

Isaiah

A Suggested Outline of Isaiah

- I. Condemnation (1–39) (The defeat of Assyria)
 - A. Sermons against Judah and Israel (1–12)
 - B. Burdens of judgment on the other nations (13–23)
 - C. Songs of future glory for the nation (24–27)
 - D. Woes against the sins of the people (28–35)
 - E. Historical Interlude (36–39) (King Hezekiah)
 - 1. His victory over Assyria (36–37)
 - 2. His sin with Babylon (38–39)

- II. Consolation (40–66) (The remnant returns home)
 - A. God's Greatness (40–48)
 - The true God vs. the false gods of the heathen.
 - Emphasis on the Father, Jehovah God.
 - B. God's Grace (49–57)
 - The Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ, dies for men.
 - Emphasis on the Son, Jesus Christ.
 - C. God's Glory (58–66)
 - The glory of the future kingdom.
 - Emphasis on the Spirit (59:19, 21; 61:1; 63:10–14).

Introductory Notes to Isaiah

I. Name

“Isaiah” means “the salvation of Jehovah,” and the word salvation is repeated many times in the book. Isaiah apparently was from a leading family, since he had access to several of the Jewish kings. He was married (8:3) and the father of at least two sons (7:3 and 8:1–3). He began his ministry near the close of the reign of King Uzziah, or about 758 B.C. He preached until the turn of the century, and tradition tells us he was sawn asunder by wicked King Manasseh (Heb. 11:37).

II. Theme

The Book of Isaiah divides itself into two sections, chapters 1–39 and chapters 40–66. The first section warns the Jews about the impending Assyrian invasion of Judah, while the second section encourages the captives returning from the Babylonian captivity.

The main theme of the first section is God's chastening of Judah for their sins, while the main theme of the second section is God's consolation of the captives after their suffering. Isaiah experienced the events of the first thirty-nine chapters, but he prophesied the events of the last section of the book. In the first section, Assyria was the chief foe; in the last section, Babylon was the enemy.

III. Historical Setting

You will recall that the nation divided after the death of Solomon; ten tribes in the north were organized as Israel, and two tribes in the south as Judah. The capital of Israel was Samaria; the capital of Judah was Jerusalem. Isaiah ministered in Jerusalem, but his messages touched both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. Isaiah lived to see Israel (the Northern Kingdom) decline and finally go into ruin under Assyria.

The political scene was threatening to Judah at that time. Assyria was the menacing power and the other nations wanted to form a coalition to fight her. However, King Ahaz of Judah would not join the league. So, Syria and Israel united to attack Judah to try to force Ahaz to cooperate. Instead of trusting the Lord for help, Ahaz turned to *Assyria* for assistance and made a secret pact. Assyria was only too glad to get her foot in the door; she defeated Israel in 721 B.C., but Judah became a vassal state to Assyria, the price Ahaz had to pay for his security. No sooner was Israel out of the way than Assyria decided to attack *Judah* and enslave the entire Jewish nation. Isaiah told the people to trust the Lord for help, but various groups told the king to turn to Egypt for aid. In chapters 36–39, Isaiah tells how God gave King Hezekiah victory over Assyria when the invading army was at the very walls of Jerusalem. However, Judah was so weakened from war, and her cities had been so overrun by the enemy, that the nation never really recovered. Assyria was defeated by the Egyptians; the Egyptians fell to the Babylonians; and in 606–587 B.C., the Babylonians took Judah into captivity. So, in the first half of his book, Isaiah counseled the nation concerning Assyria; in the last half, he comforted the remnant concerning their return from Babylon.

IV. Christ in Isaiah

Isaiah gives a rich prophetic picture of Jesus Christ. We see His birth (7:14 with Matt. 1:23; also Isa. 9:6); the ministry of John the Baptist (40:3–6 with Matt. 3:1ff); Christ anointed by the Spirit (61:1–2 with Luke 4:17–19); Christ the Servant (42:1–4 with Matt. 12:17–21); Israel's rejection of Christ (6:9–11 with John 12:38ff, Matt. 13:10–15, and parallel references in the Gospels; also Acts 28:26–27 and Rom. 11:8); the Stone of Stumbling (8:14 and 28:16 with Rom. 9:32–33 and 10:11, 1 Peter 2:6); Christ's ministry to the Gentiles (49:6 with Luke 2:32, Acts 13:47; see also 9:1–2 with Matt. 4:15–16); Christ's suffering and death (52:13–53:12); His resurrection (55:3 with Acts 13:34; 45:23

with Phil. 2:10–11 and Rom. 14:11); and the Coming King (9:6–7, 11:1ff, 32:1–2; 59:20–21 with Rom. 11:26–27; 63:2–3 with Rev. 19:13–15).

V. The Suffering Servant

There are seventeen references in Isaiah to “Jehovah’s servant.” In thirteen of these, the nation is in view (43:10; 44:1–2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3, 5–7); in four, Jesus Christ is in view (42:1 and 19; 52:13–53:11). The entire section from 52:13 to 53:12 is a vivid description of the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Israel was Jehovah’s servant in that the nation was used of God to bring the Word and the Savior to the world. However, Israel was a disobedient servant that had to be chastened. Jesus Christ is the true Servant of Jehovah who died for the world and perfectly did His Father’s will. In 41:8–9, Cyrus is the servant.

VI. Isaiah’s Two Sons

The symbolical names of his two sons (7:3 and 8:1–3) illustrate the two main messages of Isaiah’s book. Shear-jashub means “a remnant shall return” and ties in with the second half of the prophecy, the return of the remnant from Babylon. Maher-shalal-hash-baz means “speed to the spoil, haste to the prey” and ties in with chapters 1–39, the defeat of Assyria.

It has been suggested that Isaiah’s book is like a “Bible in miniature.” Its sixty-six chapters are divided into two parts, thirty-nine chapters in the first division (like the OT) and twenty-seven chapters in the second division (like the NT). The first thirty-nine chapters emphasize judgment; the last twenty-seven emphasize mercy and comfort.

Isaiah 6

King Uzziah has died and the throne of Judah is empty. Like all men of faith, Isaiah turned to God for his help and comfort, and in that hour of seeming defeat, he experienced a great spiritual blessing. He saw that the throne of heaven was still occupied by Jehovah God! Note the three-fold vision God gave to Isaiah.

I. The Upward Look—He Saw the Lord (6:1–4)

Like all devoted citizens, Isaiah had venerated King Uzziah. For fifty-two years, Uzziah had led Judah in a program of peace and prosperity. It was an era of expansion and achievement. It was unfortunate that the king had rebelled against the Word of God and died a leper (2 Kings 15:1–7; 2 Chron. 26). Isaiah realized that though the nation had prospered materially, it was in terrible condition spiritually. The economic growth and temporary peace were a veneer that covered a nation with a wicked heart. What was going to happen to Judah?

God lifted Isaiah's eyes from himself and his people to the throne of heaven. There might be confusion and unrest on earth, but there was perfect peace in heaven: God was seated in majestic power and glory. People on earth might be recalling the shame of Uzziah's death as a leper, but there was no shame or shadow of failure in heaven. Rather, the seraphim were saying, "Holy, holy, holy."

John 12:38–41 informs us that Isaiah saw Jesus Christ in His glory. He was on the throne of heaven being praised by the seraphim. His royal robe filled the heavenly temple, and the house was filled with the smoke of His anger against sin (Ps. 80:4). His angelic creatures, the seraphim ("fiery ones"), praised Him for His holiness and His glory. "The whole earth is full of His glory." Isaiah did not see much glory that day, nor do we see it today. Rather, it seems that the whole earth is "filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11). We see events from a human perspective; the angels see them from God's viewpoint. One day when Jesus reigns, the whole earth shall be full of His glory (see Num. 14:21, Ps. 72:19, and Hab. 2:14). See also Isa. 11:9. "Lord of hosts" is Isaiah's favorite name for God; he uses it at least sixty-five times. "Lord of the armies" is what it means. The prophet also calls God "the Holy One of Israel" at least thirty times. Jehovah is the God of holy warfare, the God who opposes sin and defeats the enemy. Isaiah needed to realize this fact in a day when Judah appeared to be defeated. This is a good practical lesson for Christians today: when the day is dark, lift your eyes to heaven and see Christ on the throne. "The Lord is in His holy temple."

II. The Inward Look—He Saw Himself (6:5–7)

A true vision of God and His holiness always makes us realize our own sinfulness and failure. Job saw God and repented (Job 42:6); Peter cried out, "I am a sinful man" when he saw Christ's power (Luke 5:8). Self-righteous rabbi Saul saw that his own righteousness was but "garbage" next to the glory of Christ (Acts 9 and Phil. 3), and he believed and became the Apostle Paul. When believers have a true experience with the Lord, it does not make them proud; rather, it humbles and breaks them.

When Isaiah confessed his sins, he mentioned especially his unclean lips. Of course, unclean lips are the products of an unclean heart. The prophet knew that he could not faithfully preach for the Lord unless he was prepared and cleansed. How different from some Christians who rush out to serve Christ before taking time to meet the Lord and be cleansed. God met the prophet's need: He sent a seraph to cleanse him with a coal from the altar. How tragic it would be to have the throne without the altar! There would be conviction of sin, but no cleansing. Note that it was more important for the seraph to equip Isaiah to be a soul-winner than to praise God. True worship ought to lead to witness and service. Too many Christians want to hold on to a "spiritual experience" with the Lord, rather than be prepared to go out to share the Lord with others.

There is a wonderful word of encouragement here: God quickly answers prayer and cleanses us (1 John 1:9). He longs to equip us to serve Him.

III. The Outward Look—He Saw the Need (6:8–13)

Everything to this point was a preparation. Now God can call Isaiah and use him to preach His Word. The prophet is no longer wrapped up in his own needs; he wants to do the will of God. He is no longer burdened by sin; he has been cleansed. He is no longer discouraged; he knows that God is on the throne. Now he is ready to go to work.

The call is an evidence of God's grace. He is willing to use human beings to accomplish His will on earth. God certainly could have sent one of the seraphim, and it would have obeyed instantly and perfectly. But when it comes to proclaiming His Word, God must use human lips. God is still calling believers today and, alas, few are responding. In Isaiah's day, only a "remnant" would obey.

"Go and tell!" This is God's commission to us today. "You shall be witnesses to me ... to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, nkjv). It was not an easy commission God gave to the prophet, for the nation was in no mood to hear his messages of sin and judgment. In chapter 1, God pictures the nation as a sick body, covered with wounds and rotting sores, and as a stubborn and rebellious animal, too ignorant to listen to his own master. In chapter 5, the nation is pictured as a beautiful vineyard that did not produce good grapes. As you read chapters 1–5, you understand the burden that God gave Isaiah. The nation was prosperous; why preach about sin? The "fashionable ladies" would not like it (3:16–26), nor would the leading rulers (5:8ff). When people are rich, full, and satisfied, they do not believe that judgment is coming.

Verses 9–10 are quoted six times in the NT: Matt. 13:13–15, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, John 12:40, Acts 28:25–28, Rom. 11:8; making a total of seven references in all. Is God saying that He deliberately blinds people and condemns them? No, not at all. What He is saying is that the Word of God has this hardening and blinding effect on sinners who will not listen and yield. The sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay. Note the steps downward in John 12: they *would* not believe (v. 37); therefore, they *could* not believe (v. 39); and thus they *should* not believe (v. 40) because they had sealed their own doom.

The servant of God is to proclaim God's Word regardless of how people respond. It took a great deal of faith on Isaiah's part to obey such a commission. "How long should I preach and therefore produce these tragic results?" he asks. "Until I am finished with My judgment on the land," the Lord replies. This kind of judgment is announced in 1:7–9 and 2:12–22. But the Lord will save a remnant, even though the nation will be removed far away into captivity (vv. 12–13). This prophecy applied immediately to the captivity, but it also pictures God's dealings with Israel in the last days, when a small remnant of Jews will believe during the Tribulation period. Isaiah pictures the nation as a tree cut down; the stump remains and a new shoot can grow from it. Relate this to 11:1ff, the prophecy of "the Branch—Jesus Christ." When Isaiah walked out of the temple that day, he was no longer a mourner—he was a missionary. He was not merely a spectator; he was a participant. God had equipped him to do the job: Isaiah had seen the Lord, he had seen himself, and he had seen the need. Knowing that God was on the throne, and that God had called and commissioned him, he was ready to preach the Word and be faithful unto death. What an example for us to follow today.

Isaiah 7–12

There are two important principles to keep in mind as you study OT prophecy: (1) the prophets saw Christ's coming in humiliation and in glory, but did not see the period of time between these events—the church age (1 Peter 1:10–12); and (2) each prophecy grew out of a definite historical situation but looked beyond that present day to the future. We shall see these principles in the chapters before us now. The prophet is dealing with a definite crisis in Judah's history—the impending attack by Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Syria—and he tells the nation exactly what will happen. Within these prophecies, Isaiah also announces the coming of the Messiah. Note the prophecies he gives.

I. Judah Will Be Delivered from Her Enemies (7:1–16)

A. *The situation (vv. 1–2).*

Assyria was growing stronger and threatening the other nations, so Israel and Syria joined forces to protect themselves. They wanted Judah to line up with them, but she would not. Actually, Ahaz was secretly bargaining with Assyria to protect him (2 Kings 16:1–9). The nation was frightened because Syria and Israel were about to attack and there seemed to be no way of escape.

B. *The promise (vv. 3–9).*

God sent Isaiah and his son Shear-jashub (“The remnant shall return”) to meet King Ahaz while the ruler was inspecting the Jerusalem water supply. Isaiah gave the king a message of hope and confidence: “Don't be afraid of Syria and Israel, for within sixty-five years they will be broken.” This prophecy came true: Assyria defeated Syria (Damascus) in 732, and Israel (Ephraim, Samaria) in 721, within the allotted time given.

C. *The sign (vv. 10–16).*

Ahaz acted very pious by refusing to receive a sign from God. So, the Lord turned from Ahaz and gave a sign to the entire house of David (v. 13). This sign was fulfilled ultimately in the birth of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:23). He was born of the Virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31–35). To make the word “virgin” in v. 14 into the word “young woman” is to twist the Scriptures. His name was “Immanuel,” which means “God is with us” (see 8:8 and 10). Jesus Christ is God come in human flesh, yet without sin (John 1:14). He is not merely a “good man” or a “great teacher”; He is the very Son of God. To deny this is to deny the Word of God (1 John 4:1–6).

It is possible (but not necessary) that there was some kind of an immediate fulfillment of the prophecy as a sign to the king and the nation. This does not mean a miraculous virgin birth, since only Jesus Christ could be born in that manner. But it does suggest that a Jewish virgin was wed and within the next year gave birth to a child. Before this child could reach the legal Jewish age of accountability (12 years old), the

enemy nations of Israel and Syria would be defeated. If this sign was given in 735 B.C., as it probably was, then by 721 the promise would be fulfilled. As we have seen, Syria fell in 732 and Samaria in 721. It is possible that the “sign child” was born to Isaiah’s wife; the record is given in 8:1–8. This would mean that the prophet’s first wife (the mother of Shear-jashub, 7:3) had died, and that the prophet married the second wife shortly after uttering this prophecy. In spite of King Ahaz’s unbelief and scheming (he robbed the temple to bribe Assyria—2 Chron. 28:21, 24–25), God graciously delivered Judah from her enemies. But Judah was left enslaved to Assyria, and only a divine intervention in Hezekiah’s day delivered the nation (see Isa. 36–37).

II. Israel Will Be Defeated by Assyria (7:17–10:34)

From 7:17 on, Isaiah is talking to apostate Israel and Pekah, her king. He warns the Northern Kingdom that Assyria will come upon them and completely ruin them, leaving the land in poverty and ruin instead of fullness of blessing. It was at this point that the “sign child” was born (8:1–4), and named Maher-shalal-hash-baz—“speed to the spoil, haste to the prey.” His name emphasized the coming ruin of Samaria and Syria (8:4). Israel’s confederacy with Syria would not protect the people (8:11–15); they needed to join with Jehovah and let Him be their stone of safety. They needed to get back to the law (8:20).

In 9:1–7 Isaiah gives a second prediction of the coming Messiah; see Matt. 4:13–16. The areas mentioned in 9:1 suffered the most when Assyria swept over Israel, but they would be the ones to see the light of Messiah. In vv. 3–5, the prophet looks down the years to the time when Israel would rejoice, when burdens would be lifted, when the weapons of warfare would be burned as fuel—the time when Jesus Christ would reign as Prince of Peace. See here the humanity of Christ (“a Child is born”) and the deity of Christ (“a Son is given”). Then the prophet jumps from His humble birth to His glorious reign, when He shall rule from Jerusalem and there shall be perfect peace.

In 9:8–10:34, Isaiah continues to warn Israel of her impending doom. He also warns Assyria not to become proud of her victories, for she is but a tool in the hands of God. Her day of defeat will come too. We may see in Assyria a type of the Antichrist who will gather all nations against Jerusalem at the Battle of Armageddon. Just as God defeated Assyria with His miraculous power, so He will defeat Satan and his united armies (Rev. 19).

III. Israel and Judah Will Unite in the Kingdom (11–12)

Note 11:12—the divided nations will one day unite and return to their land in peace. In 11:1–3 we have a picture of Jesus Christ, “the Branch.” In 6:13 we saw the nation “chopped down” as a tree, with the stump remaining; now we see Christ coming from the stump to save the people. Jesus Christ is the legal descendant of David; He is “rooted” in Judah as a Jew Himself. He is called “the Branch of the Lord” in 4:2, “a righteous Branch” in Jer. 23:5; “my servant the Branch” in Zech. 3:8; and “the man whose name is the Branch” in Zech. 6:12. The Hebrew word *netzer* (“branch”) ties in with the name given to Jesus in Matt. 2:23—“the Nazarene.”

The four Gospels describe “the Branch” for us as follows: *Matthew*—David’s righteous Branch (Jer. 23:5); *Mark*—my servant the Branch (Zech. 3:8); *Luke*—the man whose name is the Branch (Zech. 6:12); and *John*—the Branch of Jehovah (Isa. 4:2). Thus Jesus Christ will one day fulfill the OT promises God gave to the Jews and will reign over His kingdom in glory and victory (Rom. 15:8–12). We see all three Persons of the Godhead in 11:2—“The Spirit of the Lord (Jehovah) shall rest upon Him (Christ).” There is a seven-fold ministry of the Spirit here. Certainly the Holy Spirit empowered Christ in His ministry here on earth (John 3:34); and the Spirit shall also empower us today to enable us to serve Christ and glorify Him (Acts 1:8). From 11:4 on, we have a description of the glorious kingdom that Christ will establish when He returns to reign. It will be a time of honest judgment when sin will immediately be dealt with. Nature shall be restored (Rom. 8:18–25), and there will be no more curse. Violence and war will be gone. “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (v. 9); see Isa. 6:3 and Hab. 2:14. Please do not “spiritualize” these promises. To steal them from the Jew and apply them to the church is to twist the Scriptures. These are literal promises of a literal kingdom over which Christ shall reign one day.

In 11:10 we are told that Christ will call the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The miracle of crossing the Red Sea at the Exodus will be repeated in the last days so that Israel will be able to return to her land (11:11–16). People once laughed at these promises, but now that Israel possesses her own land and Holy City, their fulfillment seems near. Chapter 12 is the nation’s song of victory. They sang this song when they were delivered from Egypt (Ex. 15:2), and also when they returned after the exile to rebuild the temple (Ps. 118:14). They will sing it again when they go back to their land in victory and glory when Jesus shall reign over a world of peace and prosperity.

Isaiah 40–66

Isaiah 40–66 is often called the “New Testament section” of the book. It has twenty-seven chapters in it, similar to the twenty-seven books of the NT. It begins with the ministry of John the Baptist (40:3–4 with Matt. 3:1–3) and its emphasis is Christ and salvation. At the very heart of this section is chapter 53, the greatest OT prediction of Christ’s death on the cross. While Isa. 1–39 emphasizes God’s judgment on His people, Isa. 40–66 sounds a note of comfort and redemption. It was written to encourage the Jewish remnant that would be delivered from the Babylonian captivity after their seventy years of captivity. Isaiah wrote this amazing prophecy over 150 years before the remnant would ever need it for their encouragement.

As you read these chapters, several major ideas will stand out. The first is the constant emphasis, “Fear not.” See 41:10, 13–14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8. Of what were the Jews afraid? Of the great Gentile nations that were moving in conquest across the world. Israel had been taken by Assyria; Judah had been captured by Babylon, and now a new empire—the Persians—was emerging on the scene. And all these nations worshiped idols. “If these nations are so victorious,” some of the Jews argued, “then their gods must be the true gods, and Jehovah cannot be trusted.” This leads to the

second major idea: the greatness of God and the falseness of the heathen idols. Read carefully 40:18–20; 41:6–7, 29; 42:8, 17; 43:10–12; 44:9–20 (a scathing exposure of the stupidity of idol-worship); 45:16, 20; 46:1–2, 5–7. Please note the repeated statement that God is true and there is no other god to be compared with Him (40:18, 25; 43:10–11; 44:6, 8; 45:5–6, 14). In each of these chapters, Isaiah exposes the folly of idols and exalts the greatness of Jehovah. The Jewish remnant did not have to fear, God was great enough.

The third major idea has to do with Cyrus, King of Persia, the man God raised up to conquer Babylon and enable the Jews to return to their land (read 41:2–5, 25; 44:28–45:4; 47:11). He is the Cyrus mentioned in Ezra 1:1; he reigned from about 559 to 529 B.C. The fact that Isaiah calls him by name two centuries before he was born is another proof of the divine inspiration of the Bible. King Josiah was also named hundreds of years before his birth (1 Kings 13:2 and 2 Kings 23:15–18).

As you read these chapters, keep in mind that they have an immediate fulfillment in Cyrus and the return of the remnant from Babylon, and also an ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the redemption we have in Him. The wonderful deliverance from Babylon is a picture of the redemption Christ purchased for us on the cross. King Cyrus, though a heathen ruler, is in this sense a picture of Christ, our Redeemer (45:1–4). Isaiah 42:1–9 presents Christ as God's obedient Servant, bringing glory to the Jews and salvation to the Gentiles. Compare these verses with Matt. 12:18–20.

With this background, we may look at these chapters and see how God reveals Himself to His people and encourages them to trust Him. God reveals to them several aspects of His greatness.

I. The Greatness of His Person (40)

This chapter contrasts the greatness of God with the feebleness of man (vv. 6–8) and the weakness of the idols (vv. 18–20). How could this feeble remnant of Jews ever return to their land and establish the nation again? God would go before them and open the way (vv. 3–5). In Matt. 3:3 this promise is applied to John preparing the way for the arrival of Christ. "Don't look at yourselves" says the prophet in vv. 9–17. "Look at your God. He is the Creator of the universe. Is He not able to strengthen you and sustain you?" Note the blessed promise in vv. 28–31.

II. The Greatness of His Purpose (41)

Jehovah is not simply the God of the Jews; He is the Controller of the nations. He would raise up Cyrus from the east (Persia, v. 2) but bring him down from the north (after he conquered the Medes, v. 25). The nations trembled and turned to their idols, but they could not deliver them (vv. 3–7). God has a purpose in the rise and fall of the nations; Israel did not have to fear (vv. 10, 13–14) because God was with them and working out His purposes (Rom. 8:28). He would turn the "worm" into a "threshing-machine" and remove mountains! The idols had no purposes; they could not plan and control future events (vv. 21–24).

III. The Greatness of His Pardon (42–43)

In 42:1–9 we are introduced to Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:18–20) as we see His first coming in humility and grace, and His second coming in power and judgment. Between these two events we have the present age of the church. God had permitted the Jews to be captured and exiled to chasten them for their sins (42:18–25), but their captivity would not be forever. He would come in judgment and destroy Babylon (42:10–17), using Cyrus as His tool. Chapter 43 again assures Israel, “Fear not—I am with thee.” Their deliverance would make them witnesses to the world of the grace and power of God (43:10, 12). But Isaiah chides the nation for having forgotten God (43:22–27); and yet in His grace God would forgive their sins (43:25). It is possible to apply these promises of pardon to the future Jewish remnant during the Tribulation period.

IV. The Greatness of His Promises (44–45)

Note the repeated “I will” statements in these chapters. Here God is promising the nation His help and blessing. In 44:1–8 He promises to restore them to their land, bless the land, and reign as their King. Of course, the nation must repent of its sins before God can restore and forgive (44:21–23). In 44:9–20 the prophet again exposes the folly of the heathen idols: a man chops down a tree, uses part of it for fuel, and uses the rest of it to make himself a god. Jehovah is a God who makes and keeps His promises; the idols are but lies (44:18–20). In 44:24–45:8 we have another promise of deliverance through Cyrus. The heathen priests and sorcerers may promise defeat (44:25), but God will frustrate their lies and give Cyrus victory. Judah would be inhabited again, and Jerusalem would be rebuilt. This was fulfilled in Ezra 1. In 45:1–3, Isaiah even tells how Cyrus would capture the invincible fortress of Babylon: he would dry up one of the rivers that flowed into the city and come in under the gates. History records this feat, but prophecy announced it hundreds of years before it happened. Can anyone frustrate or oppose the promises and purposes of God? (45:5–10) No. God would raise up Cyrus to build His city (45:13); He would give Cyrus other nations as his wages for serving God (45:14). The idols would be confounded, but God would be glorified (45:16–19). Note in 45:17 that the historical blends in with the eternal: it would be everlasting salvation. Here the Prophet Isaiah looks down the centuries to the salvation we have in Christ (45:22), as well as to the future deliverance of Israel and the establishing of the kingdom.

V. The Greatness of His Power (46–48)

These chapters describe the utter ruin of Babylon. When Isaiah spoke and wrote these words, Babylon was not yet a great world power. Some of the Jews must have wondered at his message. But Babylon did arise in power and did conquer Judah. Nevertheless, God would one day conquer Babylon, and her false gods would themselves be carried into captivity. Instead of the heathen gods carrying their people, the people would carry their gods (46:5–7). But God would carry His people (46:3–4) and bring salvation to Zion. The “ravenous bird” in 46:11 is Cyrus, of course. Read chapters 47–48 to see how God's power would destroy the great nation of Babylon.

“Fear not” is God’s great promise to us as NT Christians. He is greater than Satan and this world, so we need not fear. He has a purpose for our lives, and He will fulfill it if we trust Him. He will pardon our sins and keep His promises.

Isaiah 53

This chapter is the very heart of Isa. 40–66, and it takes us to the cross. That these verses apply to Jesus Christ is proved by John 12:38, Matt. 8:17, Acts 8:32–35, Mark 15:28, Luke 22:37, Rom. 10:16, and 1 Peter 2:24. Isaiah 53 is quoted or referred to at least eighty-five times in the NT.

The prophecy begins with 52:13–15. Verse 13 tells of Christ’s exaltation, and the rest of the section deals with His humiliation. It is this strange “contradiction” that perplexed the OT prophets, as 1 Peter 1:10–11 informs us. They did not realize that there would be a long period between Messiah’s coming as the Suffering Servant to die and then returning as the Exalted Sovereign to reign. Verse 14 informs us that Christ’s physical sufferings made Him look inhuman, so much so that men were astonished at Him. But when He returns the second time (v. 15), the whole world will be “startled, shocked” (the word should not be translated “sprinkle” but “startle”). See Zech. 12:9–10 and Rev. 1:7. The first time He came, He astonished a few people in Palestine; the next time He comes, He will startle the whole world. Now for the chapter before us. It traces the life and ministry of Christ.

I. His Rejection (53:1–3)

The unbelief of Israel is now announced: they saw Him, heard Him, but would not trust Him (John 1:11; 12:37–38). There was a three-fold rejection: they rejected His words, “report,” and His works, “the arm of the Lord” See John 12:37–40 especially. The prophet had been warned of this hardness of heart in 6:9–10. The third focus of rejection was His person (v. 2). He was not born in a palace; He was born in a Bethlehem stable, and He grew up in the despised town of Nazareth (John 1:43–46). The words “tender plant” literally mean “a little bush” such as would spring from a low branch. In other words, Christ was not a great tree, but a humble bush. See Isa. 11:1. When He appeared, the nation was barren and dry spiritually. They had a form of religion, but they had no life, and because He brought life, they rejected Him. What a remarkable Man, human (“He shall grow up”) yet divine. This offended the Jews who could not believe that God would come in the form of a Servant (Mark 6:1–3). His physical appearance was not unusual; there was no splendor or special human attractiveness to the human eye. Of course, to those who know Him, He is the fairest of the fair (Ps. 45:1ff). He was despised (not wanted, looked down upon), rejected (forsaken by His disciples, His nation, and His world), lightly esteemed (not valued highly, not wanted). Yet He went about doing good and helping the helpless. This only shows the wickedness of the human heart, that men would so treat the very Son of God.

II. His Redemption (53:4–6)

Why should an innocent man such as Jesus Christ die such a terrible death on the cross? These verses explain why: He was taking the place of sinners and bearing their judgment for them. See 1 Peter 2:24 and 2 Cor. 5:21. Note the price that he paid: (1) wounded, or pierced, referring to His death on the cross, pierced by nails—John 19:37, Zech. 12:10; (2) bruised, which means “crushed” as under a burden, the weight of sin which was laid on Him; (3) chastised, or punished as though He had broken the law, in this case with stripes from the scourging.

But these physical sufferings were nothing compared to the spiritual suffering of the cross, when He bore our transgressions (vv. 5, 8), our rebellious and deliberate breaking of God's Law; our iniquities (vv. 5–6), the crookedness of our nature; and our griefs and sorrows (v. 4), our calamities and the unhappy results of our sins. We are sinners by birth (“All we like sheep have gone astray”) and by choice (“we have turned every one to his own way”). See Ps. 58:3 and Rom. 5:12ff. Verse 6 begins with the “all” of condemnation, but ends with the “all” of salvation. He died for us all. These verses are the very heart of the Gospel—“Christ died for *our* sins.”

III. His Resignation (53:7–9)

He was not treated justly; He was oppressed, harassed, treated roughly. Yet He did not complain or cry out. They mocked Him and pushed Him from one place to another, yet He was silent and meek as a lamb. He was the “Lamb of God” who came to take away the world's sins (John 1:29). Verse 8 suggests that He was taken violently from prison and was not permitted to have justice. See Acts 8:33 and Matt. 27:22–31. The trial was “rigged” and the whole thing was illegal. Yet His “generation” did not protest; His disciples had forsaken Him and fled. And His death was not a glorious one; He was “cut off” like an unclean leper cast out of the city. In spite of this illegal and inhuman treatment, Jesus Christ did not protest or argue. Why? Because He had come to die for the sins of the people. Barabbas the criminal was treated with more kindness than was Jesus the Son of God.

Verse 9 should read: “And they appointed His grave with the wicked, yet He was with a rich man in His death.” Were it not for Nicodemus and Joseph, the body of Jesus would have been buried in a “potter's field” or thrown on a garbage heap (John 19:38–42). God had promised His Son a “grave in the garden,” and this was fulfilled. “He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth.” Men were unjust, but God was just. What an example Christ is to us as He submitted completely to the will of God (1 Peter 2:18–25). When men treat us unjustly (as they will because we follow Christ), we must glorify Christ by being yielded to His will.

IV. His Reward (53:10–12)

All of this was planned by God and His plan was a complete success. See 52:13 and 42:1–4, where we see the success of the Savior's work. These verses in chapter 53 show us the Godward side of the cross: His death “pleased the Lord.” Does this mean that the Father rejoiced in His Son's suffering and death? No. But it pleased Him to see

the work of salvation completed, the sacrifice accepted, and sin atoned for. Now a holy God could, in His grace, save undeserving sinners. Though Christ was slain by the evil hands of men, their deeds were overruled to accomplish the purpose of God (Acts 2:22–24). Christ's death was not a "moral example"; it was an offering for sin (v. 10). He died in our place.

What was Christ's reward, apart from the joy of having done His Father's will? He was raised from the dead ("He shall prolong His days") and given a spiritual family ("He shall see His seed"). Verse 11 presents the picture of a spiritual family, for it describes the "travail" of His soul on the cross. See Ps. 22:30 and Heb. 2:13. In Isa. 9:6 Christ is called the "Everlasting Father" and this is the reason why: His death and travail on the cross have made possible God's family of saved sinners. These are people whom He has justified, declared righteous through His grace.

Verse 12 presents another reward of the faithful Servant: an inheritance from the Father. He has conquered sin and Satan; now He divides the spoils (Eph. 4:8). When He was on earth, Christ was lightly esteemed, but now He is ranked with "the great." Kings will bow to Him (52:13, 15; Ps. 72:8–11; Rev. 19:14ff). Psalm 2 describes how Christ will one day claim His inheritance.

The closing statements take us back to the cross. Christ was numbered with transgressors—He was crucified between two thieves and treated like a criminal (Matt. 27:38). He made intercession for the transgressors, praying for them (Luke 23:34, 43). He did not speak when men cruelly reviled Him, but He did speak for the sake of lost sinners. And today He is interceding for His own (Rom. 8:34). There is no judgment upon them because He bore it all Himself. Have you trusted Him as *your own* Savior?

Isaiah 60–66

These chapters describe the glorious kingdom that Jesus Christ will establish when He returns to earth to reign. The word "glory" in its various forms is found twenty-three times in these chapters. There was certainly no glory in Israel or Judah when the Babylonian captivity ended and the feeble remnant returned to their land. How discouraging it must have been to return to a war-torn land, a city with walls broken down and gates burned, and a temple left in ruin. But Isaiah looked down the years and saw a glorious "holy city" with a glorious temple (60:7; see 64:11) and rebuilt walls and gates (60:10–11). Israel was the scorn of the Gentile nations, but she would be the center of the earth, the very throne of God; and the Gentiles would come to Jerusalem and worship the true God (see 60:3, 5, 11, 16; 61:6, 9; 62:2; 66:12, 19). These promises of the future glory of the nation would be a great encouragement to the Jews as they returned to their land after the Captivity. Note in these chapters four wonderful pictures of the restored nation.

I. A Glorious Dawning (60)

A. The new day dawns (vv. 1–9).

How dark it was for the Jews in Isaiah's day, and how much darker it would be during the Tribulation when the nation would suffer under the hands of the Antichrist and the Gentile nations. But the darkness will end with the return of Christ. The Lord Himself shall appear to the Jews—"they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7). In that day Israel will share the glory of Christ as He reigns upon David's throne, and the church will reign with Him in His kingdom. Isaiah sees the Gentile nations coming to Jerusalem in peace, not war, with Israel sharing the wealth of the nations (vv. 3–9). Some apply v. 5 to the Dead Sea, for even today the Jews are extracting wealth from this body of water. Today, the nations are against Jerusalem; she has been the center of worldwide opposition. But in the day that Christ restores the glory to Israel, the Gentiles will bow down in peace.

B. The blessings abound (vv. 10–22).

The nation will be rebuilt, and the gates will never have to be closed because of danger. The millennial kingdom (a thousand years, Rev. 20:4–5) will be a time of peace and prosperity for the whole world. It will be a "new day" for mankind when the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ, returns (Mal. 4:1–3). Do not apply these promises to Christians today by spiritualizing them or turning them into symbols. They will be fulfilled literally in the land of Israel when Jesus comes again. As NT Christians, we are looking for "the Bright and Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16) that precedes the dawning; for Christ will return in the air for His church and take us to heaven before His judgments fall on the world.

II. A Joyous Wedding (61–62)

Isaiah 61:1–2 was read by Christ in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21), and He applied the words to Himself. He had come to meet the spiritual needs of the people and "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." There He stopped reading, for "the day of vengeance" would not come until the Tribulation (see 63:1–4). We are living today in God's "year of acceptance," the day of grace. Of course, Isaiah is speaking here of the Lord's ministry to Israel, when He would return to convert their "funeral" into joyous "wedding." Verse 3 pictures the mourners drying their tears and putting on festive garments instead of mourning clothes. Verse 10 describes the nation rejoicing as the bride and the bridegroom.

Israel was "married" to Jehovah at Mt. Sinai, when He gave them the Law. But the nation was unfaithful and went after the gods of other nations. Because of her "spiritual adultery," the nation was sent into captivity, but even this did not cure her of her sins. Today, Israel is a "forsaken wife," but when Christ returns and the nation is cleansed, she will again be "married" to Jehovah. Isaiah 62:4 promises that she will not be "Forsaken" or "Desolate"; rather, she will be named "Hephzibah," "My delight is in her," and "Beulah," "married." Verse 5 pictures the Lord rejoicing over His restored wife. Do

not confuse this with the church, the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:1–2). See Hosea 2, Isa. 50:1 and 54:1.

III. A Righteous Victory (63–64)

In 63:1–6 we have Christ pictured as the blood-stained Warrior, returning from His victory over the nations at the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11–21). His victory is pictured as a farmer pressing out the juice on the winepress. Christ's first miracle on earth was turning water into wine; His last victory before establishing His kingdom on earth will be treading out the winepress of His wrath. Why will Christ defeat the nations that try to destroy the Jews? Because of His grace and faithfulness (vv. 7–9). When Isaiah considered the goodness of God to Israel, in spite of their rebellion, he had to cry out in prayer for the cleansing of the nation (63:15–64:12). How he longed to see God work in mighty power as He had done in years past. The temple was trodden down, and the nation had possessed it but a few years (63:18). Isaiah points out their sins: uncleanness (64:5–6), unconcern (64:7), and unyieldedness (64:8). When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, He rode in peace upon a donkey. When He comes to earth the second time, He will ride in majesty on a white horse. And the nations will learn that the Prince of Peace is also a Man of War, judging sin and delivering His people.

IV. A Marvelous Birth (65–66)

God describes what He will do when the kingdom is established on the earth. He reminds the nation of her sins (65:1–7) and rebukes her by announcing His salvation for the Gentiles (Rom. 10:19–21). The OT promised salvation to the Gentiles, but it did not reveal that believing Jews and Gentiles would be made into one body, the church. The nation deserved to be destroyed, but God would preserve her (65:8). His believing remnant would inherit the land, but the unbelievers would be cut off (64:9–12). Isaiah 65:18–25 pictures the blessings of the kingdom when Jerusalem is the center of the earth. There will be long life (65:20); death will not be destroyed until after the kingdom age when Satan is finally judged (Rev. 20:7–14; 1 Cor. 15:26). People will work at their jobs in peace and happiness and see their labors fulfilled. Nature will be at peace (65:25; see Rom. 8:18–24). What a glorious day it will be. In 66:7–9 we have the miraculous birth of the new nation. "Political" Israel was born on May 14, 1948, but it is a nation in unbelief. "Righteous Israel" will be born when Jesus Christ returns and they see Him and trust Him. The Tribulation period will be the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), when the nation will "travail" in pain. It will be a time when God will purge Israel and a believing remnant will be spared to establish the kingdom. It took years of political "travail" for the present Israel to become a nation, but the restored nation will be born in a day when they see Christ. The birth is announced in 66:7–9; the joy of the birth in 66:10. But instead of the "baby" nursing on others, Israel will provide the blessings for the other nations (66:11–12). And Jehovah God will "mother" the new nation (66:13) and cause her to bring joy and blessing to the whole earth.

Note in 66:7 that *before* the "travail" of the Tribulation, the nation would give birth to Christ. See Rev. 12:1–6. There are, then, two births here: the birth of Christ, the Man-child (66:7), and the birth of the restored nation after the Tribulation (vv. 8–9). Keep in

mind the order of events: (1) the rapture of the church (1 Thes. 4:13–18); (2) the rise of Antichrist (2 Thes. 2); (3) the breaking of Antichrist's seven-year covenant with the Jews (Dan. 9:27) after three and a half years; (4) the pouring out of God's wrath on the world (Matt. 24:15–28) to judge the Gentiles and purify Israel; (5) the return of Christ with the church to the earth to defeat the nations (Rev. 19:11–21, Armageddon); and then (6) the establishing of the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:1–6).