

DRAFT

## **The Prophets, Book 1**

*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (II Peter 1:21)*

### **Isaiah**

Isaiah may justifiably be thought of as the Prince of the Prophets, in that his book is not only the longest of the books of prophecy, but also, perhaps, the richest. He is quoted in the New Testament more than any other prophet. "Prince" is also a valid title for him in that he was "royal" in the literal sense; according to Jewish tradition he was the nephew of King Uzziah, and grandson of King Joash, thus a prince in human terms as well as in spiritual terms. He is also thought of as the Messianic Prophet, for the recurring theme of his book is the coming Messiah.

#### **Comparison with the Bible**

Many commentators have seen an interesting comparison of the Book of Isaiah with the entire Bible. As there are 66 books of the Bible, there are 66 chapters in Isaiah. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah deal with judgment, corresponding with the 39 books of the Old Testament; and the last 27 chapters of Isaiah, written in a different style, deal with redemption and eternal restoration, corresponding with the 27 books of the New Testament. We will refer to this comparison in considering authorship.

#### **The Isaiah Scroll**

Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran in 1947, the oldest known Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were written about 900 AD. On these are based what is called the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible; it is also the basis for the Old Testament in most Christian Bibles, both traditional and modern.

But, among the Dead Sea Scrolls, there was found a complete scroll of Isaiah, dated at about 100 BC, taking the Hebrew Scriptures, in one gigantic leap, 1,000 years farther into the past, and closer to the originals. The Isaiah Scroll is virtually identical to the book of Isaiah in the Authorized Version (KJV), thus disappointing many critical scholars, and further verifying the preservation and credibility of Scripture.

#### **Archeological Note: Another Victory for the Bible**

In Isaiah 20:1 it is written, "In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod (when Sargon, the King of Assyria, sent him), and fought against Ashdod and took it." Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, this was the only known mention of Sargon in ancient literature. Thus, skeptics proclaimed, this mentioning of a king who was never otherwise known to have existed, was "proof" of the Bible's unreliability.

Then, in 1842, a French diplomat and archeologist named Paul-Emile Botta discovered the ruins of Sargon's palace, with treasures and inscriptions, in what is today northern Iraq. These treasures and inscriptions revealed that Sargon had been one of Assyria's greatest kings; yet his name had disappeared from history, except for this one mention of him in Isaiah 20:1.

Archeology not only confirmed the existence of Sargon, but one of his inscriptions is practically a paraphrase of the verse in Isaiah! Sargon wrote, "Azuri, King of Ashdod, planned in his heart not to pay tribute. In my anger I marched against Ashdod with my usual bodyguard. I conquered Ashdod, and Gath. I took their treasures and their people...." The Bible wins again!

**A. Author.** The human author was "Isaiah, son of Amoz," who identifies himself in the very first verse. This Amoz (**not** the prophet Amos) was, according to rabbinic tradition, a brother to King Uzziah, making Isaiah a nephew to King Uzziah, and grandson of King Joash, thus of royal blood, and a part of the court of the kings of Judah. He certainly seems to have been a part of the king's court, for he often appears there, moving about freely, especially during the reign of Hezekiah, in which he played a prominent role.

Were There "Two Isaiahs"? Until late in the 18th Century, Isaiah's authorship of the entire book was not questioned; he was accepted as the single author by both Jewish and Christian authorities. Since that time, because of the differences in style of the two portions of Isaiah (see, "**Comparison with the Bible**" above) critical scholars have taught that there were two authors, giving the presumed author of the last 27 chapters a name, "Deuteroisaiiah" (second Isaiah). Some have imagined that there were even more than two. This is the sort of intellectual gymnastics and dissection of Scripture with which critical scholars make their reputations and careers, perhaps pander to their intellectual pride, and unnecessarily confuse the rest of us.

What underlies this kind of skepticism, and all such speculations on the part of such scholars is that they generally deny the possibility of miracles; in this case, what they reject is the possibility that God would inspire a prophet to see into the future, and write of things to come. Thus, they insist, the writer of Chapters 40-66 wrote of events during the Babylonian captivity, so he must have lived at that time, not during the period before the fall of Jerusalem, as stated in 1:1.

***NOTE:** We must keep in mind the paradigm principle underlying all of this rejection of miracles by naturalist, critical scholars: if there is no God with supernatural powers, to whom we are responsible, then man is his own god. Thus, man becomes his own source of truth and is responsible only to himself. This is the heart of humanism; and it ultimately leads to the humanizing of God, and the deification of man.*

The Evidence for Isaiah as the Single Author. But what is the evidence for Isaiah as the single author of the book which bears his name? First, the book itself states that Isaiah wrote it, in the very first verse. Second, at least four of the New Testament writers, and many of the Church Fathers, declared that Isaiah was the human author--of the last 27 chapters, as well as the first 39<sup>1</sup>. And, finally, Jesus Himself quoted from Chapter 61 of "the book of the prophet Esaias," thus identifying Isaiah as the author of the second portion as well as the first<sup>2</sup>.

Josephus wrote of how Cyrus the Great was moved to send the Jews back to Jerusalem by reading the prophecies of Isaiah (not someone else) concerning him; and those prophecies are in the second section of the book (41:1-4; 44:24-28; 45:1-5; and 46:9-13)<sup>3</sup>.

Note also the fact that the Isaiah Scroll found at Qumran, the oldest and most important manuscript of Isaiah known to exist, is not divided into two parts, attributed to two human authors. No--this very ancient document is one narrative, uninterrupted and undivided, declaring itself to be the work of a single human author, the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz.

The Logical Conclusion. All things considered, the logical conclusion is that Isaiah was the human author of the book that bears his name--all of it.

**B. Place and Date.** The book was completed about 700 BC in Jerusalem. The time of Isaiah's active ministry was approximately 750 to 700 BC. He lived and ministered in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) when Assyria was the super power of the known world; and he died at the time of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) by the Assyrians. He states at the beginning of the book that he served under four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Three of these were godly kings; the exception was Ahaz, who was extremely wicked<sup>4</sup>.

Although Isaiah doesn't mention Manasseh, his life probably extended also into the early years of the reign of King Manasseh, Hezekiah's evil son; for, according to the Talmud, Isaiah was martyred by being placed between two planks at Manasseh's command and "sawn asunder" for refusing to approve the wickedness

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:3, 8:17, 12:17-21; Lk 3:4, 4:17-19; Jn 1:23, 12:37-41; Acts 8:27-33; Rom 10:16-21.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 4:18-21.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, Antiquities, 11.1.2.

<sup>4</sup> II Chronicles 28:1-4.

of that evil king. The Talmudic account of Isaiah's martyrdom gains additional credibility in that it was believed and accepted by several of the Church Fathers. We cannot know this with any certainty, but Hebrews 11:32 and 37 may be a reference to Isaiah's martyrdom.

**C. Theme.** The overriding theme of Isaiah's book is the coming of the Messiah. John the beloved apostle, in quoting from Isaiah, wrote of him that, "he saw his [Christ's] glory, and spake of Him<sup>5</sup>."

**D. Highlights.** Due to the richness of the book, its highlights are too numerous to include them all here; selected ones are the following:

1. God's Gracious Offer of Forgiveness. (1:16-20)

God's people often prove to be weak, sinful, and rebellious; yet forgiveness is available if only we will repent and seek it. This wonderful fact is beautifully expressed by Isaiah in an often-quoted, poetic, passage in the first chapter.

2. A Vision of Judgment and World Peace in the End Times. (2:1-17)

In Chapter 2, Isaiah speaks of the situation in Judah at the time, with its material wealth, but spiritual poverty and its sin of idolatry and unfaithfulness. In the same passage he sees a vision of the end times, when the Lord will return to judge their wickedness and establish worldwide peace. Verse 4 is one of the most often-quoted passages, and one of the most wonderful promises, in the Bible.

3. Isaiah's Vision of the Heavenly Temple, and His Calling. (Chapter 6)

Isaiah vividly describes his vision of the Lord, and the seraphim which surround and praise Him, in His heavenly throne room. In the vision, Isaiah also describes the Lord's calling him to minister as a prophet. In 13 verses, there is expressed the majesty of God and His court, the inherent sinfulness of man, and the way man is confronted with his sinfulness merely by being close to the purity and majesty of God. Also expressed in the passage is the fact that it is not our human abilities or righteousness the Lord desires, but our willingness to allow Him to cleanse and empower us for service to Him. The Kingdom is only for those who truly hunger for righteousness--not for the indifferent or casual enquirer. Jesus quoted from this passage to explain why He taught in parables<sup>6</sup>.

***NOTE:** The last verse (v 13) is difficult to interpret; this is testified to by its various interpretations by different interpreters. It obviously speaks of the people of Judah's being carried away into captivity. The difficult part concerns the tenth part of the people; if it remains, we read that it "will be eaten." This probably means that if even a tenth of the people somehow escape being taken to Babylon, they will be absorbed into the pagan tribes around them, losing their separate*

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<sup>5</sup> John 12:41.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 13:13-15.

*identity as Israelites. This may speak of the mixing of Jews and Canaanites which produced the Samaritan people, half Jew and half Canaanite.*

*The closing sentence, however, is a straightforward statement of a fundamental biblical fact: it is that God always, even in times of calamitous apostasy, preserves for Himself a faithful, righteous remnant.*

#### 4. The Virgin Birth Prophesied. (Chapter 7)

When the wicked Ahaz is King of Judah (the Southern Kingdom), Pekah, King of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Rezin, King of Syria, unite in an invasion of Judah, intending to install a puppet king of their own. The Lord graciously sends Isaiah, carrying his infant son, to tell Ahaz that he has nothing to fear from Israel and Syria. In keeping with the often-strange life of an Old Testament prophet, even the child's name is prophetic<sup>7</sup>. Not only that, but the Lord offers to give Ahaz a sign of his coming victory.

Ahaz, whose sinfulness has probably made him scornful of the Lord and His prophets, refuses to ask for a sign, pretending piety or, more likely, expressing arrogance. Isaiah replies that the Lord Himself will give him a sign, whether or not Ahaz wants one, saying "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel...<sup>8</sup>."

Of course, Ahaz would not live to see this prophecy fulfilled, for the virgin's Son would not be born for more than 700 years into the future; but that was often the way of Old Testament prophets. And, anyway, the very nature of the prophecy should have gotten Ahaz's attention. Then Isaiah goes on to say that, before his own infant son is old enough to know good from evil, both Israel and its ally Syria will be destroyed<sup>9</sup>.

Then Isaiah prophesies that The Assyrians, whom Ahaz hires to help him by attacking the Northern Kingdom and Syria, will also attack him and capture much of Judah, bringing great tribulation; and the land, which has been so fertile and productive, will become desolate and sparsely populated. The prophesied immediate future for Ahaz is bleak, but it is what he will bring upon himself for trusting in man and the arm of flesh, when he could have trusted in God and prospered<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The name of the child, Shearjashub, means "the remnant shall return," referring to the eventual return from Babylonian captivity, 200 years into the future. See in this regard 10:20-21.

<sup>8</sup> This prophecy is quoted in Matt 1:23 by the angel of the Lord, speaking to Joseph in a dream, to assure him that Mary is pure.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase in the prophecy, "before the child is old enough to refuse the evil and choose the good" (v 16) is an interesting reference to the foundational Christian doctrine of original sin. As expressed in the classic *New England Primer*, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." For more on the doctrine of original sin and the death of innocent babies, see "When a Baby Dies" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 17:5-8.

**NOTES:**

*a. The account of this period in the parallel passage, in II Kings 16, tells us that Ahaz, rejecting Isaiah's prophecy, sent instead a request to the Assyrian king for help, giving him the silver and gold from the Temple and palace. The Assyrian king did attack and conquer both Israel and Syria, and carried Israel away into captivity; but he then returned and ravaged most of Judah also. There is a lesson in life here, and it is that friendship cannot be bought. If you give a bully half of your lunch money to buy peace on the playground, he will just take the rest of the money, and he still won't be your friend.*

*b. Verse 14 is one of the most important verses in the Bible; it is the cornerstone of the essential doctrine of the virgin birth, which cannot be separated from the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. And, if Jesus is not the divine Second Person of the Godhead, then we are lost and undone, without a Redeemer. Verse 14 really is that important.*

*As we have seen, in the Hebrew language a word can have several different meanings; the Hebrew word translated "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 is "almah." It can mean "virgin"; but it can also mean "veiled maiden" or "young woman." Unbroken Hebrew tradition renders the word "virgin"; the Septuagint (Greek OT, ca 300 BC) has "parthenos" (virgin); Jerome's Latin Vulgate (ca 400 AD) has the word "virgo" (virgin); and Matthew 1:23, where Isaiah 7:14 is quoted, has the same Greek word as the Septuagint, "parthenos" (virgin). Both the Latin and the Greek are precise here; the words "virgo" and "parthenos" precisely mean "virgin," and nothing but that. Yet the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV) of 1946 substitutes in v 14 "young woman," even though their own translation of Matthew 1:23, where Is 7:14 is quoted, reads "virgin." This is a clear case of intellectual dishonesty, for the RSV translators knew their Hebrew, Greek and Latin very well; and we must wonder why they would do such a thing, when even those of us who can read only English, can **easily** see the contradiction. The answer seems to be that, like most liberal, humanist, Bible scholars, they simply didn't believe in the miracles of God, including the miracle of the virgin birth, and that they took this opportunity to make a radical statement to that effect. I can think of no other explanation.*

*c. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV) was published in 1946 by the National Council of Churches, a left-leaning organization, much given to radical social and political causes, which has consistently neglected and down-played (perhaps it would not be unfair to say "abandoned") the gospel of Christ for the "social gospel." With its parent organization, the World Council of Churches, it has supported leftist causes throughout the World, including providing weapons*

*and ammunition for Communist revolutions. The RSV was the first of the flood of modern versions that has been published since World War II, all of which delete, or cast doubt upon, vast portions of the New Testament. So far, none of the subsequent translations, however, has had the flagrant dishonesty to use "young woman" in Isaiah 7:14, as does the RSV, where English word choice clearly should be "virgin."*

5. Another Prophetic Child for Isaiah. (8:1-8)

With Syria and the Northern Kingdom still threatening to over-run Judah, the Lord calls Isaiah, with witnesses, to write more concerning the immediate coming destruction of Syria and Israel, and He gives Isaiah a prophetic name for another child whom his wife, a prophetess, will bear, (the first such son being Shearjashub)<sup>11</sup>. This name, "Mahershalalhashbaz," means "the prey speeds, the spoil hastens"<sup>12</sup>. The child's prophetic name refers to the fact that the Assyrians will sweep into the land, conquering not only Syria, as wicked Ahaz has hired them to do, but will also conquer and carry off Ahaz's Israel, and much of Judah, but not all of it. These things will happen before the child is old enough to say "father" or "mother," meaning that the time is very short (probably less than two years).

**NOTE:** *Verses 7 and 8 are enormously rich Hebrew poetry. Using the metaphor of a flooded river, overflowing its banks and sweeping all before it, Isaiah describes the way the Assyrians will sweep over Israel, Syria, and most of Judah, but will not completely conquer Judah. The water over Judah "shall reach even to the neck," but will not be over the head--i.e. it will not be a fatal drowning of the nation--almost, but not quite. Note also that here Judah is referred to as the land of "Immanuel" (God with us). This, of course, is the name to be given the virgin's Son (prophesied in 7:14); here, however, it represents the entire nation of Judah, which will eventually produce the promised Messiah. In God's plan for the Israelite people, Jerusalem and the unified nation under God really was the earthly manifestation of "God with us," for He was there with them; but the nation's sins ruined that perfect relationship.*

6. An Unchanging Standard for Judging Prophets, Counselors, and Teachers. (8:19-20)

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<sup>11</sup> See Is 7:1-9. Isaiah's wife may have been a true prophetess in the full meaning of the term, for there were prophets during the OT period who were women (e.g. Hulda, in the time of King Josiah). But it is also possible that she was called a prophetess simply because her husband was a prophet, in the same sense that the wife of a count is called a countess.

<sup>12</sup>The name of this child, at 18 letters, is one of the two longest words in the Bible; the other is "Jonathelemrechokim," a word in the superscription of Ps 56, also of 18 letters.

We hear and read a great deal of things expressing ideas and guidance about life and living, right and wrong. Such guidance and instruction may come in the form of mass media, books, published articles and pamphlets, preaching, teaching, testimonies or personal counseling. Some of this may be God-inspired truth; some may be sincere, but erroneous; and some of it may be outright, deliberate, deadly, deception. Some of it can sound so right, yet be so very wrong. This is especially true today, when there seems to be an end-times proliferation of witches, fortune-tellers, and persuasive preachers and teachers with appealing-but-false messages.

Fortunately, the Lord has given us a fool-proof standard by which we can evaluate and judge all such advice, ideas, and doctrines: it is his unchanging, inspired Word, the Bible. In two brief verses, Isaiah sets forth this vital rule in simple words; and, in my opinion, these are two of the most important verses in the entire Bible<sup>13</sup>.

**NOTES:**

*a. The Septuagint renders “them that have familiar spirits” as “ventriloquists,” i.e. those who can speak, but make it appear that a dummy (or idol) is speaking. But it can be more serious and deadly than simple ventriloquism; for some people, given over to the occult, really do have “familiar [evil] spirits” speaking through them, and this is much more dangerous. “Peep” and “mutter” in v 19 refer to a belief in ancient times that when the dead spoke, they spoke in soft, bird-like sounds, whispering in a low, quiet voice.*

*b. I have wondered how brilliant, educated people, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the Sherlock Holmes stories, could fall for such nonsense. I believe that the answer is two-fold:*

*(1) Some believe that they are hearing from dead loved ones, or the spirits of famous people long-dead, because they want it to be real--they want to believe it.*

*(2) A second reason, I believe, is that there is within many--perhaps all--of us, a desire to experience the supernatural, and this is unfulfilled in churches where miracles do not occur, and where their reality is denied.*

*For one example, once I was riding from the airport in Port au Prince, Haiti to my lodging place, and the taxi driver was telling me about his involvement in voodoo. I said, “But you told me you are a Catholic--why would you be involved in voodoo, something Catholic theology forbids?” He replied with sincere, almost child-like, conviction: “Oh, Catholic, that’s just my religion; but this voodoo stuff*

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<sup>13</sup> See also, in this regard, such a rule left to us by the beloved apostle John in I Jn 4:1-3.

is **real!**” It is a Haitian proverb that “Haiti is 98% Catholic, and 95% Voodoo<sup>14</sup>.”

*A dear friend, when a boy, became fascinated with the Ouija board, a divination device. Troubled with thoughts that it might be wrong, he went to his pastor and asked him for advice. The pastor told him there was nothing wrong with it, saying “God has many ways of speaking to us.” With this horrible counsel, my friend plunged ever more deeply into the occult, travelled the World looking for God, and ended up being “enlightened” as a Buddhist, while sitting under the same tree in India where Buddha had sat when he was “enlightened.” Through the witnessing of Christian friends he is now a Spirit-filled pastor of a vital church, with that inner need completely fulfilled.*

*c. For some time, in the early years of my teaching ministry, it was my privilege to spend time in ministry with Dr. Ray Charles Jarman, a very wise, elderly man of God. I learned a lot from the old man in the last years of his life. One thing that he told me, over and over, is that it is not only important to listen to what a preacher or teacher says; but it is also important to listen to what he **doesn’t** say. If he never preaches or teaches the cardinal doctrines of the Church, such as the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, Jesus’ blood atonement on the cross, his bodily resurrection, sin, redemption, and judgment, something is wrong.*

*This is the error of many--if not most--of the huge, “mega-churches,” where God’s love, and self-esteem, are major themes; but such things as the ugliness of sin and man’s need of redemption are seldom, if ever, mentioned. One such celebrity “pastor,” with a perpetually beatific, comforting, smile, has tens of thousands of members in his church and a nation-wide television ministry. He has said that to tell people that they are lost and need a Redeemer is psychologically destructive and is one of the most terrible things a preacher can do.*

#### 7. A Beautiful Messianic Prophecy, and a Terrible Truth of War. (9:1-7)

In Chapter 9 there is one of the most beautiful and important of the messianic prophecies. It contains matchless poetry (e.g. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined...For unto us a child is born..."). And yet, among the passages of poetic prophecy of hope concerning the coming Messiah, there are rebukes for the present sinfulness of the people,. And there is one brief sentence (verse 5) that describes a terrible reality of war; and it is as vividly, descriptively, true today as it was 2,700 years ago, when Isaiah penned the words.

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<sup>14</sup> Although the Catholic Church officially embraces belief in the miraculous for today, in Haiti it has little influence over its parishioners.

**NOTES:**

*a. The Hebrew word translated "government" in vv 6 and 7, "misraw," is used nowhere else in the Bible; it appears **only** in Is 9, and this is not by chance. This unique use of the word emphasizes the point that when the Messiah comes to establish his government on Earth, it will be a unique government, with none like it before, and none like it after, for it will be eternal, ruled by the "Everlasting Father."*

*b. In ground combat today, as in the day when Isaiah penned these words, there is always noise, confusion, and a great many "garments rolled in blood." Outside every aid station and field hospital, during a battle, there is a growing pile of bloody utility uniforms, boots, helmets, packs, cartridge belts, canteens and weapons, stripped from the casualties as they arrive. The size of this bloody pile is directly proportionate to the ferocity and duration of the battle.*

**8. A Prophecy of the Coming Messiah, the Future Millennial Kingdom, and of Final Judgment. (Chapt 11)**

Although Chapter 11 is only 16 verses long, it is extremely rich, and its content is amazingly diverse. The first five verses speak of God's Anointed One, the coming Messiah, the ultimate King of the line of David ("out of the stem of Jesse"). Verse 4 provides a glimpse of the Messiah as the final and fearsome judge<sup>15</sup>. Verses 6 through 9 speak beautifully of a future time (the Millennium?) when peace shall reign, carnivorous animals will no longer prey upon other animals, and children can safely play with animals that formerly would have been a poisonous, deadly threat<sup>16</sup>. During this unimaginably blessed time, the knowledge of the Lord shall be universal ("as the waters cover the sea"); and the significance of the cause-and-effect nature of these two conditions must not be overlooked. Then, from verses 10 through 16, Isaiah looks into the future time when the formerly divided Kingdom of Israel will be reunited, gentiles will be drawn into it, and their former enemies will be finally destroyed in an ultimate battle involving the miraculous drying up of great bodies of water. As Finis Dake expresses it, "The thought [here] is that Israel will be gathered from all lands, regardless of how many miracles it will take to gather them<sup>17</sup>."

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<sup>15</sup> See also in this regard Isaiah 40:24; Jn 12:48 and Rev 19:15-16, 21.

<sup>16</sup> The actual identifications of "asp" and "cockatrice" in v 8 are uncertain, and Hebrew translators, both ancient and modern, have struggled with them. What is certain, however, is that they refer to deadly, venomous, animals, common in that time and place. Cleopatra, ruler of Egypt, is said to have committed suicide by allowing an asp to bite her on the breast. For "asp" see the study guide to Acts 28:1-6., **NOTE b.**

<sup>17</sup> The Dake Annotated Reference Bible, p 690, note e.

*a. The imagery of v 6 has become so distorted in people's minds as to create a concept that is false, but one which has become so popular as to make misinterpretation of the verse virtually universal. Nowhere in v 6 (nor anywhere else in the Bible) is it said that "the lion shall lie down with the lamb." See also in this regard 65:25.*

*b. There are various interpretations of the statement in v 6 that "a little child shall lead them"; but it probably means that formerly wild animals will be so completely tame and gentle that a little child will be able to lead them around, in the way that, today, a grown man or woman can lead a well-trained domestic animal.*

#### 9. A Prophecy of Doom for Babylon. (13:19-22)

Babylon was an important city in Isaiah's time, and would become the center of power for the known World. It was well located, on the Euphrates River, and beautiful, with its glorious buildings; 100 years later, in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, its hanging gardens would be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Even after the decline and fall of Assyria, and the later fall of the Babylonians, the city of Babylon continued to be a political and commercial center by the succeeding Persians and Greeks. It seemed that it would last forever. But about 700 BC, approximately 200 years before its final destruction and deterioration began, Isaiah prophesied that it would be destroyed and, like Sodom and Gomorrah, never be rebuilt. It was eventually, progressively, destroyed and abandoned, just as he prophesied. And now, more than, 2,600 years later, in spite of an effort by Saddam Hussein to rebuild the city with his limitless oil wealth, and become a reincarnation of Nebuchadnezzar, the ancient city still lies in ruins, and Saddam has suffered a well-deserved, ignominious death by hanging<sup>18</sup>.

*NOTE: In v 22 we read that the desolate ruins of Babylon will be a dwelling place for dragons. Does this mean literal dragons, or is it a metaphor for wild animals in general? It probably means both. The Hebrew word here is "tanniyn" and it means "a marine or land monster." Most modern versions render this word as "jackal"; but I can't see a jackal as a "monster." A jackal is a slinking member of the genus Canis, similar to a wolf, but smaller (about the size of a coyote) and a threat to man only in packs. For some fascinating evidence concerning dragons, see "Dinosaurs and Dragons" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

#### 10. A Glimpse of the Fall of Lucifer. (14:12-17)

The history and present location of Lucifer (also known as "Satan," "that old serpent," "the devil," etc) are somewhat mysterious and unclear. It seems, however, that he was once one of the most important and beautiful angelic beings

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<sup>18</sup> See also in this regard Isaiah 14:21-23 and Jer 50 and 51.

in God's heavenly court--if not the most--and, perhaps, the leader of all music. But, according to the general belief, he became proud and ambitious, led a rebellion against God, and was cast out, doomed, but with certain supernatural power to deceive, tempt and corrupt. He rules, it seems, the Kingdom of Darkness, working to keep us from coming to know the Lord, which he will continue to do until the final judgment day. Satan is also the great deceiver, and verse 16, of Chapter 14, suggests that when we finally see him, unmasked, we will be amazed at his ugliness and insignificant reality<sup>19</sup>. Here in Isaiah 14 is perhaps the most revealing passage concerning the origins and future of this personification of evil.

**NOTES:**

*a. Critical, skeptical scholars generally deny that this passage refers to Satan (whose very existence they also tend to deny), or to anything concerning Heaven and the supernatural. They say, rather, that it is merely a derogatory condemnation of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon--merely a contemporary political insult. The clear wording of the passage, however, is extremely difficult to reconcile with their humanistic interpretation.*

*b. This is the only place in the Bible where "Lucifer" is used as a name of Satan.*

*c. The New International Version (NIV), in an extremely radical rendering of this verse, simply omits the name, "Lucifer," completely. And, while clearly leaving the verse in the context of the fallen personification of evil, assigns to him the title "morning star," a title of Christ, the Messiah (Rev 22:8, 22:16).*

*Even more amazing, to me, is that the NIV then renders the Authorized version's "day star," a reference to Christ in II Peter 1:19, as "morning star," also a title of Christ, and the same title mis-applied to Lucifer in its rendering of Is 14:12. I cannot reconcile the mis-rendering of Is 14:12, and the bizarre internal contradiction with II Peter 1:19 by the NIV translators.*

*d. The common, traditional, belief that Lucifer was once the chief musician of Heaven arises from the combination of 14:12-17 with Ezek 28:11-19. Verse 13 in the Ezek passage suggests music ("tabrets" probably means tambourines; the meaning of "pipes" is disputed, but may refer to flutes of some kind). The statement that they were "prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created" suggests that music was an integral part of this angelic being; and, in v 14, "the anointed cherub that covereth" suggests primacy. Thus has arisen the theory that Lucifer, prior to his rebellion and fall, was in a sense the chief musician in the*

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<sup>19</sup> This was my immediate reaction when I first met Henry Kissinger and looked down on that ugly, wrinkled little man, who had so much evil power. My thoughts were almost a direct quotation of vv 16 and 17.

*Heavenly Court, and very beautiful before his rebellion and fall from grace. It may well be true.*

11. God's Patient Way of Teaching Us. (28:9-17)

In Chapter 28, in the midst of a powerful condemnation of Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom) for its ongoing paganism, there is a brief passage of four verses in which there is a beautiful revelation of the way we learn, and of God's patience with us in the process<sup>20</sup>. He tells us that understanding of his precepts is accomplished by mature believers, and is not for spiritual babes. Then He tells us that even the mature will not learn them all at once, but will learn gradually. There is also a glimpse of the New Testament gifts of the Holy Spirit, 600 years before they will be granted to the Church. And all this wonderful revelation is expressed in just four verses (verses 9-12). Yet, in verses 13-17 that follow, we see that, in spite of God's wonderful plan for the Israelites, and his patience with them, they will disobey and become captives because of their proud and sinful rulers.

**NOTES:**

*a. Verses 11 and 12 speak of the New Testament Church that will be founded by the coming Messiah, Jesus the Christ. These verses also refer to the New Testament gift of speaking and praying in tongues, which point cannot be validly denied, for Paul will quote from these verses in his explanation of spiritual gifts (see I Cor 14:21, and in context).*

*b. The regrettable distortion of these verses in the Living Bible is definitely noteworthy. In its early years the publisher at least had the honesty to market it with the word "Paraphrase" on the cover; this is no longer true, and today it is marketed as if it were an accurate, word-for-word, translation--not the paraphrase that it actually is<sup>21</sup>.*

12. The Glorious Return of the Exiled Captives. (Chapter 35)

Chapter 35 is one of the most beautiful chapters in the Bible. Its 10 verses are a beautiful, prophetic, poem about the future return of the exiled Israelite captives, although it is possible that the Northern Kingdom had not as yet been taken into captivity when Isaiah wrote this, and the final captivity of the Southern Kingdom was perhaps 100 years in the future. The poem seems also to describe the ultimate homecoming of the redeemed of all time, traveling to their everlasting Zion in Heaven, in safety, along the Highway of Holiness, where there will be no danger

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<sup>20</sup> Here is a classic example of the way OT prophets freely mixed topics within a passage, and with no editorial warnings or explanations.

<sup>21</sup> In my opinion, the only rendering in the Living Bible, that is even more horrible than its rendering of this passage, is its rendering of Zech 13:6, which is a beautiful prophetic statement of the Messiah, Jesus, to come. Kenneth Taylor's paraphrase of this verse is so amazingly bad that you won't believe it when you read it!

and no dry deserts to cross--only a lush, well-watered, paradise. Sorrow and sighing will have passed away, and they will travel with joy and singing, "and everlasting joy upon their heads." Verse 10 is one that many of us learned by singing it.

**NOTES:**

*a. A significant event in the life and ministry of Isaiah (Chapts 36-37) was the brief siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, King of Assyria. In one night, the angel of the LORD killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (perhaps Sennacherib's entire army) and Jerusalem was saved. This event is described in the study guide to II Kings 18-19, however, and will not be repeated here.*

*b. The healing of King Hezekiah and the return of the Sun 10 degrees (Chapt 38) were major miracles in the ministry of Isaiah. These amazing events are described in the study guide to II Kings 20, however, and will not be repeated here<sup>22</sup>.*

13. Words of Comfort, and Prophecies of the Coming Messiah. (40:1-5)

Chapter 40 is one of the richest chapters in the very rich Book of Isaiah; it is not only filled with oft-quoted statements and messages of comfort, but it is also filled with amazing revelations concerning the future, and concerning the nature of God. A declaration of comfort in the first two verses is followed by a prophecy concerning the ministry of John the Baptist in preparing the way for the coming Messiah (verses 3-4)<sup>23</sup>. The following verse (verse 5) seems just to be a concluding part of the prophecy of verses 3 and 4; however, if we read carefully, it appears that this single verse is actually a separate prophecy of the **second** coming of the Messiah, for it states that all of mankind ("all flesh") shall see the glory of His coming at the same time. And this miraculous event, it seems, will not take place until the Messiah returns to Earth in the Second Advent. See in this regard Matthew 24:26-28 and Luke 17:22-37.

**NOTE:** "Second Advent" is the theological term for the second coming of Christ in the last days, when He shall rule, reign and judge all of mankind. Incidentally, I have not found another commentator who agrees with me concerning v 5; some see it as a part of the prophecy of vv 3-4, and some tie it to the proclamation of Cyrus to return the exiles to the Promised Land. However, the statement that "all flesh shall see it together" convinces me that it speaks of the Second Advent. The Hebrew word translated "together" ("yachad"), like most Hebrew words, has several meanings; but its primary meaning is "at the same time."

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<sup>22</sup> The only other recorded instance of the rotation of the Earth's being reversed or stopped is when the Sun and Moon "stood still" for a day to give the Israelites under Joshua more time to slaughter the Amonites (Josh 10:1-21).

<sup>23</sup> John the Baptist quoted these verses from Is 40 in declaring his ministry as the forerunner of the ministry of the Messiah (see Matt 3:1-3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:1-6; and Jn 1:15-23).

14. Temporary Things versus the Word of God. (40:6-8)

In exquisitely beautiful Hebrew poetry, Isaiah speaks here of things of this Earth that are useful and beautiful, but reminds us that they are all temporary. The thing on which we should focus our attention and base our lives, that which will never lose its beauty, or its value, and which will never change, is the Word of God. This passage is quoted by Peter in his First Letter to the Church (I Pet 1:24-25). Jesus, however, in the end of His earthly ministry, will not only affirm the concept, but will carry it a giant step farther. Going beyond the temporary nature of flowers, grass and flesh, He will tell us that even Heaven and Earth will pass away, yet the Word of God ("my words") shall never pass away (Matt 24:35). This verse challenges our understanding of things as they are, and what the future may hold; but it is a statement that we must take at face value--not symbolically or as hyperbole. If Heaven and Earth pass away and cease to exist, yet the Word of God will remain, for it is eternal, as is the God of the Word.

*NOTE: To fully understand and appreciate the following three verses (and all other such verses), it is important to know that when, in speaking of the attributes of God in the Old Testament, "arm" is used in the singular case, it refers to His strength and power (see, in this regard, 62:8, speaking of the power of God, and Ezek30:21, where the reference is to the strength of Pharaoh). This distinction is seen in vv 9 and 10, in declaring God's power to protect His people; but, as we are about to see, it is particularly important in fully understanding v 11.*

15. A Beautiful Revelation of Two Attributes of God. (40:9-11)

After Isaiah's declaration about the permanence of the Word of God, and the temporary nature of all other things, he challenges the people of Jerusalem to declare the Lord GOD ("Adonai YHWH") to the rest of the Kingdom of Judah. In so doing, he reminds the people of the absolute **power** of their GOD; and, in one beautiful verse (v 11), he reveals the wonderful fact that this absolute, unimaginable, **power** of God, is combined with such **compassion and gentle tenderness** that He can gather and carry lambs without hurting them. That wonderful verse also reminds us of His compassion for those (both women and farm animals) with babies, and his awareness of their need for gentle, special care<sup>24</sup>.

**NOTES:**

*a. In the first eight words of v 11 there is expressed a fundamental principle concerning God's relationship with His people as Shepherd of the sheep: it is the way that He feeds us, "like a shepherd." As a shepherd, He leads us "sheep" to the source of the food, but he will not force-feed us. He expects us to take*

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<sup>24</sup> Verse 11 is another that many of us first learned by singing it.

*responsibility for taking the food, preparing it, and doing the eating; it is part of that freedom of choice that He gave Adam and Eve in the beginning. He leads us to the green pastures and still waters; but we must do our own eating and drinking.*

*b. Many expressions in contemporary English have come to us from the King James Version of the Bible. Verse 15 is an example ("a drop in a bucket").*

16. The Greatness of God and A Hint as to the Shape of the Earth. (40:21-27)

Continuing to rebuke the people of the Kingdom of Judah for its unfaithfulness, Isaiah reminds them also, in powerful metaphor, of the greatness and power of God, who created all things, who "stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." He declares that, compared with their God, earthly princes, kings and judges are nothing--that He can simply blow on them and destroy them<sup>25</sup>. He calls the people's attention to the heavenly bodies, the stars and planets, and reminds them that God created them, placed them where they are, and knows them all by name. And, within this powerful passage about the incomparable greatness of God, there is a tantalizing hint at the shape of the Earth. In v 22 God is said to sit "upon the **circle** of the earth"; this declares that the view from the heavens, where God dwells, when looking down upon the Earth, it is seen as a circle. If, no matter which side of the Earth is viewed from the heavens, it appears as a circle, then it has to be a sphere, which, of course, it is.

**NOTE:** *The reference to God's power to destroy men with earthly power, and their possessions, merely by breathing on them, raises an interesting point about the breath of God. He breathed into Adam, and Adam "became a living soul" (Gen 2:7). The Hebrew word rendered "breathed" there is "naphak," meaning "to inflate" or "blow." In the Greek of the NT, the word "pneuma," means "spirit"; it also means "breath" or "wind." The resurrected Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit"<sup>26</sup>. Thus, the breath of God is also the Spirit of God--and thus it is valid to say that the Holy Spirit is the Holy Breath. Do we not sing, "Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew..."? Perhaps it is valid, then, to summarize this by saying that the breath of God is life to His children, but can be a fiery death to the wicked.*

17. A Beautiful Promise for the Weary. (40:28-31)

In the final four verses of this incredibly rich chapter, there is a wonderful promise for the weary believer. In the first two of these four verses, the prophet reminds the people of Judah of the limitless power of God.

His way of opening this declaration is extremely suggestive of the technique that will be used so often by Jesus, the Messiah whom Isaiah declares throughout his

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<sup>25</sup> See in this regard Is 11:4.

<sup>26</sup> John 20:22.

book: "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard?" Used here by Isaiah to encourage the weary and discouraged,, it will be used 700 years later by Jesus with a dual purpose: as an attention-gainer; and as an insult to the Pharisees and Sadducees, to shame them into listening to what follows (which makes it a more effective attention-gainer).

Here in Isaiah 40, however, after the attention –gainer, there then comes the good news. It is that those who put their trust in God the LORD, those who faithfully serve Him, will be refreshed and renewed when they are weak, weary and discouraged. The promise is that even when the youths, who are naturally strong but who, by implication, are not trusting in and serving the LORD (and note that here, the name is *Elohim* the *YHWH*), but are trusting in their own strength and endurance, grow weary and give up, then even the elderly who are faithful will still be strong, refreshed, and renewed in their faith. It can even mean that they will be strengthened and renewed physically; these faithful ones will be renewed, persevere, and carry on their work when the unfaithful youth have given up and quit trying.

But a question here is unavoidable: what is meant by the clause, to "wait upon the LORD"? Does it mean to have patience--to give Him time to perform His miracle of renewal? Or does it mean to serve him, as a waiter or waitress in a restaurant serves the customer<sup>27</sup>? It seems to mean both, for the promise is only for those who trust and serve Him faithfully; and, sometimes, the promised refreshing and renewing seem slow in arriving. In either case, the promise is sure. The word "shall" in verse 31 is an imperative, which means that it **will** take place; and the result can be life-changing. What a wonderful promise!

#### 18. A Beautiful, Personal, Promise of God's Presence. (43:1-7)

The first seven verses of Chapter 43 comprise a beautiful promise: we who are the redeemed of God are not to fear, for He will always be with us. It is **not** a promise that we, His people will not undergo hardship and bad times; rather it is actually a promise that we **will** go through such times. The good news, however, is that He will always be with us in such times of trial--we won't go through them alone. On its face, the promise is to the nation of Israel (both Judah, and the former northern kingdom of Israel). But here the knowledge of the Elizabethan second person singular and plural becomes important, for the promise is two-fold. It clearly refers to the Israelite people as a whole, for it says so; yet, because Isaiah consistently uses the **singular** ("thee, thou and thine") here, the promise becomes

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<sup>27</sup> It is significant that the terms, "waiter" and "waitress" seem to have become politically incorrect and fallen into disuse, and they have been replaced by the word "server" (probably because it is "unisex"). At any rate, to "wait upon" as used here means to serve, as well as to be patient.

**personal**--spoken to each of God's children as individuals<sup>28</sup>. Thus, the promise can be read validly by substituting our own names for "thee, thou and thine," such as, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you Susan (or whatever your name is), I have called you by your name, Susan; you, Susan, are mine"... When you, Susan, pass through the waters..." etc.

19. There is No (Living) God but the LORD. (43:10-13; 44:6-8; 45:5-7; 45:21 [twice]; and 48:7-15)

Throughout the Old Testament, from Deuteronomy to Hosea, the true and living God, the unique, self-existing YHWH, declares His uniqueness, and reminds His people that there is no other true, redeeming GOD, there was none before Him and there shall be none after Him. This fundamental fact of the Universe is crystallized in its final form at the end of the Bible, in Revelation 1:8-18 (q.v.), but is found in Isaiah more times than in any other book of the Bible. From Chapter 43 to Chapter 48, this declaration is made at least 16 times.

20. An Astonishing Message from God to Cyrus. (44:21-45:13)

Speaking through the prophet, Isaiah, God identifies Himself (YHWH) and speaks to Cyrus, the Persian King in Babylon, who will send the captive Israelite remnant back to Jerusalem, to rebuild and repopulate it, and to rebuild the Temple. And, goes the prophecy, Cyrus will do all this without demanding ransom, or any other form of payment. This would be a significant prophecy under any circumstances; but it is particularly astonishing in that the message is spoken about 150 years before Cyrus will be born, and 200 years before he will issue his famous decree. And, in so doing, He even gives Cyrus his name ("I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.")<sup>29</sup>. In the course of the prophecy, God calls Cyrus "my shepherd" and "[my] anointed"; I believe that we will meet Cyrus in Heaven<sup>30</sup>. Also in the prophecy, the Lord makes it clear that He confirms His own words, but condemns the utterances of false prophets and exposes them for what they are.

**NOTES:**

*a. This prophecy must have been particularly strange for Isaiah, first because he knew of no important man named Cyrus and, second, because he could look around and see that Jerusalem was not destroyed, it was already populated, and the Temple was standing there, complete. Isaiah will have died about 100 years*

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<sup>28</sup> As explained in the Introductory Material to this study guide, under "Archaic Language in the Authorized Version," in Elizabethan English "you" is a plural and, therefore, impersonal. On the other hand, "thee," "thou," and "thine" are singular and, therefore, are personal. Regrettably, no modern version makes these distinctions.

<sup>29</sup> The use of "surname" in the prophecy probably refers to "the Great" which was added to his name.

<sup>30</sup> Josephus wrote that Cyrus came to know of his destiny as an instrument of God, "by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies...." (Antiquities 11.1.2).

*before Jerusalem and the Temple will be destroyed, and the final group of Israelites carried into captivity; and he will have been dead about 200 years before the restoration that he prophesies here.*

*b. Later, Jeremiah will also prophesy concerning the decree of Cyrus, in that he will predict that the captivity in Babylon will end after 70 years<sup>31</sup>. Thus the prophecies of both Isaiah and Jeremiah will be fulfilled by the decree of Cyrus in his first year of rule over Babylon, which he will conquer. It is probable that the prophet Daniel read both prophecies to Cyrus, moving him to issue his decree.*

21. A Prediction of Babylon's Future Fall. (Chapter 47)

Isaiah continues to prophesy concerning the eventual, complete, downfall of Babylon, and states the reason for its coming downfall: the practices of pagan idolatry there. He then issues a challenge to the Babylonian sorcerers, astrologers and prognosticators (predictors of the future) in whom the Babylonians trusted, and says that they will not even be able to save themselves when the predicted downfall comes, let alone save their nation.

22. A Proverb, the Personhood of the Unborn, and a Messianic Prophecy. (48:22-49:6)

In one verse, Isaiah utters an oft-quoted proverb, a profound, fundamental, fact about the lack of peace in the life of the wicked<sup>32</sup>. He then makes a clear declaration that our lives as individual, unique, human beings, begin at conception, and that God knows us and has a plan for each of us before we are born<sup>33</sup>. And then, with this much already declared, he goes on to state the astonishing fact that the Messiah, when He comes, will bring salvation, not only to the Jew, but also to the gentile<sup>34</sup>.

23. The Classic Prophecy of the Suffering Messiah. (Chapter 53)

Chapter 53 is the classic passage predicting that when the Messiah would come, He would not come as a conquering military hero; instead, He would come as one who would suffer terribly to pay the sacrificial price for the sins of God's people (and for all others). This chapter is so obviously descriptive of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus that today most rabbis, knowing this, never preach from it or refer to it. Most religious lay Jews are completely unaware of its existence, or are forbidden to read it. Messianic (Christian) Jews often use this chapter in witnessing to Jews who are unredeemed. This is particularly effective with

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<sup>31</sup> Jeremiah 25:8-13.

<sup>32</sup> The proverbial fact stated in 48:22 is repeated, and more fully, in 57:20-21.

<sup>33</sup> See also in this regard Ps 139:13-16 and the study guide to this passage, and Jer 1:5.

<sup>34</sup> Verse 6b will be quoted, 700 years later, by the aged prophet, Simeon, as he holds the eight-day-old Jesus in his arms in the Temple, and declares Him to be the Messiah (Lk 2:32).

observant, religious, Jews (those who acknowledge the authority of Scripture), but who are unaware of this chapter<sup>35</sup>.

24. The Ultimate Husband. (54:1-10)

In Chapter 54 the Lord speaks metaphorically to the Israelites as their husband. And thus, the promise applies to us, the Church, for we have inherited the promises made to Israel<sup>36</sup>. In beautiful poetry He promises that, ultimately, He will not divorce or forsake them. It is clear that the Lord is speaking of the scattered Israelite nation, thus to us, the Church; but it is even better than that, for here again He speaks in the second person singular ("thee, thou, thy, thine"). This means that the promise also applies to us as individuals. Thus, He speaks to the unmarried, the divorced, widowed, rejected, and abandoned, and promises that, somehow, He will bring fulfillment and healing to us, as a husband to a wife he loves.

25. God's Promise for Peace and Protection. (54:11-17)

Jesus stated clearly that, "in this world ye shall have tribulation"; and anyone old enough to be reading this has probably already experienced the truth of his statement. He then, however, went on to give us the good news that we are to be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world<sup>37</sup>. When Jesus uttered these words, in his last conversation with his disciples on the night in which He was betrayed, He was, in a way, summarizing God's promise of peace and protection in Isaiah 54. Here, again in beautiful Hebrew poetry, the Lord speaks through the prophet to his people who are "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted," and promises peace, ultimate victory over tribulation, and protection from enemies--especially those who will attack us with their words.

This is all wonderfully good news; but, almost hidden in the passage (verse 13), is the key--the thing required of us in order to receive the promise of peace: it is that all our children must be taught of the Lord. Again, this refers to the children of Israel, i.e. the Hebrew nation; but it also applies to us as individual Christian parents. If we **do not** teach our children to know the Lord and His Word, the world around them **will indoctrinate them**, and they will have no peace<sup>38</sup>.

*NOTE: The promise in v 13 of peace for our children if they are taught of the LORD (YHWH), appears to have three valid meanings:*

*a. It applies to the "children of Israel," i.e. the Hebrew nation. An example of this is the contrast of the lives of the Israelites under King Josiah, before the Scriptures*

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<sup>35</sup> After the great revival in Samaria, 700 years after the writing of Isaiah, Philip the evangelist will explain to the Ethiopian eunuch that this prophecy speaks of Jesus, and the man will become a believer and ask to be immediately baptized (Acts 8:26-39).

<sup>36</sup> Galatians 3:29.

<sup>37</sup> John 16:33.

<sup>38</sup> This basic fact of life is so important that Isaiah makes it repeatedly; see also Is 48:22; 57:20-21; 59:8.

*were rediscovered, and their lives after they were rediscovered, and systematically taught throughout the kingdom.*

*b. It applies to all of God's redeemed children, then and now, who are taught of the Lord, for the assumption is that each generation will teach the next (there is no time limit included in the promise). Thus, the peace will be provided for in each generation.*

*c. And it applies to us as parents--as individual families. If our children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, they will have peace in growing up. It is demonstrated before our eyes that, with such evil all about us, all that we need to do, in order virtually to guarantee the torment and destruction of our children, is to do nothing.*

26. The Emptiness of Sin, and a Gracious Invitation. (Chapter 55)

Chapter 55 is a poem reminding us of the emptiness and vanity of life without God, and an invitation to seek Him and live a blessed life in a covenant relationship with Him. He promises that He will abundantly pardon and forgive both the unredeemed, and the wayward believer. Pointing out that His thoughts and ways are far above and beyond our own, that we cannot fully understand the things that happen, He promises that His Word will ultimately have its promised effect, as surely as the rain brings forth the growth of good things<sup>39</sup>. If we choose to forsake unrighteousness and trust Him, His Word will accomplish what it promises, and peace and joy will be our ultimate lot. Verses 1, 2 and 12 are beautiful examples of Hebrew poetic expression.

27. When the Righteous Die Young: Why? (Chapter 57)

In the first two verses of Chapter 57 there is a wonderful, comforting, revelation concerning the death of the righteous who are, by our human standards, too young to die. Here, the Lord speaks to us through Isaiah to say that the righteous young are taken to spare them from having to experience some terrible thing in the future. They, He reminds us, have entered into perfect peace and rest<sup>40</sup>. The rest of the chapter, by contrast, describes the wicked who do go on living, and their restlessness and inability to find peace.

There is a powerful lesson in the contrast of the first two verses and the last two verses. The comforting promise in the first two verses, of peace and rest for the righteous who die young, are vividly contrasted in the last two verses with the restless misery of the wicked who go on living<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> In this regard, see Rom 11:33-36.

<sup>40</sup> One of the few things about Kenneth Taylor's Living Bible (and its later incarnation, the New Living Translation) which I can recommend is its paraphrase of these first two verses. I also recommend the reading of Mrs. Siewert's amplification of them in her Amplified Bible, along with the literal translation in the AV (KJV).

<sup>41</sup> Concerning the life of the persistently wicked, see Is 59:7-8.

28. God's Chosen Fast, and its Blessings. (Chapter 58)

Chapter 58 is a condemnation of religious hypocrisy. It is a vivid illustration of what the Lord said to the prophet Samuel when he was sent to examine the sons of Jesse, and to anoint the one chosen to be the next king: "...man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart<sup>42</sup>." **This is one of the most important principles in all of Scripture.** It is so important that the Old Testament, with the words of Malachi, is closed with it<sup>43</sup>. It was repeated by Jesus in rebuking the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, calling them "whited sepulchers" because they looked good (religious) on the outside, but their hearts were hard and full of sin<sup>44</sup>. And it was later emphasized by James in describing "pure religion and undefiled<sup>45</sup>."

I believe that God would rather that we be sincerely wrong, than arrogantly right.

In the first five verses, the prophet condemns the people's hypocrisy; in verses six and seven, he declares the kind of activity that is truly pleasing to God ("Is not **this** the fast that I have chosen?"); and in the last seven verses, he describes, in beautiful Hebrew poetry, the wonderful blessings that result from sincerely seeking God and being doers of the work, having compassion and caring for others.

29. The Sin Barrier--the Bad News. (59:1-15)

I once stopped on a highway to help a woman who was alone, and her car had broken down. I was able to get her back on the road and advised her to stop at the next exit to consult a real mechanic. Then I asked her if she knew the Lord; she said, "I once did, but I have wandered far from Him." I asked her if it had made her happy; and, without a word, she began to cry. She was a living illustration of the first 15 verses of Isaiah 59. God had not abandoned her--she had abandoned Him; and, her journey through sin had definitely **not** made her happy<sup>46</sup>.

The principle is simple, and it never fails: sin separates us from God, for He cannot look upon it; it is we who create the separation by our sinful choices, not God, for He never changes and His steadfast love never ceases; and, when we choose sin, we lose peace. It really is that simple.

***NOTE:** In vv 5-6 of the above passage there is a fascinating bit of natural science revealed in advance of human knowledge: the fact that spider webs are actually made of tiny strands of silk.*

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<sup>42</sup> 1 Samuel 16:7.

<sup>43</sup> Malachi 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Matthew 23:27.

<sup>45</sup> James 1:27.

<sup>46</sup> It is also true that righteous, godly behavior offends the wicked (v 15). As a rule, our fellow sinners are greatly offended when we repent and choose righteousness, for our godly behavior casts light on their sinful behavior and reproves it, even though we say nothing about it or call attention to it otherwise. It seems that our still-sinners friends are automatically offended. (Eph 5:6-16).

30. The Sin Barrier--the Good News. (59:16-21)

The last six verses remind us of the good news: that, although our sinful choices separate us from God, there is forgiveness and blessing available for us if we will turn from our wicked ways and return to Him. He will abundantly pardon us, and reinvest us with the blessings and protection of righteousness.

Verse 19 is a precious promise that “when the enemy shall come in like a flood,” when troubles threaten to overwhelm and defeat us, the LORD (YHWH) will “raise up a standard” against the enemy, i.e. He will raise and plant the flag of righteousness in the midst of the troubles so that we have his unchanging standard of truth to keep us oriented. We will not become confused and lose our way; we will keep our eyes upon that standard and prevail in the battle. There is also in these verses, lightly veiled, a glimpse of the coming Messiah, who will redeem those who turn from sin, and will establish an everlasting kingdom of righteousness, with salvation available to us, to our children, and throughout all generations.

31. A Very Special Prophecy of the Messiah. (61:1-3)

The first three verses of Chapter 61 comprise a beautiful prophecy of the Messiah to come. Any such messianic prophecy is important, but this one is extremely important; and, it is extremely interesting; for the Messiah will, 700 years later, stand up and read these verses in his hometown synagogue at Nazareth, and then declare to them that He is their fulfillment.

One would expect that the congregation would be pleased to hear that this young man who has grown up in their midst, and in their congregation, is the long-awaited Messiah. They, however, will definitely not be pleased. We can read about it in Luke 4:18-30, and will find some fascinating details there when we study Luke 4.

*NOTE: When Jesus stands up in the synagogue at Nazareth, reads these verses from Is 61 and declares that they speak of Him, He will omit one phrase: “the day of vengeance of our god.” The reason for this is that, in his earthly ministry as Messiah He fulfill all of the prophecy, except for that one phrase. To fulfill the “day of vengeance of our God” He will wait until the end-times days of final judgment<sup>47</sup>.*

32. Retroactive Prayer? (65:24)

Is it possible that God answers prayer before we pray? Of course it is; we can arrive at this conclusion simply because He knows that we are going to pray before we do it. Yet, this simple fact opens the door to an enormously profound concept, one that underlies everything that we think, say, or do in our lives here on Earth.

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<sup>47</sup> Revelation 20:10-15.

It is helpful to remind ourselves, from time to time, that our God does not live within the limits of time and space as we do, with past, present and future; instead, He lives in one enormous present. Jesus gave us a glimpse into this remarkable reality when he said to his religious persecutors, “Before Abraham was, I am.” Think about those amazing words! To his enemies, they were just a bewildering irritant; but for us, they can help us to deal with the concept of eternity and, in so doing, find enormous comfort.

There is, in Isaiah 65, one verse which actually tells us, clearly, and in simple words, that God can answer prayer before we pray: it is verse 24. This seems to open many interesting possibilities for us. For example, it appears that we can pray for a desirable outcome, concerning something unknown which is, for us, in the past, such as the salvation of one who has died, leaving us unsure as to his eternal destiny. We must be careful not to build a doctrine on just one verse; but the possibilities are fascinating, and can be, for us, enormously comforting.

There is no other such verse in the Bible.

### 33. Prophecies of Attitudes, End Times, and Judgment.

The final chapter of Isaiah is a summation, a sort of potpourri of several interesting things, mostly concerned with the proper spirit toward God, the Millennium, judgment and the End Times.

a. (66:1-5) Isaiah opens his final chapter with a reminder that the LORD has created all things, and that what he most expects and desires from us is a broken and contrite spirit. If we make a drink offering of the finest wine, but do it in an indifferent or haughty spirit, then we might as well be offering Him an oblation of swine’s blood. Men have become proud and haughty; they have cast out the humble and the poor, behaving toward them as religious superiors. These proud men have not listened to the voice of God; and, when He returns, it is the humble and those of low estate who will rejoice, and the self-important ones will be trembling in the light of God’s displeasure<sup>48</sup>.

b. (66:6-17) Obedience and submission to the Lord, and love for Jerusalem, will result in a life of plenty, comfort and protection, even as a mother feeds, carries and protects her young child. For the haughty and disobedient, however, it will be the opposite: the LORD will come with fury, like a whirlwind, and will rebuke the proud, those who attempt to sanctify themselves, with flames of fire and the sword. They pretend to be obedient, but in secret they eat abominable things (and, presumably, worship false, pagan, gods, for these things generally go together).

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<sup>48</sup> Psalm 34:18, 115:1-16; Is 57:15.

c. (66:18-23) At this point Isaiah seems to be prophesying about the great events of the End Times: the gathering of “all nations”; a universal recognition of the LORD’s glory; a final evangelistic in-gathering of the redeemed from parts of the Earth where He has not been known. They will assemble in Jerusalem, his “holy mountain,” and He will make from them priests and Levites. This making of “priests and Levites” at the end of time seems strange--like reverting to the Old Covenant Levitical religious system--and may be just a metaphor for making them righteous and redeemed; but we must be careful not to assume that the entire passage is symbolic, and not literal.

d. (66:24) Clearly speaking of final judgment and the time of the New Heavens and New Earth, the LORD says that the redeemed will be eternally in his blessed, wonderful presence, worshiping Him. And, in this final verse, Isaiah writes that the redeemed, in some way, will look with abhorrence and disgust upon the corpses (“carcasses”) of the eternally damned, whose “worm shall not die,” neither shall their fire shall not be quenched<sup>49</sup>.”

***NOTE:** This final verse seems to be speaking of the time immediately following the great End Times battle, when the Heavenly Host of God will, finally and forever, defeat and destroy the rebellious, relentless enemies of righteousness--that time when evil will finally be forever defeated, time and space limitations will cease to exist, and we shall join our Heavenly Father in that one, enormous, everlasting, and blessed present, in which He dwells, where there is neither past nor future.*

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<sup>49</sup>About 700 years later Jesus will quote from verse 24, in speaking of the eternal, horrible, destiny of the unredeemed (Mk 9:42-48).