

Isaiah

Isaiah 1-4

Isaiah is not merely a look into a quaint history of a people long ago. His message and the message of all the prophets points definitely to Christ and his kingdom, and in practical terms shows us what causes the rise and fall of nations in every generation. The sins deplored by the LORD in Isaiah's day are still deplored today. The consequences for nations that ignore divine design have not changed. God has not withdrawn from the world, he is as fully engaged in the affairs of nations today as he was in the days of Abraham, or Moses, or David, or Isaiah, or Paul. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, and he rules the nations with the rod of iron. Nations as well as individuals do answer to him in this world, under the over-arching authority of his kingdom.

Isaiah had a long prophetic ministry, probably more than 40 years. As stated in v1 of the book, his prophecies were given during the reigns of 4 successive kings of Judah. If his call is what's described in chapter 6 then he began to prophesy in the year that king Uzziah (Azariah) died, about 740 BC, but that vision might have been given to him after he began prophesying. We can't be certain.

Isaiah saw the decline of Judah and Israel from relative independence, peace, and prosperity in Uzziah's reign through to degeneration, conquest and servitude under the Assyrians, and continually warned his people of what was coming, why, and how to do better, but they weren't listening as noted several times in the book. Isaiah has many prophecies of the Christ and his kingdom. The book has two major sections, chapters 1-39 dealing more with the historic era of the kings of Judah, and God's judgment against them, and then chapters 40-66 orienting on redemption through the future Servant of God and his kingdom.

Isaiah refers to Israel and Judah with various metaphors, and "children" who dishonor their father is a frequent one. Note 1:2, 4. Themes of divine judgment recur again and again, including the foreign invaders mentioned in 1:7. The root cause isn't a lack of religion, the people did many religious rituals (1:11-15), but lack of faithfulness and righteousness, lack of justice and mercy (1:16-17) for the weak and the poor.

1:18 is one of many well-known verses in Isaiah.

The redemption of Zion in 1:27 is also a recurring theme. God would purchase Zion, the Mountain of God, and from there redemption would go forth to all the world (2:1-5). The Christian reading Isaiah 2 should recognize the connections to fulfillment at Pentecost (Acts 2) and the gospel of Jesus going from Jerusalem into all the world.

The nature of the kingdom of God is contrary to that of the world, as highlighted here in 2:4-5.

Economic prosperity and military might (2:7) are no help when a people pursue other "spirituality" than the LORD (2:6, 8). God will humble those who do not willingly follow him (2:9-12, 17-19). The choice is take refuge in the rock (2:10) or hide when there is no hiding in

the rocks and holes when judgement comes, as it always will (2:19-22).

When a nation is led by the childish and insolent rather than the mature and prudent (3:4-5), and competent people will not take responsibility (6-7), the root cause is losing sight of the LORD and his glory (3:8).

Notice in 3:13 the LORD stands to judge “the peoples.” Not just “his people” in v14, but every nation is subject to divine judgement and consequences for unrighteousness.

The Branch of the LORD in 4:2-6 anticipates the Christ, the true vine, who was to come, and now has come. This theme is revisited in chapter 11:1ff and 53:2ff. The Zion and Jerusalem here in v3 is the home of the redeemed remnant, those whose names are recorded “for life” or as in Revelation in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Note the cleansing of bloodstains, which Jesus talked about (the blood of the prophets, including his own), and the spirit of judgment and fire. Again, the theme of the multifaceted Spirit will be revisited in chapter 11. The allusions to cloud and smoke and fire in 4:5 reminds us of the Exodus, Israel following the LORD’s presence in the cloud and at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The canopy and booths are echoed in Revelation 7:15-17, and remind us of the annual festival of tabernacles or booths when Israel celebrated their deliverance from Egypt by spending a week in the Holy City in temporary booths. This prophecy looks back to the Exodus to look forward to the New Covenant Jesus has now brought.

Isaiah 5-8

The parable of the vineyard, Isaiah 5:1-7, looks much like a parable Jesus might have told, in poetic form. v7 sums up the often repeated prophetic condemnation of a people who thrive at the expense of the weak and poor. That theme continues on in v8ff, condemning people who grow rich by swallowing up real estate making it difficult for ordinary people to have their own place. God holds accountable those whose path to wealth depends on making life difficult for others. Folks chasing the pleasures or mind altering effects of alcohol are pilloried in 5:11-12, and the crux of the problem in v13 is lack of knowledge, knowledge of the God of justice and righteousness, v16.

Isaiah 5:20-23 is an indictment appropriate to this generation in the 21st century. Calamities resulted from the injustice then, and calamities still follow communities that choose wicked paths today, but the calamities themselves don’t solve the problem of persistent evil, as noted in 5:25b. Ultimately, nations fall when evil persists, as in 5:26ff.

Isaiah 6 describes Isaiah’s vision of the throne of God and heavenly beings around his throne, not unlike the visions in Exodus 24 or Revelation 4-5 or Daniel 7. “Seraphim” here seems to be a descriptive word, rather than a name, referring to the appearance of the beings around the throne. Their behavior is much like that of the “living creatures” in Revelation 4, and their appearance is also similar to the cherubim of Ezekiel 1, 10. Isaiah’s response to the vision of the Holy One of Israel was acute awareness of guilt, his own and his people’s. However, as in Isaiah 1:18-19, sin can be removed. Here the means of purification is a burning coal from the altar of incense, which in Revelation is connected with the prayers of the holy people.

The indictment of Judah and Israel, seeing but not perceive, hearing but not understanding (6:9-10), was reiterated by Jesus in his generation (Matthew 13:14-15), long after the destruction by the Assyrians and Babylonians (6:11-13) had taken place, and foreshadowing the Roman desolation of Jerusalem. The description of self-willed people again fits our own generation very well. However, the holy seed (6:13), Jesus, the vine, and his followers, the branches, remains no matter what else falls.

Chapter 7 shifts to a specific historical setting in the days of King Ahaz, around 735 BC. 2 Kings 16:5-18 and 2 Chronicles 28:16-21 mention the turmoil and Ahaz's decision to turn to Assyria for help. By the LORD's authority Isaiah counseled Ahaz to be still and not be afraid of the alliance of Syria and Ephraim/Israel, but Ahaz refused the divine instruction. The utter devastation of Ephraim/Israel was in process and the final statement of 7:9 summarized what Ahaz need to accept and to, but would not. Stand firm in faith, or you will not stand at all.

Isaiah offered Ahaz a sign, which he refused to ask for, unlike his son Hezekiah several years later. So Isaiah promised a very special birth. Many interpreters think Isaiah indicated a birth in 7:14 that occurred in short order as a sign for Ahaz, and that may well be true, but the Jews understood this prophecy to mean much more, wondering about a virgin conceiving and bearing a child, as is recorded in the story of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 1. The word used here, translated "virgin" in most English Bibles is consistently used to describe girls who had never been with a man in the Old Testament (Genesis 24:43, Exodus 2:8, Psalm 68:25, for example), and was understood that way in the New Testament as well. Meanwhile, tough times were coming for Judah as well as Ephraim, for their own sins.

Isaiah uses several interesting metaphors for God's actions among the nations, including whistling and shaving in these verses.

Immanuel (God with us) describes Jesus (Matthew 1:23), and the land of David and Ahaz is his land (7:14, 8:8). The coming Assyrian disaster is described as a flooding river that would overwhelm Syria and Ephraim/Israel, and would rise up to the neck of Judah (8:8). In fact, the Assyrians finally took all of Judah except for Jerusalem itself. Immanuel, God with us, allowed that to happen because of the rebellion of his people.

Isaiah 8:12ff could well be a slogan for our times, with so many conspiracy theories distracting multitudes and fear mongering seemingly a way of life. Honor God, fear him, and Jesus, the very rock described in 8:14, will be our sanctuary. As the language of 8:14 is applied to Jesus, so also is 8:18 in Hebrews 2:13b. The solution to the problem of sin, and the problem of unrighteousness, and the problem of political "solutions" to spiritual ailments, all of it then and now is Immanuel, God with us, the rock, the fruitful stump.

Note too 8:19. Occult practices are just as active today and they were then, and God's people are to stay away from them and listen to the teaching of God's word, v20.

Isaiah 9-12

The Jewish elites of Jesus' day got it wrong when they said, "Search and see that no prophet

arises from Galilee” (John 7:52 ESV). Not only had there been prophets from Galilee, Galilee was to be where God’s great light shined in the darkness (Isaiah 9:1-2, John 1:5, 3:19). The “way of the sea” is the name of a major trade route that runs through the Galilee, across the Jezreel Valley below Nazareth and through Capernaum. Galilee “of the nations” (gentiles) highlights God’s eternal intention to bring light to all the nations.

The imagery of peace overcoming violence recurs in several of Isaiah’s messianic prophecies, as in 9:4-5.

“To us a child is born.” A human being, born of the people of God (consider Revelation 12:1-6, 17, Galatians 4:4-5). The government now is upon his shoulders (Ephesians 1:20-23, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28). The name of Jesus in v6 identifies him with every aspect of divinity and great glory. He is our wonderful counselor, who sent the Holy Spirit to be our counselor. He is our everlasting father who also submits to the Father. He is the Prince of Peace who reigns over a kingdom of peace, but also is charged with judging all who have ever lived. His kingdom was received when he ascended to the throne of glory (Revelation 4-5). The zeal of the Lord of hosts, 9:7, recall John 2:17.

Notice the condemnation of those who pridefully refuse the LORD’s reign in 9:12, as also in 5:25, 9:17, 9:21, 10:4, 14:26-27. Understand too that “his hand is stretched out still” over the nations in the 21st century even more surely than it was in the 8th century BC, not less. The Lord Jesus does reign over the nations.

The “head and tail” analogy for Israel’s religious and political leaders in 9:14-15 will turn up again in 19:15 and relates back to Deuteronomy 28:13, 44. Connecting “head and tail” and “palm branch and reed” to the imagery of Jesus riding into Jerusalem from the Mt of Olives on a donkey, the humble king was fulfilling multiple prophecies, including this analogy of being over the religious and political authorities who rejected him.

Don’t miss the constant prophetic emphasis on oppression of the poor and injustice for the weak, as again in 10:1-4.

Assyria in 10:5-11 is God’s instrument for judgment, though the Assyrians do not understand that and are not seeking to do God’s will. Nevertheless, Assyria, like every other nation in every other generation, including our own, is subject to divine authority and the consequences of her own arrogance in 10:12ff. Note too that the LORD’s authority to judge extends to body and soul, the whole being (10:18), as Jesus also noted (Matthew 10:26).

10:20-23 describes a holy remnant that come out of the divine judgment against God’s nominal people, a remnant that depends not on the power of the nations that have chastened them but on the LORD himself. Judah in Isaiah’s day facing the Assyrian threat was to think in terms of God’s deliverance of the people from Egypt and the Midianites at opposite ends of the 40 years in the wilderness (10:24-27). The prophecy against Assyria in chapter 10 includes a road map of Assyria’s progress in the invasion of Judah in the days of King Hezekiah in v28-32, 701 BC. An invasion that seemed irresistible, but ultimately ended in failure to take Jerusalem and disaster for the Assyrians.

Isaiah 11's prophecy of the shoot from Jesse's stump (the Messiah, Christ) connects back to chapter 4:2-6. That prophecy of the branch mentioned the "spirit of judgment and ... of burning" in 4:4. Now that Spirit of the LORD is described with 6 other attributes in 11:2, and we are reminded of the judgment in 11:3. Righteous judgment is the basis of his kingdom, which can be seen in part as a return to Eden, when the animals all ate the green plants for food (Genesis 1:30). God's holy mountain (11:9) is the site of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22) and all the earth is finally brought into peaceful subjection (11:9, Genesis 1:28).

The descendant of Jesse (Jesus) draws all peoples of all nations (11:10, John 12:32). This begins at Passover with the cross (the signal uplifted), is set in motion at Pentecost (Acts 2, Jews from every nation hearing the gospel) and continues unabated until the Lord comes again.

Seeing the uplifted branch from Jesse's root, the Son of David enthroned, is cause of joyful praise in 12:1-6. We who follow Jesus are the ones who draw water from the wells of salvation and proclaim thanks in his name among the peoples. The LORD has done gloriously, Sing praises to the LORD!

Isaiah 13-17

Isaiah 13 begins a series of prophecies against the nations: Babylon, Assyria, Moab, Syria, etc., through chapter 23.

Isaiah 13-14 zeros in on Babylon. In Isaiah's time Babylon was a significant city in the Assyrian empire (notice 14:24-27), which dominated Mesopotamia in those days. Later generations of Jews would read Isaiah's pronouncement of divine judgment against Babylon afresh, when Babylon became preeminent in about 609 BC and took control over Judah a few years later.

The Day of The LORD in 13:6, 9, as often in the prophets, is a day of divine retribution, when judgment falls on the stubborn, the proud, and the rebellious.

Isaiah's prophecy of the Medes rising up against Babylon in 14:17 may have had some fulfillment in his own generation, but was not wholly fulfilled until 538 BC, almost 200 years after Isaiah's prophecy, when Babylon was conquered by Cyrus. Babylon becoming an uninhabited waste as in 13:20 was even longer in fulfillment.

Isaiah 14:1-2 has never really happened for the physical descendants of Jacob, though they were allowed to return to their land after Cyrus defeated Babylon. I would suggest there never will be a physical kingdom of Israel like this. Rather, consider the victories of these verses in terms of the kingdom of God and the promises of Jesus as in Revelation 2:26-29, where incidentally Jesus mentions giving his faithful "the morning star" which reminds us of Isaiah 14:12-13, the true instead of the false.

The king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:3-23 can't be identified with an particular Babylonian king, but describes the ambitions and failings of many, not just of physical Babylon but also the spiritual Babylon as pictured in Revelation, the world city defying God. Certainly God did humble the

king(s) of Babylon and they died as mortal men, but the language of this prophecy, like Ezekiel 28, includes supernatural descriptive terms that remind us of the great rebel, the first liar and murderer. Some have read v12 in the KJV tradition and taken the word Lucifer as a proper name for the devil. However, while the descriptive language very well fits what we know of the devil and his descent into condemnation, the word Lucifer isn't in the Hebrew Bible, nor even in the Greek (Septuagint) translation, but was transliterated from the Latin Vulgate translation. The Hebrew word, and the Greek word, and the Latin word in the text, all mean "day star" or "morning star." This creature (really more than one spirit and more than one human has had this aspiration), created in beauty, wants to rule over God's domain, but is a created being and subject to divine judgment.

Notice in 14:15 that Sheol (or Hades from the Greek language) had levels or depths.

Though few consider it, the Hebrew terms in 14:12 translated "the mount of assembly" would be transliterated in Greek, and then into English, as "har-magedon" which most English Bibles turn into something like "Armageddon" (Revelation 16:16). "Har" means mount(ain) and "magedo" means assembly, from the Hebrew words in this verse in Isaiah. Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley of Israel is not a mountain. But the "mount of assembly" is a very good term for the Lord's people who come before him in any generation.

We are reminded again in 14:26-27 that what God was doing was a purpose for the whole earth, not just little Judah or Israel.

Isaiah's prophecy against the Philistines in 14:28-32 is dated, 715 BC, the year King Ahaz died.

While Isaiah and the other prophets all pronounced judgment on geographic Jerusalem, they also all promised an imperishable Zion, as in 14:32.

The prophecy against Moab, Israel's neighbor to the east, descendants of Lot, is severe but at the same time in 16:1-4 the Jews were enjoined to welcome and help the refugees from Moab in their time of trouble. That leads into a Messianic prophecy in 16:5, the throne of love, the king of justice and righteousness who will in fact welcome the homeless and destitute.

King Ahaz had dreaded Damascus and Ephraim allying against him, but Isaiah in chapter 17 foretold their utter devastation by the Assyrians. One outcome of the destruction would be that some who survived the catastrophe would turn away from idols (17:7) and look to the creator, the Holy One of Israel. Sometimes wisdom only comes through suffering. Abandoning the God of Salvation as in 17:10 is utter folly which must be corrected.

Isaiah 18-22

Continuing the section begun in Isaiah 13, God's judgments of the nations are presented. Starting Babylon with Assyria, then the Philistines, Moab, Damascus and Syria, chapters 18-20 continue with the African nations of Cush and Egypt, then back to Mesopotamia and Babylon in 21 and then again Isaiah's own people in Jerusalem in 22 and finally Phoenicia, Tyre and Sidon in 23 before a sweeping indictment of the whole earth in 24-26.

The judgment of Cush uses language that occurs several times in the apocalyptic prophecies of Old and New Testaments. The imagery of harvest in 18:5, of the beasts and birds feeding on the slain in 18:6, and of people among the nations who turn to serve the LORD in 18:7.

The emphasis in chapter 19 of God's power over the gods and powers of Egypt reflects back on Exodus 12:12 when God passed through all of Egypt and passed judgment on all the gods of Egypt. Isaiah foresaw a day when the Egyptians were no longer united and became subject to foreign taskmasters, which was several hundred years in fulfillment, when the Greeks and Romans mastered Egypt, and later Islam, and Egypt degenerated from a world power to a "3rd world" nation. Egypt's fate in v15 reflected similar leadership problems to those in Israel (Isaiah 9:14-15). Yet, once again Egypt is seen as having a remnant that will belong to the LORD in 19:18-25, a remnant unified with Israel and Assyria by a savior and deliverer (v20), the LORD himself (v21). Egypt indeed became a mighty center for the Christian faith, especially in Alexandria, and the Assyrian church too flourished for centuries, indeed into our own days.

Isaiah's reported testimonial in 20:3 is similar to theatrical maneuvers by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, acting out and dramatizing God's message in memorable skits, sometimes for years at a time. The immediate fulfillment of some prophecies established the credentials of the prophets for the long term messages they delivered.

Isaiah 21 turns again to Babylon, the archetypical opponent of all that is godly and true from Genesis 11 to Revelation 19. God sets limits, and pronounces the end from the beginning. Isaiah foresees the announcement that "Babylon is fallen" in 21:9, as is also seen in Jeremiah 51:8ff (about 130 years after Isaiah) and Revelation 14:8, 18:2 (about 800 years after Isaiah). Evil must be faced in every generation, its ravages endured, with the assurance that God's judgment is certain and appropriate.

Isaiah 21:13-15 again enjoins people to show mercy to the refugees fleeing the ravages of war.

In chapter 22 the LORD's message centers on Jerusalem, God's people, and their self destructive behavior. They weren't falling to a foreign enemy so much as falling to their own choices in opposition to God. In the day of destruction all they saw were natural processes, forces of man and of nature, and not the hand of God, v11. Rather than humble themselves in the time of trial, they chose to feast in the midst of famine (12-13). Paul cited v13 in 1 Corinthians 15:32 as the opposite of how Christians are to view the circumstances of life. Just as the Judahites of Isaiah's day refused to see the hand of God in their trials and humble themselves, so also right into our own day people seek naturalistic explanations and avoidance or distraction from looming disaster rather than humble themselves under God's might hand.

Two valleys alongside Jerusalem, the Kidron Valley and the Valley of Ben Hinnom, were known as scenes of religious activity with shrines and altars. The Valley of Ben Hinnom was particularly reprehensible with its abuse as a scene of the worst kind of idolatry including human sacrifices. But the valley of vision would become a scene of battle filled with chariots of the enemy, rather than the horses and chariots of Israel and of Jehovah, as seen in the days of Elijah and Elisha. Certainly this carnage happened in Isaiah's own day when the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem, and again in Jeremiah's day when the Babylonians came, and another time in 70 AD

when the Romans took their turn. Each time, the Jews sought help and deliverance in all the wrong places, not turning to the LORD in contrition.

Shebna the steward in v15ff was a real historical figure, and his (empty and despoiled) rock cut tomb probably exists to this day, according to Israeli archaeologist Gabriel Barkay. Shebna is also an archetype of those who choose power and prestige over service and are unfaithful. So God promised another steward in v22 who would have the key of David, and irrevocable authority. Jesus in Revelation 3:7 presents himself as that faithful steward with that authority, and as in Isaiah 22:23 everything honorable hangs on him. What seemed secure from a human perspective (ie Shebna with his living authority and preparation for honorable burial) would fail and be cut down, displaced by the true heir of David.

Isaiah 23-27

The last of Isaiah's series of prophecies against the nations in chapters 13-23 is directed at Tyre, the great Phoenician trading empire that spanned the Mediterranean Sea. Tyre was reduced by the Assyrians in Isaiah's generation, the coastal city was taken by Nebuchadnezzar in about 572 BC, and the island fortress was defeated and destroyed by Alexander the Great in 332 BC.

Tyre, like Judah in the Babylonian era, would have a recovery after 70 years, and continue in her unfaithfulness, but her wealth nevertheless would be for good purposes in God's time, as dedicated booty in war could be repurposed for the temple. Notice Tyre in Acts 21:3-6 as a site of Christian habitation.

Chapters 24-27 address the judgment of the whole earth, redemption for the saved, and the end of death. The first 3 verses of 24 describe the totality of God's judgment, reaching to all people of all sorts. Humans have abrogated their divine responsibilities to the world where God gave dominion at creation and defiled the earth (24:5) by their disobedience to God's stated purposes. The harvest imagery in 24:13 is a typical prophetic metaphor describing the judgement to come.

There is a stark contrast between those who have abandoned their responsibilities before the LORD and those who give him glory and welcome his coming in 24:14-16. In v18b we're reminded of the flood in Genesis 7:11.

The judgment of the earth includes the judgment of supernatural creatures, those of the heavenly host who abandoned their 1st estate (24:21-22). The sun and moon, as in Revelation 21-22 will have no more purpose in the governing of day and night. The LORD's reign before the heavenly elders (24:23b) is as depicted in Revelation 4-5, etc.

Chapter 25 continues various aspects of the final outcome of God's purposes, worthy of praise in v1, defeating the mightiest of opponents in v2-5, and rewarding those of all nations who belong to him in the grand feast on God's mountain in v6, as seen in Revelation and the parables of Jesus. 25:7-8 celebrates the resurrection and overthrow of death, the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26, 54), and wipe tears from his people's eyes (Revelation 7:17, 21:4). v9 is the reprise of the redeemed, This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Not everyone will be saved, as we're reminded here of Moab in 25:10-12. The destiny of the arrogant and rebellious is to be trampled down into the manure, an apt metaphor for hell (see also Micah 7:10).

26:1 depicts a strong city with open gates welcoming the righteous nation, again consistent with the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22, and the righteous nation being the church in this generation. 26:3 is worth noting and remembering, consistent with Jesus' promise in John 14:27, 16:33. The resurrection is particularly highlighted in 26:19. Then v20-21 directs God's people in this world to buckle down and trust the LORD to bring us through to the end and the fulfillment of God's justice.

Reading of leviathan and the terms for serpents and the dragon in 27:1 again must remind us of the dragon, the ancient serpent in Revelation 12, and the beasts who follow him in Revelation 13, all punished with the LORD's mighty sword, as in Revelation 19:11-21. In contrast to the destruction of the enemies of God and his people we have the peaceful vineyard, the ordered garden kept by the LORD. The people of God (again, including the church in this generation) will flourish and grow and fill the earth (compare 27:6 with Matthew 13:31-32 or John 15:1-6). v7-13 are divine assurance that the process of divine refining is worth it all, that God's investment in his people even with suffering and sin along the way, will have the intended outcome of redemption for the sojourners of the ages who lived as foreigners among the nations of the earth, whose citizenship is in heaven.

Isaiah 28-30

On the one hand in 28:1-4 there is the "proud crown" of Ephraim/Israel's drunkards, and on the other hand there is the "crown of glory" of God's presence among the remnant of his people. The abuse of wine and beer and other strong drinks continues is further described in v7ff, pertaining to religious leaders. Believers today need to be reminded again that mind altering substances, including alcohol as well as other drugs, carry with them a pseudo-spiritual attraction. Paul warns against this in Ephesians 5:18-20. The "proud crown" of alcohol stands and falls in opposition to the "crown of glory" of the Holy Spirit within the people of God. ... v10 sets out the idea of learning without knowing, as Jesus accused the Pharisees of his generation of doing. For them the Law had become a set of rules to be painstakingly analyzed and enforced, rather than a pathway to knowing God. And so v11, people of other nations following the LORD as a testimony to Israel, quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:21(see also Romans 11:11-16, 31). ... 28:16 also refers to Jesus, the rock, and is quoted of him in 1 Peter 2:6. Justice and righteousness are the standards of his kingdom (the plumb line, v17, recall Amos 7:7, Isa 9:7). ... Mt. Perazim, where God defeated the Philistines in David's day, and Gibeon where the LORD defeated the kings of the Amorites on Joshua's long day. God's "strange work" in Isaiah's day called for overthrowing Israel this time, but with the end in view of the ultimate victory over sin and death. That's the point of 28:23-29. Seemingly pointless tasks of farming are necessary preparation for eventually having a useful harvest.

In 29:1 Jerusalem is called Ariel, which apparently means "lion of God." But a lion can be a beast of prey that needs to be captured, and that was where Jerusalem had gone, becoming beastly. God would humble Jerusalem, but would also break the nations that oppressed them.

Israel and Judah were not understanding, because the message was sealed (v11-12) but the reason it was sealed was because hearts were not open to receive it and understand (v13). Even so, God had “wonder upon wonder” planned for the future (v14) which finally was the work of Jesus, disproving the wisdom of the world (v14, 1 Corinthians 1:19). And again, Paul alluded to v16 in Romans 9:20-21. As literal signs v18 would show that the Messiah had come to initiate his kingdom.

Reflecting back on Isaiah 1:2-4, in chapter 30 the people of Judah and Jerusalem again are pictured as rebellious children seeking human solutions to spiritual problems. People want guidance that fits their desires (v10), messages that reaffirm what they want. That, however, is a pathway to disaster. The way to be saved was (and is) to repent and rest in faith upon God, v15, but they (and people still) were not willing, choosing again human solutions that were no solution at all. Nevertheless, God would wait and show his grace (v18) to all who would (will) wait for him. This is again anticipation of Christ, as Savior and as Judge, as is reflected in the language of 29:20-21, 23, 25-26. As was the judgment against Judah “up to the neck” (Isaiah 8:8), so also the judgement of the nations in 30:28, the one is a foreshadowing of the other. The fiery judgment of gehenna is anticipated in v20-33 where we have the contrast between the joyful feast in the night (the wedding supper) and the outpouring of God’s wrath upon the adversaries. The “burning place ... long prepared” in v33 is referenced by Jesus in Matthew 25:41.

Isaiah 31-34

“Woe to those who...” turn to some other power for security, rather than the LORD. This is the opposite of Psalm 20:7. Frightened by Syria and/or Ephraim? Turn to Assyria for help. Scared of Assyria? Seek an alliance with Egypt. “The Egyptians are man, and not God...” And likewise with whatever “power” in this world that people look to for rescue. What Israel/Judah needed was to humble themselves before the LORD and choose justice and righteousness. God was ready and willing to protect Jerusalem/Zion (31:4-5) if they would turn toward him (v6). This is still a lesson to be learned again for the 21st century.

When God’s kingdom of righteousness came (32:1-4, Romans 1:16-17, 2 Corinthians 3:9, 5:21) Jesus began to reign in righteousness, and his brethren, that is, Christians, are called to rule in justice and be a shelter for others and streams in the desert. Those whom the Lord calls brethren are light and salt in this world as citizens of his kingdom. In a final climax he who reigns in righteousness will also judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). ... The time of the righteous kingdom had not yet come in Isaiah’s generation, there was much to be done in dealing with evil and complacency first, but again in 32:15-20 we have justice and righteousness prevailing in the fruitful kingdom of the Lord after “the Spirit is poured upon us from on high” as is described in Acts 2. The Lord’s peace came to earth in company with faith (quietness and trust). ... “Happy (blessed) are you who sow beside all waters” in v20, sowing the seed of the kingdom of Christ.

Noting again the fate of the destroyer (to be destroyed) in 33:1-4, Isaiah again extols the coming kingdom (now come) of justice and righteousness in v5-6, stability in all times and circumstances in the Lord, not in the events of the day. In a land plagued by dishonesty and

violence the Lord would arise (v10) to be exalted. Some would be chaff for burning, sinners ought to be afraid, because the Lord is a consuming fire (v14, and see Hebrews 12:29, Deuteronomy 4:24), either to refine or to consume. The upright (v15-16) can look forward to secure on high with the Lord. ... To behold the king in his beauty (v17) is what John looked forward to in 1 John 3:2 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12, the outcome of a life grounded in faith, hope and love. To see the king in his beauty is to see dishonesty no more, disharmony (Babel) no more, but instead the New Jerusalem secure an immovable forever, with no more sea dividing the lands, and the Lord is with his people. v23 reminds them and us that this would not be of their own doing, they couldn't achieve such a future, but God could, and from our perspective, God did, and the fullness is yet to come.

Chapter 34 again looks to those who are not dependant upon the LORD, the multitude of the nations who have chosen to serve the host of heaven rather than the creator of all. God's judgment falls upon all powers in heaven and on earth, all the rebellious will fall before God's wrath in the day of the Lord's vengeance. Notice the reference to a fire that "shall not be quenched" and "its smoke shall go up forever" in v10, language repeated by Jesus of hell (gehenna) and also John in Revelation. While Isaiah names Edom here, the message is for all the nations in v1-4. The dwellings of the rebellious will be overgrown and become wild land where animals live in peace, each with its mate (34:13-17). And books shall be opened (34:16, Revelation 20:12) including the Book of Life. We're reminded of the goodness of creation being restored, and reminded of God gathering the animals to Noah, each with its mate, to restart the redeemed world.

Isaiah 35-36

In the structure of this book we've had a series of judgments against the nations and their rulers in chapters 13-23, culminating in the judgment of the whole world and the end of death, with a new beginning for the redeemed in chapters 24-27. Then we've had another series of woes pronounced against the idolaters among the nations and in Israel in chapters 28-33, with promises of both divine justice and redemption for all who turn to the LORD. Chapters 34-35 reaffirm the themes of judgment on all nations, the whole earth, indeed the whole of creation, like chapters 24-27, with promises of redemption woven into the whole.

Where Isaiah 34 promised a day of vengeance for all the injustice of the ages, and a new start for the creation, chapter 35 centers attention again on the kingdom of righteousness and justice presided over by the Lord. The greenest and most beautiful places known to the people of Israel are the standard of the newly refreshed kingdom of heaven in v1-2. So, strengthen the weak hands, in v3, which is quoted for the church in Hebrews 12:12. We live in the transition from the old blighted creation to the newly restored creation of all things glorious and beautiful. God came to save us, v4, John 1:1-3:21, finishing the work of redemption, and will come once more to finish the work of judgment, Hebrews 9:27-28. He proved his authority for Isaiah 35:4 by doing the word of 35:5-6. Jesus himself is "the Way of Holiness" in v8 (John 14:6-7). Isaiah 35:10 is a beautiful promise and assurance.

Chapter 36 through 39 are an historical narrative, also recorded in 2Kings 18:13-20:19, describing how very close to destruction Jerusalem came in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah.

Kings provides a prelude extolling the goodness of Hezekiah and his works, and Chronicles provides even more extensive description of Hezekiah's efforts at restoring faithful worship in Judah after his father Ahaz had virtually shut down the worship of the LORD in Jerusalem.

The invasion of Judah by the Assyrians in 701 BC when Hezekiah reigned is described in the annals of Sennacherib, which have been rediscovered in modern archaeology. Of all the cities the Assyrians attacked in the 8th century BC only Jerusalem survived. Of all the kings who rebelled against Assyrian authority in those days, only Hezekiah kept his life and his throne. The survival of Jerusalem and Hezekiah is the great miracle of the prophets in the 8th century BC. The arrogance of the Assyrian king and his envoys in Isaiah 36 was grounded in success after success, not realizing that they themselves were God's instrument and subject to his will, as in Isaiah 33:1. Some of the boasting was true, as for example the futility of trusting Egypt for help (36:6-7, 31:1), but the notion that Hezekiah had offended God by removing places of worship on the mountains (36:7) showed good intelligence of matters in Judah, but ignorance of God's covenant commandments, and the words of v18-20 were disastrously blasphemous arrogance.

Isaiah 37-39

Isaiah 37-39, as also in 2 Kings 19-20, describe the resolution of the Assyrian threat against Hezekiah and Jerusalem in 701 BC, and Hezekiah's illness and recovery. Notice Hezekiah's awareness that the LORD alone is God over all the kingdoms of earth (37:16) and that the deliverance of Jerusalem is attributed to Hezekiah's prayer (37:21) and the arrogant blasphemy of the Assyrian king (37:29). While the king of Assyria saw himself as completely independent in his actions, God through Isaiah affirmed again that Assyria had been God's mechanism of judgment, and could herself be judged by the LORD. Again, the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army was unique, every other city and nation attacked by the kings of Assyria in the closing decades of the 8th century BC was conquered, but Jerusalem and Hezekiah survived. ... The account of Hezekiah's illness shows again the power of prayer, when the LORD's stated determination was that Hezekiah was about to die, and then minutes later because of Hezekiah's ardent prayer the LORD extended his life 15 more years. Hezekiah's psalm in Isaiah 38:9-20 reflect his musings on death, his desire to live, and perhaps v19 reflects his idea that he needed more time with his children. Unfortunately, his son Manasseh proved to be the worst of the kings of Judah despite Hezekiah's added years. ... Chapter 39 recounts the visit of envoys from Babylon, welcomed by Hezekiah with open arms. The LORD gave a dire warning that eventually Babylon's envoys would be back, with force of arms to take the things Hezekiah had shown them. While Hezekiah has great grades in Kings and Chronicles for his godliness, we do witness some understandable human frailty in his thoughts about dying in chapter 38 and his notion that at least "there will be peace and security in my days" at the end of 39.

Isaiah 40-43

The tone of Isaiah shifts significantly in chapter 40 and for the rest of the book. With the chapter divisions we have it has been noted that there is some correspondence of the first 39 chapters with the 39 books of the Old Testament, and the next 27 with the 27 books of the New Testament: 66 books of the Bible and 66 chapters of Isaiah. That's not original design in the Hebrew and Greek, chapter divisions came much later as well as our way of counting the books,

but does point up memorably the dramatic shift in style and emphasis between chapters 1-39 and 40-66.

The historical interval of Isaiah 36-39 has concluded. Chapters 1-35 had numerous prophecies of the coming King from the line of David, and his kingdom of peace founded on righteousness and justice, all set within the framework of Isaiah's own 8th century when Assyria was the dominant power in the Middle East. Chapters 36-39 depicted the failure of Assyria to destroy Jerusalem or even unseat Hezekiah as king, and chapter 40 now steps ahead to prophetic glimpses of the next great crisis with Babylon, and God's resolution through a deliverer provided by himself.

Isaiah 39 ended with a gloomy anticipation of future Babylonian conquest, and chapter 40 opens with consolation, that there would be an end of conquest and retribution for sin. God would make an end of conflict and pardon sins. And so 40:3-5 foretells John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-3) and the revealing of Jesus, "the glory of the LORD" (John 1:14). Peter interprets 40:6-9 as the good news of Jesus we see in the New Testament (1 Peter 1:23-25). The coming of Jesus was/is the coming of "the Lord GOD ... with might" in v10, and he is that shepherd of v11. God's plans are transcendent, eternal, and inscrutable, except that he has made them known through his prophets (40:12-14) and the only solution for the sins of the nations is the sacrifice God himself would provide (40:15-17). The theme of human folly, missing the mark with their worship of "things" rather than the maker of all things in v18-26, and 40:27-31 demonstrates that Jacob/Israel has failed to trust in the LORD who gives them strength and deliverance to all who wait for him in faith.

Again in chapter 41 the LORD reminds us that he moves the nations for his own purposes. That an Assyria or a Babylon in ascendancy is accomplishing his will from beginning to end (first and last). Sadly, rather than turn to the LORD for renewed strength, what we see is the manmade idol of 40:18-20 reinforced by human craftsmanship in 41:6-7. ... Israel was called to be God's servant and make him known among the nations (41:8-16) by trusting him for victory. However, since Israel did not continue as friend of God (Abraham had been, v8) and did not hold up faith as a light to the nations, we'll see God promising to provide a servant who would do all his will, an individual who personified Israel. ... As Paul said, "prophecy is a sign... for believers" (1 Corinthians 14:22) and so the LORD reminded Israel that he'd given them prophecies of the nations (41:25-27) that they'd seen fulfilled, but unfortunately they persisted in the folly of their images and failed prophets.

Despite Israel's failure to live as God's servant, God would have his servant. Chapter 42 describes the one who would personify the nation, the one who would keep the law and be obedient in suffering and bring justice (1-4). The Creator would send the Christ as a servant (see Philippians 2:7, Matthew 20:28) to reestablish his reign in the earth. He, Jesus, is the covenant to the people and light for the nations (v6) who performed signs and wonders as in v7 to demonstrate his power and authority even while he served in humility. Again in v10-13 the new song (Revelation 14:3) is for people of every nation who follow the "mighty man, like a man of war" (v13, Samson fulfilled in Jesus). God changed everything through Jesus as highlighted in v14-17. ... In v18-25 we have a recapitulation of why God needed to provide a servant who would obey, because Israel as servant saw without seeing and heard without hearing (recall Isaiah 6:9-10) and didn't learn to trust, even with the chastening of fire.

Isaiah 43 asserts that Israel was created and called by God. They'd been purchased by God from the nations more than once, yet only a remnant of those who redeemed would actually answer his call and come to him out of the nations. The LORD asserts his unique position of preeminence in existence, in power, in wisdom, in foretelling the future, in being the only true savior (v9-15), and his purposes will not be denied. Contrary to popular thinking, all things do not continue as they have from the beginning, God can and does do new things (v18-19) and he promised, and has fulfilled, a new life for a new nation in a newly vivified landscape (compare v21 to 1 Peter 2:9). ... Despite Israel's weariness in serving the LORD (v22-24) God would shoulder the burden and deal with sin (v25) as only he could, by the incarnation of the Son of God as servant and savior, to do what the princes of Israel would not and really could not.

Isaiah 44-48

In 41:14 God referred to himself as Israel's redeemer. That idea is repeated again and again in these chapters; 43:1, 14; 44:6, 21, 22, 23, 24; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 50:2; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 62:12; 63:9, 16. The idea of God redeeming his people was mentioned way back in Isaiah 1:27, and that is a running theme all through chapters 40-66. God had once redeemed his people from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 6:6) with "great acts of judgement" to make a nation for himself, and he would act again in human history at great cost to purchase a people for himself. A greater and better Israel that would serve him faithfully.

Once again in chapter 44 God refers to Israel as his servant, chosen by God, made by God, formed by God. Yet he referred to a time beyond Isaiah when the Spirit would be poured out like water on dry ground and the LORD's people would be like the one whose delight is in the law of the LORD in Psalm 1, trees growing by flowing streams (of the Spirit of God). Jesus promised to make this happen in John 7:37-39, and Acts 2 records the dramatic beginning of the fulfillment of God's Spirit being poured out like water. And so, people from anywhere can call on the LORD and be part of the family of Jacob as in 44:5.

Another repeated theme in these chapters is the uniqueness of God, as in 44:6, 8; 45:5, 18, 21; 46:9, etc. There is none like him, Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. He alone knows and declares the end from the beginning, he alone is worthy of worship.

The futility of manmade gods was already stressed in 41:6-7, 21ff. This is stressed yet again in 44:9-20. God forms man, and shapes a nation out of rebellious humanity, but mankind forms idols to worship, things made of created substances to serve in lieu of the Creator himself. This is a heart problem. "A deluded heart has led him astray" (44:20).

In the midst of referring to Israel as God's servant in 44:21ff, God names a chosen one in 44:28-45:13 who will do the LORD's will without knowing the LORD. Isaiah prophesied in the 2nd half of the 8th century BC, Cyrus came as described and freed the Jews to return to Jerusalem in 538 BC, almost 200 years after Isaiah prophesied his name and purpose (See Ezra 1:1-4, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23, Daniel 10:1). Ancient Jewish tradition, as reported by Josephus in about 90 AD, suggested that one reason Cyrus was well disposed toward the Jews was that this prophecy had been shown to him. While Cyrus was a pagan king, he is also presented by Isaiah in

descriptive terms that foreshadow the Christ/Messiah, Jesus. Cyrus is called God's anointed, which is messiah in Hebrew, Christ in Greek (45:1). He is "my shepherd" in 44:28, and had the language of 45:1-2 fit very well the work of Jesus as kingdom builder, overcomer of Greek (bronze) and Roman (iron) culture and power. While Cyrus had treasures opened to him despite his ignorance of God, Jesus revealed the hidden treasures with the knowledge of God.

Some are confused reading 45:7 that God creates, as some translations report, "evil". Yet, all things God created are "good" in Genesis 1, and "very good" in Genesis 1:31. The Hebrew word here, and the English word "evil," don't always mean morally corrupt, but generally mean that which is harmful or difficult. God works through hardship as well as bounty, he uses discipline, sometimes fierce, that is evil to experience but necessary to chasten or to rescue. Cyrus was such an "evil," delivering God's people from bondage by conquest of their oppressors.

Reading 45:8 remember 43:20-21, 44:3-5. The theme of redemption and new life by the Spirit is sprinkled all through these prophecies.

Recognizing God as Creator is fundamental to truly knowing him, as is also repeated again and again in these redemption chapters (45:12, 18). 45:18 affirms that humans are the reason for the creation, and planet earth's inhabitants are what God's creative work is all about. We need to act accordingly, in relation to God and to the world where he gave us a place.

Isaiah 45:18-25 affirms God alone as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. All of which he has made known through verbal revelation by his prophets. Everyone from every nation will be gathered for judgment, and everyone who ever lived will bow their knees before the LORD, either to be justified as the extended family of Israel (recall 44:3-5) for glory, or ashamed and humiliated for their rebellion against the Creator and Redeemer. Paul cites v23 as a description of Jesus in Philippians 2:10-11. Only in him are righteousness and strength. We will all bow to him sooner or later. Sooner, takes the humble to glory. Later takes the rebellious to shame.

Isaiah 46 continues themes already set forth, including the futility of idols. While the makers of idols have to carry them about, God himself has carried his people, and he always will. God's uniqueness in power and love and knowledge and wisdom are again highlighted in 46:5, 9. What God had begun would not be disrupted by the rise and fall of nations, even of Israel herself. God would bring his righteousness and salvation and it would be found in Zion (v13), as again is fulfilled in Jesus.

When we read of the humiliation of Babylon in chapter 47 we should think of the neoBabylonian empire where Nebuchadnezzar reigned, but we should also think of Babylon (rendered Babel) in Genesis 11:1-9 and Revelation 17:1-19:5, the world city, the harlot, who opposes God and the heavenly city and the radiant bride. Babylon in 47:8, 10 sees herself as unique in the same language that God has used to describe himself in these chapters, but she is wrong, and she will be humbled in each of her manifestations. The enchantments and sorceries that undergird Babylon (47:12) are still at work in our time and our place, and still won't be enough to forestall God's judgment or defeat his people. The fire would come (47:14, Matthew 3:11-12).

Isaiah 48:1-2 opens with what Jesus called hypocrisy. Being called one thing, but actually being

another. An actor behind a mask. Claiming to be of sacred origin, but not living as citizens of God's sacred realm. Such stubbornness would not be tolerated forever. "New things" were in the works, an actual new creation (48:7) which is referenced in the New Testament as already (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15) and not yet (Romans 8:18-25).

Isaiah 48:14-16 has the LORD speaking of the working of the LORD. That is, we have a glimpse here of Father and Son, and Spirit. The Father sends the Son, and when the Son has finished his work he receives the authority to send the Spirit. Meanwhile, Israel had missed a great opportunity to prosper with God's blessings generation after generation (v18-19), but their failure was not the end of the story. There would be an opportunity to come out of Babylon (recall again the multiple faces of Babylon from Genesis to Revelation). All the earth was to receive the good news (the gospel) of the new Exodus, the LORD leading his people through the wilderness to their home with him, with abundant water from the Rock that is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

The ominous ending of chapter 48 should never be forgotten, "There is no peace for the wicked," says the LORD.

Isaiah 49-53

A dominant theme in these chapters of Isaiah is the "servant of the LORD." Notice in 49:1-4 that the servant is Israel, except in v4 Israel hasn't accomplished God's purpose. So the forming of the servant in the womb goes from Israel in v1 to the servant who will rescue Israel in v5, and even more than that the servant was to be a light for the nations in v6, bringing salvation not just to Israel but to the end of the earth. These promises link to John 1:9, 3:19, 9:5, etc. and Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8. Jesus took upon himself the role of the servant to become the embodiment of Israel, fulfilling God's covenants and laws.

Even though God's servant is humble and despised in 49:7, the rulers of the world will bow to him. The promises of kingdom life in 49:8-13 are in progress for the redeemed, with a greater realization yet to come.

Reading 49:16 consider Jesus' wounds from the nails. In v18 remember the frequent references to the church as the Lord's bride.

In v20, the widow (Jesus died) who nonetheless has children too numerous for the old place (geographic Jerusalem) links to Isaiah 54:1 and hence to Galatians 4:27. Again in v22 these promises are for the nations, not just ethnic Israelites.

Isaiah 50 reminds us of Israel's failures of faith and obedience, and the consequent judgments of almighty God. The divine answer was the Lord as servant taking the beating himself in 50:6, including the spit in the face (Mark 10:34, 14:65). 50:10-11 contrasts those who in darkness trust the LORD and those who kindle their own fire. Our own fire/light only leads to greater darkness. We desperately need to trust the light of the LORD.

The future for the ones who imitate the faith of Abraham and Sarah (51:1-3) is a restoration of

the beauty and abundance of Eden. The creation itself is consumable but God's salvation is forever (51:6, 8). Rahab in 51:9 is a word meaning "pride" and is used as an analog of the terms dragon and leviathan. Egypt was called Rahab in Psalm 87:4 and 89:10 as also here. Pharaoh is also pictured as a dragon in Ezekiel 29:3. When human rulers follow the path of the Serpent they are his kindred, whether Egypt or Assyria or Babylon or Greece or Rome or any modern nation. God overthrows Pride, the dragon, and the redeemed of the LORD come forth with singing into everlasting joy (51:11), to the Zion above which lacks the limitations of geographic Zion. Those who are unredeemed though have chosen to face the wrath of God (51:17). Redemption means being set free from the guilt that leads to drinking the cup of wrath (51:21-52:3), having the wrath removed by a kind of resurrection, renewed life in freedom (see Galatians 5:1ff).

Isaiah 53 is among the best known passages in the book, among Christians, but hardly known at all among the Jews where it is omitted from the reading cycles in the synagogue. Verses from Isaiah 52-53 are cited in the gospels, in Acts, in the letters of Paul and Peter and John, and in Revelation. The theme of the rejected suffering servant (who is justified and glorified) actually does begin in 52, where we have redemption in v3 at a price other than money (see 1 Peter 1:18-19) of a people who altogether know the LORD's name (v6). The proclamation of the gospel (v7, see Romans 10:15) is the means of bringing the salvation of the LORD not only to Israel but to the nations. God's arm (Jesus) has been bared before the nations (52:10). While the good news of salvation goes to the nations, the message is to come out of the nations and be a separate people, following the LORD in an orderly way (52:11-12, 2 Corinthians 6:17). The servant who fulfills Israel's purpose in 52:13-53:12 is lifted up in exaltation, because he humbled himself to be abased in the most hideous abuse humans could imagine. His blood is sprinkled not only on the physical seed of Abraham but on the nations in 52:15. Many will not believe (53:1) but he who was pierced for us (53:5) and died with sinners to be buried in a rich man's tomb (53:9) nevertheless lives and has progeny (53:10) who are made righteous by his knowledge and his sacrifice (53:11). Though he died, yet he lives to make intercession for us (53:12, Hebrews 7:25).

Isaiah 54-58

The "barren one" and "desolate one" (54:1) is the childless widow. Ruth was a childless widow, but she was redeemed and bore an heir whose descendant was King David the ancestor of Jesus. God's people would yet bear fruit, and Paul applied this teaching to the New Covenant people of God in Galatians 4:27. Her husband (Jesus) died, and yet she bears children to him in her redemption. She isn't bound to a small land, but instead grows and her offspring (Christians) possess the nations in v3. The husband in v5 is Creator, the LORD of hosts, our Redeemer, and he is Jesus the Christ in Ephesians 5:22ff. The gathering in v7 is through the proclamation of the good news (gospel) of Jesus (recall 52:7). God made a covenant promise in Noah's time (Genesis 9) and has made new covenant promises through Christ (54:9-10) which likewise will not fail. The future for God's people in v11-17 is that reflected in Revelation with the casting down of the accuser and the conquest of the nations by the King of Kings so that the heavenly city with the beauty of precious stones and precious metals always dwells secure.

Isaiah 55 is a beautiful invitation to come to the LORD and be satisfied in him. Jesus is the great inviter, the one who says, "Come to me, all you who are weary." He who offered, "ask me, and I

will give you the water of life.” When Jesus proclaims his offer of the Spirit in John 7:37-39 he’s asserting his imminent fulfillment of the everlasting covenant here in 55:3. No one expected the kind of servant messiah God provided (55:8-9) but God’s purposes and promises would not be thwarted by failures to listen and understand. Again, 55:10-11 is a beautiful celebration of the power of God’s word (the gospel is the power of God for salvation) and 12-13 brings the whole creation into celebration of God’s good purposes, the (new) earth brought into subjection in beauty and harmony.

Isaiah 56 extolls the role of Israel keeping God’s Sinai covenant anticipating the salvation to come. v3 reemphasizes the inclusion of the foreigner who turns to God, as well as the eunuch who had been excluded from certain rites in the rules of the priests and Levites. When Philip preached Jesus from Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 this promise was highlighted for us, that the borders of the kingdom were being extended as promised by Isaiah. The Sabbath was a covenant sign for Israel, calling for trusting the Lord enough to rest from labor. The New Covenant calls for us to trust the Lord enough to receive his grace without striving to earn his good will. Jesus, anticipating the temple of his body after his resurrection, cited Isaiah 56:7b when he overturned the tables and drove out the animals in Mark 11:17. We who are of the nations and not born of Abraham’s seed are beneficiaries of the promises here in 6-8. Unfortunately, in Isaiah’s generation as well as in Jesus’ day, those who should have embraced these words of promise instead pursued their own appetites as in 56:9-12).

Isaiah 57:1-2 is an assurance for the ages, that the death of the righteous can be viewed as divine providence, God essentially rescuing the upright from troubles to come in this world, so that they enter into peace. God made similar personal promises of peace in death to several saints along the way, including Abraham who lived a long life and Josiah whose life was relatively short.

On the other hand, in 57:3-13 we have a polemic against those who serve themselves, their passions, their idols, their appetites, rather than their Maker and Husband. Those who choose the flesh rather than the spirit have no such deliverance as 57:1-2 to look forward to. Even when there is no satisfaction in the pursuit of wickedness, the worldly just look for new indulgences hoping for something that will satisfy. The reality though in 13b is that those who trust the LORD are the ones who have a grand future. Notice in v13 where the LORD lives, in 2 strikingly different locales. He is in eternity on high, and he is in time and history with the contrite and lowly. Nor is anyone who lives beyond God’s willingness to forgive and heal, v18-19, the very substance of the gospel of Christ. Peace is God’s gift to those who turn to him, but again, “there is no peace for the wicked.”

Isaiah 58 distinguishes between religion as rules and rituals and true service to God. God has no interest in rituals, like fasting, performed by people who aren’t living in integrity and showing compassion. Sacrifices and fasts are no substitute for helping the helpless, feeding the hungry and being rich in good works (v6-10). The outcome of giving mercy rather than sacrifice (11-12) is renewal and restoration, a divine presence to guide God’s people as when Israel came out of Egypt, the fulfillment of Eden and Psalm 1, and enduring peace and prosperity. God wants his people to do his will with delight (v13-14) because they delight in him, not perform obligatory rituals hoping to keep God in check.

Isaiah 59-63

Isaiah 59:1 is just as true today as it was when Isaiah wrote it. The next several verses rehearse the problem of sin as the reason for alienation from God, violence, injustice, greed, deceit, a web of treacherous works that covers sinners no better than the fig leaves in the Garden. Paul quotes v7-8 in his indictment of all humans as sinners in Romans 3:15-17. It does no good to hope for light and justice and continue in sin, denying the LORD. Yet what mankind has not done for itself, God himself has provided in 59:15b-20. Jesus came in humility but nevertheless is that mighty man, the arm of God, clothed in righteousness and salvation and zeal and vengeance. He is Redeemer and Judge. v21 is the Father's promise to the Son as the outcome of his battle against sin and death.

Isaiah 60 should stir a memory for us of the darkness at noon when Jesus was crucified. That's where the world still is in relation to God and his victorious Son, but the light has come (see John 3:16ff). And the nations have come to the light, but not everyone. There are tares among the wheat. Nevertheless, while not all accept the light of redemption, many have, and the Lord's work is a triumph. The Kingdom of Heaven receives the best of the nations, the wealth of the nations, coming with good news (gospel = good news) and praises of the LORD. ... the heavenly kingdom is always pictured as a dynamic and prosperous kingdom, full of life. Camels and flocks and herds are mentioned here, all part of the wealth and beauty (note 7b) of the LORD's house. People sometimes have failed to see the lively beauty and glory of the heavenly city vibrant with life, not static or sterile, certainly not dull or repetitive. 60:8-22 stresses the multitude of the nations who share in the heavenly country, which is already in progress and will be fulfilled in glory. Several of the descriptions here recur in Revelation 21-22 for the divine city whose gates never close (v11) and whose light is the LORD instead of sun and moon. A country of everlasting day.

Isaiah 61, the first several verses were read by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth, followed by the pronouncement that he was fulfilling this prophecy (Luke 4:16-21). He'd been anointed by the Holy Spirit when he was baptized by John, he was God's Christ (anointed one). He did miracles to prove the authority he claimed, as he came to restore a world blighted by sin. This is the LORD's Jubilee. The end of the captivity of God's people began with the coming of the Christ. Again we see the breadth of this renewed kingdom in v5, and the fulfillment of God's people being a kingdom of priests as offered at Sinai and fulfilled in the church. God's people here receive the double portion allotted to the firstborn, in v7, and the joy is everlasting. The everlasting covenant of v8 is sealed with the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 13:20). The acknowledgment of the faithful among the nations is referenced in Luke 12:8-9. The bride and groom analogy in v10 turns up frequently in the New Testament.

Isaiah 62 acknowledges that the present Zion and Jerusalem weren't scenes of righteousness and salvation, but that God would persist and such a Jerusalem would come into being. There is again a reference to the desolation of ancient Jerusalem (recall 54:1-2) being supplanted by the union to come with the Christ, the glorious bride (the church) and the wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19). The watchmen on Jerusalem's walls might have included faithful priests and others, but especially included the prophets of God (v6, Ezekiel 3:17). The perfected Jerusalem God promised (v7) would enjoy the bounty of God's blessings and all together eat and

drink the bounty of the harvest in the (new) temple courts. There was work to be done (v10) but the promises (v11) would be completed and salvation would come. Has come. God has a Holy People (v12; the New Testament term for holy people is often rendered “saints” in English Bibles).

Isaiah 63 recaps historical references to God leading his people. He is mighty to save (v1) but he is also the righteous judge who treads the winepress of God’s wrath. Again, as in 59:16, there was no man to do the necessary work of redemption or qualified to do the work of judgment (63:5) so “my own arm,” Jesus, came into the world as a man to do what had to be done, both redemption and judgement, two sides of the same coin. God’s judgement is not in conflict with his love, rather his love demands his own consistency and righteousness, and he always offered forgiveness and consolation. The suffering of the afflicted, even if deserved, was sorrowful to the LORD (v9) as he ultimately showed in taking our wounds upon himself in the person of Jesus. As he was present through angels in the Exodus and carried them on eagles wings, so he would follow through with salvation at great cost to himself. ... Notice the description of God in v16, “you are our Father.” Jesus took up that refrain, praying “Our Father who is in heaven...” and we echo Isaiah and Jesus in our prayers. The prophet had seen in person and in visions the devastation of Israel as it was in her alienation from God, but he prayed for a better enduring relationship with God as pictured in the revelations he saw and heard.

Isaiah 64-66

Isaiah 64 continues the appeal from 63:15, that God would show mercy to his beleaguered people. In 63:15 the Father is urged to “look down from heaven and see” and in 64:1 it becomes “rend the heavens and come down.” There are certainly reminders of the great flood and Israel at Sinai in Isaiah’s language, and we have an echo of Isaiah’s request in Mark 1:10 when John baptized Jesus and “he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.” At that time the Father said, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” So God has rended the heavens and come down, Son and Spirit. And Jesus described his mission as coming to kindle fire on earth (Luke 12:49, compare Isaiah 64:2).

The plight of Israel, “our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (64:6) is the universal problem of humanity, and Isaiah has already declared several times that the LORD’s servant would redeem not only Israel but the nations or Gentiles. And so the Lord came to be found, as described in the book of Acts, by a people who had not known him, through the work of the apostles of Jesus.

In Isaiah 65:2-7 we are reminded again that while humans seek different spiritual paths and different ways to justify their own appetites and rationalizations, there is no substitute for the LORD and there are terrible consequences for idolatry in all its forms. ... in v8 he spoke of new wine, which happens to be the way Jesus described his message (Mark 2:22). ... v11 repudiates trusting in “luck” or “fortune” or “fate”, all pagan idolatrous concepts. ... v15 anticipates a new name for God’s people in lieu of “Israel” and Peter’s comment in 1 Peter 4:16 suggests the direction we should go in understanding this promise. ... v16 speaks of blessing by the “God of truth.” The Hebrew word for “truth” here is “amen.” That’s the word Jesus often used in his emphatic statements, usually rendered “verily, verily” or “truly, truly.” “Amen, amen,” the Lord said. Jesus is the Amen, Rev 3:14. The end of troubles in v16 leads into God creating “the new

heavens and new earth” in 65:17, the same phrase we have in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1 for what comes after the Lord comes in judgement.

From 65:17 through chapter 66 we should read with a view toward glimpses of the heavenly City of God. Isaiah here and John in Revelation have visionary glimpses of the future from different angles, but it is the same future. The recreated Jerusalem is a joy and gladness (v18) forever. Not just for the inhabitants but for God (v19). There is no weeping (v19, Revelation 21:4). No sadness of lives cut short. Lives are long in Isaiah’s figurative description, like the days of a tree (v20, 22). It’s a productive future with building and planting nurturing with God right at hand. And, as in Isa 11::6ff, it is a restoration of the order that existed before sin, where the beasts of the earth are all herbivores and there is no conflict (v25, Genesis 1:30).

Though God rested from his work of creation in Genesis 2:2-3, the rhetorical question here in Isa 66:1 is “where is the place of my rest?” Not in a temple built by hands (quoted by Stephen in Acts 7:49-50) but rather the temple Jesus built, consisting of the humble in spirit who tremble at God’s word (Isa 66:2). Again, in v3-4 religious ritual is no substitute for listening to God and choosing to live in a way that pleases him. The “son” born in v7 must be the same child we saw in Isa 9:6, that is Jesus the heir of David who came to restart God’s nation/kingdom. The New Covenant initiating the kingdom came immediately, with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and will be fully realized “in one day” when he comes again in glory for judgment. This Jerusalem (v10) receives the peace of God and glory of the nations (v12). She is our mother (v12 and Galatians 4:26 with 1 Peter 2:2-3). The 2nd coming will be in fire (Isa 66:15-16, Hebrews 9:27-28, 12:28-29) and those who’ve chosen their own path of “sanctification” (v17) will come to an end, what Isaiah refers to as dead bodies eaten by worms and fire (v24, and see Mark 9:47-48) and John saw as the 2nd death in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15). Before that consummation of all things and the full realization of the new heavens and new earth, God promised to gather people of all languages and nations (v18) who in turn would be messengers to the uttermost parts of the earth, declaring God’s glory among the nations (v19) to bring in all of God’s family by all means, on horses and camels and so forth into glory. This new heavens and earth will endure month to month, week to week, and all that live in that dwelling with God will worship before him, knowing the fate from which we’ve been rescued.