

An Introduction to Isaiah

Fast Facts

His name

Isaiah means “salvation of the Lord.”

His ministry

Isaiah prophesied in Judah during the reigns of four kings, a period of about 60-70 years during which Samaria was captured, Israel was carried away (722 – 721 B.C.), and Judah was invaded (701 B.C.). He was a contemporary of Hosea and Micah.

His themes

Isaiah’s messages hearken back to the eternal counsels of God and the creation of the universe (see 42:5) and gaze forward to God’s creation of new heavens and a new earth (65:17; 66:22). While there are many important prophecies concerning Jerusalem, Israel and Judah, Isaiah’s predictions encompass all the nations of the earth (see 2:4; 5:26; 14:6, 26; 40:15, 17, 22; 66:18).

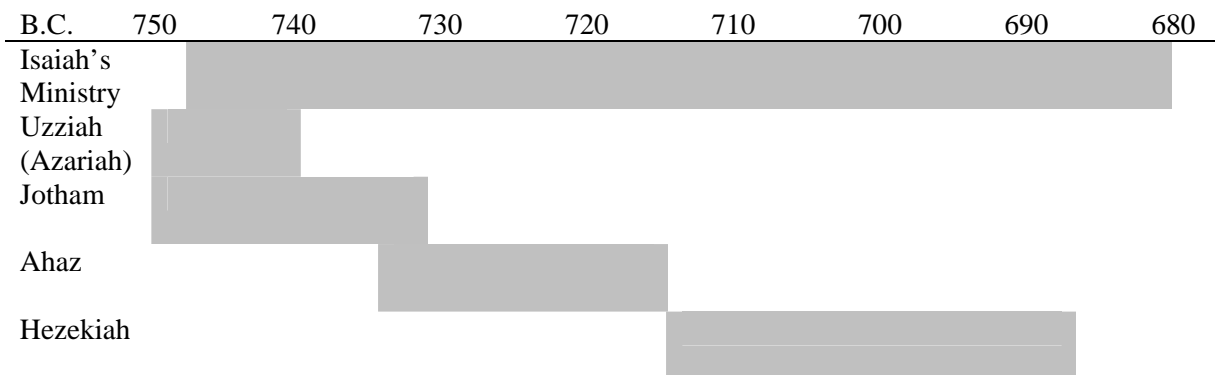
His Messianic focus

Isaiah foretells the Messiah’s birth (7:14; 9:6); His deity (9:6-7); His ministry (9:1-2; 42:1-7; 61:1-2); His death (52:1 – 53:12); and His future reign on earth (chaps 2; 11; 65).

His impact

Isaiah “was the greatest of the writing prophets,” according to *The New Scofield Study Bible*. “No other prophet has written with such majestic eloquence about the glory of God.... Of all the O.T. prophets, Isaiah is the most comprehensive in range. No prophet is more fully occupied with the redemptive work of Christ. In no other place, in the Scriptures written under the law, is there so clear a view of grace” (p. 924).

The kings of Judah*



* Chronologies for the Hebrew kings vary between one and 10 years depending on the source consulted. Here are the dates according to E.R. Thiele in *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983): Uzziah/Azariah – 792-740 B.C.; Jotham (co-regent until Uzziah’s death) – 750-732 B.C.; Ahaz – 735-716 B.C.; Hezekiah – 716-687 B.C.

Uzziah and Jotham

Isa. 1:1 tells us the prophet's ministry began during the time of Uzziah and his son Jotham. It is likely that Isaiah began late in Uzziah's reign, after he had attained substantial wealth and military success, perhaps between 750-740 B.C. At this time Jotham was coregent and running the country because Uzziah was leprous and therefore secluded. Uzziah's success early in his kingship was due to his willingness to listen to the prophet Zechariah, who taught him God's ways. As a result, Uzziah is listed as one of Judah's kings who "did what was right in the Lord's sight" (2 Chron. 26:4-5). But his legacy began a downward spiral when he arrogantly entered the temple in Jerusalem and burned incense to God, despite warnings from 80 priests. As a result, God struck Uzziah with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-20) and his son Jotham ruled as coregent for about 10 years until Uzziah died around 740 B.C.

Ahaz

Religious life in Judah deteriorated significantly during the reign of Ahaz, who "did not do what was right in the Lord's sight ... he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and made cast images of the Baals. He burned incense in the Valley of Hinnom and burned his children in the fire, imitating the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites" (2 Chron. 28:1-3). His lack of faith in God was illustrated graphically when he failed to trust God despite the promise of military victory (Isa. 7:1-9).

Hezekiah

Hezekiah was a great religious reformer, a man of faith who led his armies to trust in God for deliverance (2 Chron. 32:6-8), and who did so himself when he asked God to deliver the Jews from the Assyrians (2 Chron. 32:20-21). In the first year of his reign, he repaired the temple, consecrated priests, renewed the nation's covenant with God, removed pagan elements his father brought into the temple area, and restored worship (see 2 Chron. 29:3-11, 15-36). Although he later was puffed up with pride for a time, he quickly repented, and God blessed him with great riches (2 Chron. 32:27-29).

The prophet Isaiah

It's difficult to get a full picture of the prophet because his writings reveal very little about his personal life. We do know that Isaiah identifies his father as Amoz, who may have been a scribe in the king's court. Jewish tradition suggests that Amoz was the brother of King Amaziah, the father of Uzziah, but there is no way to substantiate this. Isaiah's wife is called a prophetess (8:3), but there is no record of her prophetic messages, so it's possible the term simply identifies her with Isaiah. Isaiah and his wife have at least two sons (7:3; 8:3), but little is known of them.

A high point in Isaiah's ministry comes in chapter 6 when he meets with God. He despises his uncleanness and confesses his sinfulness as he catches a glimpse of the glory of God (6:1-4). He then confesses the sins of the people of Judah and responds to the divine call to take God's message to the people (6:6-8). Gary V. Smith comments, "Isaiah did not know the nature of the mission God designed for the one being sent, the length of

the responsibility, where this person must go, the message that must be spoken, or the difficulty of the task that must be accomplished. Nevertheless, Isaiah immediately volunteered. He did not make excuses or question God's plan like Moses or Jeremiah (Exod. 3:11; 4:1, 10; Jer. 1:6) but gladly offered to serve God" (*The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, Isaiah 1-36, p. 36).

It is important to note that Isaiah is sent to bring hardness to the hearts of the people of Judah (6:9-10). The Lord states plainly that the future is dark for His people, but there is hope (6:11-13). This is illustrated in Isaiah's encounter with Ahaz in chapter 7. God instructs Isaiah to bring the wicked and wildly outnumbered king hope of God's deliverance in the upcoming Syro-Ephraimite War. Rather than trusting God, however, Ahaz hardens his heart and refuses to invite God to grant a sign (7:10-13).

Isaiah obediently serves the Lord even when the assignments seem bizarre. For example, he is told to go naked in public for parts of three years (20:2). This symbolizes what would happen to the inhabitants of Judah if taken captive in war; normally, war captives are stripped in shame. It isn't known whether Isaiah explains his behavior to anyone in self defense, but the Lord calls Isaiah "my servant," "a sign," and "portent." The impact of Isaiah's ministry is felt far beyond the scope of his lifetime. He is quoted directly in the New Testament more than 65 times, far more than any other Old Testament prophet, and is mentioned by name more than 20 times.

Through a literary device known as "prophetic foreshortening," Isaiah predicts future events without laying down exact sequences of the events or the time intervals separating them. For example, as John MacArthur writes, "nothing in Isaiah reveals the extended period separating the two comings of the Messiah (cf. Is. 61:1, 2; Luke 4:17-22). Also, he does not provide as clear a distinction between the future temporal kingdom and the eternal kingdom as John does in Revelation 20:1-10; 21:1-22:5. In God's program of progressive revelation, details of these relationships awaited a prophetic spokesman in a later time" (*The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, p. 757).

In summary, Isaiah the person is known primarily through what he says, not what he does. His speeches focus on Judah's wrong political policies as reflections of their lack of trust in God. In ways similar to Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum and Zephaniah, Isaiah offers little biographical information about the prophet. Many of the Lord's prophets seem intentionally to downplay themselves in order to lift of God and His message.

Tradition has it that Isaiah met his death under King Manasseh by being cut in two with a wooden saw (see Heb. 11:37).

An outline of study

Commentators approach the book of Isaiah in different ways, but generally we will pursue this simple outline:

- I. Judgment: Chapters 1-35
- II. Historical Interlude: Chapters 36-39
- III. Salvation: Chapters 40-66

Chapter 1: Judah on Trial

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Opinions vary, but it appears that Chapter 1 is written near the end of Isaiah's ministry and is placed at the start of the book as both an introduction and a summary. "This introduction is also a motivational attempt to convince [Isaiah's] readers to acknowledge what God says and repent so that their sins can be forgiven" (Gary V. Smith, *New American Commentary, Isaiah 1-39*, p. 93). Possibly, this chapter is written some time after the 701 B.C. attack by the Assyrians.

Key verse:

Isa. 1:18: "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool" (NASB).

Quick summary:

"Chapter 1 is God's solemn call to the universe to come into the courtroom to hear God's charge against the nation Israel" (J. Vernon McGee, *Isaiah Vol. 1*, p. 17).

Take note:

Although Isaiah is identified as the prophet (v. 1), God is the source of the message. Note how God speaks throughout the chapter:

- "... the Lord has spoken" (v. 2).
- "Hear the word of the Lord ... listen to the instruction of our God" (v. 10).
- "'What are your sacrifices to Me?' asks the Lord" (v. 11).
- "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord" (v. 18).
- "... the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (v. 20).
- "Therefore the Lord God of Hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, declares" (v. 24).

God's case against Judah (Isa. 1:1-9)

Isaiah begins by telling us what we are about to encounter: one vision, concerning two locations (Judah and Jerusalem), delivered during the time of four kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah). A powerful new nation has arisen to the north. Assyria is about to take the northern kingdom of Israel captive, and does so in 722. B.C. Later, God asserts that the brutal Assyrian invaders will not take Judah. Rather, He is raising up another kingdom, Babylon, to judge the southern kingdom, but until then He is giving Judah one more chance to repent. Isaiah's book is called a *vision*, suggesting that the prophet "saw" mentally and spiritually as well as heard what God communicated to him. The word "vision" also introduces the prophecies of Obadiah, Micah, and Nahum. The term "vision" (*hazon*) frequently refers to the general reception of a divine revelation, without accompanying visual imagery; Isaiah's use of the word "vision" implies that what he is about to say comes from God.

God calls heaven and earth into the courtroom to hear His case against Judah. The language in verse 2 is similar to the way Deuteronomy 32 begins. Having delivered the Jews from Egyptian bondage, the Lord lays down the conditions under which His people would inhabit the Promised Land and calls heaven and earth as witnesses. If they fail to obey God, especially by engaging in the worship of false gods, then Yahweh has the right to chasten them even to the point of removing them from the land. It was happening to Israel. Judah is next.

The Lord uses satire in verse 3. He tells the Jews that two of the dumber beasts of burden, oxen and donkeys, know their masters and understand who feeds them, but the Jews live in oblivion to the Lord's providential care.

Verse 4 lays out God's description of who the Jews are and what they have done. They are a sinful nation, a people weighed down with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, and depraved children. They have abandoned the Lord, despised the Holy One of Israel, and turned their backs on God.

God has been chastening Judah according to Deuteronomy 28-29 and asks, "Why do you want more beatings? Why do you keep on rebelling?" (v. 5). Despite the Lord's correction and gracious invitation to return to Him, the Jews will not repent, so the time for expulsion from the land is drawing nigh.

"Isaiah first used the figure of a person who had been beaten and was bruised over his entire body (Isa. 1:5-6). Though these untreated wounds ... welts, and open sores characterized the nation's spiritual condition, Isaiah was also speaking of her condition militarily. They were beset on all sides by hostile forces and were losing some of their territory to foreign nations (v. 7). They should have realized that these terrible problems had come because of their spiritual condition" (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

Isaiah depicts Jerusalem's inhabitants as being like a shelter in a vineyard or a shack in a cucumber field – temporary structures built to shade the sun from persons hired to guard the crops against animals and thieves. Such huts were solitary and easily attacked. If not for a remnant of faithful Jews, Isaiah says, Judah already would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah, totally devastated.

“I have had enough ...” (Isa. 1:10-17)

From a human perspective, the Lord’s words in these verses convey exasperation with His people’s empty religious rituals. D.A. Carson comments, “Of all prophetic outbursts at religious unreality ...this is the most powerful and sustained. Its vehemence is unsurpassed, even in Amos, and the form and content build up together. First, the offerings are rejected, then the offerers (11–12); but while God’s tone sharpens from distaste to revulsion, his specific accusation is held back to the lurid end of v 15: *Your hands are full of blood*” (*New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, Section Is. 1:10).

The Lord is not abolishing, or even minimizing the importance of, the sacrificial system or the feasts by which His people could approach Him and enjoy His fellowship; rather, He is refuting their assumption that sacrifices and religious observances, without pure motives and repentant hearts, could atone for their sins.

Immediately following this thunderous rebuke are nine calls to repentance (vv. 16-17):

- Wash yourselves.
- Cleanse yourselves.
- Remove your evil deeds from My sight.
- Stop doing evil.
- Learn to do what is good.
- Seek justice.
- Correct the oppressor.
- Defend the rights of the fatherless.
- Plead the widow’s cause.

J. Vernon McGee comments: “God has spelled out His charge against them. They are guilty of spiritual apostasy. It led to moral awfulness and to political anarchy in the nation. God has called Israel into court and has proved His charge against them. Israel is like a prisoner standing at the bar waiting for the sentence of judgment. God can now move in to judge them” (McGee, p. 25).

“Let us reason ...” (Isa. 1:18-20)

While some see chapter 1 as a courtroom setting, it’s probably more accurate to see it as an arraignment, where the Lord states His case against His people, anticipates their defense and refutes it. Essentially, He tells Judah as well as all who witness His words that there is overwhelming evidence to secure a conviction. But rather than go through with a trial, conviction and sentencing, God gives the Jews a chance to settle their case out of court.

The term “let us reason” is sometimes rendered “enter a lawsuit” or “let us test each other,” but the basic meaning of the term is “to determine what is right.” Some translators favor the term “to settle out of court.” There is graciousness here on God’s part, as well as an opportunity for the Jewish people to “reach a settlement quickly” with their adversary (Matt. 5:25). The blessings of repentance and the curses of rebellion are clearly laid out: “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword” (vv. 19-20).

God’s use of the word “scarlet” is significant. The Hebrew word means “double-dyed,” emphasizing the deep-fixed permanency of sin in the people’s hearts. But there is hope. The color of Jesus’ robe when bearing our sins was scarlet (see Matt. 27:28). So was the color of the cord that spared the life of Rahab and her family (Josh. 2:18), as was the color of the thread tied to the scapegoat. The rabbis say that after the high priest confessed his sins and the people’s sins over the scapegoat, the thread turned white. The miracle ceased, they say, 40 years before the destruction of Jerusalem, coinciding with the crucifixion of Christ (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, *Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, Isaiah 1:18).

“I ... will burn away your dross” (Isa. 1:21-31)

Verses 21-26 describe a theological cycle for Jerusalem. First, the city was faithful (v. 21a). Now it is in rebellion (vv. 21b-23). God will purge the evil from Jerusalem with His refining fire (vv. 24-25). Finally, the city will return to its faithfulness (v. 26). God compares Jerusalem in its faithfulness to silver and wine but says the silver is now dross and the wine is diluted with water. Sin has been welcomed into the city and into the hearts of its inhabitants and has corrupted both. The Lord spares no rebuke when he calls the leaders rebels, friends of thieves, and lovers of graft (v. 23).

Therefore, God is determined to purify the city. He will satisfy His holiness (v. 24b), remove impurity (v. 25), and restore His city (v. 26). His promise to Jerusalem is an encouragement to faithful believers everywhere and at all times when they suffer through life at the hands of sinful and selfish leaders. Gary V. Smith writes, “A day will soon come when God will transform this world, remove all sin, replace all evil leaders, and rule his kingdom in righteousness and justice. This passage is also a warning to every leader. You will be held accountable for how you lead the people God has called you to serve” (p. 114).

Closing thought

Isaiah argues that God deals with sin in one of two ways. He removes the stain of sin if His people repent (1:18-19), or he removes the sinner with His refining fire so His nation is purified (1:25-27). Does Judah repent? No, and as a result, she is carried away into Babylonian captivity a century later. Will we as God’s people repent of our sins or face chastisement? That is the fundamental question that nations and people must continue to answer.

Chapter 2: A Day of Reckoning

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Some commentators believe this chapter was written during the reign of Jotham or Ahaz because of the description of Judah in verses 6-8. But it may be better to consider King Uzziah's reign, which was noted for its prosperity, power and pride. More specifically, Isaiah's sermons in chapters 2-12 likely happened some time after the Syro-Ephraimite War in 734-32 B.C. In any case, this prophecy was given during the early years of Isaiah's ministry.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Uzziah (Azariah)	[Shaded area]		[Shaded area]					

Key verse:

Isa. 2:12: For the LORD of hosts will have a day *of reckoning* against everyone who is proud and lofty and against everyone who is lifted up, that he may be abased. (NASB)

Quick summary:

The Lord will establish His kingdom on earth in “the last days,” and will execute judgment in a “day of reckoning.”

Take note:

It's clear that chapter 2 addresses the future, particularly the last days. Note how Isaiah identifies this time:

- “the last days” (v. 2)
- “on that day” (v. 11)
- “a day belonging to the Lord of Hosts is [coming]” (HCSB) / “the Lord of Hosts will have a day of reckoning” (NASB) (v. 12)
- “the Lord alone will be exalted on that day” (v. 17)
- “On that day” (v. 20)
- “when He rises to terrify the earth” (v. 21)

The city of peace (Isa. 2:1-4)

The first four verses of this chapter describe a future day in which a final and lasting peace comes to the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. At least two things are clear: God is the One who establishes and maintains this lasting peace, and He does it in “the last days,” or, from a New Testament perspective, in the days encompassing the first and second comings of Christ.

The term “last days” is used at least 13 times in the Bible (HCSB) and describes the final period of the world as we know it. In the Old Testament, the last days are anticipated as the age of Messianic fulfillment (Isa. 2:2; Micah 4:1), while the New Testament writers consider themselves living in the last days – the era of the gospel (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2). “The last days, then, are the days of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are preliminary to and preparatory for the last day of final judgment of unbelievers and the dawn of eternal glory for believers” (*Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, p. 800).

Gary V. Smith adds a cautionary note: “The phrase ‘in the last days’ cannot be associated with the millennium or with the church age in Isaiah’s thinking, because such concepts were not known to the prophet. He is simply talking about the last events in human history, when the kingdom of God would begin. New Testament readers must be careful not to read later NT information back into earlier texts and make them say things that God did not reveal to the prophets” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 129).

The plural use of “days” implies a sustained length of time. While those living in Old Testament times may have viewed the coming Messianic age as singular and continuous, New Testament revelation shows us that the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah are to be fulfilled in two stages. First, Messiah will come as the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53), or Lamb of God (John 1:29). Then He will return one day as the Lion of Judah to defeat the wicked and establish His earthly kingdom (Rev. 19:11 – 20:6).

Isaiah’s reference to the “mountain of the Lord” (v. 2) points to His kingdom, authority or rule. One day the kingdoms of men will become the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:24). Isaiah also draws an analogy between the kingdom of God and the Temple on Mount Moriah, which towers above the countryside in Isaiah’s day. The kingdom of God will rise above, overshadow, and nullify the arrogant, warring and fleeting kingdoms of men. The prophet Daniel makes reference to these days when interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the statue, which symbolized earthly kingdoms: “Then the iron, the fired clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were shattered and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors. The wind carried them away, and not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great *mountain* and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35; emphasis mine).

The Lord Himself will settle disputes between nations. Ruling in majesty, power, justice and wisdom, He will so change the nature of worldly authority that people will “turn their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives” ... “and they will never again train for war” (v. 4). These opening verses of chapter 2 are almost identical to Micah 4:1-5.

The Day of the Lord (Isa. 2:5-22)

Verse 12 warns that a day of reckoning is coming. Various translations describe it as:

- “a day belonging to the Lord of Hosts” (HCSB)
- “the day of the Lord” (KJV)
- “a day of reckoning” (NASB)
- “a day against all that is proud and lofty” (ESV)
- “a day in store” (NIV)

“The day of the Lord” is different from the previous reference to “the last days.” Specifically, it refers to God’s supernatural intervention in human history, usually with reference to events that will take place at the end of time. “Most often,” according to *Wilmington’s Bible Handbook*, “it relates to the Tribulation preceding the return of Christ” (Isa. 2:12).

Isaiah catalogues the reasons God has abandoned His people:

- They have adopted religious superstitions from their neighbors (v. 6).
- They have formed national alliances for strength rather than relying on God (v.6).
- They have accumulated wealth and built up huge armaments rather than trusting God for their provision (v. 7).
- And they have embraced idolatry, worshiping the creature rather than Creator (v. 8; see also Rom. 1:25).

Since Israel has made itself look and act like the heathen nations around it, God will judge Israel in a manner appropriate for the heathen. It’s likely that Isaiah does not see the lengthy time frame of repeated judgment, stretching out more than two millennia into the future, yet he is clear that Judah has been sufficiently rebellious to attract God’s wrath now. “The Lord alone,” he proclaims, “will be exalted on that day” (v. 11). He will break down the arrogance of all people, specifically:

- “cedars” and “oaks” – a reference to haughty nobles and princes (v. 13; see also Amos 2:9; Zech. 11:2).
- “high mountains” and “lofty hills” – an image of government and society (v. 14).
- “every high tower” and “every fortified wall” – a picture of military might (v. 15).
- “every ship of Tarshish” and “every splendid sea vessel” – a reference to commerce (v. 16).
- “human pride” and “the loftiness of men” (v. 17).
- “idols” (v. 18).

While these appear to be figurative references, it’s probable that the people of Judah in Uzziah’s day literally took pride in their fortified cities, tall towers, large ships and beautiful trees.

There is a parallel in Rev. 6:15-17 to how the wicked are seen responding to God's wrath in Isa. 2:19-21: "Then the kings of the earth, the nobles, the military commanders, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of Their wrath has come! And who is able to stand?'" Just as God will bring judgment on His people for their rebellion in Isaiah's day – through the Assyrian and Babylonian empires – the Lord Himself will execute judgment directly on the whole earth on "the last day."

Closing thought

There is hope for Judah in Isaiah's day, as there is for us today. "Come and let us walk in the Lord's light," the prophet urges in verse 5, adding in verse 22, "Put no more trust in man, who has only the breath in his nostrils. What is he really worth?"

Gary V. Smith summarizes: "This sermon provides two unmistakable theological choices to any reader/listener. One can follow the path of proud leaders like Uzziah, or a person can 'stop trusting in man' now and exalt God alone. The theological choice is clear and presented as two opposite alternatives with two opposite consequences: life with God in his glorious kingdom (2:1-5), or frightful humiliation and destruction (2:6-22). There is no middle ground for people to hide" (Smith, p. 142).

Chapter 3: Stumbled and Fallen


Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapters 2-12 likely were written during the reign of King Uzziah. Some commentators believe this chapter was written before the Syro-Ephraimite War in 734-32 B.C.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry Uzziah (Azariah)								

Key verse:

Isa. 3:8: For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen because they have spoken and acted against the LORD, defying His glorious presence.

Quick summary:

The Lord argues His case against Judah and Jerusalem and stands ready to execute judgment. He is particularly pointed in His wrath against corrupt leaders and haughty women.

Take note:

Unlike chapter 2, which looks well into the future, chapter 3 focuses on the here and now for Israel, with an especially harsh assessment of the manner in which God's people have squandered their wealth and privilege. The New Testament equivalent could be the words of Jesus in Luke 12:48: "Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more."

God will remove the leaders (Isa. 3:1-12)

Judah and Jerusalem are comfortable, given the peace and prosperity of King Uzziah's day. But their wealth, economic stability and military security have led their leaders to become self-

absorbed, complacent, and corrupt. Isaiah delivers a wake-up call, warning that the Lord God of Hosts is about to remove “every kind of security” (v. 1). The loss of food (“the entire supply of bread and water,” v. 1) and the removal of key leaders (“the hero and warrior, the judge and prophet, the fortune-teller and elder, the commander ... dignitary, the counselor, cunning magician, and necromancer,” vv. 2-3) imply a military siege and captivity. Perhaps this describes the approaching Syro-Ephraimite War. The king and priests are not mentioned. It’s possible that Isaiah is speaking of the time when Uzziah would be separated from society because of his leprosy and a group of more than 80 priests would faithfully serve God (2 Chron. 26:16-21), although the text does not specifically say so.

The Lord then says He will make “youths” their leaders and place the “unstable,” or “mischief-makers,” in authoritative positions (v. 4). This could be understood literally, or it could be that the new leaders would be scraped from the bottom of the barrel – immature, unwise, mischievous, and strong willed. Gary V. Smith summarizes the situation well: “In a sense God seems to be saying, ‘If you want to trust in incompetent leaders then I will give you some really bad ones’” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 146).

With biting mockery, Isaiah predicts the day in which the only qualification for leadership will be whether someone owns a coat (v. 6). But even with the bar set that low, people will avoid leadership responsibilities. As a result, the worst possible types of people will become leaders by default.

In verses 8-9, Isaiah makes it clear that Judah and Jerusalem are bringing disaster upon themselves. They have “stumbled” and “fallen” because they have “spoken and acted against the Lord, defying His glorious presence.” The people made no effort to hide their defiant behavior before God or one another. They openly paraded their sins in public like those in Sodom did prior to their destruction (v. 9; see Gen. 19-20).

The righteous in Judah are assured that it will go well with them, while it will go badly for the wicked (vv. 10-11). This is not a pitch for the prosperity gospel. Nor does Isaiah tackle the thorny issue of why the righteous suffer as Job and the writer of Ecclesiastes do. Isaiah simply is telling his countrymen what the apostle Paul later told the Galatians – there are consequences of our actions; that is, we reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7).

God will judge (Isa. 3:13-15)

In light of the evidence of Judah’s sinfulness and rebellion, the Lord warns that He may have to take the leaders to court. Specifically, He accuses the leaders of oppressing the people, leading them astray, plundering the poor, and crushing God’s people. Part of their responsibility was to defend the poor and helpless against powerful landlords and skillful lawyers. Instead, they allow youngsters to rise to the throne and permit women (maybe the queen mother or women in the harem) to rule the people (v. 12). This charge could be interpreted literally, or it could be a sarcastic remark comparing Judah’s leaders with silly boys or women. The Lord seems

astonished at this behavior and asks why the leaders “crush” His people and “grind” the faces of the poor. They have utterly rejected the divine mandate to care for the people and have come to adopt a low regard for human life.

Today, the Lord still has high standards for people in positions of authority in the family, government, business, and the church (see Matt. 24:45-51; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; James 3:1). Since all governing authority is given by God (Rom. 13:1), all those in leadership positions ultimately are accountable to God, and there is a day of reckoning.

Judah’s women denounced (Isa. 3:16 – 4:1)

Since the time of Uzziah is a period of peace and prosperity, the wives of many government officials, businessmen and military leaders have the financial resources to pamper themselves and dress lavishly. It’s clear from the context that God is condemning the pride of the wealthy women of Jerusalem. He calls them “haughty,” meaning self-engrossed or proud. Isaiah notices these arrogant, well-dressed women in the temple area of Jerusalem, where God should be exalted and humility should be the prevailing attitude of the people. The Lord describes their behavior: they walk pompously, with their noses in the air, giving flirtatious glances, walking provocatively with short hops or steps that caused the jewelry on their ankles to jangle, thus drawing attention to themselves.

But God is determined to remove everything these women hold so dear, bringing them to the point of humiliation and shame, and making their appearance repulsive to others. Even though these verses do not say exactly how God will accomplish this, the description of the women indicates it may very well be as a result of the rape and savagery that comes with defeat in warfare. If they do not repent, their opulent world will come crashing down on them. Verse 24 uses the word “instead” five times:

- Instead of perfume (derived from the balsam tree) there will be a stench, probably from decaying flesh and festering wounds;
- Instead of fashionable belts, their clothes will be secured with a rope, or perhaps they will be bound as prisoners;
- Instead of beautifully styles hair, baldness;
- Instead of the finest fashions, sackcloth, symbolic of grief and mourning;
- Instead of beautiful clothes and makeup, a brand pressed into their flesh by conquering soldiers.

Added to this will be the shame of living without husbands or children, probably as a result of the death of many husbands and sons in warfare. The death of these males will take away the women’s income, security and social status, to the point where they will desperately grab hold of a man, vow to share him with other women, and even take care of their own needs in exchange for the opportunity to have children.

Closing thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “This passage challenges people to test their own heart to see if that tattoo, that new pair of shoes, that new job, that new house, or the purchase of that new car was motivated by pride or if it will result in a prideful attitude. Although pride differs from self-esteem, the concern for my rights, my opinions, my way, and my honor is a sign of a sick self-centered society that fails to give complete honor and glory to God” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 153).

Chapter 4: Zion's Future Glory


Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapters 2-12 likely were written during the reign of King Uzziah.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry Uzziah (Azariah)								

Key verse:

Isa. 4:2: On that day the branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of Israel's survivors.

Quick summary:

Israel's present pride and God's pending judgment will not defeat the Lord's ultimate plan to establish His future kingdom on earth.

Take note:

The name Zion is used three times in consecutive verses:

- "Whoever remains in Zion ... will be called holy" (v. 3).
- "When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion" (v. 4)
- "Then the Lord will create a cloud of smoke by day and a glowing flame of fire by night over the entire site of Mount Zion" (v. 5).

The word Zion is a Hebrew word whose precise meaning may not be known. It may mean citadel or fortress, but generally it refers to aspects of Jerusalem. The terms Zion, Jerusalem, and City of David often are used synonymously in the Old Testament. The Temple Mount is referred to as Zion as well. Zion is called "His holy mountain" (Ps. 48:1). Zion is used as a metaphor for security and protection (Ps. 125). The New Testament continues this imagery, using the term "heavenly Jerusalem" or Zion in reference to the church (Heb. 12:22), the gospel message (1 Peter 2:6), and the place of God's swelling (Rev. 14:1).

The branch of the Lord (Isa. 4:2)

Isaiah closes out this lengthy message (Isa. 2:1 – 4:6) by returning to the same positive themes with which he opened it (Isa. 2:1-5). Both the beginning and the end of Isaiah's prophecy describe what will happen in the last days when God gathers His special people to Zion. Unlike the beginning, however, which focuses on the coming of the Gentile nations to learn from God, these closing words describe God's work of purifying His holy remnant in Jerusalem.

Commentators differ in opinion as to whether the term "branch" is a reference to the "fruit of the land" or to the Messiah. The Aramaic Targum, which translates or paraphrases Old Testament passages into Aramaic, translates this verse as "Messiah of the Lord," indicating that early Jewish interpreters thought this was a messianic passage. In addition, Isaiah later uses a different Hebrew word but says of the Messiah, "a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse" and "the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples" (Isa. 11:1, 10). Jeremiah refers to the "righteous branch of David" (Jer. 23:5; see also 33:15), and Zechariah uses the term "Branch" with connections to the Messiah (Zech. 3:8; 6:12).

Gary V. Smith suggests that Isaiah's reference to "branch" in 4:2 refers to two parallel acts of God that will transform Zion. "God will (a) cause his messianic Branch to spring forth, and also (b) bring marvelous fertility to the produce of the field. This interpretation shows how God will reverse the situation in 2:6 – 4:1. He will (a) replace the proud leaders of his people and give them a new leader, the Branch of the Lord, and (b) replace the ruin, devastation, and shame of the destroyed land with lush crops that will have great fertility" (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 156).

Isaiah's frequent use of the term "on that day" (or "in that day") in chapters 2-4 illustrates that God's work of punishing His people for their sins and establishing His kingdom for His glory are complementary acts of carrying out His covenant promise to Israel. Purification involves intense heat and pressure to burn off the dross and perfect the precious metal. In the end the purged metal radiates with beauty and testifies to the skillful hand of the refiner. Verses 2-6 stand in stark contrast to Isa. 2:6 – 4:1.

A cloud by day and a flaming fire by night (Isa. 4:3-6)

God will cleanse those left in Zion of their sin and transform them into a holy people. The word holy (*qados*) is a reminder of God's original plan to make Israel His "own possession," "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). The emphasis here is on what God will do, not on anything His people will do to merit God's favor. Holiness means being set apart for God alone. The holiness God will give this remnant makes them fit for His kingdom and it stands in stark contrast to the sinfulness of the present generation in Zion (2:6 – 4:1).

In verse 4, Isaiah uses a different metaphor than in 1:25 to describe the purifying work of God. Instead of purification through smelting, God will “wash away” filth and “cleanse” bloodguilt; this is more of a reference to sacrificial work than to refining. The prophet also refers to “a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning” as the means by which cleansing is accomplished. This seems to describe God’s purification of Zion by destroying the remaining wicked people of the city. But it also could describe the work of the Holy Spirit in cleansing the human heart. Matthew Henry comments: “By the judgment of God’s providence, sinners were destroyed and consumed; but by the Spirit of grace they are reformed and converted. The Spirit herein acts as a Spirit of judgment, enlightening the mind, convincing the conscience; also as a Spirit of burning, quickening and strengthening the affections, and making men zealously affected in a good work.”

After Zion is purified, God will “create” something new. The word “create” (*bara*) is a divine activity of making something new, either by transforming something that already exists or by bringing into existence something new. What is God going to create? A “cloud of smoke by day and a glowing flame of fire by night.” This appears to be a reference to God’s special act of re-creating the new heaven and the new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). God’s glorious presence will be the central feature of this new kingdom. The cloud by day and fire by night are drawn from the Exodus tradition, in which God’s presence in the cloud and fire led the Israelites out of Egypt and ultimately resided in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle (Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19, 24; 40:34; Deut. 1:33; 31:15; 1 Kings 8:10-11). This divine presence demonstrates God’s acceptance of His holy people. “The surprising difference is that God’s presence will not be limited to a temple building; it will be like a canopy over the whole of Zion (cf. 60:1-2; 62:2; Ezek. 39:25-29), because all of Zion and its people will be holy” (Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 158).

Closing thought

It is clear from Isaiah’s writings that God is at the center of all promises regarding the future of Israel and the world. Gary V. Smith comments: “God will wash away sin and make it possible for people to be holy. God is the one who writes people’s names in his book (4:3-4). God will create a new world order over Mt. Zion, and his glorious presence there will bring protection for his people. He will make the messianic Branch beautiful and he will increase the productivity of the earth. God is the one people can trust and he is the one to exalt. The future of this world is completely dependent on God” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 159).

Chapter 5: Worthless Grapes


Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapters 2-12 likely were written during the reign of King Uzziah.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry Uzziah (Azariah)								

Key verse:

Isa. 5:5: Now I will tell you what I am about to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge, and it will be consumed; I will tear down its wall, and it will be trampled.

Quick summary:

Isaiah uses a parable to foretell judgment on Judah, and then pronounces six woes on the people as he catalogues their sins.

Take note:

The parable of the vineyard in verses 1-7 is similar to the parable of the vineyard owner Jesus tells in Matt. 21:33-44. At the same time, the woes pronounced on the wicked in verses 8-30 have a familiar ring; Jesus' woes on the Jewish religious leaders in Matthew 23 are aimed at their arrogance, hypocrisy and self-righteousness. There appears to be good reason why Jesus quoted Isaiah so often: Just as the prophet foretold pending judgment on Judah for its sins, the Messiah foretold judgment on Israel for its vapid spiritual life.

Parable of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7)

This parable foretelling judgment on Judah is eerily similar to the parable of the vineyard owner Jesus tells in Matt. 21:33-44, predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of Israel that occurs in 70 A.D. with the most notable consequence being the temporary setting aside of God's spiritual blessings on Israel in favor of the church. In Isaiah, the pending judgment is national and focused mainly on the leaders' social injustice. In Matthew, the pending judgment also is national but centers on the leaders' spiritual coldness – particularly their rejection of Jesus as Messiah.

D.A. Carson summarizes the parable in Isaiah 5: “The parable brings home, as nothing else could, the sheer unreason and indefensibility of sin – we find ourselves searching for some cause of the vine's failure and there is none. Only humans could be as capricious as that” (*New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, Section Isaiah 5:1).

There is no mistaking the meaning of this parable. The vineyard is “the house of Israel” and the fruitless vine “the men of Judah” (v. 7). Like a wise, experienced, and caring husbandman, God has done everything necessary to make Judah a shining testimony of His greatness. He plans the vineyard, setting it on “a very fertile hill” (v. 1); prepares the soil, breaking it up and clearing it of stones (v. 2); plants it “with the finest vines” (v. 2); operates and watches over it, building a tower in the middle of the vineyard (v. 2); anticipates its fruitfulness, hewing out a winepress (v. 2); and expects it to “yield good grapes” (v. 2). So when the vineyard “yielded worthless grapes” (v. 2), God could legitimately ask, “What more could I have done for My vineyard than I did?” (v. 4).

God has blessed Israel and given her advantages no other nation on earth has ever experienced. Centuries later, after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and before God revisits judgment on Israel through the destruction of the Temple and the Diaspora, the apostle Paul reminds his Jewish readers of their special place in God's heart (Rom. 9:4-5). Nevertheless, Isaiah warns his fellow countrymen what God is about to do. He will remove His hedge of protection so it will be consumed (v. 5); tear down its wall so wild beasts and human plunderers will trample it (v. 5); abandon its care so that “thorns and briars will grow up” (v. 6); and even withhold rain so that it becomes a “wasteland” (v. 6). In practical terms, God is going to give up his special care of Israel so invaders will destroy it. He will even withhold the “rain,” likely a reference to the heaven-sent teachings of the prophets.

There is an interesting play on words in verse 7. Good looks for “justice” (*mishpat*) but finds “oppression / injustice” (*mispach*); He looks for “righteousness” (*tzedakah*) but hears “cries” (*tzedkah*) of wretchedness (*The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*).

Woes for the wicked (Isa. 5:8-30)

Isaiah notes six distinct types of sin resulting in woes from the Lord. As D.A. Carson summarizes in the *New Bible Commentary*, “The attack has all the bite of personal portraiture. Here are the great, for all to see; they emerge as extortioners (8-10), playboys (11-12; *cf.* 22-23) and scoffers, whose only predictable values are cash ones (18-23).” Specifically, the sins are:

- **Disregarding Jubilee.** “Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, Until there is no more room, So that you have to live alone in the midst of the land!” (v. 8). The jubilee restoration of land every 50 years is designed to protect against greed, but the inhabitants of Judah are selfishly hoarding property (see Lev. 25:13; Micah 2:2). As a result, God will cause many houses to become desolate and the land to yield its fruit grudgingly (vv. 9-10).
- **Drunkenness.** “Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink ...” (vv. 11-12). God’s people are indulging in strong drink and revelry without regard for the Creator and Provider of their food and drink. Their parties begin early, when it is especially shameful to drink (see Acts 2:15; 1 Thess. 5:7) and continue into the night. In verse 12, Isaiah refers to the tambourine among other musical instruments that were part of the reveling. The Hebrew word is *tophet*, and the tambourine was used to drown out the cries of children sacrificed to Moloch. Therefore, God will punish His people for their reckless living by sending them into exile, where they will suffer hunger and thirst – a stark contrast to the gluttonous food and drink found at their banquet tables (v. 13). *Sheol*, the abode of the dead, has “enlarged its throat” to accommodate the number of Jews who will die in exile (v. 14). In addition, the splendor of Jerusalem will be taken away, the common man will be humbled and the man of importance abased (v. 15). But “the LORD of hosts will be exalted in judgment” (v. 16).
- **Obstinate perseverance in sin.** “Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, And sin as if with cart ropes” (v. 18). The rabbis used to say, “An evil inclination is at first like a fine hair-string, but the finishing like a cart-rope.” Jamieson, Fausset, Brown comment, “The antithesis is between the slender *cords* of sophistry, like the spider’s web (Is 59:5; Job 8:14), with which one sin *draws* on another, until they at last bind themselves with great guilt as with a *cart-rope*. They strain every nerve in sin” (*A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, S. Isa. 5:18). While buried up to their necks in sin, the Jewish people seem to be questioning whether God is really in control of the nation, and they challenge them to show Himself by delivering them despite their obstinacy (v. 19).

- **Perverted values.** “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness ...” (v. 20). Matthew Henry writes that such people “not only live in the omission of that which is good, but condemn it, argue against it, and, because they will not practise it themselves, run it down in others, and fasten invidious epithets upon it—not only do that which is evil, but justify it, and applaud it, and recommend it to others as safe and good” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, S. Is 5:18).
- **Arrogance.** “Woe to those who are wise in their own opinion and clever in their own sight” (v. 21). Many in Judah think they know better than the prophet and therefore disregard the Word of God through Isaiah. *The New Bible Commentary* calls them “calmly omniscient.”
- **Alcoholic excess and perversion of justice.** “Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine ... who deprive the innocent of justice” (vv. 22-23). They know the value of money, but little more. The judges in particular bankroll their self-indulgence with bribes that favor the rich and deny justice to the innocent. They mix their drinks, not with water, but with spices for intoxication (Prov. 9:2, 5; Song of Sol. 8:2).

As a result of these sins, the people of Judah would be burned like dry grass, and their beauty vanquished like a flower turned to dust. When God’s judgment comes, He will use Egypt and Assyria, and later Babylon, as His rod of punishment. These ferocious powers descend on Judah as if God has raised a banner and called people from “the ends of the earth” to war (v. 26). While these violent conquerors are to be feared like a growling lioness or the roaring sea, they are under the sovereign hand of God and do as He pleases. This chapter ends darkly, with nothing but pending judgment, like storm clouds gathering on the horizon.

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “These woes assure the reader that God will judge sin severely. The lament conveys the truth that God is terribly saddened when his people reject him or his revealed instructions. Nevertheless, in the end he will hold all people accountable for their actions, especially his own privileged people” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 182).

Chapter 6: Holy, Holy, Holy


Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapter 6 recounts an event in “the year that King Uzziah died” (v. 1).

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah’s Ministry Uzziah (Azariah)								

Key verse:

Isa. 6:3: And one [seraphim] called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; His glory fills the whole earth.

Quick summary:

Isaiah has a stunning vision of the Lord, who sends the prophet to keep preaching to the unrepentant Jews “until the land is ruined and desolate” (v. 11).

Take note:

This is the only place in Scripture where seraphim are mentioned by name. Apparently these creatures are among the highest order of angels and serve at the throne of God. Their name, which means “burning ones,” describes their role as proclaimers of God’s holiness. They also declare that man must be purged of sin’s moral defilement before he may stand before God and serve Him. Seraphim appear to have some human features since they are depicted as standing, having faces, and having feet. Yet they also have six wings each and are capable of flight. Their acts of worship are so intense that they cause the thresholds of the divine Temple to shake. They stand ready to serve God at a moment’s notice.

In comparison, cherubim have an extraordinary appearance with four faces – those of a man, lion, ox and eagle – four wings and the feet of calves. They guard the gate to the Garden of Eden, preventing sinful man from reentering (Gen. 3:24). They also are depicted as golden figures covering the mercy seat above the ark in the Holy of Holies (Ex. 25:17-22), and they attend the glory of God in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek. 1).

However seraphim and cherubim are different, they appear to be some of God’s most powerful, intelligent, and beautiful creatures. Satan may have been an “anointed guardian cherub” (Ezek. 28:14) if Ezekiel 28 is a reference to him before his rebellion.

Isaiah’s vision (Isa. 6:1-7)

There is some debate as to whether this passage should be at the beginning of Isaiah rather than inserted here. But because much of what we’ve read so far – especially Isa. 2-5 – deals with events during Uzziah’s life, it seems clear that Isaiah’s vision in “the year of Uzziah’s death” (v. 1) is his inauguration into a new level of ministry. However, some argue that Uzziah’s “death” could mean the end of his civil service as king due to his leprosy. If that’s the case, Isaiah’s vision would have come many years before the king’s death. An interesting thought: Isaiah’s claim to have seen God may have been the pretext for his being sawed asunder under Manassah’s reign, according to tradition (see Heb. 11:37).

Isaiah’s vision of the Lord (*Adonai* in v. 1; *Yahweh* in v. 5) implies the Trinity in unity. Jesus is interpreted to be the one speaking in Isa. 6:10 according to John 12:41, while Paul attributes the words to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25-7). Also, the seraphims’ declaration of the Lord as “Holy, holy, holy” provides additional support to the notion that what Isaiah saw was a representation of the Triune Godhead if not God’s divine essence (see John 1:18). The Trinity is further implied later in verse 8, where God says, “... who will go for Us?” In any case, what Isaiah sees is different from the Shekinah glory that resides above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, for the Lord is seated here on a throne, attended by heavenly creatures, and His robe fills the Temple.

The seraphim have been discussed above, but Jamieson, Fausset and Brown provide some added insight. They say that while the term is used nowhere else in Scripture of God’s attending angels, it is used to describe the rapidly moving serpents the Lord sent to torment the Israelites (Num. 21:6). The commentators add, “Perhaps Satan’s form as a *serpent (nachash)* in his appearance to man has some connection with his original form as a seraph of flight” (*A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, Logos Research Systems, S. Is. 6:2).

Isaiah’s response to this vision of the Lord is consistent with the reaction of others in Scripture who encounter God after the Fall: fear and a realization of one’s complete

inadequacy in the presence of Almighty God. Isaiah's words in verse 5 are instructive:

- “Woe is me, for I am ruined.” Some translations say “undone” or “lost.” Isaiah is in good company when he gasps at being in the presence of the Lord. Gideon has a similar response (Judges 6:22). So do Manoah (Judges 13:22), Job (Job 42:5), Peter (Luke 5:8) and John (Rev. 1:17). Isaiah has pronounced woes on the inhabitants of Judah; now he declares that he, too, is subject to judgment.
- “... because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips.” John Walvoord and Roy Zuck comment: “When seen next to the purity of God's holiness, the impurity of human sin is all the more evident. The prophet's unclean lips probably symbolized his attitudes and actions as well as his words, for a person's words reflect his thinking and relate to his actions. Interestingly Isaiah identified with his people who also were sinful (a people of unclean lips)” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1045).
- “... and because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.” Isaiah sees, not necessarily God in his full glory (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16), but a representation of His presence. The writer of Hebrews, for example, says Christ is “the exact expression of His nature” (Heb. 1:3), and John tells us the Word, who is God, “became flesh and took up residence among us” (John 1:14).

In verses 6-7 one of the seraphim flies to Isaiah and touches his mouth with a glowing coal he has snatched with a tong from the altar. The heavenly creature declares that Isaiah's wickedness is removed and his sin is atoned for. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown have an interesting perspective on this: “The mouth was touched because it was the part to be used by the prophet when inaugurated. So ‘tongues of fire’ rested on the disciples (Acts 2:3, 4) when they were being set apart to speak in various languages of Jesus” (*A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, of the Old and New Testaments*, S. Is 6:7).

Isaiah's commission (Isa. 6:8-13)

The Lord's self-reference to both “I” and “Us” strongly suggests the triune nature of the Godhead (see also Gen. 1:26; 11:7). The Lord's questions – “Who should I send?” and “Who will go for Us?” – indicate that few are both willing and qualified to deliver the unwelcome message to the Jews, enduring hardship, rejection, and unbelief. Isaiah responds promptly to the call: “Here I am. Send me.” Eagerness for service is a sign of God's purifying and enabling work in a believer's life (see also 1 Sam. 3:10; Acts 9:6-8).

The Lord immediately lays out His challenging mission. Isaiah is to declare God's truth, but it will only result in hardening of the people's hearts. Judah's rejection of Isaiah's message, and the sovereign Lord who initiated it, are as certain as if they already have occurred. This passage, like many others throughout Scripture, illustrates the mystery of the parallel truths of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. This particular decree of hardening is repeated in full or in part six times in the New Testament (for example,

Matt. 13:14-15; Acts 28:26-27), but it should be read in its entirety to see that God's pending judgment will clear the ground for new national and spiritual growth.

D.A. Carson puts it well:

Isaiah fulfilled this mission to blind and deafen by proclaiming (not withholding) the truth. God here shares with the prophet the critical significance of his ministry. Sinful Israel has come to the point where one more rejection of the truth will finally confirm them for inevitable judgment. The dilemma of the prophet is that there is no way of saving the sinner but by the very truth whose rejection will condemn him utterly (*New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 6:1).

The Lord does not leave Isaiah or his beloved nation without hope, however. He assures the prophet that there will be a remnant, a "holy stump," that will sprout again one day. Although Judah's population would be almost totally wiped out, like a fallen and burned tree, God would preserve a remnant in the land. *The Tyndale Bible Commentary* says "there would be life in the roots of the stump from which the Messiah ('the holy seed') would grow again" (S 260).

Closing Thought

Larry Richards and Lawrence O. Richards comment:

Uzziah's death was symbolic. He who had begun so well and had found prosperity in obedience had been struck by the dread disease of leprosy. An appearance of health and strength remained for a time, but the disease was at work within the body of the king; its marks became more and more visible as the ravages of that dread sickness took their toll. Finally, destroyed within and without, Uzziah died; his pride and his disobedience brought judgment on him. Isaiah pointed out that Judah was also diseased, just like her king, because she too had deserted the Lord (*The Teacher's Commentary*, S 367).

Chapter 7: The Lord Himself Will Give You a Sign

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Chapter 7 is set in the days of King Ahaz, specifically when Israel and Syria are poised to attack Judah in an effort to unify the three kingdoms against the superpower Assyria.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded bar]							
Ahaz	[Shaded bar]				[Shaded bar]			

Key verse:

Isa. 7:14: Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.

Quick summary:

Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel are determined to replace Judah's king Ahaz with a puppet king who will cooperate with them in an alliance against Assyria. When Ahaz resists, Syria and Israel invade Judah and crush her. Ahaz pleads for help from Assyria, which comes to Judah's assistance, defeating Syria and Israel, and then turning on Judah, which becomes an Assyrian satellite. In the midst of all this, God provides one of the most noteworthy signs of His faithfulness through Isaiah's prophecy of Immanuel.

Take note:

The Messianic prophecy in 7:14 requires special attention. When Isaiah says the Lord will give "you" a sign, the "you" is plural and refers to the believing remnant of the house of David, not Ahaz. God remembers His covenant with David and remains faithful to it.

The word “virgin” in Hebrew speaks of a young unmarried woman, implying one who has never had sexual relations. However, the New Testament Greek and the rabbi’s translation of the Septuagint both use a word that definitely means a true virgin. As for the identity of Immanuel, more information will be provided in Isa. 9:6-7 and 11:1-5. While Ahaz is concerned with raising an army, God directs our attention to a child.

War against Jerusalem (Isa. 7:1-9)

Israel and Syria are desperately trying to unite their neighbors against Assyria. Judah has refused to join the alliance. As a result, the armies of Israel and Syria have arrived in force to conquer Judah and replace Ahaz with a puppet king.

Judah’s Jotham, son of Uzziah, has ruled well, but Jotham’s son Ahaz is a notoriously wicked king who is about to draw God’s wrath down on the nation. We are told in 2 Kings 15:37 that during his reign “the LORD began sending Rezin king of Aram and Pekah (king of Israel) against Judah.” Ahaz and the people are terrified. As Matthew Henry writes, “They had made God their enemy and knew not how to make him their friend, and therefore their fears tyrannized over them” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 7:1).

Isaiah’s message in the midst of panic is significant. With his son Shear-Jashub, Isaiah implores the people to trust in God. Shear-Jashub (“a remnant will return”) is a living reminder of God’s judgment and salvation. Within a few years, the two “smoldering stubs of firebrands” (v. 4), Rezin and Pekah, will be snuffed out. Syria is crushed in 732 B.C. As early as 734 B.C. Israel loses her northern territories. By 722 she loses her racial identity, and by 669, according to God’s word, she is “too shattered to be a people” (v. 8).

God’s words through Isaiah will echo in the ears of the people for years to come, and they resound yet today: “If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all” (v. 9).

The child Immanuel (Isa. 7:10-16)

The Lord’s challenge to Ahaz to “ask for a sign” (v. 11) exposes the depths of the king’s rebellious heart. At first glance, it seems Ahaz responds humbly: “I will not ask. I will not test the Lord” (v. 12; see Deut. 6:16). However, to wave off God’s invitation is to reject God Himself. Faith played no part in Ahaz’s religion or his politics (2 Kings 16:3-4, 10-20). Besides, Ahaz has other plans in mind; he’s going to align with Assyria (see 2 Kings 16:7-10), which will come to Judah’s assistance and then turn brutally on its newfound ally (Isa. 7:17-25).

Despite Ahaz's obstinacy, the Lord gives a sign of the coming Messiah. This sign is not for Ahaz but for a much wider audience – King David's dynasty, and for us; the "you" in verses 13-14 is plural. While Ahaz looks to an army, God looks to a child (see Gen. 17:19). How the prophecy fits into the current crisis is much debated. As a straightforward prophecy of Christ (see Matt. 1:22-23), the sign seems to bypass Ahaz. Yet the sign is for the house of David, which has come under attack (see vv. 6, 13), and the promise of a coming prince in itself is reassuring.

This passage is fraught with difficulties. And while scholars continue to debate the best way to interpret the limited information about the young woman and her son, it's important to see this prophecy in light of the complete revelation of Scripture. Gary V. Smith puts it in perspective:

This passage reveals that a Davidic dynastic replacement for Ahaz would come at some point after a time of defeat by the Assyrians and that 'Immanuel' would be a godly ruler who would make just choices. The possibility remains that this new ruler could be the Messiah or some other godly, righteous king, but this text alone does not give clear irrefutable evidence that points exclusively to a messianic ruler. Thus, this incipient messianic text needs greater clarification concerning the significance of this son named Immanuel. The word Immanuel occurs again in 8:8 and 10. In addition, 9:1-7 refers to a coming son who will be a future Davidic messianic ruler who will reign forever. These later passages serve as commentaries that clarify the identity of Immanuel through progressive revelation. Thus what was not completely clear in chap. 7 becomes very clear to Isaiah by chap 9. Later prophetic and New Testament texts further the interpreter's insight into these themes by progressively uncovering more and more information about the person and work of the Messiah (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 216).

Trials to come for Judah (Isa. 7:17-25)

There are four "on that day" oracles that provide more specific information about the coming devastation of Judah that is revealed earlier in 5:26-30:

- Assyria and Egypt will infiltrate the land (7:18-19). The reference to flies and bees appears to picture the manner in which Judah's enemies will swarm over the land.
- Assyria will humiliate its Hebrew captives (7:20). It's not clear whether the imagery of a barber should be understood literally as a description of the treatment of prisoners, or more generally as a pillaging of the land.
- People will eat nomadic food (7:21-22). While the food is sufficient, the reference to one calf and two goats denotes a small herd and suggests that grain farming and cities will see an end.
- Agrarian society will cease (7:23-25). Isaiah seems to compare the destruction of God's vineyard (5:1-7) with the destruction God will bring through the Assyrians.

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “In spite of all the negative theological implications of Ahaz’s action, God did not totally give up on his plans for the Davidic dynasty. Out of the midst of suffering, another ruler unlike Ahaz will arise. Immanuel will choose the good and reject the evil. This unknown son, the child of a young woman, is a future Davidic figure of hope” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 218).

Chapter 8: Prepare for War, and be Broken

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapter 8 takes place during Ahaz's reign, after Assyria has defeated Aram and Israel. This should have prompted Judah to turn to God, but instead Ahaz orders his priests to conform their temple worship to the practices of the pagans in Damascus.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Ahaz	[Shaded area]			[Shaded area]				

Key verse:

Isa. 8:13: You are to regard only the LORD of Hosts as holy. Only He should be feared; only He should be held in awe.

Quick summary:

The armies of Assyria are about to pour into Judah, flooding the nation up to its very head, Jerusalem. The people are instructed to abandon their fear of men like Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel, who terrorize Ahaz but soon will be dead, and instead put their trust in God, who will be a refuge to those who turn to Him.

Take note:

Isaiah describes the Lord as a sanctuary for those who trust in Him, but “a stone to stumble over and a rock to trip over” for those who persist in rebellion against Him (v. 14). Peter quotes a portion of this passage, referring to those who reject Jesus as Messiah (1 Peter 2:8), as does Paul in Rom. 9:33.

Damascus and Samaria fall (Isa. 8:1-8)

Isaiah is instructed to write on a large scroll the name of a son who would be born to him and his wife. The son's name is announced even before he is conceived to emphasize the certainty of his birth and the inevitability of the national calamity his name describes. Maher-shalal-hash-baz is the longest personal name in the Bible. It means "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." Soldiers are known to shout these words to one another as they sweep down on their defeated foes. Remembering the prophecy of the fall of the Aram-Israel alliance (Isa. 7:4-9), Isaiah's listeners understand the significance of his son's name as they watch for the imminent defeat of Judah's neighbors.

Isaiah's wife is called "the prophetess" either because she is the wife of a prophet or because, like Isaiah, God has gifted her with prophetic abilities. The Bible does not record any instances in which she prophesies, although some commentators believe this is the best interpretation of her descriptive name. In less than two years – nine months for the pregnancy and about one year of the child's infancy – Assyria will plunder Damascus (Aram's capital) and Samaria (Israel's capital). Many scholars say this happened in 732 B.C., indicating that Isaiah's prophecy is given in 734 B.C. When the alliance falls, Judah should turn to the Lord, as Isaiah urges. Instead, one of the two witnesses (v. 2), Uriah the priest, follows Ahaz's orders and changes the temple worship to conform to the pagan practices of Damascus.

The term "these people" in verse 6 could refer to Judah, which rejects God and will come to experience the brutality of Assyria. More likely, however, the phrase describes the northern kingdom, which turns its back on Judah – "the slowly flowing waters of Shiloah" may be a reference to Jerusalem – in favor of an alliance with Aram. As a result, "the mighty rushing waters" of Assyria will sweep through the northern kingdom and ultimately destroy Judah as well.

A believing remnant (Isa. 8:9-22)

Though Judah almost would be defeated by the Assyrian invasion, Isaiah urges the people not to be afraid because they will experience victory. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck comment: "The great truth of chapters 7-9 is that God was with Judah.... Even though the nations would raise a war cry and prepare for battle against Judah, they would not succeed. They would be shattered, a fact stated three times in verse 9 for emphasis.... Because God has promised to be with His people they were to have faith in Him no matter how bad their circumstances" (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1051).

Despite God's promise, many in Judah refuse to trust in Him, and the Lord warns Isaiah not to be like them (v. 11). The Lord will be a sanctuary for those who believe in Him, but "a stone to stumble over and a rock to trip over, and a trap and a snare" to those who reject Him (v. 14). Peter quotes a portion of this verse, referring to those who reject the Messiah (1 Peter 2:8). This is a subtle but important reference to the deity of Christ and the unity of the triune Godhead. Along these lines, it is interesting to note that Heb. 2:13 ascribes the words in Isa. 8:17c-18a to Christ. While the immediate context indicates that Isaiah is speaking these words and referring to the children God has given him as signs, in the larger context Jesus (Immanuel / God with us) has placed these messages on Isaiah's lips. Perhaps more important, since Jesus is the eternal Son of God who took on human flesh, the writer of Hebrews points to the common humanity Christ now shares with those who trust in Him.

For Isaiah to "bind up the testimony" and "seal up the instruction," he is reaffirming his dependence on God and inscribing His word on the hearts of His followers. D.A. Carson calls verses 16-18 "a kernel of immense promise. With the expression *my disciples*, God introduces a new definition of his people and their relation to him.... Isaiah's responsive faith (17) speaks for such, and the little group of v 18 is seen in Heb. 2:13 as typical of the church gathered around Christ" (*New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 8:16).

These disciples stand in stark contrast to the people described in verses 19-22. They practice what God prohibits (see Deut. 18:9-12). Instead of prophets, they seek out mediums. Instead of teaching, they embrace gibberish. And instead of the living, they desire guidance from the dead. No wonder there will be "no dawn for them" (v. 20). An interesting side note about the spiritists (necromancers) who "chirp" in verse 19: Faint chirping, as of birds, generally is ascribed to departed spirits in biblical times. By ventriloquism soothsayers would cause these sounds to emerge from the grave. Basically, it is all smoke and mirrors. That may be the reason the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates the word "spiritists" in this verse as "ventriloquists."

The result of all this, according to Isaiah, is that the people who reject God's message will end up wandering, dejected and hungry. Rather than acknowledge the error of their ways, they will look up and curse their king and their God, a response that foreshadows the reaction of the Antichrist's followers to the judgments of God in the last days (Rev. 16:11). Ultimately, those who reject God see "only distress, darkness, and the gloom of affliction (v. 22).

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments:

These negative experiences teach a positive lesson. People need to pay attention to God's revealed will and follow it, as Isaiah and his followers did. This obedience leads to a faithful relationship of respect and awe before the presence of a holy God, as well as hopeful waiting for God to act and confident assurance in his plan (8:17).

Temptations to follow the false messages of proud political leaders, secular materialistic philosophies, and misguided religious leaders will be less attractive when people put them under the scrutiny of divine truth (8:20) (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 232-33).

The Book of Isaiah

Chapter 9: Prince of Peace, and Scorched Earth

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Chapter 9 takes place during the reign of Ahaz, Judah's wicked king. While Isaiah's ministry focuses on the southern kingdom, this chapter speaks to the northern kingdom of Israel as well. Even though the Israelites will face the darkness of military defeat, the day is coming when they will see "great light" as the Messiah lives and ministers in Galilee.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded bar from 750 to 680]							
Ahaz	[Shaded bar from 730 to 710]							

Key verse:

Isa. 9:6: For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Quick summary:

This chapter highlights God's Son and God's sovereignty. Verses 1-7 give us additional information about Immanuel (Isa. 7:14), who will be a gift from heaven, God incarnate, and a light to all people. Verses 8-21 describe the punishment God is about to inflict on His own people, even though their defeat at the hands of the Arameans and Philistines will not lead to repentance.

Take note:

Verse 6 is one of the clearest Old Testament passages affirming the deity and the humanity of the Messiah. He will be born a male child, yet is from age to age Mighty God and Eternal Father.

Birth and reign of the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:1-7)

The devastation of Israel at the hands of Assyria eventually will give way to an age of universal peace. In fact, the very lands about to experience darkness and death will be the first to see the light of a new day with the coming of the Messiah. As Matthew's gospel makes clear, the region of Israel referred to in Isa. 9:1 is the first to rejoice in the light brought by Christ's preaching (Matt. 4:12-17).

While Isa. 7:14 focuses on Messiah's birth and 11:1-16 on His kingdom, verses 6-7 of chapter 9 lay great emphasis on His person. The first three titles imply deity:

- The word "wonderful" as in "Wonderful Counselor" regularly means "supernatural" in scripture. See, for example, Judges 13:18. In addition, Isa. 28:29 describes Yahweh as "wonderful in counsel" (KJV).
- "Mighty God" is a term ascribed to "the Lord, the Holy One of Israel" in Isa. 10:20-21.
- "Everlasting Father" has no exact parallel but is significant. "*Father* signifies the paternal benevolence of the perfect Ruler over a people whom he loves as his children. *Peace* in Hebrew implies prosperity as well as tranquility" (D.A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 9:1). While Messiah is a distinct person from God the Father, Jesus clearly claims to be both Messiah and co-equal with the Father (John 10:30). "Father of Eternity" is a better translation, according to Warren Wiersbe. "Among the Jews, the word 'father' means 'originator' or 'source.' For example, Satan is the 'father [originator] of lies' (John 8:44, NIV). If you want anything eternal, you must get it from Jesus Christ; He is the 'Father of eternity'" (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 9:1).

The fourth title, "Prince of Peace," speaks to Messiah's character. Luke 2:14, John 14:27, Acts 10:36, Rom. 5:1-10, and Eph. 2:14-18 are a few of the New Testament passages that point to Jesus as the One who brings peace to human hearts and to a sin-sick world. Matthew Henry comments: "As a King, he preserves the peace, commands peace, nay, he creates peace, in his kingdom. He is our peace, and it is his peace that both keeps the hearts of his people and rules in them" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 9:1).

Finally, verse 7 emphasizes the scope of Messiah's kingdom. It will be vast and never-ending (see Dan. 7:14, 27; Micah 4:7; Luke 1:32-33; Rev. 11:15). He will maintain righteousness as His rule conforms to God's holy character. "This will all be accomplished by the zeal of the LORD Almighty. The coming of the millennial kingdom depends on God, not Israel. The Messiah will rule because God promised it and will zealously see that the kingdom comes. Without His sovereign intervention there would be no kingdom for Israel" (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1053).

God's anger with Israel's arrogance (Isa. 9:8-21)

The rest of the chapter warns that God is about to punish Israel at the hands of the Arameans and Philistines. Even though Israel will be destroyed, she will not repent and turn to the Lord. Lawrence O. Richards writes, “Isa. 9:6–7 describes the universal reign of the Messiah. Then the rest of the chapter suddenly shifts to describe the judgment about to be visited on the Northern Kingdom, Israel (vv. 8–21). How are these linked? Jesus’ reign is marked by universal allegiance to God. Israel’s tragic history was marked from the beginning by rebellion against Him (1 Kings 12). Those who will not submit to the Lord will surely experience not the blessing of messianic times, but the havoc and ruination that crushed Israel” (*The Bible Readers Companion*, Electronic edition, S. 417).

Verses 9-10 describe the arrogance with which the northern kingdom regards God’s wrath. Though their sun-dried bricks will not stand, the people plan to rebuild with more expensive and durable cut stones. And though sycamores are abundant and used for their antiseptic qualities, which induced the Egyptians to use sycamore to encase their mummies, the northern tribes boast that they will rebuild with the aromatic, knot-free, and more valuable cedar.

Verses 11-12 describe what is about to happen. The foes of Rezin, king of Aram and an ally of Israel, will consume the northern kingdom. Specifically, the foes are other Arameans and the Philistines. While this is the Lord’s doing, it does not bring Israel to repentance and therefore does not quench the wrath of God. Verse 12 ends with a refrain that is repeated three more times in the following verses: “In all this, His anger is not removed, and His hand is still raised to strike” (see Isa. 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4).

The words in verse 14 – “So the Lord cut off Israel’s head and tail, palm branch and reed” – comprise a *merism*, a figure of speech using opposite extremes to include the whole spectrum. Verses 15-17 provide the needed detail. The elders (the head) and the false prophets (the tail), the leaders and those who are misled – even the fatherless and widows will reap judgment because “everyone is a godless evildoer” (v. 17).

Verses 18-21 describe the wickedness of God’s people as a consuming fire, with the people themselves as fuel. As God directs punishment against them, they are destroyed by enemies from without and rivals from within. “Ephraim’s own wickedness was destroying the nation, the way a fire destroys a forest or a field,” writes Warren W. Wiersbe. “But the sinners would become fuel for the fire *God* could kindle! In their greed, the people of the Northern Kingdom were devouring one another (v. 20) and battling one another (v. 21); but they would soon be devoured and defeated by Assyria” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 9:1).

Closing Thought

Matthew Henry writes: “The reason why the judgments of God are prolonged is because the point is not gained, sinners are not brought to repentance by them. *The people turn not to him that smites them*, and therefore he continues to smite them; for when God judges he will overcome, and the proudest stoutest sinner shall either bend or break” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 9:8).

Chapter 10: The Remnant will Return

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Chapter 10 takes place during the reign of Ahaz, Judah's wicked king.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded bar from 750 to 680]							
Ahaz	[Shaded bar from 740 to 730]			[Shaded bar from 720 to 710]		[Shaded bar from 700 to 680]		

Key verse:

Isa. 10:21: The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God.

Quick summary:

The Lord will use Assyria as the rod of His anger against unrepentant Israel. Then He will punish the king of Assyria for his arrogance and welcome a remnant of Jacob. "In just a little while My wrath will be spent," the Lord tells His people, "and My anger will turn to their (Assyria's) destruction" (v. 25).

Take note:

The sovereign hand of God is clearly revealed throughout this chapter. In verses 1-4 He laments the injustice of His people and promises to punish it; in verses 5-11 He refers to Assyria as the rod of His wrath; in verses 12-19 He promises to rebuke Assyria for its prideful acts of aggression; in verses 20-26 He declares that a remnant will return to the Mighty God; and in verses 27-34 He reassures His people that the yoke of Assyrian oppression will fall from Israel's neck.

Crooked statutes and oppressive laws (Isa. 10:1-4)

Israel's leaders are guilty of several evil acts: 1) enacting crooked statutes; 2) writing oppressive laws; 3) preventing the poor from getting fair trials; 4) depriving the afflicted of justice; 5) hurting widows; and 6) plundering the fatherless. By preying on the vulnerable, the leaders are violating God's law (see Ex. 22:22; 23:6; Deut. 15:7-8; 24:17-18). As a result, the whole nation will go into captivity. The leaders will have no one to help them, just as they refused to help their fellow countrymen in need. "Those who had defrauded the poor and made unjust laws for their own profit would lose all their wealth and cringe among the captives, or fall among the slain" (Larry Richards, Lawrence O. Richards, *The Teacher's Commentary*, S 374).

Assyria: the instrument of God's wrath (Isa. 10:5-19)

Verses 5-11 show how God is using Assyria as "the rod of My anger" (v. 5), while 12-19 warn the arrogant Assyrian king that even he is subject to Almighty God. The destruction of the northern kingdom by Shalmaneser was foretold in chapter 9 and accomplished in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign (see 2 Kings 18:10). Now, God foretells the judgment of the southern kingdom (Judah) at the hands of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, and this is accomplished in the 14th year of Hezekiah.

"The knowledge that the aggressor is wielded by God puts the question of wicked men's success in its proper context, by showing that it serves the ends of justice when it seems to defy them (6-7), and it is neither impressive in itself (15) nor ultimately unpunished (12)," writes D.A. Carson in *The New Bible Commentary* (S. Is 10:5).

While God will use Assyria to punish a "godless nation" – strong words for Israel in verse 6 – the Assyrian king sees Israel as one of many nations he intends to destroy. His sights also are set on Egypt and Ethiopia (Isa. 20:1-6). Matthew Henry comments: "When God makes use of men as instruments in his hand to do his work it is very common for *him* to mean one thing and *them* to mean another, nay, for them to mean quite the contrary to what he intends. What Joseph's brethren designed for hurt God overruled for good, Gen. 50:20. See Mic. 4:11, 12. Men have their ends and God has his, but we are sure *the counsel of the Lord shall stand*" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 10:5).

Assyria already has conquered the Aramean cities of Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, Damascus, and Israel's capital of Samaria. Because the Assyrians believed these cities had greater gods than Jerusalem, the taking of the capital of Judah would be relatively easy. Assyria's motives clearly are political and expansionist. However, God ultimately

will strike down Assyria because of the king's "arrogant acts and the proud look in his eyes" (v. 12). Five times in verses 13-14 the king uses the word "I" and twice he uses the word "me" to describe his achievements, attributing them entirely to his own military might rather than to God.

So how will the Lord bring haughty Assyria low? First, He compares Assyria to a tool in His hand – an ax, saw, staff, or rod – and then He vows to afflict the people with "an emaciating disease" and a "burning fire" (v. 16). God will destroy the Assyrian army like trees consumed in a forest fire. So few soldiers will be left standing that a child may count them. This is fulfilled years later when, in 701 B.C., 185,000 Assyrian soldiers surrounding Jerusalem are killed (Isa. 37:36-37). Then, in 609 B.C., the Assyrians fall to the Babylonians.

The remnant will return (Isa. 10:20-26)

Isaiah now contrasts the defeated remnant of Assyria (v. 19) with the repentant remnant of Israel, which will learn to depend on God rather than on alliances with idolatrous nations such as Assyria and Egypt. This is partly fulfilled in the days of Hezekiah, but it appears this will be more completely fulfilled in the days after the defeat of Antichrist and the return of Israel to the Lord (see Rom. 9:27-28).

Isaiah assures his readers that they need not fear the Assyrians. After God uses them to punish His own people, He will turn His wrath on the Assyrians, dealing with them as He did with the Midianites and the two Midianite leaders (Judges 7:1-25). The Lord of Hosts also will destroy the Assyrians – referred to figuratively as "the sea" – as He did the Egyptians in the days of Moses.

Assyria: the target of God's wrath (Isa. 10:27-34)

The route the Assyrian invaders would take in their assault on Judah begins at the northern boundary of Judah at Aiath (another name for Ai) about eight miles from Jerusalem and continues to Nob, two miles north of the city. The sites of eight of the 12 cities mentioned in this passage are known today, according to *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. But Assyria will not succeed in its plan to take Jerusalem. The Lord God of Hosts will intervene and cut down the invading troops as if they were trees, chopping off their branches "with terrifying power" (v. 33). "In the end history will turn to destiny, and the plans and promises of our Sovereign Lord will be perfectly fulfilled" (*The Teacher's Commentary*, S. 375).

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “Sometimes righteous people do not know why they suffer, but at other times God clearly reveals that people are being punished for their sins (as in Isaiah 10). In such cases, it is always wise for the sinners to return to God and rely on him. Trusting in other men or nations will only lead to disappointment. The only true source of hope is to lean on Almighty God and fear only him” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 267).

Chapter 11: The Righteous Branch

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Chapter 11 takes place during the reign of Ahaz, Judah's wicked king.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded bar from 750 to 680]							
Ahaz	[Shaded bar from 740 to 730]			[Shaded bar from 720 to 680]				

Key verse:

Isa. 11:2: The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him – a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

Quick summary:

The day is coming when Messiah, a descendent of Jesse, will reign with righteousness, uniting Israel, bringing justice to the oppressed, and striking the wicked. No harm will come to any creature, even animals, because “the land will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is filled with water” (v. 9).

Take note:

Isaiah refers to the Holy Spirit more times than any other Old Testament prophet: Isa. 11:2 (four times); 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:21; 61:1; 63:10-11, 14).

Righteous reign of the branch (Isa. 11:1-10)

The Lord will cut down the tall trees and clear the forests (Isa. 10:33-34), that is, the armies invading Israel, but God's kingdom will arise from a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, David's father (see Rev. 22:16). No doubt, Isaiah has in mind God's promise to David that one of his descendants will rule over his kingdom forever (2 Sam. 7:16; see also Isa. 9:7). His rule will be unique in that the ruler himself is both divine and divinely endowed, being gifted in three ways: with "*wisdom and understanding for government (cf. 1 Ki. 3:9–12), counsel and power for war (cf. 9:6; 28:6; 36:5), and knowledge and the fear of the LORD for spiritual leadership (cf. 2 Sa. 23:2)*" (D.A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary*, S. Is 11:1). The giver of these gifts is the Holy Spirit, who falls on Messiah on the day of His baptism to inaugurate His earthly ministry and empower Him for His work of redemption (Matt. 3:16-17).

Warren Wiersbe observes: "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)" (*Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, S. Is 7:1).

The title "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) is illustrated beautifully in verses 6-9 of chapter 11 as all God's creatures live together harmoniously. But peace is hard won; it follows judgment and flows from Messiah's righteousness. Just as Christ today transforms the human heart through the new birth, so one day He will restore the entire creation to its pre-Fall perfection (Rom. 8:19-25). There is some debate as to whether the animal kingdom will experience this full transformation during the millennial kingdom or after the creation of the new heavens and earth. In any case, we may be assured that God will fully reverse the effects of the Fall and restore His creation to sinless perfection one day (2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev. 21-22).

Verse 10 features several key truths:

- One day Messiah "will stand as a banner for the peoples." While this likely pictures Jesus in His kingly role after His return, it is based on His finished work at Calvary, where He was "lifted up" (see John 3:14-16; 12:32).
- The Messiah is the Savior of the whole world, not only the Jews, and the day is coming when Gentiles ("nations") will seek Him.
- "His resting place will be glorious." Some see this as a reference to His work on the cross; others to His ascension, after which He sat down at the right hand of the Father; still others as the church, the body of believers over whom He is Head. In any case, it will be glorious because He has made it so.

The restored remnant (Isa. 11:11-16)

Some commentators find the phrase “a second time” significant (v. 11). Many Jews returned to Israel after the Babylonian captivity, but a far more devastating dispersion, known as the “Diaspora,” occurred in 70 A.D. with the destruction of the Temple and the sacking of Jerusalem. So when Isaiah says “the Lord will extend His hand a second time to recover,” this could be a reference to the re-establishment of Israel as a sovereign nation in 1948 as well as the blessings the people will enjoy when Christ returns and rules from the throne of David.

Isaiah looks forward to the day when the animosity between Israel’s northern and southern kingdoms will cease. Ephraim and Judah will live harmoniously as does the once-combative animal world (vv. 6-9). What’s more, the reunited Jews will defeat their neighboring enemies to the south and east. Finally, when the Jews return to their homeland at the beginning of the Millennium, God will dry up the Gulf of Suez and divide the Euphrates River into shallow canals to hasten their return from Africa and the lands to the east. They will be reminded of God’s work in ancient times, parting the waters of the Red Sea and enabling the Jews to escape captivity in Egypt.

Closing Thought

Warren Wiersbe comments: “When Isaiah looked at his people, he saw a *sinful* nation that would one day walk the “highway of holiness” and enter into a righteous kingdom. He saw a *suffering* people who would one day enjoy a beautiful and peaceful kingdom. He saw a *scattered* people who would be regathered and reunited under the kingship of Jesus Christ. Jesus taught us to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come’ (Matt. 6:10); for only when His kingdom comes can there be peace on earth” (*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, S. Is 9:1).

Chapter 12: God is My Salvation


Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapter 12 likely takes place during the reign of Ahaz, Judah's wicked king.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry Ahaz								

Key verse:

Isa. 12:2: Indeed, God is my salvation. I will trust Him and not be afraid. Because Yah, the LORD, is my strength and my song, He has become my salvation.

Quick summary:

Isaiah recites a song of praise that God's people will sing when the Messiah accomplishes His mission.

Take note:

Isaiah's song of praise is similar to the song Moses and the Israelites sang when God delivered them from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 15:1-21).

Thanksgiving to the Lord (Isa. 12:1-3)

Isaiah uses the phrase "on that day" 48 times in his prophetic writings, often to emphasize the certainty of God's pending judgment. But he uses this common phrase twice in Isaiah 12, in verses 1 and 4, to preview days in which God's anger is set aside and His compassion is brought to the forefront. These are days in which His people will exalt Him with praise, thanksgiving, and celebration.

The idea of salvation (v. 2) in the Jewish mind is tied to the feast of tabernacles. The reference in verse 3 to joyfully drawing water from the springs of salvation reminds the

people of the ceremony practiced each day of the feast in which water is drawn from the Pool of Siloam, and it foreshadows the day when Jesus would stand, on the final day of the feast, and proclaim, “If anyone is thirsty, he should come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). “As the Jew was reminded by the feast of tabernacles of his wanderings in tents in the wilderness, so the Jew-Gentile Church to come shall call to mind, with thanksgiving, the various past ways whereby God has at last brought them to the heavenly ‘city of habitation’ (Ps. 107)” (Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, S. Is 12:2).

Some may wonder how to reconcile the concept of a loving God with Isaiah’s depiction of the Lord as angry. Matthew Henry comments, “Though God may for a time be angry with his people, yet his anger shall at length be turned away; it endures but for a moment, nor will he contend for ever. By Jesus Christ, the root of Jesse, God’s anger against mankind was turned away; for *he is our peace*... The turning away of God’s anger, and the return of his comforts to us, ought to be the matter of our joyful thankful praises” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 12:1).

Testimony to the world (Isa. 12:4-6)

The saved remnant of Israel will thank the Lord for what He has done and call upon one another to tell the world about His greatness. Isaiah previews several acts of worship that will flow from the hearts of his redeemed Jewish brothers, who will say:

- “Give thanks to the Lord; proclaim His name!”
- “Celebrate His deeds among the peoples.”
- “Declare that His name is exalted.”
- “Sing to the Lord, for He has done great things.”
- “Let this be known throughout the earth.”
- “Cry out and sing, citizen of Zion, for the Holy One of Israel is among you in His greatness.”

“Chapter 12 is a fitting climax to the contrast between the fall of the Assyrian Empire, which was threatening Judah in Isaiah’s day, and the rise of God’s glorious kingdom, which will certainly come. Eventually all the world will know of God’s truth” (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1058).

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments that in this short hymn of praise “worship and evangelism are connected at the hip ... For worship to become evangelical it has to be done outside of the four walls of a church, where non-believers can hear God’s praise” (*The New American Commentary, Isaiah 1-39*, p. 284).

Chapter 13: Babylon's Time is Almost Up

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapter 13 likely takes place at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded area]				[Shaded area]			

Key verse:

Isa. 13:13: Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will shake from its foundations at the wrath of the LORD of Hosts, on the day of His burning anger.

Quick summary:

The Lord, who uses Babylon as an instrument of judgment against Judah, will punish the Babylonians for their wickedness. The instrument of God's wrath will become the object of it.

Take note:

Isaiah's warning about the brutality of the Medes raises questions about God's justice. If God is using the Medes to punish the Babylonian leaders and their army, why does Isaiah warn that the "children will be smashed [to death] ... and their wives raped" (v. 16)? We will address this issue in the notes that follow.

Prophecies about Babylon (Isa. 13:1-5)

Isaiah plunges headlong into a description of battle complete with banners, cries, and hand signals. While the immediate context of chapter 13 concerns Babylon, Isaiah seems to foreshadow the day in which God will judge the whole earth (see vv. 6-16). Verse 3 illustrates God's sovereignty. The Lord speaks of "My chosen ones" and "My warriors" who will "exult in My triumph" and "execute My wrath." These soldiers are serving God

and His purposes, whether they know it or not. As D.A. Carson points out, the reference to these warriors is non-moral and does not seek to describe believers (*New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 13:1). The “army” of verse 4 is that of Medo-Persian troops under the command of Cyrus, who conquers Babylon in 539 B.C.

It is clear that the Lord of Hosts is in command. Matthew Henry writes:

He raises them, brings them together, puts them in order, reviews them, has an exact account of them in his muster-roll, sees that they be all in their respective posts, and gives them their necessary orders.... All the hosts of war are under the command of the Lord of hosts; and that which makes them truly formidable is that, when they come against Babylon, the Lord comes, and brings them with him as *the weapons of his indignation*, v. 5. Note, Great princes and armies are but tools in God's hand, weapons that he is pleased to make use of in doing his work, and it is his wrath that arms them and gives them success (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 13:1).

Judgment on the Day of the Lord (Isa. 13:6-16)

In these 11 verses, Isaiah uses the term “the day of the Lord” twice and the phrase “the day of His burning anger” once. Surely, God will use the Medes to destroy the Babylonians. Yet there is a longer view in mind here – perhaps, as some commentators suggest, a foreshadowing of the tribulation that precedes Christ's return. “Sometimes when a historical day of the Lord was being described, the writer included some references to future end-time judgment and blessing,” according to Robert B. Hughes and Carl J. Laney. “The events described in 13:10–13 go beyond the historical judgment on Babylon in 539 B.C. and suggest the end-time judgments of the Tribulation” (*Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, S. 262).

But why make Babylon the focus of current and future judgment? Perhaps because Babylon has long been a rallying point of activity against God, beginning with the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Throughout the centuries, as various dynasties ruled that part of the world, it was viewed as a center of animosity toward God. Even in the tribulation, this will be so, although some consider the apostle John's references to Babylon to be figurative rather than literal (see Rev. 17-18).

But now we come to a most thorny issue: If what is about to happen to Babylon is from the Lord, and if what is to come about at the time of Christ's return is from the Lord, then how can a loving God act in a way that results in human horror, pain and agony (v. 8)? How can the Day of the Lord be described as “cruel, with rage and burning anger” (v. 9)? How can the children of the wicked be “smashed [to death]” and “their wives raped” (v. 16)?

There are several observations to be made:

- Man is sinful. His heart is “more deceitful than anything else and desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9). All people are sinners (Rom. 3:23).

- Sin has consequences. All human suffering may be traced to the Fall, including suffering as a result of natural disasters (Rom. 8:22). Even more, the “wages of sin is death,” wrote the apostle Paul (Rom. 6:23). Our rebellion against God leads to spiritual and physical death. In the case of Babylon, the wickedness of its rulers would lead to terrible acts of brutality against her women and children at the hands of the Medes and Persians.
- God judges sin. Because He is holy, God does not even look upon sin (Hab. 1:13).
- God’s judgment may be directed against individuals, families, nations and even the whole world.
- God’s judgment takes on many forms. He may act directly, through angels, through human agents, through armies of wicked men, or even through nature itself. In Isaiah 13, God is going to use the Medes and Persians to judge the Babylonians for their arrogance and wicked acts against His people.
- God gives ample time for repentance before He wields judgment. The Amorites had more than 400 years to repent before God destroyed them (Gen. 15:16).
- God takes no pleasure in the death of evil people (Ez. 33:11).
- God judged our sin in His own Son so that we can be forgiven by God’s grace (2 Cor. 5:21).
- Those who reject God’s goodness and persist in evil bring judgment upon themselves.
- The acts of brutality about to be visited upon the Babylonians are the full responsibility of the Medes and Persians, but God will use their sinfulness to bring judgment on the Babylonians.
- God judges from an eternal perspective. All people will stand before Christ in final judgment one day (John 5:28-29). He will reward and punish based on His holiness and knowledge of all things, including the thoughts and intents of the heart. We have every reason to believe that the truly innocent – babies, for example – will be compensated in eternity for what was taken from them in time.

Gary V. Smith writes that the horrors about to befall Babylon – and later, the world – are best understood as “the immoral pit that sin will eventually lead this violent world to wallow in.” He adds: “The picture is more horrible than what anyone can imagine or describe. The earth will be in disarray as the dependable forces of nature will disintegrate and people will turn to a savage form of debased animal existence. Government, respect, civility, kindness, and hope will totally disappear. The vile evil of sin and its horrible consequences will be in full view, but God will finally eradicate it all from the face of the earth” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 302).

Babylon Will Fall to the Medes (Isa. 13:17-22)

Isaiah now takes the principle that God will destroy proud sinners on “the day of the Lord” and applies it to the kingdom of Babylon in the near term. The reference to the Medes as God’s instrument of judgment is parallel to God’s use of Assyria to punish the northern

kingdom (Isa. 10:5) and His sending Nebuchadnezzar to defeat Judah (Jer. 25:1, 9). In each case, God directs the course of history through His use of powerful armies.

The Medes are described as determined soldiers who cannot be bribed with gold or silver (v. 17). They will ferociously destroy their enemies with “no compassion on little ones” or “pity on children” (v. 18). Isaiah likens the destruction of Babylon to that of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were not rebuilt. Since prophets like Isaiah usually do not know the date of the fulfillment of their prophecies, it's impossible to know with certainty whether God is speaking through him about Assyria's defeat of Babylon in 689 B.C. or Babylon's defeat at the hands of Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians, in 539 B.C. It is true that following Assyria's attack in 689 B.C., King Sennacherib tore down Babylon's walls, flooded the area, depopulated the city, and turned the city into a meadow.

Closing Thought

J. Vernon McGee comments: “The future Babylon will become a great center on earth. The man of sin, the willful king, called the Antichrist, will reign in that place. It will be destroyed just as the ancient Babylon was destroyed. Babylon is a memorial to the fact of the accuracy of fulfilled prophecy and a testimony to the fact that God will also judge the future Babylon” (*Isaiah: Vol. 1*, p. 122).

The Book of Isaiah

Chapter 14: The Lord's Outstretched Hand

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapter 14 likely takes place at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded area]				[Shaded area]			

Key verse:

Isa. 14:27: The LORD of Hosts Himself has planned it; therefore, who can stand in its way? It is His hand that is outstretched, so who can turn it back?

Quick summary:

Chapters 13-24 feature a series of divine oracles, or declarations, against the nations surrounding Israel. The great powers of Isaiah's day, and days to come, that set themselves against the Lord of Hosts will be brought low; only the coming kingdom of the Messiah will endure the test of time.

Take note:

Many Bible commentators point with fascination to verses 12-15. Do these verses speak of a Babylonian king, or of Satan? Perhaps both. In what is known as the "law of double reference," Isaiah may be showing us Satanic qualities in evil earthly leaders, just as other Old Testament prophets use godly leaders to foreshadow the coming Messiah. In any case, both Satan and evil rulers will be brought low.

Israel's Return (Isa. 14:1-2)

Although judgment will fall on God's rebellious people, the Lord will "choose Israel again" (v. 1). Their restoration is grounded in their election as God's chosen people (see Ps. 102:13-22). God's choosing of Israel – as well as Judah, Jerusalem, David and Solomon –

is an important Old Testament theme, especially in 1 and 2 Chronicles and the Psalms. The fact that non-Israelites ("the nations") will join Israel also is an important teaching in Scripture (see, for example, Isa. 56:6; 60:10; 61:5). Israel's role will be reversed. Rather than captives, they will be captors. And rather than exiles, they will reside safely in their homeland, a nation restored to international prominence as in the days of King David.

Israel's Taunt against Babylon (Isa. 14:3-23)

Verses 3-21 record a song, or a taunt, that will be sung by people freed from the clutches of the king of Babylon. "The song's overall message is that people will be amazed that this great king is cast down like the monarchs of other cities. People will rejoice in his demise for they had lived in fear of him" (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1061).

But who is this king of Babylon? Many commentators believe he is Satan, especially based on the description in verses 12-14. Tertullian (A.D. 160-230) and Gregory the Great (A.D. 540-604) were the first to offer this view, which is now widely accepted. In the New Testament, Jesus uses language similar to that of Isaiah's to describe Satan (Luke 10:18). However, while verses 12-14, along with Ezek. 28:12-19, could describe Satan's pride and subsequent downfall, the context of Isaiah 14 points squarely to an earthly king. It's possible that Isaiah is employing the "law of double reference" in this passage, showing us Satanic qualities in evil earthly leaders, just as other Old Testament prophets use godly leaders to foreshadow the coming Messiah. In support of this view, let's consider King Sennacherib.

Sennacherib rules Assyria from 705-681 B.C. By this time in history, Babylon is a vassal state under the authority of the Assyrian empire. For example, Tiglath-Pileser III, a predecessor of Sennacherib, crushes a Babylonian revolt and is crowned king of Babylon in 728 B.C. Though Nineveh is the capital of Assyria, Babylon becomes its cultural center and the Babylonian god Marduk is widely worshiped throughout the Assyrian empire. Assyria's Sargon II (B.C. 722-705) and Sennacherib also call themselves kings of Babylon.

After Sargon dies in 705 B.C. and Sennacherib becomes king, there is much rebellion throughout the Assyrian empire, including Babylon. In 689 B.C., Sennacherib marches on Babylon to subdue the rebellion. He destroys the city and floods the ruins, although it is rebuilt years later. Sennacherib's assassination in 681 B.C. (2 Kings 19:37) is welcome news to the surrounding nations, especially Judah.

The song-taunt of verses 3-23 features two dominant themes, according to D.A. Carson. "The broken *oppressor* is the first theme [vv. 4b-11]; his real epitaph is the unspeakable relief the world feels at his passing. God's name for such thrusters is not 'men of destiny' but 'he-goats' (the literal meaning of the Hebrew word translated *leaders [in verse] 9*), a description almost as deflating as the pathetic state to which they are all seen to come.... The fallen *morning star* is the second theme [vv. 12-21], *i.e.* the tyrant's fatal ambition

rather than his oppression.... The idea of storming heaven ... was certainly connected with Babylon (*i.e.* Babel; Gn. 11). One of its ironies is the idea that to be *like the Most High* (14) is to be self-exalted, whereas it is to be self-giving (*cf.* Phil. 2:5–11.). The ugliness as well as the brevity of the false glory is powerfully shown in vs 16–21” (*The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, Is 14:3).

Judgment on Assyria (Isa. 14:24-27)

Though Assyria ultimately would fall to Babylon in 605 B.C., this prophecy refers to the kingdom's defeat on the “mountains” of Israel (v. 25), a reference to the work of the Angel of the Lord who destroys 185,000 Assyrians in 701 B.C. (see 2 Kings 19; Isa. 37:36-38).

Judgment on Philistia (Isa. 14:28-32)

These verses tell of a critical test of faith for Hezekiah. Judah's King Ahaz, who was pro-Assyrian, is now dead. The Philistines approach his successor, Hezekiah, and propose an allied rebellion against the weakened Assyria. Such a plot is tempting to Hezekiah, and even if it weren't, the Philistines are not a people to be offended at this time (see 2 Chron. 28:18-19). What should the king do? The Lord provides a three-fold response. First, the Assyrians are not finished (v. 29). Second, the Philistines are a doomed people (vv. 30b-31). And third, true warfare is in the hands of God (vv. 30a, 32). The bottom line: trust God, not human alliances or intrigue.

Final Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “Every generation of leaders is called to acts of faith, to choose a path of utter dependence on God rather than alternatives that initially look more defensible. People are challenged not to do what may seem the most reasonable thing from a human perspective, but to do what God instructs them to do.... The circumstances may be a health crisis, the loss of a job, or an international political crisis, but the answer is always the same: trust in God for refuge. Most of the time people know what God would want them to do. The really difficult question is: Are they willing to follow God's direction?” (*New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 326)

The Book of Isaiah

Chapter 15: The Waters are Full of Blood

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Chapter 15 likely takes place during the reign of Hezekiah when the Assyrians are trying to gain control of the countries around Judah.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Timeline bar]							
Hezekiah	[Timeline bar]							

Key verse:

Isa. 15:9: The waters of Dibon are full of blood, but I will bring on Dibon even more than this — a lion for those who escape from Moab, and for the survivors in the land.

Quick summary:

God raised up nations like Moab to be the instruments of His judgment against His people (see Isa. 5:26-30; 7:18-20). Now, in chapters 13-24 Isaiah identifies these nations and exposes their sin. They have gone beyond God's boundaries in punishing Israel. Therefore, God will bring them down.

Take note:

Israel's neighbor Moab will be invaded and her people will become refugees (Isa. 15:5-7). Because of the depths of their sin, God will bring additional suffering upon the refugees (Isa. 15:9). We will see in chapter 16 that Israel offers them asylum, but in their pride they refuse the offer and ultimately fall.

Judgment on Moab (Isa. 15:1-9)

The Moabites are the product of Lot's incestuous union with his daughter (Gen. 19:30-38). Their pagan practices corrupted Israel and they became the sworn enemies of the Jews (see Num. 25; Deut. 23:3).

Several cities and towns are mentioned in the first four verses of this chapter. Ar and Kir, possibly located near the southern end of the Dead Sea, are destroyed before Isaiah records this oracle. Dibon is one of Moab's key cities. The city of Nebo is located near a mountain close to the northern shore of the Dead Sea; it is here that the Moabites worship the god Chemosh. Heshbon and Elealeh are in northern Moab. Shaved heads and cut beards are signs of humiliation (see Job 1:20; Isa. 7:20; Jer. 47:5, 48:37; Ezek. 7:18; Amos 8:10; Micah 1:16). Wearing sackcloth pictures one's dejected state of mourning. The Moabites are lamenting the fall of their cities. Even the soldiers are wailing because of their inability to protect their homeland.

The tenderness of Isaiah's heart is exposed in verse 5 as he grieves over Moab's plight (compare with Isa. 21:3-4). Fleeing the invading Assyrians, the Moabites move south to Zoar, the northernmost city of Edom. The waters of Nimrim (v. 6) probably refer to a wadi in southern Moab. Because it is dry, the refugees, clutching their personal belongings, press farther south, to the Wadi of the Willows (v. 7). Reaching Dibon, the Moabites find the water supply to be bloody, indicated a great deal of death and destruction. They find no rest here, however. Isaiah describes their plight like one being constantly stalked by a lion.

Final Thought

It is difficult for some to believe the depths of sorrow Isaiah expresses over the destruction of Moab's cities and the suffering of her people. In fact, some commentators conclude that Isaiah is actually mocking the Moabites. Yet it may be better to see Isaiah's lament as a reflection of God's genuine grief over human sin and suffering. As God expressed through the prophet Ezekiel, "As I live" – the declaration of the Lord GOD – "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked person should turn from his way and live" (Ez. 33:11).

In the New Testament, Jesus weeps at the news of Lazarus' death and is moved in His spirit by the tyranny of death as a consequence of sin (John 11:34-5). He also weeps over Jerusalem because of its pending judgment for rejecting Him as Messiah (Luke 19:41-4). It's good to remind ourselves that while vengeance belongs to the Lord, He strongly prefers mankind's repentance and restoration to divine judgment. The apostle Paul tells us it is the goodness of God, not His vengeance, which leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Chapter 16: An Object of Contempt

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapter 16 is a continuation of the prophecy against Moab that begins in chapter 15. It likely takes place during the reign of Hezekiah when the Assyrians are trying to gain control of the countries around Judah; however, some scholars place this earlier, about three years prior to Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Timeline bar]							
Hezekiah	[Timeline bar]							

Key verse:

Isa. 16:14 And now the LORD says, "In three years, as a hired worker counts years, Moab's splendor will become an object of contempt, in spite of a very large population. And those who are left will be few and weak."

Quick summary:

Arriving in Edom, the Moabite refugees should turn to God through their neighbor Israel, but in pride they refuse to do so. As a result, the fruitfulness of their land will cease.

Take note:

Isaiah provides a three-year time frame for fulfillment of this prophecy. Whether this is Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C. or an earlier invasion is not clear. However, Isaiah's listeners throughout Judah and Moab are able to see the fulfillment of his prophecy and confirm that he is speaking the word of the Lord. If the short-term prophecies come to pass, Isaiah's credibility is enhanced as he foretells Judah's judgment, the virgin birth of the Messiah, and the Messiah's reign on the throne of David.

The Plea of Moab (Isa. 16:1-5)

The one place the Assyrians cannot conquer is Jerusalem, although they have tried (see Isa. 36-37). But rather than flee to Mt. Zion, the Moabite refugees flee south to the fords of the Arnon River and the rock city of Sela (Petra) in Edom. From there, they send a request for asylum to the king of Judah, along with sheep as a form of tribute (see 2 Kings 3:4).

Isaiah is not impressed with their plea. He calls the Moabites extortionists, spoilers and oppressors, and says the nation is destined to be destroyed. Why so harsh? Because the Moabites want Judah's protection but not Judah's God. Verse 5 is messianic, pointing to the day when the Messiah will sit on the throne of David and reign in righteousness and mercy.

The Pride of Moab (Isa. 16:6-14)

Warren Wiersbe's comments on these verses are instructive:

We can understand the pride of a city like Babylon (14:12-14), but what did the tiny nation of Moab have to boast about? Their pride kept them from submitting to Judah, and this led to their defeat. Their boasting would turn into wailing and their songs into funeral dirges. Moab would become like a vineyard trampled down and a fruitful field left unharvested. Isaiah 16:9-11 describes the prophet's grief—and the Lord's grief—over the destruction of Moab. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezek. 33:11). Isaiah could have rejoiced at the destruction of an old enemy, but instead, he wept (Prov. 24:17-18)" (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 15:1).

Moab's pride (v. 6) is perhaps best understood in light of her idolatry (v. 12). Although on the run from the Assyrians and facing certain defeat, the Moabites reject Israel's God and cling instead to the idol Chemosh on Mt. Nebo. There, Isaiah points out, the Moabites will become fatigued with burdensome and empty rituals, and their prayers will not prevail.

Chemosh is the national god of the Moabites, known as the destroyer, subduer, or fish-god. In Scripture, the Moabites are called the "people of Chemosh" (Num. 21:29; Jer. 48:7, 13, 46). Solomon, under the influence of his idolatrous wives, introduced the Israelites to the worship of Chemosh. He built a high place in the mount before Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7), but Josiah abolished this idolatrous worship (2 Kings 23:13).

The Moabites have always had close ties with Israel (see Gen. 19:30-38; Ruth 4:10, 18-22) but oppose them spiritually and politically (see Num. 25; Judges 3:12-14; 1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:2, 11-12; 2 Kings 3). The Lord makes it clear that her day of reckoning will come within three years. Whether Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. or 701 B.C. is in view – it is difficult to set this chapter specifically in either time frame – most people who hear this prophecy live to see it fulfilled and learn that the God of Israel, unlike the idol Chemosh, is true and trustworthy.

Final Thought

The prophecy concerning Moab makes several key theological points, according to Gary V. Smith: “First, God controls what is happening to all the people on earth and he understands why they wail and suffer pain and ruin.... Second, God’s message and his relationship with people is one of identification with the pain of the sufferer (15:5; 16:9).... Third, God warns people about the future and then confronts them with their errors (particularly pride) for two reasons: (a) so that they will have some comprehension of why they will suffer (16:6), and (b) so that they will have an opportunity to choose a different path” (*New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 338).

Chapter 17: Partners in Crime

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

The oracle in chapter 17 describes the fall of Damascus and the fortified cities of Ephraim (the northern kingdom of Israel). The events described in this chapter belong to the period of the Syro-Ephraimite War (734-732 B.C.), when Judah's king Ahaz asks the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III to rescue him from the attacks of Syria and Ephraim.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Timeline bar]							
Ahaz	[Timeline bar]				[Timeline bar]			

Key verse:

Isa. 17:10a For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and you have failed to remember the rock of your strength.

Quick summary:

J. Vernon McGee writes: "Because of the confederacy between Syria and Israel (often for the purpose of coming against Judah), Israel is linked with the judgments pronounced on Syria. Partners in crime means partners in judgment" (*Isaiah Volume 1*, p.137).

Take note:

Despite harsh words and a bleak outlook for Israel, the Lord reminds His people of His purpose in judgment – so they will "look to their Maker and will turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the altars they made with their hands or to the Asherahs and incense alters they made with their fingers" (Isa. 17:7b-8).

Prophecy Against Damascus (Isa. 17:1-3)

The northern kingdom of Israel (also called Ephraim) and Damascus, the capital of Syria (or Aram), have joined forces against Judah. For this they will suffer together. Both will be besieged and deported by Assyria (see 2 Kings 15:29; 17:6). The Assyrians conquer Aram in 732 B.C. and, according to their custom, deport many of the citizens, leaving the cities deserted and the land untended. They also likely burn the houses and demolish the fortifications, leaving the capital city a “ruined heap” (v. 1).

Isaiah also says the cities of Aroer, a Syrian province, are forsaken. “God is righteous in causing those cities to spue out their inhabitants, who by their wickedness had made themselves vile; it is better that *flocks should lie down there* than that they should harbour such as are in open rebellion against God and virtue” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 17:1).

The Syrians are the ringleaders in the confederacy against Judah, so they are punished first and most harshly. The glory of Israel will be no comfort to the Syrian survivors.

Judgment Against Israel (Isa. 17:4-11)

Now Isaiah turns his attention to Syria’s ally, Ephraim. He uses several graphic images to describe the northern kingdom’s imminent downfall: the fading splendor of Jacob (v. 4a); the emaciation of a sick person (v. 4b); the gleanings of a small harvest (vv. 5–6); the abandonment of woods and mountain peaks (v. 9); and the sudden decay of a garden (v. 11). On that day the people will come to their senses and realize that their idols cannot save them. They will turn to their Maker, but it will be too late (v. 7; see also Prov. 1:20-33). In 722 B.C., Assyria sweeps into the northern kingdom, and she is no more.

Warren Wiersbe comments:

The emphasis in this section is on the God of Israel. He is the Lord of hosts (the Lord Almighty), who controls the armies of heaven and earth (Isa. 17:3). He is the Lord God of Israel (v. 6), who called and blessed Israel and warned her of her sins. He is our Maker, the Holy One of Israel (v. 7); He is the God of our salvation and our Rock (v. 10). How foolish of the Israelites to trust their man-made idols instead of trusting the living God (v. 8; 1 Kings 12:25–33). But like Israel of old, people today trust the gods they have made, instead of the God who made them; these include the false gods of pleasure, wealth, military might, scientific achievement, and even “religious experience” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 17:1).

Isaiah’s words are echoed in Paul’s letter to the Romans more than 700 years later. Though the Asherah poles used to worship the Canaanite fertility goddess are no longer standing, the first-century world still clung to idols: “For though they knew God, they did not glorify

Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles” (Rom. 1:21-23).

Judgment Against the Nations (Isa. 17:12-14)

These verses spell out the consequences for those who plunder the people of God. Even though God uses surrounding nations to judge Israel, he holds them accountable for their actions and brings them to justice. This passage seems especially to take aim at Assyria, which, after aligning itself with Judah, invades it unsuccessfully. As Matthew Henry writes, “If the Assyrians and Israelites invade and plunder Judah, if the Assyrian army take God’s people captive and lay their country waste, let them know that ruin will be their lot and portion” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, S. Is 17:12).

The Assyrian army is diverse, made up of many nations. What’s more, its soldiers are noisy and boastful, “like the roaring of the seas ... like the raging of mighty waters” (v. 12). They make boisterous threats in order to frighten their enemies into submission and prevent surrounding nations from coming to their enemies’ defense. But God will punish them, scattering them “like chaff on the hills, and like dead thistles before a gale” (v. 13). “How appropriate that though Assyria brought terror in the evening, the enemy would be gone before morning, for such was the case with the Assyrian army (37:36-37). Though the Assyrian soldiers had plundered many cities of Judah, 185,000 soldiers were slaughtered over night” (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1065).

Closing Thought

Matthew Henry comments: “It was in the night that the angel routed the Assyrian army. God can in a moment break the power of his church’s enemies, even when it appears most formidable; and this is written for the encouragement of the people of God in all ages, when they find themselves an unequal match for their enemies; for *this is the portion of those that spoil us*, they shall themselves be spoiled. God will plead his church’s cause, and those that meddle do it to their own hurt” (S. Is 17:12).

Chapter 18: Left for the Birds of Prey

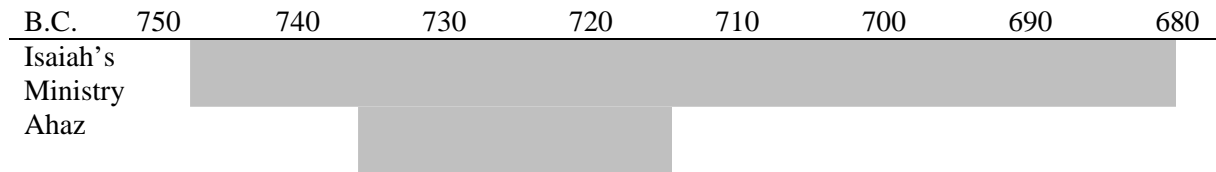
Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

The oracle in Chapter 18 likely occurs during the reign of Judah's king Ahaz, or perhaps during the reign of his son Hezekiah. In any case, the oracle is given prior to Assyria's invasion of Judah in 701 B.C.



Key verse:

Isa. 18:7 - At that time a gift will be brought to the Lord of Hosts from a people tall and smooth-skinned, a people feared near and far, a powerful nation with a strange language, whose land is divided by rivers-to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts.

Quick summary:

The land of Cush is told not to move frantically by boat or other means to secure alliances against Assyria, for the Lord will deal directly with the Assyrians and leave their corpses to the birds of prey.

Take note:

Cush, or Ethiopia in many translations, consists of modern-day southern Egypt, the Sudan and northern Ethiopia. Isaiah calls it the “land of buzzing insect wings” (v. 1), not only because of the locusts and other insects that infest the land (like the tsetse fly and winged beetle), but because of the frantic diplomatic activity taking place as envoys from Cush seek alliances to protect them from Assyria. Cush rules Egypt from 715 – 663 B.C.

The Lord's Message to Cush (Isa. 18:1-7)

In verse 2, Isaiah depicts the ambassadors of Cush making haste in their light, swift boats to seek alliances against Assyria. "Papyrus was used on the Nile for making boats," according to *Manners and Customs of the Bible*. "Sometimes bundles of the plant were rudely bound together in the form of a raft. At other times the leaves were plaited like a basket and then coated with bitumen and tar after the boat was constructed. Similar boats were used on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The boats were circular in shape, and sometimes covered with leather instead of bitumen" (James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, S. 352).

Some commentators believe that at the time of this prophecy, envoys from Cush are in Jerusalem, seeking an alliance for mutual protection from Assyria. If so, Isaiah tells the diplomats to go home, and He invites the whole world to witness what God is about to do. No alliances among nations are sufficient to defeat the terrifying Assyrians, and none are needed, for the Lord is about to cut them down like ripened vines (v. 5).

The birds and wild beasts will feast on the corpses of the Assyrian soldiers for an extended period of time (v. 6). Keep in mind that the Assyrians first are used of God to punish the northern kingdom of Israel by taking the people captive. But once that is accomplished (in 722 B.C.), God turns His chastening rod against the proud Assyrians. On the hills surrounding Jerusalem, and about to sweep victoriously into the southern kingdom's capital city, 185,000 Assyrians are struck down by God in a single night (Isa. 37:36). No army, and no alliance of nations, may take credit for this stunning turn of events; it is exclusively the work of the Lord of Hosts. See Rev. 19:17-21, where a similar image is used of end-time judgment.

After the Assyrian defeat, the Lord will prompt the people of Cush to bring gifts to the Lord on Mount Zion, where His name dwells (see Deut. 12:5). Whether this is immediately after the Assyrian defeat, or simply a preview of what will occur during the millennium, is not clear (see Zech. 14:16), but certainly the nations will stream to Mount Zion after Messiah establishes His kingdom on earth (Isa. 2:1-4).

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith writes in *The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39* that this chapter features two theological principles that apply to every nation: "First, people should not allow their attention to be sidetracked to focus on human accomplishments, religious ritual, or man-made theological idols, for that will bring God's judgment. Second, people should pay attention to God their Creator, remember that he is holy, is able to save them, and can protect them in times of trouble. No one today should repeat the mistakes of Israel and Judah, unless they want to suffer the same fate" (p. 352).

Chapter 19: Egypt's Heart will Melt

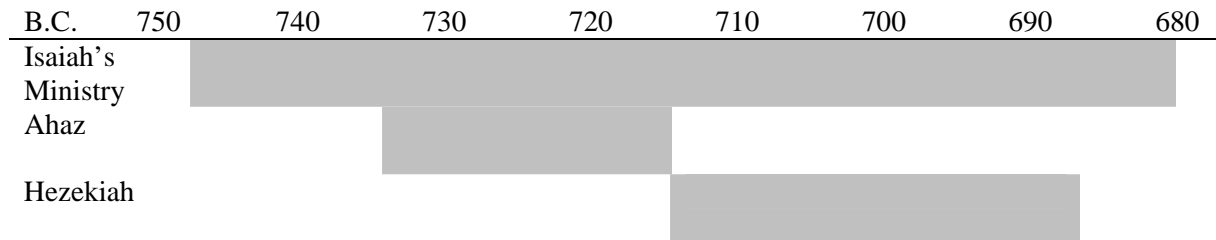
Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

The oracle in Chapter 19 describes four different kings who are trying to control Egypt around 720 – 711 B.C., according to Gary V. Smith in *The New American Commentary*. If so, this would place Isaiah's prophecy in the reigns of Judah's kings Ahaz and Hezekiah.



Key verse:

Isa. 19:1 - Look, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. Egypt's idols will tremble before Him, and Egypt's heart will melt within it.

Quick summary:

D.A. Carson summarizes: "This oracle is a strong expression of the truth that God smites in order to heal (see v 22). The initial breakdown is followed by a renewal which goes beyond anything promised to a Gentile nation in the O.T. Perhaps Egypt is shown here in its two aspects: first, as the worldly power to which Israel was always looking (*cf.* 20:5) and secondly, as part of God's world, for which he cares, with a place in his kingdom in which present ranks and races will be quite superseded" (*New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 18:1).

Take note:

While Egypt must suffer God's judgment, Isaiah depicts a glorious day when the nation will be converted and worship Him. When the Egyptians are converted (vv. 18-22) they will openly honor the Lord with an altar in the center of the country and a pillar near the border (vv. 19-20). The Egyptians will offer sacrifices and gifts to the Lord (v. 21) and, along with the Assyrians and

Israelites, joyfully serve Him (vv. 23-25). Other Old Testament prophets wrote of Egypt's future as well (see Jer. 46; Ezek. 29-30).

The Lord's Message to Egypt (Isa. 19:1-15)

Here and in other passages of Scripture the Lord is seen riding on a cloud (v. 1; see also Ps. 68:4, 33: 104:3). In Canaanite mythology, the same imagery is used of Baal, the god of rain and fertility. But the Lord, not Baal, is the true Giver of rain, something the Egyptians will sorely need (vv. 5-10). The Egyptians' false gods will not be able to save them from approaching judgment. Forced to abandon their trust in idols that "tremble" before Yahweh, the Egyptians will be reduced to infighting, despair and defeat at the hands of "harsh masters" and "a strong king" (v. 4). Isaiah does not identify the strong king, but possibly it is the Ethiopian ruler Shabaka or the Assyrian king Sargon.

Matthew Henry writes: "Isis, Osiris, and Apis, those celebrated idols of Egypt, being found unable to relieve their worshippers, shall be disowned and rejected by them. Idolatry had got deeper rooting in Egypt than in any land besides, even the most absurd idolatries; and yet now the idols shall be moved and they shall be ashamed of them" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 19:1).

The Lord also will afflict the source of their livelihood, the Nile River, interrupting the annual flooding that brings water and mineral-rich silt to its banks. As a result, papyrus reeds, plants, and every cultivated crop will wilt. Fishermen using hooks or nets will fail to get their catch of fish in the receding, putrid waters. And those who derive their income from flax, or from linens made of flax or other materials, will lose their livelihood. The entire economy will come to a halt despite the feverish way they invoke their pantheon of gods.

Zoan and Memphis (vv. 11, 15) are the two largest cities in Lower (northern) Egypt in Isaiah's time and serve as important administrative centers. Although many leaders in these cities profess themselves to be wise, steeped in the ways of their fathers, God has given them "a spirit of confusion" (v. 14) so that the princes are "complete fools" and Pharaoh's wisest advisers offer "stupid advice" (v. 11). The nobles of Egypt boast of their antiquity, but even with thousands of years of accumulated wisdom, they are not able to see the calamity coming, or prevent it. "Without access to God's wisdom and plan, people are left confused and misguided. Fearing God and depending on his wisdom is where every wise person must start (Prov. 1:7)" (Smith, p. 358).

Egypt Will Know the Lord (Isa. 19:16-25)

The six-fold refrain, "On that day ..." (vv. 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24) points to the day of the Lord and features the conversion of the Gentiles – in this case, the conversion of Israel's enemies, the Egyptians and Assyrians. This is a future promise of judgment followed by blessing.

Both Egypt and Judah will see their roles reversed in the days ahead. In contrast with Isaiah's day, when Judah thinks about appealing to Egypt for help, a time will come when Egypt is in

terror as she recognizes that Judah is the stronger nation, held firmly in the uplifted hand of the Lord Almighty.

The “five cities” (or “several cities”) of verse 18 are unknown but could represent the rest of the nation. The “City of the Sun,” however, likely is Heliopolis, a major city in the south of the Nile Delta dedicated to the worship of the sun god Re. The dramatic change in this city – where the Lord is exalted above all Egyptian gods – will demonstrate to the world that Egypt has repented of idolatry and placed its trust in the one true and living God.

Some commentators suggest that the cities mentioned here are near the Egyptian border and engaged in commerce with Israel. If so, the cities could be Heliopolis, Leontopolis, Migdol, Daphne (Tahpanes), and Memphis. Isaiah’s prophecy that the Egyptians will speak the “language of Canaan” (v. 18) likely means they will embrace the Jewish religion and desire to study God’s Word in its original language. When will all this take place? After the Messiah comes and sits on the throne of David (Zech. 14:9; John 17:21).

An interesting side note about verse 19: In about 170 B.C. a temple was built at Leontopolis by Onias IV, an ousted Egyptian priest who appealed to this verse as justification. But the intention of this passage, it seems, is to point out that this once profane land one day will become holy ground.

Verses 23-25 give us a magnificent foretaste of the Gentiles’ full inclusion in God’s kingdom. “Israel will have only an equal part (a *third*, 24; but not third place), and her distinctive titles will be shared out with her cruelest enemies” (D.A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 19:16). This must be an unbelievable prophecy for the listeners in Isaiah’s day. The nation’s sworn enemies, and pagans as well, one day will be God’s people, sharing in Israel’s covenant blessings, having their prayers heard and answered, offering sacrifices to the Lord, and receiving spiritual healing. It *will* happen, and from our New Testament perspective we may anticipate this day just as the faithful in Judah did 2,700 years ago.

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith writes: “Knowing how the radical Muslims control much of Egypt, Iraq, and Iran today, this prophecy still seems an amazing promise of the miraculous transforming power of God’s presence and grace. The prayer of every believer should be that the people in their own nation would respond as the Egyptians will and consequently join the many nations that will worship at God’s throne some day in the future” (p. 364).

Chapter 20: Naked and Barefoot

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

God speaks through Isaiah in “the year that the commander-in-chief, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it” (v. 1), which would be 711 B.C., during the reign of Judah’s King Hezekiah.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah’s Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded area]				[Shaded area]			

Key verse:

Isa. 20:5 - Those who made Cush their hope and Egypt their boast will be dismayed and ashamed.

Quick summary:

The Lord commands Isaiah to walk naked and barefoot among the Jews for three years as a warning not make the same mistake Ashdod made in trusting the Egyptians for protection against the invading Assyrians. If they do, they will be defeated and marched naked and barefoot into captivity.

Take note:

A “sign act,” such as walking naked and barefoot for three years, “can communicate a difficult message that some people might otherwise ignore,” writes Gary V. Smith, “but the sign can teach the central point of the message in an interesting, attention getting, shocking, or somewhat mysterious way” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 367).

“How Shall We Escape?” (Isa. 20:1-6)

Isaiah inserts a narrative passage here to punctuate his message about Cush (Ethiopia) in chapter 18 and Egypt in chapter 19. Some in Judah want to form alliances with Cush and Egypt to stave off the expansionist threats of the Assyrians, but Isaiah’s graphic “sign act” in chapter 20 illustrates the folly of relying on anyone but the Lord.

Here is some background: Tartan, the commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army under Sargon II, captures the Philistine city of Ashdod in 712-711 B.C. The city’s anti-Assyrian king, Yamani, who had rebelliously replaced an Assyrian puppet king, now flees to Egypt. But when the Assyrian army threatens the Egyptians, they hand Yamani over to Assyria. This all happens about the same time that King Hezekiah of Judah decides not to pay tribute money to the Assyrians, and Shabaka the Ethiopian solidifies his rule over a weakening Egypt. It is against this historic backdrop that God instructs Isaiah to walk “naked and barefoot” throughout Judah. The message is clear: If the people of Judah follow the example of Ashdod by trusting in Egypt for help, they will be defeated, shamed, and taken captive.

Although the text says Isaiah went about “naked” for three years, a better translation is “uncovered.” Isaiah merely “put off the outer sackcloth, retaining still the tunic or inner vest (1Sa 19:24; Am 2:16; Jn 21:7); an emblem to show that Egypt should be stripped of its possessions; the very dress of Isaiah was a silent exhortation to repentance” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, S. Is 20:2). Further, some commentators say Isaiah dresses this way only at intervals rather than full time, emphasizing three years of calamity that would fall upon Egypt and Ethiopia. In any case, this is the only strictly symbolic act of Isaiah’s ministry. With later prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, these types of acts are more common.

When Egypt and Ethiopia fall to the Assyrians, the Jews who hope for an alliance with these defeated nations will be “dismayed and ashamed” (v. 5). Rather than deliverance from a common enemy, the Jews will lament that they have no escape (v. 6). “Judah, then, should trust in the LORD for protection rather than in the foreign alliance they were contemplating” (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1067).

Closing Thought

God’s message to the Jews in Isaiah 20, graphically illustrated by the prophet’s “sign act” of walking naked and barefoot, exhorts His people to trust fully in Him. This message is echoed some 2,700 years later, when the writer of Hebrews urges Jewish Christians not to return to Old Covenant practices but to trust fully in Christ and His finished work on the cross. Just as the Jews of Isaiah’s day would watch the Egyptians and Ethiopians be taken captive by the Assyrians and ask, “How shall we escape?” so the writer of Hebrews tells first-century Christians to remain faithful to Christ or face His divine discipline. “How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb. 2:3).

Chapter 21: Babylon has Fallen

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Isaiah speaks these oracles against Babylon, Dumah (Edom) and Arabia during the reign of Hezekiah, who hopes that a Babylonian uprising will break the grip of the Assyrians. Unfortunately for Judah, the rebellion fails.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded area]				[Shaded area]			

Key verse:

Isa. 21:4 – My heart staggers; horror terrifies me. He has turned my last glimmer of hope into sheer terror.

Quick summary:

Lawrence O. Richards writes, “Isaiah continues his predictions of judgments destined to soon strike contemporary nations. The prophet foresees the fall of pagan Babylon, not due to emerge as a dominant world power for yet another 100 years (21:1–10). He also prophesies briefly against Edom and Arabia, who will try futilely to resist Assyria’s power (vv. 11-17)” (*The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed., S. 422).

Take note:

Many commentators assume that this oracle predicts the fall of Babylon to the Medo-Persian Empire in 539 B.C. That future event will produce joy among the Jews because it will result in the end of their captivity. So why does Isaiah liken the fall of Babylon to a time of terror for the Jews? Because Isaiah’s focus is on the more immediate future. In 722 B.C., a Chaldean prince named Marduk-apal-iddina revolts against Assyria, captures Babylon and becomes its king. Hezekiah and his people are hopeful that this rebellion will break the stranglehold of the Assyrians in that part of the world. But by 705 B.C. Marduk-apal-iddina and his ally Elam will be defeated, and by 698 B.C. the area around the Persian Gulf will be destroyed. The Jews’ hopes will be dashed.

A Judgment on Babylon (Isa. 21:1-10)

Rather than introduce a well-known country like Egypt or Moab, this oracle is against the “desert by the sea” (v. 1), a reference to southern Babylon, known for its swampy marshes between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the home of Marduk-apal-iddina (also known as Marodach-baladan). The invading army is depicted as a destructive desert storm, likely a reference to the Assyrian attack on Babylon around 689 B.C. Babylon’s neighbors, Media and Elam, are urged to attack the Assyrian forces to divert their attention from Babylon. The phrase, “I will put an end to all her groaning” (v. 2) possibly refers to the common people of Babylon who will finally experience rest from the attacks and counterattacks taking place in their country.

The strong emotional response in verses 3-4 likely is Isaiah’s gut-wrenching realization that Judah’s ally would meet a violent end, leaving Judah to defend herself against the Assyrians. Gary V. Smith writes, “He seems to be describing physical signs of cramps that brought him to his knees and a psychological astonishment that knocked the wind out of him. His heart stopped briefly and a horrendous thought brought great fear over him. He was hoping to enjoy a good night’s rest, but now God has turned this vision into a nightmare” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 372).

In verses 6-10 we are given the prophetic report of a watchman, sent by Isaiah at God’s command, to be on the lookout for any signs of battle between Babylon and Assyria. Day and night the watchman peers faithfully at the horizon and questions passers by. Finally the news arrives: “Babylon has fallen, has fallen. All the idols of her gods have been shattered on the ground” (v. 9). If the people of Judah trust in an alliance between King Hezekiah and Babylon’s Marduk-apal-iddina, hoping a Babylonian revolt will break Assyria’s domination over the region, they will be sorely disappointed. The words of the watchman bring Isaiah and the people to their knees. Isaiah reiterates that his message is from God (v. 10). He is only telling them what the Lord Almighty has revealed. The man from the “desert by the sea,” Marduk-apal-iddina, will fail. Judah must trust God, not the Babylonians, to save them.

An Oracle Against Dumah (Isa. 21:11-12)

This is a mysterious oracle. The name Dumah was given to one of Ishmael’s sons (Gen. 25:13-15), as were the names Kedar and Tema (mentioned in Isa. 21:13-16), so the name most likely as associated with an oasis in the northern part of the Arabian desert, northeast of Edom. This site is on the trade route from Mesopotamia to Edom, and traders passing through would bring news about what is happening in Babylon. Since little information is provided, it’s hard to determine when this oracle is given. Likely it is prior to 700 B.C. during the reign of Sargon or Sennacherib (which fits vv. 1-10), or a much later date when the Babylonian king Nabonidus conquers various tribes in the Arabian Desert (500-540 B.C.).

In any case, the message is clear. The people along the trade route closer to Assyria and Babylon want to know, “Watchman, what is left of the night?” When will all the bloodshed and oppression be over? The watchman, perhaps Isaiah himself, replies that morning is

coming, but so is another evening. In other words, there will be a brief respite from warfare, and then more troubling times. Finally, the watchman tells the inquirer to ask again later, implying that more information has yet to be revealed.

It's difficult to grasp the meaning of this oracle to Judah, especially since neither Judah nor God is mentioned. Gary V. Smith offers good insight: "If this prophecy came during the time when the Assyrian kings were oppressing Judah and Babylon (21:9-10), this news would give the people of Judah a general assurance that better days are ahead, but also warn them that these good times would be followed by more dark days. It is possible that Isaiah's audience might conclude from these words that they must not expect that their alliance with Babylon will quickly solve all their problems with Assyria. The previous oracle tells why: Babylon will fall" (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 377).

An Oracle Against Arabia (Isa. 21:13-17)

This oracle foretells the difficult times the people of Arabia would soon experience at the hands of the Assyrians. The Dedanites (v. 13) are from a tribe in southern Arabia. Tema (v. 14) is a well-known oasis in northwestern Arabia, and Kedar (v. 16) is in northern Arabia. Kedar is known for its distinctive black tents (Ps. 120:5; Song of Sol. 1:5; Jer. 49:28-29), but within one year the warriors of Kedar will experience a crushing defeat. The Arabians will become fugitives, running for their lives. In 715 B.C. Sargon writes that he has defeated a number of Arabian tribes and deported them to Samaria.

"The special significance of this oracle lies in its warning to the freest and most inaccessible of tribes that Assyria's long arm will reach even them, at God's command," writes D.A. Carson. "Those of the far south, Tema and Dedan, will have to succour their more exposed brother-tribe of Kedar" (*New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 21:13).

Closing Thought

This chapter informs the people of Judah that the entire Middle East, even the remote desert lands, will be in turmoil under the expansive political and military ambitions of the Assyrians. It's a reminder to all God's people that the Lord is sovereign over every nation and tribe, even those refusing to acknowledge Him, and that He directs human history toward its inevitable climax when Messiah comes in power and glory and rules the earth from David's throne. Rather than trusting in chariots and horses (Ps. 20:7), or in national alliances, we would do well to trust in God.

Chapter 22: What’s the Matter with You?

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

This oracle against Jerusalem is offered during the reign of Hezekiah and speaks both to the imminent invasion by the Assyrians and the future destruction by the Babylonians more than 100 years in the future.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah’s Ministry	[Timeline bar]							
Hezekiah	[Timeline bar]				[Timeline bar]			

Key verses:

Isa. 22:12-13 – On that day the Lord GOD of Hosts called for weeping, for wailing, for shaven heads, and for the wearing of sackcloth. But look: joy and gladness, butchering of cattle, slaughtering of sheep, eating of meat, and drinking of wine -- “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”

Quick summary:

Warren W. Wiersbe writes, “The people of Judah were behaving like their pagan neighbors, so it was only right that Isaiah should include them in the list of nations God would judge. Yes, in His mercy, the Lord would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrian army; but He would not deliver them from Babylon. Isaiah pointed out two particular sins that would cause Judah to decline and ultimately go into Captivity in Babylon ... [t]he unbelief of the people ... [and] the unfaithfulness of the leaders” (*Be Comforted, An Old Testament Study*, S. Is 22:1).

Take note:

The “Valley of Vision” is a reference to Jerusalem, which even though located on Mt. Moriah is situated in a valley surrounded by higher hills (Ps. 125:2; Isa. 2:3; Jer. 21:13). The Valley of Kidron runs between two hills east of Jerusalem, the seat of divine revelation. Jerome calls it “the nursery of prophets.” From this city God reveals Himself to, and through, the prophet Isaiah. “The point seems to be that Jerusalem has received message after message (i.e., ‘vision’) from God and yet failed to really hear” (Lawrence O. Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed., S. 422).

The Valley of Vision (Isa. 22:1-14)

While some portions of this passage refer to the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's day (see Isa. 36-37; 2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chron. 32), the primary emphasis is on the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Isaiah provides a stark contrast between Jerusalem's gaiety and its grim future (vv. 2a, 13). Possibly, the prophet refers to the celebration that will take place when Assyria's Sennacherib retreats (see Isa. 37:37); to Judah's overconfidence in Jerusalem's defenses; or to the escapism that reveals the moral bankruptcy of Jerusalem's citizens as they face inevitable destruction. In any case, their philosophy is, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (v. 13b; cf. 1 Cor. 15:32).

Rather than partake in the revelry on the rooftops, Isaiah descends into the valley, where he sees people dying, not from battle wounds, but from starvation and disease (v. 2). He sees the nation's leaders running for their lives as the invading hoards descend on the capital city (vv. 3-7; 2 Kings 25:1-10). The people do what they can to brace themselves for a long siege, collecting armor, fortifying the walls, and securing a supply of water, but their efforts will come to naught as the Lord "remove[s] the defenses of Judah" (vv. 8-11). Longer term, many will find themselves mired in an entitlement mentality, thinking, "Just as God delivered us from the Assyrians, He must also save us from the Babylonians. After all, we're His chosen people." Quite the contrary, the Lord will use the pagan Babylonians as His rod of judgment against the eat-drink-and-be-merry citizens of Judah.

"The people did everything but trust the Lord," writes Warren Wiersbe. "Instead of feasting, they should have been fasting, weeping, putting on sackcloth, and pulling out their hair in grief (v. 12; Ezra 9:3; James 4:8-10). God had sent the nation many prophets to warn them, but the people would not listen. Now it was too late; their sins could not be forgiven because their hearts were hard. Judah would go into captivity, and God's word to Isaiah would be fulfilled (Isa. 6:9-13)" (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 22:1).

A Warning to Shebna (Isa. 22:15-25)

There might be hope for Judah if the leaders would call the people to repentance, but too many leaders like Shebna have only themselves in mind. Shebna is identified as a steward in charge of the king's palace. He may be Hezekiah's chief administrator or prime minister who carries out the will of the king; if so, he is second in command and deeply involved in mounting defenses against Sennacherib's military forces.

Isaiah is sent to Shebna, who is more concerned with building a monumental tomb for himself and acquiring chariots than he is with honoring the king and serving his country. Likely, he sides with the pro-Egypt party in Judah. Isaiah's question cuts to chase: "What are you doing here?" (the construction site of his tomb). The young steward's actions belie his wicked heart, and Isaiah informs him that the Lord is about to shake him violently (v. 17). "God judged Shebna by demoting him (he became 'secretary' according to 36:3, NIV), disgracing him, and deporting him. Eventually he was thrown 'like a ball' (22:18) into a far country (Assyria?), where he died. He could not have an expensive funeral and be buried in his elaborate tomb" (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 22:1).

Isaiah predicts that Eliakim will replace Shebna, and apparently Isa. 36:3 shows the fulfillment of this prophecy. Eliakim will be like a father to the people, “a throne of honor for his father’s house” (v. 23). The “key” in verse 22 is a symbol of authority that a steward has over the house. Jesus makes reference to this when he tells Peter He will give him “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16:19). *The New Manners and Customs of the Bible* provides some interesting insight into the references to keys by Isaiah and Jesus:

The idea contained in both these passages is expressed in Isaiah 9:6, where it is said of the Messiah: “the government will be on his shoulders.” The word keys is used figuratively again when Jesus says to Peter: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19)... Matthew 16:18 has caused considerable controversy, but verse 19 has been even more fiercely debated. Nothing in either verse, however, suggests the possibility that Peter or any of the apostles were given authority to forgive sins. The words *bind* and *loose* are rabbinic terms meaning *to forbid* and *to permit*. Keys were the symbol of knowledge or the fruit of the scribal or teaching office.... The use of those keys—knowledge of the gospel—would build the church. Peter did precisely this at Pentecost (Acts 2:14), at Samaria (Acts 8:14), and for Cornelius the Gentile (Acts 10). Phillip did it at Samaria (Acts 8:5), and Paul did it throughout all of Asia (Acts 19:10). To say that only Peter had the keys to heaven would give the power of salvation to Peter and not to the gospel: “the gospel ... is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Romans 1:16) (S. 355).

Another illustration is given to us in the “peg” in verse 23. This is not, as some might think, a reference to a wooden tent peg that is driven into the ground. Rather, Isaiah compares Eliakim to a peg that is driven into the wall to hold up kitchen utensils or other items. However, if the people trust wholly in Eliakim, rather than in God, they will be disappointed, for the weight of their burdens will shear off the peg and all that hangs upon it will fall. Some commentators believe Eliakim’s advancement results in corruption of his family, eventually leading to a fall, while others see Eliakim as a type of Christ, the latter of which would take all mankind’s burdens upon Himself (see Isa. 53:4-6). In any case, Isaiah’s message is consistently clear: Trust God.

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “Leaders who fail to lead people to depend on God will not last; instead, God will raise up true servants (22:20) who care for others, like a father cares for his children (22:21). God will firmly establish them and give them great opportunities for service and influence (22:22). Nevertheless, people are not the basis for a secure future in any organization; God is the only truly dependable resource for hope” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 394).

Chapter 23: The Lord of Hosts Planned It

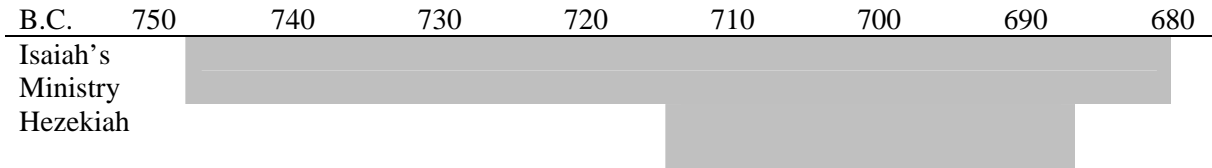
Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

While it's difficult to pinpoint the time of this prophecy, Isaiah likely proclaims this oracle against Tyre during the reign of Hezekiah, a short time before Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C.



Key verse:

Isa. 23:11 – He stretched out His hand over the sea; He made kingdoms tremble. The LORD has commanded that the Canaanite fortresses be destroyed.

Quick summary:

This oracle completes a series of messages from the Lord stretching from Isa. 13-23. Beginning with Babylon in the east and ending with Tyre in the west, Isaiah exposes the sins of these nations and foretells God's dealings with them. Gary V. Smith comments: "God's destruction of all these nations, including the great sea power Tyre, clearly demonstrates God's sovereign power over every people on land and sea" (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 394).

Take note:

Tyre and Sidon are powerful international trading centers. Tyre's merchants are the first to navigate the Mediterranean waters. They establish colonies on nearby coasts and in faraway lands. Tyre consists of two parts: a rocky fortress on the mainland called "Old Tyre," and the city itself, built on a small, rocky island about half a mile from shore. The purple dye of Tyre is famous for its beauty and durability, and both Tyre and Sidon are crowded with glass shops, dyeing and weaving establishments, and engravers of precious stones (see 2 Chron. 2:7, 14). But the wickedness of these cities is well known, too, as several Old Testament prophets attest (Jer. 25:22; Ezek. 26, 28; Amos 1:9-10; Zech. 9:2-4).

Tyre and Sidon are important cities. Both David and Solomon make use of laborers and building materials from Phoenicia (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:8-9). King Ahab marries the Phoenician princess Jezebel, who spreads the worship of Baal throughout Israel (1 Kings 16:29-33).

The Lord makes it clear that He – not any earthly power – is judging Tyre and Sidon (v. 9), and He will continue to use them for His purposes. Their ill-gotten gain ultimately will benefit the righteous (v. 18). A church is established here soon after the death of Stephen. Paul, returning from his third missionary journey, spends a week with the disciples on Tyre (Acts 21:4). Both Tyre and Sidon are located in modern-day Lebanon.

The Lament over Tyre (Isa. 23:1-14)

While Isaiah predicts the stunning destruction of this prosperous port city, he also is speaking to the Hebrews, who watch the Lord sweep His mighty arm of judgment across neighboring states. As the men and women of Judah face the threat of military action against them, it becomes clear that trusting in alliances with these nations is a recipe for disaster. Judah's only hope is to trust in God.

Several dates are suggested for the historical setting of this prophecy, including Alexander the Great's siege of Tyre around 332 B.C. However, it seems best to understand this lament as anticipating the fall of Tyre and Sidon during the time of Isaiah's ministry. Since the Phoenician people will flee to Cyprus, and Babylon recently has been defeated (Isa. 23:13 happens in 703 B.C.), this prophecy may be given a short time before the Assyrian king Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Only a year earlier, Sennacherib (704 – 682 B.C.) puts down a revolt by the Babylonians, attacks their cities and tears down their fortresses. If the Lord can do this to Babylon, why not to Tyre – or even Judah?

Tyre does not fall because she provokes her neighbors to wrath but because she entices them with her wealth, establishing her own colonies and engaging in massive international commerce. "She had become the mart of the nations, the great emporium of that part of the world. Some of every known nation might be found there, especially at certain times of the year, when there was a general rendezvous of merchants" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 23:1). The people of Tyre grow comfortable, then confident, and then arrogant, ignoring the prophet's warnings that their wealth is a gift from God and may be revoked by Him. Steeped in a tradition of self-indulgence, these merchants look back on their long and prosperous history and conclude that it will continue forever. But Isaiah makes it clear that wailing, not revelry, is in their future (vv. 1, 14).

The Restoration of Tyre (Isa. 23:15-18)

After predicting the fall of Tyre, Isaiah speaks about her future restoration after 70 years. This is similar to the end of the Egypt oracle (Isa. 19:18-25). Just as the Egyptians and Assyrians one day will worship God (19:21), the citizens of Tyre one day will offer holy gifts to the Lord (23:18). "The implication of this prophecy for the prophet's audience in Judah is that the

people of Judah need to trust God, for several of these foreign nations will eventually see the error of their ways and come to trust God” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 403). After Tyre is destroyed, it will be forgotten for 70 years. It’s impossible to say exactly when this 70-year period begins and ends. However, if the Assyrians defeat the Phoenicians around 702 B.C., then Tyre’s season of insignificance will last until about 630 B.C., the time when the Assyrian empire collapses.

Isaiah then moves to “the song of the prostitute,” probably a song familiar to his audience. The song mocks an aging and forgotten prostitute who must take to the streets, play music and sing suggestive songs in order to attract business. Just like the prostitute, Tyre will long to be remembered once again after a 70-year decline. “The Lord will restore Tyre,” the prophet promises (v. 17), and enable her to rise to prominence once again – with one dramatic difference. Rather than hoard tons of gold for her own pleasures, the people of Tyre will give some of the money they earn in international trade to the temple of the Lord, supporting the temple servants who dwell in God’s presence (v. 18). History provides no information about the fulfillment of this prophecy. However, the spirit of the prophecy matches that of Isa. 2:1-4 as all nations stream to Zion to worship the Lord. Perhaps this final verse of the chapter is a long-range view of the millennium.

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “Life, liberty, security, and prosperity are dependent on the gracious plan of a sovereign God, not on any arrogant attempts to manipulate circumstances through human wisdom, military might, or political alliances. God has revealed this truth to his prophets and history proves that it is so; therefore, each generation and each nation must choose how it will respond. The proud and self-reliant will be humbled; the humble people who trust God will walk in the security of his plan” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 395).

Chapter 24: The Earth Mourns and Withers

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Isaiah 24-27 forms a single prophecy. While it's difficult to pinpoint the time in which it is given, it seems best to place it a short time before the attack by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, on Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded area]				[Shaded area]			

Key verses:

Isa. 24:21-22 – On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven above and kings of the earth below. They will be gathered together like prisoners in a pit. They will be confined to a dungeon; after many days they will be punished.

Quick summary:

This section of Isaiah begins with an end-times perspective explaining how the Lord will judge the whole world and set up His kingdom on earth (Isa. 24:1-3, 19-23). “These prophecies reveal how God will finally deal with the rebellious nations of chaps. 13-23 so that he can bring an end to the pride and violent sinfulness that has polluted the earth. God will destroy the wicked and establish peace on the earth, and then the holy people who remain will worship God alone and sing songs to exalt him” (Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 405). Because of their description of the Tribulation and Millennium, chapters 24-27 are known as “Isaiah’s apocalypse.”

Take note:

Notice Isaiah’s description of end-time events that are reinforced in New Testament prophecies. For example, the earth will be stripped completely bare and its inhabitants scattered (vv. 1-3; cf. Rev. 8:6 – 9:21), and the sun and moon will darken in preparation for the full revelation of Messiah’s kingdom (v. 23; cf. Matt. 24:29-30; Rev. 21:23).

The Coming Tribulation (Isa. 24:1-13, 16b-22)

While the immediate context of this chapter may refer to the Assyrian invasion of Judah, or to the Babylonian captivity that will occur more than 100 years later, it seems to have its ultimate fulfillment in the Great Tribulation yet to come. H.L. Willmington offers the following observations:

A. The Great Tribulation—what it is (24:1–4, 6–13, 16b–22)

1. *God himself will lay waste to the entire earth (24:1):* The earth will become a great wasteland, and the people will be scattered.
2. *All people and fallen angels will be judged (24:2–4, 21–22):* No one will be spared from God’s wrath, and the fallen angels will be put in prison.
3. *Very few will survive (24:6):* A curse will consume the earth and its people, who will be destroyed by fire.
4. *Happiness will no longer exist (24:7–13):* All joy in life will be gone.
5. *Evil and treachery will be everywhere (24:16b–18):* People possessed by sheer terror will flee from one danger only to be confronted with something even more horrifying.
6. *The earth will stagger like a drunkard (24:19–20):* It will fall and collapse like a tent, unable to rise again because of the weight of its sins.

B. The Great Tribulation—why it occurs (24:5): Humanity has twisted the laws of God and has broken his holy commands (*The Outline Bible*, S. Is 24:5).

Isaiah uses the word “earth” 16 times in this chapter to emphasize the global impact of God’s intervention in human affairs, wielding judgment and exalting His glory. No stratum of society is spared and no portion of the earth escapes unscathed. The reason for God’s plundering of the earth is provided in verse 5: “The earth is polluted by its inhabitants, for they have transgressed teachings, overstepped decrees, and broken the everlasting covenant.” That covenant “probably refers not to the Abrahamic or Mosaic Covenants but to the covenant people implicitly had with God to obey His Word. Right from the very beginning mankind refused to live according to God’s Word (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-6; cf. Hosea 6:7). And throughout history people have refused to obey God’s revelation” (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1072). Robert B. Hughes and Carl J. Laney add, “The ‘everlasting covenant’ must refer to the moral law of God revealed in his word and written in man’s heart (cf. Rom. 2:14-15)” (*Tyndale Concise Bible Dictionary*, S 263).

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that God is the one wreaking havoc on the earth. While people are responsible for their sinful actions, and these actions often produce great hardship for the perpetrators and for others in the process, the Lord of Hosts clearly is demonstrating His holiness and power in events that otherwise might be interpreted as a scorched-earth policy. After all, if God created the present heavens and earth out of chaos (Gen. 1:2) and judged the earth by water in the great flood (Gen. 6-9), He has every right to judge mankind’s sin in the latter days by reintroducing chaos to the created order. Ultimately, He will purge the heavens and earth of the last vestiges of sin by fire and create new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:5-13; Rev. 21-22). Even the imagery of Isaiah in verse 18 harkens back to the

flood: “For the windows are opened from above, and the foundations of the earth are shaken” (cf. Gen. 7:11).

Matthew Henry summarizes well:

The Lord that made the earth, and made it fruitful and beautiful, for the service and comfort of man, now *makes it empty and waste* (v. 1), for its Creator is and will be its Judge; he has an incontestable right to pass sentence upon it and an irresistible power to execute that sentence. It is *the Lord* that *has spoken this word*, and he will do the work (v. 3); it is his curse that has *devoured the earth* (v. 6), the general curse which sin brought upon *the ground for man’s sake* (Gen. 3:17), and all the particular curses which families and countries bring upon themselves by their enormous wickedness. See the power of God’s curse, how it makes all empty and lays all waste; those whom he curses are cursed indeed (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 24:1).

One final note should be made before moving on. Isaiah writes that the Lord will punish “the host of heaven above and the kings of the earth below” (v. 21). The “host of heaven” may refer to the spiritual forces opposed to God, specifically Satan and demons. The “kings of the earth below” no doubt are the earthly political forces facing God’s judgment. “Those powers in the heavens and on the earth will become like cattle when the Lord herds them together and places them like prisoners . . . in a dungeon. Their punishment after many days refers to the great white throne judgment after the Millennium when all the unrighteous will have to stand before God and be judged for their evil deeds and lack of faith in Him (Rev. 20:11-15)” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, S. 1:1072).

The Promised Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 24:14-16a, 23)

A few will escape these terrible judgments, just as a few olives or grapes may be gleaned after the harvest (v. 13). The survivors will rejoice, raising their voices in songs of praise that may be heard from “the ends of the earth” (v. 16). This singing seems to come out of the scattered remnant, which in the light of the gospel may be seen as Jews and Gentiles alike (cf. John 11:52). “Out of this terrible devastation . . . will come the glorious light of Christ in his millennial kingdom (24:23; see 60:19-20; Rev. 21:23; 22:5)” (*Willmington’s Bible Handbook*, S. 365). If the sun and moon are to lose their luster in comparison with the Messiah, what a surpassing vision of glory awaits all who trust in Him (see Rev. 21:22-27).

It’s important to keep in mind that the concept of a remnant is central to Isaiah’s teaching (see Isa. 1:9; 10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 14:22, 30). The believing remnant will view the earth’s devastation as the righteous act of a holy God; it will not be viewed in the way the people of Isaiah’s day see the Assyrian invasion – as cruel and unjust punishment. Those who receive Christ by faith today may joyfully anticipate His future physical and visible manifestation of power, glory and holiness.

Closing Thought

Matthew Henry writes: “Those who through grace can glory in tribulation ought to glorify God in tribulation, and give him thanks for their comforts, which abound as their afflictions

do abound. We must in every fire, even the hottest, in every isle, even the remotest, keep up our good thoughts of God. When, though he slay us, yet we trust in him—when, though for his sake we are killed all the day long, yet none of these things move us—then we glorify the Lord in the fires” (S. Is 24:13).

Chapter 25: He Will Destroy Death Forever

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Isaiah 24-27 forms a single prophecy. While it's difficult to pinpoint the time in which it is given, it seems best to place it a short time before the attack by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, on Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded bar from 750 to 680]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded bar from 720 to 700]							

Key verse:

Isa. 25:8 – He will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face and remove His people's disgrace from the whole earth, for the LORD has spoken.

Quick summary:

Speaking in the first person, Isaiah describes conditions when Messiah's kingdom is established on earth. "This wonderful twenty-fifth chapter is a song, a song of three stanzas," writes J. Vernon McGee. The first stanza (vv. 1-5) is praise to God for deliverance from all enemies. The second stanza (vv. 6-8) is praise for provision for present needs. And the third stanza (vv. 9-12) is praise in anticipation of future joys (*Isaiah: Volume 1*, pp. 175-178).

Take note:

New Testament writers Paul and John quote from this chapter as they anticipate the return of the Lord. Paul borrows from Isa. 25:8 when he writes about our future resurrection and glorification, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). And John, looking toward the day when believers will fellowship face-to-face with Christ, also quotes from verse 8: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21:4).

Deliverance from All Enemies (Isa. 25:1-5)

While there could be some immediate or near-term fulfillment in this song of thanksgiving, it's probably best to view Isaiah's praise through the longer lens of the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. At that time all the enemies of God and His people will be humbled and there will be a dramatic reversal of fortune for the remnant that has suffered poverty, captivity and persecution. Isaiah's confessional song expresses a personal choice to identify with the name and deeds of God. Claiming "Lord, You are my God," Isaiah states his commitment to a personal relationship with the Creator and Judge of all. In a melodic way, the prophet declares the wonderful truth that God is personal, knowable, just and faithful.

Isaiah provides at least three reasons God's people are to be thankful:

- God is faithful to His plan. "Although Judah was being attacked by Assyria, the people could rest assured that what God has said about the future will happen exactly as predicted. Believers today can have the same confidence. Nothing is outside the plan or power of God; no evil or circumstances will interfere with God's accomplishment of his will for his people" (Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary, Isaiah 1-39*, p. 430).
- God will defeat His enemies. The identification of "the city" in verse 2 has been interpreted in a variety of ways, from a Moabite city (see v. 10) to Babylon. But perhaps it's best to view this term as symbolic rather than specific, assuring us that even the best-defended walled cities – the seats of power and influence – will fall beneath the mighty hand of God.
- God is a refuge to the weak. Isaiah uses two analogies to illustrate this truth. First, the Lord will be like a shelter that protects people from the scorching sun and the driving rain. That is, He will make sure the oppressive forces of evil will not overtake them. Second, He will be like the shade of a cloud that subdues the heat. Although wicked and barbarous people will always oppose God and His people, the Lord will restrain their evil as a cloud gives relief from the heat of the sun.

If chapters 24-25 are spoken just before Sannacherib's attack on Jerusalem, Isaiah's song of thanksgiving is an inspiration to those about to face a withering siege on their capital city. "Although this prophecy did not promise them deliverance from Assyrian oppression or victory in their present battle, it reminded them that everything happens according to God's plan, that their God can do miraculous wonders to save his people, that God is a refuge in times of trouble, and that ultimately God will win the victory over all ruthless peoples" (Smith, p. 431).

Provision for Present Needs (Isa. 25:6-8)

When Messiah reigns, there will be a joyous celebration of His rule by people from around the world. As other passages in Isaiah confirm, Jews and Gentiles from every tribe and nation will gather to enjoy the abundance of the King's provision (cf. Isa. 2:2-3; 14:1-2; 19:18-25; 45:20-25; 49:22; 60:1-22; 66:18-21). This feast is similar to what David envisions when God finally rules the earth (Ps. 22:25-31). The image of prosperity and fruitfulness stand in stark contrast to earthly conditions in Isaiah 24.

Besides all this, verses 7-8 tell us God is going to do even more. He will destroy death, wipe away tears from every face, and remove His people's disgrace:

- The burial "shroud" could be understood in two ways: first, as the covering for a dead body; and second, as a shroud that mourners place over their heads (see 2 Sam. 15:30). In either case, Isaiah sees a day when death is destroyed and there is no longer any need to fear death or to mourn the loss of loved ones. More than 700 years later, the apostle Paul looks forward to the same thing: "The last enemy to be abolished is death" (1 Cor. 15:26). Once the enemies of God in heaven and on earth are judged, the Lord will purge His creation of sin and its effects (2 Peter 3:10-13).
- In addition, God promises the complete removal of tears – not just tears of mourning, but of sadness, pain, loneliness, oppression, injustice and all other kinds of loss. Since God is the Provider and Comforter, everyone will be happy and safe.
- Finally, the Lord will "remove His people's disgrace from the whole earth." This is more than a promise to Israel, for at this point in human history all people are God's people. The reproach His followers have suffered for their faith will be taken away and their sacrifices for the sake of the kingdom well compensated. The enemies of God and His people have been brought to justice in God's court, found guilty and punished (see Rev. 20:11-15).

Anticipation of Future Joys (Isa. 25:9-12)

On that day, when the believing remnant is delivered and Messiah rules as King over the entire earth, the saved ones will rejoice in the Lord and reaffirm their trust in Him. For those in Isaiah's day, they would see the miraculous hand of God in delivering Jerusalem from the Assyrians as He strikes dead 185,000 enemy soldiers. If God can deliver a city from certain destruction, He can – and will – deliver His people all around the world from the rampant wickedness of the last days.

Isaiah refers to Moab as representative of those who oppose God and will be destroyed. Moab lies east of Israel across the Dead Sea and is a constant enemy of God's people. "Israel and Judah had many altercations with Moab, that was known for her pride (v.11; cf. 16:6). She felt that the works of her hands and her cleverness would protect her, but it would not. Moab – and all God's enemies – will be totally destroyed, trampled, and brought down ... low (cf. 26:5) to the very dust. Only God's people, in Israel and other nations, will enjoy God's time of prosperity and blessing" (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1074).

Warren Wiersbe adds: "The imagery here is quite graphic: The Moabites are compared to straw trampled so deeply into manure that the people have to swim through the manure to get out! While the Jews are enjoying a feast of good things, the Moabites are trying to escape from the excrement of the animals the Jews are devouring! Moab was always known for its pride (16:6ff); but God will bring them low along with all the other nations that exalt themselves, exploit others, and refuse to submit to the Lord" (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 25:1).

Closing Thought

Matthew Henry writes, “There is no fortress impregnable to Omnipotence, no fort so high but the arm of the Lord can overtop it and bring it down. This destruction of Moab is typical of Christ’s victory over death (spoken of v. 8), his spoiling principalities and powers in his cross (Col. 2:15), his pulling down Satan’s strong-holds by the preaching of his gospel (2 Co. 10:4), and his reigning till all his enemies be *made his footstool*, Ps. 110:1” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 25:9).

Chapter 26: We Remember Your Name

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment Chapters 1-35	Part 2: Historical Interlude Chapters 36-39	Part 3: Salvation Chapters 40-66
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When this takes place:

Chapters 24-27 of Isaiah form a single prophecy. While it's difficult to pinpoint the time in which it is given, it seems best to place it a short time before the attack by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, on Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Timeline bar from 750 to 680]							
Hezekiah	[Timeline bar from 720 to 700]							

Key verse:

Isa. 26:13 – Lord, our God, other lords than You have ruled over us, but we remember Your name alone.

Quick summary:

In the context of chapters 24-27, Isaiah uses an analogy of the future destruction of all God's enemies (chaps. 24-25) to urge the people of Judah to trust Him now (chaps. 26-27). Although God is using the Assyrians as the rod of His judgment against Judah, those who place their faith in the Lord and endure the childbirth-like pains of His correction (vv. 17-18) will rejoice in His salvation: "Yes, Lord, we wait for You in the path of Your judgments. Our desire is for Your name and renown" (v. 8).

Take note:

Some would argue there's a contradiction in chapter 26. In verse 14 Isaiah declares that "the dead do not live, departed spirits do not rise up." Then, in verse 19, he states that "your dead will live; their bodies will rise." How can both be true? *The Apologetics Study Bible* explains: "This apparent conflict vanishes when the statements are placed in context. He [Isaiah] referred to past oppressors of Israel, the 'wicked' who act 'unjustly' (v. 10), the 'other lords' who had ruled over God's people and whom God had already 'visited and destroyed' (vv. 13-14). These oppressors could no longer attack God's people. The situation changed with verse

19; in the future God's people who die will live ... a person can have life after death. The fact that Elijah and Elisha brought to life two boys who had died (1 Kg 17:17-24; 2 Kg 4:18-37), and that a dead man came back to life when his body touched the bones of Elisha (2 Kg 13:20-21), indicates that individual resurrection from the dead was known and experienced long before the time of Isaiah" (pp 1024-25).

The Song of Judah (Isa. 26:1-6)

Although Jerusalem will be surrounded in Isaiah's day, and vanquished a century later by the Babylonians, the day is coming when Israel's remnant will sing of their glorious reversal of fortune as they enter the impregnable New Jerusalem. The humble will be exalted and the oppressors crushed. Because of Messiah's presence there, the city figuratively is said to have salvation as its walls and ramparts (v. 1). While other nations will have places in the kingdom, believers in Israel will hold special positions.

The Lord promises perfect (genuine, complete) peace to those who trust Him – now, as well as in the Millennium (v. 3). The apostle Paul reminds us of this great truth in Phil. 4:7: "And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck write, "This availability of inner tranquility encourages believers to continue trusting the Lord (Isa. 26:4) because He is firm like a Rock ... and He is eternal" (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1074). For other Scriptures that describe the Lord as a Rock, see Ps. 73:26 ("strength" literally means rock); Isa. 17:10, 30:29, and 44:8.

"The Hebrew word for 'peace' (*shalom*) means much more than a cessation of war. It includes blessings such as wholeness, health, quietness of soul, preservation, and completeness. 'What is your peace?' is the way Jews often greet one another; and Isaiah's reply would be, 'My peace is from the Lord, for I trust wholly in Him!' Paul's counsel in Philippians 4:6-9 is based on Isaiah 26:3" (Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Comforted*, S. Is 26:1).

In contrast with the righteous who enter the city are the arrogant who "live in lofty places" (v. 5); the Lord will bring them down. Those who used their wealth and privilege to oppress the poor will be on the business end of God's rod of justice. This does not mean that poverty itself is a virtue. Isaiah simply repeats an oft-repeated message that God has special concern for the poor who seek Him (Isa. 25:4; Matt. 11:5; Luke 4:18).

The Long Night of Waiting (Isa. 26:7-18)

Isaiah describes a level and straight path for the righteous, cleared by God Himself. "In the Yukon of old, one man was often sent ahead to 'break trail' for others or a dog sled. This passage reminds us that a righteous God has already broken trail for those who follow Him because they are committed to righteousness too" (Lawrence O. Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed., S. 424). As a result, God's redeemed "wait" for Him, "desire" His name and renown, "long" for Him in the night, and diligently "seek" Him in order to "learn righteousness" (vv. 8-9). What a dramatic change occurs in the hearts of men and women when they learn to trust God above all else.

The struggles of Judah returning to God are like the pains of childbirth. Isaiah writes that the nation is writhing in anguish beneath the punishing hand of God. Like a pregnant woman giving birth to wind, Judah experiences emptiness and defeat through its sinful acts. The Hebrew verb in verse 13 translated “ruled over” gives us the noun *baal*, the Canaanite storm god whose worship caused so much trouble in Israel. But the word also means “husband,” so the message is that God’s people were not faithful to Him, preferring to pursue their lust for idols. The same image is given in James 4:4: “Adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the world’s friend becomes God’s enemy.” Even so, the Lord graciously carries His people through and keeps His covenant. For other comparisons of spiritual struggle to childbirth, see Isa. 13:8, 42:14; John 16:21; Gal. 4:19.

Isaiah’s comment about the dead tyrants who have troubled Judah (v. 14) do not contradict the doctrine of universal resurrection supplied in verse 19 and elsewhere in Scripture (see, for example, Job 19:25-27; Ps. 17:15; Dan. 12:1-3; John 5:28-29, 1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:11-15). The prophet simply is emphasizing that the rulers who wrought so much terror and destruction on God’s people can no longer do them harm. Lawrence O. Richards comments in *The Bible Readers Companion*: “Storms of judgment may sweep over our earth. Wars may devastate, and disease may ravage. Famines may decimate the land, while starvation stalks our families. There are indeed dread fates that are to be feared. But these are not history’s last words! At the end of history – both the history of nations and the personal history of each individual – the shout of God’s promise echoes. ‘Your dead will live; their bodies will rise!’ What a truth to hold fast in troubled times” (S. 424).

Resurrection and Final Judgment (Isa. 26:19-21)

This is a most revealing Old Testament passage on future resurrection and judgment. While these verses focus on the resurrection of the just – the “first resurrection” of which John wrote in Rev. 20:5-6 – Daniel adds that the unjust also will be raised and that all people will experience eternal life or eternal shame (Dan. 12:2). What a comfort these words are to those experiencing warfare, captivity, injustice, and even death. The promise that God will raise all people one day and pronounce final judgment with absolute justice should spur fear in the hearts of the wicked as it does hope in the hearts of the righteous.

Although views differ on the order of events, the New Testament clearly teaches future resurrection and final judgment for all people:

- Jesus often speaks of His return and final judgment. For example, in John 5:28-29 He says all people will be raised from the dead and experience either everlasting life or condemnation.
- The apostle Paul writes in detail about the rapture (“catching up” / “snatching away”) of the church in 1 Cor. 15:50-58 and 1 Thess. 4:13-18, as well as judgment and reward for all believers (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).

- The apostle John refers several times to resurrection and final judgment in the book of Revelation. He alludes to the rapture by not mentioning the church from Rev. 4-18, chapters depicting the tribulation. He also speaks of the “first resurrection,” or resurrection of the just, in Rev. 20:5-6. And he writes in some detail about the raising of the wicked to stand before the great white throne, from which they are cast into hell (Rev. 20:11-15).

Verse 20 urges God’s people to “hide for a little while until the wrath has passed.” “When God is about to take vengeance on the ungodly, the saints shall be shut in by Him in a place of safety, as Noah and his family were in the days of the flood (Ge 7:16), and as Israel was commanded not to go out of doors on the night of the slaying of the Egyptian first-born (Ex 12:22, 23; Ps 31:20; 83:3). The saints are calmly and confidently to await the issue (Ex 14:13, 14)” (Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, S. Is 26:20).

Finally, verse 21 gives Judah the assurance that God will deal with her oppressors – Assyria in the near term and Babylon in the long term. Even more, this verse previews the glorious appearing of the Messiah one day to execute judgment upon the earth’s wicked (see Rev. 19:11-21).

Closing Thought

Commenting on the phrase in verse 21, “The earth will reveal the blood shed on it and will no longer conceal her slain,” Matthew Henry writes: “Secret murders, and other secret wickednesses, shall be discovered, sooner or later. And the slain which the earth has long covered she shall no longer cover, but they shall be produced as evidence against the murderers. The voice of Abel’s blood cries from the earth, Gen. 9:10, 11; Job 20:27. Those sins which seemed to be buried in oblivion will be called to mind, and called over again, when the day of reckoning comes. Let God’s people therefore wait awhile with patience, for behold the Judge stands before the door” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 26:20).

Chapter 27: Jacob's Iniquity Will be Purged

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Chapters 24-27 of Isaiah form a single prophecy. While it's difficult to pinpoint the time in which this prophecy is given, it seems best to place it a short time before the attack by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, on Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded area]				[Shaded area]			

Key verse:

Isa. 27:9 – Therefore Jacob's iniquity will be purged in this way, and the result of the removal of his sin will be this: when he makes all the altar stones like crushed bits of chalk, no Asherah poles or incense altars will remain standing.

Quick summary:

Isaiah looks ahead to the destiny of God's ancient people. The Lord again will tend to His vineyard (see Isa. 5:1-5; 27:2-4), purge the people's sins and return them to their land. Isaiah's use of the ancestral name "Jacob" is a reference to all Jewish people.

Take note:

Isaiah refers to "leviathan" in verse 1 and calls him the "fleeing serpent ... the twisting serpent ... the monster that is in the sea." The name means "twisting one" and is a mythological sea serpent or dragon associated with the chaos at creation. Sometimes the name is used of an animal such as the crocodile. "Leviathan" is referenced in other Old Testament passages – Job 3:8, 41:1; Ps. 74:14, 104:26 – and the context must help determine its meaning.

But why would Isaiah tell us God will "bring judgment" on this creature if he is only a mythological figure or an animal? In Ezek. 29:3, 32:2, Rev. 12:3 and elsewhere, wicked

human leaders hostile to Israel are similarly described; “antitypically and ultimately Satan is intended (Rev 20:10)” (Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, S. Is 27:1). If these earthly leaders personify Satan and his evil intent toward mankind in general and Israel in particular, then both the human leaders and Satan ultimately will experience the wrath of God.

John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck provide deeper insight into Isaiah's use of this word:

In Ugaritic literature (of Ugarit, a city-state in North Syria) reference is made to a similar seven-headed creature. Isaiah, though not believing this ancient Semitic myth, simply referred to Leviathan to convey his point (cf. Job 3:8). Leviathan, the twisting monster of the sea, was viewed in Ugaritic literature as an enemy of order in Creation. But the Lord can stop this chaotic state and establish order on the earth and in people's hearts. When God's judgment comes in that day, when He slays the wicked at the end of the Tribulation, it will be like His slaying the chaotic dragon Leviathan. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1075).

The Song of the Vineyard (Isa. 27:2-6)

Isaiah employs the phrase “on that day” four times in this chapter to highlight the Lord's future dealings with Israel and her enemies. Yahweh will “bring judgment on Leviathan” (v. 1; cf. Rev. 20:1-3, 10); cause Israel to “blossom and bloom” (v. 6); gather His people (v. 12); and enable them to worship Him in Jerusalem (v. 13).

The vineyard in verses 2-6 symbolizes Israel, and there is an interesting contrast between the songs of the vineyard in Isa. 5:1-7 and Isa. 27:2-6. In the first song, Isaiah laments the destruction of the vineyard for its unfruitfulness. The second song, however, rejoices over the prospect of God's protection and the vineyard's ultimate abundance. Isaiah makes the point that the covenant-keeping Lord will do whatever is necessary to make Israel the nation through which He will bless the world (see Gen. 12:3). If the nation produces “thorns and briers” He will “burn it to the ground” (v. 4); surely His judgments against the northern kingdom at the hands of Assyria and the southern kingdom at the hands of Babylon are clear examples of the vineyard owner's pruning capabilities. On the other hand, if His people “take hold of My strength” and “make peace with Me” (v. 5), He will cause Israel to “fill the whole world with fruit” (v. 6).

Warren Wiersbe offers this insight: “In Isaiah's day, the vineyard was producing wild grapes; but in the future kingdom, Israel will be fruitful and flourishing.... The Bible speaks of three vines: the people of Israel (Isa. 5; 27), Christ and His church (John 15), and godless Gentile society, “the vine of the earth” (Rev. 14:18). The vineyard of Israel is not bearing fruit, the “vine of the earth” is filling the world with poisonous fruit, and God's people must be faithful branches in the Vine and produce fruit that glorifies God's name” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 26:1).

Looking at this passage from a New Testament perspective, we can see how Jesus the Messiah blessed the whole world through His work on the cross (John 3:16-18; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 1 John 2:2), and how, in His second coming, He will judge His enemies and gather before Him redeemed people of "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

The Coming Judgment (Isa. 27:7-11)

Because the Lord loves His people He will punish them and purify them so they are fruitful. While judgment is about to fall on Judah, the Lord promises not to deal as harshly with her as he does with her enemies. He will use warfare and exile (v. 8) – certainly warfare with Assyria, and later warfare with and exile to Babylon. But if the result is that Judah relinquishes her idolatry, her hardship is not in vain. The terms "His severe storm" and "the east wind" (v. 8) may refer figuratively to Babylon, which lay to the east and would destroy Jerusalem in 586 B.C. "The Exile would help purify Judah so that she would not worship foreign gods and goddesses" (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1076).

Israel would be driven out of her land because of her disobedience to the Law (Deut. 28:15-16, 25, 49-52). Evidence of her repentance would be the pulverizing of altar stones dedicated to false gods, and the removal of Asherah poles, wooden symbols of the Canaanite goddess of fertility. None of these pagan gods would be able to spare God's people from seeing their nation defeated, their capital city ruined, and their land left desolate. Hungry calves would graze among Jerusalem's rubble, stripping bark off trees for food. Women would cut off tree branches and use them to build fires. All of these are to be signs that the Lord is judging His people by temporarily withdrawing His compassion (v. 11).

The Regathering of Israel (Isa. 27:12-13)

But God's anger will not burn forever against His people. He promises "on that day" to regather the Jews in their homeland. He will "thresh grain from the Euphrates River as far as the Wadi of Egypt" (v. 12). This probably means he will bring judgment upon these far-flung regions – Assyria, Babylon and Egypt – and draw His people back to Jerusalem and its surroundings. Verse 13 also may include Gentiles among the "lost" and "dispersed." Certainly within a few generations of this prophecy, the Jews are released from captivity in Babylon. And in our generation we have witnessed the birth of the modern state of Israel. But the ultimate promise is that when Messiah returns to sit on the throne of David, Israel's borders will be widened and all believers will dwell in the land God promised Abraham.

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: "This prophecy describes how God can make something beautiful and productive (the vineyard in 27:2-6) out of something that was quite hopeless (the vineyard in 5:1-7). The credit goes to God who cares and protects his vineyard, but the choice

to produce good or sour grapes was the choice of the vines, the people of Israel. This second song reminds the reader that God has the ability to transform people into beautiful blossoming plants in spite of their former rebellion. He does not give up on rebellious people but loves them and by his grace gathers them to worship together at his temple (27:12-13). His wonderful grace is still available to those who remain in rebellion against him" (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 465-66).

Chapter 28: A Deal with Death

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Isaiah 28 takes place during Hezekiah’s reign. “The setting is the restless period of intrigue with Egypt which led to Hezekiah’s revolt against Assyria and the reprisals of 701 BC ... but the prophecies frequently break out of these narrow confines” (D.A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 27:12).

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah’s Ministry	[Shaded area]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded area]				[Shaded area]			

Key verse:

Isa. 28:16 – Therefore the Lord GOD said: “Look, I have laid a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; the one who believes will be unshakable.”

Quick summary:

Robert B. Hughes and Carl J. Laney write: “Ephraim was the chief tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel. As the people mocked Isaiah’s prophecy as nonsense (28:9–10), so they would get their fill of the nonsensical language of the Assyrians (28:11)... Instead of trusting in shaking alliances (28:15), God’s people were to rely on the firm Cornerstone, the Messiah (cf. Ps. 118:22; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6)... God works in many different ways to accomplish his purposes (Isa. 28:23–29)” (*Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, S. 263).

Take note:

Paul refers to Isa. 28:11 in 1 Cor. 14:21 to demonstrate the purpose of tongues as a sign of God’s judgment on unbelieving Jews. The people in Isaiah’s day mock the prophet’s words as incoherent babbling, so God promises to “speak to this people with stammering speech and in a foreign language” (v. 11); that is, they will be conquered by the Assyrians, who speak in a language they cannot understand. In the same way, the apostle Paul writes, the spiritual gift of tongues serves as a sign to the unbelieving Jews of his generation that God’s judgment is

once again about to descend on Israel. This occurs in 70 A.D. as the Romans sack Jerusalem, destroy the temple, kill more than 1 million Jews, and scatter the rest worldwide in the Diaspora.

As new believers speak in tongues – dialects, or human languages unknown to them – on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), their Spirit-filled glorification of God is greeted by some Jews with derision: “But some sneered and said, ‘They’re full of new wine!’” (v. 13). Peter addresses all of the Jews from around the world gathered in Jerusalem for this important feast and declares that “these people [speaking in tongues] are not drunk, as you suppose ... On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel ...” (vv. 15-16). As his sermon, proclaiming Jesus as Messiah, draws to a close, Peter warns his fellow Jews. “And with many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, ‘Be saved from this corrupt generation’” (v. 40). Sadly, many first-century Jews reject the words of Peter and Paul and are swept away in God’s judgment at the hands of the Roman legions.

The Drunkards of Ephraim Isa. 28:1-6)

This seems to be an early prophecy before the fall of the northern kingdom and its capital city of Samaria in 722-21 B.C. Isaiah paints an interesting picture in verses 1-4. He compares Samaria, an affluent city set on a hill, to a garland on a drunkard’s brow. The glory of this once-great city is fading and God is about to bring swift judgment upon Ephraim’s clueless drunkards (v. 1). The “devastating hailstorm” in verse 2 no doubt symbolizes the Assyrians, who will snatch the capital city like a passing traveler snatches a ripe fig (v. 4). There is a day, however, when the clouds depart and the Lord of Hosts – “a crown of beauty and a diadem of splendor” – will adorn the believing remnant of Israel (v. 5). The Lord Himself, active among and engaged with His people, provides “a spirit of justice ... and strength” in stark contrast to the corrupt and inept leaders of the northern kingdom (v. 6).

Vomit-covered Tables (Isa. 28:7-13)

Isaiah now returns to the image of the northern kingdom as a drunkard (cf. v. 1). He refers to the people and their leaders – meaning the priests and prophets – as revelers at a banquet where the tables are covered with vomit and the stench is inescapable (v. 8). “They were intoxicated even when supposedly seeing visions (the false prophets) or when rendering decisions (the false priests). No wonder the nation was ripe for judgment” (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1077).

The speakers in verses 9-10 likely are the priests and prophets spoken of in verses 7-8. Offended that Isaiah is speaking to them like children, they mock the prophet as if he’s speaking baby talk. “The Hebrew of v 10 is a jingle, almost the equivalent of our derisive ‘blah blah,’ but not quite as meaningless (D.A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 28:7). “A little here, a little there” is a method used to teach children. So essentially the priests and prophets employ simple repetitive phrases used with youngsters to

make it clear they are insulted by Isaiah's speech and want nothing to do with the message or the messenger.

Isaiah's response is that if the people won't listen to his plain-spoken message of repentance, they will be lectured by their conquerors, who speak a difficult and foreign language. He's referring, of course, to the Assyrians, who are bearing down on the northern kingdom and who will deliver God's judgment to its citizens. Although the Lord offers His people "rest" and "repose" (v. 12), they refuse to listen. Therefore, God will turn their mocking back on them and they will "go stumbling backwards, to be broken, trapped, and captured" (v. 13).

A Deal with Death (Isa. 28:14-22)

Isaiah has strong words for Judah's leaders, whom he calls "mockers," perhaps in part because of their childish taunting of the prophet in verses 9-10. Instead of leading the people responsibly, the nation's rulers scoff at the threat of judgment. "We have cut a deal with Death," they boast, and when judgment comes "it will not touch us" (v. 15). Why would they say such a thing? In the Ugaritic pantheon of gods, death is personified as the god of the underworld. Jerusalem's leaders are trusting in false gods to save them from the "overwhelming scourge," the Assyrian invasion. But with "falsehood" on their lips and "treachery" in their hearts, their trust is misplaced. They will come to ruin.

In verse 16, Isaiah gives the Lord's response to Jerusalem's arrogant rebellion. "Look, I have laid a stone in Zion," says the Lord, "a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation, and the one who believes will be unshakable." God, not idols or human resistance, is the only true source of physical and spiritual salvation. Whether Isaiah is thinking of the cornerstone as Messiah is not completely clear; however, other Scripture passages make this connection (Zech. 10:4; Eph. 2:20) and both Paul and Peter quote this verse as Messianic (Rom. 9:33, 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6). Lawrence O. Richards makes an interesting observation: "In human construction, the same stone cannot serve both as the foundation of the building and the capstone, which holds the arch atop it together. But the Messiah is both foundation and capstone in God's building, both the beginning and end. What's more, this stone both is God and is laid by God. Only Jesus, sent by God and yet God the Son, could possibly fulfill this requirement" (*The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed., S. 425).

Next, the Lord responds to each of Jerusalem's boasts. "Your deal with death will be dissolved," He tells them. "Your deal with Sheol will not last. When the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be trampled" (v. 18). This message will bring sheer terror on those who realize its implications. To seek the intervention of false gods in the midst of God's judgment will be as futile as sleeping comfortably in a bed that is too short or seeking warmth in a blanket that is too small. Destruction will sweep down into Judah. Mount Perazim and the valley of Gibeon (v. 21) are near Jerusalem, where David defeated the Philistines (1 Chron. 14:11, 16). Just as God defeated David's enemies, He now threatens to defeat David's kingdom. Therefore, Jerusalem's leaders are warned to stop mocking God's prophet, and to cease trusting in idols. The Lord's wrath is coming.

The Parable of the Plowman (Isa. 28:23-29)

This chapter ends with a message of hope as Isaiah shares the parable of the plowman. Just as the farmer employs different steps – plowing, planting, threshing – to produce a variety of crops, so the Lord will take the appropriate steps to purify His people. “A farmer must crush his crops to get the desired results. For example, caraway and cumin, aromatic herbs, are beaten out with a rod or stick, not threshed, because their seeds are so small. Grain is ground by millstone, after the wheat stalks are threshed.... Similarly God ... is the Master ‘Farmer,’ who knows how to handle each ‘crop.’ Therefore the Southern Kingdom should submit to Him because He is wonderful in counsel (cf. 9:6) and magnificent in wisdom (cf. 11:2)” (Walvoord and Zuck, S. 1:1078).

God’s purpose in punishment is not to destroy His people any more than the farmer’s object in threshing is to obliterate his crop; rather, it is to produce an abundance of fruit. Isaiah challenges his listeners to look to the farmer’s ways to vindicate God’s work among the citizens of Judah.

Closing Thought

Warren W. Wiersbe comments: “Perhaps the people of Judah rejoiced to hear Isaiah announce the fall of their rival kingdom, but their celebration was shortlived; for the prophet then announced that *Judah was guilty of the same sins as Samaria and therefore was in danger of judgment* ... Jerusalem watched the Northern Kingdom fall to the Assyrians, but this judgment did not bring them to repentance. When we start saying to ourselves, ‘It can never happen to me!’—*it is sure to happen!*” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 28:1).

Chapter 29: Man-made Worship

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Isaiah 29 likely takes place during Hezekiah's reign and is part of a series of woes in chapters 28-33 against those who oppose God's word.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Timeline bar]							
Hezekiah	[Timeline bar]				[Timeline bar]			

Key verses:

Isa. 29:13-14 – The Lord said: Because these people approach Me with their mouths to honor Me with lip-service – yet their hearts are far from Me, and their worship [consists of] man-made rules learned [by rote] – therefore I will again confound these people with wonder after wonder. The wisdom of their wise men will vanish, and the understanding of the perceptive will be hidden.

Quick summary:

Lawrence O. Richards writes: “Jerusalem will be besieged and brought low (29:1–4), although God will at last fight against Israel’s enemies (vv. 5–9). Until then God’s people will be blind to the vision, for their hearts are far from God (vv. 10–16). One day the mockers will be destroyed. Then a shamed Israel will at last stand in awe of God and gain the understanding she now so tragically lacks (vv. 17–24)” (*The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed., S. 425).

Take note:

Jesus quotes verse 13 to describe the hypocritical Pharisees: “Then the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, ‘Why don’t Your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating bread with ritually unclean hands?’ He answered them, ‘Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commands of men’” (Mark 7:5-7).

The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day are guilty of the same empty formalism – if not the idolatry – that brought God's wrath down on Judah. In a similar manner, the Jews' rejection of Jesus as Messiah in favor of their traditions would lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple at the hands of the Romans in 70 A.D.

Jerusalem's Judgment and Reprieve (Isa. 29:1-8)

The name "Ariel" is obscure and could mean "altar hearth" or "lion of God." In any case, the reference clearly is to Jerusalem, as verse 1 confirms by calling it "the city where David camped" (see 2 Sam. 5:7, 9, 13) and as verse 8 confirms by identifying Ariel as "Mount Zion." "Many interpreters say Ariel means 'lion of God,' in which case the city is seen as a strong, lionlike city. Ariel may also be translated 'altar hearth,' as in Isaiah 29:2; Ezekiel 43:15-16. Jerusalem is the place where the altar of burnt offering was located in the temple. Though Jerusalem is where festivals were celebrated before God (Isa. 29:1), the city would be besieged and fighting and bloodshed would turn it into a virtual altar hearth" (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1078).

The Lord is going to use the city's enemies to bring judgment on her. Four times in verses 2-3 Yahweh uses the personal pronoun "I" to make it clear He is sovereign over the affairs of men. The Lord will "oppress Ariel," resulting in "mourning and crying." He will "camp in a circle" around Jerusalem and "besiege" it with "earth ramps" and "siege towers" – all for the purpose of bringing His people back to Him.

In the end, however, the Lord of Hosts will miraculously deliver Ariel from certain defeat. This is partially fulfilled in 701 B.C. as the Lord strikes dead 185,000 Assyrians encamped around the city (Isa. 37:33-37). But the gathering of nations (vv. 5, 7-8) and the spectacular signs (v. 6) suggest a later, and greater, event, likely God's deliverance of the Jews from her enemies at the time of Christ's return. Warren Wiersbe observes, "This is what prophetic students call 'the battle of Armageddon,' though that title is not used in Scripture (Rev. 14:14-20; 16:13-21). When it looks as though the city is about to fall, and the enemy armies are sure of victory, Jesus Christ will return and deliver His people (19:11-21). The enemy victory will vanish" (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 29:1).

Israel's Darkness Dispelled (Isa. 29:9-24)

This section of Isaiah's prophecy contrasts Jerusalem's present spiritual stupor with its future spiritual understanding. Like drunkards, the people stumble about, unable to grasp the reality of their situation as God's people under God's judgment. Their inability to discern God's message is itself a judgment from the Lord, who has poured out on the people an "overwhelming urge to sleep," and has shut the eyes of the prophets and covered the heads of the seers (v. 10).

The people are engaged in a cold and ritualistic form of man-made worship but do not honor the Lord with heart-felt adoration. Rather than devotion to God's law, they pursue a legalistic path to secure His blessings. This is a pattern often repeated throughout Jewish history, perhaps most clearly in the days of Jesus, who quotes Isa. 29:13 to the scribes and Pharisees who challenge His disciples' lack of conformity to the traditions of the elders (Matt. 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7). As a result of Jerusalem's cold-hearted worship, Isaiah says the Lord will take away wisdom from the wise men and understanding from the perceptive ones (v. 14).

The Lord then pronounces woe on those who believe they can perform their evil deeds in secret. Isaiah likens such people to clay pots challenging the creative power and wisdom of the potter. "You have turned things around," he says, "as if the potter were the same as the clay" (v. 16). The people are demonstrating through their actions that they know very little, while Isaiah reminds them that God knows everything. Isaiah returns to the theme of the potter and the clay in Isa. 45:9; 64:8.

Beginning with verse 17, however, Isaiah looks expectantly toward the future. The phrase "in just a little while" is a reference to the millennial kingdom. Some commentators believe these words refer to the destruction of the Assyrian army a few years after this prophecy (Isa. 37:36), but the promise of more universal judgment and blessing seems to fit the days of the Messiah better than Jerusalem's deliverance from an invading army. When the millennium comes, the deaf will hear and the blind will see (Isa. 32:3; 35:5). Jesus gives us a foretaste of that coming age in His miracles, which include opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. There also seems to be a spiritual application in this passage. Though the Lord is judging the people in Isaiah's day with a spiritual stupor, in the future He will open their spiritual eyes and ears so they understand His ways.

The attitude of God's people in Judah and Jerusalem will be transformed. They will no longer be humiliated by foreign domination or scuttled in their man-made plans for peace and security. Instead, they will honor the Lord's name and "stand in awe of the God of Israel" (v. 23). "The Lord's delivering them from Sennacherib was a foretaste of the ultimate deliverance they will experience. People who are wayward and who complain will change and will accept instruction. No longer will blindness prevail; then they will know God's ways" (Walvoord and Zuck, S. 1:1079).

Closing Thought

Warren Wiersbe comments: "Why were the people of Jerusalem so ignorant of what was going on? *Their hearts were far from God* (Isa. 29:13). They went through the outward forms of worship and faithfully kept the annual feasts ... but it was not a true worship of God (Matt. 15:1-9). Going to the temple was the popular thing to do, but most of the people did not take their worship seriously. Therefore, God sent a 'spiritual blindness' and stupor on His people so that they could not understand their own Law. Such blindness persists today (Rom. 11:8; 2 Cor. 3:13-18). *If people will not accept the truth, then they must become more and more blind and accept lies* (See John 9:39-41 and 2 Thes. 2:1-12.)" (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 29:1).

Chapter 30: Lips Full of Fury


Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Isaiah 30 likely takes place early in King Hezekiah's reign and is part of a series of woes in chapters 28-33 against those who oppose God's word.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry Hezekiah								

Key verses:

Isa. 30:27-28 – Look, Yahweh comes from far away, His anger burning and heavy with smoke. His lips are full of fury, and His tongue is like a consuming fire. His breath is like an overflowing torrent that rises to the neck. [He comes] to sift the nations in a sieve of destruction and to put a bridle on the jaws of the peoples to lead [them] astray.

Quick summary:

Isaiah summarizes what Israel has done to God and what God will do to Israel. The people make their plans without consulting God; they demand that the prophets stop preaching against sin; and they ask for more comforting messages. As a result, the Lord's judgment will fall on them like a bulging wall and they will be smashed like pieces of pottery. Even so, God calls His people to repent and return to the Lord, and He promises a day in which He will bring salvation to Israel. In that day He will comfort His people and hear their prayers; teach and guide them; give them abundant crops; defeat their enemies; and fill their hearts with joy.

Take note:

Isaiah's words in verse 10 have echoed through the ages. They are as much an indictment of the church today as a harsh rebuke of the Israelites in Isaiah's time: "Do not prophesy the truth to us. Tell us flattering things." The apostle Paul warns the Romans against divisive people in their congregation: "Now I implore you, brothers, watch out for those who cause dissensions and pitfalls contrary to the doctrine you have learned. Avoid them; for such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattering

words they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Rom. 16:18). He goes on to warn the young pastor Timothy of those who neglect the truth in favor of having their ears tickled: “For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will accumulate teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

The Egyptian Alliance (Isa. 30:1-17)

The chapter begins bleakly, with Isaiah comparing the citizens of Judah to obstinate children. The Lord already has made it clear that He will use Assyria to destroy Israel and to punish Judah, yet the leaders of the southern kingdom travel to Egypt, seeking an alliance against the Assyrian invaders. This is an act of rebellion against God and it will lead to Judah’s shame since Egypt does not have the ability to protect Judah from the Assyrian invaders (vv. 3, 5).

In verses 6-7, Isaiah describes the envoys from Judah who load their donkeys and camels with great treasures for the Egyptians and brave the dangerous Negev, where wild animals like lions and poisonous snakes lie in wait. But Isaiah calls feckless Egypt “Rahab Who Just Sits” (v. 7). “In Ugaritic literature Rahab was the name of a female sea monster associated with Leviathan (cf. Job 9:13; 26:12). Perhaps the hippopotamus, an animal that often sits in the water of the Nile doing nothing, represents that mythical water beast. Understandably Rahab came to be a poetic synonym for Egypt (and also for a demon behind Egypt) when God overpowered the Egyptian soldiers in the sea at the Exodus (cf. Isa. 51:9; Pss. 87:4; 89:10). So Egypt, Isaiah wrote, was good for nothing; she could not assist Judah in any way” (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1080).

The Lord then tells Isaiah to write this message on a scroll, which will serve as testimony against the “deceptive children” who may later claim they never heard God’s warning. They are “rebellious people ... children who do not obey the Lord’s instruction” (v. 9). They are unwilling to listen to the Lord and do not want the prophets to tell them the truth. In fact, they go so far as to shout, “Rid us of the Holy One of Israel” (v. 11).

Nevertheless, Isaiah confronts them with a stark message from the Lord. By rejecting God’s call to repent of their sin and trust Him, by relying on their own plans and by engaging the deceitful Egyptians, they would bring down judgment upon their heads. Isaiah likens this judgment to a cracked wall that suddenly collapses, and to shattered pottery whose pieces are so small they are no longer of value. They would be alarmed by the approaching enemy, and though they would flee on horses, the Assyrian horses would be faster and overtake them. In their crushing defeat, the survivors would stand like a banner on a hill – a warning to others not to trust in military might or political alliances.

The Lord's Mercy (Isa. 30:18-26)

These verses anticipate the coming of the Messiah and the spiritual and material blessings that will result from His reign. Although the inhabitants of Judah have turned away from the Lord, they are still His covenant people whom He desires to grant mercy, compassion and justice. Isaiah implores them to wait patiently on Yahweh. During times of calamity they will suffer hardship and survive on bread and water, but the day is coming when they will dwell securely on Mt. Zion and “never cry again” (v. 19). The Israelites will eagerly learn from their Teacher – the Messiah – and embrace the instruction of the prophets and priests. They will be sensitive to God’s Word, as if He were speaking softly to them, “This is the way. Walk in it” (v. 21). The people they will see their idolatry as God sees it and be repulsed. They will throw away their silver-plated idols and gold-plated images “like menstrual cloths, and call them filth” (v. 22).

Isaiah then describes what life will be like when the Messiah comes and their hearts are in tune with Him. The Lord will send rain and the earth will produce rich and bountiful crops. “Physical prosperity accompanies national piety; especially under the Old Testament. The *early* rain fell soon after the seed was sown in October or November; the *latter* rain in the spring, before the ripening of the corn. Both were needed for a good harvest” (Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, S. Is 30:23). In addition, the cattle will graze in open pastures and the beasts of burden will have plenty to eat. There will be ample fresh water flowing from the streams and fountains on every hill and mountain. Even the natural light will be increased. The moon will shine as brightly as the sun, which will glow seven times more brightly. Perhaps this is figurative language to illustrate God’s presence among and provision for His people (see Isa. 60:19-20; Rev. 21:23-24; 22:5). In any case, the same Lord who chastens His people with a rod of iron will bless them with His very presence as He “bandages His people’s injuries and heals the wounds He inflicted” (v. 26).

Yahweh's Burning Anger (Isa. 30:27-33)

Isaiah now returns to the present situation, prophesying that the Assyrian army, which surrounds Jerusalem, would be defeated. This is fulfilled in 701 B.C. as the Lord strikes dead 185,000 soldiers in a single night (Isa. 37:36). Notice how Isaiah contrasts the Lord’s mercy toward Israel in the previous section with his fiery anger toward Assyria: His anger is burning and heavy with smoke; His lips are full of fury; His tongue is like a consuming fire; and His breath is like an overflowing torrent that rises to the neck; He sifts the nations like a farmer shaking his grain to clear it of the smallest pebbles; and He puts a bridle in the jaws of the people to lead them astray (vv. 27-28).

This graphic imagery, depicting God’s defeat of Assyria, is continued elsewhere in Scripture to describe the Lord’s wrath on the day of judgment. For example, the apostle Paul says that when Christ returns He will take “vengeance with flaming fire on those who don’t know

God” (2 Thess. 1:8). And the apostle John describes the returning Christ as having eyes like “a fiery flame,” a “robe stained with blood,” striking the nations with a sharp sword coming from His mouth, and “trampling the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty” (Rev. 19:12-15).

God’s miraculous work on behalf of His people will cause them to break out in celebration, rejoicing as in the days of the three annual festivals in which they made their way to the temple on Mt. Zion. Meanwhile, the sulfurous breath of God will ignite a fire that consumes Judah’s enemies. The Assyrian army will be destroyed like a pile of wood or a sacrifice in Topheth (v. 33), an area in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem where children are sometimes sacrificed to the Ammonite god Molech (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31). In Jesus’ day the valley was a burning trash dump, which He used to illustrate the never-ending fires of *gehenna* – a transliteration from the Aramaic form of the Hebrew *ge-hinnom*, “Valley of Hinnom.” The apostle John continues this imagery of hell in Rev. 19:20; 20:10; 21:8.

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “Trust in God in such dire circumstances is a risk that is not easy to accept. It puts everything on the line for what often appears to be a nebulous hope that God will act. What does one have to do to truly trust God? Isaiah indicates the people need to (a) repent of their present rebellious acts; (b) rest securely in God’s salvation; (c) be calm rather than fearful; (d) rely on God’s heroic strength; and (e) stop trusting in human power (30:15-16).... Faith is not blind acceptance of something totally unknown; it is a confident relational walk based on spiritual knowledge that directs the will to act in reliance on the character and promises of someone who sovereignly controls this world” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 528-29).

Chapter 31: The Fire in Zion

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Isaiah 31 likely takes place shortly before 701 B.C., when the Assyrian army sweeps through Judah and surrounds Jerusalem. Hezekiah and his people are exhorted to trust God, not the Egyptians, for deliverance.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Timeline bar]							
Hezekiah	[Timeline bar]				[Timeline bar]			

Key verse:

Isa. 31:3 – Egyptians are men, not God; their horses are flesh, not spirit. When the LORD raises His hand [to strike], the helper will stumble and the helped will fall; both will perish together.

Quick summary:

Isaiah contrasts the futility of human resources with the strength and security of divine protection. King Hezekiah's advisors are pressing for an alliance with Egypt to defend Jerusalem against the Assyrians, but Isaiah implores them to trust the Lord. "Egyptians are men, not God; their horses are flesh, not spirit," the prophet reminds them (v. 3). "Assyria will fall, but not by human sword" (v. 8). The Holy One of Israel, who keeps His covenant, will rescue the capital city in stunning fashion, and His people will marvel at His glorious deeds (see. Isa. 37:36).

Take note:

Isaiah uses the imagery of animals in his efforts to convince Hezekiah and his advisors to trust the Lord. First, he rebukes the people of Judah for thinking that Egypt's impressive stable of battle-ready horses will deliver them from the marauding Assyrians. The Egyptians' horses "are flesh, not spirit," the prophet says (v.3), and the people would be wise to "look to the Holy One of Israel" and "seek the Lord's help" (v. 1). Then, in verse 4, Isaiah likens the Lord to a lion growling over its prey, undeterred by a band of shepherds who can only make

threatening shouts. Finally, in verse 5, the Lord is compared to “hovering birds” who keep a watchful eye on Jerusalem. He will protect, rescue, spare and deliver the city.

A Woe Pronounced (Isa. 31:1-3)

This is the last of four consecutive chapters that begin with woes against sinners among the professing people of God: Ephraim’s drunkards (28:1); Ariel’s unwitting leaders (29:1); Judah’s rebellious children (30:1); and now the southern kingdom’s covenant breakers. Isaiah reminds Judah of her Deuteronomic covenant with God, which specifically prohibits returning to Egypt or acquiring horses there (Deut. 17:16). Returning to Egypt has always been a temptation to the Jews (see Ex. 13:17; 14:11-12; Num. 11:5, 18) and King Solomon ignored God’s warnings against it (1 Kings 10:28-29).

Because God keeps His covenants, He will judge Judah for violating the agreement into which the people willingly entered after the Lord delivered them from bondage. Besides, the Egyptians would prove to be no help against the Assyrians. “They go down to Egypt for help in every exigence, as if the worshippers of false gods had a better interest in heaven and were more likely to have success of earth than the servants of the living and true God” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 31:1). Isaiah reminds them that “Egyptians are men, not God; their horses are flesh, not spirit” (v. 3). King David had it right when he declared, “Some take pride in a chariot, and others in horses, but we take pride in the name of the LORD our God” (Ps. 20:7).

The Lord’s Protection (Isa. 31:4-9)

The Lord assures His people that He is sovereign over the nations and will protect them from the Assyrian threat. Just as a lion growls over a herd of sheep and is undeterred by shepherds who make noises to frighten him away, so the Lord of Hosts will fearlessly devour the Assyrian army that encircles Jerusalem. Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord will shield Mount Zion from the advancing army of Judah’s enemy. Warren Wiersbe puts it this way: “Why should the Lord fear the Assyrians? Does a lion fear a flock of sheep and their shepherds? Do the eagles fear as they hover over their young in the nest? God will pounce on Assyria like a lion and swoop down like an eagle, and that will be the end! In one night, the Assyrian army was wiped out” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 31:1).

Since God will deliver Judah, Isaiah implores the people to turn from their idols and return to the One against whom they have rebelled. The prophet looks to the day when the citizens of Judah will reject the gold and silver idols they have sinfully made and worshiped (compare Isa. 30:22). “Their future hope in the kingdom should change their present behavior. The future reality should have an ethical impact on their lives” (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1081).

Isaiah reminds the people once again that the Assyrians will fall at the hands of God, “not by human sword” (v. 8). Seeing Judah’s battle standard and watching as the Angel of the Lord smites their once-invincible army, the Assyrian commanders will be terrified and flee (see Isa. 37:36-37). The Lord will make sure that the “fire ... in Zion” – likely a reference to the altar fires at the temple – will continue to burn (v. 9).

Wiersbe writes that there is a contemporary lesson in this passage: “As God’s church today faces enemies and challenges, it is always a temptation to turn to the world or the flesh for help. But our first response must be to examine our hearts to see if there is something we need to confess and make right. Then we must turn to the Lord in faith and obedience and surrender to His will alone. We must trust Him to protect us and fight for us. A friend of mine kept a card on his office desk that read: Faith Is Living Without Scheming. In one statement, that is what Isaiah was saying to Judah and Jerusalem; and that is what he is saying to us today” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 31:1).

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “This message confirms the central theological principle that it is foolish and sinful to depend on human power to bring deliverance from troubles. Human plans to manipulate a nation’s circumstances will inevitably fail, just as an individual’s attempt to determine his future without consulting God will end in frustration.... Grace is not earned or deserved; yet God richly provides hope for some through acts of divine intervention. Even the Assyrian soldiers who survived God’s destruction of their army had the opportunity to respond positively to the experience of seeing the powerful hand of God at work. By grace they had survived to tell the story about God’s defeat of the most powerful army in the world. Everyone who knows about the work of God has the opportunity of glorifying his name by telling others about his great deeds” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 536).

Chapter 32: A King will Reign Righteously

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Since the surrounding chapters address the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C., a date approximately one year prior to that event fits the broad setting of Isaiah 30-32. Isa. 32:10 indicates that Jerusalem will be assaulted in “a little more than a year.”

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Timeline bar]							
Hezekiah	[Timeline bar]				[Timeline bar]			

Key verses:

Isa. 31:14-15 – For the palace will be forsaken, the busy city abandoned ... until the Spirit from heaven is poured out on us. Then the desert will become an orchard, and the orchard will seem like a forest.

Quick summary:

In verses 1-8 Isaiah describes the righteous rule of the Messianic king, and in verses 15-20 he provides some detail about the work of the Spirit in that day. Between these comforting promises the prophet warns the “complacent women” of Jerusalem that they will soon experience Assyria’s wrath (vv. 9-14).

Take note:

Isaiah places his comments about the woes in Judah between two prophetic views of the future, one involving the reign of the Messiah and the other concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In verses 1-8 we see a glorious foreshadowing of the righteous king, and in verses 15-20 we catch a glimpse of the Spirit sent from heaven. Verses 9-14, however, bring us back to Isaiah’s day and record the prophet’s warning to Judah’s complacent women. This chapter is similar to others in the book of Isaiah in which God’s message of pending judgment is tempered by His wonderful promises of future blessing. Through it all we are reminded that the Holy One of Israel is a covenant-keeping God.

The Righteous King (Isa. 32:1-8)

Isaiah calls the citizens of Judah to look beyond their current plight to the triumphant Messiah, who will reign in righteousness. Even the rulers under Him will project Messianic qualities. Their just leadership will be like “a shelter from the wind, a refuge from the rain ... streams of water in a dry land, and the shade of a massive rock in an arid land” (v. 2). John the apostle also sees this marvelous day in his vision on the island of Patmos. Resurrected and glorified believers “will be priests of God and the Messiah, and they will reign with Him” – first for 1,000 years, and then “forever and ever” (see Rev. 5:10, 20:6, 22:5).

Warren Wiersbe writes: “In Isaiah 32:1, Isaiah writes about ‘a king’; but in 33:17, he calls him ‘the king.’ By the time you get to verse 22, He is ‘our king.’ It is not enough to say that Jesus Christ is ‘a King’ or even ‘the King.’ We must confess our faith in Him and say with assurance that He is ‘our King.’ Like Nathanael, we must say, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ (John 1:49, NKJV)” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 32:1).

In the age to come, people will see and hear the Lord clearly – a stark contrast to their present spiritual stupor. They will understand God’s Word and speak its truths profoundly (compare vv. 3-4 with Isa. 29:10-12). Fools and scoundrels will be exposed as the evil-doers they are. Their nobility and respect will be taken away. The people will see that the fool (Heb. *nabal*, “senseless” one) “plots iniquity ... lives in a godless way ... speaks falsely about the Lord ... leaves the hungry empty and deprives the thirsty of drink” (v. 6). In addition, the people will stand nobly for what is right, no longer falling victim to the scoundrel who “hatches plots to destroy the needy with lies” and takes advantage of the poor (v. 7). As D.A. Carson notes, “Above all, truth has ousted the fictions under which vice takes shelter” (*New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 32:1).

Complacent Women (Isa. 32:9-14)

In the shadow of Jerusalem’s wicked rulers are their aristocratic wives, whose complacency and self-interest make matters worse in Judah. They trouble themselves little about urgent political matters, preferring to indulge in their lavish lifestyles (see Isa. 3:16-23). Isaiah warns them that in “a little more than a year” the land and the cities will be desolate. This comes to pass in 701 B.C. when Sennacherib’s Assyrian army overruns the land and devastates it. The Jews surrounded in Jerusalem naturally are worried about future harvests, and Isaiah has a word for them (Isa. 37:30-31). But before the siege ends and God miraculously delivers Jerusalem, the city’s leading ladies will suffer a great deal.

John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck comment: “The first evidence of the judgment would be the failing of the harvest of grapes and other fruit, perhaps because the Assyrians would overrun the fields. Therefore because of the ravaging of the land the women would mourn. If

the noisy city to be deserted (32:14) refers to Jerusalem then Isaiah meant that the Assyrian attack was the beginning of the end for Jerusalem, which fell to the Babylonians 115 years later (in 586 B.C.). In that case Isaiah was not saying (v. 10) that the judgment would be completed in about a year but that it would *begin* in about a year. However, perhaps ‘the noisy city’ refers to any one of the 46 Judean cities Sennacherib king of Assyria claimed to have defeated” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1082).

The Spirit from Heaven (Isa. 32:15-20)

In the closing verses of this chapter, Isaiah turns his attention to the future ministry of the Holy Spirit, who will be “poured out” on the people, usher in an era of peace resulting from righteousness, and guarantee abundant crops. What a contrast between verses 14 and 15. From a forsaken palace and abandoned city to a thriving land of peace and prosperity, Jerusalem is revived by the divine presence of the Holy Spirit. It’s the same in the human heart. The unbeliever is spiritually dead, desolate and depraved until the Spirit makes him or her alive through regeneration (see Eph. 2:1-10; Titus 3:5-7).

The result of Spirit-produced righteousness is peace (v. 17). Lawrence O. Richards elaborates: “The Heb. word for peace, *shalom*, expresses a basic and vital biblical concept. The word suggests wholeness and harmony, that which is complete and sound, prosperous, healthy, and fulfilled. The word occurs over 200 times in the O.T. In narrative books it typically is used to describe an absence of hostility or strife. In the psalms and the prophets it goes beyond this, so that in at least 2/3 of the biblical references the word indicates a total fulfillment that comes when persons experience God’s presence. Isa. 32:15–16 portrays both the inner peace and material prosperity that will mark the joyful fulfillment of man’s hopes under the rule of the Messiah, God’s Prince of Peace” (*The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed. S. 427).

The prophet Joel also foresees the future ministry of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32), and on the day of Pentecost Peter declares that his fellow Jews are witnessing the beginning of that prophecy’s fulfillment as the Spirit falls on followers of Christ and they proclaim the mighty works of God in the languages of the world (Acts 2:16-21).

A foreboding message is inserted in verse 19: “But hail will level the forest, and the city will sink into the depths.” Some commentators say this is a word of warning to the Assyrians and the city of Ninevah. The “hail” is the Lord’s wrathful visitation (Isa. 30:30). The “forest” is the Assyrian army that surrounds Jerusalem and will be destroyed (Isa. 10:18-19, 33-34). Other commentators indicate that the destruction in this passage belongs to Judah, either in the days of Sennacherib’s invasion (701 B.C.) or 115 years later when the Babylonians utterly destroy the capital city of Jerusalem. In any case, “the basic principle expounded in this poem is that *peace* is not a thing God superimposes on a corrupt society: the ground must be cleared

and re-sown with *righteousness*, of which peace is the fruit” (D.A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 32:9).

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “The theological principle that Isaiah teaches is that true security and peace are by-products of righteous living, and righteous living is made possible through the gift of God’s Spirit and the rule of his just king. Security cannot be gained through human effort or the manipulation of a person’s circumstances, but it can be received as a gift because of the Spirit’s work in one’s life” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, p. 548).

Chapter 33: Judge, Lawgiver and King

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

Since chapter 33 is among the “woe oracles” extending from Isaiah 28-33, it seems best to place these events around 704-701 B.C., during the time the Assyrians invade Judah and besiege Jerusalem.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah's Ministry	[Timeline bar from 750 to 680]							
Hezekiah	[Timeline bar from 720 to 700]							

Key verse:

Isa. 33:22 – For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King. He will save us.

Quick summary:

The Assyrian army, the “destroyer never destroyed,” is warned of imminent divine judgment. Even though Assyria is terrifying Judah and surrounding nations, the Lord will soon rise up and show His might. As for the citizens of Judah, only those who pursue righteousness and justice will be spared. Finally, the glories of the Messianic Kingdom are previewed, with the King making Jerusalem secure.

Take note:

Some commentators have pointed to verse 22 as a model for America’s founding fathers in establishing the three branches of government: executive (king), legislative (lawgiver), and judicial (judge). While only the Messiah assumes these three roles with perfection, the “balance of power” suggested by this model serves as an excellent guide to sinful people striving to govern well.

Woe to Assyria – and Judah’s Sinners (Isa. 33:1-16)

Isaiah begins by addressing the “destroyer” and the “traitor.” The “destroyer” is Sennacherib who, along with his Assyrian army, is breathing down the necks of God’s people. Powerful, boisterous, swift and cruel, the Assyrians are sweeping across Judah, conquering the fortified cities and closing in on Jerusalem. They are building siege ramps and sealing off the city so that no one may enter or leave. It is becoming increasingly clear that unless God intervenes, all is lost. The “traitor” refers to those within Judah who want to buy off the Assyrians, as King Hezekiah once tried unsuccessfully to do (2 Kings 18:13-15), or form alliances with Egypt or other nations to protect them against the advancing Assyrian hordes. God’s word through Isaiah is clear: The destroyer will be destroyed and the traitor betrayed. Sennacherib has broken his agreement with Judah and invaded the country, and the Egyptians will prove unable to rescue the Jews. Yet in a single night God will strike 185,000 Assyrians dead on the hills surrounding Jerusalem.

While the clamor of Assyrian soldiers rings the city, a righteous remnant in Jerusalem prays for deliverance. Warren Wiersbe describes the scene as it unfolds in verse 2: “Isaiah had promised that God would be gracious to them if they would only trust Him (30:18–19), so a few devout people turned His promise into prayer. God spared Jerusalem for David’s sake (37:35) and because a believing remnant trusted God and prayed. Never underestimate the power of a praying minority” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 33:1). Verses 3-6 speak of the righteous remnant’s confidence in God and their praise for His salvation. Although Hezekiah had acted foolishly by using the temple treasury to pay off Sennacherib, the Lord forgave him and now Isaiah reminds him that “[t]he fear of the Lord is Zion’s treasure” (v. 6).

Verses 7-9 describe the dire circumstances in Judah during the Assyrian invasion. Judah’s bravest soldiers stand in the streets and weep bitterly as one fortified city after another falls. The nation’s envoys shed tears of helplessness as their diplomatic missions come to naught. The roads are treacherous, the fields and orchards are barren, and there’s no avenue of escape – except with the Lord. “Now I will rise up,” He declares. “Now I will lift Myself up. Now I will be exalted” (v. 10). Although the Assyrians are “pregnant” with plans to conquer Jerusalem, the Lord says they will “conceive chaff” and “give birth to stubble” (v. 11). Chomping at the bit, panting for yet another devastating military victory, the Assyrians will find their hot breaths to be like fire that consumes them in a back draft (vv. 11-12). As a result, people far and near will know that the shocking death of 185,000 Assyrians in a single night is the Lord’s doing and a demonstration of His supernatural strength (v. 13). “God is long-suffering with His enemies, but when He decides to judge, He does a thorough job” (Wiersbe, S. Is 33:1).

The miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem does more than bring glory to God among the Gentiles. It also causes fear and conviction in the hearts of the ungodly in Judah. The Lord does not free us of danger so we may continue in sin. Rather, “with You there is forgiveness, so that You may be revered” (Ps. 130:4). When the Jews awaken one morning to the sight of 185,000 Assyrian corpses on the hills outside Jerusalem, they realized the God of Israel is “a consuming fire” (v. 14; see Isa. 10:17; Heb. 12:29).

Isaiah then describes the kind of person God will bless: the one who “lives righteously and speaks rightly, who refuses gain from extortion, whose hand never takes a bribe, who stops his ears from listening to murderous plots” (v. 15). That person will “dwell on the heights; his refuge will be the rocky fortresses, his food provided, his water assured” (v. 16). This is not a universal promise of prosperity, for surely many godly people suffer extreme hardship and persecution (see Heb. 11:35b-38). It is, however, a reminder of God’s promise to bless Israel, contingent upon the people’s faithfulness to Him.

The Reign of God in Zion (Isa. 33:17-24)

The prophet now describes the prosperous land in which the redeemed one day will live, safely and securely in the majestic presence of the Messiah. They will remember the dark days of oppression at the hands of foreign invaders, including the Assyrians, and rest in the knowledge that their nation and its capital city are free from attacks by land or sea. Assyria’s defeat will be like a shipwreck, leaving abundant spoils for the Jews to plunder. In fact, the booty will be so great after the Lord strikes the Assyrian army (Isa. 37:36) that even the lame will have ample time to take their fill (v. 23). Peace and prosperity will come by the Lord’s doing, not by human strength or political alliances.

Verse 17 offers a marvelous contrast. While the residents of Judah now see King Hezekiah in sackcloth, harassed and humbled by the Assyrians, one day they will see Messiah in His beauty – a righteous King to whom the world is drawn, preventing the unrighteous from entering His city. Three times in verse 22 He is called “the Lord,” and three titles are given to Him: Judge, Lawgiver and King. This is the “perfect ideal of the theocracy, to be realized under Messiah alone; the judicial, legislative, and administrative functions as king to be exercised by Him in person (Is 11:4; 32:1; Jam 4:12)” (Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, S. Is 33:22).

Jerusalem during the messianic kingdom is described as “a peaceful pasture.” How different from Isaiah’s day in which Sennacherib surrounds the city with barbarous troops, seals it off and builds siege ramps against it. The day is coming, the prophet assures God’s people, when Jerusalem will be like a tent pitched by a broad river inaccessible to warships. “Jerusalem is one of the few great cities of antiquity that was not built near a river, but that will change during the millennial kingdom (Ezek. 47). Of course, the river symbolizes the peace that the Lord gives to His people (Isa. 48:18; 66:12; Ps. 46:4)” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 33:1).

Closing Thought

Matthew Henry comments: “When things are brought thus to the last extremity, God will magnify himself. He had seemed to sit by as an unconcerned spectator: ‘*But now will I arise, saith the Lord; now will I appear and act, and therein I will be not only evidenced, but*

exalted.' He will not only demonstrate that there is a God that judges in the earth, but that he is God over all, and higher than the highest. 'Now *will I lift up myself*, will prepare for action, will act vigorously, and will be glorified in it.' God's time to appear for his people is when their affairs are reduced to the lowest ebb, *when their strength is gone and there is none shut up nor left*, Deu. 32:36. When all other helpers fail, then is God's time to help" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 33:1).

Chapter 34: There will be Blood

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

There is not sufficient information to know precisely when Isaiah delivers the prophetic messages of chapters 34-35. It is clear, however, that these prophecies anticipate the Day of the Lord, when He will judge the nations and deliver His people. Some commentators believe chapters 34-35 serve as an “eschatological conclusion” (an end-times wrap up) to the woe oracles of Isa. 28-33, which could place this message in the reign of Hezekiah.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah’s Ministry								
Hezekiah								

Key verses:

Isa. 34:2 – The LORD is angry with all the nations – furious with all their armies. He will set them apart for destruction, giving them over to slaughter.

Quick summary:

Isaiah describes the judgments of the Day of the Lord in detail, including miraculous wonders in the heavens. In all likelihood, Edom is symbolic of the world powers that have opposed Israel and now must face the Jewish people’s “Judge ... lawgiver ... and King” (Isa. 33:22). “In the Day of the Lord, the Gentiles will be repaid for the way they have treated the Jews and exploited their land (Joel 3:1–17). ‘Zion’s cause’ may not get much support among the nations today, but God will come to their defense and make their cause succeed” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Comforted*, S. Is 34:1).

Take note:

Anyone who contends that Jesus is the consummate peace-love-and-joy hippie who taught “live and let live” and never spoke a harsh word or raised a hand in anger would do well to note how Isaiah, Jesus Himself and the New Testament writers depict the Messiah in both His first and second comings. Isaiah, for example, describes the Lord as “angry,” “furious,”

setting the armies of the nations apart for “destruction” and “giving them over to slaughter.” The “stench of their corpses will rise,” the prophet reveals, and the mountains will “flow with their blood” (Isa. 34:2-3). Jesus often expresses anger, especially toward the religious leaders of His day, and twice he violently drives the money changers from the Temple. A reading of His “woes” against the “scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites” in Matthew 23 reveals stinging rebukes against the religious elite of His day, and His parables of the kingdom of heaven lay out a tragic end for those who oppose Him (see, for example, Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50; 22:1-14) What’s more, His return will be violent and bloody as He punishes those who shake their fists toward heaven and fight against the rightful Heir to the world’s throne (see Rev. 19:11-21).

The Judgment of the Nations (Isa. 34:1-4)

The chapter opens with a call to the entire earth to “come here and listen.” No one is left out of this frightening message of God’s future judgment. He clearly beckons the “nations ... peoples ... earth ... and all that fills it ... the world and all that comes from it” (v. 1). What is so important that no one is exempted? “The Lord is angry with all the nations – furious with all their armies” (v. 2). In His wrath, Yahweh will slaughter countless evil soldiers, leaving their blood to flow in the valleys and their corpses to rot on the hillsides.

There will be wonders in the sky as well. “All the heavenly bodies will dissolve,” Isaiah writes. “The skies will roll up like a scroll, and their stars will all wither as leaves wither on the vine, and foliage on the fig tree” (v. 4). Catastrophic events in the heavens will accompany the Messiah’s return to earth to establish His kingdom (see Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Zech. 14:6-7; Matt. 24:29). However, it is difficult to know with certainty exactly when and how these prophecies will be fulfilled. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck comment: “Isaiah 34:4 may refer to the judgment of the sixth seal in the Tribulation (Rev. 6:12-13), or to the eternal state, after the Millennium, when the sun will not be needed (Rev. 21:1). Or perhaps Isaiah was speaking figuratively of a change in the whole power structure in the Millennium when human kings will be done away with and God alone will be in control” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, S. 1:1084).

The Judgment of Edom (Isa. 34:5-17)

Isaiah uses Edom as an example of the world, which will come under God’s judgment. The Edomites are descendents of Esau, Jacob’s older brother, and are perpetual enemies of Israel (cf. Ezek. 35; 36:5). As such, they are an appropriate representation of what the Lord will do to all nations that oppose His people. The Lord’s slaughter of Edom is depicted as “a sacrifice in Bozrah,” the capital city of Edom (v. 6). Modern-day Buseirah is located about 25 miles southeast of the Dead Sea and is a place animals in Isaiah’s day are slaughtered for sacrifice. The Jews’ practice is to offer sacrifices to God, but in this passage it is God offering the wicked as sacrifices. The Lord depicts His enemies as animals, who are sacrificed along with the fat (Lev. 3:9-11). These nations often slaughtered and sacrificed God’s people, so now the Lord sacrifices them.

Many Bible commentators believe this bloody scene depicts the battle of Armageddon in the last days. Warren Wiersbe writes: “Isaiah compares the Day of the Lord to *the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah* (Isa. 34:9–10; Gen. 18–19). This is a significant comparison because, just before the coming of the Lord, society will be ‘as it was in the days of Lot’ (Luke 17:28). Tar running like streams and sulfur like dust will keep the fires of judgment burning (Gen. 14:10; 19:24). The description in Isaiah 34:10 reminds us of the fall of Babylon (Rev. 14:8–11; 19:3). We should also remember that the fires of eternal hell, the lake of fire, will never be quenched (Mark 9:43–48)” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 34:1).

“Edom symbolizes in Scripture the ungodly (*cf.* Heb. 12:16) and the persecutor (*cf.* Ob. 10–14), the opposite and adversary of the church,” writes D.A. Carson. “The metaphor in vs 5–7 is a grim variant of the banquet scene (*cf.* 25:6), dwelling on the butchery behind the sacrificial feast and using [a] current idiom to show that the whole people, from ‘young bloods’ and leading citizens (7a) to the least and lowest (6), is doomed (*cf.* 63:1–6)” (*New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 34:1).

As a result of God’s judgment, the land will seem to be ablaze – her streams turned to pitch (a flammable tar-like substance) and her soil to sulfur. The land will become desolate, inhabited only by creatures that seek out more solitary confines. Owls, ravens, jackals, ostriches, hyenas, wild goats and other animals will abound as the land becomes overgrown and uninhabitable for generations. Isaiah uses an interesting name in verse 14: The “night monster” (NASB) or “screech owl” (HCSB), literally *Lilith*, is noted in ancient mythology as a female night demon that inhabits desolate places. The imagery here is used to illustrate the total devastation of the heathen lands.

The theme of divine vengeance dominates chapters 34–35, prompting some people to withdraw from the “angry” and “vindictive” God of the Old Testament in favor of a kinder, gentler New Testament God. Some even argue the Bible cannot be true since it depicts two entirely different Gods in the Old and New Testaments. Yet God is immutable, or unchanging, as Scripture makes clear, and He alone is the rightful Author of vengeance. Both the Old and New Testaments affirm the truth that the Lord is the “God of vengeance” (Ps. 94:1). In Deut. 32:35 the Lord declares, “Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay.” Sometimes God’s vengeance is carried out through human agencies (*cf.* Num. 31:2–3; Josh. 10:13). “Yet no individual has God’s permission to take personal revenge,” writes Lawrence O. Richards. “The reason is that vengeance is a judicial concept. It is reserved for God, as moral and spiritual Judge of His universe, to punish those who persistently reject Him, abandon His ways, and oppress the righteous. Typically vengeance is reserved for history’s end (*cf.* Isa. 63:1–6), and any present time is marked by a divine forbearance that provides individuals and nations with every opportunity to repent and to believe” (*The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed., S. 428).

In the New Testament, the doctrine of God's vengeance is expressed in the Greek words *dike* and *dikesis*. The primary meaning is "justice" and communicates the fact that justice is a judicial function reserved for God alone (Rom. 12:19). As in the Old Testament, vengeance in the New Testament often looks toward the end of human history (Rom. 2:1-11) and is sometimes graphically described (2 Thess. 1:5-10; Rev. 19:11-21). "The real wonder is not that God will certainly punish the unrepentant, but that He chose to vent His anger against sin on Christ rather than on us. Christ's sufferings for us forever disprove the notion that a God of vengeance could not also be a God of love" (Richards, S. 428).

Closing Thought

Matthew Henry comments: "As there is a day of the Lord's patience, so there will be a day of his vengeance; for, though he bear long, he will not bear always.... There is a time prefixed in the divine counsels for the deliverance of the church and the destruction of her enemies, a year of the redeemed, which will come, *a year of recompences [sic] for the controversy of Zion*; and we must patiently wait till then, and *judge nothing before the time*" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 34:1).

Chapter 35: The Return of the Ransomed

Prologue

Where we are:

Part 1: Judgment	Part 2: Historical Interlude	Part 3: Salvation
Chapters 1-35	Chapters 36-39	Chapters 40-66

When this takes place:

There is not sufficient information to know precisely when Isaiah delivers the prophetic messages of chapters 34-35. It is clear, however, that these prophecies anticipate the Day of the Lord, when He will judge the nations and deliver His people. Some commentators believe chapters 34-35 serve as an “eschatological conclusion” (and end-times wrap up) to the woe oracles of Isa. 28-33, which could place Isaiah’s prophecy in the reign of Hezekiah.

B.C.	750	740	730	720	710	700	690	680
Isaiah’s Ministry	[Shaded bar from 750 to 700]							
Hezekiah	[Shaded bar from 720 to 700]							

Key verse:

Isa. 35:10 – [T]he ransomed of the LORD will return and come to Zion with singing, crowned with unending joy. Joy and gladness will overtake [them], and sorrow and sighing will flee.

Quick summary:

“The glorious fact of the coming Millennium should serve as strength and comfort to all believers living in difficult times,” writes H.L. Willmington. “The deserts will bloom. The lame will walk, and the mute will shout and sing. The blind will see and the deaf will hear. A highway of holiness will be built” (*The Outline Bible*, S. Is 35:3-4).

Take note:

It’s important to keep in mind that while the millennium is a time of great prosperity and peace for the redeemed, it is not yet the new heavens and new earth promised in Scripture (for example, see 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Rev. 21-22). There is still the presence of “unclean” people, although they will not be permitted on the Holy Way (v. 8). There also are the foolish, even though they will be kept from going astray. And the animal kingdom is not yet totally tamed, despite the fact that God’s people are protected from the “vicious beast” (v. 9). We learn from other Bible passages that there will be sin and death during Christ’s earthly reign, although

the human lifespan is significantly lengthened and Jesus will tolerate no rebellion (Isa. 65:7-25). The primary reasons for joy during this 1,000-year period are Christ's righteous reign from the throne of David (Isa. 9:7) and Satan's imprisonment (Rev. 20:1-3). In short, the millennium is the most glorious time in human history, and yet it is just a foretaste of what's to come when God makes all things new (Rev. 21:5).

Life in the Perfect Age (Isa. 35:1-2, 5-10)

“The glory of this chapter is enhanced, if this is possible, by its setting as an oasis between the visionary wasteland of ch. 34 and the history of war, sickness and folly in chs. 36–39,” writes D.A. Carson (*New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, S. Is 35:1). In a familiar pattern, Isaiah follows a graphic depiction of judgment with a glorious foretaste of the millennium. Both nature and humanity are restored. The redeemed return to Zion on the “Holy Way” and are overcome with joy.

Note the specifics of Isaiah's vision of the perfect age:

- “The wilderness and the dry land will be glad ...” (v. 1). All of nature waits eagerly for the redemption in Christ's return (Ps. 96:11-13; 98:7-9; Isa. 55:12-13; Rom. 8:19-22). The beauty that today bursts through the thorns and thistles of fallen nature bears testimony of God's promise to free creation of the curse of sin (Gen. 3:17-19; Rev. 22:3). Verses 6b-7 provide further details of a redeemed plant and animal world.
- “The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon” (v. 2). Isaiah names three of the most beautiful and fruitful locations in the land, and yet when Christ returns even the desert will produce an abundance that exceeds theirs. There will be no more “parched ground” (v. 7) because the land will become a plush garden that bears testimony of Messiah's glory.
- “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy ...” (vv. 5-6). Jesus evidently refers to these verses to encourage the imprisoned John the Baptist that He is the promised Messiah (Luke 7:18-23). As Jesus' miracles confirm His deity and Messianic authority, they also provide a foretaste of the coming kingdom, in which complete health is the norm.
- “A road will be there and a way; it will be called the Holy Way” (v. 8). Isaiah often uses the theme of a highway (Isa. 11:16; 19:23; 40:3; 62:10). The highways are not safe to travel during the Assyrian invasion (Isa. 33:8), but in the coming kingdom age the Lord will make them safe and provide a special road called “the Holy Way.” Warren Wiersbe writes, “In ancient cities, there were often special roads that only kings and priests could use; but when Messiah reigns, *all of His people* will be invited to use this highway. Isaiah pictures God's redeemed, ransomed, and rejoicing Jewish families going up to the yearly feasts in Jerusalem, to praise their Lord” (*Be Comforted*, S. Is 35:1).

- “There will be no lion there, and no vicious beast will go up on it” (v. 9). No ferocious animals will hinder the redeemed from traveling the Holy Way to worship the Lord. Even the wild beasts will enjoy a unique period of God-ordained restraint during the millennium (Isa. 11:6-9; Ezek. 34:25; Hosea 2:18).
- “Joy and gladness will overtake [them], and sorrow and sighing will flee” (v. 10). Matthew Henry writes, “When God’s people returned out of Babylon to Zion they came *weeping* (Jer. 50:4); but they shall come to heaven singing a new song, which no man can learn, Rev. 14:3. When they shall *enter into the joy of their Lord* it shall be what the joys of this world never could be: *everlasting joy*, without mixture, interruption, or period. It shall not only fill their hearts, to their own perfect and perpetual satisfaction, but it shall be *upon their heads*, as an ornament of grace and a crown of glory, as a garland worn in token of victory” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, S. Is 35:5).

Life in the Present Age (Isa. 35:3-4)

Israel’s glorious future is the backdrop against which God’s people are called to live in the present. Although the Assyrians are besieging Jerusalem and the Babylonians will destroy it, the Lord promises vengeance, retribution and salvation. In light of these promises, God’s people are instructed to encourage the faint hearted and comfort those who are traumatized by Sennacherib’s invading hoards.

In much the same way, Christians today should live in the light of God’s glorious redemption. While we suffer pain, sickness, aging and death, the Lord has promised to redeem our mortal bodies and give us glorified ones (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:51-58). Though we struggle with sin, He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). And even though many Christians around the world are persecuted for their faith, they will be vindicated at the return of Christ (Luke 21:28; Rev. 6:9-11; 19:11-21). And when it comes to the Lord’s chastening, Christians today, like the citizens of Judah in Isaiah’s time, are urged to “strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but healed instead” (Heb. 12:12).

Closing Thought

Gary V. Smith comments: “There is no doubt about the theological principle that God will have vengeance on the wicked and violently destroy them and the earth where they live. His judgment is real, it is devastating, and it is final. If one can conceive of a world without divine support and care, that is the world that awaits the nations that will receive God’s wrath.... [I]n chapter 35 God offers an alternative world of fertility, joy, and gladness where he will reveal something of his marvelous glory. The theological principle here is that everyone should be encouraged to experience the salvation of God, no matter how weak or blind they are. God is not only able to remove blindness and strengthen the weak; he will also miraculously open the eyes of many. His kingdom will have abundant water, great fertility, and a holy highway for his redeemed people to come to Zion to worship him. Only those who return to God, only the holy, and only the ransomed will experience the joy of that day” (*The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 581-82).