel (or “Ben-tabeel”). Furthermore, besides having Syria and Israel as enemies, Judah was also being attacked by the Edomites from the south and the Philistines from the west (2 Chron. 28:17-18). The book of 2 Chronicles gives the real reason for Judah’s troubles at this time, and it was Ahaz’s rejection of Yahweh and His laws (2 Chron. 28:19).

“Ephraim” was the most prominent and powerful tribe in the nation of “Israel,” so in this context, “Ephraim” stands for the whole country of Israel. Technically, this is the figure of speech synecdoche of the part, when a part is put for the whole. Ephraim was often put for the country of Israel although at other times Ephraim had more of the connotation of Samaria, the capital of Israel because that was where the king lived and thus it was the center of corruption and idolatry (cf. Isa. 7:2, 5, 8; 11:13; 17:3; Jer. 7:15; 31:9; Hos. 6:4; Zech. 9:10). Also, although technically the city of Samaria was in the tribal area of Manasseh, the fact that Ephraim and Manasseh were both “the tribe of Joseph” (Deut. 33:13; Josh. 17:14-18; 18:5; Judg. 1:22), the fact that the exact boundaries between the tribes were often ignored, and the prominence of Ephraim such that often all Israel was called “Ephraim,” led to the city of Samaria being referred to as being part of Ephraim (cf. Isa. 7:9).

Isa 7:3

**“Shear-jashub.”** The meaning of Shear-jashub is “a remnant will return.” The reason that Isaiah was told to bring his son is not stated. It is possible that God wanted there to be two witnesses to what Isaiah told the king, although the king would certainly not have been alone with Isaiah. But it is also possible that the prophetic meaning of Shear-jashub was important, even if ambiguous. The meaning could be taken in a negative sense, that the devastation of Judah would be so great that only a remnant would be left to return, or it could be taken positively, that no matter how great the destruction was, there would be a remnant left to return to work and even return to God. There is no indication in the text that Ahaz paid any attention to Shear-jashub, and as we learn in the text, Ahaz had already hired the Assyrians to attack Syria and Israel, so he likely did not think much at all about what Isaiah said.

**“upper pool.”** As the population of Jerusalem grew and expanded north from its only natural water source, the Gihon Spring, aqueducts, and huge cisterns were needed to provide water for the population. Today there are huge pools outside of Jerusalem that used to supply water to the city, but although they are called “Solomon’s pools,” Solomon did not build them.

Isa 7:4

**“Make sure you stay calm.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “Guard yourself; stay calm.”

**“two stubs of smoldering firewood.”** The Hebrew word translated “firewood” is *ud* (#0181 אוּד), and it can refer to a stick that was used to poke and stir the fire, which often caught fire itself, or to a log or piece of wood in the fire. It is hard to tell in this case which of the two meanings applies, but the likely meaning is simply a piece of firewood. The English word “firebrand,” which is used in many English versions, is unclear because “firebrand” is not used of a stick one stirs the fire with and although “firebrand” can refer to a piece of burning wood, that is a very uncommon use of the word. Versions that read “firewood” include the BBE, CJB, NIV, and NJB.

In Isaiah 7:4, the prophet Isaiah is telling King Ahaz that the kings of Syria and Israel are just smoldering pieces of wood. Their fire has gone out and soon they will be gone too; Rezin was killed by the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III, and Pekah was assassinated by his successor, Hoshea (2 Kings 15:27-30).

**“the son of Remaliah.”** This refers to King Pekah, who was the son of Remaliah (2 Kings 15:25, 27). Pekah became king of Israel by killing King Azariah (2 Kings 15:25), and he himself was killed by Hoshea who became king in his place (2 Kings 15:30). Hoshea was the last king of Israel before it was conquered by Assyria.

Isa 7:5

**“Because Syria.”** This starts a three-verse sentence that ends in Isaiah 7:7. The Syrians and Israel made assertions (Isa. 7:6), but Yahweh made His assertion (Isa. 7:7), which is what mattered in the end.

Isa 7:6

**“break it open.”** This is a quite literal rendering of the Hebrew. It clearly means to break into the city and conquer it, but the phrase carries the emotional power of a ruthless attack. The phrase has been translated in many different ways in the different English versions, including: “capture it,” “divide it,” “conquer it,” “make a breach in it,” and “make it our own by force.” Given the history of the conquest of a walled city, the phrase summarized the idea of breaching the city and then conquering it.

**“even the son of Tabeel.”** In their arrogance and confidence of their victory, Syria and Israel had already chosen the king they would appoint over Judah. But their plan failed and God’s plan succeeded. The name Tabeel seems to be Syrian, so the man the kings picked to be the ruler of Judah and Jerusalem would most likely be a Syrian.[[8]](#footnote-26678)

Isa 7:8

**“the head of Syria is Damascus.”** The “head,” the capital city, of Syria, was Damascus, and the king of Damascus was Rezin.

**“and within 65 years Ephraim will be broken in pieces so that it will not be a people.”** This phrase has been considered problematic because Israel was conquered by Assyria and the people of Israel carried out of their land in 723/722 BC, which was only 12 or 13 years after Isaiah gave this prophecy to Ahaz. However, the process of replacing the people of Israel with pagan people continued long after any initial conquest and exiling of captives to Assyria. The people who wanted to build the Temple with Ezra (Ezra 4:1-5, esp. v. 2) were brought to Israel during the reign of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (c. 681-669), and that would have been within the 65-year period of time mentioned here in Isaiah 7:8. It is quite possible that Israel was not considered completely broken up and no longer a cohesive “people” until that time when the people of Israel would have been very settled in the places to which they were taken and the area of Samaria was so settled by pagans that even by New Testament times the people there were not integrated into the major Jewish population.

Isa 7:9

**“the head of Ephraim is Samaria.”** The capital city of “Ephraim” (Israel), is Samaria (see commentary on Isa. 7:2). And the king in Samaria was Pekah, the son of Remaliah.

**“If you are not firm *in your trust*, you will not be firm *in life*.”** The Hebrew text uses a wordplay. The verb “firm” is repeated twice, the first time in the hiphil tense and thus having an active sense, the second time in the niphal tense and thus having a passive sense. The actual Hebrew text is short and would be literally translated as something like, “If you are not firm you will not be firm.” The NET gets the idea using the word “remain”: “If your faith does not remain firm, then you will not remain secure.” The NIV uses the word “stand”: “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” Many versions ignore the wordplay and try to get the sense differently. Thus, the NASB has, “If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.”

This sentence is short but powerful. The great key to success in this life and in the next is trust in God and obedience to Him. Even with all the evil Ahaz had done, his kingdom would be spared and would be prosperous if he would trust and obey God. As it was, his kingdom escaped total destruction but suffered attacks in which his people suffered.

Isa 7:10

**“Yahweh spoke again to Ahaz.”** This is a wonderful example of the Jewish understanding of agency; Author and Agent. Yahweh spoke, but He spoke through the mouth of Isaiah.

Isa 7:12

**“I will not ask.”** This sounds very holy, but actually, Ahaz was hoping to deceive Isaiah. Ahaz did not think he needed a sign from Yahweh that Syria and Israel would be defeated in a war because he had already taken the gold and silver from the Temple and hired Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria, to attack Syria and Israel (2 Kings 16:8-9). Tiglath-pileser attacked and conquered Syria in 732 BC, during the reign of Pekah of Israel and Ahaz of Judah. Later, after the reign of Pekah and during the reign of Hoshea, the Assyrian king Shalmanezzar, who succeeded Tiglath Peleser, conquered Israel and deported the people in about 722 BC.

But God knew of Ahaz’s attempted deception and his plot to hire the Assyrians, as we see in Isaiah 7:13, and God gave Ahaz a sign of victory anyway (Isa. 7:14-16).

Isa 7:13

**“And he said.”** That is, Isaiah the prophet said.

Isa 7:14

**“the young woman.”** Isaiah 7:14 is quoted in Matthew 1:23. Isaiah 7:14 has much in it that is unclear, which makes sense when we realize that it is a prophecy with two separate fulfillments separated by over 700 years. It was a prophecy about a young woman in the time of Isaiah and Ahaz, and it was a prophecy about the birth of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew text has many words that can have two meanings, which is one reason there are so many different English translations of the verse. Of course, that makes sense when we realize that God is trying to give both a present-tense prophecy of what is happening at the time, and a future prophecy of what will happen in another 700 years. The Hebrew is grammatically like “Therefore the Lord himself will give [future tense verb] you all [plural; you all] a sign. Behold, the young woman is pregnant [the verb is present tense, but can be taken as a future in some circumstances] and about to bear [a participle; more literally, “bearing”] a son, and you [feminine singular], *young woman,* will call his name Immanuel.”

Although many English versions of the Bible have “virgin” instead of “young woman,” the Hebrew word is *`almah* (#05959 עַלְמָה), and it refers to a young woman, either of marriageable age but not yet married (and therefore presumably a virgin), or a young woman who is married. Whether an *`almah* is a virgin or not gets determined from the context, but the immediate context of Isaiah 7:14 is not completely clear. The text note in the NET states: “Though the Hebrew word used here עַלְמָה), '*almah*( can sometimes refer to a woman who is a virgin (Gen. 24:43), it does not carry this meaning inherently. The word is simply the feminine form of the corresponding masculine noun ) עֶלֶם'*elem*, ‘young man’; cf. 1 Sam. 17:56; 20:22(. The Aramaic and Ugaritic cognate terms are both used of women who are not virgins. The word seems to pertain to age, not sexual experience, and would normally be translated ‘young woman.’” Also, there is a Hebrew word that more clearly means “virgin,” *bethulah* (#01330 בְּתוּלָה; although even *bethulah* does not always mean “virgin,”[[9]](#footnote-17697) so if God had wanted to more clearly say “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14, He could have. There are no examples in the Old Testament, however, that use '*almah* of a married woman, which is probably why the Septuagint used *parthenos*, usually understood as “virgin,” in their translation of Isaiah (for more on the use of “virgin,” see commentary on Matt. 1:23).

There is good evidence that in Isaiah 7:14, '*almah* should be translated “young woman” and not “virgin.” One is that the “sign” of the young woman was specifically given to Ahaz that Israel and Syria would be shortly defeated in war. Isaiah said, “…the Lord himself will give you [King Ahaz] a sign. Behold, the young woman will conceive and bear a son, and will call his name Immanuel...before the child knows to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you abhor [Israel and Syria] will be forsaken” (Isa. 7:14, 16). That event took place around 730 BC, long before Christ was born. This is also supported by the fact that Isaiah said to Ahaz, “the young woman,” not “a young woman,” indicating a young woman that they were aware of.

Some of the best evidence that Isaiah 7:14 does not specifically refer to a virgin birth is in the text of the Bible itself. We have just seen that the “sign” was for Ahaz in his time, about 730 BC, and so the birth that occurred at that time was not a virgin birth. Also, Ahaz was not surprised when Isaiah spoke of the “young woman,” but he well might have been if Isaiah had said “virgin.” Even better evidence that Isaiah 7:14 refers to a “young woman” and not a “virgin” comes from the fact that no one in the New Testament times was expecting a virgin birth. Mary and Joseph were both God-fearing people, and neither of them were (Matt. 1:18-21; Luke 1:34). The experts in the Old Testament were not either, and so accused Jesus of having been born out of wedlock as a bastard child (John 8:41). If the Old Testament had clearly foretold a virgin birth, then people, especially a godly woman from the line of David like Mary, would have been expecting to be able to get pregnant without a husband involved.

We should note, however, that translating Isaiah 7:14 as “young woman” does not forbid a virgin birth, it just does not clearly foretell one. Thus, the “young woman” who gave birth to the Messiah, Mary, turned out to be a virgin, as we see in the New Testament. A growing number of English versions have “young woman” and not “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14 (cf. BBE, CEB, CJB, JPS, Moffatt Bible, NAB, NEB, NET, NJB, NRSV, RSV, TNK).

To add to the ambiguity in Isaiah 7:14, the Hebrew text can be translated as a future tense verb, “the young woman will become pregnant” (CJB; cf. HCSB, JPS, NASAB, NET, NIV), or as a present tense verb, “the young woman is pregnant” (CEB; cf. BBE, NAB, NJB, NRSV). Just as with the word “young woman,” this double possibility of translating the verb opens the door for the double fulfillment of the prophecy. In Isaiah’s time, the woman was most likely already pregnant, although her getting pregnant may still have been in the very near future, and in any case, her getting pregnant soon would have been a sign to Ahaz, whereas when used as a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah, the pregnancy was in the future.

Messianic prophecies sometimes involve a double fulfillment, just as we see here in Isaiah, and require an understanding of the history of Israel and the complexity of the text to see and appreciate. It is amazing that God could give King Ahaz a prophecy that his kingdom, and thus the line of David, would be rescued from his enemies, and at that same time give a much more hidden prophecy about the Greater David, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**“is pregnant.”** The Hebrew text is unclear because it can be translated as either “is pregnant,” or “will conceive.” The whole temporality of the verse is in question because the verse can be translated as “the young woman, pregnant, is bearing a son,” or “the young woman, pregnant, is about to bear a son” (cf. NAB). Young’s Literal Translation reads, “Lo, the Virgin is conceiving, And is bringing forth a son.”

**“and you, *young woman*.”** The “you” is feminine singular, referring to the woman who will bear the child, she will name the child.

**“about to bear a son.”** The Hebrew is a participle, “bearing,” likely meaning “about to bear.”

**“will call.”** The Hebrew verb is feminine, and thus means, “she will call.”

**“Immanuel.”** Some people believe that because Jesus was to be called Immanuel (meaning “God with us”) that he must therefore be God incarnate. That is not the case. The name “Immanuel” means “God with us,” and it was symbolic of the fact that God would be with His people to support and deliver them. The name “Immanuel” fits the double prophecy well both at the time of Isaiah and at the time of Jesus.

In the time of Ahaz and Isaiah, things looked bad for Judah. Syria and Israel were both larger nations than Judah, and Judah would not stand much of a chance in a war against them. But Isaiah foretold Judah’s deliverance, bolstered by the fact that God would be with them to deliver them, symbolized by the birth of a child who would be named “Immanuel,” and indeed God was with Judah and they were delivered from the enemy. Then, more than 700 years later, at the birth of Christ, the name Immanuel was again symbolic and appropriate because God was working powerfully in Christ to support and deliver His people and make salvation available to everyone, which Jesus did.

[For more information on this verse, which is quoted in Matthew, including more on the name “Immanuel,” see commentary on Matt. 1:23. For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Isa 7:15

**“before he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good.”** This line has been interpreted two ways. One is that before the child knows what is bad and what is good usually in the context of eating, that is, before the child is very old, say 3 to 5 years old, “the land whose two kings you abhor will be forsaken” (Isa. 7:16). That idea would work for Syria (Aram), because it was attacked and destroyed by Assyria within three years. However, the nation of Israel was not conquered by Assyria for another 12 or so years, so that explanation does not exactly fit.

It is more likely that the child is raised in good circumstances, something that is indicated by his eating butter and honey, and when he is old enough to really understand the difference between good and evil, likely in his teenage years, both the nation of Syria and the nation of Israel would have been conquered and their populations carried off to places in Assyria.

Isa 7:17

**“Ephraim separated from Judah.”** The United Kingdom of Israel that was established and ruled by Saul, then David, then Solomon, split into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah after the death of Solomon (c. 940 BC; 1 Kings 12). Since Isaiah gave this prophecy to king Ahaz, it was during his reign and thus between 740 and 726 BC.

Isa 7:18

**“the fly that is in the uttermost part of the streams of Egypt and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.”** The fly and the bee are both insects that can come in swarms and get into the most seemingly inaccessible places. The fly and the bee represent Egypt and Assyria, and although Egypt did not invade Judah and Israel in the way Assyria did, it is possible that Isaiah is making a general threat about the national powers that could invade Israel. Isaiah makes it clear several verses later that Assyria is the real threat at this time.

Isa 7:19

**“the water holes.”** The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain, which explains the huge diversity of translations. The REV translation is taken from the primary meaning in the *HALOT*.[[10]](#footnote-20827)

Isa 7:20

**“razor.”** Israel had sinned against God for centuries, and Isaiah foretold that they would be “shaved” by the Assyrians in many ways. As it turned out, the Assyrians burned their cities and took the people and valuables captive to Assyria. Isaiah foretold that the extent of the destruction and disgrace would be almost unimaginable, and God personalized it by a picture of a person’s humiliation and defeat if an enemy captured a man (or woman) and shaved off the hair of the head and the genitals, and for a man, also the beard, all of which would be horribly disgraceful in that culture.

**“shave with a razor...the hair of the feet.”** Here “feet” is an idiom, and used euphemistically for the genital organs. Isaiah 7:20 is a prophecy that when the Assyrians conquer Israel and take the people captive they will “shave the hair of the feet.” It is unfortunate that many versions say “shave the hair of the legs,” which misses the point entirely. Why would people shave the legs of their captives? The captives were led away “naked and barefoot” and “with buttocks bared” (Isa. 20:4). Isaiah was saying that not only will these captives be carried away naked with their buttocks exposed, but they would suffer the humiliation of having their pubic hair shaved by their Assyrian enemies. In Isaiah 47:2, which is a prophecy of when the Persians will carry the Babylonian women away captive, they will be stripped naked and their “thigh” will be uncovered, “thigh” being another sexual euphemism for the genitalia (see commentary on Isa. 47:2).

It was quite common that captives were stripped naked to humiliate them, and very common that the women were raped. The Hebrew word *gala*, which is used as “uncover” in a sexual sense (see Lev. 18 and 20 where “uncover” is used many times for sexual intercourse), is also used for “to be led captive” (2 Kings 17:11,28; 24:14; 25:11, *etc.*), perhaps because of the strong cultural connection between being taken captive and being stripped naked and likely raped.

The “feet” are used idiomatically for the genital area in other verses as well. Ezekiel 16:25 says the woman “opened her feet” to everyone, referring to sexual intercourse. Another connection between the genital area and the feet can be seen in 2 Kings 18:27 and Isaiah 36:12 where the Hebrew phrase for urine is, “the water of the feet.”

Captives were also humiliated by shaving their beard or their hair. In 2 Samuel 10:4-5, the king of Ammon took the emissaries that had come from David and shaved off half their beards, and the men were so embarrassed that David had them stay away from Jerusalem until their beards had grown back. Isaiah 7:20 says that the Assyrians will be a razor that will shave the people of Judah; shave their heads, their beards, and their pubic hair. Jeremiah 2:16 personifies Israel and says that Egypt will shave his head.

Isa 7:23

**“1,000 shekels.”** 1,000 shekels is roughly 25 pounds (11.3 kg). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.” Although the word “shekel” is not in the Hebrew text, it was the most standard measure for silver and gold.

Isa 7:24

**“all the land will be briars and thorns.”** The land will not be good for farming at that point, but will be good for hunting.

**Isaiah Chapter 8**

Isa 8:1

**“Take a large tablet.”** This announcement of the Assyrian invasion (of Syria, Israel, and then Judah) was to be public. The tablet, and the baby that was to be born, were to be signs to Judah (cf. Isa. 8:7). The Hebrew word for “tablet” is *gillaovn* (#01549 גִּלָּיוֹן), which generally refers to a tablet of wood or metal that would be capable of being put up as a placard to be read by many people, and that is likely the case here.

**“An ordinary stylus.”** The Hebrew is literally “the stylus of a man.” In other words, Isaiah was not to engrave the tablet with some special instrument. However, because the phrase is an idiom, different scholars have different ideas about the emphasis it is bringing to the text. For example, the ESV has, “write on it in common characters.” In that case, the stylus would be a metonymy for what the stylus wrote, but there does not seem to be any good reason for importing the metonymy into the verse.

**“Maher-shalal-hash-baz.”** Biblical names, especially when they were given by God, were always descriptive of the person in some way; they were mini portraits of the person or some aspect of the person’s life. It is impossible to give an exact translation of a name for several reasons. First, it is not written as a sentence so the connectors have to be supplied. Secondly, the Hebrew words involved can often be translated differently. For example, in this name, the Hebrew form of the first word, *maher*, can either be an infinitive verb or an imperative verb, and the way those can be brought into English can differ. Thirdly, the words themselves have different definitions, but the translator has to choose one for his translation. This explains why different commentaries or study Bibles have somewhat different meanings for the name. The essence of the name is something like: “Haste to the spoil; hurry to the prey (or plunder),” or “speeding to the plunder; hurrying to the spoil.” In this case, the name foretold the conquests of the Assyrian Empire over Syria and Israel (Isa. 8:4), and even over much of Judah as well (Isa. 8:8).

Isa 8:2

**“and call reliable witnesses.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text has “I [God] will call,” but it stands alone. The Dead Sea scrolls, Septuagint, Syriac, and Aramaic Targums all read “call” in the imperative, and the Vulgate reads “I called” in the past tense. In this context, it makes much more sense that God told Isaiah to call faithful witnesses to hear his prophecy than that God would say He would call them.

Uriah and Zechariah are called “reliable witnesses” or “faithful witnesses,” which may be a reflection of the fact that they were generally good men who were living in the time of an ungodly king, or it may mean that they were known by the people to be generally reliable.

**“Uriah the priest.”** The fact that he is simply named and not further described makes it almost certain that he is the same man as the high priest in 2 Kings 16:10-11 who was commanded by Ahaz to replace Solomon’s bronze altar with the replica of the pagan altar from Damascus. He may have been a good man who was forced by the king to do evil. In any case, God wanted to be sure he heard this prophecy about the Assyrian invasion.

**“Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.”** The identity of Zechariah is not known with certainty. He may have been Ahaz’s father-in-law (cf. 2 Kings 18:2).

Isa 8:3

**“And I went into the prophetess.”** The Hebrew uses an idiom, literally, “I drew near the prophetess.” So Isaiah had sex with the prophetess. From the scope of Scripture and the holiness of Isaiah, we can conclude that “the prophetess” was Isaiah’s wife. As the wife of a prophet she may well have been known as “the prophetess,” or she may have been a prophetess in her own right, the Bible does not say.

**“Then Yahweh said to me, ‘Call his name.’”** Here, with the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz, it was Isaiah the father who was to name the child. In Isaiah 7:14, at the birth of Immanuel, the mother was to name the boy.

Isa 8:4

**“For before the child knows how to say, ‘My father,’ and, ‘My mother,’”** It is noteworthy that with both the birth of the baby boy Immanuel, and with the birth of the baby boy Maher-shalal-hash-baz, it is the age of the child that is the marker of when the prophecies will be fulfilled (Isa. 7:15-16; Isa. 8:4). It is not clear how old the child has to be in order to be able to say “My father” and “My mother.” Does he have to say it clearly and know what he is saying, or does he just have to utter the equivalent of “da-da” and “ma-ma?” The difference would mean the fulfillment of the prophecy about a year after the birth or perhaps two or even three years.

The destruction of Damascus and the spoiling of the provinces of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, here called “Samaria,” took place in 732 BC. That would put Isaiah’s prophecy in 735-733 BC. It would be about a dozen years later, in 723/22 BC that the city of Samaria would be conquered and the people of Israel scattered around Assyria (2 Kings 17:6).

Isa 8:5

**“Yahweh spoke to me again.”** The Bible does not say how much time elapsed between Isaiah 8:1 and Isaiah 8:5, but it could not have been shorter than about two years or much longer than four.

Isa 8:6

**“this people.”** Most likely Judah and Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 1:1), however, in this context it well could include all of the twelve tribes and include Israel, which was destroyed by Assyria, and then Assyria attacked Judah.

**“the waters of Shiloah that go softly.”** Although the reference is unclear, it seems to be a reference to the waters that flowed under and around the Temple, such as fed the Gihon Spring. God is saying that because the people of Judah refused the living water of the Word of God that should have been available at the Temple, they will be attacked by the Assyrians, which they were. Shiloah is the name of the pool that is referred to as the “pool of Siloam” in John 9:7, “Siloam” being the Greek spelling. The stream from the Gihon Spring and the pool of Shiloah likely represented the Davidic dynasty, which Judah had refused.

**“and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah’s son.”** Rezin was the king of Syria, and Pekah was king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the son of Remaliah. The fact that the text says that the people of Judah “rejoice in” Rezin and Pekah is a problem for commentators. Judah seems to be afraid of Syria and Israel (Isa. 7:2). It has been proposed by some scholars that there were Israelite sympathizers in Judah who rejoiced at the thought of removing the Davidic King Ahaz, and that may be the case but there is no mention of such sympathizers in the Bible. Other scholars suggest that the Masoretic Hebrew text has been miscopied here and that the text should be amended, but there is no evidence that the text is wrong. It seems a likely possibility that God is speaking from His point of view. King Ahaz of Judah, and the Judean people in general, had rejected Yahweh and His Temple and His Law. In that, they acted exactly like the Syrians and the Israelites who also rejected Yahweh. It could well be that in regard to the mutual rejection of Yahweh, Judah “rejoiced” in Syria and Israel and acted like they did.

Isa 8:7

**“the River.”** A common biblical idiomatic name for the Euphrates River. The people rejected the water in Judah, so metaphorically the water of Assyria will flood upon them, as the Assyrians attack. The Assyrians will overflow their channels and banks and flow out of Assyria and into Israel and Judah. The Euphrates River was much larger than any river in Israel, and it was known for its sudden and violent floods.

**“the king of Assyria.”** Isaiah had already foretold the invasion of the Assyrians privately to King Ahaz (Isa. 7:17-20), now, in Isaiah 8:1-7, Isaiah declares it in a very public way.

**“and all his glory.”** Edward Young writes, “Accompanying the king of Assyria would be all his glory. In their historical inscriptions, the Assyrian kings often spoke of the power of the glory of their might as overwhelming the enemy.”[[11]](#footnote-20239)

Isa 8:8

**“it will reach even to the neck.”** The “waters of Assyria” overflowed into Judah and got deeper and deeper, but they only reached Judah’s neck. Judah did not drown in the metaphorical waters of Assyria as Israel did, which was destroyed. Although almost all the major cities of Judah were destroyed, Jerusalem was rescued by Yahweh.

**“will fill the width of your land.”** The Assyrian attack will affect all Judah, all its width from side to side.

**“Immanuel.”** The word means “God is with us.” Here it is a name, while two verses later the same Hebrew word refers to God being with Israel. The Assyrians will attack, but they will not conquer Judah. At the close of the verse, God is speaking and notes that the rightful owner of the land (“your land”) is “Immanuel,” which in this context refers to the Messiah, who will ultimately, in the future, control the land.

Isa 8:9

**“Make an uproar.”** The subject of Isaiah 8 changes abruptly and without explanation in Isaiah 8:9. The subject from Isaiah 8:1 to 8:9 had been the Assyrian attack and the defeat of Syria (Aram) and Israel. But in Isaiah 8:9-10, Isaiah looks past the immediate future and the destruction of Israel to far future of the defeat of the nations who are against Israel. Although in this context that defeat would start with the defeat of Syria and Israel in their war against Judah, the defeat of the enemy nations of the world will ultimately come at the hands of “Immanuel,” the Messiah, at the Battle of Armageddon. The phrase “all you from far countries” applied in a limited sense to the Assyrian attack on Israel and Judah, because people joined Assyria from other countries. However, the ultimate fulfillment of Yahweh defeating the people from “far countries” will occur at Armageddon. Note the purposeful use of the Hebrew word *immanuel* at the end of Isaiah 8:10. *Immanuel* is used in different ways in the immediate context. In Isaiah 7:7 it is used as the name of a young boy born in Judah with application as a prophecy and type of the Messiah (Matt. 1:23). In Isaiah 8:8 it is used of the Messiah. In Isaiah 8:10 it is not used as a name at all, but has its literal meaning, “God is with us.”

The Hebrew phrase translated as “make an uproar” is unclear and it is translated in different ways in the English versions. The variations include making some kind of uproar (ASV, CJB, JPS; NIV); gathering together or uniting (CEB, CSB, KJV, NAB, NLT, NRSV); and being broken (ESV, NASB, NET, RSV). In any case, the verb is imperative and in the context, whether the nations make an uproar, band together, or are broken, they will eventually be shattered and God’s people will prevail. The Assyrians did invade Judah and devastated it, but when they attacked Jerusalem their army was shattered (2 Kings 19:35-37). The ultimate fulfillment of the shattering of the nations that oppose God will occur when Christ fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11-21).

Isa 8:10

**“Take counsel together, and it will be brought to nothing.”** Although the enemies of God enjoyed some success, ultimately their plans will fail and their words will not stand. Some of the plot of the enemies is stated in Isaiah 7:5-7.

**“God is with us.”** This is the same Hebrew word, and the same inflection, as the name “Immanuel” in Isaiah 8:8. In Isaiah 8:8, “Immanuel” is the child’s name, while here in Isaiah 8:10 it refers to God being with Judah.

Isa 8:11

**“For Yahweh spoke thus to me with a strong hand.”** This is idiomatic for Yahweh speaking to Isaiah in an especially powerful and memorable way. So it is with some emphasis that Yahweh commands Isaiah not to say what the other people of Judah were saying about there being a conspiracy.

[For more on the ways in which God gives revelation through His gift of holy spirit, see commentary on Gal. 1:12.]

Isa 8:12

**“Do not say, ‘A conspiracy!”** Exactly what the conspiracy was and who was involved is not stated. One likely possibility is that Ahaz, the king of Judah had made an agreement with the king of Assyria (2 Kings 16:7-9) to defeat the enemy, Syria and Israel (cf. Isa. 7:2), and the people of Judah were in agreement with the king’s actions, relying on human strength instead of relying on Yahweh for deliverance. Isaiah and other prophets warned Judah about this (cf. Isa. 7:17-25), but that made them the enemy of the State, and the people accused them of conspiring against the king and his plans. So God warned Isaiah not to be swayed by the massive public opinion and follow the people (Isa. 8:11) and begin to think that it was those people who were against the king who were part of a conspiracy against Judah. Isaiah 8:11-12 should be read together because it was the people who thought that what the prophets were saying was a conspiracy, and God warned Isaiah of that.

It is also possible that the “conspiracy” was a general term being thrown around in Judah as different forces allied with each other and some supported one group and others supported others, but no one seemed to be turning to Yahweh for His reasons about what was happening in Israel and Judah.

**“And do not fear what they fear.”** The people of Judah were afraid of Israel and Syria, but they should have been afraid of ignoring Yahweh and his prophets (Isa. 8:13), and afraid of what the Assyrians would do to Judah after they conquered Syria and Israel.

Isa 8:13

**“you all must regard as holy.”** God had been speaking to Isaiah, but that changes here. The pronouns “you” throughout this verse are plural, “you all,” so God is not just speaking to Isaiah here, but to all His faithful people, and indeed, the message of Isaiah 8:13 applies to all of God’s people.

**“He is the one you must fear.”** Jesus taught the same thing in Matthew 10:28.

Isa 8:14

**“he can be a refuge or *he can be* a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling.”** God can either be an ally or He can be against you, depending on whether or not you are obedient to Him. By his very nature, God causes a division between those who accept Him and those who reject Him. Similarly, God’s Son, Jesus, can also be a stone of help or a stone of stumbling (cf. 1 Pet. 2:8; Luke 2:34; Matt. 21:42-44; Rom. 9:33).

**“for both houses of Israel.”** Although the phase is somewhat unclear, it is likely that northern Judah was close enough to Israel that the people there followed in some of the sins of Israel. That may be why, for example, Isaiah was told to prophesy to “Judah and Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:1). If that explanation is correct, God would consider the people of northern Judah more a part of Israel than a part of Judah, which would explain the phrase “both houses of Israel” and then in the same sentence mention “the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”

Another, but less likely explanation is that “both houses of Israel” referred to “Israel” as it was in the United Kingdom of David and Solomon, consisting of all 12 tribes. Then, both houses of Israel would be the nation of Israel in the north and the nation of Judah in the south. If that is the case, they are being called “Israel” here to call into remembrance that they are all tribes of Israel and God’s intention was that they be united.

Isa 8:15

**“Many will stumble over it.”** The rejection of the Messiah, the “stone of stumbling,” will result in total destruction, a point that is made by paring five different verbs pointing to the demise of those who reject God. They will “stumble, fall, be broken, be snared, and be captured.” But there seems to be a hidden message in this passage, because if the total meaning was that those who reject the Messiah would be destroyed and die, we would expect a list like, “stumble, be broken, be destroyed, die, and be annihilated,” but included in the list are verbs such as “be snared” and “be captured.” This hints at the fact that those who reject the Messiah are not immediately destroyed but are pulled into the snare of the Devil (2 Tim. 2:26), and they often turn to the Devil’s ways including magic and the occult, as well as emotional troubles like envy, jealousy, anger, and hatred. The “works of the flesh” often manifest themselves in those who stumble over Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 5:19-21).

Isa 8:16

**“Bind up the testimony.”** That is, roll up the scroll and tie it so it is preserved as a testimony against the people. The Law and what God revealed to Isaiah are not going to change. The people complained about what Isaiah and the other prophets who prophesied around the time he did (e.g., Amos, Hosea, and Micah), but that did not stop them from prophesying, and it did not change the nature of the prophecies they gave.

Although some scholars believe the binding and sealing refers to God telling Isaiah to bind and seal the prophecies and withdraw from public life because no one is listening, that explanation goes against the fact that Isaiah kept on speaking, and furthermore, the prophets of God generally kept on speaking against sin and evil even when it seemed no one was listening.

Isa 8:17

**“who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob.”** God hides His face from people who practice evil and ignore or defy Him and His Law. God said that He hid His face when the people prayed because they were so wicked (Isa. 1:15; cf. Isa. 1:10-15).

Isa 8:18

**“I and the children whom Yahweh has given me are for signs.”** The children that Yahweh had given Isaiah were Shear-jashub (“A remnant will return”) and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (“Haste to the spoil; hurry to the prey”). They were signs to Israel that Yahweh was God, and they should know that because He foretold what would happen to them.

**“Yahweh of Armies who dwells on Mount Zion.”** Yahweh was “Yahweh of Armies” and He was willing to fight for Israel and Judah if they would return to Him. And He did not live far away but in their midst, right in His Temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

Isa 8:19

**“Consult the spirits of the dead and the spiritists.”** When people leave their trust in God and their commitment to Him, they frequently turn to the occult.

Isa 8:20

**“Turn to the law and to the testimony!”** The answers to human need are not to be found in the occult or in fleshly practices, but in obeying the Word of God.

Isa 8:21

**“And they will pass through it.”** The close of Isaiah chapter 8 is confusing at best and there is no consensus among the scholars as to how to translate it correctly or as to what it means. The REV gives a possible reconstruction of Isaiah 8:21-22. Although the “it” is unstated and debated by scholars, the most likely thing it refers to is the darkness which is the last thing mentioned in Isaiah 8:20.

**“and they will turn their faces upward.”** The people, desperate for help, turn their faces upward to see if their gods, the stars, or whatever, can help, but there is no help for those who have rejected God.

Isa 8:22

**“And they look to the earth and see distress, darkness.”** Those who reject God only have darkness on earth. But look at Isaiah 9:1! “There will be no more gloom for those who were in anguish.” Why? Because the Messiah is coming. “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light,” i.e., the Messiah (Isa. 9:2). “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders” (Isa. 9:6). The people who reject God have only darkness, but those who accept the Messiah as their Lord will have great light and everlasting life.

**Isaiah Chapter 9**

Isa 9:1

**“There will be no more gloom.”** Isaiah 9:1-2 is quoted in Matthew 4:15-16. The reason there will be no more gloom in the area of Galilee is that the Messiah will come and rule the earth in a godly manner (Isa. 9:6-7; see commentary on Isa. 9:6).

**“those who were.”** The Hebrew text is singular, “she who was,” speaking of Israel as a woman, but due to the context which is involved, that literal English rendering is somewhat unclear, so many English versions opt for a clearer English translation, and treat Israel as a nation of people and say “those who were.”

**“he treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt**.” The “land of Zebulun” and the “land of Naphtali” are the historical areas of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali that were assigned by Joshua (Josh. 19:10-16, 32-39). The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali are said to be “treated…with contempt” because of what happened to those tribes. Because of Israel’s disobedience to God, it was afflicted by outside armies. The northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali (and Dan) bore a lot of the burden of those attacks because those tribes were attacked first when armies from the north invaded Israel. Before the time Isaiah wrote in the 700s BC, the Syrians had invaded Israel, and by the time Isaiah wrote Isaiah 9, perhaps even the Assyrians had started invasions. In fact, by the end of 722 BC, the Assyrians had conquered Israel and then they carried all Israel away captive back to Assyria (2 Kings 17:6, 23).

But Isaiah 9:1 foretells, “there will be no more gloom” for the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and they will be glorious. In fact, the whole Galilee and even land east of the Jordan River will see a great light, and light will shine on them (Isa. 9:2). We should notice that God specifically mentioned Zebulun and Naphtali, because a great light did shine in those areas because much of the Messiah’s life and ministry happened in those two tribal areas. For example, the town of Nazareth where Jesus grew up is in the tribal area of Zebulun, so the people of Zebulun got to experience the Messiah more intimately than most of the other tribes of Israel. Also, the town of Capernaum is in the tribal area of Naphtali, and Capernaum was where Jesus lived during most of his ministry.

In fact, much of what Jesus did in his life and ministry was in Zebulun and Naphtali. He announced his ministry in Nazareth in Zebulun (Luke 4:16-21). He turned water into wine, his first miracle, in the town of Cana in Naphtali, and also taught the Sermon on the Mount, his first public sermon, in Naphtali (Matt. 5-7). Also, he called most of his apostles in Naphtali as well. He pronounced woes over Capernaum and Chorazin, two towns in Naphtali where many of his mighty works were done because they did not generally accept who he was (Matt. 11:20, 21, 23).

Isaiah 9 does not specifically say that the Messiah would spend most of his life and ministry in Zebulun and Naphtali, and in fact, it says the Messiah will reign on David’s throne, which is in Jerusalem (Isa. 9:7). However, given the fact that the Messiah had to grow up before he ascended to the throne, and given the fact that no other tribes besides Zebulun and Naphtali are mentioned by name in Isaiah 9, it is possible that godly people suspected that the Messiah would somehow be closely associated with the northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali even though he was foretold to be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) and reign as king in Jerusalem.

**“in the last *time* he will make glorious.”** The text says, “he has made glorious” (past tense), even though the event is future. This is a good example of the Hebrew idiom of the prophetic perfect. The prophetic perfect idiom occurs when a future event is spoken of as if it had already happened. The Semitic languages do this for emphasis, writing about a future event in the past tense to emphasize that the event will absolutely happen. Especially in Hebrew, which does not have a specific future tense like Greek or English does, it was important to be able to express that a future event was sure to happen. The idiom that accomplished that was the idiom of the prophetic perfect, which spoke of the future as if it were in the past and had already happened, thus assuring the reader that the event would happen.

Often, the prophet was taken into the future in a prophetic vision, and thus, in his vision, he saw the events that he wrote about actually happening or having already happened, and then he wrote it as he saw it. Isaiah 9 is about the coming Messiah and what he will accomplish, so it makes sense that it has a lot of prophetic perfect idioms. Comparable chapters include Isaiah 11 and 53, which are about the Messiah, because they also have a lot of the prophetic perfect idioms. One clear prophetic perfect in this context is Isaiah 9:6, which says a child “has been born” even though Isaiah wrote more than 700 years before the Christ was born (cf. Young’s Literal Translation of Isa. 9:6).

The prophetic perfect idiom is a challenge to translators because if they translate it literally as a past tense, it may confuse the English reader, whereas if they translate the text idiomatically, it may be easier to read the English but what the Hebrew text actually says is lost. The translators and versions are divided about what to do, as we can see by the English versions. For example, in Isaiah 9:6, some English versions say, “a child is born” (ESV, KJV, NIV); some say, “a child has been born” (NET, NJB, YLT); and some say “a child will be born” (HCSB, GW, NASB, REV).

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentaries on Eph. 2:6 and Isa. 11:1.]

**“the Way of the Sea.”** This was the major road from Egypt to Syria, often called the “Via Maris,” its Latin name.

Isa 9:2

**“have seen a great light…the light has shined.”** This is an example of the prophetic perfect idiom, when a future event is spoken of as if it had already happened. The NLT translation catches the correct sense in modern English: “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.” Zechariah’s prophecy of the Messiah used this same vocabulary, that light would shine on people in darkness and in the shadow of death (Luke 1:79).

[For more on the idiom of the prophetic perfect see commentary on Eph. 2:6, “raised…seated.”]

Isa 9:3

**“have enlarged...have increased.”** God will enlarge the nation in the future, but also during the time of Isaiah, during the reign of Hezekiah, the land had been enlarged. However, the Hebrew text can also speak about it in the past tense as if it had already happened to emphasize that it will happen. This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect (see commentary on Isa. 9:1).

Isa 9:4

**“their…their…their.”** The Hebrew text reads in the singular, “his,” but it refers to each of God’s people who were oppressed together, so we, like many other versions, pluralized it for clarity.

**“have broken.”** God broke the rod of the Assyrians, but also God will break the yoke of Israel’s oppressors in the future, but it is written about as if it had already happened to emphasize that it will happen. This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect (see commentary on Isa. 9:1).

**“day of Midian.”** This refers to the record in Judges 6-8 when God defeated Midian through the hand of Gideon. With only 300 men, Gideon defeated an army of 135,000 Midianites (Judg. 7:7; 8:10).

Isa 9:6

**“For a child.”** In reading Isaiah 9:6, it is important to know that there are several ways that this verse can be understood, and two of those ways are articulated in the commentary below.

Isaiah 9:6-7 gives us the reason why “there will be no more gloom for those who were in anguish” (Isa. 9:1), and the people who walked in darkness will see a great light (Isa. 9:2), and people will rejoice (Isa. 9:3), and the yoke of their burden and the rod of their oppressor will be broken (Isa. 9:4), and garments used in war will be burned (Isa. 9:5). It is ultimately because the Messiah will come and rule the earth in righteousness forever (Isa. 9:6-7).

**“a child will be born.”** The Hebrew text reads, “a child has been born...a son has been given.” The Hebrew verb about being born is a perfect passive and is most literally translated, “has been born.” Although some scholars say this prophecy is about Hezekiah, and in fact it may reflect upon him in part, the prophecy is more completely about the Messiah. It is common in the Hebrew idiom to write about something that will happen in the future as if it had happened in the past, and this is referred to by many scholars as the idiom of the “prophetic perfect.” Also, the prophetic perfect occurs very often in prophecy, especially in Isaiah.

There are several reasons why Isaiah 9:6, and the prophecies in Isaiah 9, are mainly about the Messiah. One is that Isaiah has many prophecies about the Messiah that are stated as prophetic perfects or have prophetic perfects as part of the prophecy (e.g., Isa. 11:1-12; 42:1-7; 52:13-14; 53:4-10). So the fact that some of the verbs in the prophecies in Isaiah 9 are prophetic perfects fits the pattern of Isaiah speaking of the Messiah and using the prophetic perfect. Another reason that this prophecy is primarily about the Messiah and not only about Hezekiah is that Hezekiah does not fulfill the prophecy. He may fulfill it to a small degree, but the Messiah fulfills it completely. For example, Isaiah 9:1 reads, “There will be no more gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt; but in the last *time* he will make glorious the Way of the Sea, the other side of the Jordan, *and* Galilee of the nations.” The tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphthali that Isaiah is referring to are tribal areas in the northern kingdom of Israel that were already captured by the Assyrians (1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Kings 17:5-6) and that were in gloom. Were those places restored under Hezekiah? No, they were not. Hezekiah’s victory in 2 Kings 19:35-37 preserved Jerusalem and thus the kingdom of Judah (although almost all of Judah except Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Assyrians) but Hezekiah did not restore places like Zebulun and Naphtali. Still another reason that Isaiah 9:7 is primarily about the Messiah is that Isaiah prophesies of a time in which peace will “have no end” and this king will sustain the kingdom, “with justice and with righteousness from that time on and forever.” Yet, that did not happen under Hezekiah. The prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7 was given around 710-720 BC, but in 604 BC, just over 100 years later, Judah surrendered to the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. But then Judah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar which resulted in the large-scale deportation of the people of Judah and the burning of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC. (2 Chron. 36:4-21).

Still another reason that the Messiah was the fulfillment of Isaiah 9, and perhaps this reason should have been first on the list, is that Matthew 4:14-16, says that the Messiah fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2. According to Matthew 4:13-16, Jesus “left Nazareth and went and lived in Capernaum, which is by the lake, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, with the result that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah was fulfilled, saying, ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, along the Road of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and on those who sat in the region and shadow of death, a light has dawned on them.’” So, Matthew understood the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2, and thus the rest of Isaiah 9, to be fulfilled by Jesus as the Messiah.

Some translators opt for a past tense “has been born” since the immediate reference appears to be King Hezekiah, who was instrumental in delivering Jerusalem from Assyria. However, other translators understand that the prophecy could only be completely fulfilled by the Messiah, and so there is some justification for seeing the verb *yālad* here as a “prophetic perfect.”

**“And he will call his name.”** The phrase “he will call” is the translation of a third-person masculine singular verb in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) texts of Isaiah. The Septuagint (LXX) has the verb in the passive voice, “he will be called,” and the vast majority of modern Bibles follow the Septuagint and use the passive voice in their translations. However, since we have multiple witnesses in the Hebrew text of Isaiah, there is no reason to assume the Greek translation is correct over the Hebrew witnesses. Thus, the REV translates the verb in the active voice, “he will call,” as does *Young’s Literal Translation* and the *Literal Standard Version*. Moyter is aware that the literal translation of this verb is active when he says, “He will be called: literally ‘one will call his name.’”[[12]](#footnote-25725)

The most logical choice for who would name the child was Yahweh, his Father, although who exactly the “he” is, remains uncertain.

**“and the government will be on his shoulders.”** Isaiah 9:6-7 is one of the many verses in the Old Testament that portray the Messiah as being born and then growing up to destroy the wicked and rule the world in righteousness without saying anything about his death, resurrection, ascension, or the Great Tribulation and Battle of Armageddon. There are many Scriptures in the Old Testament that speak of the coming of Christ and God’s vengeance on the wicked as if they were going to happen at the same time (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 61:1-3; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 9:9-10; Those many Scriptures, along with the fact that there are no clear Scriptures that portray the two comings of Christ, are the reason that at the time of Christ people did not think that Christ would die (cf. Matt. 16:21-22; Luke 18:31-34; 24:19-21, 44-46).

[For more on Scriptures that directly connect the coming of Christ with him conquering the earth, see commentary on Isa. 61:2.]

**“The Mighty God is an Extraordinary Advisor”** The phrase is usually translated as “Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor” in most English Bibles. However, as is explained below, a better way to understand it is as a theophoric name, which is an honorific name containing a description about or reference to God that is given to a person, but does not actually describe the person bearing the name.[[13]](#footnote-19396) It is noteworthy that if Isaiah 9:6 was a proof text that Jesus is God, nothing is said about it in the New Testament, and it was not used to show that Jesus was somehow God and equal with the Father until well into the New Testament Church era.

The Hebrew phrase in Isaiah 9:6 that most English versions translate as “Mighty God” is *el gibbor*. Although a few translations render this phrase “mighty hero,” this would be stretching the Hebrew grammar beyond its normal limits. In Hebrew typically the noun comes before the adjective. Thus, the adjective *gibbor* (warrior) would be modifying the noun *el* (God), i.e., the Warrior God. Yet, translating this phrase *el* (God, mighty one) *gibbor* (hero, warrior) as “mighty hero” is reversing the order, taking *el* as an adjective modifying *gibbor.* Therefore, “mighty hero” would not be following the typical rules of Hebrew grammar.

Another reason to prefer the translation “Mighty God/Warrior God” for *el gibbor* is that the same name is attributed to Yahweh (the true God) subsequently in Isaiah 10:21, as well as in all the other biblical occurrences (cf. Deut. 10:17; Jer. 32:18).[[14]](#footnote-13833) So, in the other places where this same phrase is used in the singular, it is referring to Yahweh, not to anyone else. Although Ezekiel 32:21 uses the plural *eley gibborim* (אֵלֵ֧י גִבּוֹרִ֛ים) it should not be used as a parallel construction to Isaiah 9:6 because *eley* is actually from the root word *ayil* (אַ֫יִל) not *el*.[[15]](#footnote-30231) So, in every occurrence of *el gibbor*, it refers to God the Father—Yahweh. This provides strong evidence that *el gibbor* in Isaiah 9:6 likely also refers to Yahweh, and not the child.

Although some Trinitarians attempt to see this text as teaching the Messiah’s Deity, many do not consider that the text, taken consistently in their framework, would actually be calling the child, “The Everlasting Father.” That would then make Jesus the “Everlasting Father,” which would be Modalism, where God is strictly a unitary being who exists at different times in different modes (i.e., the Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Son). The Athanasian Creed, which is considered as orthodox today, states that Christians should “neither confound the Persons nor divide the Substance,” but if Isaiah 9:6 says the Son is the Father, then it would be doing that and not teaching the modern definition of the Trinity.

Yet, the question remains, does it teach Modalism? There are a few reasons to believe Isaiah 9:6 is not teaching Modalism either. Firstly, Modalism is disproven all throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God’s messiah, spoken of here in Isaiah 9:6, is a man who was not portrayed as the same being as God himself, but as God’s appointed ruler. For example, in 2 Samuel 7:12-14, this is what Yahweh says to David, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your parents, I will raise up your seed after you who will proceed out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father and he will be my son….” Clearly, this man is not the same being as Yahweh, he is the son of the Father. Elsewhere in the Old Testament Yahweh is also clearly distinguished from his messiah (Psa. 2, 110). In the New Testament, Jesus prays to his God (Luke 23:34; Mark 6:46) and ascends to his God (John 20:17); he is not the same being as Yahweh. Secondly, even in the immediate context of Isaiah 9, the Messiah is someone different from Yahweh himself. The Messiah is someone who would be “born” (Isa. 9:6), would reign on David’s throne (Isa. 9:7), and from 2 Samuel 7:12-13 it is clear that this human on David’s throne is God’s son, not God himself. So, for all these reasons, Isaiah 9:6 is not espousing Modalism or Trinitarianism.

Now, since *el gibbor* refers to the Father, and yet, it is clear from the Old Testament and from Isaiah that the Messiah is not the same being as Yahweh, how are we to understand the language of Isaiah 9:6?

There is a very common Hebrew practice that solves the dilemma in Isaiah 9:6. Both the ancient and modern Jews sometimes name their children a name that says something about the God they serve. Scholars refer to this kind of name as a “theophoric” name. In the Hebrew culture, the names given to people meant something. This is true throughout the Old Testament. Theophoric names are given to people to declare a truth about who God is or what God’s relationship is to the person or to Israel (and by extension, humankind). William Holladay gives a great explanation of theophoric names:

“Israelite personal names were in general of two sorts. Some of them were descriptive names... But most Israelite personal names were *theophoric* ; that is, they involve a name or title or designation of God, with a verb or adjective or noun which expresses a theological affirmation. Thus, ‘Hezekiah’ is a name which means ‘Yah (= Yahweh) is my strength,’ and ‘Isaiah’ is a name which means ‘Yah (= Yahweh) has brought salvation.’ It is obvious that Isaiah is not called ‘Yahweh’; he bears a name which says something *about* Yahweh.”[[16]](#footnote-20975)

Within the surrounding context of Isaiah 9, there are two theophoric names also used. For example, in Isaiah 7:14, the boy who was to be born in Isaiah’s time was called “Immanuel,” which means “God (is) with us.” And likewise in Isaiah 8:1, the child is called “Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz,” which means, “The spoil speeds, the prey hastens.”[[17]](#footnote-13121) Yet, neither one of these names is directly about who the child is. “Immanuel” (or “God is with us”) is a reassurance that God has not abandoned Israel in their desperation (Isa. 7:16-17), and “Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz” is about how the Assyrians are going to quickly plunder Samaria (Isa. 8:4).

It is vitally important to understand how common theophoric names are. Here is a short list of names, and many more examples could be given:

Daniel: “God is my judge”  
Elijah: “My God is Yahweh”  
Lemuel: “Devoted to God”  
Samuel: “God heard”  
Abijah: “My father is Yahweh”  
Adonijah: “Yahweh is the Lord”  
Zechariah: “Yahweh has remembered”

Thus, when arriving at Isaiah 9:6, it is in keeping with the context that Isaiah would use a theophoric name to describe the future Messiah. A theophoric understanding is preferable because not only does it do the most justice to the Hebrew grammar (*el gibbor* and “Everlasting Father” are titles of Yahweh, not a human messiah), it also takes into account the Jewish culture, Isaiah’s writing style, and creates the least theological problems (such as the Messiah being Yahweh himself, or the idea of Modalism). Also, theophoric names that were a sentence or two long were not uncommon either.[[18]](#footnote-14822) So, the theophoric interpretation of Isaiah 9:6 is not weakened at all by the fact that the name is two sentences long.

The phrase, “The Mighty God is an Extraordinary Advisor” is a name given to the (then) future Messiah, but it tells us something about God. Particularly, in the context of Isaiah 9, it is likely about how Yahweh is able to defeat his enemies because of his superior intelligence and power. This notion is aptly described by Pluschke, who is quoted by Albert Barnes, as saying, “In my opinion this name is altogether symbolical [*sic*]. The Messiah shall be called strength of God, or strong God, Divine hero, in order by this name to remind the people of the strength of God.”[[19]](#footnote-15575)

**“The Everlasting Father is a Ruler of Peace.”** This sentence is the second half of the theophoric name of the Messiah that describes God. God has the power to bring and sustain peace over the kingdom of his son who will sit on David’s throne (Isa. 9:7).

The phrase in Hebrew is literally, “Everlasting Father, Ruler of Peace,” but because it is a theophoric name, often the translator must add a “to be” verb into the sentence to make sense of the name.[[20]](#footnote-32116) For example, this is done in the name “Adonijah” (see commentary above), which means “Yahweh (is) the Lord.” This is a very common practice with theophoric names. Thus, the REV translates the text as “The Everlasting Father is a Ruler of Peace.”

The phrase “Everlasting Father” is from two words, *`ad* (#05703 עַד, “everlasting”) and *ab* (#01 אָב, “father”). This phrase provides even more evidence that Isaiah 9:6 should be understood in a theophoric way because this is a clear description of Yahweh. Only Yahweh is eternal (Isa. 40:28; Psa. 90:2; 1 Tim. 1:17) and nowhere else is the Messiah labeled with the term “Father” but always with the term “son” (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 7:13; 28:6; Psa. 2:7; Heb. 1:5; Matt. 16:16).[[21]](#footnote-28733) Even at the beginning of the verse this Messiah is called a “son” (Isa. 9:6), so to call the Messiah the “Everlasting Father” or, “Father of the coming age,” would be quite perplexing. Therefore, this choice of language would be extremely confusing if referring to the Messiah, yet extremely fitting if it was a theophoric name that referred to Yahweh the Father. It is worth noting that Yahweh is referred to as “Father” two other times in Isaiah (Isa. 63:16; 64:8). All of this lends credibility to understanding Isaiah 9:6 as containing theophoric names.

It is perhaps possible to understand this Hebrew text in a way that is not a theophoric name, and that is by understanding it to be calling the Messiah the “Father of the coming age.” Although it is true that in a sense the Messiah will rule over the coming age, one must add in the word “coming” which is not inherent in the phrase *abi`ad* (“Age-Father” or “Everlasting-Father”) in order to make sense of the phrase, because the Messiah was certainly not ruling the current “age” during the time of Isaiah.

The evidence of the verse combined with the scope of Scripture supports that in Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah is using a theophoric name of the future Messiah to describe Yahweh who is a Mighty God that is able to conquer his enemies (e.g., as in the days of Midian; Isa. 9:4) and rule over a kingdom in peace. He is looking forward to a time when Yahweh will set the Messiah on the throne of David and rule over an everlasting kingdom in peace (Isa. 9:7).

[For more information, see commentary on Isa. 11:1. For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on the “Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father, while the “holy spirit” refers to the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more information on the coming age and Jesus’ kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the earth becoming a “Paradise,” see commentary on Luke 23:43. For more on theophoric names, and the name “Immanuel,” see commentary on Matt. 1:23. For more on the early Church Fathers being subordinationists and not Trinitarians in the modern sense of the word, see *The Restitution of Jesus Christ* by Servetus the Evangelical (AKA Kermit Zarley), Chapter Two: “Church Christology in the First Millennium.”]

Isa 9:7

**“Of the greatness of authority and of peace there will be no end.”** The prophecy of the coming Messiah in Isaiah 9:1-7 blends the first and second coming of Christ and makes it seem like it will be one coming and not two. It was this kind of prophecy that led people to believe that when the Messiah came he would conquer the earth and rule it, and thus they did not understand what Jesus meant when he said he would have to suffer and die (see commentary on Luke 18:34).

**“on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness.”** The Hebrew is not a complete sentence, and the reason for that seems to be that this sentence relates to the promise of Yahweh to David about his dynasty, which would ultimately culminate in the Messiah but would have a number of kings along the way who would bring peace and prosperity in various measures, Hezekiah being one of those kings. The REV adds “He will reign” to help the reader, as do some other versions (e.g., CSB, Douay-Rheims, NET, NIV2011, NLT).

**“upon the throne of David.”** The Messiah was foretold to be a descendant of David and will rule “on the throne of David.” The meaning of that statement cannot be overstressed. The “throne” of David refers to both a literal throne and the authority of being God’s anointed king reigning on the throne (seat of authority) that God promised to David. When God promised the kingdom to David and his descendants, He did so by saying that the “throne” of David would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:16; cf. 2 Sam. 7:13). It is important to realize that it was the “throne” that would be established, not David’s descendants. God did not say that David’s descendants would always reign, because they did not. Jehoiachin was the last surviving king of Judah (not Zedekiah), and after he died there was never another king on David’s throne—it sat empty, and will be empty until it is once again occupied by the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Christ sets up his kingdom on earth, he will reign from Jerusalem.

[For more on Christ’s future kingdom being on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will do this.”** This is an interesting personification, whereby the “zeal” of Yahweh is spoken of as if it can act on its own. Speaking of zeal in this way intensifies it and brings attention to it. Yahweh is greatly invested in His plans for the Messiah and for the future world coming to pass. In fact, He has so much zeal that it seems like it almost acts on its own.

The phrase, “The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will do this” is the only true imperfect verb (“future tense verb”) in the section from Isaiah 9:1-7. The rest of the section uses past tense verbs that can express an exaggerated past tense reality but more strongly can be seen as a prophetic perfect for a future situation.

Isa 9:14

**“head and tail, palm branch and reed.”** Yahweh uses two examples of “small and great” to emphasize that when disaster falls on His people, it will fall on all of them. The “head” refers to those who are rulers and leaders in Israel, those who are rich and famous, those who are influential and well-connected, while the “tail” refers to the weaker and less important people in the kingdom, the “nobodies” who were consistently the victims of the rich and powerful. The prophecy is graphically stating that no one from the rich and powerful to the weak and needy will be spared from the wrath of God. The phrase “palm branch and reed” refers to the same thing as “head and tail,” but simply uses a different metaphor (actually, it is the figure of speech hypocatastasis; see commentary on Rev. 20:2). The “palm branch” was high and lifted up, and visible to everyone, while the “reed” was lowly and common, most often living in marshy, swampy places. However, in an interesting and ironic twist, God, in the next verse, Isaiah 9:15, proclaims that the lying prophets are the “tail.” That certainly was the truth from God’s point of view, when humanly speaking the lying prophets were very often honored as being important and knowledgeable.

Isa 9:15

**“the prophet who teaches lies is the tail.”** See commentary on Isaiah 9:14.

Isa 9:18

**“For wickedness burns like a fire.”** Wickedness is truly destructive. It will destroy a person’s life, and can and often does destroy their everlasting life. John Oswalt writes: “Here [in Isa. 9:18] Isaiah lays bare the true nature of sin. It is not a little misguided playfulness as it is so often depicted. It is a rebellion against God’s order for life. As such, it can only be destructive, like a grass fire which works its way through the brush at the edge of the forest deceptively slowly but then increases speed until it bursts into the woods with a roar and an upward rush of smoke. Because sin seeks gratification in denial of the created order, it can find such gratification only in increasingly flagrant denials. The sinful acts themselves cannot satisfy. Soon rebellion for its own sake, a raging fire, is all that is left.”[[22]](#footnote-30249)

Isa 9:19

**“No one spares his brother.”** The nature of sin is destructive and self-serving, it is narcissistic. In contrast, love treats others better than oneself (Phil. 2:3).

Isa 9:20

**“One will devour on the right hand but be hungry; and he will eat on the left hand, but they will not be satisfied.”** This enigmatic phrase In Isaiah 9:20 must be understood in light of the closing phrase in Isaiah 9:19, that sinful people do not even spare their brothers and people close to them. They devour people who are on their right and eat the people on their left but they are still hungry, still unsatisfied. Sin does not get satisfied even when it tries to fulfill its desire. Sin craves more and more of the same, more and more sin.

**“Everyone will eat the flesh of his own arm.”** Sin destroys relationships, and here it is depicted as a savage who is eating his own “arm,” that is, his own strength; that is, the strength that comes from loving relationships, as the next verse, Isaiah 9:21, makes clear. Interestingly, in Hebrew, the same consonants that make up the word “arm” are also the consonants that make up the word “offspring” (children). This is why some translations read like the NLT: “In the end they will even eat their own children” (cf. CEB, JPS, NIV, NRSV). However, the fact that Isaiah 9:21 illustrates the statement by pointing out that the tribes of Israel are fighting each other militates against the idea that “arm” should actually be “offspring.”

**Isaiah Chapter 10**

Isa 10:1

**“enact unrighteous laws.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “decree unrighteous decrees,” but while that catches the attention, it is harder to understand in English so most translations avoid it. A lot of the “lawlessness” in society is not due to people defying human law, but to rulers writing laws that defy and contradict God’s laws (see commentary on Matt. 24:12).

**“oppressive regulations.”** The word “laws” is not in the Hebrew text, which would more literally be something like “oppressions,” but it refers to oppressive laws and regulations.

Isa 10:3

**“the day of visitation.”** No specific day is mentioned; the reference is general. It refers to a time when trouble comes and only God could really help but the people have forsaken Him. The “day of visitation” also includes Judgment Day, even though that is not the primary focus here. But people should not be mistaken; there will be a Judgment Day when God will hold people accountable for what they have done in life and He will reward the righteous and punish the sinners. God created people to love and obey Him and love others also, and woe to those who ignore that fact (cf. Eccl. 12:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15).

**“Where will you leave your wealth?”** The greedy, evil rulers had enacted laws that allowed them to get rich by taking advantage of the poor and needy. But what will they do in the day that God punishes them, and what will they do with their wealth then? They will pay a terrible price for their evil deeds.

Isa 10:6

**“I will send him against a godless nation.”** God is saying, “I will send the king of Assyria against Israel,” which currently is a godless nation; and Israel is currently the people of God’s wrath.

Isa 10:7

**“But this is not what he intends, and his heart does not think that way.”** The king of Assyria does not think like Yahweh thinks, that Assyria is against Israel because of Yahweh’s anger; instead, he is bent on destruction and conquest. The NLT, a paraphrased version, catches the sense: “But the king of Assyria will not understand that he is my tool; his mind does not work that way. His plan is simply to destroy, to cut down nation after nation.”

**“cut off nations—not a few.”** This is an emphatic way of saying “many nations.” It is the figure of speech tapeinosis, saying something that lessens something to actually emphasize it.

[See Word Study: “Tapeinosis.”]

Isa 10:10

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

Isa 10:11

**“Worthless Ones.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), “worthless ones” or “worthless things” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”). This is contrasted with the word “idol” (or “image”) at the end of the verse.

Isa 10:12

**“I will.”** The text abruptly changes here from third-person speech to first-person speech, with God speaking directly about what He will do.

**“punish.”** The word is also translated “visit,” but here “punish” is the clearer translation.

[For more on “visit,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

**“arrogant heart.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “the greatness of the heart,” idiomatically referring to the arrogance or pride in the heart of the king. The “fruit” of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria is the words and deeds of the king of Assyria. An evil heart produces evil fruit (see commentary on Matt. 15:18).

**“boastfulness of his haughty looks.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “the glory of the height of his eyes.” The Hebrew seems unclear, but it is because the text is comparing the King of Assyria to a large, glorious fruit tree: he has fruit, glory, and height.

[For more on hypocatastasis, the figure of comparison being used in this verse to compare the king of Assyria to a large fruit tree, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

Isa 10:17

**“Light of Israel…their Holy One.”** These are “names” of God, designations of the God of Israel, who will eventually have vengeance on Israel’s enemies, in this case, Assyria.

Isa 10:26

**“His rod.”** That is, God’s rod.

Isa 10:28

**“He.”** The Assyrians, here personified under their leader.

**“Ai.”** The city mentioned in Joshua 7 and 8. Here it is spelled with the feminine ending, thus “Aiath” in the Hebrew text.

Isa 10:29

**“Ramah trembles.”** That is, the people of Ramah tremble. “Ramah” is put by metonymy for the people who live there.

**“Gibeah of Saul has fled.”** The people of Gibeah have fled. Here the city of Gibeah is put by metonymy for the people who live in it.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Isa 10:32

**“He shakes his fist.”** It is a very common human gesture to shake your fist at something or someone in anger and defiance.

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8). Describing Zion as a daughter can have the connotation of someone that is beloved, but more often, and certainly here, it has the connotation of one who is like a daughter in that culture: vulnerable, in need of support and protection. Zion would be smitten by the Assyrians (Isa. 10:22-23), but God would eventually vindicate her. However, we know from history that she would not be grateful for God’s deliverance, but would turn against Him and be carried into captivity by the Babylonians.

Isa 10:34

**“Lebanon will fall.”** The wording is perfectly chosen. The area of Lebanon would be conquered, but Lebanon was famous for its tall cedar trees, and they would be cut down, felled.

**Isaiah Chapter 11**

Isa 11:1

**“shoot.”** This is another word for “branch,” which is in the second half of the verse. The shoot and branch are likely members of the Davidic dynasty, but ultimately, THE shoot and branch are the Messiah.

**“will come out.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “has come out.” This is the prophetic perfect idiom. In the Hebrew and Aramaic languages in which much of the Bible was written, when something was absolutely going to happen in the future, it was sometimes spoken of as if it had already occurred in the past. This idiomatic use of the language was apparently due to the fact that it is sometimes hard to express that a future event is certain to happen. Many times when we simply say that something “will” happen, it does not happen. One way the Semitic languages avoided that was by idiomatically saying that a future event had already happened, even though the event was actually still future. The prophetic perfect idiom is used a lot in prophecy to express that the prophecy will come true.

Only the Messiah will fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1-12. Isaiah 11 has many prophetic perfects, emphasizing what the Messiah will do. To emphasize this fact, reproduced below are the prophetic perfects in Isaiah 11:1-10. The text has been shortened for ease of reading, but the salient past-tense verbs have been translated as past tense. Although translating the text more literally as is done below would be confusing to an English reader, to a native Hebrew speaker who is used to the idiom, the text is quite understandable. Isaiah 11:1-10 (shortened):

Isa. 11:1A shoot has come out of the stump of Jesse. 2And the spirit of Yahweh has rested on him. 4With righteousness he has judged the poor, and decided with equity for the humble of the earth. He has stricken the earth with the rod of his mouth. 5Righteousness has been the belt of his waist. 6The wolf has lived with the lamb. 8The nursing child has played near a cobra’s hole, and the weaned child has put his hand on the viper’s den. 9For the earth has been filled with the knowledge of Yahweh like the waters cover the sea. 10And there has been, in that day, that the nations do seek the root from Jesse who stands as a banner of the peoples, and his resting place has been glorious.

Writing of the future events in the past tense can create a very powerful experience for the reader, and build the reader’s excitement and hope for the future when these things will be fulfilled. However, as was stated above, reading a literal rendition of the text without a thorough knowledge of how the prophetic perfect idiom works is likely to only cause the reader to be confused.

**“stump.”** This is the same word as “trunk” in Isa. 40:24, but here it is to be understood as a stump because the trunk was cut down by Yahweh, using the Assyrians as His tool (Isa. 10:15, 34). The translation “trunk” would be okay if one understood that it had been cut down into a stump.

**“of Jesse.”** Jesse was the father of David, and thus an ancestor of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. John Oswalt writes, “Commentators (cf. Calvin) are possibly correct when they suggest that the use of *Jesse* is an attempt to downplay the house of David (cf. Isa. 7:1-2, 13). Salvation would not come from the pomp and glory of the royal house. Rather, it would come from the promise of one who could create a royal house from a peasant family. Deliverance is God’s gracious gift, an exercise of his faithfulness. Nevertheless, God’s promise to David stands. It is not merely through any of Jesse’s sons that deliverance will come, but specifically through a descendant of David. Both earlier (cf. Isa. 9:6 [Eng. Isa. 9:7] and later exegesis (Isa. 16:5; 55:4-5; Jer. 23:5; 33:15) make the connection explicit.”[[23]](#footnote-14986) (Scripture references modified to link in the REV commentary.)

**“from his roots.”** The plural “roots” refers to the descendants of Jessie via David that are left over after the Assyrian attack. The roots continue to grow after a tree is cut down, and here the roots are the descendants of Jesse, and specifically David and the Davidic dynasty that has been preserved—there are still descendants of David who are alive. From one of those descendants, the dynasty will continue. This is all about the continuation of the dynasty of David and God’s actions in preserving it.

Isa 11:2

**“the spirit of Yahweh will rest on him.”** This is the spirit of God that rested in various measures on the Old Testament prophets. God gave His gift of holy spirit to some people in the Old Testament to empower them. Then, on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God gave a different gift of holy spirit to the Christian Church. The Hebrew text uses the prophetic perfect idiom and speaks of this as happening in the past to emphasize the fact that it will happen in the future. The Hebrew text more literally reads, “has rested on him,” not “will rest on him.”

[For more on the difference between the gift of holy spirit God gave in the Old Testament and the gift of holy spirit that Christians have today, see commentary on Eph. 1:13. For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“a spirit of knowledge.”** Here in Isaiah 11:2, the Hebrew text does not close out this list of attributes with “and” a spirit of knowledge,” but leaves off the “and,” thus making this sentence the figure of speech asyndeton.[[24]](#footnote-12915) In normal grammar, when a list occurs, an “and” is placed in front of the last item in the list. Normal grammar is modified to good effect in the figures of speech “polysyndeton” and “aSyndeton.” The figure polysyndeton places an “and” between each item in the list and by that literary device emphasizes each thing in the list. Thus, when Jesus says we must love God “with all your heart, **and** with all your soul, **and** with all your mind, **and** with all your strength,” he is specifically emphasizing each point in the list.

In contrast to polysyndeton and normal grammar, the figure asyndeton does not have an “and” in the list, not even the standard “and” between the last two items of the list. This means that there is no emphasis on each specific thing in the list, but rather the reader is to go through the list and notice what is there, but move on to the conclusion, which is where the asyndeton is leading. Furthermore, the asyndeton lets us know that the list is not meant to be complete—there are other things that could have been on it. We see that with the asyndeton list of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23—there are fruit that are not on the list (patience and humility are two examples). Here in Isaiah, God could not possibly give us all the things that the spirit of God would do for His Messiah, but He gives us good examples of what the spirit did do for the Messiah.

Isa 11:4

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God. The Messiah will not play favorites; he will be just and equitable toward everyone. He will not favor the rich or powerful, but he will do what is right (for “righteousness” referring to “justice” in some contexts, see commentary on Matt. 5:6).

**“he will judge the poor.”** It is chapters such as Isaiah 11 that caused the Jews to believe that when the Messiah came he would conquer the earth and set up his kingdom. There is no hint of a 2,000-year break between Isaiah 11:3 and Isaiah 11:4 (although one could argue the break is between verses 2 and 3), and certainly no hint that the Messiah would die for the sins of mankind. Instead, he would come and kill the wicked. The reader must get his understanding of the death of Christ from places such as Isaiah 53, although that was unclear to Jews before Christ. There are many Scriptures in the Old Testament that speak of the coming of Christ and God’s vengeance on the wicked as if they were going to happen at the same time (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 61:1-3; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 9:9-10; Mal. 3:1-3; 4:1-3). Those many Scriptures, along with the fact that there are no clear Scriptures that portray the two comings of Christ, are the reason that at the time of Christ people did not think that Christ would die (cf. Matt. 16:21-22; Luke 18:31-34; 24:19-21, 44-46; John 12:34; 20:9).

Like several of the prophetic verses here in Isaiah 11, the Hebrew text of Isaiah 11:4 uses the prophetic perfect idiom and states the future event in the past tense as if it had already happened. The Hebrew text has “he has judged the poor” to emphasize the fact that he will judge the poor.

[For more on Scriptures that directly connect the coming of Christ with him conquering the earth, see commentary on Isa. 61:2. For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“oppressed.”** The Hebrew word refers to those people who are “low” and thus oppressed, afflicted, downtrodden, meek, humble, etc. In this context of judging with equity, the word “oppressed” fits very well. These oppressed people have not been given a fair trial on earth, but they will when Christ returns.

**“spirit from his lips.”** The Messiah’s prophetic word will kill the wicked. The word “spirit,” *ruach* (#07307 רוּחַ), can refer (by metonymy) to the message that is spoken by the spirit. The book of Revelation shows Jesus with a sword coming from his mouth (Rev 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21), and 2 Thessalonians 2:8 says the Lord Jesus will kill the Lawless One (the Antichrist) by the spirit from his mouth.

While the Hebrew word *ruach* (“spirit”) also means “breath” (cf. ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV), it may not be the best translation in this context due to the use in both the Old and New Testaments of “spirit” referring to a message or prophecy spoken by the power of the spirit. Also, it is not like Jesus breathes out and the wicked die. It is his prophecies, his powerful word, that kills them, just like Joshua’s prophecy stopped the sun (Josh. 10:12), or Jesus’ prophecy caused the death of a fig tree (Matt. 21:20). The HCSB gets the sense correct, although their translation is not literal: “He will kill the wicked with a command from his lips.” Jesus’ prophetic command is powerful and effective. It will do its work.

[For more on “spirit” being used for a message spoken by the spirit, see commentaries on 1 Cor. 14:12 and Rev. 19:15.]

**“he will kill the wicked.”** When the Messiah comes from heaven, fights the Battle of Armageddon, and conquers the earth, he will kill the wicked. There are a number of verses that express that fact in various ways (cf. Rev 19:19-21; Isa. 11:4; 63:1-6; 2 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 45:3-5; Matt. 25:41-46). The fact that there will be no wicked people on earth when the Messiah rules it as king is one of the reasons that the next life will be wonderful and called “Paradise.”

There are many Christians who believe that Jesus is always this “nice guy” who would never hurt anybody for any reason. That is not the testimony of Scripture. In his first coming, Christ lived a very sacrificial life so he could die for the sins of humankind, but in his second coming he will be the king and will take very seriously his responsibility to carry out God’s laws and keep the good people of society safe from criminals and predatory people. Even our current fallen world would be a much nicer place if there were no criminals, and the next life will be Paradise in part because there will not be any evil people there.

[For more on killing the wicked and the death penalty, see commentary on Exod. 21:12. For more on the Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth. For more on why the future Kingdom is called “Paradise,” see commentary on Luke 23:43.]

Isa 11:6

**“The wolf will live with the lamb.”** Isaiah 11:6-9 is shortened and restated in Isaiah 65:25. When Christ conquers the earth and reigns as king, the earth will be restored to an Edenic state and animal nature will revert to the wonderful way it was before Adam and Eve sinned. The Bible says in a couple different places that there will not be any more harmful animals on earth (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25; Ezek. 34:25).

Isa 11:10

**“root from Jesse.”** The “root from Jesse” (cf. NET) are the descendants of Jesse. It is important to understand that the “root” of Jesse does not refer to the rootstock of Jessie, i.e., the ancestors of Jesse, or to an ancestor of Jesse, but rather to a descendant of Jessie. The Hebrew noun translated “root” is *sheresh* (#08328 שֹׁרֶשׁ), which means “root.” While it can refer to the root of a plant, which is the first definition in the *HALOT*,[[25]](#footnote-16382) the second definition in *HALOT* is “branch of a root, descendant.” For support of the definition “descendant,” *HALOT* says, “see especially Dietrich-Loretz-Sanmartin *Texte* 1, 17:i:20, 25, 43; ii:15.” But then it says evidence can also be found in people’s personal names that are related to the word “root,” which indicates they are a descendant. Furthermore, the “branch of a root” is still a descendant.

The conservative scholar and commentator, John Oswalt, says this about the word “root” in his commentary on Isaiah 11:10: “*shoresh*, ‘root’, is the normal word for the literal root of a plant. But it is also a favorite term for descendants or for that elemental hope which remains for a person (Deut. 29:18; Job 14:8; 2 Kings 19:30; Isa. 40:24; Dan. 4:15, 23, 26, 11:7). Eventually, like ‘branch,’ *shoresh* became a term for the Messiah (Isa. 53:2, Sir. 47:22; Rev. 5:5, 22:16).”[[26]](#footnote-26539)

George Gray also saw that the word “root” referred to a descendant, and wrote, “*The root of Jesse*, i.e., the new shoot from the old root (cf. v.1), ‘root’ being used in the same sense as in Isaiah 53:2.”[[27]](#footnote-10547) (Also see commentary on Isa. 53:2). In Isaiah 53:2, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, grows up before God as a “root,” that is, as a descendant of David and an heir of the promises made to David about an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam. 7:13, 16).

It was a common practice particularly in the Semitic languages to double a point to make it clear, and we see that in many references to the Messiah. For example, in Isaiah 11:1, the Messiah is called a “shoot” and a “branch.” In Isaiah 53:2, the Messiah grows up before God as a “young plant” and a “root,” both words referring to a descendant. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus Christ is referred to as “the root” and “the descendant.”

It is also worth noting that the NET translation of Isaiah 11:10 reads: “At that time *a* root *from* Jesse will stand like a signal flag for the nations,” and the NIrV (the New International Reader’s Version) reads “root of Jesse.” The NLT paraphrases the Hebrew text such that the more literal “root from Jesse” was translated as “the heir to David’s throne.”

[For more information on the word “root” referring to a descendant, see commentary on Rev. 22:16.]

Isa 11:11

**“Pathros.”** This is most likely a designation for “Upper Egypt” which is southern Egypt. “Lower Egypt” was the Egypt that was close to the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the NIV has “Upper Egypt” and the NLT has “southern Egypt,” to make the text clearer to English readers. If “Pathros” is southern Egypt, then “Egypt” in this list refers to northern Egypt, which was in fact the Egypt that people in and around Israel were more familiar with since not many people from the nations around Israel traveled deeply into southern Egypt, which was deeper into the heart of Africa.

**“from the islands of the sea.”** From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the parts west of Israel as islands.

Isa 11:12

**“He will set up a banner for the nations.”** It is not known what the banner is. Some commentators have suggested the Messiah himself, but there is no way to establish that as true. Isaiah 66:19 seems to refer to the same thing.

**“assemble the outcasts of Israel.”** When Jesus Christ comes from heaven and conquers the earth at the Battle of Armageddon, he will set up his kingdom on earth and reign 1,000 years. He will raise the righteous dead of the Old Testament, Gospels, and book of Revelation in the “Resurrection of the Righteous,” the first resurrection, and gather the people of Israel and Judah back to the land of Israel. Many verses describe this regathering of Israel and Judah to the land of Israel (see commentary on Jer. 32:37).

[For more on the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteousness, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 11:13

**“And the envy of Ephraim will depart.”** In this context, the dominant tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel, Ephraim, is put by metonymy for the northern kingdom of Israel itself. That metonymy is not uncommon in the prophetic books (e.g., Isa. 7:2, 17; Jer. 7:15; Hos. 5:3; Zech. 9:10). Israel and Judah were rivals for centuries, but when the Messiah comes they will not envy one another but will be together in the kingdom of the Messiah.

Isa 11:15

**“the *Euphrates* River.”** In Old Testament prophecy, “the River” is the Euphrates River. Thus, Isaiah 11:15 is a wonderful prophecy about God’s provision for inclusiveness in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. Barriers such as rivers and seas that would block people from coming to Jerusalem to worship God will be removed.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 12**

Isa 12:1

**“In that day.”** This is a continuation of the subject in chapter 11, which ended with blessings in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. This would have been somewhat clearer if the verses in Isaiah 12 had been the closing verses of Isaiah 11.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 12:3

**“the wells of salvation.”** The Hebrew word “salvation” is *yeshuʿah* (#03444 יְשׁוּעָה) a feminine noun, meaning “salvation.” The name “Yeshua” (Jesus) is related, but to refer to the masculine man Jesus the noun would not have the “h” at the end, and the vowels would have to be changed (#03442 יֵשׁ֡וּעַ ).

**Isaiah Chapter 13**

Isa 13:1

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

**“of Babylon.”** The message in Isaiah 13 is about Babylon. However, much of the prophecy is couched in language of the Great Tribulation and the Last Days. In that sense, the prophecy was fulfilled when the Medes and Persians attacked Babylon, and it will be fulfilled again when “Babylon the Great” falls (cf. Rev. 17:3-7; 18:1-3).

Isa 13:6

**“*El* Shaddai.”** This is the only use of *El* Shaddai in Isaiah.

Isa 13:9

**“the Day of Yahweh is coming.”** The Day of Yahweh (“the Day of the LORD”) in this context is also called the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21; cf. Mark 13:19; Luke 21:22). The Bible speaks of a time coming in the future when people, and even the earth itself, will suffer the consequences of all the sin that has occurred since Adam (Matt. 23:34-35; Luke 11:50-51). This time of great wrath on the earth was spoken about by Jesus Christ (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) and is described in much more detail in the book of Revelation. It will be a time of terrible trouble and will end with the Battle of Armageddon, and most of the people on earth will be killed.

According to the prophets, it will be a cruel day, with people becoming as scarce as gold (Isa. 13:9-13). The earth will be laid waste with very few people left (Isa. 24:1-23; cf. Isa. 34:2-8). The slain will lie like refuse on the ground, and the leaders will not escape (Jer. 25:29-38). It will be “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), and a time of doom for the nations (Ezek. 30:1-3), and a time of distress such as has never been seen before on earth (Dan. 12:1). It will be a time of darkness and gloom (Joel 1:15; 2:1-11). Woe to people who think they are righteous and long for the Day of Yahweh as if it would vindicate them because it will not (Amos 5:18-20). People’s evil deeds will return on themselves (Obad. 1:15-16). God, in anger and wrath, will take vengeance on the land and on nations, and destroy witchcraft and idols to the end that there will be no more idolatry (Mic. 5:10-15). It will be a day of wrath, distress, and anguish; a day of trouble, ruin, gloom, and darkness. No one’s wealth will be able to deliver them. God will make a terrible end to the people who dwell in the land. God will sweep away humans, animals, fish, and birds—everything—from the face of the earth (Zeph. 1:2-18). God will shake both the heavens and the earth (Hag. 2:6-7), and that Day will burn like a furnace (Mal. 4:1).

Scripture supports that the Administration of Grace, the Christian Church, will end with the Rapture, and quickly after that, the Great Tribulation will begin and last seven years, ending with the Battle of Armageddon and Satan being imprisoned (Rev. 19:11-20:4). Then Jesus Christ will establish his kingdom on earth and will reign from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. At the end of the 1,000 years, there will be a great war and the final judgment (Rev. 20:7-15).

[For more information on the Tribulation, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more information on the Rapture, see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:17. For more information on Jesus’ future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For a basic timeline of End Times events, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

Isa 13:10

**“will not give their light.”** Revelation 8:12 states that part of the tribulation that comes on the earth in the Last Days will be a time when the sun and stars are darkened. In the biblical culture there were no easy or reliable artificial light sources, and not having light to see by was a disaster, not to mention that without enough light a lot of crops will not grow or grow well.

Isa 13:11

**“punish.”** The word is also translated “visit,” but here “punish” is the clearer translation.

[For more on “visit,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Isa 13:17

**“I will stir up the Medes against them.”** This is an amazing prophecy. Babylon had not yet come to be the most powerful nation in the Middle East and would not until it defeated Assyria, which had been the more dominant nation in the Middle East. There had been a series of battles between Babylonia and Assyria that lasted more than ten years, and finally the Babylonians, in league with the Medes, fought the last battle with Assyria and conquered it in 609 BC. Then the Medes, as a province in and a part of the Persian Empire, conquered Babylon in 539 BC. So if Isaiah was writing this prophecy fairly early on in his ministry, which seems to be the case, it could have been over 200 years before this prophecy was fulfilled.

[For more information on the Medes, see commentary on Jer. 51:11.]

Isa 13:20

**“nor will it be lived in from generation to generation.”** Isaiah is speaking about Babylon, and some 200 years later Jeremiah said the same thing (Jer. 50:39).

**Isaiah Chapter 14**

Isa 14:1

**“For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob.”** Isaiah 14:1-2 best describes Israel in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ rules as king over the earth (see commentary on Isa. 2:2).

Isa 14:2

**“for male servants and for female servants.”** The word “servants” could be translated as “slaves” here.

**“rule over their oppressors.”** That is, Israel will rule over those who had once oppressed them. This will happen in the Millennial Kingdom, when Christ rules the earth.

Isa 14:9

**“male goats.”** Leaders and rulers were called “he-goats.” The male goat or ram was used idiomatically by the figure of speech hypocatastasis for the powerful people or rulers, and it was especially true when used of ungodly leaders, as it is here and in Zechariah 10:3. When one studies the use of “goats” in the Bible, and also studies their destructive behavior, it is easy to see why the Bible calls unbelievers or the unsaved, “goats” (cf. Matt. 25:33).

Part of the destructive nature of goats is due to the fact that they are “browsers,” not “grazers” like sheep and cattle. As “browsers” they taste almost anything and end up eating many things that are barely edible; besides shrubs, trees, and many plants that other animals don’t eat because they are toxic, goats occasionally eat things such as clothing (ancient clothes were made of cotton, linen, wool, and other natural, non-synthetic fibers, and could be eaten by a goat).

Goats are also extremely intelligent animals, and even learn from each other. If a goat is penned up but escapes, it will not only remember how to escape and do it again, other goats will see it escape and follow. That fact may have also helped the comparison between believers as sheep and unbelievers as goats. Jesus taught that the children of this world (the unbelievers) act more wisely or shrewdly than the believers do (Luke 16:8), and that is certainly often the case in business. Calling an unbeliever a “goat” is fitting in more ways than one.

Goats provided milk and meat, and they were also valuable for their skin, which was the most common source for the skin-bottles of the ancient world, so they were often mixed with sheep and herded in one big herd. But unlike sheep, which are quite defenseless against any enemy, goats could butt and kick much more effectively, and also escape much more effectively, including by climbing trees if the trunk had a slant to it. Both male and female goats raised in the biblical world had horns, and most modern goats of both sexes have horns, although the male goats are well-known for being more aggressive.

The biblical image of unbelievers being “goats” also fits well with what many scholars feel is the true meaning of “Azazel,” the word that occurs only in Leviticus 16 and that the King James Version translates “Scapegoat.” The actual meaning of “Azazel” is likely “Mighty Goat,” and is a name of the Devil. Also, “goat demons” are mentioned in Leviticus 17:7 and 2 Chronicles 11:15.

[For more on Azazel, see commentary on Lev. 16:8. For more on the figure of speech hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

Isa 14:12

**“Shining One.”** Isaiah 14:12-15, and possibly verses 12-17, refers to a spirit being that warred against God and now is known as the Devil. This was believed by many of the early Church Fathers (e.g., Jerome, Augustine, Origen, Eusebius, Ambrose, Cassiodorus, John Cassian), but that belief, long held by the Church, was in large part overturned during the Reformation. At that time, more teachers came to believe that the verses were hyperbolic and referred to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. However, if this section in Isaiah applies to Nebuchadnezzar, there is no parallel to it in Eastern literature. Scholars have searched for one without success. John Oswalt, who thinks that the section refers to Nebuchadnezzar and not to the Devil, has to admit that in spite of “vigorous investigation there is no single mythical story that can be said to be the prototype for Isaiah 14:12-15…among the numerous stories of a challenge to the high god, all the challenges are made by another god.”[[28]](#footnote-26490)

This admission by Oswalt is important because he does not believe that Isaiah is referring to the Devil even though all the parallel literature from the Eastern culture were gods challenging the Most High God, which fits exactly with Isaiah saying that the Devil, the “Shining One, son of Dawn,” challenged God.

We find the textual and contextual evidence that Isaiah 14:12-17 refers to the Devil to be compelling, and refer the reader to some of the good work on the subject that has already been done by men such as E.W. Bullinger, C.C. Ryrie, and C. I. Scofield. Godly men have long recognized the need for reading the Scriptures with a spiritual sensitivity, to see the fullness of what God is saying. One reason we believe this section of Isaiah is about the Devil is that it seems necessary that God would give some explanation of His chief adversary, and without this section and Ezekiel 28:11-19, there would be no explanation for the origin and fall of the Devil. Also, the Devil is, and always has been “the power behind the throne” of evil rulers, and so from that perspective, we can see why here in Isaiah God inserts the Devil into a section about the King of Babylon, and in Ezekiel God speaks of the Devil as “the King of Tyre.” The Devil is “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) and the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31), and so fitting him in with powerful ungodly kings is appropriate. Also, we would point out that although there is hyperbolic language used of kings and rulers in much of the ancient literature, the details of this section and the section in Ezekiel 28 seem to clearly refer to a divine being, not just an exalted earthly ruler.

Here in Isaiah 14:12, the Hebrew word is *heylel* (#01966 הֵילֵל), and it literally means “shining one.” In the Hebrew language, *heylel* was used as a name for the planet Venus. This in part explains how the Latin Vulgate arrived at the translation “Lucifer” (literally, “Light Bringer”), because in Latin, “Lucifer” was a word that was commonly used for the planet Venus. Thus, for the Latin Vulgate to translate *heylel* as “Lucifer” made perfect sense because both *heylel* and “Lucifer” were used of the planet Venus. The association between the “Shining One” and Venus also explains why so many versions say, “morning star.” Venus was well-known as the morning star. So *heylel* meant “Shining One, and was used as a name for the planet Venus, which was the “morning star.”

Further evidence that “Shining One” is a reference to the planet Venus, which was being used as a hypocatastasis for the Devil, is the fact that the Hebrew text reads, “Shining One, son of Dawn.” In Hebrew, the word translated “dawn” is *shachar* (#07837 שַׁחַר), and in cognate languages such as Ugaritic, it was used as a divine name. In Greek mythology, Venus was the “son of Eōs,” (“son of Dawn”). Eōs was the female Titan who was the personification of the dawn (the Titans were the first generation of gods, before the Olympian gods that were ruled by Zeus). Of course, we know that the Devil was not the son of a Greek Titan, but the reference to “son of the Dawn” in Isaiah emphasizes the fact that the Devil, and the angels who supported his rebellion, should have known that he was not the Creator God, but was himself a created being who owed allegiance to his Creator. Modern versions do not use “Lucifer” in Isaiah 14:12, but because “Lucifer” appeared in the Vulgate and KJV, and thus was the dominant translation of Isaiah 14:12 for around 1600 years, “Lucifer” has become one of the most well-known names for the Devil.

[For more on the name “Shining One,” see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Isa 14:13

**“I will.”** Here in Isaiah 14:13-14, we see the pride that the Devil has. The phrase “I will” occurs five times in two verses. However, Satan’s pride will not get him far in the long run. Yahweh, his creator, reacted against the Devil’s pride and says, “Yet you will be brought down to Sheol” (Isa. 14:15).

**“I will scale the heavens!”** The New English Bible and the Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern catch the sense well: “I will scale the heavens,” and some other versions are similar (e.g., the New Jerusalem Bible; The Complete Bible, an American Translation). The common translation in most English Bibles, which is “I will ascend to heaven” (ESV), does not catch the sense of the statement. When Satan was created, he was already the “anointed cherub” (Ezek. 28:14) and was already on the holy mountain of assembly. So he did not have to “ascend to heaven” because he was already there. But Satan was not satisfied with his position. He wanted to be above all the other spirits there, and be “like” the Most High God, in other words, be number one in heaven. This would mean he would have to “scale the heavens,” or, as we might say in modern jargon, be a social climber and then replace Yahweh, the Most High God, in order to be the Most High God. Satan was already in the heavens and on the Mount of Assembly when he sinned, so he was cast off of it (Ezek. 28:16-17; cf. Isa. 14:15) and cast down to earth (Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:17).

The Hebrew word translated in the REV as “go up” is *ʿalah* (#05927 עָלָה), and it can mean “go up,” “climb up” “ascend” “make one’s way up.” The text gives the impression that Satan is going to exert whatever effort it takes to get him to the highest position on the holy mountain of God.

**“I will raise my throne high above.”** The meaning of this phrase is that Satan did not just want to be with the other “stars” (spirit beings); he wanted to be high above them.[[29]](#footnote-16918)

**“above.”** The Devil wanted to be on the mountain of assembly and have his throne “above the stars of God” (the created spirits of God) who were assembled there. According to Eastern custom and speech, saying that the Devil wanted his throne “above” the other thrones did not just mean “above” in the sense of vertically in height (but in this case, there would have been a vertical aspect to it because Satan wanted to be higher on the holy mountain than any other spirit). “Above” also referred to the throne being in a more important position and thus having more authority than the other thrones. We see this cultural use of “high” and “low” in Jesus’ parable of the wedding feast (Luke 14:7-11). Jesus said when you go to a feast, take the “lowest place” (Luke 14:10), and when the host sees you there he will say, “Friend, go up higher,” with “higher” meaning closer to the host himself. If the Devil could sit “above” the other thrones, then he could be “like the Most High” God. He could be the number one God. Here in Isaiah 14:13, when the Devil wants to be “above” the other spirit beings, he wants to be higher in elevation, higher up the mountain than they were, as well as higher in importance and authority.

**“stars.”** In this context, “stars” refer to heavenly spirit beings, especially in this context, ruling angels. Because spirit beings inhabit the heavens above us, the ancients sometimes referred to them as “stars.” In the biblical world, lots of things that we do not call “stars,” they referred to as “stars.” For example, to them, “planets” were “wandering stars,” asteroids whose tails could be seen were sometimes referred to as “hairy stars,” and of course, the stars were called “stars.”

Jesus Christ is referred to as a star in prophecy in Numbers 24:17; 2 Peter 1:19; and Revelation 2:28; 22:16. Other verses that refer to angels as stars include Job 38:7; Daniel 8:10; and Revelation 9:1; 12:4.

**“of God.”** The Hebrew word translated as “God” here is El, not Yahweh or even Elohim. In the Canaanite mythology, the god El ruled on a mountain, and thus the title may be used here to communicate that Satan felt that he was at least equal to El and deserved to have a higher position than El.

**“sit.”** The word “sit” in the biblical culture often meant to rule, because rulers usually sat while others stood. It was common for rulers to have a throne to sit on while the ones they ruled stood before them. Here, in the context of an assembly of gods, “sit” means to have a ruling position. The NET Bible even translates this phrase in Isaiah 14:13 as “I will rule on the mountain of the assembly.” Whatever position Satan had before he fell from his position in heaven, it was not good enough for him. He wanted to rule in heaven.

That rulers sat while the ruler’s subjects stood is a common theme in Scripture. In 1 Kings 22:19, in the vision God gave Micaiah, Yahweh sat on His throne while the host of heaven stood around Him, a vision that was similarly being played out on earth because in 1 Kings 22:10 (cf. 2 Chron. 18:9) the kings of Israel and Judah sat while the prophets stood and prophesied before them. Also, Esther 1:14 speaks of the seven men who “sat first” in the kingdom of Persia; in other words, they were top rulers under the king. In Revelation 18:7, Babylon says to herself that she sits as a queen, that is, she rules as queen. In Daniel’s vision of the future recorded in Daniel 7:9-10, God sits on a throne, and His heavenly court is also sitting, while “ten thousand times ten thousand” stand before Him. Then, in Revelation 7:11, all the angels are standing around the throne upon which God is sitting. Similarly, in Revelation 7:9, the multitude of people stood in front of God who was seated on the throne (that God was seated on the throne is clear from Rev. 4:1-5:13; and we should note that in that context, the Lamb, Jesus Christ, does not sit on a throne but stands as God’s right-hand minister, a scene we also see in verses such as Acts 7:55).

In Psalm 61:7, the Messianic king sits, i.e., sits enthroned, in God’s presence forever. In some contexts, to “stand before” the king meant to be in his service as an official or officer (e.g., Gen. 41:46; 1 Sam. 16:22).

**“Mountain of Assembly.”** This was believed—and the evidence is that it is correctly believed—to be a mountain that exists in the spiritual world where certain select spiritual beings that form God’s divine council assemble to meet with God and help Him rule creation. That is why the Devil wanted to be there and have his throne “above the stars of God” who were assembled there.

In many of the religions of the ancient Near East, the assembly on the “mountain of assembly” was believed to refer to a special assembly of spirit beings. That is certainly the case here in Isaiah. Many of the religions of the ancient world located their gods on mountains, and some wrote about ruling assemblies that met on those mountains. Given what we read in Isaiah, there is every reason to believe those “ancient myths” were built around a historical kernel of truth. Richard Clifford writes about a Ugaritic myth: “An examination of the Ugaritic texts shows that the mountain of both El and Baal can be called cosmic. El’s mountain is where the gods meet to decide issues that affect the universe; it seems to be the paradisiac source of water that gives fertility; it is the place where decrees are issued that give ruling power to death-dealing and unruly enemies or to life-giving powers.”

If the “mountain of assembly” only referred to a place where all of God’s spirit beings assembled, then the Devil would not have made such a big deal about going there. As an important spirit being, he would have already been invited to any general meeting of all the spirit beings (cf. Job 1:6). Thus, the evidence supports that the “mountain of assembly” is a place where God’s intimate divine council meets. At one time, before his rebellion, the Bible indicates that Satan was part of the assembly on “the holy mountain of God” (Ezek. 28:14). But that was not good enough for him. He wanted to be “above” the other ruling spirits, and even equal to or above Yahweh, his creator. Finally, because of his sin and rebellion, God threw him down from the mountain of God (Ezek. 28:16).

We learn some wonderful things about heaven from Ezekiel and Isaiah. For example, we learn from Ezekiel 28:13 that heaven is a colorful place, and we also learned from both Ezekiel and Isaiah that heaven is not flat, but has mountains, just like the earth has mountains. When God made the earth for humans, he made it a colorful and interesting place to live. Thus, there is every reason to believe that when God created the heavens for spirit beings, He created them to be colorful and interesting as well.

[For more on God’s divine council, see commentary on Gen. 1:26. For more on God’s title El Shaddai, and that it means “God, the One of the mountain,” and for why God is called the “Most High God,” see commentary on Gen. 17:1. For more on God’s holding general assemblies for all His spirit beings, see commentary on Job 1:6.]

**“the heights of *Mount* Zaphon!”** The modern name of Mount Zaphon is Jebel Aqra. “Mount Zaphon” is an imposing mountain located near the mouth of the Orantes River on the Mediterranean Sea on the border between Turkey and Syria. Mount Zaphon is over 5,600 feet tall and has a long history of being known as a sacred mountain, a fact that is traceable from the ancient Canaanite religion and continuing through classical antiquity.[[30]](#footnote-22941) That Mount Zaphon was such a high mountain and easily visible from the Mediterranean Sea made it a well-known landmark for sailors, which explains why it was known in so many different ancient countries, including Canaan, Ugarit, Egypt, Phoenicia, Israel, Akkad, Greece, and Rome.

Mount Zaphon was well-known for frequent thunderstorms and had been a worship site for many centuries. The Canaanites and some other ancient cultures believed it was the home of the storm-god Baal. Its position far north of Israel eventually led to “Zaphon” being used as a Hebrew word for “north.”[[31]](#footnote-11832) Although it is possible that Isaiah 14:13 could mean “north,” it is more likely that “Zaphon” is the meaning, and in this case, “Zaphon” refers to a sacred mountain of the gods represented by the actual Mount Zaphon on earth. Satan wanted to sit enthroned like God on the spiritual Mount Zaphon.

[For more on Mount Zaphon and the name “El Shaddai,” see commentary on Gen. 17:1. For more on Mount Zaphon, see commentary on Ps. 48:2.]

Isa 14:14

**“I will ascend above the heights of the clouds!”** Many of the “holy mountains” in the ancient world where gods were believed to dwell were high enough that their tops were often covered with clouds. That was certainly the case with mountains like Mount Olympus in Greece, Mount Zaphon in Turkey, and Mount Hermon in Israel. Satan had high aspirations. He wanted to be “above” the clouds.

**“I will make myself like the Most High!”** In Isaiah 14:13-14, we see the relationship between God and His title, “the Most High,” which occurs some 50 times in the Bible. God’s divine council met on the “Mountain of Assembly” (Isa. 14:13), the holy “mountain of God” (Ezekiel 28:14, 16). When Satan sinned, he was “cast out” of the mountain of God, and thus cast out of the divine assembly that met there (Ezek. 28:14). In keeping with custom, Yahweh, the top God and creator of the heavens and earth, would have His throne on the mountain at the highest point of the assembly and thus He would be “the Most High” God. Thus, the title “Most High” came from the literal fact that Yahweh had the highest position of all the “gods,” the spirit beings, on the holy Mountain of Assembly.

Isa 14:15

**“Yet you will be brought down to Sheol.”** Since in its ordinary usage, Sheol refers to the state of being dead, this verse could well be literal and saying that the ultimate fate of the Devil is death (see commentary on Rev. 20:10).

**“to the depths of the pit.”** The “pit” generally refers to the grave (cf. Jonah 2:6). This phrase is one more indication that the ultimate fate of the Devil is death.

Isa 14:21

**“Prepare for slaughter of his children because of the iniquity of their fathers.”** This verse is sometimes said to contradict Deuteronomy 24:16, but this is not the case. Deuteronomy 24:16 is speaking of civil penalties carried out by the government. This is clear from the context. Isaiah 14:21 is speaking of national calamities (in this case, war) that are the result of the evil of earlier generations. The two subjects are totally different. Many “children” (men 16-25) died in WWII because the “fathers” sat by while Hitler preached hate, then built a huge army. Similarly, “sons” now die of mercury poisoning because “fathers” dumped mercury, PCBs, etc., into lakes.

Isa 14:28

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.” Here we added the word “prophetic” for clarity.

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

Isa 14:29

**“the rod that struck you is broken.”** This refers to Assyria, which was broken and could no longer afflict Philistia as it had in the past. But Philistia was not to gloat because there would be a descendant, a root, out of which more trouble for Philistia would emerge.

[For more on “root” referring to descendants, see commentary on Isa. 11:1.]

Isa 14:30

**“The poorest of the poor will eat *plenty*.”** The first half of Isaiah 14:30 describes conditions in the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth. The Hebrew text would be hard to understand if translated literally: “The firstborn of the poor will graze.” The word “firstborn” is being used idiomatically here for the “first,” and thus in this case the “first” of the poor is the poorest of the poor. Then, by the figure of speech hypocatastasis, the people are being compared to sheep, God’s sheep of His pasture. So whereas God’s sheep, and especially the poor and needy among them, are often treated very badly, when Christ reigns on earth they will have plenty to eat and “lie down,” i.e., live peacefully, in safety.

[For more on verses describing the Millennial Kingdom in Isaiah, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on the figure of speech hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“I will kill your root with famine.”** This is one of the verses that clearly shows that the “root” refers to descendants, not the predecessors. This is important information when studying the “root of Jesse” who are the descendants of David (cf. Isa. 11:1, 10).

Isa 14:31

**“Howl, O gate! Cry out, O city!”** The word “howl” could also be translated as “wail.” This is the figure of speech personification.

[For more on personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**“for smoke comes out of the north.”** It has been suggested that this might be the dust kicked up by the approaching army, but the use of “smoke” makes it much more likely that as the Assyrian army approached from the north they were burning the cities they conquered.

**“and there is no straggler in its ranks.”** The meaning of this phrase likely refers to the fact that the Assyrian army was confident and well-disciplined. There were no stragglers and no deserters.

**Isaiah Chapter 15**

Isa 15:1

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

**“Ar of Moab.”** “Ar” means “city,” and Ar was apparently a notable city in Moab, and it is mentioned several times in the Bible, but its location is unknown, perhaps because it was “brought to nothing.”

**“Kir of Moab.”** Kir of Moab is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible as one of the two main strongholds of Moab, the other being Ar. It is probably the same as the city called Kir-haresh, Kir-hareseth, and Kir-heres. The word Kir alludes to a wall or fortress. It is identified with the later city Al Karak.[[32]](#footnote-16899) Although Kir was properly a Moabite city, it was occasionally occupied by conquering Amorites (Num. 21:30).

Isa 15:2

**“Bayith and to Dibon.”** Cities of Moab.

**“to the shrines to weep.”** In this context the Hebrew word *bamot* should be understood as “shrines” (see commentary on Num. 33:52; cf. CEB, CEV, GNT, NLT). The people went to their pagan shrines to weep and to implore their gods for help, but the pagan gods could not help the people.

**“every head is shaved bald.”** Like Jeremiah 48:37, Isaiah 15:2 portrays tremendous mourning in Moab. One mourning custom was shaving the head (see commentary on Jer. 47:5). Another was for a man to cut off his beard (cf. Jer. 41:5). Isaiah 15:2-3 has a lot in common with Jeremiah 48:37-38, which was written over 100 years later (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

**“over Nebo and over Medeba.”** Nebo and Medeba were Moabite cities. Medeba was a very important city of Moab, about 25 miles south of the capital city, currently Amman. Medeba was located right on the King’s Highway, the main north-south route through Moab from Damascus to Egypt.

Isa 15:4

**“Heshbon cries out with Elealeh. Their voice is heard even to Jahaz.”** Isaiah 15:4 is similar to Jeremiah 48:34, which was written over 100 years later (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Isa 15:5

**“for they go up by the ascent of Luhith.”** This is quite similar to Jeremiah 48:5, which was written over 100 years later. Actually, there is a lot about Moab in Isaiah that is similar to the material about Moab in Jeremiah (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

**Isaiah Chapter 16**

Isa 16:1

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

Isa 16:2

**“scattered nest.”** Here, “nest” is put by metonymy for the birds in it, which are scattered. Thus, some versions have “scattered nestlings” (cf. NAB, NASB, NJB, NRSV, RSV, TNK).

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Isa 16:3

**“Make your shade like the night in the middle of the noonday.”** An expanded translation of this might be, “Make your shade as dark as the night in the middle of the noonday.” The noonday sun was hot and bright, and people often sought protection and shelter from it. What is challenging about this verse is that it is unclear who is doing the speaking. Perhaps the writer is speaking as if he were one of the Moabites who were suffering terribly and requesting shelter and protection.

Isa 16:5

**“one will sit on it in faithfulness.”** The “one” is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In the Millennial Kingdom, when Jesus Christ rules the earth from Jerusalem, he will sit on a throne and administer justice to the world.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom in Isaiah, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“what is right.”** The Hebrew is “righteousness,” which in this context is “what is right,” or as some English versions have, “justice.”

[For more on “righteousness” referring to what is right or to “justice,” see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

Isa 16:6

**“We have heard of the pride of Moab.”** This is very similar to Jeremiah 48:29 (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Isa 16:7

**“Moab will wail for Moab.”** This is similar to Jeremiah 48:31, written over 100 years later (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Isa 16:9

**“I will weep with the weeping of Jazer.”** This is similar to Jeremiah 48:32, written over 100 years later (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Isa 16:10

**“Gladness is taken away.”** Isaiah 16:10 is similar to Jeremiah 48:33, written over 100 years later (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Isa 16:11

**“my bowels.”** In the biblical culture, the bowels and abdominal organs were the seat of emotion.

**“moan like a harp for Moab.”** Isaiah 16:11 is similar to Jeremiah 48:36, which was written over 100 years later (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

**Isaiah Chapter 17**

Isa 17:1

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

**Isaiah Chapter 18**

Isa 18:1

**“whirring wings.”** Several interpretations have been set forth as to what “whirring wings” refers to. Ethiopia was known by some for its large amount of insects, so that has been set forth as a meaning. Also, the root of the Hebrew word means “shadow,” and Ethiopia was close enough to the equator to have the phenomenon of sometimes having a shadow fall from the north and sometimes from the south, and so “shadow” has been set forth as a possible meaning, and the TNK version has “land in the deep shadow of wings.” However, it seems more likely that the correct meaning is the one found in the Septuagint and Aramaic Targum, which say the phrase refers to ships that race up and down the rivers, and would have had the “wings” (sails) in the wind. Also, that interpretation fits with the use of rivers in the second stanza and in Isaiah 18:2, which speaks of sending “swift messengers” by sea.

**“beyond the rivers of Cush.”** Cush is the biblical country that was south of Lower Egypt and encompassed much of what is now Ethiopia, and because of that some versions have “Ethiopia,” but Cush and Ethiopia do not have exactly the same boundaries. Biblically, “beyond the rivers of Cush” was considered the end of the earth, so the phrase “beyond the rivers of Cush” meant “to the ends of the earth.”

Isa 18:3

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**Isaiah Chapter 19**

Isa 19:1

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

Isa 19:3

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

Isa 19:18

**“In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that...swear to Yahweh of Armies.”** Isaiah 19:18-25 mainly describe things that will occur in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ rules the earth, although there are some things in the verses that occur before Christ rules on earth. The key to understanding prophecies such as this one in Isaiah 19:18-25 is realizing that the prophecy is not in chronological order, and so the reader must understand from many other places in the Bible what the Millennial Kingdom will be like, as well as understand what the Tribulation and Armageddon, which precede the Millennial Kingdom, will be like. Then the reader can use that information to sort out what pieces of the prophecy refer to events before the Millennial Kingdom and which events have never occurred but will occur in the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more on the prophecies of the Millennial Kingdom in Isaiah, see commentary on Isa. 2:2.]

**“City of Destruction.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads “City of Destruction” which may be a reference to its past. However, the Qumran scroll of Isaiah, 1QIsaa, reads“City of the Sun,” and that reading better fits the context, which is about how Egypt will turn to Yahweh in the future. Furthermore, “City of the Sun” is also supported by some medieval Hebrew manuscripts, Symmachus’ Greek version, the Aramaic Targum, and the Latin Vulgate. The Greek for “City of the Sun” is Heliopolis, a well-known city in Egypt. Saying that Heliopolis turned from Egyptian idols to the worship of Yahweh would catch people’s attention due to the size and importance of that city.

Isa 19:19

**“and a standing-stone to Yahweh.”** This amazing prophecy is that in the future, in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus rules the earth, Egypt, which has always had dozens and dozens of different gods and goddesses, will worship the true God, Yahweh, and set up a standing-stone as a testimony and witness of Yahweh at its border.

[For more on the prophecies of the Millennial Kingdom in Isaiah, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18.]

Isa 19:22

**“he will allow himself to be entreated.”** The verb is in the passive tense. The sense and translation should not be uncomfortable. We know from many Scriptures that sin separates God from people, and God opposes the proud (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5) and turns his ear away from people’s prayers (see commentary on Amos 5:5). So when people repent and make amends for their sin, God then opens his eyes and ears to the people and thus allows Himself to be entreated by them. The same passive tense verb occurs in 2 Samuel 21:14; 24:25 and Isaiah 19:22.

**Isaiah Chapter 20**

**Isaiah Chapter 21**

Isa 21:1

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

**“desert of the sea.”** From the scope and context, this seems to be a prophecy against the country of Babylon. In ancient times, Southern Babylon was referred to as “the Sealand,” because of the swamps and marshes between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and also perhaps due to its proximity to the Persian Gulf.

Isa 21:11

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

Isa 21:13

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

Isa 21:17

**“the children of Kedar.”** The children of Kedar are descendants of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13) who was an archer (Gen. 21:20).

**Isaiah Chapter 22**

Isa 22:1

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

**“the valley of vision.”** This may or may not refer to a literal valley around Jerusalem. There may have been a literal “valley” where some of the prophets of Yahweh had seen visions, and it may have even been where the Kidron, Hinnom, and Tyropoeon valleys met just south of the city of Jerusalem. But it does seem that this is a sarcastic reference to Jerusalem because the prophecy is about Jerusalem, not a valley. Also, the one thing the people of Jerusalem lacked was vision. They had turned from God and now, as if they were in a valley, they could not see clearly.

**“That you have all gone up to the housetops.”** This refers to the custom of people going up to the housetops to see what was happening and be able to talk about it with neighbors. In biblical times, houses had flat roofs, and the Mosaic Law commanded that a railing be built around the roof so people would not fall off (Deut. 22:8). People would spend time on the roof when the weather was nice, which is why Peter went up on the rooftop to pray (Acts 10:9).

The houses were built close together, often even having common walls, and were generally close enough to get from one roof to another. The streets between the houses were usually very narrow. That meant that getting to the outside of town by traveling rooftop to rooftop was usually quicker than using the narrow streets through town. Moving roof to roof was known as “the road of the roofs,” and that was why Jesus said that when people saw the signs of the End Times they should flee town without going back down into their houses (Matt. 24:17; Mark 13:15; Luke 17:31).

The narrow and often winding roads between the houses were not a good way to travel quickly through town because they would clog up so quickly. Besides being narrow, they were also often dark and wet, and those factors made them not very inviting for people to stand in to talk to their neighbors and get news. When something happened that got the attention of the people of town, they would all go up on their roofs where they could see and talk to neighbors and get the news.

Isa 22:8

**“the House of the Forest.”** This is the House of the Forest of Lebanon, a wing of Solomon’s palace where weapons and armor were stored (cf. 1 Kings 7:2).

Isa 22:9

**“you gathered together the waters of the lower pool.”** Many scholars believe that the “lower pool” was a designation for the Pool of Siloam (see commentary on John 9:7).

Isa 22:12

**“baldness.”** Shaving one’s head was ordinarily a sign of mourning (see commentary on Jer. 47:5, “baldness”). Even though the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem had been lifted, the country itself was devastated. God called for public mourning and repentance, but the people would have nothing to do with that. They wanted to party. Putting on sackcloth was also a sign of mourning (cf. Jer. 48:37).

Isa 22:13

**“killing cattle and slaughtering sheep.”** The people should have repented of their sin, but instead, they gave themselves over to being killed in the future, so they just celebrated and ate and drank. They killed cattle and sheep, which they would almost certainly have needed for food and clothing in the future. The text uses “kill” and “slaughter,” which refer to the same thing in this context, to catch our attention and point to the people’s unwillingness to plan for the future.

Isa 22:15

**“Over the House.”** “Over the House” was the title of the palace administrator (see commentary on 1 Kings 4:6). During the reign of King Hezekiah, Eliakim replaced Shebna, who had apparently abused his office but who nevertheless remained an important figure in the kingdom for a while anyway (cf. Isa. 22:15-21).

Isa 22:17

**“throw you down violently.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “throw you with a throwing,” but the phrase means to throw down violently.

**“O mere man!”** The Hebrew is simply, “O man,” but the idea is that Shebna is just a mere man even though he holds a powerful position in the kingdom.

Isa 22:23

**“I will fasten him like a peg.”** Modern houses have pegs and hooks to hang things from so that there is order in the house, and ancient houses, and even tents had pegs and hooks too. That Eliakim the son of Hilkiah would be fastened like a peg was a simile that revealed that Eliakim would bring order to the people. The concept of a peg bringing order is why Jesus said about loving God and loving your neighbor, “On these two commandments hang [like from a peg] the whole Law, and the Prophets” (see commentary on Matt. 22:40).

**Isaiah Chapter 23**

Isa 23:1

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

Isa 23:12

**“virgin daughter Sidon.”** The Hebrew text is idiomatic and is referring to Sidon, calling it a “virgin daughter.” It was common to refer to cities and countries as being female (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

Isa 23:17

**“prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world.”** Pagan religions often include ritual sex, and both physical and spiritual prostitution is involved in pagan religions, and the seaport city of Tyre would have contact with many different pagan religions.

**Isaiah Chapter 24**

Isa 24:1

**“will make the earth empty.”** The Great Tribulation and Battle of Armageddon will kill most of the people on earth and destroy much of the earth itself. See commentary on Isaiah 13:9 and Daniel 12:1. The Hebrew text is written as if these things were happening now, but the prophecy is of the future.

Isa 24:5

**“the everlasting covenant.”** What this covenant is, is not stated in the text and is debated. Some scholars favor the covenant God made with Noah because that covenant is associated with the shedding of blood, but it is unclear how people could “break” that covenant, which was unilateral. Some scholars favor the Mosaic Covenant because that clearly could be broken, except that covenant was not as universal as Isaiah 24:5 seems to be. Scholars counter that by saying that the Mosaic Covenant had universal application even if it was made with Israel and not all humanity. Some scholars say Isaiah is generalizing information from several covenants and making the point that God’s intention was to rule the world justly and have people be obedient to Him—something that people should have understood—but they transgressed God’s rules, polluted the earth by sin, and have thus broken the covenant. Given the fact that Isaiah does not specifically state which covenant is broken and no single covenant exactly fits the criteria in the verse, this last option seems the best.

Isa 24:6

**“burned up,”** The judgment of God is often referred to as a fire; so this may not be a literal fire, but instead be referring to the judgment of God.

**“few people are left.”** Isaiah 24 is about the Tribulation period that is described in the book of Revelation. According to Daniel 9:27, the Tribulation will last a “week,” which refers to a week of years, or seven years. Between the troubles on earth during that time, which will include both natural disasters and wars, the vast majority of people and animals on earth will be killed, which is why “few people are left” alive on earth. It is sometimes taught that no one survives the Tribulation and Armageddon, but that is not true; there will be survivors on earth, and they will be judged in the “Sheep and Goat Judgment” of Matthew 25:31-46 (see commentary on Matt. 25:32).

God says in a few different ways that not many people will survive the Tribulation. Here in Isaiah 24:6, He says it very literally. However, in Isaiah 24:13 He makes the point by comparing the few people who are left on earth with the few olives that are left in the tree after the olive tree is beaten, and also with the few stalks of grain that are left in a field for the gleaners after the grain crop is harvested. Also, in Isaiah 13:12, God says the people on earth will be scarcer than pure gold, and in Jeremiah 25:33, God says the bodies of the people who are killed will be all over the face of the earth. Jesus taught that if the Tribulation was not a short period then no one would be left alive (Matt. 24:22).

To best understand Isaiah, however, we have to take the statement that “very few are left” in comparison to how many there were alive when the trouble started. Matthew 25:31-32 says that after the Battle of Armageddon, when Jesus has conquered the earth and is sitting on his throne, “all the nations will be gathered before him.” Since there are more than seven billion people on earth now, “very few” left could easily be several million people or more.

[For more on the Great Tribulation and the destruction during that time, see commentary on Dan. 12:1.]

Isa 24:13

**“the beating of an olive tree.”** This refers to the biblical custom of beating the olive tree to get the olives off of it (Deut. 24:20). The beating got most of the olives but left some of them, and that is why this comparison is being used here in Isaiah 24:13. Isaiah 24 is about the Tribulation period that is described in the book of Revelation, with its seal, trumpet, thunder, and vial judgments and the devastation of most of human and animal kind. Between the Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon, “very few” people are left alive on earth. God is trying to make that point, so He says it plainly in Isaiah 24:6 (“very few are left”), and says it again in a pictorial way by comparing the people who are left on earth to the few olives that are left after the olive tree is beaten and also to the very little grain that is left (the gleanings) after the field is harvested.

Isaiah 24:13 is just one of the many places where the Bible says that very few people survive the Tribulation and Armageddon. Isaiah 13:12 says people will be scarcer than pure gold. Jeremiah 25:33 says the slain will be all over the earth. Jesus said that unless the days of the Tribulation and Armageddon were very short, “no flesh would have been saved” (Matt. 24:22). If you calculate the number of people who will be killed in the various judgments in Revelation, you get the same picture. But although there will be worldwide devastation, there is also hope, because the relatively small number of people who are left will praise Yahweh and sing songs to Him from all over the world (Isa. 24:14-16). In the Millennial Kingdom, people all over the world will worship Yahweh.

[For more on very few people being left alive on earth, see commentary on Isa. 24:6. For more on the custom of beating the olive trees, see commentary on Deut. 24:20. For more on the worldwide devastation of the earth that will occur during the Great Tribulation, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on people all over the world worshiping Yahweh in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Zeph. 2:11. For more on the Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 24:14

**“These will lift up their voice.”** This verse has engendered much scholarly discussion but little certainty, especially since the unspecified “they” is emphasized in the Hebrew text. From the general scope of Scripture, it seems the ones who are shouting for joy are those who have escaped destruction, and/or are peoples that live far away from the destruction. In any case, the ones who suffer destruction are not the ones shouting for joy. This is one of the many verses of Scripture in which the subject of the context abruptly changes, and in this case, those who experience God’s deliverance are joyful.

**“west.”** The Hebrew is literally, the “sea,” that is, the “Western Sea,” the Mediterranean Sea.

Isa 24:15

**“islands*.*”** From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the parts west of Israel as islands. However, the Hebrew word can (and in this case does) refer to both the coastland and the islands, which were often close to the coast.

**“of the sea.”** The Hebrew word translated as “sea” is also occasionally used for “west,” because in Israel, the Mediterranean Sea was in the west. That explains why some English versions read “sea,” and some read “west.” The idea of the verse is that God is to be praised all over, in the east and in the west. From Israel, both the east and the west (the islands of the sea) were Gentile lands. Yahweh was not to be glorified just in Israel, but in all the Gentile lands as well.

Isa 24:17

**“Fear and the pit and the snare are upon you.”** Isaiah 24:17-18 are very similar to Jeremiah 48:43-44, which was written over 100 years later (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Isa 24:18

**“will fall into a pit.”** The prophecy that during the Great Tribulation, people will flee one disaster only to have a different disaster happen to them is also graphically portrayed in Amos 5:19.

[For more on the Day of Yahweh (the Great Tribulation), see commentary on Isa. 13:9.]

Isa 24:21

**“the army of the heavens in the heavens, and the kings of the earth on the earth.”** When Jesus comes and fights the Battle of Armageddon the human armies of the earth will be killed (Rev. 19:19-21) but the demonic army that has served Satan for millennia and wreaked havoc on the earth will be captured and thrown into Tartarus, the “god-prison,” where they will be imprisoned for the 1,000-year duration of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan and his demons will be loosed and they will gather people together to fight against God’s people. But they will be defeated in battle and thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:7-10).

There are already demons in Tartarus for their sin against God (1 Pet. 3:18-20; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6), and the demons of the “army of the heavens” of Isaiah 24:21 and who exercise control on the earth will be put there too. God has a prison for the Devil and demons, and it is called by different names in the Bible: the “pit” in Isaiah 24:22, “Tartarus” in 2 Peter. 2:4, the “Abyss” in Revelation 20:1, and “prison” in 1 Peter. 3:19. Isaiah 24:21-22 helps clarify Revelation 20:1, which only mentions Satan being chained in the Abyss for 1,000 years but says nothing about Satan’s demons. We know by logical deduction that not just Satan, but Satan and his demons, will be imprisoned at the end of the Battle of Armageddon because Christ’s 1,000-year kingdom on earth could not be “Paradise” (2 Cor. 12:4) if people were constantly being afflicted by demons like they are now. Verses such as Isaiah 24:21-22 and Daniel 7:12 are scriptural support that the demons are also imprisoned during the Millennial Kingdom, and furthermore, it is common in the Bible to mention something happening to a king or ruler when it will happen to his followers as well. For example, when the Bible makes a statement such as, “David went out and fought with the Philistines” (1 Sam. 19:8), the text only mentions David but it means David and his army. Similarly, when “Satan” is thrown in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1), or “the Devil” is thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10), it means Satan and his demon army.

In the Battle of Armageddon, both human kings and also demon spirits who are called “kings of the earth” will be punished. The human kings will be killed and the demon “kings” will be imprisoned. Here in Isaiah 24:21-22 however, the primary meaning of “the kings of the earth” is the demon “kings” that rule the earth behind the scenes, for example, the powerful demon in Daniel who is called the “prince” of Persia (Dan. 10:13, 20). After Armageddon, the demonic heavenly army and the demonic “kings” who influence what happens on earth will be rounded up and punished by being put into the “pit,” just as Isaiah 24:22 says. Furthermore, they will be “visited” after many days. The word “visited” can mean either visited for good or visited for evil, and here it primarily and ultimately means “visited for evil”—they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:7-10). Actually, from the whole scope of Scripture we know that Satan and his demons will be “visited” in the sense that they will be let loose out of their prison at which point they will return to earth and deceive the people into going to war against God’s people (Rev. 20:7-8) but then God “visits” them by a war from heaven and they are cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:9-10).

[For more on the use of the word “Paradise” to describe the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 12:4. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 24:22

**“visited.”** In this context, we know that the demons who will be in prison after the Battle of Armageddon will be there until the end of the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom. At that time they will be “visited,” (released) and will go out and deceive the nations of the earth and precipitate a war that will result in them being thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:7-10).

Isa 24:23

**“for Yahweh of Armies will reign.”** Yahweh will reign through the vice-regency of His Son, the Messiah (Ps. 2:6). In his future kingdom on earth, Jesus Christ will carry out the will of God just like he always has.

[For more on Christ’s future kingdom being on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 25**

Isa 25:5

**“like the heat in a dry place.”** The placement of this phrase is disputed by scholars. To us and others (cf. ESV, NIV), it seems to fit best as the last phrase in the sentence that started in Isaiah 25:4. The heat in the Middle East is oppressive and pounds down on people. Thus, the breath of the ruthless pounds people down, like a pounding rain during the rainy season, and the pounding oppressive heat during the dry season.

Isa 25:6

**“On this mountain.”** This is referring to the mountain on which Jerusalem is built and where the Temple resides (Isaiah 24:23; cf. Isa. 2:2-3; 25:10; 27:13; Mic. 4:1-2).

Isaiah 25:6-9 is about the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ rules the earth. Isaiah 25:6 actually picks up the train of thought where it left off in Isaiah 24:23. Isaiah 24 is about the Great Tribulation that precedes the Battle of Armageddon, and includes allusions to, and the idea of, Christ conquering the earth and setting up his kingdom and reigning from Jerusalem as God’s appointed king. Isaiah 24 ends with Yahweh of Armies having conquered the enemy and then reigning on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem. Then, Isaiah 25:1-5 is a poem or hymn of praise to Yahweh who has been a shelter in the storm for the godly, conquered the enemy, and is worthy of honor and praise. Isaiah 25:1-5 could be placed in a parenthesis. The flow of thought in the context continues from “Yahweh of Armies” and “Mount Zion” in Isaiah 24:23 to “Yahweh of Armies” and “this mountain” in Isaiah 25:6.

Also, once we see the connection between Isaiah 24:23 and Isaiah 25:6, we can see why Yahweh of Armies will host a magnificent feast. He has just conquered the earth and set up His kingdom, which He will rule through His Messiah, Jesus Christ. It was customary to have a huge feast when a king was inaugurated (1 Sam. 11:15; 1 Kings 1:9, 25). That the inaugural feast will be close to the beginning of the reign of the Messiah on earth is also made clear by the way Isaiah 25:6 is connected with the resurrection of the dead in Isaiah 25:7-9. It seems logical that the general sequence of end-times events near the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth will be:

* The Tribulation (Isa. 24; Matt. 24:21; Rev. 6-19).
* Battle of Armageddon (Isa. 63:1-6; Zech. 14:3-6; Rev. 16:11-16; 19:11-21).
* Sheep and Goat Judgment and First Resurrection (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:11-14; Dan. 12:2; John 5:25-29; Rev. 20:4; Matt. 25:31-46).
* The Temple (and Jerusalem?) being rebuilt (Ezek. 40-43; cf. Hag. 1:1-11).
* The Wedding Banquet of the Lamb, the great inaugural feast (Isa. 25:6; Matt. 8:11-12; Rev. 19:9).

[For more on the prophecies in Isaiah that refer to the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more about the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.]

**“banquet...banquet of choice wines.”** The mention of choice wines is appropriate, because the Hebrew word translated as “banquet” can mean “drinking bout,” and it generally refers to a meal with wine. This will be a huge meal with lots of wine and likely other drinks as well. During Isaiah’s time, beer was common and is mentioned in the Bible, but distilled liquor was not able to be made yet. However, it is possible that liquor may also be part of this great future banquet. This banquet will most likely be toward the beginning of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom.

[For more on this banquet, see commentary on Matt. 8:11.]

**“of choice wines.”** The Hebrew text reads, “a feast of wines on the lees.” The “lees” were the sediments at the bottom of the wine, and allowing the wine to age on the lees gave the wine a deeper and richer flavor, thus the translation, “choice wines.” The NASB reads “aged wines,” and that catches the sense also. The word “lees” has been preserved in the last phrase of the verse. Leaving the wine on the lees was well-known to enrich the flavor of the wine, and so allusions to it are made in several places in the Bible (Jer. 48:11; Zeph. 1:12).

**“of fat *meat*.”** More literally, “of fat” or “of the fat.” Many modern versions avoid the use of the word “fat” because so many people are health conscious, and do not like the idea of eating meat that has plenty of fat in it, but in biblical times that was not the case at all. The wording, “of the fat,” or “of fat things” or “of fat meat” communicates that this will be a feast indeed, with wonderful fatty meat and wine. But there is something else being communicated as well—the graciousness and generosity of the Host, God. According to Mosaic Law, when an animal was killed for sacrifice, God got the fat (Lev. 3:3-5, 9-11, 14-16; 4:8-10, 19, 26, 31, 35), but at this future feast, God graciously lets the people eat the meat with the fat. That there will be plenty to eat and great tasting meat with the fat is also implied in Psalm 63:5. John Oswalt correctly comments: “To a people who did not have to worry about cholesterol, the fat portions of the meat were the best.”[[33]](#footnote-24667)

**“wine on the lees *that has been* thoroughly strained.”** Leaving the wine on the lees, the sediment at the bottom of the container, gave the wine a richer flavor, but was not pleasant to drink, so the wine was strained before being consumed. Many translations say “refined,” but that is not really accurate to today’s thinking. The wine was not “refined” in any way, it was strained to get out the lees and any other thing, such as a seed, leaf, or pebble, that may have gotten into the wine in the winemaking process.

Isa 25:7

**“swallow up.”** God will swallow up the burial shroud that covers all people. This is a graphic and idiomatic image for putting an end to death, and the use of the Hebrew word *bala* (#01104 בּלע), “swallow up,” in this context is very purposeful and catches our imagination. The redeemed can have a feast and “swallow up” the good food that God has provided (Isa. 25:6) because God has “swallowed up” death. The redeemed will come up out of the graves and live forever once the earth gives birth to her dead (Isa. 26:19). The word *bala* occurs again in Isa. 25:8.

**“the *burial* shroud.”** The Hebrew text is idiomatic and literally reads, “the face of the *burial* shroud.” When bodies were buried it was customary to wrap them up, similar to what happened when Jesus was buried (Matt. 27:59). ​

Isa 25:8

**“He will swallow up death.”** The Hebrew uses the prophetic perfect to guarantee the promise. It reads, “He has swallowed up death,” even though His promise will be fulfilled in the future.

[For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Isa 25:11

**“He will spread.”** The “he” is Moab, portrayed as a man who spreads out his hands to swim out of the manure muck, but will not succeed. The simile of Moab as a swimmer portrays the pride and arrogance of the people of Moab, who are trampled in the manure but instead of realizing their situation and humbling themselves before God, try to swim out of the mess they are in by their own strength. But they do not succeed.

Isa 25:12

**“he will bring down.”** Here in Isaiah 25:12 the “he” switches from Moab (Isaiah 25:11), to God. God will bring down the fortifications of His enemies.

**Isaiah Chapter 26**

Isa 26:14

**“visited.”** When God “visits,” He intervenes, and He can intervene for blessing or to bring deserved consequences or punishment. Here in Isaiah 26:14, He visited with destruction.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Isa 26:19

**“Your dead will live.”** The speaker changes from the prophet in Isaiah 26:18 to God here in Isaiah 26:19. The prophet had been speaking of God’s greatness and human misery (cf. Isa. 26:15-18), and God now answers him with a message of hope about the resurrection of the dead into a better life. The sudden change from the prophet speaking to God speaking is not unusual and is why it is so important to pay attention to the context and flow of thought in the Scripture.

Here in Isaiah 26:19, God says to the prophet “your dead will live” because they are the people of the prophet, the righteous ones in Israel. Then God expands that thought by saying, “My dead bodies will arise,” because they are God’s people as well. The people are the same: “your dead” and “my dead” are the same people; the righteous ones of Israel. Some commentators think that the prophet, not God, is speaking in Isaiah 26:19. However, the prophet would not have been able to promise that the dead would live and shout for joy, nor would he have had a reason for saying “your dead” and “my dead,” whereas God would, and also it seems that what God is doing here is giving the prophet hope after his somewhat hopeless statement earlier in the chapter (Isa. 26:14).

That God is going to raise people from the dead and judge them is clearly set forth in a number of verses in the Old Testament and Gospels (cf. Job 19:25-27; Ps. 71:9; Isa. 26:19; 66:14; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2, 13; Hos. 13:14; Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31; 14:14; John 5:28-29). Then, after the day of Pentecost, it is set forth again in the Epistles and book of Revelation (Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:20-22, 42-49, 52; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 20:4-15).

**“My dead bodies will arise.”** This wording seems difficult, so the evidence is that it was amended in the Septuagint and Aramaic Targums, which is why some English versions read “their dead bodies” instead of “my dead bodies.” However, the Masoretic Hebrew text and also the Great Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls read “my,” and there is no good reason to assume that reading is not the original text and correct. But why would God call them “my” dead bodies? The answer is that these people will get up in the first resurrection and live forever with God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that there will be two resurrections separated by a 1,000-year period. The first resurrection is called, “The first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5-6); “the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15); and “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29); and it will start very soon after the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-20:5). It is called “the first resurrection” because it is first; “the resurrection of life” because the people who get up are given everlasting life; and “the resurrection of the righteous” because the ones who get up were righteous before God in their life on earth.

The second resurrection will start after Christ’s 1,000-year reign on earth (Rev. 20:4-13), and it is called “the resurrection of the unrighteous” (Acts 24:15) and “the resurrection of “judgment” (John 5:29 ESV), because most of the people who are raised at that time had lived unrighteous lives and will be judged unworthy of everlasting life and so will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

The people the Bible is speaking about here in Isaiah 26:19 are the righteous people who will get up in the first resurrection and live forever with God. That is why God calls these dead bodies “my dead bodies,” and that is why these people are told to “awake and sing for joy.” When they get up in new, glorified bodies and realize they have everlasting life they will indeed sing for joy. In contrast, most of the people in the second resurrection, the “resurrection of the unrighteous,” will get up, but it won’t be a time of joyful singing. Instead, they face judgment and then annihilation in the Lake of Fire, and so there will be “sobbing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; Luke 13:28).

[For more on the two resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on Christ’s 1,000-year reign on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on dead people being dead and not alive in any form until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on what happens to those unsaved people who are thrown into the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“you who dwell in the dust.”** People who have died are now dead and not alive in any form. They are “in the dust,” and if they have been dead long enough, they themselves have turned back into dust (cf. Gen. 3:19). But not to worry, because God remembers everyone who has ever lived and just as Adam came from dust to be fully human, God will reconstitute every person who has ever lived and bring them back to life. Orthodox Christian teaching is that when a person dies their “soul” (or “spirit”) is still alive and goes to heaven or “hell,” but that teaching contradicts the Bible. Note that the text says, “you who dwell in the dust,” not “those bodies which are in the dust.” It is people who dwell in the dust, not just bodies.

[For more on dead people being dead and not alive in any form until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“For your dew is like the dew of the *morning* light.”** The climate in Israel had two seasons, a rainy season and a dry season. The rainy season was usually late October until sometime in April, and then from late April until late October it did not rain at all. During the dry season the plants often became dry and withered, especially by the end of the day. However, Israel also has very heavy dews, and so by the first morning light there was often a heavy dew on the ground and the plants, which might have been considered dead the previous afternoon, suddenly revived and “came to life.” That is the illustration that is being used here in Isaiah: many of God’s people are currently just dry bones and dust in the ground, but God will act in power to raise them, and when He does the people will spring to life and sing for joy.

**“the earth will give birth to her dead.”** This gives us a wonderful mind picture of the first resurrection. At the resurrection of the righteous, the dead people will come up out of the earth in beautiful new bodies just as a baby comes from its mother’s womb in a beautiful new body.

Isa 26:21

**“punish.”** The word is also translated “visit,” but here “punish” is the clearer translation.

[For more on “visit,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

**Isaiah Chapter 27**

Isa 27:1

**“punish.”** The word is also translated “visit,” but here “punish” is the clearer translation.

[For more on “visit,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

**“Leviathan the fleeing serpent, and Leviathan the twisted serpent, and he will kill the sea monster that is in the sea.”** In the Ugaritic myths, Leviathan was part of the forces of chaos that sought to overturn the established order of God’s creation. This was part of the mythology of the ancient Near East related to the battle between chaos and order; basically between good and evil. In these ancient myths, there is a “sea” in which these gods (monsters) or chaos live. Realizing that helps us understand verses such as Psalm 29:3, 10; 93:3-4 where God reigns over the waters (see commentary on Isa. 51:9).

Isa 27:6

**“In the *days* to come.”** This verse is a reference to the restoration of Judah and Israel in the Millennial Kingdom, the future reign of Christ on earth. In the future, God’s enemies will be destroyed but God’s people Israel and Judah will be restored.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom and verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2.]

Isa 27:8

**“when you sent her away.”** The text itself and the meaning of the text are unclear. “Israel” is in the feminine here, in contrast to Isaiah 27:6, 7, and 27:9, in which “Israel” is masculine, and so this verse may be referring to God sending Israel away, which happened in the Assyrian Captivity of 722 BC. Also, the chapter later says that Israel will be regathered (Isa. 27:12-13).

Isa 27:13

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**“lost.”** The Hebrew word is *'abad* (#06 אָבַד) and it has a wide enough meaning to include both those who are already dead and those who were perishing. Thus, it implies both a resurrection of the dead and a gathering of the living (cf. Matt. 25:31-46, the Sheep and Goat Judgment; see commentary on Matt. 25:32).

**“worship.”** The Hebrew word translated “worship,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “bow down.” This verse could be translated the way it currently is, or “They will bow down to Yahweh.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 28**

Isa 28:1

**“Woe.”** Isaiah 28 marks a shift in the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah has been mentioning the foolishness of the leaders relying on foreign nations for strength and support instead of relying on God, but now Isaiah’s warnings have intensified and he sees the impending destruction of Samaria and problems for Judah. So “woe” is spoken in Isaiah 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1, and 31:1.

**“the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim.”** The “proud crown” of Israel was their capital city, Samaria, which sat on top of a prominent and well-fortified hill. The walls around the city at the top of the hill were very much like a crown. Samaria was known for its sin and was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

**“to the fading flower of its glorious beauty.”** Isaiah, like other prophets of his time, foresaw the destruction of Samaria and thus compared it to a fading flower; the glorious beauty of Samaria would soon be gone, and that happened in Isaiah’s lifetime.

**“that is on the head of the fertile valley.”** The valleys around Samaria, particularly to the west, were very fertile.

**“*the crown* of those who are overcome with wine!”** The syntax of this last phrase does not fit with the earlier part of the verse, which is why the English versions differ so greatly in the way they translate the verse. The REV follows the NET in bringing the idea of the crown into the last line of the verse, which makes good sense.

Isa 28:2

**“a strong and powerful one.”** The reference is to Assyria, which will soon destroy Israel. The coming of the Assyrian army and their destruction of Israel is compared to the destruction of a mighty storm.

**“he will cast *it* down to the earth with his hand.”** In the Hebrew text, the verb “cast down” does not have an object. The REV and other English versions supply “it” or “crown” because the previous verse and the next verse refer to the destruction of Samaria, the “crown” of Israel. The omission of the object of the verb is likely to emphasize God’s judgment and that what matters is not what is judged but rather that disobeying God brings horrific consequences upon nations and people. The city of Samaria was indeed “cast down to the earth,” and little of the Israelite city remains today.

Isa 28:4

**“The fading flower of its glorious beauty, that is on the head of the fertile valley.”** The reference is to the city of Samaria, the capital city of Israel, as in Isaiah 28:1.

**“the first-ripe fig before the summer.”** It was not uncommon for a fig tree to have a fig that ripened early, before the rest of the fig crop ripened and was picked. Those early figs were often large and sweet, and were plucked and eaten right away (cf. Jer. 24:2; Hos. 9:10; Mic. 7:1; Nah. 3:12). Isaiah says that Samaria (and by extension Israel) will be like the first-ripe fig, it will be eaten, consumed, and the implied idea is that it would happen very quickly. Even if the destruction of Israel and Samaria was some years away, from the perspective of prophetic history, it would be very soon.

Isa 28:5

**“In that day.”** The scene now suddenly shifts from the impending destruction to a one-sentence description of the future. It is likely that the Author, God, had in mind both the destruction of the enemy, Assyria, during the reign of Hezekiah, and also ultimately Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth (Isa. 28:5-6 are one sentence although it is broken into two verses). The phrase “in that day” and the content of Isaiah 28:5-6 let us know that it is referring to the future and ultimately to the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 28:6

**“and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment.”** The prophecies of the Messiah when he reigns on earth are similar to this (cf. Isa. 11:1-5).

Isa 28:9

**“To whom will he teach knowledge?”** This verse has been taken in two totally different ways. The traditional way is that this verse suddenly switches speakers, and the speakers seem to be those at the drunken feast who reprove Isaiah for reproving them and trying to teach them the way of the Lord. They say to each other, “To whom will this “prophet” teach knowledge? Then they allude to the fact that they are not babies but have knowledge themselves. Children were weaned late in the biblical world, usually between 3 and 5 years old, and by that time they had already begun to be taught elementary things about God and His ways. These drunken people are mocking Isaiah as if he were treating them like toddlers.

The other way this verse can be understood is that the “he” in the verse is God, who is frustrated at the lack of humility and love in the leaders of Israel. He states that the leaders are actually like children who do not know either Him or the law.

Isa 28:10

**“For it is precept by precept.”** The traditional understanding of this verse, which is favored by many conservative scholars, is that the drunken mockers continue their mocking of Isaiah as if he were trying to teach them the way a child was taught. The overall meaning of the verse is clear enough, but the exact meaning and reason for the words in the verse are debated by scholars.

Isa 28:11

**“Indeed, he will speak.”** The verse is now the prophet speaking to the people of Israel. For years God had been speaking to the people of Israel in their own language, sending His prophets to reprove the people and bring them back to the law of God and obedience to that law. Along with Isaiah, other prophets that were prophesying at or near the time of Isaiah were Hosea, Micah, Amos, Jonah, and Nahum (see commentary on Isa. 1:1).

**“he will speak.”** God will speak to Israel by the Assyrians, who attacked and conquered the land of Israel and carried the people captive back to Assyria. God had been speaking to Israel through His prophets since its inception to return to God. During the reign of Israel’s first king, Jeroboam I (this is the Northern Kingdom of Israel consisting of the ten northern tribes of Israel), Ahijah the prophet foretold that Israel would be uprooted from its land and carried beyond the Euphrates River, an area that, in Isaiah’s time, was ruled by Assyria (1 Kings 14:15). Since the Jews ignored God’s prophets who spoke to them and told them to repent, God then “spoke” to the Jews through an invading army that did not speak Hebrew, which is the meaning of the “stammering lips and another tongue (another language).

God promised that if His people obeyed Him then they would defeat their enemies (cf. Lev. 26:2-8). The fact that Israel was defeated by their enemies was thus a “sign” that they were sinning and living apart from God’s favor. God uses this example of the Assyrians with their foreign language being a “sign” to Israel to good effect in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22.

[For more on the “sign” of the Assyrians, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:22.]

Isa 28:12

**“This is the resting place.”** The resting place for God’s people is in Him and in His law. That is where people will find rest and blessing. When there is disobedience and defiance of God and His laws, there is only trouble and hardship (cf. Mic. 2:10, “this is not your resting place”).

Isa 28:14

**“that rule this people in Jerusalem.”** As it turned out, God saved Jerusalem from the Assyrian army, but that was due to the godliness of King Hezekiah and the reform he initiated. Even so, basically all of Judah was wiped out by the Assyrians, including well-fortified cities like Lachish. While Isaiah was prophesying “woe” to “Ephraim” (put for the Northern Kingdom of Israel; Isa. 28:1), the people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah should have paid attention.

Isa 28:15

**“cut a covenant with death.**” The penalty for breaking the Law was death (Rom. 6:23), so these lawbreakers arrogantly brag that that will not happen to them because they have made a covenant with death so that the “scourge” will not come upon them. They were wrong, of course, and died (cf. Isa. 28:18).

Isa 28:16

**“I lay in Zion a foundation, a stone.”** Isaiah 28:16 is quoted in Romans 9:33. The Messiah is referred to as a “stone” in Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16, and Psalm 118:22 is quoted or referred to six times in the New Testament (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:10-11; 1 Pet. 2:4 and 2:7. See commentaries on Ps. 118:22 and Zech. 3:9).

Isa 28:17

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God (see commentary on Matt. 5:6).

**“The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies.”** The wrath of God is often portrayed metaphorically in Scripture as a powerful storm (e.g., Ps. 18:12-14; 77:17-18; 83:15; Isa. 28:17; 30:30; Jer. 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 13:11; see commentary on Ezek. 13:11).

**Isaiah Chapter 29**

Isa 29:6

**“visited.”** When God “visited” someone, He intervened, and He could intervene for their blessing or to bring deserved consequences or punishment. God is a righteous God, and He holds people accountable for their actions. Here in Isaiah 29:6, God “visits” in judgment.

[For more on God “visiting,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Isa 29:13

**“Because this people draws near with their mouth.”** Isaiah 29:13 is quoted in Matthew 15:8-9 and Mark 7:6-7, but the New Testament quote is closer to the Septuagint than to the Hebrew text.

Isa 29:17

**“Is it not yet *only* a very little while, and Lebanon will be turned into a fruitful field.”** In the previous verses, people—the things that are made—have been arrogant and disobedient to their Creator, Yahweh. But God will not put up with that forever. There is a day coming in the future when God will bless those people who have been meek and afflicted, and the arrogant will be punished.

Isaiah 29:17 suddenly shifts to when Israel is redeemed and restored, and Isaiah 29:17-24 is about the future Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ rules the earth. At that time the earth will be restored to an Eden-like state and Jesus will rule the earth from Jerusalem. This is one of the many prophecies in the Bible that say that the Lord’s reign on earth would happen very soon, but it has now been delayed some 2,700 years since Isaiah wrote.

This verse seems to depict that the Millennial Kingdom will be a time of different priorities than we see on earth today, and that will certainly be true of life when Christ rules the earth. Historically, Lebanon has been known for great forests, but in Christ’s kingdom, it will be known for its fruitful fields which will be so abundant that they will seem like forests.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 29:18

**“In that day.”** This verse speaks of the Day of Yahweh, but that part of the Day of Yahweh that is the Millennial Kingdom of Christ when he rules the earth and the earth is a paradise.

**“the deaf will hear the words of a book.”** When Jesus Christ rules the earth everyone will be healed. The deaf and the blind, two very problematic illnesses of the ancient world, will be healed, and in this context, those two ailments are a synecdoche (a part for the whole) for all ailments being healed.

[See Word Study: “Synecdoche.”]

Isa 29:21

**“by false testimony.”** This is more literally, “by emptiness,” so it could refer to a number of different things that are false, including false charges, false testimony, or false witnesses.

Isa 29:24

**“err in spirit.”** This is the use of “spirit” (Hebrew: *ruach* #07307 רוּחַ) that refers to the activities of the mind: the thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. In the future when Christ reigns as king on earth, people who err in their minds and attitudes will have understanding.

[For more on the uses of “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.” Usage #13 concerns thoughts and emotions. For more on the future reign of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.]

**“grumble.”** In this context, those people who “grumble” criticize and complain. Those people will accept instruction and come to understand more about God and life.

**Isaiah Chapter 30**

Isa 30:1

**“by my spirit.”** This verse is saying the people acted on their own, not by revelation from God, which came through the gift of holy spirit that God put on the prophets and some priests and leaders.

[For more on the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” and also commentaries on John 7:39 and Eph. 4:4. Also, the book, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ* by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit.]

**“so that sin is added to sin.”** The Hebrew can be translated as a result clause, “so that,” or as a purpose clause, “in order to.” Here the result clause is the most likely meaning.

Isa 30:3

**“the stronghold of Pharaoh.”** Isaiah uses this phrase sarcastically, because the “stronghold” of Pharaoh, the protection offered by him, was no match for the Assyrian army.

Isa 30:4

**“Zoan...Hanes.”** The city of Zoan was in the Egyptian delta in north Egypt; in contrast, the city of Hanes was located somewhere in the southern region of what is known as lower Egypt, south of the city of Memphis, but the precise location is debated by scholars. In any case, Isaiah 30:4 refers to Egypt and mentions cities in both north and south Egypt.

Isa 30:6

**“burden.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. It might have been more clear in English to say “burdensome message” instead of “burden,” but the Hebrew word is “burden.”

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

Isa 30:7

**“Rahab.”** “Rahab” was, in popular legend, a sea monster, and it was also an ancient name for Egypt (cf. Isa. 30:7; Ps. 87:4; 89:10).

Isa 30:9

**“children who refuse to listen to the law of Yahweh.”** In a context like this, the word “listen” can also be used idiomatically and have the meaning “obey.” Some scholars refer to this as the “pregnant sense” of the word. In this verse it has the meaning “listen to and obey.” Many Hebrew words are used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense (see commentary on Luke 23:42).

Isa 30:11

**“Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.”** The people did not want to hear any more about Yahweh from the prophet Isaiah. The Hebrew is more literally, “Cause to cease from before us the Holy One of Israel.” This has been understood like it is in the REV (cf. ESV, NAB, NASB, NLT, NRSV), and it has also been understood as “Remove from our presence the Holy One of Israel” (NET; cf. CEB, CJB, CSB, NJB). Although the exact translation is debated, the meaning is clear. Isaiah was telling the people about God and they did not want to hear anything more about Him.

Evil people do not want to know God or His ways, and they harden their hearts against Him (cf. Job. 21:14; 22:17; Isa. 30:11; Mic. 2:6. See commentary on Matt. 13:13).

Isa 30:19

**“For the people will live in Zion at Jerusalem. You will weep no more.”** In Isaiah 30:19, Isaiah shifts from speaking about his present time to speaking about the future Millennial Kingdom when Christ reigns on earth. Thus, Isaiah 30:19-26 are about the Millennial Kingdom. There will be joy, and not weeping and crying, in Christ’s kingdom (cf. Isa. 61:2-3; 65:19).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 30:20

**“Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction.”** This stanza speaks of the situation that the people of Israel were going through at the time of Isaiah. Among other things, the Assyrian attacks had made life difficult.

**“yet your teachers will not be hidden anymore.”** Isaiah shifts from the present, when the people are in need of food and water, to the future Millennial Kingdom when Christ reigns on earth. At that time the true teachers will be out in the open and well-known. In the time of Isaiah and before, the teachers of truth either did not speak up boldly due to persecution and danger, or they were so intermingled with false teachers and false prophets that they were hard to recognize. But when Christ reigns on earth the true teachers will be out in the open.

The word “teachers” is generally taken to be a plural, but some scholars feel the Hebrew word is a less common singular form or a plural of majesty for “teacher.” However, that is less likely, especially given the context. The Scripture portrays a time when there will be many teachers and many will know the truth and thus as a person is going through life if they begin to go astray they will hear a voice behind them correcting them (Isa. 30:21).

Isa 30:23

**“your livestock will feed in large pastures.”** Israel is not known for having “large pastures.” Much of the ground is rocky, like Jesus described in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:5), but in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth the soil will be restored and there will be large pastures for livestock.

Isa 30:24

**“will eat seasoned fodder that has been winnowed.”** The food in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom will be so plentiful that even the animals will eat grain that has been winnowed with a shovel and winnowing fork. Food has never been that abundant on earth, and working farm animals like cattle and donkeys have always eaten grain from the field or just cut as hay. Today we have machines that thresh the grain so special animals such as racehorses and pets get grain, but historically it took too much effort to thresh the grain to do that for farm animals. Isaiah 30:24 is a wonderful picture of how abundant food will be in the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 30:26

**“the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun.”** Isaiah uses poetic language to describe this, literally, “the light of the white will be like the light of the heat,” where “white” is the moon and “heat” is the sun.

**“and the light of the sun will be seven times *brighter*.”** This verse applies to the Millennial Kingdom when the Lord Jesus Christ rules the earth will be a time of unprecedented blessing, and there are many verses about the Millennial Kingdom scattered throughout the Bible and especially in the books of the prophets, such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. Darkness was a real problem in the ancient world, and there was simply no way to easily get needed light into dark places or at night. Although it is hard to understand exactly how this verse will be literally fulfilled, added light both day and night would be a blessing.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom and Christ’s rule on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”].

**“the day.”** This is the use of “day” to refer to a period of time, not a literal “day.”

Isa 30:30

**“with a driving rain, storm, and hailstones.”** The wrath of God is often portrayed metaphorically in Scripture as a powerful and destructive storm (e.g., Ps. 18:12-14; 77:17-18; 83:15; Isa. 28:17; 30:30; Jer. 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 13:11; see commentary on Ezek. 13:11).

The Hebrew word translated as “driving rain” in the REV is quite general and can refer to different things that burst forth during a storm. The English versions represent that diversity of meanings (e.g., “blast” (ASV); “cloud-burst” (BBE, CJB, ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV); “driving rain” (CSB); “waterflood” (Darby); “tempest” (JPS, NAB); “scattering” (KJV, LSV, YLT); “thunderbolt” (NJB); and “burst” (Rotherham). In fact, all of these things “burst forth” and produce “scattering” on earth, and so all of them should likely be considered as part of the meaning of the word, which is metaphorical for the storm that is analogized with the wrath of God. The wrath of God, like a terrible storm, is destructive and horrific, and people should obey God and avoid the wrath of God.

**Isaiah Chapter 31**

Isa 31:2

**“he also is wise.”** Although the people of Israel did not seek Yahweh they should have, because “He too is wise.” Actually, this is an irony designed to point out the folly of not looking to or seeking Yahweh, for He alone is truly wise. If anyone lacks wisdom, let that one ask of God (James 1:5).

Isa 31:4

**“he will not be afraid because of their shouting.”** Like a lion fighting for the food he has just killed is not afraid of a bunch of shepherds with their sticks, God is not frightened or intimidated by humans and their feeble efforts. God can and will fight for His people and can and will win the fights He engages in. He is making this known to Israel and Judah so that they might turn away from help from humans and idols and seek Him and His help. Sadly, the people of Israel and Judah did not turn to God, and they suffered terribly for it. Christians should be wiser than these people in the Old Testament and always turn to God and Jesus for help.

Isa 31:5

**“Like birds hovering.”** Just as birds hover around their nest and their young to protect them, so Yahweh would hover around Jerusalem to protect it. And Yahweh did hover around Jerusalem during the time of Isaiah and the Assyrians, who eventually came to attack Jerusalem but were defeated by God’s direct action (2 Kings 19:35-36). However, the people of Judah and Jerusalem became increasingly ungodly and so God could no longer protect them and they were conquered by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24, 25).

Isa 31:7

**“For in that day.”** The subject shifts abruptly here, as is often done in the Old Testament. This is a common way of referring to the Day of the Lord, and this verse looks forward to the tribulation and Kingdom of Christ on earth. This prophecy was not fulfilled at the end of the Babylonian Captivity and is still future. This prophecy is similar to Isaiah 2:20.

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

**Isaiah Chapter 32**

Isa 32:1

**“Behold, a king will reign in righteousness.”** Isaiah suddenly shifts the subject, and Isaiah 32:1-5 refers to the future Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ rules the earth. In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God.

[For more on the word “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

**“rulers will govern with justice.”** When Christ sets up his kingdom on earth, he will be assisted in governing the earth by people who have been faithful to him (see commentary on Jer. 23:4).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 32:2

**“the shade of a great rock in a weary land.”** The shade provided by a large rock was a welcome rest to the overheated and weary traveler. In the Millennial Kingdom, when Christ rules the earth and the rulers and leaders under him are righteous people, the justice, peace, and security they provide will be like the shade of a large rock to the weary traveler; it will give peace and comfort to the people who live on earth. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament indicate that people who have been faithful in their first life on earth will help rule the future earth (Isa. 1:26; 32:1; Jer. 3:15; 23:4; Ezek. 44:24; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26).

In 1855 Horatio Hackett wrote about the comfort that the shade of a large rock could give in the Middle East. “This happened as I was going from Jerusalem to Jericho—a region so wild and desolate that it might be called emphatically ‘a dreary land.’ In many places the want of trees renders the shelter of a rock the only refuge which a person can find from the scorching heat; and even when trees are at hand the rock affords the better protection because it excludes so much more effectually the rays of the sun. … I was often glad myself, when fatigued with hard riding, and oppressed with heat, to dismount and rest for a while in the cooling shade of an overhanging rock. No one who has traveled in the Orient can fail to bear witness to the value of such a refuge, or to recollect with pleasure how often he has availed himself of it.”[[34]](#footnote-21412)

Isa 32:3

**“The eyes of those who see will not be closed.”** There are verses about the blind being healed in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, but this is not one of them. This is about the mentally blind, those who just do not see the truth, finally being able to see and understand the truth. And those who have not been able to hear the truth will hear it when Christ reigns as king.

Isa 32:4

**“mind.”** The Hebrew word is *lebab* (#03824 לֵבָב), which is often translated “heart,” but which also refers to the mind, will, understanding, thoughts, reflections, attitudes, emotions, and other attributes of the mind. This is one of the places where the translation “heart” would cause confusion. In modern English, the word “heart” usually refers to emotion or passion, but that is not its meaning here. The function of the brain was unknown in biblical times, so functions that we generally assign to the brain, like thinking, attitudes, understanding, and good sense, were assigned to the heart. This verse is a promise of healing in the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom. At the Rapture and in the resurrections, everyone will be healed, not only of physical disease, but of mental disease as well.

[For more on the Hebrew word “heart,” see commentary on Prov. 15:21, “sense.” For more on the meaning of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.” For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 32:6

**“his heart plans iniquity.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “his heart does iniquity,” but the heart does it by planning it.

Isa 32:15

**“and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field.”** In Isaiah 32:15-20, the prophet Isaiah again shifts from the present to the future Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 32:16

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God. When the Messiah reigns on earth there will be justice and righteousness in the wilderness and field. From the Fall of Adam until the Messiah reigns on earth, the wilderness and field have been places of injustice in every way: the crops, the animals, and of course the way in which people have treated each other.

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on “righteousness” meaning justice and treating others in a godly way, see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

Isa 32:17

**“the effect of righteousness *will be* quietness and confidence forever.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God, and in effect is “justice.” There is no justice on earth now, but there will be in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth. Christ will reign in righteousness, doing the right and just thing, and the effect of that will be peace, quietness, and confidence.

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

**Isaiah Chapter 33**

Isa 33:4

**“Your spoil will be harvested.”** The Assyrians had taken great spoil from the peoples they conquered. Now God tells them that there is a day coming when the spoil they have taken will be taken from them. It will be “harvested” (the Hebrew is more literally “gathered,” but it refers to being gathered in harvest) as if locusts had come and taken their spoil. People will leap upon it (or “rush to and fro on it”) like locusts. The two words for “locust” in the verse are different, but refer to different stages in the growth of the locust. So the REV uses “young locust” (which some versions translate as “caterpillar”) and “locust.”

Isa 33:5

**“he will fill.”** The Hebrew uses the prophetic perfect idiom, and reads, “he has filled.” The prophetic perfect was a common way that a future event that was sure to come to pass was expressed in the Hebrew language—by saying it had already happened.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God, and in effect is “justice.” In Isaiah 33:5, “justice” means more like “judgment,” that is, fair judgment, thus justice. The emphasis is the effect: justice. In contrast, “righteousness” has more emphasis on the action; doing what is right and just to fellow humans and in the sight of God. There is no justice on earth now, but there will be in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth. Christ will reign in righteousness, doing the right and just thing, and the effect of that will be peace, quietness, and confidence.

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6. For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 33:6

**“And he will be.”** The phrase refers to God. God is to be people’s stability.

**“Zion.”** The Hebrew is simply the masculine singular pronoun, “his.” In this case, Zion is being portrayed as a man, and the fear of God is to be “his” treasure, but the pronoun makes the English very unclear, so, like the ESV, the REV substituted the noun Zion for the pronoun.

Isa 33:9

**“the Arabah.”** The Arabah is the Great Rift Valley that runs from Lebanon down into Africa, and it is the valley in which is the Sea of Galilee, most of the Jordan River, and the Dead Sea.

Isa 33:11

**“You.”** We can see from Isaiah 33:12 that the “you” here in Isaiah 33:11 refers to the hostile nations that desire to destroy God’s people, but they will not succeed.

**“your breath.”** This is the reading of the Hebrew text, although there is a variant reading, “my breath,” which has been picked up by some of the English versions (cf. NAB, NASB). It seems certain that “your breath” is original. The enemy planned to consume God’s people, but their evil plan was self-destructive and resulted in their own destruction. God is righteous, and He has set His laws and His judgment in such a way that on the Day of Judgment the wicked are destroyed as a consequence of the evil they have done. In a very real sense, their own “breath” destroys them. However, it is much more than just their “breath” that destroys the wicked. The Hebrew word translated “breath” is *ruach* (#07307 רוּחַ), and *ruach* can refer to a large number of things, including wind; spirit, and breath. It also refers to the natural life of our fleshly bodies that is sometimes referred to as “soul;” and it includes the activities of the mind such as people’s thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. Thus, the Hebrew text is saying that what the wicked do, what they “breathe out” if you will, their evil thoughts, attitudes, and emotions, will result in their destruction.

[For more on the usages of *ruach*, spirit, see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Isa 33:12

**“as if burned into lime.”** This is a powerful simile in the text because the limestone that was quite common in Palestine was quarried into building stones of various sizes and used to build many things from small buildings to large Temples. But the limestone was also burned into lime and used to fertilize the fields. The analogy is that the enemy that might seem so large and imposing, like a huge building, will be burned into nothing just like limestone is burned into lime. But if the fire is too hot, some 900 degrees, even the lime decomposes.

**“like thorns.”** The thorns could seem like an impenetrable barrier and/or be a serious trouble, but they could be cut down and burned, and be no more. Some people think this section of Isaiah, especially Isaiah 33:14, refers to people burning forever in the Lake of Fire, but both the context and the wording of the text militates against that. For example, here in Isaiah 33:12, God is speaking of things that burn up, not things that burn forever. For example, limestone burns down to lime, but even lime itself decomposes at about 900 degrees. And thorns burn up completely in a fire. In the context, God is speaking of the destruction of His enemies and that they will come to nothing. In the future, God’s enemies will not burn forever but like the thorns will be burned up in the Lake of Fire.

[For more on the death of the wicked, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Isa 33:14

**“are afraid.”** Wicked people and sinners have great bravado and boasting against God until they actually meet Him. We humans are weak and frail; we cannot even keep ourselves from getting sick, much less prevent ourselves from dying. We need God to give us life and everlasting life. Nevertheless, the wicked seem to ignore those things and act as if they are strong and self-sufficient. But there is a day coming when the wicked will experience the judgment of God, and there will be fear and trembling in that day.

**“devouring fire.”** God is described as a “devouring fire” (some versions have “consuming fire”) in Deuteronomy 4:24 and Hebrews 12:29. God’s tongue is referred to as a “devouring fire” in Isaiah 30:27 because it speaks the death sentence of the wicked, and God is also associated with a devouring fire in Isaiah 30:30. Here in Isaiah 33:14, God is again being described as a devouring fire as He was earlier in Scripture. Of course, God is described as a “devouring fire” because eventually, all His enemies are completely devoured and destroyed.

Although the orthodox teaching is that wicked people burn forever in “hell,” that is not the teaching of Scripture. The unsaved are thrown into the Lake of Fire where they burn up and are annihilated (Rev. 20:11-15). Many verses associate God or God’s wrath and judgment. For example, Malachi 4:3 speaks of the wicked being ashes under the feet of the righteous. Jesus compared the unsaved to trees that do not produce fruit and so are cut down and burned (Matt. 7:19); to weeds that are gathered and burned up (Matt. 13:40); and to vine branches that do not produce fruit and so are cut off and burned (John 15:6). All of those illustrations are comparing the wicked to things that burn up and are gone, not to things that go on burning.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“*the* age-enduring hearth fire.”** The consuming fire and age-enduring hearth fire both refer to God. Isaiah 33:14 is speaking about sinners who have rejected God and are now afraid and trembling. The last two sentences in the verse refer to sinners living with God. God is the consuming fire. God is the everlasting hearth fire. The sinners are asking themselves, “Who can live (literally, “sojourn”) with God, that consuming fire, that fire on the hearth that burns up what is on it and burns from age to age?

The wording of the Hebrew text in the last phrase is difficult because it is importing a word picture that is unfamiliar and strange to most people. The Hebrew is *‘olam moqed*. The Hebrew word *‘olam* (#05769 עוֹלָם) is a quite common noun, and has a range of meanings that include “of long duration; of unknown future duration, thus, an age,” as well as “old, ancient,” and also, “always, forever, everlasting.” The context determines the more exact meaning of *‘olam* in any given verse. Since this phrase is speaking of God, “age-enduring” or “everlasting” is appropriate.

The Hebrew word *moqed* (#04168 מוֹקֵד) is also a noun, not a verb, and it is a very unusual noun that only occurs two or three times in the Bible. It means, “hearth” or fireplace,[[35]](#footnote-20604) or a burning or burning mass.[[36]](#footnote-23519) The use of “hearth” paints the word picture of God, who is being represented by the altar in the Temple, with its perpetually burning fire—the fire was never to go out on God’s altar (Lev. 6:12). Then, by extension, *moqed* also points to God, who is that “age-enduring hearth fire,” that “never-dying blaze” on the altar (TNK), or “age-enduring burning thing.”

Isaiah 33:14 ends with two questions that are being asked by the sinners who are now frightened at the prospect of facing God, and who know Him to be a consuming fire. The sinners are saying, “Who among us can live with God, that holy and righteous One who is a devouring fire? Indeed, who among us sinners can live with God, that age-enduring hearth fire?” The answer, of course, is no sinner will be able to live with a holy God. In contrast, however, the very next verse, Isaiah 33:15, shows us who can live forever with God: the one who walks righteously before Him.

The fact that *moqed* is the noun “hearth,” “fireplace,” or “burning thing” should show us that “everlasting burning” is not an accurate translation, even though many English versions read that way. Furthermore, we should not then take that mistranslation and say that the “everlasting burning” refers to “hell” or the Lake of Fire. The translation “everlasting burning,” makes *moqed* into a verb or verbal, which it is not. It is a noun, and it refers to God.

In spite of the fact that *moqed* is a noun, some people think this section of Isaiah, especially Isaiah 33:14, refers to people burning forever in the Lake of Fire. That is a common Christian belief, but one that is not correct. Even if Isaiah 33:14 was speaking about an age-enduring fire and not an age-enduring God, the fire would not be an everlasting fire. Both the context and the wording of the verse militate against that. Ed Fudge writes: “Some traditionalists have interpreted verse 14 as referring to unending conscious torment, but the entire context argues otherwise. Verses 11-12 picture total destruction by fire. The fire consumes, which is why no wicked person can ‘dwell’ with it. Verse 14 describes the eternal holiness of God himself, who is a ‘consuming fire.’”[[37]](#footnote-10192)

In the context, in Isaiah 33:12, God is speaking of things that burn up, not things that burn forever. Limestone burns down to lime, but even lime itself decomposes at about 900 degrees. And thorns burn up completely in a fire. In the context, God is speaking of the destruction of His enemies and that they will come to nothing. In the future God’s enemies will not burn forever; they will be burned up in the Lake of Fire.

People burning forever would also build a contradiction into the verse and context. Sinners cannot burn up like lime and thorns do, in a “consuming fire,” and at the same time not be burned up. Furthermore, sacrifices on the altar in the Temple do not burn forever, they are burned up and consumed—it is the fire on the altar that keeps burning. Sinners either burn up in the Lake of Fire or burn forever in it, but not both, and we assert that the Scripture is clear that sinners do not burn forever, but are consumed in the Lake of Fire. No sinner can live with a consuming God, they will be consumed. Moreover, Isaiah 33:14 is not speaking of an everlasting fire, but rather of God being an age-enduring hearth fire.

[For more about the wicked being annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Isa 33:24

**“*of Zion*.”** This is supplied for clarity from Isaiah 33:20. The more literal is simply, “No resident will say….” Isaiah is speaking of the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 34**

Isa 34:1

**“And everything that comes from it.”** This refers to everything the earth produces. Isaiah 34 transports us into the distant future and the Day of Yahweh (“the Day of the LORD”). Isaiah says that God’s judgment is going to come upon the entire earth, something we see very clearly in the book of Revelation, and so everything on earth had a vested interest in hearing what God had to say. The Day of Yahweh will be a time of horrific destruction, as many prophecies state (see commentary on Dan. 12:1).

Isa 34:2

**“He will devote...He will give.”** The Hebrew text uses the prophetic idiom, putting the verb in the past tense to magnify the certainty of what God will do. So literally the text says that God has destroyed...He has given, but the event is in the future. To “devote to destruction” is to totally destroy.

[For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6. For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

There is coming in the future a time of great tribulation upon the earth in which most of the people of the earth will be killed (see commentary on Isa. 13:9).

Isa 34:3

**“will melt away by their blood.”** The picture being painted is that there will be so much killing during the Day of the LORD that the blood will flow in rivers down the mountains and wash away the dirt in the same way that a huge rainstorm that lasts for days can wash huge areas of dirt and debris down the mountains. This is a difficult concept, and so many of the English versions nuance the text to read like, “the mountains will flow with blood,” or “the mountains will be drenched with blood.” But the actual Hebrew text is more graphic by being hyperbolic: that there will be so much blood flowing down the mountains that they will wash away. Revelation 14:20 says the blood flowing from the Battle of Armageddon will flow for about 180 miles. Jeremiah 7:32 says that there will be so many dead bodies people will be forced to bury them in the unclean valley of the Son of Hinnom, the Gehenna.

Isa 34:5

**“will drink.”** This is the prophetic perfect like Isaiah 34:2 (see commentary on Isa. 34:2).

Isa 34:6

**“will be...will be”** The Hebrew is literally present tense, not future, but the context and other future tense verbs in the context make it clear that this is referring to a future event. The present tense is a prophetic perfect, putting the future as a past or present event (see commentary on Eph. 2:6).

**“has a sacrifice.”** Here in Isaiah the death of the wicked is mentioned as a sacrifice which also happens in other scriptures (cf. Jer. 46:10; 51:40; Ezek. 39:17; Zeph. 1:7). Sin that is not atoned for ends in death (Rom. 6:23), so in this context, in a kind of irony, the death of the sinner is seen as a sacrifice. The picture is that the sinner can either be atoned for by a sacrifice, or he will be a sacrifice himself. It is not often taught that a person can pay for their own sin, but they can. The wages of sin is death and the sinner can pay for his own sin with his own death, but of course, the problem with that is that the sinner is dead. Here, the unrepentant sinners are a sacrifice and are killed in a “great slaughter.”

**“Bozrah.”** A major city in Edom, also mentioned in Isaiah 63:1.

Isa 34:7

**“wild oxen...the young bulls...the mighty bulls.”** These are metaphors for powerful people (actually, the figure of speech is hypocatastasis; see commentary on Rev. 20:2). On the day of God’s vengeance, being wealthy or powerful will not protect people from God’s wrath and justice.

Isa 34:9

**“Its streams.”** That is, the streams in Edom (cf. Isa. 34:5).

Isa 34:14

**“Lilith.”** Lilith is mentioned only here in Isaiah 34:14 in the Bible. She is a female spirit or demon in some ancient Mesopotamian cuneiform texts, including texts from Sumer, Assyria, and Babylonia, and that fits here in Isaiah as well. That Lilith is a female demon has been doubted by many, and they point out that Lilith is not mentioned except here in the Bible. But Lilith would not need to be described in detail or said to be a demon if the common understanding in the culture at the time was that she was a demon. Furthermore, if she was a demon she would not likely be named more than once in the Bible because God does not magnify or legitimatize demons in the Bible by giving their names. The only other demon who is named in the Bible is “Legion,” and he is only named in the one record when Christ met the demoniac man (Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30). We do not even know the actual name of the Devil. He is called by many descriptions that are used as names, such as the “Devil,” but “Devil” is the word “slanderer” (see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil”).

As we might well imagine, as time went on more and more was added about Lilith—who she was and what she did—and we have to be careful not to think of that newer information as having the same authority as the ancient culture and biblical text. For example, according to some later Jewish mythology, Lilith was the first wife of Adam and was created the same day and from the same dirt as he was, but then she refused to be subservient to him and left the Garden of Eden. Lilith is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (*Eruvin* 100b, *Niddah* 24b, *Shabbat* 151b, *Baba Bathra* 73a). From the 500s AD and later, Jewish magical inscriptions visually portray Lilith and show her as a female demon. Even today Lilith continues to capture the attention of many and so she is written about in occult, fantasy, and horror literature. Predictably, in modern culture, Lilith sometimes shows up as someone who fights for women’s liberation and equality. That fits with the Devil’s agenda to hide the actual existence of demons and the evil they do, and to call evil “good,” and good “evil.”

It makes sense that Isaiah 34:14 would mention Lilith. Isaiah 34:14 is in the context of the destruction of Edom, which had been a perpetual enemy of Israel and thus of God. According to biblical prophecy, Edom will be totally destroyed and rejected by God to the point that even Lilith herself will dwell there. In other words, it makes sense that a place as evil as Edom would attract an evil female demon like Lilith. There are scholars who assert that “Lilith” is a kind of bird because the context mentions birds and animals that would live in deserted Edom, but there is no evidence of what kind of bird that would be that is only mentioned once in the Bible, and also the most ancient texts and Jewish writings have her as a spirit or demon, which, as stated above, makes sense in the context.

It should also be said that the Bible makes it clear that there are both male and female spirit beings (see commentary on Zech. 5:9).

Isa 34:17

**“has cast the lot for them.”** “Lots” (like dice) were cast to make decisions. In the case of Israel, the High Priest wore a garment with a pocket over the breast and stones were pulled from it to get the decision of Yahweh. In this case, Yahweh Himself is portrayed as casting the lots for the birds as if they cannot do it for themselves (the exact manner God cast the lots is not described and is assumed unimportant). The “them” is feminine and agrees with the birds (the kites) of Isaiah 34:15. In the next line God gives the birds a portion by dividing it with a measuring line. The point God is making is that He has divided up the country of Edom and given it to the wild animals and birds.

**Isaiah Chapter 35**

Isa 35:1

**“The wilderness and the dry land will be glad.”** The prophet Isaiah suddenly shifts from talking about the destruction of Edom to the restoration of the earth in the Millennial Kingdom (although it is important to realize that the Old Testament does not make a distinction between the Millennial Kingdom and the Everlasting Kingdom—that distinction was not made until John wrote the book of Revelation).

The shift of subjects and the joy of the Millennial Kingdom is emphasized in the Hebrew text by the fact that the first word in the verse in the Hebrew text is “glad.” To better represent that in English we would say, “Glad will be the wilderness and dry land.” It is easy to see the harsh contrast between what will become of Edom—“Its streams will be turned into pitch, its dust into sulfur, and its land will become burning pitch” (Isa. 34:9)—and what will happen to the land in the Millennial Kingdom when the land will be glad and the desert rejoice. Then the prophet continues speaking about the future Millennial Kingdom of Christ through the whole chapter (Isa. 35:1-10).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 35:2

**“Lebanon’s glory.”** Lebanon was known for its lush forests and tall cedars. The wilderness and dry places will be like Lebanon.

**“Carmel...Sharon.”** Mount Carmel was one of the lushest places in Israel, along with the plain of Sharon. It is a wonderful promise that in the future Israel will be lush like Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon.

Isa 35:4

**“your God will come.”** God will come in the person of His agent, the Lord Jesus Christ, and God will empower him to accomplish the will of God.

**Isaiah Chapter 36**

Isa 36:1

**“Sennacherib king of Assyria.”** Sennacherib’s attack is recorded in 2 Kings 18; 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 36.

Isa 36:3

**“Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was Over the House.”** “Over the House” was the title of the palace administrator (see commentary on 1 Kings 4:6). During the reign of King Hezekiah, Eliakim replaced Shebna, who had been Over the House, but who nevertheless remained an important figure in the kingdom for a while anyway (cf. Isa. 22:15-21).

Isa 36:7

**“But if you say to me.”** 2 Kings 18:22; 2 Chron. 32:12; and Isaiah 36:7 are very similar.

**“our god.”** The Assyrians thought of Yahweh as just another god.

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. The context indicates these shrines were pagan in nature (cf. “pagan shrines” NLT). Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

**“worship.”** The Hebrew word translated “worship,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “bow down.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Isa 36:12

**“urine.”** Here in Isaiah 36:12 and in 2 Kings 18:27, the Hebrew text uses an idiom: “the water of the feet.” The word “feet” was sometimes used for the genital organs (see commentary on Judg. 5:27).

Isa 36:15

**“rescue, yes, rescue.”** This is an emphatic translation of the Hebrew, which uses the figure of speech polyptoton.[[38]](#footnote-30731) The Hebrew repeats the word “rescue” in different tenses.

[For more on polyptoton and the emphasis it brings, as well as the way it is translated in the REV, see commentaries on Gen. 2:16 and 2:17.]

Isa 36:19

**“Have they rescued Samaria from my hand?”** Rab-shakeh is using abbreviated language. The people of Judah understood what he was saying. The NET expands the translation for clarity: “Indeed, did any gods rescue Samaria from my power?” Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had lots of pagan gods and was conquered by Assyria (2 Kings 17).

Isa 36:22

**“Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was Over the House.”** “Over the House” was the title of the palace administrator (see commentary on 1 Kings 4:6). During the reign of King Hezekiah, Eliakim replaced Shebna, who had been Over the House, but who nevertheless remained an important figure in the kingdom for a while anyway (cf. Isa. 22:15-21).

**Isaiah Chapter 37**

Isa 37:1

**“And when King Hezekiah.”** Isaiah 37 is almost the same as 2 Kings 19.

Isa 37:2

**“Then he sent Eliakim.”​** Cf. 2 Kings 19:2.

**“Eliakim, who was Over the House.”** “Over the House” was the title of the palace administrator (see commentary on 1 Kings 4:6). During the reign of King Hezekiah, Eliakim replaced Shebna, who had been Over the House, but who nevertheless remained an important figure in the kingdom for a while anyway (cf. Isa. 22:15-21).

Isa 37:4

**“the remnant that is left.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:4.

Isa 37:6

**“Tell your lord this.”** In the Hebrew text the word “lord” is a grammatical plural, literally “lords,” but it refers to King Hezekiah.

**“servant boys.”** The Hebrew calls the men of the king of Assyria a word used for young men, thus sarcastically showing that they are mere children to God.

Isa 37:7

**“I will put a spirit in him.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:7.

Isa 37:9

**“Sennacherib.”** The Hebrew is “he,” but since the “he” in the immediately preceding sentence in 2 Kings 19:8 was Rab-shakeh, the “he” in this verse was replaced with “Sennacherib” for clarity.

Isa 37:10

**“your god.”** The Assyrians thought of Yahweh as just another god.

Isa 37:11

**“devoting them to destruction.”** Here used by the Assyrian king meaning “totally destroying them.”

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

Isa 37:13

**“the king of the city of Sepharvaim.”** The Hebrew can be read as the REV text is, or it can be read as “the king of Lair,” Lair being a city in northeastern Babylon. The English versions differ as to which translation is correct.

Isa 37:14

**“And Hezekiah.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:14, which is a parallel verse.

**“and read them.”** The Hebrew reads “and read it,” where the singular Hebrew seems like a collective singular referring to the message contained in the letters.

Isa 37:16

**“O Yahweh.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:15, which is very similar to this verse.

**“sits *enthroned between* the cherubim.”** The Hebrew text is more literally “sits of the cherubim,” but it was the custom for kings to sit on thrones, not just regular chairs, so translating according to the culture of the day, “enthroned” is a good translation and adopted by many English versions (CEB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, NRSV). That Yahweh sat “between” the cherubim is understood from Numbers 7:89, which says that Yahweh sits over the atonement-cover (traditionally “mercy seat”) and between the cherubim.

**“you are God, you alone.”** The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Isa 37:17

**“Incline your ear.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:16, which is almost exactly the same as Isaiah 37:17 (Isaiah has “hear all the words” whereas 2 Kings does not have the word “all”).

Isa 37:18

**“It is true, O Yahweh.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:17.

**“the countries and their lands.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “the lands and their lands,” but that is likely a copyist’s error. The parallel verse, 2 Kings 19:17, has “nations and their lands,” which makes more sense and is likely correct. It is possible but less likely, that Isaiah is using “lands” twice with two different meanings.

Isa 37:19

**“putting their gods into the fire.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:18.

**“so they have destroyed them.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:18.

Isa 37:20

**“But now, Yahweh our God.”** Isaiah 37:20 is almost identical to 2 Kings 19:19.

Isa 37:21

**“Because you have prayed to me.”** Isaiah 37:21 differs from 2 Kings 19:20 somewhat. The relative particle *asher* most likely means “because” in this sentence because the phrase “I have heard” is not in Isaiah, in contrast to 2 Kings 19:20, which has that phrase. See commentary on 2 Kings 19:20.

Isa 37:22

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**“has despised you.”** The “you” in Isaiah 37:22 is singular and refers to Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

**“Daughter Jerusalem.”** The Hebrew structure and idiom is similar to that of “Daughter Zion” (see commentary on Isa. 1:8). Here in Isaiah 37:22 (and also 2 Kings 19:21), Jerusalem is referred to twice in the verse by two different names, “Daughter Jerusalem” and “Daughter Zion.” It is typical of Hebrew poetry to refer to the same thing in two different ways.

2 Kings 19:21 and Isaiah 37:22 are a good portrayal of God showing that with His help great feats can be accomplished and horrible and impossible-looking situations can be turned into great victories. Jerusalem is portrayed as a young woman, a virgin daughter, thus likely in her early teens, being approached by the “big, bad man,” Assyria, who is intent on raping and pillaging her the same way he raped and destroyed her sister, the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Yet with God’s help, she defies him, ridicules him, and shakes her head at him. She trusts God, and God, her protector, steps in and takes care of the situation. Ultimately those who trust in God will always have the victory, even over death. “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57; cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Isa 37:25

**“I will dry up all the rivers of Egypt.”** The king of Assyria had not yet ventured into Egypt (and historically never did), but he is boasting that the “rivers” of help for Israel that might flow out of Egypt would never materialize. But Assyria was wrong to assume that Israel’s only help and hope was Egypt, because the real help was Yahweh their God.

Isa 37:26

**“Have you not heard.”** See commentary on 2 Kings 19:25, where this verse also occurs.

Isa 37:36

**“The angel of Yahweh.”** This verse is almost identical to 2 Kings 19:35.

**“And when they got up early in the morning.”** The ones who got up in the morning were the Israelites, the Assyrians were dead. This verse is a good example of why reading the Bible requires logic and knowing the context. God expects us to read with care and build our background knowledge of His Word.

**“look, all of them were corpses; dead *men*.”** There is something very final about seeing the dead body of an enemy. It gives closure to the situation. If the Assyrians simply were not there, then there would always be a question about what happened to them and whether they were somehow still alive. There are a number of times in Scripture when people see the dead bodies of the enemy (e.g. Exod. 14:30; Isa. 37:36; 66:24).

Isa 37:37

**“So Sennacherib.”** cf. 2 Kings 19:36.

Isa 37:38

**“as he was worshiping.”** This is repeated in 2 Kings 19:37.

**Isaiah Chapter 38**

Isa 38:1

**“sick to *the point of* death.”** The record of Hezekiah’s sickness and recovery is in 2 Kings 20:1-11; 2 Chronicles 32:24-26; and Isaiah 38:1-22.

Isa 38:3

**“wept; *it was* a great weeping.”** The Hebrew text says that Hezekiah “wept a great weeping.” Although most English versions say “wept bitterly,” that is a bit of an assumption, because “bitterly” brings in an emotion that Hezekiah may not have felt. Rotherham takes “great weeping” to mean “out loud.” Hezekiah may have felt great sorrow or loss, or may have had some idea that Manasseh, his son who became king after him, would not make a good king, which was certainly true, Manasseh was a horrible king. In any case, Hezekiah wept greatly and prayed very humbly and honestly.

Isa 38:8

**“sundial.”** The Hebrew can refer to a sundial or to steps. E. Fox[[39]](#footnote-19434) has “step-dial” in 2 Kings 20:11.

Isa 38:10

**“prime of my days.”** The Hebrew word translated “prime” only occurs here and the meaning is uncertain. It seems to mean “half” or “middle” of my life, that is, in the prime of life, when I am still young.

**“the gates of Sheol.”** Sheol is the state of being dead, and there is no escape from it except by being raised from the dead by God. Because of that, Sheol is compared to a prison that has “gates” from which no one can escape without God’s help. These “gates” are referred to as the “gates of Sheol” (Job 17:16; Isa. 38:10) and “the gates of death” (Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18). Jesus Christ referred to the gates in Matthew 16:18 where in many versions they are translated as “the gates of hell.”

[For more on these gates, see commentary on Matt. 16:18. For more on Sheol, see Word Study: “Hades.” For more on dead people being dead, lifeless in every way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Isa 38:11

**“I will not see Yah.”** “Yah” is a shorter name for “Yahweh.” Isaiah 38:11-20 is one of the sections in the Word of God that shows that when a person dies, they are dead in every way, not alive in heaven, “hell,” or some other place. They are dead, lifeless, until they are raised from the dead at the resurrection. The great Judean king, Hezekiah, when facing death did not talk about going to heaven or to a good place. He said, “I will not see Yah...you [God] will make an end of me...you [God] will make an end of me” (Isa. 38:11-13). Because Hezekiah did not die but was healed, he exclaimed, “You have delivered my soul from the pit of oblivion” (Isa. 38:17). Then Hezekiah went on to say, “Those who go down into the pit [the grave] cannot have hope for your faithfulness” (Isa. 38:18). The reason that a dead person “cannot have hope for your [God’s] faithfulness” is that dead people are dead, totally lifeless, so they do not know anything and cannot have hope.

[For more on people being lifeless when they die, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Isa 38:12

**“dwelling.”** The Hebrew word translated “dwelling” is a hapax legomenon, meaning it only occurs this one time in the Hebrew Bible, and due to that fact, the English versions differ as to how to translate it. The English translations include: “dwelling” (ASV, CSB, ESV, NASB, NRSV, Rotherham, REV); “dwelling place” (NET), “house” (NIV); “home” (CJB, NJB); “lifetime” (CEB); “age” (DBY, KJV); “habitation” (JPS); “life span” (NKJV); “life” (NLT); and “generation” (DRA). The *HALOT* and Holladay Hebrew lexicons give “dwelling place” as the definition, while the BDB[[40]](#footnote-19142) gives “period, generation, dwelling” as the definition. Here in Isaiah 38:12, Hezekiah is speaking about his death and that the “dwelling,” the “home,” that is his human body will be removed and gone like a shepherd’s tent: “My dwelling is pulled up and removed from me like a shepherd’s tent.” Although the illustration of a shepherd’s tent being taken away and moved is somewhat appropriate for one’s life ending, the illustration leaves us with a sad and heavyhearted feeling. But as much as we want our lives to leave a lasting impression, it is most often the case that people die and, relative to historical time, are quickly forgotten.

Horatio Hackett wrote about the tents in the Bible Lands, and how very quickly they left no trace of having been in any given place: “The tents of the East...seldom remain long in the same place. The traveler erects his temporary abode for the night, takes it down in the morning, and journeys onward. The shepherds of the country, also, are constantly moving from one place to another…‘There is something very melancholy,’ writes Lord Lindsay…‘The tent-pins are plucked up, and in a few minutes a dozen holes, a heap or two of ashes, and the marks of the camels’ knees in the sand, soon to be obliterated, are the only traces left of what has been, for a while, our home.’ Hence, this rapid change of situation, this removal from one spot to another, without being able to foresee today where the wanderer will rest tomorrow affords a striking image of man’s life—so brief, fleeting, uncertain.”[[41]](#footnote-26888)

Despite Hezekiah’s melancholy words, the people—including Hezekiah—who are saved can look forward to a joyful and wonderful everlasting life. The person and their works in this life may disappear from earth shortly after their death, but their resurrected life will go on forever.

[For more on everlasting life and how to get saved, see commentary on Rom. 10:9.]

**“From day to night you bring me to an end.​”** From “day” when things were good for Hezekiah, to “night,” when the darkness of death closes in, “you bring me to an end,” that is, you bring me to death, and death would be the end of him; he would be dead, totally lifeless and not alive in any form. See commentary on Isaiah 38:11.

Isa 38:13

**“I waited patiently until morning.”** The meaning of the Hebrew text is debated. It could mean that Hezekiah waited patiently until morning hoping things would improve, or “waited patiently” could be more like “calmed myself.” But other scholars propose a translation like “I cried out until morning,” based on some difference in the Hebrew text. However, the Hebrew text can be understood without emendation and many translations go that way.

**“he breaks all my bones like a lion.”** Hezekiah was in pain, and like a lion, God was not showing him any relief or mercy.

**“you bring me to an end.”** Hezekiah’s death would be the end of him; he would be dead, totally lifeless, and not alive in any form. See commentary on Isaiah 38:11.

Isa 38:14

**“Support me.”** The Hebrew is more like, “Be my support,” but we would say “Support me.”

Isa 38:15

**“What can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done it.”** Now Hezekiah changes from Isaiah 38:14 when he was sick, to Isaiah 38:15 when he is healed. And what can Hezekiah say about this? God spoke through the prophet Isaiah that Hezekiah would be healed, and he was. God spoke it and did it.

**“I will walk carefully all my years.”** Hezekiah says that he will walk before God “carefully,” meaning with humility and obedience, throughout the rest of his life because of his near-death experience and the bitterness of soul that he experienced when he was sick. Many people change their life quite drastically when they come close to death, and with good reason. Many people ignore Judgment Day as if it will never happen, but coming close to death reveals what is really important in life and what one has to do to be acceptable to God and receive a good judgment on Judgment Day. The idea of being “careful” before God is represented in the Hebrew as walking “slowly” or perhaps “quietly,” but it refers to being careful before God.

**“because of the anguish my soul *experienced*.”** The Hebrew text more literally reads “bitterness” instead of “anguish,” but that is likely to get misinterpreted by the English reader. We do not normally think of bitterness as something we experience, we think of it as something we feel—an emotion. But to Hezekiah, his sickness was a “bitter” (harsh, severe, stinging) experience. But if we read in the Bible that Hezekiah walked carefully “because of the bitterness of my soul,” we think that Hezekiah was bitter about his sickness, which is not what the text is saying. While it is true that when Hezekiah was sick he would have had some bitter feelings about dying at a young age, that is not what the Bible is saying in this verse. The Bible is saying that Hezekiah lived carefully before God because of the anguish of the experience he had in the past when he was sick. The reader is supposed to recognize that Hezekiah’s sickness was past and he was recovered when he spoke the words recorded in Isaiah 38:15, and that should be communicated in the translation. So the REV nuances the English translation from the more literal Hebrew “because of the bitterness of my soul” to “because of the anguish my soul *experienced*.”

Isa 38:17

**“you have delivered my soul from the pit of oblivion.”** Hezekiah was told he would die, but then prayed and God answered his prayer by saying he would live 15 more years. So Hezekiah said, “you have delivered my soul from the pit of oblivion.” This is one of the many verses of Scripture that shows that when a person dies, they do not go to “heaven,” or “hell” or to any other place; they are dead, lifeless. Hezekiah described it as “the pit [grave] of oblivion” because when a person dies, they cease to exist as a person. They are dead in every way and form, and will not live again until the resurrection. The word “soul” here is equivalent to “self,” and thus the text means, “you have delivered me.” However, the way the text is worded it does also show that when a person dies, their “soul” is dead as well as their body.

The Hebrew word translated “oblivion” is *beley* (#01097 בְּלִי), and it typically is used of a negation, such as “un-” in “untouched” or “-less,” in “nameless.” It is used when something wears out to nothing, or ceases, or is destroyed. Although some versions translate the phrase as “pit of destruction” (CSB, ESV, NIV), that is not really accurate because the person was destroyed when they died, not destroyed while dead. The translation “pit of nothingness” (NASB, NJB; cf. CJB), is accurate but hard to grasp in English, whereas “the pit of oblivion” (NET, REV) catches the sense of the Hebrew and is easy to understand. Once dead, people know nothing and do nothing. If God did not know them and remember them and in the future resurrect them from the dead, they would be in, and remain in, nothingness, in oblivion, and what Paul said would be absolutely true: “if Christ has not been raised, your trust is pointless; you are still in your sins. Then also, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor 15:17-18).

[For information on the dead being dead until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on “Sheol” referring to the state of being dead, see Word Study: “Hades.” For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on the soul not being immortal but dying when the person dies, see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 39**

Isa 39:1

**“sent letters and a present to Hezekiah.”** This is also recorded in 2 Kings 20:12-19.

Isa 39:2

**“the house of his armor.”** The Hebrew word translated as “armor” here is a general word that can refer to a number of different things, so the verse could also refer to other valuable things, even jewels.

Isa 39:7

**“eunuchs.”** The Hebrew word can refer to eunuchs or to court officials, and the English versions are divided as to the meaning in this context. Actually, it is likely that both meanings are true. Some men were likely made eunuchs while others rose to prominence in the kingdom.

Isa 39:8

**“trustworthy peace.”** For more on the translation, “trustworthy peace,” see commentary on 2 Kings 20:19.

**Isaiah Chapter 40**

Isa 40:1

**“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.”** The word “comfort” is repeated twice for emphasis. Note that God does not say, “I will comfort my people,” but instead gives the command for someone to comfort His people. The command is no doubt to Isaiah, but would include other prophets and also likely leaders who are charged with the responsibility of taking care of God’s people. Note also that it is “my people” who are to be comforted. In the context of Isaiah and the time in which he lived, the unspoken understanding is that God’s people, Judah, will be comforted in the flesh to some extent, but the real comfort is to Judeans who are believers, who will be comforted in this life and the next. The comfort to unbelievers is that they have the opportunity to be saved, but if they reject that salvation, they are doomed—they will eventually be annihilated in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15-21).

The words “Comfort, comfort my people,” are sudden and somewhat unexpected. They come after chapters in which God’s judgment is pronounced against God’s people for their sin, but the words now reveal the love and mercy of God. This prophecy is a different cry from earlier in Isaiah’s ministry when he was told he would call out to Israel but they would not listen (Isa. 6:9-10). By the time of Isaiah 40, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians and had gone into exile, but the Babylonian Captivity of Judah was still more than 100 years in the future, and who knew if Judah would repent and that prophecy would change?

Isa 40:2

**“paid for.”** In certain contexts, the Hebrew verb *ratsah* (#07521 רָצָה) means to “make up for,” “pay for,” “expiate,” and this is one of those cases. This same word occurs in Leviticus 26:34, 41, and 26:43. Keil and Delitzsch write that Israel’s “iniquity is atoned for, and the justice of God is satisfied: [The Hebrew word *ratsah*] which generally denotes a satisfactory reception, is used here in the sense of meeting with a satisfactory payment, like [*ratsah avon*] in Lev. 26:41, 43, to pay off the debt of sin by enduring the punishment of sin.”[[42]](#footnote-25617)

The sin of Israel has been “paid off,” and thus pardoned, because she received from Yahweh “double” for all her sins. God had said that sometimes sin would be repaid double (cf. Jer. 16:18; 17:18) and in Leviticus 26, God had clearly said that if people behaved like Israel had behaved, they would receive “sevenfold” punishment for their sin (Lev. 26:18, 24, 28). In any case, at this point, Judah had paid for her sin. This verse in Isaiah shows that sin was sometimes thought of in terms of being a debt that needed to be paid, something that was much more fully developed during and after the Babylonian Captivity and during New Testament times.

[For a more complete understanding of sin, see commentary on 1 John 1:7, “sin.” For a more complete understanding of the land incurring a debt when the Sabbath years were not honored, see Lev. 26 and commentary on Lev. 26:34.]

**“double for all her sins.”** The word “double” here could mean twice as much punishment as Jerusalem deserved, but it is more likely that in this context it simply means “an abundance” or “enough.” There is no apparent reason for God to punish Jerusalem twice as much as she deserved.

Isa 40:3

**“A voice of someone calling out.”** Isaiah 40:3 is quoted in Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; and John 1:23. The fact that the identity of the one speaking is not specified shows us that here, as in Isaiah 40:1-2, the messenger is purposely not named to place the emphasis on the message. In the New Testament, the “voice” who speaks this message is identified as the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist (Matt. 3:3), and John told the religious leaders that he was the voice of Isaiah 40:3 (John 1:23).

**“Prepare a road for Yahweh in the wilderness!”** The road is to be prepared “in the wilderness” and “in the desert.” In saying that, the Hebrew text is different from the way the text is quoted in the New Testament, where John the Baptist is “in the wilderness” and he is crying out to prepare the road in the desert. But both texts are accurate. Although John was in the wilderness, it was still true that the road had to be prepared there also.

More evidence that John the Baptist is the voice that is calling out comes from the book of Malachi. Malachi 3:1 uses the phrase “prepare a road,” And the Hebrew phrase is the same here in Isaiah as it is in Malachi 3:1.

**“for our God.”** This is an example of the Jewish principle of agency. Yahweh would come to Israel via His representative, the Messiah. To welcome Yahweh’s representative was to welcome Yahweh, and to reject the representative was to reject Yahweh, and by that same principle of agency, people who received those who Jesus sent received Jesus himself (cf. Matt. 10:40; John 13:20).

In this context, Yahweh is God. Some Trinitarians try to use this section of Isaiah to prove that Jesus is God, but actually it proves the opposite, that Jesus is not God. Yahweh is the Father, Jesus is the Son of Yahweh. So when Isaiah 40 says that Yahweh is coming, it can't directly refer to the Son. As stated above, according to the Jewish law of agency, the agent can be spoken of as the one he represents. In this case, “Yahweh” refers to the one who represents Yahweh, which is His Messiah.

[For more on the Jewish law of agency, see commentary on Matthew 8:5.]

Isa 40:4

**“Every valley will be lifted up and every mountain and hill will be made low.”** This verse is both literal and figurative. When the Lord Jesus comes and conquers the earth, it will indeed become a “paradise on earth” (cf. Luke 23:43). Mountains will be lowered and steep valleys will subside and be less steep (Isa. 2:2; Ezek. 38:20), but there will still be mountains (Amos 9:13; Mic. 4:1).

On the figurative side, “mountains” were often used to represent huge problems or even empires (Isa. 41:15). Babylon was figuratively called the “destroying mountain” because of its imposing nature, not because the city of Babylon was in a mountain setting (Jer. 51:25). The future Kingdom of Christ is called a “mountain” for the same reason (Dan. 2:35). There was a great “mountain” that stood against Zerubbabel, and although scholars disagree on what the mountain is, all are in agreement that it is not an actual mountain, but was a kingdom or perhaps a person representing the power of a kingdom. So here in Isaiah 40:4, when the Messiah comes, every thing and every problem that stands in his way will be removed. “Mountains” and “valleys” will be leveled for him. Jesus’ coming and his triumph over evil will not be able to be successfully resisted.

Isa 40:5

**“the glory of Yahweh will be revealed.”** This is speaking about the second coming of Christ, when he comes to conquer the earth, and it is therefore future. In this context “the glory of Yahweh” almost certainly has several meanings. The word “glory” can in some contexts refer to power, and in this context of the coming of Yahweh, the power of Yahweh will be revealed as he conquers the earth. Furthermore “all flesh will see it together,” so this refers to the Messiah’s coming when he comes to earth to fight the battle of Armageddon. This is the time when “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him” (Rev. 1:7). Also, as Christ’s kingdom is established on earth, the “glory of Yahweh,” the glorious light that surrounds Yahweh, will be seen as well.

[For more on the glory of Yahweh, see commentary on Ezek. 1:28].

Isa 40:6

**“I said.”** The Hebrew can be read as either “he said” or “I said.” Although the versions differ, “I said” seems to make more sense, especially in light of the fact that God, the Author, knew that the intimate reference in this context was to the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist.

**“All flesh is like grass, and all its dependability is like the flower of the field.”** This is a beautiful and powerful picture of the short duration of human life, and the powerlessness of any human to be able to extend their life to any great degree. Human life is not “dependable;” humans will die, and do not even know when that will be (cf. Eccl. 8:8). So people should do whatever it takes to receive everlasting life from the One who can raise them from the dead and give them that life.

Although many versions read “glory” in the verse, that is adopted from the Septuagint because the Hebrew word, which is *hesed* (#02617 חֶסֶד) and which is often translated as “covenant faithfulness” does not seem to make sense here. But *hesed* can have the sense of “faithfulness,” and here seems to have the sense of “dependability.”[[43]](#footnote-32098)

Isa 40:7

**“grass.”** The biblical world did not have anything like our soft and manicured green grass. “Grass” was a generic term for the vegetation that grew on its own, which we would generally call field grass or weeds.

**“Surely the people are like grass.”** Human life is fragile and short. It is not something on which to build anything everlasting. In contrast, the Word of God is everlasting (Isa. 40:8).

Isa 40:9

**“go up on a high mountain!”** The verb “go up” is imperative. The command is “go up!” The next imperative is “lift up!” The command is to go up on a high mountain in order to be heard far away.

**“lift up your voice with strength.”** The verb “lift up” is imperative, and to lift up your voice with strength is to speak or cry out loudly. Those who speak up for God should do so in a way that they can be seen, like on a high mountain, and so that they can be heard, which would be by speaking loudly.

**“Zion...Jerusalem...cities of Judah.”** The audience of the verse expands as the verse, and then the context shows. The speaker speaks to Mount Zion, a part of Jerusalem, then to Jerusalem, then to the cities of Judah. But then Isaiah 40:10-28 reveal that God is the creator and ruler of the universe, and everyone should know about Him.

**“Behold your God.”** Yahweh will come in the sense that his representative, His Messiah, will come. This is the common Jewish understanding of “agency,” when a principal sends an agent who is empowered to do work in the name of the principal (see commentary on Matt. 8:5).

Isa 40:10

**“the Lord Yahweh will come.”** Yahweh will come via His personal representative, the Messiah. This is the Jewish principle of agency (see commentary on Isa. 40:3). Then Yahweh will be present in Jerusalem when the Messiah builds a Temple for Him (Zech. 6:12). That future Temple is described in Ezekiel 40-44.

**“Yahweh will come as a mighty one, and his arm will rule for him.”** The image is unmistakable. When Yahweh first comes, He will have to come as a warrior and ruler with a strong arm. The current powers that be will not automatically welcome Him or give up their control and power. Those who resist Him will have to be defeated...and they will be. When the Messiah comes, he will kill the wicked and take care of those who have been disadvantaged (Isa. 11:4).

**“Behold, his reward is with him and his repayment accompanies him.”** When Christ comes back, people will get what they deserve (cf. Matt. 16:27).

[For more on people getting what they deserve, good or bad, when the Lord Jesus returns, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

Isa 40:11

**“flock...shepherd...lambs.”** God is often portrayed as a shepherd and His people as sheep.

**“He will gather the lambs in his arm.”** The weak and downtrodden people on earth have been beaten down and taken advantage of for so long that they might well wonder if God would ever take care of them. But God has watched the affliction of the afflicted ones and they are guaranteed to be well taken care of when the Messiah comes.

Isa 40:12

**“span.”** A span was the distance between the tip of the thumb and the tip of the little finger if the hand was spread out and the fingers extended.

Isa 40:13

**“Who has.”** Here in these verses, Isaiah 40:12-28, Yahweh is clearly the one and only God. He created the universe and no other god was His counselor. Yahweh is the one God of Israel, surely, but He is the One God, period. There are no other gods who helped Him create the universe. We today don’t think twice about these statements, but they were a new revelation to people in the ancient world, who saw the universe as the product of the work of many gods.

**“the spirit of Yahweh.”** In this context, the “spirit” of Yahweh refers to His mind, which is why it could be “directed” or “instructed.” The word “directed” is *takan* (#08505 תָּכַן), and it has been translated a number of different ways, e.g., “directed” (HCSB, KJV, NAB, NASB, NRSV, REV); “measured” (CJB, ESV); “meted out” (JPS, YLT); “understood” (NIV84); “can fathom” (NIV2011); “able to advise” (NLT). In this context, “directed” seems to be a good translation.

The “spirit of God” sometimes refers to the deep inner things of God, such as His mind, something which the Bible itself clarifies. Isaiah 40:13 is quoted two times in the New Testament: Romans 11:34 and 1 Corinthians 2:16. In both of those passages, the word “spirit” in Isaiah is translated as “mind.” For example, Romans 11:34 says, “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor,” and 1 Corinthians 2:16 also has “the mind of the Lord.” That Isaiah uses the word “spirit” but the New Testament uses the word “mind” shows us that “the spirit of Yahweh” in Isaiah is not a reference to a separate “Person” in the Trinity, but is a way of speaking about God or His inner parts, in this case, His mind.

The Septuagint also reads “mind” instead of “spirit,” showing that the ancient Jews understood the “spirit” of God to refer to the workings of His mind. That would not be unusual since many times the Hebrew word “spirit” was used of the working of the mind or the emotions (cf. The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of people’s thoughts, attitudes, and emotions (cf. Gen. 26:35; 45:27; Exod. 6:9; Deut. 2:30; Josh. 2:11; 5:1; Judg. 8:3; 1 Sam. 1:15; 1 Kings 10:5; 21:5; Job 7:11; 17:1; 21:4; Ps. 34:18; 51:17; 143:4; Prov. 16:18, 19, 32; 29:11; Eccl. 1:14; Isa. 54:6; Ezek. 11:5; and Haggai 1:14).

[For more on the usages of “spirit” in the Bible, see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“counselor.”** The Hebrew is literally, “a man of his counsel,” that is a “man” who gives him counsel. The Hebrew word “man,” *ish* (#0376אִישׁ ), while it could refer to a human, in this context more likely generically refers to “someone,” human or spirit being, who is a counselor, thus the translation, “counselor.”

Isaiah 40:13-14 have been used to try to show that God does not work with a divine council, but works alone and without the advice or support of others. However, that is not what the verse is saying. There is ample evidence that God works in concert with His creation and enlists them to help Him administer the universe. 1 Kings 22:19-20 shows God asking his spirit beings how Ahab can be defeated in battle. Isaiah 6:8 shows God asking who He can send to Israel.

Beyond those scriptures, and there are more like them, God enlisted the aid of Adam and Eve to administer the earth (Gen. 1:28), the aid of judges to help Him rule mankind (Deut. 16:18), the aid of ministers in the Church to help His Son administer the Church (Eph. 4:10-12), and in the future He will enlist the aid of judges and rulers to help His Son rule the Messianic Kingdom on earth (Isa. 1:26; Jer. 23:4). Given that God has worked with His creation to help administer it in all those different ways, why would he not work with His creation to administer the spirit world? Furthermore, the word “archangel” means “leading, chief, or ruling” angel, so there are ruling spirits in the spirit world.

The point of this section of Isaiah is not to make the point that God works alone without the help of other spirit beings or human beings, but to show that He does not need their help—God is the Great Power in the universe, the everlasting God. He does not need anyone to counsel or teach Him. He is enthroned above the earth (Isa. 40:22), and none can be compared to Him or be His equal (Isa. 40:25). God enlists the help of His creation to rule the various aspects of the universe, but not because He could not do it Himself, it is an act of love and desire to interact with His creation.

[For more on God’s divine council, see commentary on Gen. 1:26. For more on the future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see commentary on Matt. 5:5.]

Isa 40:14

**“the path of justice.”** The meaning is, who taught God the “right way to do things.”[[44]](#footnote-17169) Although “justice” is a meaning of the Hebrew word, it has a wide range of meanings, many of which apply here. No one taught God the path of justice or the right way to do things.

Isa 40:15

**“a speck of dust on a balance.”** The “balance” is what merchants used to buy and sell. The dust would never even affect a biblical balance—they were too crude. See commentary on Proverbs 11:1.

**“he lifts up the islands.”** From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we today do not think of the parts west of Israel as islands. The “islands” (the Hebrew term is also used for “coastlands”) are at the far reaches of the known world at that time, hence they are used to refer to things at the ends of the earth.[[45]](#footnote-24648) Isaiah 40:15 refers to the Gentiles as the “nations” in the first part of the verse, and then refers to them as “the islands” because they were west over the Mediterranean Sea.

Isa 40:16

**“Lebanon would not suffice to burn *a sacrifice*.”** Lebanon had huge forests and many important trees, which is why Solomon had wood for the Temple imported from Lebanon (1 Kings 5:6-14). But all the wood in Lebanon would not be enough to burn the kind of sacrifice that God deserves as the creator of the universe and lover of humankind.

**“its animals sufficient for a burnt offering.”** All the animals of Lebanon would not be sufficient for the kind of sacrifices that God deserves.

Isa 40:17

**“like nothing...less than nothing...emptiness.”** The text uses three words that are somewhat similar but have different meanings in this context, but those meanings are hard to exactly define and distinguish. The CEB is a typical translation and has, “All the nations are like nothing before God. They are viewed as less than nothing and emptiness.” God values the nations, but in comparison to Him, they are nothing and less than nothing.

Isa 40:21

**“Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?**” The fact of the existence of the earth points to a creator. Even with the modern theories of the universe, such as the Big Bang theory, there still must be material that made the Bang possible. That material had to come from a creator. Material things are not self-existent.

Isa 40:22

**“he who sits above the circle of the earth.”** God is described as sitting above the circle of the earth. This would not be what we refer to as a “satellite view” of the earth from above. It is unlikely that ancient people would describe the earth from that position. Rather ancient people would sit on a mountain or high place and look in every direction and see horizon in every direction and the earth would appear to be a circle. Furthermore, the sky was considered to be a dome, and thus God could sit above it and look down on people, who from that vantage point would look like grasshoppers. This is the only verse that mentions the “circle of the earth.” It would be too much to interpret this verse to mean that the earth was a globe.

Isa 40:23

**“who brings rulers to nothing.”** The Hebrew word “brings” is the common word for “give,” and it is likely used here to mean something like “appoint.” Humans “appoint” other humans to positions of power and authority, but God appoints human rulers to nothingness. In the final scheme of things, it is what God appoints people to that is important.

Isa 40:24

**“They are barely planted; they are barely sown.”** Human rulers are barely established when they are taken away.

**“trunk.”** The Hebrew word refers to the main part of the plant. Since this refers to a part of the plant that takes root in the ground, it is the “trunk” of the tree or plant.

Isa 40:30

**“stumble, yes, stumble.”** This is an emphatic translation of the Hebrew, which uses the figure of speech polyptoton.[[46]](#footnote-28455) The Hebrew repeats the word “stumble” in different tenses.

[For more on polyptoton and the emphasis it brings, as well as the way it is translated in the REV, see commentaries on Gen. 2:16 and 2:17.]

Isa 40:31

**“those who wait for Yahweh.”** John Oswalt writes that in Hebrew, waiting “is not merely killing time, but a life of confident expectation.”[[47]](#footnote-21425) God has made promises, and those who trust God and have confidence that God’s promises will come to pass draw strength from their confidence, and can run and not be weary. They can go on day after day serving the Lord knowing that one day God’s promises will be literally fulfilled and they will be richly rewarded (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58).

**Isaiah Chapter 41**

Isa 41:1

**“O islands.”** From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we today do not think of the parts west of Israel as islands. Isaiah 41:1 refers to the Gentile nations as the “islands” and also “the peoples.”

Isa 41:5

**“The islands.”** From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we today do not think of the parts west of Israel as islands. Also, some of them were considered to be so far away they were “the ends of the earth.” The Gentiles will come to God, fearing and trembling.

Isa 41:15

**“You will thresh the mountains.”** In this context, the “mountains” and “hills” is the figure of speech hypocatastasis for the powerful enemies. particularly the powerful men in the enemy countries. The enemy may seem strong, but with God’s help, they will be easily defeated.

[For more on the figures of speech of comparison, simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

Isa 41:17

**“seek water.”** In this context, “water” is certainly one of the things that humans need and they seek it when there is none. But in this context, the “water” seems more logically to be put by the figure of speech synecdoche (the part for the whole) for all the things that people need and that God can and will supply. Note how in the verse the people are weak and needy, which is the true condition of every person. When it comes to the needs of life, including health and life itself, humans are frail and needy. We need God’s help to live, survive, and prosper. And, as the verse says, God will answer people (those people who turn to Him). He will prosper them and give them everlasting life. In contrast, those who are His enemies will perish (cf. John 3:16).

[See Word Study: “Synecdoche.”]

Isa 41:18

**“I will open rivers on the bare heights and springs in the middle of the valleys.”** In Isaiah 41:18-20, the prophet Isaiah again shifts from the present to the future Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, and the earth will be restored to an Eden-like state.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 41:19

**“fir trees, pine, and cypress.”** The exact species of these trees are debated and the English translations vary greatly (cf. Isa. 60:13). The “take-home message” from the verse is that it is God, not humans or pagan gods, that is able to meet the needs of humankind.

Isa 41:21

**“Present your case*.*”** Here God switches abruptly and addresses the idol gods. He says, “Present (or “bring near”) your case (or “legal arguments”)” to me, says Yahweh.

**“says the King of Jacob.”** In context the idea is, “says God, the King of Jacob, to the pagan idols.”

Isa 41:22

**“Let them draw near.”** The idea is that the idols are to come near and present the evidence they are genuine gods with divine knowledge and power. Of course, they cannot do that, showing that God is the true and Most High God.

Isa 41:23

**“so that we will be frightened and afraid.”** The Hebrew text is taken in different ways by different scholars. A translation like the one in the REV is supported by many scholars and also fits the context.

Isa 41:24

**“The one who chooses you is an abomination.”** The person who chooses to follow pagan gods instead of the true God is an abomination to God and will suffer the consequences of his foolishness.

Isa 41:25

**“one from the north.”** The identity of this foreign conquering ruler is not given, but with hindsight, many scholars think it refers to Cyrus the Persian.

**“he will trample on rulers.”** The Masoretic Text says, “he will come on rulers,” but the Aramaic Targums support a reading such as “trample,” which seems to be the more accurate reading here.

**Isaiah Chapter 42**

Isa 42:1

**“Behold, ...”** Isaiah 42:1-3 is quoted in Matthew 12:18-21.

**“my servant.”** Isaiah 42:1-7 is the first of four “Servant Songs” in Isaiah, which are poetic sections about the Messiah. They are called “Servant Songs” because they are Hebrew poetry about the Messiah, the servant of God. The scholars differ about the exact ending of each song because there is not a definitive “last verse” in the songs that lets people know when the song ends. Nevertheless, the four songs seem to be: Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12. The last “Servant Song,” Isaiah 52:13-53:12, is famous because it is the section that shows the Messiah suffering for the sins of mankind, and has verses such as these: “Surely he has borne our sickness and carried our suffering, yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:4-5).

Two of the four Servant Songs—the first and the last—are Yahweh speaking (Isa. 42:1-7, and 52:13-53:12), while two—the middle two—are the Servant speaking (Isa. 49:1-7, and 50:4-11).

In the “Servant Songs,” the Messiah is called God’s “servant,” which is the Hebrew word *ebed* (#05650 עֶבֶד), which can mean “servant” or “slave” in the same way that the Greek word *doulos* can mean “servant” or “slave.” However, the idea of a “servant” can be very broad. For example, a servant in a household is usually a very low position, while a “servant of the king” can be a high official or an office in the army (cf. Esther 1:3). In the Servant Songs, the servant of Yahweh is understood to be a very high official, indeed, he is the Messiah himself, who will rule over nations (Isa. 42:1).

The fact that the “Servant Songs” use the title “my servant” does not automatically mean the servant is the Messiah. In the Bible, a number of people are called the “servant of Yahweh,” including Moses,

[For more information on the Servant Songs, see commentary on Isa. 52:13. For more on Jesus being God’s servant, and not God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“I have put”** As spoken by Isaiah, “I have put” is the Hebrew idiom of the “prophetic perfect,” Jesus had not even been born yet, so Jesus getting the spirit is a future event. The Servant Songs, like a lot of biblical prophecy, uses the Hebrew idiom of the “prophetic perfect,” which states a future event as if it has already happened to emphasize the fact that it will happen. The Bible has many verses in which a future event is spoken of as if it were a past event. The prophetic perfect idiom is why Isaiah 53 speaks of the suffering of Christ in the past tense and says, “he has borne our sickness and carried our suffering, yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way, and Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth” (Isa. 53:4-7). The past-present-future language of the Servant Song confuses some people, just as some 2,000 years ago it confused the Ethiopian eunuch, who asked Philip, “of whom does the prophet say this? About himself, or about some other *person*?” (Acts 8:34).

The prophetic perfect idiom is a challenge to translators. Some translators want to keep the idiom, expecting the reader to become educated as to what it means, so versions like the ESV have, “I have put My spirit upon him,” while other versions, trying to make the English make sense to the less educated reader, use the future tense and say, “I will put my spirit on him” (NIV). In the REV we have generally, but not always, retained the literal reading of the text and expect the reader to know from the context and scope of Scripture that the verse is speaking of a future event. The Messiah was not even born when Isaiah 42:1 was written, and so we know that God’s putting His gift of holy spirit upon him referred to a future event. Then, from the New Testament, we learn that God put holy spirit upon Jesus right after he was baptized by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22).

**“I have put my spirit upon him.”** Jesus received the gift of holy spirit at His baptism and had it upon him when he started his ministry (Luke 4:18). Jesus needed God’s gift of holy spirit, just like the leaders and prophets of the Old Testament did so he could walk with spiritual power (cf. Num. 11:17-29; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 16:13; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 15:1; Mic. 3:8). Other verses that say God was going to put holy spirit upon the Messiah are Isaiah 11:2 and 61:1. That Jesus needed the spirit of God—that is, the spirit that comes from God—to do what he did is good evidence that Jesus was not God. Jesus was what he, and others, and the New Testament say he was: a sinless man empowered by God.

[For more on Jesus not being God or a God-man, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Isa 42:3

**“bent reed...dimly burning wick.”** These represent the weak, disadvantaged, and oppressed people on earth. Isaiah 42:3 is quoted in Matthew 12:20.

[For an explanation of the figure and its meaning, see commentary on Matt. 12:20.]

Isa 42:4

**“coastlands.”** Although the Hebrew word is usually translated as “coastlands” or “islands,” it generally refers to distant lands beyond the sea, which, for Isaiah’s audience would be the Mediterranean Sea. For the “Servant” (the Messiah) to establish justice “on the earth,” his reign and influence must extend beyond Israel and the Mediterranean Sea to the ends of the earth. The same word is used of the “Servant” in Isaiah 49:1.

**“wait expectantly.”** The Hebrew means both to wait and hope, but individually neither of those captures the meaning here, which is “wait expectantly” (NASB, NET, LSB, YLT).

Isa 42:5

**“This is what God Yahweh says.”** Isaiah is very clear that the “Servant” is serving under God. It is God who created the heavens and earth.

**“and stretched them out.”** The text uses language that compares God creating the heavens to one who stretches out his tent as a covering. That God stretches out the heavens as a tent is in other places in the Bible (cf. Ps. 104:2; Isa. 40:22).

**“he who spread out the earth.”** The Hebrew text uses a word translated as “spread out” which often refers to hammering out something, such as gold. The New Jerusalem Bible reads, “who hammered into shape the earth.” The idea is that God purposely prepared the earth and gave the things that come from it in the way that He did so that life could thrive on the earth. The earth and the life that it supports is no accident; it is the purposeful creation of God.

**“breath...spirit.”** The use of “breath” and “spirit” here in the poetry of Isaiah 42:5 is a good example of Semitic parallelism, where two things are mentioned but both refer to the same thing (but may bring a different emphasis). In this case, both “breath” and “spirit” refer to “life.” God is the creator of all life.

Isaiah 42:5 says God gives life to people, and that is a true statement. People who believe in evolution claim that life can form spontaneously, and they sometimes point out that some primitive proteins have been formed in a laboratory. But a protein is not alive (people eat protein every day when they eat dead meat, fish, etc.). No human has at any time produced even an acceptable theory that explains how dead molecules can join together and then “become alive.” Life comes from God. The “best theory” of life is that there is a God. Besides, evolution cannot explain the existence of spirits and the spirit world. Atheists simply deny that spirits exist, but they are denying what is known and believed by the majority of the people on earth.

Isa 42:6

**“have called you.”** The “you” is referring to the Servant, the Messiah.

**“in righteousness.”** The call of the Messiah to his mission and ministry is in keeping with the righteousness of God. God needed the Messiah to do what needed to be done on earth both when he came the first time as “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” and when he will come the second time as the conqueror and ruler.

**“watch over.”** God will “watch over” His Messiah. He will not abandon him but will be with him. The Hebrew could also be translated as “guard, keep, preserve.” In light of what the Messiah would go through in life, this was a very comforting statement.

**“set you as a covenant.”** A major part of Jesus’ ministry on earth was to be the covenant sacrifice for Israel—a sacrifice that would also suffice for the sins of the world—and here we see that Jesus was a “covenant” (a covenant sacrifice and covenant maker) with “the people,” i.e., Israel, but also a “light” or blessing, for the Gentiles, the “nations,” i.e., the other nations besides Israel. As we see from Romans and Galatians, people who believe in the Messiah are included in the covenant.

[For more information on Jesus being a covenant for Israel and a light to the nations, see commentary on Isa. 49:8.]

**“a light for the nations.”** The salvation and everlasting life given by the Messiah was not just for the Jews, even though many of them thought that it was. The first prophecy of the Messiah is the one God made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15, and that was thousands of years before the Jews existed. About 2,000 years after that first prophecy of the Messiah, God promised Abraham that all the people of the earth, not just the Jews, would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3). Then God repeated that promise to Isaac (Gen. 26:4); and to Jacob (Gen. 28:14). Besides those promises, the Old Testament had a number of verses that spoke of Gentiles being included in the Messianic Kingdom, which meant they were granted everlasting life (Ps. 102:15; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-7; 60:3; 66:18-21; Ezek. 39:21, 27; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22).

Isa 42:8

**“I will not give my glory to another.”** This verse teaches that there is only one God, Yahweh, and that God will not give his one-of-a-kind glory to anyone else. Neither should we give His glory to anyone or anything else (Isa. 42:10-11, 17), because He alone is God.

Some Trinitarians propose that since God will not give his glory to another (Isa. 42:8), and He has given his glory to Jesus (John 17:5), that therefore, Jesus is God. However, this line of thinking is faulty for a few reasons. Firstly, John 17:5 does not say that Jesus had “God’s glory,” it simply says that he had “glory,” so the idea that Jesus had or would have God’s glory is mistaken. Secondly, in Isaiah 42:8, God is speaking from the first person singular “I” not “we.” If it was the three person Trinity speaking, they should have used “we,” yet, the text explicitly says there is no other God besides this singular “I,” Yahweh, the Father. Therefore, to squeeze Jesus into this statement, as if Jesus was also Yahweh, is to break the rules of grammar. That would be at least two persons speaking (The Father and Jesus) so God should have spoken with the plural pronoun “we.”

Lastly, Christians will also receive the glory that was given to Jesus, “And the glory that you have given me, I have given to them, so that they can be one, just as we are one” (John 17:22). So, one cannot understand this to mean that if someone (e.g. Jesus) receives glory, then they become part of the “Godhead,” or else it would be much more than a Trinity, there would be millions of people in the Godhead.

Isa 42:12

**“in the islands.”** From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we today do not think of the parts west of Israel as islands. Also, however, the Hebrew word that is translated as “islands” can also refer to the coastlands, which applies here, because the coasts of Israel would also praise God.

Isa 42:15

**“make the rivers into islands.”** The plants would not be the only thing to dry up. The rivers would dry up such that where there once was a deep flowing river there will be shallow water and even islands. Droughts at times have caused parts of the Mississippi River to have islands.

**Isaiah Chapter 43**

Isa 43:3

**“your Savior.”** Yahweh was the true “savior” of Israel. All other saviors derived their power and ability from Him.

Isa 43:10

**“and my servant whom I have chosen.”** Israel here is both a witness and a servant of God (cf. Isa. 41:8), but sadly, historic Israel failed at both. However, in the future, the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) will be both a witness and a servant of God.

**“Before me there was no God formed, nor will there be after me.”** The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Isa 43:11

**“savior.”** The word “savior” is one of the many words that is used of both God and His Son, Jesus, and others as well. For example, Othniel, who judged Israel, is called a “savior” (Judg. 3:9), and so is Ehud (Judg. 3:15). But God is the ultimate savior, and all the others who are called “savior” derive their calling and ability from Him. Of course, God knows that the word “savior” is used of others besides Him, so when He uses it here of Himself, He is using it in the sense of the ultimate savior, which He is. No other “savior” is in the category of God, besides Him “there is no savior.”

[For the usages of “Savior” in the Bible, see commentary on Luke 1:47. For Jesus not being God and not being part of the Trinity, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”

**Isaiah Chapter 44**

Isa 44:2

**“Jeshurun.”** Jeshurun is a prophetic name God calls Israel. It is from the Hebrew root for “upright,” and so it could loosely be translated “the Upright,” or “Righteous-nation.” Although Israel was certainly not upright in Isaiah’s time, they will be in the future. It occurs four times in Scripture, here, and in Deuteronomy 32:15 and 33:5, 26.

[For more on Jeshurun, see commentary on Deut. 32:15.]

Isa 44:3

**“For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground.”** Isaiah 44:3-5 speaks of some of the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, and the earth will be restored to an Eden-like state. The “water” on the one who is thirsty likely refers to the gift of holy spirit being poured out upon those who believe.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 44:5

**“One will say, ‘I am Yahweh’s.’”** The context of this dedication to God is the giving of the gift of holy spirit to people. The gift of holy spirit that is given to Christians today and other believers in the future after the Rapture will influence people to be godly and obey God (cf. Ezek. 36:27).

[For more about the holy spirit that God promised in the Old Testament to give in abundance in the future but had not given by the time of Christ, see commentary on John 7:39. For more about the gift of holy spirit being “upon” people in the Old Testament and “in” people after the Day of Pentecost, and the differences between holy spirit in the Old Testament and after Pentecost, see commentary on Eph. 1:13, “promised holy spirit.” For more about the holy spirit being the gift of God and not a “Person” called “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the holy spirit and New Birth, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

Isa 44:6

**“I am the first and I am the last.”** This title applies to God here, and it appears in a similar form in Isaiah 48:12. See commentary on Revelation 1:17.

**“no God except me.”** The REV capitalizes “God” here, as do a large number of English versions, because that is the meaning of the text. God is saying there is no other being who is His equal, i.e., “God.” There is only one true God, Yahweh, the creator of the universe. Although some versions have “god” with a lowercase “g,” and read, “there is no other god besides me,” that is not technically correct because there are lesser “gods” alongside the true God. The entire Old Testament is filled with admonitions for God’s people not to worship other gods, and 1 Corinthians 8:5 says there are many “gods.” However, we are to know the one true God, even as Jesus himself prayed: “that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Isa 44:15

**“worships.”** The Hebrew verb is *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), and it is the same Hebrew word as “bow down.” The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. *Shachah* is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 45**

Isa 45:1

**“his anointed one, to Cyrus.”** Cyrus is one of the kings in the Old Testament whom God anointed with holy spirit.

[For more on anointed ones in the OT, see commentary on 1 Sam. 12:3.]

**“Cyrus.”** “Cyrus” is a proper name, unlike Ahasuerus, Xerxes, or Artaxerxes, which are all titles. Cyrus reigned over Persia for 30 years, from c. 559 to 530 BC. Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, which would be at the most from 776 BC (the start of the sole reign of Uzziah) to 697 BC (the end of Hezekiah’s reign). It is unlikely that this prophecy of Isaiah was at the very end of his reign, and thus likely that this prophecy was given at least 150 years before Cyrus reigned. Foreknowledge of this type and accuracy can only be accomplished by God, which is why doubters say that this part of Isaiah could not have been written during the lifetime of Isaiah, but had to be written after Cyrus reigned and then adjusted to make it seem like a prophecy. But there is no real evidence that this prophecy was not written by Isaiah. This kind of historically verifiable prophecy is one of the reasons that we can believe that the Bible is the Word of God, not the words of humans.

Isa 45:2

**“The bars of iron.”** The “bars” of a city gate were the strong wooden beams that were placed behind the doors of the gate so they could not be opened and could withstand pounding from the outside without giving way. Those bars were the origin of the shout “Bar the doors!” when an enemy would approach. The bars would not normally be made of iron, that was a hyperbolic way of saying that even if the city seemed impregnable, that God would be able to conquer it.

Isa 45:5

**“there is none else. Besides me, there is no God.”** The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Isa 45:7

**“I make peace and create evil.”** God does not “create evil.” That would be against His character and contradict the fact that He is love. Love and evil are mutually exclusive. This is the common Semitic “idiom of permission,” in which God is said to actively do something that He was only related to in some way. In this case, when God created the earth and created humankind to live on it, and gave humans (and spirit beings such as angels) freedom of will, He “created” the possibility of evil.

God gave people free will, and also gave them laws, rules, and norms that made a distinction between good and evil. Thus, when spirit beings or humans used the free will that God gave them and did evil, by the Semitic “idiom of permission” God was said to have caused the evil.

[For a more complete explanation of the idiom of permission, see commentary on Exod. 4:21.]

Isa 45:14

**“bow down.”** The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Isa 45:21

**“There is no other God besides me.”** There are many other places where Yahweh acknowledges the existence of other gods, and He consistently reproves people for worshiping them. But here He qualifies the other gods. There are no other Gods besides Yahweh who are righteous and saviors (see commentary on Isa. 44:6).

The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Isa 45:22

**“all you ends of the earth.”** The “ends of the earth” is put by metonymy for all the people who live on earth. God’s message to every person on earth is to look to Him to be saved.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Isa 45:23

**“every tongue will swear.”** The meaning of “swear” must be understood from the scope of the whole Word of God. It is well represented in Philippians 2:11 when it is alluded to and stated as “every tongue will confess.” In the context of Isaiah, and in the context of Romans 14:11, where Isaiah 45:23 is quoted, the meaning is not “swear allegiance,” as some English translations have, but “swear” to the authority of God as Creator and Lord, and in the NT swear to the authority of Jesus Christ as the one who has been invested with all authority by God (cf. Matt. 28:18).

**Isaiah Chapter 46**

Isa 46:1

**“Bel.”** Another name for Marduk, who was the chief god of Babylon. The name “Bel” is equivalent to the Canaanite “Baal;” both names mean “lord.” Isaiah 45 concerned the Persians and the Jew’s rebellion against God. Isaiah 46 opens with the gods of Babylon being defeated and disgraced.

It seems that Isaiah prophesied between c740-680 BC., and this should put in perspective the fact that he spoke of events that were over a hundred years after his life (which is why the scholars who do not believe in God think Isaiah was written much later than it was). Babylon conquered Judah and burned the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC, and the Persians did not conquer Babylon until 539 BC, which means that this prophecy in Isaiah 46:1 was likely fulfilled more than 150 years after it was spoken.

**“bows down…stoops low.”** The gods of Babylon bow before the Persian conquers.

**“Their idols.”** The idols of the Babylonians.

Isa 46:2

**“they bow down together.”** Just as the Babylonian gods bow before the Persian conquerors, so too do the Babylonian people. They bow down together with their gods.

**“they are not able to rescue the burden.”** The Babylonian people are not able to rescue the “burden,” that is, their gods, from the Persian conquerors. God’s use of “burden” here is deliberate and a great lesson. Of course, the Babylonian gods, which were often made of metal, including gold and silver, were a burden to carry. But much more than that, the Babylonians trusted their idol gods when in reality all they were was a burden. They introduced demons into the lives of the people and burdened them with lies and pagan worship rites and regulations and kept them from the truth. And now, as they went into captivity, they even burdened the animals who carry them. This verse has to be read with spiritual understanding, not just looking at historical fact. Some English versions try to make the English easier to understand, but in our opinion go too far. For example, the NET says, “they are unable to rescue the images.” While that is true, the “burden” was the idols, in changing “burden” to “images” the fact that God is warning us that false gods are a burden gets completely lost.

Isa 46:8

**“so you can be brave.”** The meaning of the Hebrew verb here in Isaiah 46:8 is uncertain, but likely has to do with being brave, strong, or established. “Show yourselves men” has been a translation with a long tradition (cf. KJV), but that translation is certainly nuanced and not what the text says, even if it means something close to that. The REV sees the clause as a purpose clause as does the NET. The NET text note reads, “The imperative with *vav* (ו) may indicate purpose following the preceding imperative.” The purpose of God’s telling the people to remember what He was telling them about the false gods was so they would be brave and not be afraid of them.

Isa 46:9

**“and there is no other.”** Yahweh is the only true God. The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Isa 46:11

**“To fulfill my purpose.”** The text is “a man of my purpose,” but in this case, the man of purpose is a man who will carry out God’s purpose.

**Isaiah Chapter 47**

Isa 47:1

**“Come down and sit in the dust.”** Sitting in the dust would normally be a sign of humiliation, but sitting in the dust instead of on a throne is not just humiliation, but degradation and shame as well (see commentary on Isa. 52:2).

Isa 47:2

**“grind flour.”** This was ordinarily the work of women and slaves, but it is mentioned here in the context of the highborn women of Babylon because they would have had slaves to do that work.

**“thigh.”** An idiom. The word “thigh” was often used euphemistically for sexual organs because of their close proximity. Genesis 46:26 literally reads, “All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his thigh” (cf. Exod. 1:5; Judg. 8:30). Numbers 5:21 contains a curse, the essence of which is that if a woman has committed adultery, then “her thigh will rot.” Also, it was a custom for a man to make a solemn oath while holding the penis and testicles of the one he was swearing to, just as Abraham said to his servant, “put your hand under my thigh” (Gen. 24:2, 9; 47:29).

Here in Isaiah 47:2, the highborn women of Babylon (“tender and delicate;” Isa. 47:1) will be forced to grind grain, a menial task. Their veils and their clothing will be stripped off and their genitals will be openly exposed, and they will be marched across the rivers into Persia. The ancient cultures had some very cruel practices, and publicly stripping people naked was one of them. This stripping naked in Isaiah 47 was done by the Persians. In Isaiah 7:20 it was done by the Assyrians, who had a reputation around the East for their cruelty. There were many sexual euphemisms in biblical languages, just as there are in all languages. For the use of “feet” as a sexual idiom, see commentary on Isaiah 7:20.

Isa 47:5

**“queen mother.”** The Hebrew word translated “queen mother” is *gebereth* (#01404 גְּבֶרֶת), and it can refer to the queen mother, the queen, or a mistress over servants (Gen. 16:4; 2 Kings 5:3). In this context it refers to a woman who is the queen mother, that is, the mother of the king and thus still considered a queen (BDB Hebrew and English lexicon). The Queen mother was the most powerful woman in the kingdom, much more powerful than any of the wives of the king, who often did not have much real power at all. Isaiah 47:5 refers to Babylon as the “queen mother” of kingdoms because it was the most powerful kingdom in the biblical world at that time.

Isa 47:7

**“queen mother.”** It was common in the biblical culture to refer to cities and countries as being female (see commentary on Isa. 1:8). Here in Isa. 47:7, Babylon boasted of herself that she was the “queen mother” of cities. The “queen mother” was the mother of the reigning king and therefore the most important woman in the kingdom (most kings had more than one wife, so in the biblical culture the mother of the king was usually more esteemed and powerful than a wife of the king). By thinking of herself as the “queen mother” of cities, Babylon was claiming to be the most important city in the world.

**“you did not lay these things to your heart; you did not remember the end of it.”** That is, Babylon did not take to heart or consider what happened to Judah when they disobeyed God, and so it went headlong against His principles of mercy and justice. So now their end will be like Judah’s end, they will be conquered by a foreign nation. Indeed, Persia conquered Babylon.

Isa 47:14

**“they will be like stubble, the fire will burn them up.”** “Stubble” is a term that was used for the cut-up stalks of grain or grass that burned very fast and hot and was used to start fires or heat an oven (cf. Isa. 5:24; Obad. 1:18; Matt. 6:30).

**Isaiah Chapter 48**

Isa 48:3

**“The former things I declared long ago.”** The meaning of this sentence is captured in the much more paraphrased version, the NLT: “Long ago I told you what was going to happen.”

Isa 48:8

**“you have been called a rebel from the womb.”** Israel (and Judah) were rebellious “from the womb,” that is, from the time the nation was born as a covenant nation of God’s people. It was only a very short time—a couple of months at most—after Israel made a covenant on Mount Sinai to obey God (Exod. 24) that they disobeyed Him and abandoned Him and made a golden calf god (Exod. 32).

Isa 48:10

**“I have tried you.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads “I have chosen you,” but that must be a copyist’s error. It does not fit the context, and the Qumran scroll of Isaiah (1QIsaa) reads “tried, tested,” which occurs in most modern versions including the New King James Version.

Isa 48:11

**“I will not give my glory to another.”** In the Hebrew text, “my glory” is moved to the front of the sentence for emphasis: “My glory I will not give to another.” God is our One God, and He will not share His praise and the worship due Him with another god. However, He gives humankind their own glory (Ps. 8:5).

Isa 48:12

**“I am the first**.” Yahweh, the God of Israel, calls himself the first and the last earlier, in Isaiah 44:6, and He calls Himself the same thing here. In the New Testament, after Jesus assumes his place at God’s right hand as God’s second in command, Jesus is called the first and the last. See commentary on Revelation 1:17.

Isa 48:13

**“has laid the foundation of the earth.”** Isaiah 48:13 refers to Yahweh, and there are many scriptures that say that God, Yahweh, created the heavens and the earth (cf. Gen. 1:1; Neh. 9:6; Job 9:8; 38:1, 4-6; Ps. 24:1-2; 33:6; 102:25; Jer. 10:10-12; 27:5; 32:17; 51:15; Zech. 12:1). Also, because of the spiritual battle that was raging in Isaiah’s time over the worship of pagan gods instead of Yahweh, there is a special emphasis in Isaiah that it was Yahweh who created the heavens and the earth (cf. Isa. 37:16; 40:10-12, 22, 26, 28; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12, 18; 51:13), not the pagan gods.

There are Trinitarians who say Isaiah 48:12-16 supports the Trinity. Part of their argument is their claim that Jesus Christ made the heavens and the earth, but we just saw many verses that said Yahweh did that, not Jesus Christ, and furthermore, Job 9:8 and Isa. 44:24 say Yahweh did it “alone.” Furthermore, the verses that some Trinitarians use to say that it was Jesus Christ who created the heavens and the earth, such as Hebrews 1:10 or Colossians 1:16 can be understood in a non-Trinitarian way without a Trinitarian meaning, and Biblical Unitarian scholars assert those verses do not support the Trinity (see commentary on Col. 1:16 and Heb. 1:10).

Isa 48:14

**“who among them has declared these things.”** Here in Isaiah 48:14, the “them” in the phrase, “who among them,” refers to the pagan gods, the idols. Who among the idols has been able to declare the future like Yahweh can? None of them. The contrast and contest between Yahweh and idols is the whole subject even from Isa. 48:1, and the idols are specifically mentioned in Isa. 48:5: “I [Yahweh] showed them [future things] to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my carved image and my cast image have commanded them.’”

**“He whom Yahweh loves will perform his pleasure on Babylon.”** The text does not tell us who the “He” is in this verse, but the context and scope of Scripture tells us, and it is Cyrus the Persian.[[48]](#footnote-15521) Some scholars say it is Judah itself, but Judah does not fulfill the prophecy here in Isa. 48:14-16.

Cyrus arose from a lesser status to conquer many kingdoms and rule over the largest kingdom the world had ever seen by that time. But he did not achieve that status on his own. God raised up Cyrus, called him by name, gave him a title of honor, gave him holy spirit, and empowered him (Isa. 45:1-6). We know God gave Cyrus the gift of holy spirit to empower him because that is the meaning of God’s calling Cyrus “His anointed” in Isaiah 45:1, and that is confirmed in Isaiah 48:16.

Isaiah 45:1-6 tells us that God raised up Cyrus for the sake of Israel and Judah. So it was that Cyrus did “perform God’s pleasure on Babylon” by conquering it, and it was Cyrus who, in the first year after that conquest allowed the people of Israel to return to Judah from the Babylonian Captivity (cf. Ezra 1:1-8).

Isa 48:15

**“he will make his way prosperous.”** God called Cyrus, empowered him, and give him His gift of holy spirit, and Cyrus then walked out his calling and made his way successful. People are co-workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9), and when we walk according to God’s direction and empowerment, we are successful. Cyrus fulfilled the call God called him to, and was successful.

Isa 48:16

**“Now the Lord Yahweh has sent me.”** The subject abruptly shifts here, which is not uncommon, and Cyrus answers God’s call. Isaiah himself had answered God’s call earlier (Isa. 6:8), and now Cyrus does. God sent Cyrus and Cyrus both obeyed the call and acknowledged the God of Israel (Ezra 1:2).

**“and *also sent* His spirit.”** It was well-known that for prophets and kings to be successful they had to be empowered by God’s spirit, His gift of holy spirit. That was why God put his spirit upon the elders that were to rule Israel (Num. 11:17-29), why after David sinned he prayed that God would not take His holy spirit away (Ps. 51:11), and why Elisha asked for a double portion of God’s spirit to be upon him (2 Kings 2:9), and indeed, the Bible records that Elisha did almost twice as many miracles as Elijah. Cyrus, in typical fashion of one who does not take credit not due him, acknowledges here in Isaiah 48:16 that God sent him, but will not take full credit for his success but says that God also gave His spirit to Cyrus, which was the source of much of his success.

[For more on the difference between Holy Spirit, a name for God, and “holy spirit” (often just called “the spirit”) the gift of God, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**Isaiah Chapter 49**

Isa 49:1

**“Listen to me.”** In this second “Servant Song,” the song opens with the Servant (the Messiah) himself speaking. Isaiah contains four sections that the scholars refer to as “Servant Songs,” in which Isaiah portrays the Messiah as the Servant of Yahweh. The Songs are Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. The start of the first Servant Song, Isaiah 42:1, is quoted in Matthew 12:18 and positively identifies the “servant” as the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 49, the Servant is mentioned in Isaiah 49:3, 5, and 49:7.

[For more information on the Servant Songs, see commentary on Isa. 52:13. This “Servant Song” further clarifies the mission and ministry of the Messiah.]

**“islands.”** From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea), so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the parts west of Israel as islands. Thus, the word “islands,” referring to Gentile lands, is juxtaposed with “from afar,” because the Gentile lands were far away. However, the Hebrew word can refer to the coastlands, and so the text would include islands and coastlands of the Gentile lands.

**“Yahweh called me...from the belly of my mother.”** That the “Servant” was called from the womb and from the belly of his mother is very good evidence that the Servant is the Messiah, a man, and not, as some scholars propose, the nation of Israel. Jeremiah was also called from the womb (Jer. 1:5; and see Gal. 1:15). Interestingly, the mother of the Messiah is mentioned in several prophecies of the Messiah (e.g., Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:10; Isa. 7:14; Mic. 5:2). This makes perfect sense when we realize that to be a genuine descendant of David, the Messiah had to have at least one parent who was an actual descendant of David.

Isa 49:2

**“he has made...he hid...he has made.”** Throughout the Servant Song prophecies, God uses the idiom of the prophetic perfect to portray what He will do in the future. God “will make” the mouth of the Messiah like a sharp sword.

**my mouth like a sharp sword.”** The mouth of the Messiah will be like a sword in many ways. It will kill the wicked (Isa. 11:4; cf. Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21), but it will also speak the words that will divide people into those who believe and those who do not, which will be the basis of judgment on Judgment Day.

**“in the shadow of his hand he hid me.”** That God kept His Messiah “in the shadow of His hand” has overtones of protection, but also reflects the fact that the Messiah’s mission and ministry were hidden.

**“he has made me a polished arrow.”** The “polished arrow” is a Semitic parallelism to “sharp sword” with a different nuance, It still has the implication of the Messiah killing the wicked, but adds ideas such as speed and that his enemies far away will not escape his justice. The Hebrew word translated as “polished” can also mean “sharpened” (cf. CEB, CJB, CSB, NAB, NASB2020, NET, NJB, NLT), but it is a different Hebrew word for “sharp” than “sharp” sword, so perhaps “polished” is better here.

**“in his quiver he hid me away.”** We could see the normal use of quiver here, that the arrows were protected from being broken or damaged, and they were close at hand and ready to be used when needed. But it also seems to refer to the “hidden” nature of the Messiah’s mission. For one thing, it was not at all clear before Christ came that he would come twice; once as the sinless lamb who takes away the sin of the world, and then a second time as conqueror and king. Even Jesus’ disciples did not understand his mission as the sacrificial lamb until after his death and resurrection (cf. Matt. 16:22; Luke 18:34; John 16:17-18; Luke 24:45).

Isa 49:3

**“Israel.”** The scholars are divided on who “Israel” is in this context, but it is clear that it is the Servant, the Messiah. But in what sense is it being used? Edward Young refutes one of the more common ideas, i.e., that “Israel” is both the Servant and the nation of Israel. Young writes: “In what sense, however, is the word *Israel* to be understood? In the light of the fact that the servant is the speaker himself, and his address to God is so individualistic in nature, it is clear that the reference is not to the nation. The people of Israel, personified, are not the speaker. This appears also from the close connection between *servant* and *I shall glorify myself*. It is the servant character of Israel that brings glory to God. To be God’s servant is the highest privilege, and it is in performing the works of the servant that God is glorified. This could hardly apply to the recalcitrant, sinful nation, for this nation was unable to be the true Israel. All that the prophet writes concerning Israel makes clear that they could not be what the servant of the Lord should be. When the servant accomplishes his task, God is glorified; the empirical Israel could not accomplish that task; hence, whatever be the force of *Israel* here, it is not merely a designation of the nation.”

In this context, “Israel” is the Messiah, but not just the Messiah as a person, but rather the Messiah understood as the head of the congregation of believers, much in the way that the New Testament speaks of “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

**“in whom I will be glorified.”** The “I” in this context is Yahweh (Isa. 49:1). When Jesus did mighty works, people glorified God (e.g., Matt. 9:8). Furthermore, any time Jesus was glorified, it was so he could give glory back to the Father (John 17:1).

Isa 49:4

**“I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing.”** Jesus was totally human and had human feelings. Despite all that he taught and did, the majority of the people rejected him and his teachings. Although in the narrative in the Four Gospels we only get glimpses of Jesus’ deep feelings, we see it in prophecies such as here in Isaiah 49:4 and Isa. 53:3. Jesus cried and lamented when he entered Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). Jesus became troubled over what he would have to go through at the end of his life (John 12:27).

**“yet surely the justice due to me is with Yahweh.”** Like true believers everywhere, Jesus knew that there was little justice in this fallen world, but believers can look forward to a future when the righteous will be rewarded. Jesus endured the cross with the hope of the joy that had been set before him in the Scriptures, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36), no doubt by personal revelation from God, and perhaps in revelation communicated to him by angels (cf. Matt. 4:11).

Isa 49:5

**“formed me from the womb to be his servant.”** The Messiah was “formed” by Yahweh to be the servant who could accomplish the mission God sent him on. The Hebrew text is clear that the Messiah was formed “from” (not “in”) the womb. Of course the forming of the Messiah as a man who could carry out the mission God sent him on started in the womb, but it continued on after Jesus was born. As Hebrews says, “he learned obedience by the things that he suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

Isaiah 49:5 is one of the verses that disproves the Trinity. If Jesus was God in the flesh, he did not need to be “formed” by Yahweh to be a servant, instead he “incarnated” as the perfect God-man. But if the Messiah is a fully human being, then through his development in the womb and on into life, he had to be “formed” by Yahweh to be the sinless Savior. The traditional explanation of Isaiah 49:5 is that the “human part” of Jesus was formed, but that is not what the Bible says, It says Yahweh “formed me,” that is “me,” the Messiah, not part of the Messiah.

[For more on Jesus Christ not being God in the flesh, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“to bring back Jacob to him, and so that Israel would be gathered to him.”** Part of the mission that God sent the Messiah on was to bring back Jacob and gather Israel to God. That did not happen during Jesus’ first coming, but in his Second Coming, after Jesus conquers the earth, Physical Israel will be reestablished, and the tribes of Israel will be regathered (see commentary on Jer. 32:37).

We also know that, as seen in light of the New Testament, this prophecy applies to all the believers, who are the “seed of Abraham” (Gal. 3:29), and this is foretold in the next verse, Isaiah 49:6.

Isa 49:6

**“It is too small a thing.”** It is a thing to be thankful to God for, that He wanted “all people” to be saved through the Messiah, and not just Israel.

**“my salvation to the end of the earth.”** The salvation and everlasting life given by the Messiah was not just for the Jews, even though many of them thought that it was. The Old Testament has a number of verses that spoke of Gentiles being included in the Messianic Kingdom, which meant they were granted everlasting life (Ps. 102:15; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-7; 60:3; 66:18-21; Ezek. 39:21, 27; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Also, New Testament verses such as Galatians 3:29 confirm that all believers are the “seed of Abraham.”

[For more information on the Messiah being a blessing to the Gentiles, the nations, see commentary on Isa. 42:6.]

Isa 49:7

**“Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel, its Holy One.”** Yahweh has many different names, and two of them are placed together in this verse: “the Redeemer of Israel” and “Holy One.” A few English versions (the KJV included) put an “and” between “the Redeemer of Israel” and “its Holy One,” but that is not necessary and causes confusion because then it could seem that there are two beings talking, the Redeemer and also the “Holy One.” But only Yahweh is speaking.

The Holy One of Israel is another name for Yahweh, as we see here in Isaiah 49:7 and in many other verses (cf. 2 Kings 19:22; Job 6:10; Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Prov. 9:10, 30:3; Isa. 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6). Some English versions read “his Holy One,” and that is okay if we understand that Israel is being referred to as a male (sometimes Israel is referred to as a female). However, since Hebrew does not have a neuter gender, and thus things are either male or female, it seems to make better sense to translate the nation of Israel as an “it” and not a “him.”

**“to one whose soul is despised.”** This translation closely agrees with K. Baltzer.[[49]](#footnote-15183) The one being spoken to is the Messiah, as the context and history make clear. The English translations differ, in part because the Hebrew word *nephesh* can be “soul” or “life,” or it can refer to the self and thus be “him” or an equivalent. Although the English versions differ as to exactly how to translate the Hebrew text, they all catch the main idea: this person is despised, and we learn from the scope of Scripture that he is despised by worldly and ungodly people. The Servant Song in Isaiah 53 repeated that the Messiah would be despised (Isa. 53:3).

**“the nation.”** The use of the singular here indicates that this is not “the nations,” that is, the Gentiles, but the nation of Israel itself, and indeed, the majority of the Jews rejected Christ. At Jesus’ trial before Pilate, the people and their leaders shouted, “Crucify him” (Matt. 27:20-23).

**“a servant of rulers.”** Although he was the Son of God and therefore higher than any earthly ruler, the Messiah came to serve, not be served, and by his life and death made everlasting life available to everyone (cf. Matt. 28:20; Phil. 2:7).

**“bowed down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body and face to the earth. The word translated “bowed down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship,” and it is translated “worship” in some English versions.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Isa 49:8

**“I will answer...I will help.”** The Hebrew is written in the past tense (“I have answered...I have helped”) and is the prophetic perfect idiom, referring to something in the future as if it were in the past to show that the event will happen. In this context, there are several indications that the prophetic perfect idiom is being used. One is that the subject of the sentence, who is the Messiah, has not even been born yet, so to say that God has answered and has helped him has to be idiomatic. Another is that part of the sentence “and I will preserve you” is in the imperfect tense, here referring to the future. This is a verse where translating the Hebrew literally as a past tense action only confuses the reader because English does not have a clear prophetic perfect idiom.

Reading Isaiah 49:8-23 as a unit shows that it is referring to the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ rules over the earth from his throne in Jerusalem. The majority of the statements in Isaiah 49:8-23 describe things that will occur in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ rules the earth, although some of the things mentioned in the verses, such as we read in Isaiah 49:14, occur before Christ rules on earth. The key to understanding prophecies such as this one in Isaiah 49:8-23 (cf. Isa. 19:18-25) is realizing that the prophecy is not in chronological order, and so the reader must understand from many other places in the Bible what the Millennial Kingdom will be like, as well as understand the times the prophet is living in and also what the Tribulation and Armageddon, which precede the Millennial Kingdom, will be like. Then the reader can use that information to sort out what pieces of the prophecy refer to events before the Millennial Kingdom and which events have never occurred but will occur in the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“as a covenant.”** The phrase “as a covenant” (or “for a covenant”) is general and thus has a number of meanings relating to the death of Christ and the covenants. Just as a covenant binds parties together, so also Jesus Christ would bind people to God. Also, the fact that Jesus Christ was given “as a covenant” indicates that in him the Old Covenant was fulfilled and the New Covenant ratified. Jesus was both the sacrifice that was required because the Old Covenant was broken (as per Matt. 26:28) and the blood sacrifice that ratified the New Covenant (as per Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; cf. Exod. 24:8). Thus, the word “covenant” is a metonymy for a “covenant sacrifice;” both the sacrifice that had to be offered when a covenant was broken, and the blood sacrifice that ratified and began a covenant.

**“the people.”** Israel was God’s chosen people, so they are often referred to as “the people,” as they are here. We can see that from the scope of Scripture and especially the parallel verse in Isaiah 42:6 where “the people” (Israel) are contrasted with “the nations,” i.e., the Gentiles, the other nations besides Israel. Paul also contrasted “the People” with the Gentiles (Acts 26:23).

The Gentiles were blessed in Christ (Ps. 102:15; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-7; 60:3; 66:18-21; Ezek. 39:21, 27; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22), but God made His covenant with Israel, the “Old Covenant” (Exod. 24), and He also promised to make a new covenant with them, and Jesus Christ was the covenant sacrifice, as he openly stated at the Last Supper when he said the blood of the covenant was his blood.

Isa 49:9

**“on all bare heights will be their pasture.”** In the future, the bare heights will become rich pastureland.

Isa 49:10

**“They will not hunger or thirst, nor will the heat or sun strike them.”** The Millennial Kingdom, when Christ rules the earth, will be a wonderful place. There will be no starvation or even hunger and the water will be abundant and safe to drink. The word “heat” may refer to the dry heat of the sun, or some scholars think it refers to the scorching dry desert wind. In any case, the picture Isaiah is painting of the Millennial Kingdom is that it will be an amazingly wonderful place. Unlike the conditions that Isaiah’s audience was used to, which were very hot summer days and a hot dry wind that annually came off the eastern desert, Israel would have a wonderfully mild climate.

[For more on the wonderful Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 49:11

**“I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways will be raised up.”** In the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth the mountains and valleys will be much more level, and travel will be easier.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 49:12

**“some...some...some.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “these,” but that is unclear in English since ordinarily “these” refers to people or things that have been specifically delineated in the context.

Isa 49:23

**“bow down.”** The word translated “bow down,” *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Isa 49:24

**“tyrant.”** This is the reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Syriac, and Vulgate. Although the accepted Masoretic Hebrew text has “righteous man,” that does not fit the context (cf. Isa. 49:25).

Isa 49:25

**“the mighty man.”** The word “mighty” is singular in Hebrew, so it refers to the “mighty man.”

**Isaiah Chapter 50**

Isa 50:1

**“This is what Yahweh says.”** In Isaiah 50, the first three verses (Isa. 50:1-3), and the last two (Isa. 50:10-11), are Yahweh speaking. The middle verses, Isaiah 50:4-9, are the Messiah speaking.

Isaiah 50:1-3 most naturally goes with the subject of end of Isaiah 49, in which the people of Israel had been taken captive and taken away from their land by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:6, 18-20). God divorced Israel because of her sins and sent her away from Israel to Assyria. Isaiah 50 would be easier to understand if the chapter started with the words of God’s Servant, starting in Isaiah 50:4.

**“the bill of your mother’s divorce.”** In Hebrew, the Israelites are literally “the children [or “sons”] of Israel.” But in this context, the “mother” of the Israelites is the Israelites themselves, and they have sinned egregiously and God is divorcing them. God is apparently referring to their “mother” as a figurative way to distance the people from the so-called “mother” so that they can look at their sin more objectively.

**“divorce.”** Israel sinned so egregiously that God divorced her (cf. Jer. 3:8). God hates divorce, and never intended it, but even God recognized that there are times when a marriage is unworkable, and that happened between Him and Israel. He divorced her for sins, especially “adultery” with pagan gods and goddesses.

**“sent away.”** In this context, being “sent away” is a synonym for “divorce.”

Isa 50:2

**“Why was no one there when I came?”** God is making the point that He had come to Israel and called to Israel to bring them back to Himself, but Israel would not repent and return to Him.

Isa 50:3

**“sackcloth.”** A rough cloth made of goathair, which was generally black in the biblical world. So to be covered in sackcloth was to be covered in black.

Isa 50:4

**“The Lord Yahweh has given me.”** The “me” in this verse is the Servant of God, who is identified in Isaiah 50:10.

In Isaiah 50:1-3, God is speaking, as He is at the end of Isaiah 49. But Isaiah 50:4-9 is the Messiah speaking. The “me” in Isaiah 50:4 is the Messiah, and Isaiah 50:4-11 is the third of the four “Servant Songs” in Isaiah. Isaiah contains four sections that the scholars refer to as “Servant Songs,” in which Isaiah portrays the Messiah as the Servant of Yahweh. The Songs are Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12.

The start of the first Servant Song, Isaiah 42:1, is quoted in Matthew 12:18 and positively identifies the “servant” as the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 50, the Servant is mentioned in Isaiah 50:10.

[For more information on the Servant Songs, see commentary on Isa. 52:13.]

**“the tongue of those who are taught.”** Someone who is taught is someone who is a disciple to the teacher. In Isaiah 50:4, the “Servant” portrays himself as a disciple, a learner.

Isa 50:5

**“I was not rebellious.”** The Messiah was directed to do many things that he likely did not want to do, especially dying on the cross, but he always did the will of God, his Father (cf. John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29).

Isa 50:6

**“my cheeks to those who plucked out my beard.”** Slapping someone on the face, pulling out someone’s beard, or spitting on them, were all terrible insults in the biblical culture. For more on slapping the face, see commentary on Luke 6:29. The Hebrew text reads, “the beard,” but often the Greek or Hebrew use “the” when the referent is clear and we would say “my” for clarity, and that is the case here. No one else’s beard is the subject.

Although there is no specific record in the Four Gospels of anyone doing that to Jesus, we can certainly imagine that it occurred, especially given the culture of the time.

Isa 50:7

**“I will not be disgraced.”** The Hebrew is the prophetic perfect idiom (Lit. the past tense: “I have not been disgraced”).

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Isa 50:8

**“declares me righteous.”** The Hebrew word is *tsadaq* (#06663 צָדַק ), and here in Isaiah 50:8 it is in the hiphil aspect of the verb, and can mean to give one justice or bring justice to someone; to acknowledge or declare that someone is right, righteous, or not guilty; to pronounce someone, or treat someone, as not guilty (innocent); or to help someone gain his rights. Here in Isaiah 50:8, in the context of the coming Messiah who was accused of being a criminal, *tsadaq* carries a couple of those meanings. God would declare (and prove) that Jesus was righteous by raising him from the dead, and He would help Jesus gain his rights by making him Lord and giving him all authority in heaven and on earth. It is impossible to bring all that into English without writing a greatly expanded translation, and so most English translations choose either “justify” or “vindicate” as a translation. The REV went with “declares me righteous” because the person who is declared righteous in the sight of God will then get whatever they rightly deserve as well, and it connects the righteous Messiah with all the other righteous people in the Bible.

The vocabulary being used in the text portrays a court scene, with an accuser, an adversary, but the judge hears the case and declares that the accused is righteous.

**“Let us stand up together.”** In other words, “Let’s see each other face to face and before the Judge. No hiding here!

Isa 50:9

**“the moth will eat them up.”** The moth eating up a garment is a picture of destruction. Those who condemn the Messiah will be destroyed.

It is worth noting that this verse is one that portrays destruction for the unsaved sinner, not eternal torment. Garments that are eaten by moths are gone, totally destroyed. This is an accurate picture of the unsaved. They will not “be tormented in hell forever,” they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up; annihilated.

[For more on the annihilation of the unsaved, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“declare me to be guilty.”** The courtroom scene in Isaiah 50:8 continues in Isaiah 50:9. The person who declares that God’s Messiah is guilty of sin will himself be condemned to death.

Isa 50:10

**“Who among you fears Yahweh.”** Isaiah 50:1-3 was God speaking, Isaiah 50:4-9 was the Messiah speaking, and now Isaiah 50:10-11 is Yahweh speaking again. Some scholars end the Servant Song with Isaiah 50:9, and say that Isaiah 50:10 starts another section. The text does not clearly indicate when the song ends.

Isaiah 50:10 is translated a little differently in the English versions, primarily because it involves an ellipsis. A quite literal translation of the Hebrew text would be: “Who among you fears Yahweh, hearing the voice of his servant” with “hearing” having the meaning of obeying. If we complete the ellipsis, the reading becomes something like, “Who among you fears Yahweh? Who obeys the voice of His Servant?” The two lines together make the point that the person who fears Yahweh will obey the voice of His Servant, the Messiah.

Isa 50:11

**“Walk in the light of your fire.”** This is irony; sarcasm, to get people to think about their actions. The desire of God, of course, is that people would not walk in the light of their own fire. The prophets sometimes used irony to get people to think about what they were doing, as long as it was clear from the context and subject matter that the prophet’s words were indeed irony. For example, Amos said, “Go to Bethel, and sin” (Amos 4:4). Bethel had become a center of the worship of pagan gods, but Amos was certainly not encouraging people to go and sin. He, like Isaiah, was using irony. Amos and Isaiah were contemporaries.

**“lie down in torment.”** The phrase “lie down” here likely refers to dying, as it does in several places in the Bible (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12; Job 7:21; 20:11; 21:26; Isa. 43:17). The unsaved are thrown into the Lake of Fire and die there (Rev. 20:11-15).

For more on the annihilation of the wicked, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 51**

Isa 51:1

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God (see commentary on Matt. 5:6).

Isa 51:3

**“For Yahweh will comfort Zion...and will make her wilderness like Eden.”** Isaiah 51:3-6 is about the future and includes both the Millennial Kingdom and information about the Everlasting Kingdom (Isa. 51:6). The Hebrew is written in the past tense: “For Yahweh has comforted Zion; he has comforted all her waste places and has made her wilderness like Eden.” Writing about a future event as if it were past is idiomatic, and is the prophetic perfect idiom (see commentary on Eph. 2:6).

“Eden” is a transliteration of the Hebrew word. A good translation of “the Garden of Eden” is “the Garden of Delight” (see commentary on Gen. 2:15).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“the Garden of Yahweh.”** The “Garden of Yahweh” is another term for the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 13:10). Isaiah 51:3 uses the common practice of Semitic parallelism, emphasizing a point by referring to it in two different ways: “like Eden...like the Garden of Yahweh.”

Isa 51:5

**“my salvation is on the way.”** This could even be translated as “my salvation will go forth.” The literal Hebrew is “my salvation has gone forth,” but it is the prophetic perfect idiom (see commentary on Eph. 2:6). The salvation is coming in the future. John Oswalt correctly states, “This is another ‘prophetic perfect’ (see above on v. 3), whereby the prophet sees the reality of what God is going to do so clearly that in his mind it is already done. …Isaiah sees God’s plan with startling clarity. The fulfillment of God’s righteousness, his faithfulness to his own nature and promises that culminate in human salvation, is now all in place as never before. …Yet for all this, it would be many long years before the promises here would come to fruition.”[[50]](#footnote-31233)

**“islands.”** In this context, the word “islands” refers to the Gentile lands in contrast to Israel, the homeland of the Jews. From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the countries west of Israel as islands.

**“in my strength they will trust.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic, literally, “on my arm they will trust,” where “arm” is put for the strength of the person.

Isa 51:6

**“will die in the same way.”** People will age and die as they always have. Some scholars have suggested that the Masoretic Hebrew text is corrupt and the verse should read like it does in the CSB: “die like gnats” (or “flies” or “lice,” which are other suggested readings). But there is no need to amend the text, and John Oswalt in his book on Isaiah, defends the Masoretic text very well.[[51]](#footnote-11949)

**“but my salvation will be forever.”** Those people who accept God’s salvation will live forever.

Isa 51:8

**“For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool.”** Unbelievers will eventually die and then, at the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, they will be judged and then thrown into the Lake of Fire and annihilated. Just as there is nothing left of a garment that has been consumed by moths, and nothing left of a wool garment that has been eaten by worms, eventually people who are thrown into the Lake of Fire will be totally burned up and there will be nothing left of them.

[For more on dead people are dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead Are Dead.” For more on the two resurrections, the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on unsaved people being annihilated in the Lake of Fire and not being in torment forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more about Gehenna, see commentary on Matt. 5:22. For information on the punishment of the wicked being in proportion to the wrong they have done, see commentary on Rom. 2:5. For information on how to be saved and live forever instead of dying unsaved and being annihilated, see Rom. 10:8-10 and see commentary on Rom. 10:9.]

Isa 51:9

**“Awake, awake, put on strength, arm of Yahweh!”** The people of Israel call out to Yahweh to apply His strength and help them “like in the days of old.” But in fact, in Isaiah 52:1, God uses the same language to tell the people to awake: “Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion!” God is always ready to help, but the people must trust in God and be obedient to Him.

**“cut Rahab in pieces.”** In this context, “Rahab” is another name for Egypt (cf. Isa. 30:7; Ps. 87:4). However, to understand more fully why Egypt would be called “Rahab,” and why Pharaoh is likely referred to as the “sea monster,” we need to know that Isaiah is referring to well-known myths about struggles between gods to make his point that Yahweh is the Most High God. John Oswalt writes: As is known from Ugaritic studies*, the twisting monster* is a figure in the struggles of Baal with the god of the sea, Yam, as is “Leviathan,” which is equated with the monster in Isa. 27:1. Given these facts, and the evidence that the myth of the struggle of the gods of the sea monster was known in one form or another all over the ancient Near East, one has reason to believe that Isaiah is here, as in 27:1, utilizing this acquaintance among the people for his own purposes. …there is an appeal here neither to some current Hebrew myth nor to some original one, now dead. Rather, just as a contemporary poet might allude to the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, utilizing imagery familiar to his hearers, but that is hardly part of their belief system, so Isaiah uses the imagery of the well-known stories of creation to make his point. It was not Baal or Marduk or Ashur who had any claim to being the creator—it was the Lord alone.”[[52]](#footnote-28066)

Oswalt also points out that “sea monster” (the Hebrew can also mean “dragon”) referred to Pharaoh, as Ezekiel 29:3 says, and the modern Arabic word for crocodile is derived from the word “Pharaoh.” So while “Rahab” and “sea monster” refer to Egypt and Pharaoh, the terminology used also points to the ancient spiritual struggle between God and the gods as to who is the Creator and real ruler of the universe.

Psalm 74:13-14, using much the same terminology, says, “You [Yahweh] broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters. You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces.” The “sea monsters in the waters” and “Leviathan” refer to gods in the known mythology (and the kernel of truth that mythology contains) about the ancient war between God and the “gods” (who were God’s created spirit beings like Satan), over God’s created order and who will rule creation. The “waters” and “sea” became symbolic of the chaos that surrounded these gods, and the Bible states that God had victory over them.

These verses point out that God is the Most High God and He showed Himself to be the most powerful one in ancient battles, both spiritual and physical, and He has not changed so He can deliver His people in the time the prophet Isaiah was writing about.

[For more verses connected to the concept of ancient waters of chaos and the monsters (“gods”) who lived in those waters, see Ps. 29:3, 10; 93:3-4; 74:13-14; 77:16-20; and 89:9-10]

Isa 51:17

**“the cup that causes people to stagger.”** The Hebrew is “the cup of staggering,” that is, a cup that causes the people who drink it to stagger.

**Isaiah Chapter 52**

Isa 52:1

**“Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion!”** Here in Isaiah 52:1, Yahweh calls to the people to be strong and faithful and obey Him, then He can help them and He will bring deliverance to them. In Isaiah 51:9, the people of Israel used almost the same words to ask for God’s help: “Awake, awake, put on strength, arm of Yahweh! Awake, like in the days of old.” But God has always been ready to help His people if they will be trusting and obedient.

Isa 52:2

**“Shake yourself from the dust!”** Sitting in dust was a sign of lowliness and humiliation, so getting up from the dust and shaking off the dust was a sign of being elevated in position, being exalted. It was also a sign of poverty (1 Sam. 2:8; Ps. 113:7). God raised King Jehu of Israel from the dust to the throne (1 Kings 16:2). The reverse is going from an exalted state to a humiliated and shameful state (see Isa. 47:1). A person can have their glory be put down in the dust (Ps. 7:5; cf. Ps. 44:25).

**“Arise! Sit down.”** What seems like a contradiction to us (get up and sit down) makes perfect sense according to biblical custom. Jerusalem had been like a captive, but now it was to be free. It could arise and get up off the ground, but more than that, it was to reign, and so it was to “sit down.” In the biblical culture, rulers sat while others stood. See commentary on Isaiah 14:13, “sit.”

**“O captive.”** The Hebrew word is a noun, not an adjective, so it is an apposition to “Daughter Zion.” So here in Isaiah 52:2, Jerusalem is called by three “names”: Jerusalem, captive, and Daughter Zion.

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

Isa 52:3

**“You.”** The “you” is plural. The people of Israel sold themselves by their evil behavior.

**“sold yourselves.”** The Hebrew verb *makar* (#04376 מָכַר) is masculine plural and in the niphal aspect, and thus can either mean “to be sold” or “to sell oneself” (cf. Lev. 25:47). Although most English versions have “were sold,” and most commentaries say that God sold His people to the enemy, the fact that God could not protect Israel was their own doing. God loves Israel and would never sell them to an enemy unless He was somehow forced to, and He was. The truth is that Israel, through their defiance and disobedience to God, forfeited His care and protection and “sold themselves” into the hand of the enemy. Because Israel sold themselves, God was forced to let them go into the hands of the enemy. There are times when the text does say that God “sold” Israel (Isa. 50:1), but the deeper understanding, set forth here in Isaiah 52:3, is that Israel always first sold themselves by abandoning God.

Versions such as *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible* and commentaries such as the *Commentary on Isaiah* by Harry Bultema translate the verb as a reflexive, that Israel “sold themselves.” Also, the verb “sell” is plural in the Hebrew text, but for God to be the seller we would expect the verb to be singular. Thus, the grammar in the verse also supports that it was the people, “you,” which is plural in the Hebrew text, who sold themselves.

It should be both a comfort and an exhortation for believers to know that the people of Israel sold themselves to the enemy and that God would never do that on His own, as if He were somehow fickle or vindictive. Believers have the comfort of knowing God will always be with them, but have the exhortation of knowing that if we abandon God, then we limit His protection over us. The believer’s best blessing and protection is by obeying God.

**“without money you will be redeemed.”** God knew that Israel’s, indeed, the whole world’s, redemption would not be by a payment of money but by a payment of innocent blood, and furthermore, on the basis of that payment the Messiah could conquer the earth and reign over it in righteousness.

[For more on Jesus Christ’s coming kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 52:4

**“the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.”** Israel had done nothing to Assyria such that they should have attacked and conquered Israel.

Isa 52:5

**“what am I to do here.”** The Hebrew is an idiom: “What to me here?” The idiom likely means, “What am I to do here,” or “What should I do here?” God had helped Israel in Egypt, and from the Assyrians, but what is He to do now? Even if the phrase is translated as, “What do I have here,” He still has a situation that He needs to deal with.

**“my people are taken away for nothing.”** Israel was taken captive, and God got nothing for it. It was their own fault and the consequence they got for rebelling against God, and God gets nothing in return...except that His name is treated with contempt. The Assyrian conquest of Israel is in 2 Kings 17:6-23.

**“and my name is treated with contempt all day long.”** Sadly, God’s name (and thus what He stood for; his commandments and regulations) were treated with contempt by both the Assyrian captors and by the Israelites themselves.

Isa 52:6

**“Therefore.”** The people of Israel are in captivity and have contempt for God. But that state will not continue. When God finally delivers Israel, they will know His name and that it is Yahweh who moves and delivers them.

**“my people will know my name.”** They don’t “know” it now, in their captivity, in the real sense; at this time they believe a lie about God. But God will come, represented by His Messiah, and then people will know—really and experientially know—God. The word “know” means more than just an intellectual knowledge, it refers to a deep, personal, and experiential knowing.

**“they will know in that Day that I am he who speaks.”** The use of “that Day” to refer to the Day of the Lord (the Day of his conquest; the day of His judgment) is common in Isaiah (e.g., Isa. 2:11, 17, 20; 4:1, 2; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 12:1, 4; 17:7; 19:18, 19, 21, 23, 24; 24:21; 25:9; etc.).

Isa 52:7

**“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news.”** After captivity and humiliation, the feet of the one who brings good news and proclaims the reign of God on earth through His Messiah can be considered “beautiful.” Isaiah 52:7 is quoted in Romans 10:15.

**“Your God reigns!”** The Hebrew text is literally in the past tense: “Your God has reigned,” and God certainly had manifested his power in the past, but the sentence does have present implications, as the versions and REV reads. The Septuagint has the sentence in the future, “Your God will reign.” God’s reign will be in full effect when His Messiah reigns on earth as king and subjects the earth to his righteous rule. People speak of God reigning now, but his reign is not in full effect as long as the Devil is the god of this age and the ruler of the world (see commentary on Luke 4:6). Right now there are many enemies that are not under Christ’s feet, i.e., in subjection to him (1 Cor. 15:25-28).

Isa 52:8

**“together they shout for joy.”** When the watchmen see the messenger coming and hear his announcement of good news, they shout for joy.

**“for right before their eyes.”** The Hebrew text is literally, “eye in eye,” which is an idiom for “right before your eyes.” The only other occurrence of “eye to eye” in the Bible is Numbers 14:14. This idiom is “used to speak of the incontrovertible evidence of God’s presence.”[[53]](#footnote-10422)

When Yahweh returns to Zion, which He does by sending the Messiah, His Son, those who are watching in Jerusalem will shout for joy.

Isa 52:9

**“Yahweh will comfort his people, he will redeem Jerusalem.”** The two verbs, “comfort” and “redeem” are in the past tense in the Hebrew text and are an example of the prophetic perfect idiom, in which the actual event is future but the verb is in the past tense. The verbs are in the past tense because God gives the prophet Isaiah a picture of the future and Isaiah is describing that future—but in the future, these events have already occurred, so Isaiah describes them as past events.

However, since most English readers are not familiar with the prophetic perfect idiom, it is helpful to write the English Bible as future events because they are in fact in the future. So writing in the future tense in English describes the reality of the situation (cf. GW, GNT, NOG, and JPS). The prophetic perfect idiom is used a lot in Isaiah 52 and 53 (cf. Isa. 53:5). Another way to tell that these verbs are the prophetic perfect idiom is that they are in the context of future tense verbs (cf. Isa. 52:12).

Isa 52:10

**“will bare...will see.”** This is the prophetic perfect idiom (see commentary on Isa. 52:9). There are other English versions that translate the prophetic perfect as a future event (cf. EXB, GW, GNT, ICB, NOG, NCV, NIV).

Isa 52:11

**“Depart, depart, go out from there.”** The location where the people are to depart from is unstated, and scholars have many suggestions, including Babylon, although that is after Isaiah’s time. It seems Edward Young[[54]](#footnote-17976) could well be correct that Zion itself is an oppressor. Godly people should leave it in a more spiritual sense, leave the unclean and return to God.

Isa 52:12

**“rear guard.”** The Hebrew word is being used as a technical military term in this context.

Isa 52:13

**“my servant.”** In this context, the “servant” is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The first place in Isaiah where the Messiah is introduced as the servant of Yahweh is Isaiah 42:1-7.

Isaiah contains four sections that scholars refer to as “Servant Songs,” in which Isaiah portrays the Messiah as the Servant of Yahweh. Most scholars agree to when these Servant Songs start, but they do not have as good agreement as to when they stop; what is the last verse of the Song. For the purposes of the REV, the Songs are Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12. The start of the first Servant Song, Isaiah 42:1, is quoted in Matthew 12:18 and positively identifies the “servant” as the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The disciples understood that Jesus Christ was the servant of God and called him that (see commentary on Acts 3:13; cf. Acts 4:27).

Two of the four Servant Songs—the first and the last—are Yahweh speaking (Isa. 42:1-7, and 52:13-53:12), while two—the middle two—are the Servant speaking (Isa. 49:1-7, and 50:4-11). Reading the Servant Songs and applying them to Jesus Christ tells us—and they told Jesus—a lot about Jesus Christ, about his mission, what he would accomplish, and what would happen to him.

**“will act wisely. He will be high and lifted up and exalted.”** The verbs in Isa. 52:13 are an example of the prophetic perfect idiom, in which the actual event is future but the verb is in the past tense because God is giving the prophet Isaiah a picture of the future and Isaiah is describing that future (see commentary on Isa. 52:9). This section of Isaiah was written about 700 years before Jesus Christ was born.

Ephesians 1:20-22 says that after his resurrection, Jesus was high and lifted up far above every ruler, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, thus fulfilling this prophecy.

Isa 52:14

**“Just as many were appalled at you.”** This line is the only time in the Servant Song of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 that the servant, the Messiah, was addressed directly. The rest of the Servant Song is about him but not “to” him. That Yahweh would directly address the Servant, His Son, in this prophetic utterance and forewarn him of what is coming is an act of love and tenderness. In light of what Christ sacrificed as the Suffering Servant, it is sad that so many people will be appalled (“shudder, shocked, dismayed, disappointed”) at him when they should be overwhelmed with thankfulness. We can well understand that if Christ had not been forwarned about this he could well have been very confused about people’s reaction to him and his ministry.

Some scholars suggest changing the “you” to “him.” The Syriac version reads “him,” and some English versions read “him” (e.g. CJB, JPS, NAB, NJB, NIV, NLT, NRSV), but “you” is likely the original reading, with Yahweh addressing the Servant directly. The Masoretic Hebrew text reads “you,” and so do the Dead Sea Scrolls. Also, we can see why scribes would change “you” to him,” but there does not seem to be any reason they would change “him” to “you.” John Oswalt adds, “this kind of inconsistency in pronoun reference is not untypical of the Hebrew prophets.”[[55]](#footnote-27602)

**“were appalled.”** This is the prophetic perfect, the past tense being put for a future event. In his vision, the prophet Isaiah is seeing these events as having already happened, so he writes about them in the past tense. Sometimes it is appropriate to translate the Hebrew prophetic perfect as a future tense verb in English for clarity (for more information on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6).

**“marred beyond human resemblance.”** Jesus was beaten, whipped, and also tortured in other ways both by the Jews and the Romans. By the time he died on the cross, his body was deeply “marred” by his captors and covered with wounds, bruises, swelling, and blood, so that he did not look like a normal human being. The King James Version’s reading, “more than any man” does not capture the meaning and is misleading. Many humans have been in explosions, wrecks, or disasters that cut off limbs and disfigured them in ways that did not occur to Jesus, so Jesus was not disfigured “more than” anyone else, he was marred badly enough he did not resemble a healthy human being.

Isa 52:15

**“sprinkle.”** When the text says that Jesus will “sprinkle many nations” it refers to, and foretells of, Jesus’ priestly function as the ultimate High Priest and his making people clean before God. The term “sprinkle” takes us back to the Mosaic Law, for different things were “sprinkled” to make them ritually clean. For example, Aaron and his sons were sprinkled with oil and blood to make them clean in the eyes of God (Exod. 29:21; Lev. 8:30); oil was sprinkled on the altar and vessels to make them holy (Lev. 8:11); people with skin diseases were sprinkled when they were cleansed (Lev. 14:7); blood was sprinkled on the ark of the covenant on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:14-15), and there are many other examples as well. Jesus shed his blood, and symbolically he will sprinkle many nations—those who believe—and make them clean and acceptable in the eyes of God.

**“Kings will shut their mouths on account of him.”** Kings and people of prominence and power who had denigrated the Messiah and had contempt for him will stand in awe and fear when they see him for who he really is. Kings “will shut” their mouths, which is an idiom for being speechless (e.g., Job. 29:9; 40:4; Ps. 107:42; Mic. 8:16), and they “will see” and “will understand.” Those verbs are in the past tense and are the prophetic perfect idiom (see commentary on Isa. 52:9; and see commentary on Eph. 2:6).

**“for they will see what had not been told to them.”** This is one of the verses that reveals that the mission and ministry of the Messiah, and his two separate comings, are in the Old Testament but are in veiled terms. So the people did not understand Jesus when he came; certainly, Peter did not (Matt. 16:22), and his family thought he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21), and the crowds were confused about him (John 7:12). However, after the resurrection and ascension of the Messiah those things began to be clear (Luke 24:45), and they will be even more clear when everyone “sees” the Messiah at his Second Coming (Rev. 1:7), and then people will truly understand what Jesus accomplished and the way he accomplished it, and that he had died in place of people so they could have everlasting life.

**Isaiah Chapter 53**

Isa 53:1

**“Who has believed...”** This message about the coming Messiah, which takes all of Isaiah 53, starts in Isaiah 52:13. Isaiah 52:13 starts the section about the “servant” of God, who is the Messiah. The whole prophecy would have been clearer if Isaiah 52:13 had begun a new chapter and been Isaiah 53:1. As it is, Isaiah 53:1 starts several verses into the prophecy of the suffering savior, our Messiah. The prophecy was not understood by the Jews, who in general did not think that their Messiah would die. Note how Peter reacted when Jesus said he would die: “Be it far from you, Lord! This will never, ever, happen to you” (Matt. 16:22). Another thing that can be confusing is that some of the verbs in the prophecy are in the imperfect tense and can be translated as a future, while a great many of the verbs are in the perfect tense and normally refer to an event in the past. However, in this case, the perfect tense verbs are examples of the “prophetic perfect,” which is an idiom in which a future event is spoken of in the past tense to emphasize the certainty of the prophecy. In many of these cases, in the vision that God gives to the prophet, He takes the prophet into the future such that the prophet sees the prophecy as happening or as having happened. If we read Isaiah 52:13-53:12 straight through, we can see the possible confusion caused by the text switching the tenses of the verbs back and forth between past, present, and future, even though the entire prophecy is about Jesus Christ, whose birth was still some 700 years in the future.

[For more about the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**Who has believed what we have heard?** Isaiah 53:1 is directly connected to Isaiah 52:13-15, and the translation “what we have heard” comes from that connection. The NET text note expresses it well: “The first half of v. 1 is traditionally translated, “Who has believed our report?” or “Who has believed our message?” as if the group speaking is lamenting that no one will believe what they have to say. But that doesn’t seem to be the point in this context. Here the group speaking does not cast itself in the role of a preacher or evangelist. No, they are repentant sinners, who finally see the light. The phrase “our report” can mean (1) the report which we deliver, or (2) the report which was delivered to us. The latter fits better here, where the report is most naturally taken as the announcement that has just been made in 52:13-15.”

The people speaking in Isaiah 53:1 are the people who have just heard the prophecy in Isaiah 52:13-15, and they rightly ask “who has believed it,” because so many people reject that the Suffering Servant will be God’s exalted ruler.

“Isaiah 52:13-53:12.” 13behold my servant acts wisely; he is high, and has been lifted up and has been exalted. 14Just as many were appalled at you (his appearance was marred beyond human resemblance, and his form beyond that of human beings), 15so now he will sprinkle many nations. Kings shut their mouths on account of him, for they saw what had not been told to them, and what they had not heard they have understood. **(53:1)**: Who has believed our message? To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed? 2For he grows up before him as a young plant and as a root out of dry ground. He has no good looks or majesty. When we see him, there is no beauty that we should be attracted to him. 3He is despised and rejected by people; a man of suffering, and one who knew sickness. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he is despised and we did not respect him. 4Surely he has borne our sickness and has carried our suffering, yet we have considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. 5But he was pierced for our transgressions; was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6We all like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way, but Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7He was oppressed, yet he suffered willingly, and he did not open his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter and as a sheep that before its shearers is mute, so he did not open his mouth. 8Due to oppression and *unjust* judgment he was taken away and who among his generation considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living and afflicted because of the disobedience of my people? 9They made his grave with the wicked, but with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence and no deceit was in his mouth. 10Yet it pleased Yahweh to crush him. He has caused him to suffer. If his soul makes *itself* a guilt offering, he will see his seed. He will prolong his days, and the pleasure of Yahweh will prosper in his hand.11After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light and be satisfied. My righteous servant will justify many by the knowledge of himself, and he will bear their iniquities. 12Therefore I will give him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and he permitted himself to be counted among the transgressors. Yet he himself carried the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

**“To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?”** The “arm,” or “strength” of Yahweh is openly revealed in the Messiah, but who sees it and believes it? Some people do, most do not.

Isa 53:2

**“For he grows up before him.”** The Messiah grew up “before God,” in the sight of God. Jesus Christ did not have a plush upbringing, and did nothing to attract the attention of the world around him, but he was always walking before God.

**“young plant.”** Although Jesus was the Son of God, he did not burst on the scene as a mighty tree, impressive and imposing. Instead, he showed up as a young plant. Jesus did not seem special, but was vulnerable, like a young plant struggling for life.

**“a root.”** Here “root” refers to a descendant, as it does in Isaiah 11:1 and 11:10, and in Revelation 5:5 and 22:16. Jesus Christ grew up before God as a “root” a descendant of David, and “he” [the Messiah, Jesus Christ] grows up before “him” [God] as a servant [Isa. 52:13. And also as a descendant of David and of the promises made to David of an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam. 7:13, 16)].

[For more information on “root” referring to “descendant,” see commentary on Isa. 11:10 and Rev. 22:16.]

**“out of dry ground.”** The Mediterranean climate in Israel meant that there was no rain from May to October, and the ground became hard and dry, and plants struggled to survive. There is no evidence that Jesus got “miraculous special help” growing up, but struggled like everyone else. He learned obedience from the things he suffered (Heb. 5:8).

Isa 53:3

**“He is despised.”** Some people did despise Jesus, they actively hated him, while others looked on him with disdain and did not value his life or work.

**“man.”** The Hebrew is *’iysh* (#0376 אִישׁ) man. The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be a man, and this is one of those places, although there is no extant written record that the ancient Jews considered Isaiah 53:3 to be a Messianic prophecy, even though Christians today know it is, and verses like Matthew 8:17 confirm that it is. The Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah foretold that he would be a human being. He would be the offspring of Eve (Gen. 3:15); a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18), a descendant of Judah (Gen. 49:10); a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15); a son of David (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Isa. 11:1); a king ruling under Yahweh (Ps. 110:1); and a ruler from among the people of Israel (Jer. 30:21).

[For more information about Jesus being fully human, and not God or a God-man, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“one who knew sickness.”** Isaiah 53:3 says that Jesus got sick, just like other people do. The Hebrew word translated “knew” is the common Hebrew word for “know,” which is *yada* (#03045 ידע), which occurs over 900 times in the Old Testament and often refers to knowing something by experiencing it. Jesus “knew” sickness in many different ways. One was that he ministered to the sick and infirm. Another was that he bore our sicknesses on the cross, and even did so in a certain sense when he healed the sick, and this is the likely emphasis in this passage, as Matthew 8:17 says.

However, a normal reading of the Hebrew text lets us know that Jesus also got sick himself. Although he did not have a sin nature, he was a fully human being who lived in a fallen world that was full of things that made people sick, especially in that culture and time when the average lifespan of a male was in the late thirties. Thus, it is extremely unlikely that he lived for some 30 years without once getting sick. Sickness and food poisoning were common, which is why Jesus healed the sick in the places where he traveled. The primary meaning of the Hebrew phrase “know sickness” is to know sickness by experience, thus, “get sick.” Also, the primary meaning of the Hebrew word translated as “sickness,” *chali* (#02483 חֲלִי) is “sickness” (*HALOT*, e.g. Deut. 7:15; 28:61; 2 Kings 8:8; 13:14; 17:17; 2 Chron. 16:12; 21:15; Eccl. 5:17; Isa. 1:5; 38:9; Hos. 5:13). The meaning is not primarily “grief” or “pain” as many English versions have, but “sickness,” and a number of English versions read “sickness” or “illness” (e.g., CEB, CJB, CSB, LSV, NASB2020, NET, YLT).

Sadly, the orthodox Chuch can be stuck on the perfection of Jesus Christ instead of recognizing that he was human and experienced what other humans regularly experience, and thus some translations distance themselves from the fact that Isaiah says the Messiah “knew sickness,” i.e., he got sick. A good example of that is the CSB which reads that Jesus “knew what sickness was.” Jesus did know what sickness was, partially by getting sick himself. The translation in the Word Biblical Commentary is very good: “a man of pains who was visited by sickness.”[[56]](#footnote-10227)

Also, the Bible says that Jesus was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin, and sickness is one of the huge temptations common to humankind. Chronic sickness and pain lead to many kinds of sin, such as denying God, cursing, stealing, lying, and even suicide.

In large part due to the doctrine of the Trinity and the belief that Jesus is “God the Son,” there has been teaching that Jesus could not get sick, but that is not what the Bible says. Jesus did get sick, as Isaiah says.

Isa 53:4

**“Surely he has borne our sickness and has carried our suffering.”** This phrase in Isaiah 53:4 is quoted in Matthew 8:17. Here in Isaiah 53:4 the idea of substitutionary sacrifice is introduced. Here we see Jesus carrying our “sicknesses,” which in its broader application includes sin, for sin is not the natural God-created state of humankind, but an imputed sickness that leads to death.

**“yet we have considered him plagued.”** What an irony. We were the ones who were sick and afflicted, but when he carried our sicknesses and afflictions WE considered HIM sick!

Isa 53:5

**“he was pierced.”** This is an amazing prophecy, given over 700 years before the Messiah was actually “pierced,” and the people of Christ’s time did not see it coming because they did not apply Isaiah 53 to their Messiah. Christians today universally see that Isaiah 53 is speaking about the Messiah, but the Jews back then did not, and they still do not apply Isaiah 53 to the Messiah.

The Hebrew word translated “pierced” can also mean “wounded,” but since it is followed by the word “crushed,” the translation “pierced,” or even “pierced through” (NASB) makes more sense than “wounded.” Also, although “pierced” and “crushed” do not necessarily mean “killed,” the Servant’s death is strongly implied. But in other verses in Isaiah 53 the death of the Servant is clearly stated. In Isaiah 53:7, he is like a lamb led to the slaughter, which would not be a fitting parallel if the Servant was not killed. In Isaiah 53:8 the Servant was “cut off,” and in Isaiah 53:9 he died and had a grave. In Isaiah 53:11 the Servant sees the light, an expression of coming to life again, which speaks of his resurrection from the dead. Also, because of him, many people will be made righteous. Today we acquire righteousness in the sight of God by trusting in Christ and what he accomplished (Rom. 3:21-31). Then, Isaiah 53:12 closes this section about the Servant, the Messiah, by saying that the Servant poured out his soul to death.

**“peace.”** The Hebrew “*shalom*” means more than just peace, it means well-being, wholeness. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ gave us peace with God, and wholeness and well-being.

**“by his wounds we are healed.”** This is quoted in 1 Peter 2:24. This is an example of the prophetic perfect. The people of Isaiah’s time could not be healed by Christ’s wounds 700 years before Christ was born and was wounded, and we are not guaranteed healing in this life now. Isaiah is using the prophetic perfect idiom. The idiom is that something is stated as having happened when actually it will happen in the future, but it is stated as already being a reality because it is guaranteed to happen in the future. People who read the Hebrew text see this idiom over and over in the Old Testament, but people who do not understand the Semitic prophetic perfect idiom can be misled into thinking that what is stated is already a spiritual reality. It is not; it is a promise for a future reality. In the future, when Christ comes, every believer will be healed.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Isa 53:6

**“but Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** All of us humans have behaved like sheep when it comes to God and the things of God. Sheep are self-concerned, singleminded (on themselves and their next meal or drink of water), shortsighted (thinking of only here and now), and notoriously unaware of their surroundings and situation. They are easily scared, scatter when frightened, and unlike most animals have no natural means of defense (they do not have sharp teeth or claws, and they don’t run fast). They focus on themselves and so go astray, and are not in a position to carry their own iniquities, much less the iniquities of someone else. Because of that, Yahweh had to put on the Messiah the iniquity of all of God’s “sheep,” His people. We might expect that last phrase of the verse to be something like, “and so Yahweh had to lay on him the iniquity of us all.”

Isa 53:7

**“yet he suffered willingly.”** The Hebrew verb is in the Niphal tense, which can be either passive or reflexive, and here the reflexive seems to fit the context of Scripture best. We know that Jesus suffered willingly. He suffered, or was afflicted, but he did so willingly (cf. John 10:17-18; John 12:27; Matt. 26:53-54; Luke 22:42). This is reflected in a number of translations. The CJB and TNK read, “he was submissive.” The Douay-Rheims reads, “He was offered because it was his own will.” The RV, JPS, and Rotherham read, “he humbled himself” The NAB reads, “he submitted.” Keil and Delitzsch reads “he suffered willingly.”[[57]](#footnote-25924) John Oswalt reads, “it was he who was humbling himself.”[[58]](#footnote-22903) The point is that Jesus knew that he was to die for the sins of humankind, and he did so willingly. Furthermore, in part because of that fact, he did not open his mouth and complain about it.

**“he did not open his mouth.”** Jesus was not a loudmouth, nor did he brashly proclaim who he was and what he would do to unrepentant sinners. As Isaiah 42:2, the first Servant Song, says of him: “He will not cry out or lift up his voice, or cause it to be heard in the street.”

Isa 53:8

**“Due to oppression and *unjust* judgment he was taken away.”** The idea of the phrase, especially when connected to the last phrases of the verse, seems to be: “due to oppression and unjust judgment [at the hands of the Jews and the Romans], he [the Messiah] was taken away [to his death]” and “cut off out of the land of the living” [i.e., he died].

Some scholars see the Hebrew being a causal statement, more like, “Because of oppression and unjust judgment he was taken away” to death. In any case, most conservative scholars agree that the “judgment” refers to unjust judgment, and that Jesus was taken away from that to his death. Understanding the verse that way certainly agrees with the last days of Jesus, when he was arrested by the authorities, tortured and mocked by Annas, Caiaphas, Herod Antipas, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers, and then taken to be crucified.

The opening of the verse is more literally “from.” That has caused some scholars to say the verse means that it was “from the restraint of judgment” that he was taken away, i.e., that righteous judgment was held back so he was arrested and killed, but that interpretation has not found much support among the English versions although the reading is possible. Many versions say “by,” and that makes good sense, however, the phrase “due to” seems clearer (cf. CEB).

**“and who among his generation considered.”** The Hebrew of this phrase has been debated, but most conservative scholars have sided with a translation that is like what is in the REV. People are absorbed with their own lives, and how many people give serious thought about what Jesus had to do to accomplish salvation for them?

**“he was cut off from the land of the living.”** A poetic way of saying that the Servant was killed. The wording of the verse makes it clear that he did not die of disease or old age, but was killed.

**“because of the disobedience of my people?”** Jesus had to die due to the sin of the people of the world since Adam sinned. The people of God had been practicing animal sacrifice for thousands of years, and the Mosaic Law specifically referred to one of the sacrifices as a “sin offering” (e.g., Lev. 6:24-30 and Numbers 15:22-31). Nevertheless, it seems clear that very few of the Jews, and few if any of the Gentiles, understood that the animal sacrifice was a type of which the sacrifice of Christ was the antitype. Animal sacrifice for sin taught that something innocent could die and thus atone for the sin of someone who was guilty, but almost no one got that lesson. One person who seems to have understood was John the Baptist, who said of Jesus, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Isaiah 53:8 quite clearly sets forth that Jesus Christ died because of the sin of the people, and 2 Corinthians 5:21 refers to Jesus Christ as a “sin offering” (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:21).

Isa 53:9

**“His grave was assigned with the wicked.”** Both the Jews and Romans held evil people and criminals in great contempt and did not bury them with any glory or fanfare. Dying as a criminal, Jesus would ordinarily have simply been buried in the ground where other criminals were buried or even been put in a mass grave. He was only saved from that by Joseph of Arimathea, who asked Pilate for his body.

**“and with a rich man at his death.”** Reading the Hebrew text before Christ’s crucifixion and burial took place would have been a puzzle. How could the Servant “be assigned a grave with the wicked and with a rich man?” This would have been one more of the many conundrums in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. But we learn from the New Testament that because Jesus died as a criminal, the Roman custom would have been to assign him to a grave with the wicked, but because Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus, Pilate gave the body of Jesus to Joseph, and in that act, Pilate assigned Jesus a grave with a rich man. The phrase “a rich man” comes from the fact that the word “rich” is a substantive, an adjective, in this case describing a man. There is no “the” in the Hebrew text. Jesus was assigned a grave with a rich man by Pilate.

**“because he had done no violence.”** Jesus ended up in the grave of a rich man because Pontius Pilate gave Jesus’ body to Joseph. There is little doubt that Pilate knew Jesus was innocent (Luke 23:4; John 18:38; 19:4, 6). His wife had told him the same thing (Matt. 27:19). Also, Pilate knew the Jews only wanted to get rid of Jesus because they were envious (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10). So Jesus ended up in the grave of a rich man “because” he was innocent, “he had done no violence.”

Isa 53:10

**“Yet it was the will of Yahweh.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “it was the pleasure of Yahweh….and the pleasure of Yahweh will succeed in his hand.” But the use of the word “pleasure” twice in Isaiah 53:10 is idiomatic, and it gives the wrong impression to the reader if it is translated literally. God did not have pleasure in the death of His Son. He does not even have pleasure in the death of sinners. God says in Ezekiel 33:11, “‘As I live,’ says Lord Yahweh, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but *desire* that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?’” So if God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, how could he possibly have pleasure in the death of His Son? He didn’t! But He knew, and Jesus knew, that the only way to make everlasting life available for those people who accept God and His Messiah was for Jesus to die in place of sinners. Jesus knew that also, and so willingly gave up his life (John 3:16; Eph. 5:2). John Watts wrote on the idiom that uses “pleasure,” and says, “‘willed’ (lit. ‘was pleased’), is a term used of sovereigns. Their pleasure is equivalent to their will in a matter.”[[59]](#footnote-28585)

Israel (indeed, every human) sinned, and the only way for God to atone for that sin and grant everlasting life to people was for someone—a human without blemish (i.e., sin)—to die in place of the other humans, because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Thus, it pleased God to be able to have His Son die so that everyone else could live. As Romans 5:18 says, “So then just as one transgression [Adam’s sin] resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one act of righteousness [Christ’s atoning death] resulted in righteousness that brings life for all people.”

**“If his soul makes”** This is an idiom for “if he makes,” using the word “soul” to represent the person himself. The Hebrew verb form can be second-person masculine, “you,” or third-person feminine (“she” or “it” referring back to the word “soul” which is feminine, but which refers to the soul of the Messiah). In this context, it makes more sense that it is the servant (the Messiah) who is offering himself in obedience to God, and will be rewarded for it. So the idea is, “If his soul makes [itself] a guilt offering….”

**“a guilt offering.”** The Hebrew word is used of the “guilt offering” (some versions translate it “trespass offering”) in Leviticus 7 and 14, and in other places in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ was offered as a sacrifice that paid for our guilt and sin. This is also stated in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians 5:21. Israel sinned in so many ways that many of the sacrifices in the Mosaic Law applied to the death of Christ. Here in Isaiah 53:10, God specifically mentions the “guilt offering,” emphasizing the great deprivation of God and other humans when people live in sin. For example, God was deprived of much of Israel’s service to Him due to their sin, so a guilt offering was certainly appropriate.

“The guilt offering was a specialized kind of sin offering required in cases when someone had been denied his rightful due. …The offerer’s part in the ritual was probably identical to that of the sin offering…As with the sin offering, the animal went to the priest as food. …The guilt offering was commended in instances when another party had suffered some deprivation. [For example, in the case of a leper] the LORD was deprived of the service due from the infected person so long as his disease kept him outside the pale of the ritually clean society (Lev. 14:12-18).”[[60]](#footnote-27700)

**“and the will of Yahweh will succeed in his hand.”** The phrase is somewhat idiomatic, and it means that the good things that Yahweh desires will succeed and prosper “in the hand” (i.e., “under the authority and control”) of the Messiah. The will (lit. the “pleasure”) of Yahweh will succeed. In this context, the Hebrew word, which is more literally “pleasure,” can also be translated as “will,” “purpose,” or even “plan.”

Isa 53:11

**“After the anguish of his soul.”** The word “soul” is idiomatic and refers to Jesus himself. Thus, the phrase means, “after his anguish.” This verse is another window into the thoughts and experiences of Jesus Christ. He experienced life like any other human would experience it. He suffered anguish at what he saw around him and what he himself experienced.

**“he will see the light.”** This translation follows the scroll of Isaiah found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint. There is good reason to believe the Masoretic text was miscopied at this point. The promise of Isaiah is that the Messiah will die, but will be raised from the dead, he will “see the light” (NIV: “see the light of life”). Jesus clearly rested on this promise when he gave up his life on the cross.

**“and be satisfied.”** When he came to life after his crucifixion and death, Jesus was satisfied with what he had accomplished.

**“righteous servant...make many righteous.”** The root words for “righteous” are the same. The first, “righteous” servant, is an adjective, while the second, “make many righteous” is a verb. Through belief in the death and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, we who were unrighteous in the sight of God were declared to be righteous just as he is righteous.

**“and he will bear their iniquities.”** This is restating in different words what had already been stated in Isaiah 53:4 and 53:6. Jesus carried our sins all the way to the cross, and when he died they were paid for. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and Jesus died in our place (Rom 5:6).

Isa 53:12

**“I will give him a portion with the great.”** The Hebrew can also be translated as it is in the Christian Standard Bible: “I will give Him the many as a portion, and He will receive the mighty as spoil.” In that case, the Hebrew word “great” is translated “many,” which it can be. Although this translation is possible, the Hebrew grammar does make it slightly less likely than the way most versions translate the verse, and it does not seem to fit the context or scope of Scripture as well. This seems to be a case where just because a phrase can be translated a certain way does not mean it should be translated that way.

When Christ comes again and conquers the earth and sets up his Millennial Kingdom and rules over the earth, saved people who were “great” believers and lived righteous lives will get land on earth (e.g., Isa. 36:16; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10), while saved people who live consistently sinful lives will not (1 Cor. 3:14-17). For example, Daniel was a righteous man, and the angel promised him an inheritance (Dan. 12:13). Ezekiel 48:21-22 describes the land in the Millennial Kingdom that will be given to “the ruler,” Jesus Christ. It will be in the middle of the territory that is currently Israel.

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“because he.”** Isaiah 53 closes with the reasons that God will give the Messiah a portion with the great. He “poured out his soul to death, and permitted himself to be counted among the transgressors.”

**“he permitted himself to be counted among the transgressors.”** The Hebrew text can be translated as a simple passive, that Jesus “was counted among the transgressors,” or it can be translated as a reflexive, that Jesus “permitted himself to be counted among the transgressors.” Although both statements would be true, the reflexive translation fits the context better, as this phrase is giving a reason that God exalted Jesus. This is not just a historical fact that he “was” counted with the transgressors, but the noble act that he allowed himself to be counted with them. Jesus voluntarily gave up his life for the sins of humankind.

**“Yet he himself carried the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.”** The Messiah, Jesus Christ, carried the sin of many so that they would not have to carry them. The last phrase, “and made intercession for the transgressors” is both tied to the phrase about carrying the sins of many and yet is also separate from it. Jesus Christ made intercession for sinners by carrying their sins, but he went beyond that and continues to make intercession to the Father for the sinners (Heb. 7:25). This is Jesus acting in his role as High Priest, and standing between the sinner and God.

Isaiah 53:12 concludes the Servant Song that started with Isaiah 52:13.

[For more on the Servant Songs, see commentary on Isa. 42:1. For more on Isaiah 53 being connected with Isaiah 52, see commentary on Isa. 53:1.]

**Isaiah Chapter 54**

Isa 54:1

**“Sing, O barren one.”** Isaiah 54:1-17 speaks of the future restoration and glory of Israel, which will occur in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ rules the earth. That fact becomes clear as one reads the chapter and fits it with the prophecies of the restoration of Israel in the future kingdom of Christ on earth.

Isaiah 54 and 55 cannot be properly understood unless their connection to Isaiah 53 is understood. John Oswalt correctly sees that the “barren one” referred to in Isaiah 54:1 is not just Zion, but everyone, all sinners, because all sinners benefit from the redemptive work of Christ. Oswalt writes: “It is probably not coincidental while the term “Zion” occurs eight times between Isaiah 49:14 and 52:8, it does not occur again until Isaiah 59:20. This suggests that the prophet is consciously resisting the limitation of the implications of God’s forgiving grace that would result from the use of that term [“Zion”] here. To be sure, the imagery is that which has been previously applied to Zion. But the absence of that term here when it has been used frequently immediately before suggests that, because of the work of the servant, all who feel barren and dejected and alone as a result of their sins have a reason to shout for joy now. All, Gentiles and Jews alike, may become blessed people of God.”[[61]](#footnote-13253)

Isaiah 54 and 55 follow directly from the end of Isaiah 53, which closes with Christ bearing people’s sins. Without a way to atone for sin and be brought into God’s graces and salvation, all people are “barren,” powerless to save themselves from death, and even powerless to guarantee themselves a wonderful life on earth while they are still alive here. The “barrenness” mentioned in Isaiah 54:1 is not meant to be literal, but is a metaphor for powerlessness and shame. The barren woman cannot make herself pregnant, and nor can she escape the shame of her condition (barrenness in the biblical world was supposedly a sign of rejection by God), and similarly, the “barren” human is powerless to escape the defeat and shame of his or her fallen condition. But now, due to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, all people should break forth into singing for joy.

From the flow of Isaiah, we learn that this is Zion (Jerusalem) representing Israel, along with all other sinners as well. Christ purchased redemption for all people, and all who believe in him will inherit everlasting life.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 54:2

**“Enlarge the place of your tent.”** Isaiah 54:2 is more directly referring to Zion representing Israel than Isaiah 54:1 was, which was more inclusive of all people. Although Zion is not mentioned by name, the imagery fits her. Whereas she was once barren, she will grow to include all the different peoples that Christ came to save, and so she will need to enlarge her tent to include them, as described here in Isaiah 54:2.

Isa 54:3

**“For you will spread out to the right hand and to the left.”** That Israel would expand to the right and left makes perfect sense in the Old Testament culture. In the biblical world, the map orientation was to the east, the direction of the rising sun. So, for example, the Tabernacle and Temple faced east. Similarly, in Genesis 14:15, the Hebrew text says that Abraham fought a battle on “the left hand of Damascus,” which meant the north side of Damascus. In contrast to the eastern orientation of the biblical world, most maps in the Western World are oriented to the north. Since Isaiah 54 is about Israel, it makes perfect sense that Israel would be foretold to spread out “to the right hand,” i.e., the south, and “to the left” i.e., to the north. Israel can grow toward the south, toward Egypt, and to the north, toward Lebanon and Syria, but it cannot spread out to the west because of the Mediterranean Sea, and nor can it grow to the east because of the Jordan River and the land God gave to the nations east of the Jordan.

**“your seed will possess the nations.”** When Jesus comes back and rules the earth from Jerusalem in his Millennial Kingdom, Israel will grow and will possess the nations and resettle desolate and uninhabited cities (cf. Ps. 2:8; Isa. 11:14; 14:2).

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, see Appendix 5, “The Future Kingdom of Christ on Earth.”]

Isa 54:4

**“for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.”** The “youth” and “widowhood” are not specifically described here, but many scholars suggest that the shame of the youth referred to the bondage in Egypt, and that is likely. The “widowhood” could well refer to the time of Isaiah when the people of God abandoned Him so He abandoned them and said, “you are not my people and I will not be your *God*” (Hos. 1:9). Some liberal scholars suggest that the “widowhood” refers to the Babylonian Captivity, but that cannot be the case because Isaiah wrote long before the Babylonian Captivity.

Isaiah 54:4 refers to the future Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth. The prophecy here in Isaiah 54:4 has not been fulfilled yet, and it was spoken over 2,700 years ago. In the Millennial Kingdom, the glory of Israel will be restored.

[For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 54:5

**“For your Maker is your husband.”** God is the Maker of Israel, the one who made her.

**“your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israe**l**.”** This statement echoes the first and says the same thing but in a different way and with added information. God redeems people through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ, but the plan of redemption originated in Him.

**“he will be called the God of all the earth.”** In today’s world, the peoples of the earth have many gods, but that will not be the case in Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom when Jesus rules the earth. At that time, God will not only be the God of all the earth, but He will also be recognized as such (e.g., Isa. 54:5; Zech. 14:9; cf. Ps. 72:19).

[For more information on the Millennial Kingdom, “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 54:6

**“even a wife of youth when she is rejected.”** This does not refer to a young wife who is rejected (as the NET), but rather to a woman who became a wife in her youth but was later rejected. That is what happened to Israel. Her marriage covenant with God occurred on Mount Sinai on the way out of Egypt (Exod. 24), but she turned to idols and was rejected by God many years later. Nevertheless, in the future, God will call her back to Himself.

Isa 54:7

**“but with great mercies I will gather you.”** When Christ comes back and conquers the earth and rules it from Jerusalem, God will gather the Israelites from all over the earth to the land of Israel. Many prophecies speak about this (see commentary on Jer. 32:37. Also see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”).

Isa 54:11

**“lapis lazuli.”** The deep blue color of lapis lazuli—a stone that was well-known in the ancient Near East--was often associated with God and his throne (Exod. 24:10; Job. 28:16; Isa. 54:11; Ezek. 1:26; 10:1). The majority English translation, “sapphire,” is almost certainly wrong (see commentary on Ezek. 1:26).

Isa 54:13

**“All your children will be taught by Yahweh.”** The verses in Isaiah 54 refer to the Millennial Kingdom of Christ—the future kingdom of Christ on earth (see commentary on Isa. 54:1.

In the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth from Jerusalem, the people will be taught by Yahweh and His representatives on earth. Isaiah 2:3 says that “the law will go forth out from Zion, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem” (cf. Micah 4:2). Furthermore, the knowledge of God will be widespread. Isaiah 11:9 says, “the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh like the waters cover the sea” (cf. Hab. 2:14).

The prophecy that “all your children will be taught by Yahweh” was referenced by Jesus in John 6:45. Although the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy will happen in the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus referenced it in light of the people who hungered for truth and were thus were taught by the Father and led to Jesus Christ. The way Jesus used Isaiah was to show that God’s desire was to teach anyone who was humble and hungry for truth.

Isa 54:17

**“No weapon that is formed against you will prevail.”** This verse is concerning Israel during the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the world. At that future time, no weapon that anyone would use against Israel will succeed. Even at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, when Satan and his demons are released from their prison and attack Israel, God will defend Israel and defeat the enemy (Rev. 20:7-10). That this verse is about the Millennial Kingdom can be clearly seen from the context right in the chapter (cf. especially Isa. 54:3, 7, 11, 12, 15).

Sadly, this verse is sometimes taken out of context and used to teach that if a person “has faith” no manmade weapon will be able to harm him. That is a false teaching, and it can be shown to be false by the large number of Christians who are murdered or killed all over the earth every day. When Christians are taught that human weapons cannot kill or harm them, and they are harmed or a Christian they know is killed, it hurts their trust in God. God never promises that Christians cannot be killed or harmed by human weapons. Christians are to live wisely and do their best to stay healthy and safe.

[For more information on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 55**

Isa 55:1

**“Hey!”** The Hebrew term *hoy* (#01945,הוֹי), is an interjection that was used in different contexts and has to be translated in a way that fits with the context, and possible translations include “ah, alas, oh, woe, O, ho,” etc.). It was used in hard and difficult times such as deaths and funerals, and often is used in prophecies of judgment to catch the people’s attention. However, sometimes it was just used to get the reader to pay attention, and that seems to be the case here in Isaiah 55:1.

**“all you who are thirsty.”** This invitation is general and includes all humanity, not just Israel, as we see from the context, especially Isaiah 55:5.

Isa 55:2

**“abundance.”** The Hebrew is literally “fatness.” In ancient societies, it was uncommon to have a great variety of food, and the food people had was often meager. So a meal with things like olive oil and meat with fat was a real treat.

Isa 55:3

**“David.”** “David” refers to the future Davidic king, the Messiah. We see the Messiah called “David” in Ezek. 34:23 and 37:24 (see commentary on Ezek. 34:23). The covenant promises made to the Messiah are reliable, like the promises made to David.

Isa 55:4

**“given him.”** “given him,” that is, given the future Davidic Messiah, who we know as Jesus Christ.

Isa 55:5

**“a nation that you do not know.”** The Messianic kingdom will cover the whole earth and the Messiah will rule the whole earth, and people of every different nationality will come to him and serve him.

**Isaiah Chapter 56**

Isa 56:1

**“This is what Yahweh says.”** Isaiah 56:1-8 speaks about the Millennial Kingdom and what it takes to gain everlasting life and entrance into Christ’s kingdom on earth.

**“do righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God (see commentary on Matt. 5:6). The HCSB has, “Preserve justice and do what is right,” and that catches the meaning well.

**“for my salvation is soon to come.”** In this context, God’s coming salvation is the ultimate salvation that will come when the Messiah comes and rules the earth; the context is not about some short-lived deliverance from oppressive nations. The kingdom Christ will set up on earth will be salvation and deliverance such as the world has never seen, and it is often referred to by scholars as the “Millennial Kingdom” because it will last 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-6). There were very few bright spots in history for Judah after the Assyrian attack that destroyed Israel (722 BC) in the time of Isaiah, so no historical time of deliverance would fulfill this prophecy in Isaiah 56.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 56:2

**“Blessed is the man who does this.”** Isaiah 56:2-8 now speak of what a person has to do to be part of the Millennial Kingdom, in other words, to gain everlasting life. What had to be very encouraging to non-Jews is that they were obviously included in God’s plan of salvation (cf. Isa. 56:3, 6-7).

Isa 56:3

**“the foreigner.”** Isaiah 56:1-8 makes it clear that non-Jews who keep God’s laws will gain everlasting life and be in the kingdom of the Messiah when he rules the earth.

Isa 56:4

**“For this is what Yahweh says.”** God now speaks about the blessings that those people who have obeyed God in their life on earth will receive in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ reigns as king on the earth (Isa. 56:4-8). Thus, we see in Isaiah 56:7 that in the Millennial Kingdom, the Temple of God will be a house of prayer for all nations, not just the Jews. That is new revelation to the Jews, because up until that time, the Temple had been off limits to non-Jews, and so much so that even during the lifetime of the apostles, if a non-Jew entered into the sacred space of the Temple, he was killed (cf. Acts 21:28-31).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 56:5

**“I will give in my house and inside my walls.”** This is a promise that will be fulfilled in the Temple that will be built in the Millennial Kingdom. This promise was certainly not fulfilled in Solomon’s Temple, nor the one built under the oversight of Ezra and Nehemiah (which was later enlarged and improved by Herod the Great). Isaiah 56:1-5 are promises that the righteous people will receive everlasting life, but that promise is couched in vocabulary that points to the Millennial Kingdom and Millennial Temple.

Isa 56:7

**“my holy mountain...my house of prayer.”** When God says “my holy mountain” and “my house of prayer,” He is referring to Mount Zion where the New Jerusalem ruled by Christ will be (cf. Isa. 27:13; 57:13; 65:11), and the new Temple that will be built for the Millennial Kingdom (cf. Ezek. 40-43).

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 56:9

**“All you animals of the field, come to devour.”** The subject abruptly shifts in Isaiah 56:9 from the blessings that the righteous people will receive, which is being a part of Christ’s wonderful kingdom on earth, to the curse that the unrighteous will receive, which for some of them will be being killed and having their bodies eaten by wild animals (Rev. 19:17-18, 21). This kind of quick shift occurs often in prophecy. The righteous are blessed and the wicked are cursed. God would not have to go into the specifics of the Battle of Armageddon and its aftermath at this point in Isaiah because it was well-known that God said that people who disobeyed God would be cursed and part of that curse was that their dead bodies would be eaten by animals (Deut. 28:26).

Isa 56:10

**“His watchmen are blind.”** Isaiah 56:10 starts a new subject, which concerns the evil leaders of Judah and what happens under their rule. It would have been very helpful to the English reader if Isaiah 56:10 had been numbered as Isaiah 57:1, which would make the current Isaiah 57:1 be Isaiah 57:4. If that were done, the Bible reader would more easily see the scripture flow from the end of Isaiah 56 through the start of Isaiah 57. Then it would be much clearer as to why the righteous people were being taken from the earth and why no one seemed to notice or care (Isa. 57:1).

The close of Isaiah 56 (Isa. 56:10-12) describes the leaders of the time, and they are referred to by common words for leaders: “watchmen” and “shepherds.” But they are also referred to in a derogatory manner and called “dogs.” They did not keep watch and give warnings (they are mute dogs that cannot bark—so even as “dogs” they don’t bark and warn others); they love to sleep; they are greedy and seek their own gain instead of the welfare of others; they are shepherds who have no understanding; and they love to get drunk. In that horrific situation, the righteous people quietly disappear. Some no doubt die or are even executed after kangaroo courts and mock trials. Some likely move away, and some, sadly, seeing the prosperity of the wicked and that God does not seem to care or intervene, lose their will to stand up for the righteous laws of God and join the ranks of the evil leaders. Thus, slowly but surely, the righteous people “perish” and are “gathered to their ancestors,” a euphemism for death because dead people were often buried in the tombs of their ancestors. Yet the wicked people are so focused on themselves and their own gain that “no one takes it to heart” and there is “no one considering” what is happening or that in fact the righteous people are actually being taken from the earth and thus spared experiencing the terrible evil that God foretold would come upon the land.

**Isaiah Chapter 57**

Isa 57:1

**“The righteous person.”** Isaiah 57:1 continues the thought that was started in Isaiah 56:10 about the wicked rulers and what happens to people who are under their rule. One important thing that happens is that some of the righteous people disappear; they perish, they are taken away and gathered to their ancestors. That Isaiah 57:1 is specifically about the righteous people can be much more easily seen in the Hebrew text than the English Bible because the Hebrew text begins with “The righteous person” and ends with ‘the righteous person” (the Hebrew text ends more like: “away from evil is the righteous person”).

[For a better understanding of Isa. 57:1, see commentary on Isa. 56:10.]

**“takes it to heart.”** An idiom. The meaning is that no one understands or takes seriously the death of the righteous; in fact, it is likely that not many people even noticed.

**“the righteous person is gathered *to his ancestors*, away from the presence of the evil.”** Isaiah 57:1 makes several important points that are important to understand properly. One is that the verse is speaking about righteous people dying, but not of old age; they are dying unexpectedly. But “no one” takes this to heart (repeated twice for emphasis) likely because normally when someone died unexpectedly, a major belief in the culture was that the person must have had some kind of secret sin that deserved death. So, for example, when Job was attacked and sick, his friend Eliphaz thought he had secret sin, so he said, “Consider now: who, being innocent, has ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (Job 4:7-8). So according to the common belief of many people, if a person died unexpectedly, they were not righteous at all, but had some kind of secret sin.

Another very important thing we need to consider is that the verse never says that God took the person’s life. Often people assume that God “took” the person so they could avoid evil, but the text never says that. There are many reasons that righteous people die before calamity strikes their country or city, but simply saying in a nice way that God kills righteous people to keep them from experiencing evil is seriously problematic. One who has the power of death is the Devil (Heb. 2:14). Also, Psalm 116:15 says, “Costly in the eyes of Yahweh is the death of his faithful people.” It is when times are evil that God really needs righteous people to call others back to God. Also, many righteous people do not die unexpectedly in evil times, but have to endure them. It seems illogical that God would kill some righteous people to keep them from an evil time but let other righteous people suffer through it.

It takes great spiritual maturity to see the value and love in what God is saying here—that if a righteous person dies in evil times, they are spared much evil and heartache. Most people cling to life so tightly and are so afraid of death that they cannot imagine death could be a blessing (see commentary on Heb. 2:15). But God sees human life in a totally different way. For example, even though Jesus was in the prime of his life at about 30 years old, God (and Jesus too!) saw the value of his death in bringing blessings to others. Similarly, there are some very horrific times when from an eternal perspective it is more of a personal blessing to die than to stay alive, no matter how one happened to die.

To understand Isaiah 57:1 properly, we must understand that it is not a “universally applicable” verse, meaning that it does not apply to the death of every righteous person. After all, every ‘righteous person’ still sins sometimes, and every righteous person dies (cf. Eccl. 7:20; Heb. 9:27). Also, we all live in an evil age dominated by the Devil (see commentary on Luke 4:6 and 1 John 5:19). That is why Galatians 1:4 calls the time we live “this present evil age.” The “evil age” started when Adam and Eve sinned against God and were driven out of Eden and will end when Jesus comes back and conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom on earth (see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”). In this evil age in which humankind has lived for some 6,000 years now, righteous people are dying all the time and it is not just so they do not experience evil. If that were the case, every righteous person would die unexpectedly or seemingly before they should, which is not what is happening on earth.

So what is Isaiah 57:1 saying? There are times in history when circumstances are particularly horrific and when a righteous person dies in that circumstance, that person dies (is “gathered to their ancestors”) and is away from the presence of evil. This could be clearly seen in the time of Isaiah. Isaiah lived during the Assyrian conquest and deportation of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:6, 23), and the Assyrian devastation of Judah (2 Kings 18:14). Assyria was arguably the cruelest nation of the ancient Near East. They immortalized the way they tortured people in bass-relief rock cuts. They spiked people on upright stakes, they skinned them alive, they burned them to death, they cut off various limbs..their tortures were horrific. The Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II wrote how he treated the survivors of one of his “bloody battles”: “I caught the survivors and impaled (them) on stakes in front of their towns.”[[62]](#footnote-27893) Later, King Shalmaneser III, successor to Ashurnasirpal II wrote: “(I am) Shalmaneser, the legitimate king, the king of the world, the king without rival, the ‘Great Dragon’...who has smashed all his enemies as if (they be) earthenware, the strong man, unsparing, who shows no mercy in battle….”[[63]](#footnote-17223) Shalmaneser III wrote about another town he defeated, “Pillars of skulls I erec[ted in front of the town]. ...I slew their warriors...In the moat of the town I piled them up, I covered the wide plain with the corpses of their fighting men, I dyed the mountains with their blood like red wool.”[[64]](#footnote-29389) Some of the horrors of the Assyrians are spoken of in the Bible itself. For example, Amos 4:2 says, “The Lord Yahweh has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days will come on you that they will take you away with hooks, and the last of you with fish hooks.” Assyrian monuments show the Assyrians leading strings of captives from Israel. Each captive had a hook or fishhook through their lips or tongue, and the hook was attached to a cord which then went to the next captive and so on, such that there were lines of captives being led along by hooks on a line. Isaiah 7:20 says that there was a day coming when Yahweh would use the Assyrians to shave with a razor “the hair of the feet,” which is a euphemism for the pubic hair. Assyrians shamed and tortured their captives in many ways, and apparently one of them was shaving their pubic hair and exposing them to public nudity. It goes without saying that the women were raped and brutally abused. With the horrific cruelty of the Assyrians coming upon Israel and Judah, we can see why someone who died just before that time was spared that evil.

Another place in the Bible where we see death being spoken of as a blessing is in the horrific circumstances of the Great Tribulation. Revelation 14:13 says, “A voice from heaven said, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on,’ and the Spirit [Jesus Christ] answers ‘Yes’….” Those people who had suffered daily in the Great Tribulation were “blessed” when their pain finally ended, and they could “rest” in death and await their resurrection into a wonderful life. So it also was in the time of Isaiah when the Assyrian attacks on Israel and Judah and the extremely sinful leadership made life very difficult for believers, and slowly but surely the righteous people were taken away from the evil. God had said through Scripture and His prophets that because of the sin of the leaders and people, there would be much evil coming upon Israel and Judah, and we see from both the Bible and historical documents that it did.

The conclusion of this study is certainly not that a righteous person should consider death as an “easy out” of the pain of life, but to realistically consider that the death of a righteous person living in horrific times does in fact bring them out of pain and from the evil foretold to occur on earth, and that is what God is saying here in Isaiah 57:1.

Isa 57:2

**“He enters into peace; they rest in their beds.”** The righteous dead are here spoken of as if they are peacefully sleeping, which in a sense they are; they are sleeping the sleep of death and awaiting their resurrection to everlasting life. While “rest” (or “sleep” ) were well-known idioms for death, calling the grave a “bed” is the figure of speech hypocatastasis, a comparison by implication.

[For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2, “dragon.”]

Isa 57:4

**“sticking out your tongue.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “making your tongue long.” The custom of jeering someone by sticking out the tongue at them has been around for thousands of years.

Isa 57:5

**“inflame yourselves.”** This very graphic language pictures the sexual excitement of the people involved with pagan ritual sex, who picked cool spots underneath the trees for their rituals, and then slaughtered their children to pagan gods. This horrific sin opened the doors for God’s judgment and attacks by demons.

Isa 57:6

**“smooth ones.”** The context shows that these “smooth ones” were the smooth stones of the ravines that were used as idols or were used as part of the idol worship ceremonies.

**“how can I relent?”** The Hebrew word translated “relent” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and here it refers to God backing off of the consequences that were coming on the people for their sin. In this context, *nacham* could also be translated “change my mind.” God interacts with people and will sometimes relent or change His mind about something if people have a change of heart and action. The [NET text note](https://classic.net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Isa&chapter=57&verse=6&tab=commentaries) makes a good case for the fact that the last phrase might also possibly be translated, “Because of these things I will seek vengeance.”

[For more on God changing His mind or having regret, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

Isa 57:7

**“you have set your bed.”** It was common to set up idols on the tops of hills, and Israel’s idol worship on the mountains is described as adultery. Israel had made a covenant with God, who was to be her only love: “Thou shalt have no other gods besides me.” But she ignored the covenant and worshiped idols, in part because of the sex involved in the cultic practices. Although the heart of the people was not particularly inclined to follow God in the first place, the cultic sex of the idol worship helped drag them away, and sex still drags people away from the Lord.

Isa 57:8

**“reminder symbols.”** These reminder symbols are the reminders that the Israelites were to write on their doors, obviously in a place where they could be seen, to remind them that Yahweh was to be their only God and they were to follow Him and obey His Law. To excuse her shameful activity and not be reminded of Yahweh, Israel moved these reminders from the doorpost to behind the doors and the posts. Removing God from their eyes and hearts, they practiced their idolatry and cultic sex “away from” God: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matt. 15:8; cf. Isa. 29:13).

Some commentators and translations support the idea that these symbols are pagan symbols, but that does not seem to fit the context nearly as well as them being the reminder symbols that God commanded. The Israelites were openly practicing idolatry and cultic sex, so why would they put a symbol for it out of sight behind the door? Keil and Delitzsch write, and ably defend their conclusion: “The *zikkaron*, i.e., the declaration that Jehovah is the only God, which the Israelites were to write upon the posts of their houses, and upon the entrances (Deut. 6:9; 11:20) for a constant reminder, she had put behind the door and the post, that she might not be reminded, to her shame, of her unfaithfulness.”[[65]](#footnote-15744)

**“at their genitals.”** The Hebrew text is literally at their “hand.” Here the word “hand” is an idiom and stands for the genitals. Just as in that ancient society, a man’s hand was his strength and power, so too his ability to have children, especially sons, was strength and power (cf. Ps. 127:4-5), and on the basis of that comparison, the genitals were spoken of idiomatically as the “hand.” The firstborn son of a man was “the beginning of his strength” (Deut. 21:17). Although this is the only use of this idiom in the Bible, Keil and Delitzsch point out that “Arabic furnishes several analogies to this obscene use of the word,”[[66]](#footnote-26505) and John Oswalt[[67]](#footnote-22460) notes that “hand” is used for penis in Egyptian and appears to be in Ugaritic as well.

Isa 57:10

**“You were worn out by the length of your journey.”** The travel and efforts that Israel went to in order to worship other gods wore her out, but in the worship of those gods she found renewed strength. The translations vary on how to translate the verse, but the commentators mostly agree on the essence of what it is saying.

Isa 57:12

**“I will declare your righteousness.”** Here in Isaiah 57:12, God uses “righteousness” in an ironic way, for the “righteousness” of Judah was a sham righteousness; the people were deceiving themselves. The Day of Judgment is coming, and at that time the righteousness of every person will be revealed, and when God declares, openly reveals, the “righteousness” of Judah it will be seen for the ungodliness it really is.

Isaiah 57:12 brings out an important truth, which is that even in the midst of blatant idolatry, sexual immorality, and even child sacrifice, the people of Israel and Judah did not deny God or the existence of God, instead they deluded themselves into thinking they were pleasing God by what they were doing. So it is today. Many people today consider themselves “spiritual” and pleasing to God even though they ignore God’s commands: they do not pray to God, read His Word, live sexually pure and moral lives, or confess God’s Son, Jesus Christ, as their Lord and strive to live as he did. Instead, they look to idols and created things for help (in the form of lucky objects, crystals, amulets, astrology, etc.), and believe they will be acceptable to God on Judgment Day because they are “a good person.”

Isa 57:13

**“the one who takes refuge in me will possess the land and will inherit my holy mountain.”** This sentence speaks of the blessings that people who obey God in this life will receive in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth as king. Note that the person will “possess the land,” which is why Jesus taught that “the meek will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 57:18

**“I have seen his ways and will heal him.”** The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy of Isaiah 57:18-19 will occur in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth as king.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 58**

Isa 58:1

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Isa 58:2

**“delight to know my ways.”** This is irony. It is obvious from the context that the people sought God to get what they wanted, not sought Him to know and obey His ways. This is one of the many places where totally selfish people seek God to get things from Him without giving a thought about whether they themselves are obeying God.

**“a nation.”** God usually refers to Israel as His people or the people. But here he refers to them as a nation, a word that He regularly uses for the pagan nations. Thus, there is buried in the vocabulary God’s assessment of Israel: they were acting like pagans.

**“did what is right.”** That is, did righteous things. (See commentary on Matt. 5:6).

Isa 58:3

**“Behold.”** God starts speaking here. That would have been clearer if this sentence was the first part of verse 4 instead of the last sentence in verse 3.

Isa 58:4

**“you fast.”** The people fasted, but like the Pharisees in the time of Jesus, they did not fast out of a genuine and righteous love for God, but for their own pride and position, and then they used their religious scruples to berate and beat down everyone that did not fast like they did. That is why they fasted only “to strike others with the fist of wickedness.”

**“You cannot fast as you do this day and make your voice heard on high.”** This is an important truth that people must understand. God is not impressed with the works that people do if they do not do them with the right heart. If we want God to hear our prayers or respond to the sacrifices we make, we must do them with the purpose of humbly and honestly honoring and glorifying God. God does not listen to the prayers of the wicked or respond to the sacrifices of the wicked as if just praying or giving an offering somehow pleased God in and of itself. God does not need those things; He wants us to genuinely love Him and obey Him.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Isa 58:6

**“Isn’t this the *kind of* fast that I choose.”** In Isaiah 58 the people complained that they fasted but God did not pay attention. They complained to God, “Why have we fasted, and you do not see? Why have we afflicted our soul, and you take no knowledge?” (Isa. 58:3). It is obvious from that scripture that the people were fasting to get God’s help and were upset when God did not “see” their situation and help them. But God rebuked the people and answered that they fasted to get their own way, not seek God’s way, and they fasted without humility or repentance: “Behold, you fast only to quarrel and fight, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You cannot fast as you do this day and make your voice heard on high” (Isa. 58:4).

So we see that in Isaiah’s time, the people were not fasting to learn or do the will of God, or to repent and obey God, they were fasting as a means of forcing their will upon God. Of course that will never work, but it teaches us what is perhaps one of the greatest lessons we can learn about fasting: God said that His fasts—meaning genuine fasts—were accompanied by true humility, repentance, and godly behavior. God said, “Isn’t this the *kind of* fast that I choose: to release the bonds of wickedness…Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked *person*, that you cover him, and that you do not hide yourself from your own flesh?… Then you will call, and Yahweh will answer (Isa. 58:6-7, 9).

Sadly, sometimes the record in Isaiah 58:6-7 is used to try to show that God does not want people to abstain from food but instead just to do good works. As we can see from God’s command to fast on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31), and the many examples of godly men and women who fasted and went without food, fasting can move God and have other beneficial effects. What Isaiah 58 shows us is that going without food while still being proud, arrogant, and disobedient to God is ineffective and will not move God in any way. In that light, fasting is like prayer, the offerings and prayers of evil people are mostly ignored by God (see commentary on Amos 5:22).

Surely people fasted to get God to intervene in specific situations and to get His help, but true godly fasting was always done with humility and the idea that what the fast was supposed to help with was a godly purpose and in alignment with the will of God.

Isa 58:7

**“your own flesh.”** Meaning, other human beings. All humans are of the same flesh, descended from Adam and Eve, and we must recognize the value of every person.

Isa 58:8

**“the glory of Yahweh will be your rear guard.”** The glory of Yahweh is the brilliant cloud of light surrounding Yahweh, so if the glory of Yahweh is our rear guard, then God follows behind us guarding our backs against the enemy.

[For more on the glory of God, see commentary on Ezek. 1:28.]

Isa 58:9

**“Then you will call and Yahweh will answer.”** If a person is evil or unrepentant, God will not hear his prayers (cf. Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; James 4:3). But the prayer of a righteous person accomplishes much (James 5:16). Isaiah 58:1-8 is a powerful section of Scripture on the value of being humble and obeying God.

**“finger-pointing.”** There is nothing new under the sun. This is not a biblical custom, because finger-pointing and blaming have always been a part of human culture.

Isa 58:12

**“Some of you.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “Those from among you,” but it means “some of you.”

Isa 58:13

**“turn back your foot from *breaking* the Sabbath.”** God wanted people to refrain from traveling on the Sabbath and focus on Him, resting, and being with family (cf. Exod. 16:29; Exod. 20:11 and Deut. 5:14 say God “rested” on the Sabbath). By the time of Jesus, this travel restriction was codified in law to a distance of 2,000 cubits (slightly less than .6 mile), a “Sabbath day’s journey.”

Isa 58:14

**“feed you with the inheritance of Jacob.”** “The inheritance of Jacob” is the land of Israel, which was promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Israel. In this verse, “the inheritance of Jacob” is put by metonymy for the abundance of food produced in the land of Israel—God would feed Israel with an abundance of food produced in the land. Many verses in the Old Testament foretell a time when the land of Israel and waters there will be healed and the deserts will bloom (indeed, this will happen to the whole earth) so food and wine will be abundant for both man and animals (Isa. 25:6; 30:23-26; 32:15; 35:1-7; 41:18-20; 44:3; 51:3; Jer. 31:5, 11-14; Ezek. 47:1, 2, 7-12; Hos. 2:21-22; Joel 2:18-26; 3:18; Amos 9:13). The time this will happen will be in the Messianic Kingdom (the “Millennial Kingdom”) when Jesus rules the earth after he conquers it in the Battle of Armageddon. Many Scriptures foretell the time when Jesus will rule over the whole earth (cf. Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10; Rev. 2:8; 19:11-21), and his palace will be in Jerusalem (Ps. 2:6; 110:2; Zech. 9:9).

The abundance of food in the Messianic Kingdom is linked to the feast that God will throw for the people of the Kingdom.

[For more on the promise of the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as an inheritance, see commentary on Gen. 15:18. For more on the great feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, the Messianic Kingdom on earth, see commentary on Matt. 8:12. For more on the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 59**

Isa 59:2

**“so that he does not listen.”** God does not hear prayers simply because people pray. Everyone sins, but some people are prideful and unrepentant about their sin, and God will not listen to the prayers of those people. It is the prayer of a righteous person that accomplishes much (James 5:16). There are a number of verses that say God does not answer the prayers of the wicked (cf. Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; and James 4:3).

[For more on God not hearing the prayers of the wicked or honoring their sacrifices, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Isa 59:18

**“to the islands he will repay.”** In this context, the word “islands” refers to the Gentile lands in contrast to Israel, the homeland of the Jews. From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the countries west of Israel as being islands (although some of them were). The meaning of the verse is that God’s righteous justice will extend to all parts of the earth. It will even reach to the Gentile nations. God put it in the hearts and minds of people to know the difference between good and evil (Gen. 3:22; Rom. 2:14), and that is the basis on which He will judge all humankind.

Isa 59:19

**“So they will fear the name of Yahweh from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun.”** The phrase “from the rising of the Sun” was a way of referring to the east, so this verse foretells a time when many who come from the west and the east will fear God. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy of Isaiah 59:19 will occur in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth as king. At that time the earth will be full of the knowledge of God (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14), and there will be many people there from many countries who had been granted everlasting life based on how they had lived. Jesus taught that at the feast in the Kingdom, many would come from the north, south, east, and west and eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but the Jews who rejected God would be cast out (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28-30).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 59:21

**“that is upon you.”** This is speaking of the time of the New Covenant, when the gift of holy spirit will be in all the believers.

[For more about the holy spirit as God gave it in the Old Testament and then after the Day of Pentecost, see Word Study: “Pneuma.” For more about the gift of holy spirit being “upon” in the Old Testament and “in” after the Day of Pentecost, and the differences between holy spirit in the Old Testament and after Pentecost, see commentary on Eph. 1:13, “promised holy spirit.” For more about the holy spirit being the gift of God and not a “Person” called “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the holy spirit and New Birth, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on Christians being part of the New Covenant, see commentary on 2 Cor. 3:6, “new covenant.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 60**

Isa 60:1

**“Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of Yahweh has risen upon you.”** The whole of Isaiah 60 is about the future restoration and glory of Israel. In the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, Israel will be restored and will be the glory of the earth, in large part because Christ will rule the earth from Jerusalem and God’s Temple will be on Mount Zion. The “you” in Isaiah 60:1 is specifically Jerusalem, but then by extension all of Israel.

This opening verse, Isaiah 60:1 is the prophetic perfect idiom, speaking of a future event as if it were already a reality in order to emphasize the fact that it will happen and also, here in Isaiah, to communicate the feeling that it would happen soon (although we now know the coming of the Messiah would not be for another 700 years after Isaiah and his kingdom is still future after 2,700 years). More factually, the verse would read, “Arise, shine; for your light will come and the glory of Yahweh will rise upon you.” When God blesses Israel in the Millennial Kingdom, they are to rise and shine out the glory of Yahweh to the rest of the world.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 60:2

**“gross darkness c*overs* the peoples, but Yahweh will arise upon you.”** The time that we humans have been living in since Adam and Eve sinned is called “this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) and it is dark and evil. Furthermore, it will get very dark and dangerous as we approach the return of Christ (see commentary on Dan. 12:1). But when Christ comes back and fights the Battle of Armageddon (Isa. 63:1-6; Rev. 14:14-20; 19:11-21), he will conquer the earth and set up his kingdom on it. At that time there will be righteousness, peace, and prosperity that the world has never experienced before.

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on earth.”]

**“his glory will shine upon you.”** Taken most literally, the glory of Yahweh is the brilliant cloud of light surrounding Yahweh, so if the glory of Yahweh has shined upon people, they are in the presence of Yahweh and can see His glory. However, that the glory of Yahweh would shine on people can be more expansive and mean that Yahweh will bless the people. Also, although the Hebrew text places the verb “shine” in the past tense (qal perfect), the context indicates that it is the prophetic perfect idiom for “will shine upon you.” Also, the Hebrew word translated “shined” can also mean “risen,” in the sense that when the sun rises, it shines; and that is why some English versions say “has risen” while other versions use the word “shine.” Here in Isaiah 60:2, we see that “Yahweh” and the glory of Yahweh are used interchangeably because Yahweh is surrounded by brilliant light, which is His glory, so where the glory of Yahweh is, He is too.

[For more on the glory of God, see commentary on Ezek. 1:28. For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Isa 60:6

**“young camels.”** This is the only place in the Hebrew text where this particular Hebrew word occurs. The translation “young camels” comes from an Arabic cognate, and is likely what the Hebrew word means. The translation “dromedaries,” which occurs in some versions, is likely not correct since the dromedary is the one hump camel and is the common camel of the Middle East.

Isa 60:7

**“the house of my glory.”** “The house of my glory” is the Temple that will exist in the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, and that Temple is described in Ezekiel 40-43.

[For more on there being a Temple in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Ezek. 40:5. For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 60:9

**“Surely the islands will wait for me.”** The word “islands” refers to the Gentile lands west of Israel, in contrast to Israel, the homeland of the Jews. From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the countries west of Israel as islands.

**“Tarshish.”** There is good historical evidence that “Tarshish” was a part of what is today southern Spain.

Isa 60:13

**“fir tree, the pine, and the cypress.”** The exact species of these trees are debated and the English translations vary greatly (cf. Isa. 60:13).

Isa 60:14

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Isaiah Chapter 61**

Isa 61:1

**“The spirit of Lord Yahweh.”** Here in Isaiah 61:1, God’s gift of holy spirit is called “the spirit of the Lord Yahweh.” In this verse, the “of” indicates the genitive case, which can be a genitive of possession, i.e., “the spirit belonging to Lord Yahweh,” or it can be a genitive of origin, “the spirit from Lord Yahweh,” or it can combine both meanings and be an amphibologia (double entendre) since both meanings are true.

In this verse, God foretells that the Messiah will have God’s gift of holy spirit upon him. God placed His holy spirit upon Jesus to spiritually empower him so that he could do mighty works. God put His gift of spirit, sometimes called “holy spirit,” upon people to give them spiritual power (cf. Num. 11:17-29; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 16:13; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 15:1; Mic. 3:8), and Jesus needed God’s gift of holy spirit to have spiritual power just like the leaders and prophets of the Old Testament did. Jesus received the gift of holy spirit at His baptism and had it upon him when he started his ministry (Luke 4:18). Other verses that say God was going to put holy spirit upon the Messiah are Isaiah 11:2, 42:1 and 61:1.

Christians get spiritual power when they get the gift of holy spirit (Acts 1:8), but sadly, most believers are not taught how to use that spiritual power like Christ and the apostles did.

[For more on the holy spirit being a gift from God that empowered people to do wonderful things for God, see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Isa 61:2

**“the year of Yahweh’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God.”** There is a time period between the “year of Yahweh’s favor” and “the day of vengeance of our God” that has now been about 2,000 years. The “year of the Lord’s favor” was the time of Jesus’ ministry on earth, as we see when Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:2 in Luke 4:18-19, and then said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). But “the day of vengeance of our God” is still future and is the great tribulation that is coming on the entire earth (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21; Rev. 6:16-17). The Great Tribulation is the time of the vengeance of God, a day of wrath when He will avenge the blood of all the innocent people from Abel forward through history (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51).

There are many Scriptures in the Old Testament that speak of the coming of Christ and God’s vengeance on the wicked as if they were going to happen at the same time (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 61:1-3; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 9:9-10; Mal. 3:1-3; 4:1-3). Those many Scriptures, along with the fact that there are no clear Scriptures that portray the two comings of Christ, are the reason that at the time of Christ people did not think that Christ would die (cf. Matt. 16:21-22; Luke 18:31-34; 24:19-21, 44-46; John 12:34; 20:9).

It is important to remember that very few people who lived during Old Testament times or even at the time of Christ realized that there were going to be two comings of the Messiah, the first when he would die and the second when he would conquer. Most people believed the Messiah would come, conquer the earth, and reign from Jerusalem. By the time of Christ, some rabbis were teaching that there would be two separate messiahs, whom they called “Messiah ben Joseph,” who would suffer, and “Messiah ben David,” who would conquer the earth, but we do not know how early that fact was recognized and taught—it may have been taught by some of the Old Testament prophets but was never written down such that historians would see it (see commentary on Matt. 11:3).

That a “day of vengeance” was coming when God would take vengeance on His enemies is a theme that occurs a number of times in the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 34:8; 59:17; 61:2; 63:4; Luke 21:22).

[For more on the prophecies of the time of great tribulation, which is the day of vengeance, see commentary on Dan. 12:1.]

Isa 61:3

**“by giving.”** Gary Smith points out that the “second infinitive construct [of the verb]...is used to express attendant circumstances or manner “by giving,” and references Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar.[[68]](#footnote-15567) According to Isaiah 61:2-3, the Messiah will proclaim the year of Yahweh’s favor and the day of vengeance of God (although Isaiah only says he will “proclaim” them, from other verses we learn he fulfills them as well). He will comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who mourn by giving them a garland for ashes (people sat in ashes or put ashes on themselves when they were mourning over someone or something, cf. Esther 4:1, 3; Job 2:8; Jer. 25:34; Lam. 3:16; Ezek. 27:30; Jon. 3:6; Matt. 11:21). He will give them the oil of joy and a garment of praise.

Isa 61:4

**“They will rebuild the old ruins​.”** Isaiah 61:4-9, 11, is about the future restoration and glory of Israel. In the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, Israel will be restored and will be the glory of the earth, in large part because Christ will rule the earth from Jerusalem and God’s Temple will be on Mount Zion. The cities will have been destroyed in the Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon, but they will be rebuilt in the Millennial Kingdom. The rebuilding will be done by the people of Israel (Isa. 61:4) and by foreigners (Isa. 60:10).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 61:11

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God (see commentary on Matt. 5:6).

**Isaiah Chapter 62**

Isa 62:1

**“​until her righteousness goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a burning torch.”** Isaiah 62 is about the future restoration and glory of Israel, although there are some statements in the chapter that relate to her condition in Isaiah’s time. In the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, Israel will be restored and will be the glory of the earth, in large part because Christ will rule the earth from Jerusalem and God’s Temple will be on Mount Zion. In the various places where God speaks of the Millennial Kingdom, we learn different things about it. Here, for example, we learn that Jerusalem will have a new name (Isa. 62:2-4). Here also we see some of the similarities between the Garden of Eden and life in the Millennial Kingdom. Just as Adam and Eve were to work and care for Eden, so people in the Millennial Kingdom will work the soil (Isa. 62:8-9), and do other work as well (Isa. 62:10).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 62:6

**“I have set watchmen on your walls.”** It is likely that it is one of these watchmen who is portrayed as saying, “Who is this...” in Isaiah 63:1, although that is not explicitly stated.

Isa 62:7

**“give him no rest.”** Those who remember Jerusalem and Yahweh are to give Him no rest—in other words, be constant in prayer—until He establishes Jerusalem.

Isa 62:11

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**Isaiah Chapter 63**

Isa 63:1

**“Who is this who comes.”** Although the speaker is not specifically identified, it is likely the watchmen from Isaiah 62:6.

**“from Edom”** Edom is the country southeast of Israel, and Bozrah was a major city in Edom. Edom was a perennial enemy of Israel, and in fact “Edom” often has overtones of representing all of Israel’s enemies in the same way that “Ephraim” often stands for all of Israel. The name “Edom” is spelled in Hebrew very similarly to “adam,” mankind, and thus there is an overtone here of Jesus conquering “mankind,” inasmuch as so many of them turned away from God. Furthermore, “Edom” means “red,” and so there is a play on the concept of red as Christ coming from Edom (red) with his garments stained a red color. It is appropriate that the conquering Messiah who comes to conquer the enemy and deliver God’s people comes from the southeast. When Israel conquered the Promised Land under Joshua, they came as God’s army from the southeast (Deut. 33:2; Judg. 5:4; Hab. 3:3). Now, as part of what we know as the Battle of Armageddon, God’s Messiah comes from the southeast.

**“Bozrah.”** A major city in Edom.

**“This one who is glorious in his apparel.”** The fact that this coming conquerer has on glorious apparel, which some scholars think refers to battle armor, shows that he is more than just a regular Israelite. Indeed, he turns out to be the Messiah himself.

**“striding confidently.”** The Hebrew text is debated by scholars, but what is not debated is that the one who comes, the Messiah, is walking confidently and is one to be reckoned with. No wonder the watchmen, upon seeing this figure walking confidently toward him stained in blood asked, “Who is this who comes?”

**“speaking in righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God, and so speaking in righteousness is saying things that are right and just.

[For more on “righteousness” referring to doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God, see commentary on Matt. 5:6.]

**“mighty to save.”** Isaiah 62:11 said salvation was coming, and here we see it coming from the Deliverer, Jesus Christ.

Isa 63:3

**“the winepress.”** The “winepress” is an appropriate name for the Battle of Armageddon, in which Jesus Christ conquers the earth. There will be millions of people killed at that time, and their blood will splash onto his garments (Isa. 63:3; cf. Rev. 19:13). The Battle of Armageddon is also referred to as “the winepress” in Joel 3:13 and the book of Revelation (Rev. 14:19-20; 19:15, see commentary on Rev. 19:15).

Isa 63:6

**“I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.”** When the Messiah, Jesus Christ, comes back to earth and conquers it, he will kill the wicked people on earth. That is one of the reasons that the next life will be so wonderful—no wicked people will be there.

[For more on the wicked being killed by Christ, see commentary on Isa. 11:4.]

Isa 63:15

**“bowels and your inward parts.”** In the biblical culture, the bowels and abdominal organs were the seat of emotion. In this context, the prophet is wondering why God’s emotions and compassion seem to be withheld from him and Israel.

**Isaiah Chapter 64**

Isa 64:5

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God (see commentary on Matt. 5:6).

**“We have been in sin for a long time, and will we be saved?”** This phrase is very unclear in the Hebrew text. Many scholars say the Hebrew text has been corrupted and there have been a number of emendations to the text that have been suggested to try to make the Hebrew more understandable, but the emendations are without textual support. Furthermore, the last sentence can be a statement or a question. The REV follows what some scholars believe is the most reasonable possibility that the text is saying.[[69]](#footnote-13354)

One thing that seems clear from the context and scope of Isaiah is that the people are caught up in sin and cannot be saved on their own, but need God’s merciful intervention to be saved.

Isa 64:7

**“given us over to.”** “Made us melt” is the reading of the Masoretic Hebrew text, but many scholars think that the text was miscopied. The Septuagint, Syriac, and Aramaic Targums read “handed us over” (“given us over”), and that may well be correct. If “melt” is correct, the idea is that the people are caught up in the power of sin (the hand of sin) and are powerless to escape on their own. That would be true, because only God can truly deliver people from their sin.

Isa 64:11

**“is burned with fire.”** This is a prophetic vision of the fate of the Temple due to Israel’s sin. It would be more than 100 years after Isaiah’s time that the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, would literally burn the Temple down. However, the sin of the people was so great that God was not listening to their prayers or respecting their sacrifices, so the Temple may as well have been burned down (cf. Isa. 1:10-15).

**Isaiah Chapter 65**

Isa 65:2

**“spread out my hands.”** This is a cultural expression of asking or imploring. God implored Israel “all day long” to come to Him and obey Him, but they defied Him and ignored Him and did what they wanted, sinning against God.

Isa 65:3

**“insult me.”** The Hebrew word is related to anger, but it makes the English translation awkward. For example, “anger me to my face” gets the idea but is not clear in English. The people angered God by worshiping pagan gods. Many versions use “provoke,” but the common definition of “provoke” is to purposely incite someone, and the Israelites did not worship God with the goal of making Him angry, they were self-centered and did not submit to God.

Isa 65:9

**“and my chosen will inherit it, and my servants will live there.”** In Isaiah 65:9, the prophet Isaiah shifts to the future to the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, and the saved people will inherit the earth (cf. Matt. 5:5). Isaiah will pick up the theme again in Isaiah 65:13-25.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 65:11

**“Fortune...Destiny.”** Isaiah reproves people who worship the pagan gods “Fortune” (*Gad* #01409 גַּד) and “Destiny” (*Meni* #04507 מְנִי). The name of Leah’s son, “Gad,” is related to this word, hence the meaning of “Gad” as “Fortune” or more expansively, “Good fortune” (Gen. 30:11). However, Leah would not have been linking her son Gad to the goddess “Fortune,” she would have just been expressing the blessing she felt at the birth of a boy.

Isa 65:13

**“Behold, my servants will eat, but you will be hungry.”** In Isaiah 65:13-25, the prophet Isaiah shifts to the future to the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, and the saved people will inherit the earth (cf. Matt. 5:5) and enjoy great blessings. Isaiah starts by contrasting those people who will be in the Kingdom and will be blessed with those people who rejected God and will suffer the consequences of not being saved. Thus, the saved will eat but the unsaved will be hungry, the saved will rejoice while the unsaved will be put to shame, etc. As the chapter goes on, especially starting in Isaiah 65:17, many more blessings of the Millennial Kingdom are revealed.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 65:17

**“a new heaven and a new earth.”** Isaiah 65:9 and 65:13-25 are about the future Millennial Kingdom, and reveal some wonderful truths about it. Two times in the future there will be “a new heaven and a new earth.” The “new heaven and earth” here in Isaiah 65:17 is the heaven and earth of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth. The phrase “a new heaven and a new earth” can be confusing because Revelation 21:1 also says, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth,” but the “new heaven and new earth” of Isaiah 65 is the Millennial Kingdom, whereas the new heaven and earth of Revelation 21 is the “Everlasting Kingdom,” the final heaven and earth.

There will be two kingdoms on earth in the future. The first will be Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, and it will last 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-5). It will be “new” because when Christ comes back, the earth—the soil, oceans, lakes, and air—will be completely restored to its pristine condition. When Christ comes from heaven he will fight the Battle of Armageddon and conquer the earth and set up his Millennial Kingdom on earth. But the earth will have been so polluted and ruined by thousands of years of human occupation and pollution that he will have to regenerate it into an Eden-like state so people can live on it safely and joyfully. So the earth of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom really will be a “new heavens and earth” compared to what it is now. The total regeneration of the earth explains why Jesus spoke of a “New Beginning” in Matthew 19:28, and why in Acts 3:21, Peter said that Jesus will be in heaven until “the time all things are restored.” But the Millennial Kingdom and the earth at that time will come to an end after 1,000 years because of a war between God and the Devil, and the earth will be destroyed by fire (Rev. 20:7-10; 2 Peter 3:11-12). But after the war, God will again create a new heaven and new earth, which is briefly described in Revelation 21 and 22, and it is sometimes referred to as the “Everlasting Kingdom” because it will last forever.

We know this section in Isaiah is speaking of the Millennial Kingdom and not the final Everlasting Kingdom because of the earth it describes. For example, Isaiah 65:19 mentions the city of Jerusalem, and also there will still be people dying (Isa. 65:20).

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth. For more on why there will be natural people in the Millennial Kingdom who are born, marry, bear children, and die, see commentary on Matt. 25:32, the sheep and goat judgment.]

**“new heaven.”** In the Hebrew text, the word “heaven” is plural, but it is always plural because there is no singular form of the noun in Hebrew; there is no word “heaven,” it is always “heavens.” The plural form is emphatic and points to the hugeness of “heaven,” which includes earth’s atmosphere and the sphere of God’s dwelling. Here in Isaiah, there is no reason to believe that the “heaven” in which God dwells is going to be recreated when Christ conquers the earth, but the earth’s atmosphere will certainly be recreated and air pollution will be a thing of the past.

**“will not be remembered.”** This phrase does not mean that all of our memories of this life that we are now living will be wiped out. We will remember our lives on earth, and that will actually give meaning to the life we are living in Christ’s future kingdom. For example, if we are rewarded, we will remember what we did that we were rewarded for. Also, it is clear that we will remember people. Christ remembered everyone when he was raised from the dead, and we will too. Here in Isaiah 65:17, the word “remember” is being used idiomatically in the sense of “be concerned about.” The idiomatic sense of the word “remember” is commonly used in the Bible (see commentary on Luke 23:42).

Isa 65:20

**“For the young man will die at 100 years old.”** There will be natural people in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth, but they will live a long time, as this verse says. If a person dies at 100 years old they will still be considered as dying young. Isaiah 65:22 says the natural people in the Millennial Kingdom will live as long as trees, which could easily be several hundred years.

After Christ conquers the earth in the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21), he will gather the people who survive the battle and divide them into two groups, the “sheep” and the “goats.” The goats are immediately thrown into the Lake of Fire, while the “sheep” are let into the Millennial Kingdom (Matt. 25:31-46). The natural people who are allowed into the Millennial Kingdom at the Sheep and Goat judgment will have never experienced death, and so they will marry, bear children (Isa. 65:20, 23; Ezek. 47:22), age and die (Isa. 65:20), just as people do on earth now. It is some of those people who Satan will deceive when he is let out of the Abyss at the end of the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10). Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth will be a time of unprecedented safety and health, and the children will grow up healthy and safe.

[For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment and natural people being let into Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the Millennial Kingdom and the future reign of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the future resurrections, the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the unrighteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

Isa 65:22

**“for as the days of a tree.”** The natural people in the Millennial Kingdom will live very long lives (see commentary on Isa. 65:20).

Isa 65:23

**“children who will experience calamity.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “children for calamity,” but the meaning is children who will experience calamity (or “ruin”). The natural people who are allowed into the Millennial Kingdom at the Sheep and Goat judgment will have never experienced death, and so they will marry, bear children, age and die just as people do on earth now (cf. Ezek. 47:22, see commentary on Isa. 65:20). It is some of those people who Satan will deceive when he is let out of the Abyss at the end of the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10). Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth will be a time of unprecedented safety and health, and the children will grow up healthy and safe.

[For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the Millennial Kingdom and the future reign of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 65:25

**“The wolf and the lamb will feed together.”** Isaiah 65:25 is a shortened summary of what Isaiah had already said in Isaiah 11:6-9. The Hebrew word “together” is *'echad* (#0259 אֶחָד), “one,” and it paints a beautiful picture of the harmony that will exist between the animals when Christ conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom on earth, and rules from Jerusalem. In Christ’s kingdom the animals will eat together as “one” (*Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible* says “in unity”), and they will all be eating plants, just as Isaiah 65:25 says. The Millennial Kingdom will be a reestablishment of Eden, and in Eden, all the animals ate plants, not each other (cf. Gen. 1:30).

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the Millennial Kingdom being like the Garden of Eden, also called “Paradise,” see commentary on Luke 23:43.]

**Isaiah Chapter 66**

Isa 66:2

**“look upon *with favor*.”** In this context, “look” has the sense of “look upon with favor.”

**“humble.”** The same Hebrew word is translated “poor” in versions such as the KJV, and it can indeed refer to people who are physically poor and/or afflicted. But the Hebrew word can refer to “poor” or “humble,” and here “humble” is the better translation (cf. Matt. 5:3).

**“contrite.”** In English, the word “contrite” means “showing sorrow or remorse for a sin.”[[70]](#footnote-22280) The Hebrew word means to be struck or beaten, and then in some contexts, the meaning is extended to “bruised,” “wounded,” “ruined,” or “destroyed.” Honest, humble people have a “contrite spirit,” that is, a contrite attitude toward God because they know that no matter how hard they try, they often sin or fall short of what they know they should do. Jesus taught us, “Blessed are the poor (humble) in spirit (attitude)” (Matt. 5:3).

Isa 66:3

**“He who slaughters an ox is like he who kills a man*.*”** The context picks up with the prideful people who thought they could do enough in their own ability to go through the motions of sacrifices and offerings to be righteous in God’s sight. It is always a pure heart and trust in God that makes what we do acceptable to God.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Isa 66:8

**“Can a nation be brought forth all at once*.*”** This phrase shows us that this section of Isaiah is about the future when Christ comes from heaven and fights the battle of Armageddon, conquers the earth, and sets up his kingdom on earth, that will happen on a day like no other day (Zech. 14:3-7). There have been events that have foreshadowed this final event, such as the return of Judah to the land of Israel, but no past event has fulfilled this prophecy literally or fully.

Associated with Christ’s conquest of the earth and setting up his Millennial Kingdom will be the building of the Temple described in Ezekiel 40-48, the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), and the Resurrection of the Righteous (Rev. 20:1-4).

[For more on Jesus’ kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 66:10

**“Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her.”** Isaiah now begins speaking about Jerusalem in the future, and Isaiah 66:10-13 and 18-24 are about the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth from Jerusalem. As Isaiah’s prophecy states, Christ’s kingdom will be a time of great abundance and peace, and the glory of God will be proclaimed to the nations and the people of Israel will be gathered in their own land.

[For more verses in Isaiah that speak of the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Isa. 2:2. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 66:14

**“and your bones will flourish like the tender grass*.*”** This phrase will in part apply to those righteous people who are let into the future Kingdom of Christ on earth at the sheep and goat judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), but it mostly applies to those people who are dead and whose bones are dry and disintegrated. The righteous dead will be restored at the Resurrection of the Righteous just as Ezekiel described (Ezek. 37:1-14). The Old Testament has a number of verses about God raising the dead in the future (cf. Deut. 32:39; Job. 19:25-27; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 26:19; 66:14; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2, 13; and Hos. 13:14).

[For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Isa 66:15

**“Yahweh will come with fire.”** Yahweh will come and judge the earth through the person of His Son, the Messiah.

Isa 66:16

**“and the slain of Yahweh will be many.”** There will be a huge number of godless people killed when Jesus comes to earth to establish his Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 11:1-4, Jer. 19:11; Rev. 19:15-21).

Isa 66:17

**“to go to the gardens.”** Sacred gardens were places where pagan gods were worshiped and ritual sex often took place (see commentary on Isa. 1:29).

Isa 66:19

**“I will set a sign among them.”** What this sign is, is not known.

**“Tarshish.”** There is good historical evidence that “Tarshish” was a part of what is today southeastern Spain.

**“Pul.”** The location of “Pul” is unknown, and so many scholars have suggested an emendation, but there is no reason not to believe that a nation existed (likely for a short time) that we do not yet know about today. If the Hebrew text is corrupted and the original word was “Put,” then the text referred to Lybia in northern Africa.

**“Lud.”** Historically, “Lud” referred to “Lydia” which was in western Turkey.

**“Javan.”** This was an ancient word for Greece.

**“to the islands afar off who have not heard my fame.”** In this context, the word “islands” refers to the Gentile lands in contrast to Israel, the homeland of the Jews. From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the countries west of Israel as being islands (although some of them were). The meaning of the verse is that God will reveal His glory to all parts of the earth. It will even reach to the Gentile nations.

Isa 66:21

**“I will also take some of them as priests and Levites.”** The natural reading of this verse is that in Christ’s future kingdom on earth some of the Gentiles will be taken as priests and Levites. This makes sense because many Gentiles will be saved and will be worshiping God (see commentary on John 10:16). Nevertheless, this is so different from what God has done in keeping the priests and Levites to only descendants of Levi (and the priests as only descendants of Aaron) that many scholars think the verse is still somehow speaking of this referring to Israelites becoming priests and Levites. But if God were going to open the priesthood to any Israelite, there seems to be no reason that He would not open it to Gentiles as well.

Isa 66:23

**“From new moon to new moon.”** The new moon, the beginning of the month, was celebrated with special sacrifices and offerings (Num. 28:11-15).

**“worship me.”** Or. “bow down to me.” The Hebrew verb translated “worship” is *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), and it is the same Hebrew word as is translated “bow down.” The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. *Shachah* is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Isa 66:24

**“They will go out.”** The people will “go out” of the city of Jerusalem.[[71]](#footnote-16362) Jerusalem is the context going back to Isaiah 65:18, and it is mentioned in Isaiah 65:18-19, and in Isaiah 66:10, 12, and 66:20, and is also referred to in different ways, such as Zion (Isa. 66:8), and in association with the Temple (Isa. 65:6).

Isaiah 66:24 seems to not be meant as a historically accurate picture of the future, but rather a generalized summary of God’s vengeance on His enemies and the horrific end of those who disobey God. In some ways, Isaiah 66:24 fits the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22 because the scene seems to fit with the situation after the second resurrection and final Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). But the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22 does not have a temple (Rev. 21:22), but this vision does (Isa. 66:6). Thus, the evidence supports that this is a generalized vision of the terrible end of the people who defy God.

**“and look on the dead bodies of the people who have transgressed against me.”** There is something very final about seeing the dead body of an enemy. It gives closure to the situation. When the Israelites saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians, then they knew the danger was over. They could feel safe and they had closure (Exod. 14:30). There are a number of times in Scripture when people see the dead bodies of the enemy and got closure from it (e.g. Exod. 14:30; Isa. 37:36; 66:24). In this case, for most of history the people of God have been outnumbered and persecuted by unbelievers. There was no sense of safety or of justice with the unbelievers around. But in the situation in Isaiah 66:24, that is no longer the case. The unbelievers and persecutors are dead, and can no longer harm the believers.

**“for their worm will not die nor will their fire be quenched.”** Isaiah 66:24 was quoted by Jesus Christ in Mark 9:48. The “worm” is the worms or maggots that are eating the dead bodies, and the fire is the fire that is burning them up. Although Isaiah 66:24 is a prophecy foretelling the End Times, the way things are portrayed in the verse, i.e., that the maggots will not die and the fire will not be snuffed out, refers to the common treatment of dead bodies in the time Isaiah wrote. Generally, human bodies were given some kind of burial, but the huge number of dead bodies that resulted from the Assyrian invasion, which Isaiah witnessed, combined with the fact that the Assyrians took most of the living people captive and carried them off to parts of the Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 17:6) meant that there were not a lot of people left in Israel to bury the dead bodies. In that scenario, the bodies would be left to be eaten by maggots and vermin, or just piled up and burned. As was stated above, this is not a historically accurate portrayal of any given point in time, but rather a kind of summary of the horrors of the vengeance of God upon His enemies. We know that the prophetic picture Isaiah describes is ultimately referring to the death and destruction of the unsaved in Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, because that is the way Jesus used it (Mark 9:43-48).

Contrary to statements by many commentators, Isaiah 66:24 is not portraying the “eternal torment” of the unsaved. The unsaved may have been in torment at some time before this, but now the verse says that the people who transgressed against God are just “dead bodies,” being eaten by maggots and burned with fire. Edward Fudge writes, “…in the prophetic picture of the future (Isa. 66:24), the righteous view with satisfaction dead bodies” or “corpses” of the wicked. These are dead bodies (Hebrew *pegarim*), not living people or imperishable zombies. The righteous view their destruction, not their misery. … Both the maggots (Greek *skōkēx*) and the fire speak of total extinction. Both terms make this picture repulsive or loathsome—they describe disgust, not pity. The picture is one of shame, not pain….”[[72]](#footnote-28303)

Edward Fudge correctly points out that the picture of the worms and the fire point to total destruction. In the garbage dumps of the ancient world where dead bodies (usually animals, not people) and other waste were thrown, everyone knew that the worms and maggots would not die until there was no more garbage to eat and the fire would not go out until there was nothing more to burn. The people reading Isaiah knew nothing of “eternal worms” or “eternal fire.” To them, Isaiah would have been clear because they witnessed it regularly in their lives—the worms and fire consumed the garbage in the garbage dump until it was all gone. Warren Prestidge writes: “The ‘worm’ and the ‘fire’ and consuming ‘dead bodies’ (Isa. 66:24, 16), ‘slain’ by God. The point is, that nothing will hinder the completion of their work: total destruction. Both worm and fire speak of total and final ‘destruction’ and of ‘shame, not pain.’”[[73]](#footnote-29929) Helaine Burch writes that the worm and fire can portray “everlasting destruction with no hope of reversal.”[[74]](#footnote-27469)

There are only two destinies available for people: everlasting life or everlasting death (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23). Those who choose everlasting life will be blessed indeed, while those who choose everlasting death will die and eventually be totally annihilated—gone forever.

[For information on the dead being dead until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the annihilation of the dead, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on the two destinies of humankind, see commentary on Rom. 6:23. For more on the worm and fire, see commentary on Isa. 66:24. For more information on Gehenna, see commentary on Matt. 5:22. For more information on “hell” and Hades, see Word Study: “Hades.”]

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