

Sing a New Song

by
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The Scriptures record that God made man in His own image, making the man's body flesh and blood out of the dust of the ground. Man was free to choose what he would do, but he was responsible to God for the choice he would make. God planted a garden and put man in the garden to dress it and to keep it. Then God put a tree, with forbidden fruit, in the garden within man's reach and instructed man "Do not eat of it."

When tempted by Satan man disobeyed God, and ate the forbidden fruit. As a direct consequence man was doomed to die. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Paul points out that as a result all men are condemned to death, saying,

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Romans 5:12).

The Gospel tells us that Christ was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. This reveals that God always had in mind that His Son would die to save men from their sins. Forgiveness of sin was thus provided in the grace of God, because one day the Son of God would give His life a ransom for many.

The one requirement in this gracious arrangement was that the sinner should confess and forsake his sins. To help the sinner do this God revealed His law in the Ten Words to Moses. This code was given to help man know what sin looked like.

The law of God was always the same, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." God also revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai in the pattern of the tabernacle the procedure to be followed when a worshipper would come to God to be forgiven. The sinner was to bring a living sacrifice, such as a lamb or an ox or a dove, confess his sins over the sacrifice, which was then to be killed as a substitution for the sinner. When the ritual was completed the sinner was pronounced forgiven.

But the sinful nature of man was so incorrigible that in the course of time even this ritual of sacrifice in worship became superficial. Israel had been chosen as the people of God who would demonstrate to all nations how the grace of God would be available. But due to their sinfulness they had corrupted the very procedure that would have reconciled them to God.

In His mercy God sent prophets who preached to Israel, warning them that God is not mocked. Under their leadership there were occasional revivals of real faith in God. There was such a time in the time of Jehoshaphat, and again there was such a time in the days of Hezekiah, and again in the days of Josiah. But in time on each occasion the people slipped again into superficial routines that were not acceptable to God. In time they wore out the patience of God. Having warned them repeatedly; and having sent prophets to them who taught them and preached to them; and then having led them through experiences in providence wherein they were chastened, God had been faithful in seeking their welfare. But in spite of all these things Israel continued as they were out of touch with God.

God then revealed that He would destroy the nation of Israel. This was done when first the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians, and later the southern kingdom of Judah was taken captive by the Babylonians. But all the time while the judgment of God led into the destruction of both the northern and southern kingdoms, there were some individuals who truly believed in God. These humbly confessed their sins, and came to God to receive His grace and mercy. These people were called the remnant. Isaiah had preached to them and we remember these words in Isaiah,

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (Isaiah 1:18-20).

Here can be seen both the kindness and the justice of God, His grace and His judgment. God could be so gracious and call the people to Him with every promise, and yet so faithful as to warn them again with every statement about what He would do if they did not repent.

The remnant were the willing and the obedient who would count on God to bless them and to keep them. Even at the time when the prophets were warning the people of God that God would not accept superficial worship, the prophets were also preaching to the remnant about the grace of God that would be shown to them.

At one time a prophet would preach to the nation,

Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (Isaiah 1:10-15).

This was a stern message and this was what Isaiah brought to the people.

At the same time the prophet would declare the plan of God to save the remnant.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness (Isaiah 10:20-22).

And then we find the testimony of the remnant themselves. These were the true believers.

And in that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee (Isaiah 12:1-6).

Thus it was that while the great majority of Israel were offending God in their shallow, superficial, slipshod religious practices, some were truly repentant about their sins and were looking to God for His grace and mercy. These were the remnant; and they would be blessed of God. In this we can see a pattern of how things can and do happen among believers in Christ Jesus.

In the churches there are many who profess to believe, and who may have made public profession of their faith and have been baptized, but who are yet superficial in their procedures and in their activities. These will be disowned by the Lord. But true believers will be blessed.

We need to grasp for ourselves the fact that this goes on all the time. At the same time that some people are becoming more and more careless in their personal relationship with God, there are some true believers who honestly confess their sins before God, depend on His grace and mercy, and rejoice in the goodness of God. These are the remnant.

Paul writes to the Corinthians:

Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (I Corinthians 10:11).

In our reading of the Old Testament we get glimpses of the national history of Israel. And we get description of the personal experiences of individual men and women. But we should realize and always remember that the Scriptures were not written to give us the history of Israel nor the biography of anybody.

The Scriptures were written to set out the Gospel in such a way that a soul could understand what Jesus Christ accomplished in His death on Calvary, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven, His sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, His present ministry as our own High Priest in heaven, and His coming again to judge the living and the dead. These are the things we should learn. This is what the Scripture sets forth. It is when a soul sees, understands this truth, and knows all this was done so that the soul could hear the call of God and receive Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord, then the Scriptures have fulfilled their purpose. We read:

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (John 1:12).

That is what the Bible is all about.

Paul wrote:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4).

So we turn to the Old Testament to read and study, not primarily to learn about the nations of Israel, Judah, Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and others, but to gain more insight into an understanding of the way of God in Christ as He works His will in me to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We read the Old Testament from the believer's point of view. Our sins are forgiven because of Calvary. We are regenerated and brought into newness of life by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have been given the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide and strengthen us.

Believers in Christ have been admonished to

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

Because believers belong to Christ as members of His body, they want to be fruitful in doing His will. To do this they must know His will. To come to know His will they study the Scriptures as the Word of God.

Thus we come to the book of Isaiah to learn what will be helpful to enable us to understand the ways of God. We hold the record of what happened to Israel as written for our learning, and proceed to study it for its message for us.

We had noted that in the time of Isaiah the people of Israel had allowed their personal relationship with God to degenerate into formality. Isaiah wrote

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men (Isaiah 29:13).

Isn't that interesting? Even back in those days there were people teaching about the things of God and

doing it with human argument. God noticed this and He was very displeased with that. At the same time in Israel, even though the majority of the people commonly had come to do it this way, there were some who truly believed in God with real sincerity. The prophets spoke of these as the remnant.

In our congregation today we sadly recognize that there are many who worship God only with their lips. So many of our members do not even attend church. It is commonly held that a good church could expect the attendance of about forty percent of the membership. We all know how common it is for congregations to have no Sunday evening service. Many have even dispensed with the Wednesday evening prayer meeting. Family worship and the family altar have become something out of the past. Yet in every congregation there are some, a few people, who sincerely seek the face of the Lord. These are the remnant.

Isaiah wrote of the remnant,

There be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof (Isaiah 6:12-13).

In this figure Isaiah was indicating that even though in the course of the wintertime the leaves fall off the trees, so they look almost dead, yet in the tree there is a substance, there is life, and in the spring it will show up. The life that is in the tree makes that tree grow and bear more fruit. So Isaiah felt that in Israel there were some real believers who would be the life of the nation.

The prophet warned Israel that because of their hollow worship, God would destroy them. But at the same time they promised the remnant would be spared. Paul quoted Isaiah when he wrote:

Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved (Romans 9:27).

Paul carried this thought further.

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace (Romans 11:5).

Paul counted himself in that remnant.

It is common amongst us to use Paul's distinction of the carnal and the spiritual. We are prone to refer to a small minority in every congregation as the spiritual believers. The fact that all the others are the carnal members of the congregation is not so commonly stated, but it is obviously true. I would hesitate to make any judgment as to their eternal destiny.

And now we come to an important observation. The spiritual man is what he is by his faith. But faith is not innate. I mean by that, I am not born with faith. The Bible tells us "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." This is why we read and study and meditate upon Scriptures so that our faith might grow. This is one of the real reasons we come to church services. Truly those persons who do not come to church at all, or if they come in the morning they do not come to the evening service, or the week-day prayer meetings, show that they are not spiritually hungry. Frankly they do not feel any need. I am afraid that Isaiah would say about such that they are spiritually dead.

Thinking of Israel as the people of God we will note how the prophets ministered to the remnant. We will keep in mind that the remnant are as they are because of their faith, and that faith comes from the hearing of the Word of God. We will have special interest in what the prophet preached to the remnant.

In Isaiah chapters 40-66, Isaiah preached to say God will judge the careless worshippers, but He will save those who put their trust in Him.

Chapter 2 – Behold Your God (Isaiah 40)

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins (Isaiah 40:1-2).

This is the key note of the Word of God to the remnant. Because He is Almighty God, Sovereign, and Judge of all the earth, God judges sin and will destroy it. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But He is a God of compassion and mercy. He has planned to provide salvation for whosoever believeth in Him. John has written:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

We remember in humble worship that Christ Jesus came to give His life a ransom for many. It is because God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins that believers are delivered and are eligible to receive the grace of God. In thinking of the coming of the Son of God into this world we have in mind that He did not come to pass judgment upon the wicked, but He did come to save those who responded to His invitation, whom Isaiah called "the willing and obedient." The wicked are already condemned, but the believers need to be saved by the grace of God.

I have long been impressed by the structure of the book of Isaiah in relation to the canon of Scripture, as we have it in the Bible. I have no doubt that the Scriptures as written are inspired by God. Our Bible has two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament, which correspond to the two covenants, the covenant of the law and the new covenant of grace. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The Old Testament has thirty-nine books and the New Testament has twenty-seven books, making a total of sixty-six books. Students generally feel that chapter 40 in the book of Isaiah is the beginning of the second section. This would correspond with the major division of the canon, in that the twenty-seven chapters in Isaiah 40-66 addressed to the remnant would correspond to the twenty-seven books of the New Testament featuring the new covenant.

This correspondence is all the more striking when it is noted that as the New Testament opens with the ministry of John the Baptist, so chapter 40 opens with the very words that John used to authorize his own ministry.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (Isaiah 40:3-5).

Paul said:

John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus (Acts 19:4).

It is easy to see how repentance because of sin would be a proper preparation in the Gospel of forgiveness.

Isaiah then predicts the beginning of the message to the remnant, those who sincerely respond to God's call.

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God (Isaiah 40:9)!

This is so very important. At a time of confusion and conflicting voices, this word is strong and clear, "Behold your God." Look at God. "Behold" means not glance, not take a quick look; but behold!

That word means gaze, study, consider, think about God.

Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and is work before him (Isaiah 40:10).

That is the way Isaiah puts it. The first aspect of the coming of the Lord will be judgment. He comes as King, and He is the Ruler. After Isaiah said this about Him, we remember in the New Testament we read that with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ upon His return, He will come to judge the quick and the dead. One could read in II Thessalonians how the coming of the Lord, when He returns, is described there. He comes with a strong hand. His arm shall rule for Him. Here in Isaiah we have an amazing sketch of His mercy and grace.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young (Isaiah 40:11).

This is a graphic description of the saving work of Jesus Christ. He came to help human beings as they live. This aspect of the Lord is the basis for Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psalm 23:1-3).

The Lord does not force upon His believers what He thinks would be good for them, as much as He leads them to where they get what they need. His interest in the lambs is classic. When you read "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom" you are reminded of how Jesus of Nazareth said:

Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:14).

"He shall gently lead those that are with young," that is those who have young ones that they are carrying in their arms, or as it brings out the original "the ewes with the little lambs." His kindness to those that are caring for the very young helps us to see into the heart of God.

In the remainder of this chapter the prophet describes God in His greatness. He describes how marvelous God is, showing Him to be pre-eminent in the world which He made. But at the time, in all His prestige, when God is noted as being Creator and Sovereign, and in control of all things, He is seen as the kind, considerate, compassionate Friend in verses 10, 11 in this chapter. All the way through this chapter Isaiah sets out various aspects of God. This is what he brought to their minds.

We should remember these words were spoken to the remnant, spoken to believers. Someone might ask "If they believe already, why write to them some more?" Because faith needs to be nourished. The believer needs to keep working at it. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." The believer needs to strengthen his faith. And how is faith strengthened? By looking into the face of Almighty God. These people were the remnant, a very small minority among all the people. One sees even today in our churches a number of spiritual people. Spiritually minded people are usually a very small minority. It is to such Isaiah addresses himself. And he said to them that the important thing for them to do was to look at God. "Behold your God!"

After the prophet had called upon the remnant to behold their God, and he had given a brief sketch of the kind of person God is, he proceeded to describe the greatness of God in the universe. He began by pointing out that God is the Creator of all. God brought all that is in the universe into being. Since God brought all that is into being out of nothing, the prophet pointed out how this indicated the wisdom of God.

Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him,

and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding (Isaiah 40:12-14)?

The remnant knew from experience the might of Assyria and of Babylon, and in their history they knew of the might and the power of Egypt. The prophet emphasized now that in comparison to God, "the nations are as a drop of a bucket," altogether insignificant.

He then uses a figure of speech that may not be so obvious to everyone, saying the nations "are counted as the small dust of the balance." This refers to balanced scales when items are weighed by putting them in one dish on one side and then the weights for measuring are put in a dish on the other side. When the scales balance they tell what the weight is. To get an accurate weight a person would wipe out the dish, removing the small dust. That is what this figure means: just the kind of dust that you would blow out with your breath. That is all the nations are in the sight of God.

The prophet then makes the concluding comment, "Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing." The remnant are hereby encouraged to put their trust in God regardless of what the political, national, or international situation might be. Whatever the nations might threaten to do, God is far greater; and the remnant can find their security in Him.

In fact God is so great there is no adequate way to worship Him in a worthy manner. Israel had been trained to worship with fires of wood upon the altar, presenting animals as burnt offerings. But the prophet says it is just impossible to do enough in worship to be worthy of the great God. He writes,

And Lebanon (that is the part of the country that had forests of cedar trees) is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering (Isaiah 40:16).

Then the prophet summarizes his thoughts in one sentence.

All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity (Isaiah 40:17).

What does this mean to us today? This is saying that the United States of America, Russia, Great Britain, France, Germany, China, India in comparison to God are nothing, less than nothing, and vanity. The spiritually minded believer in Christ will not be impressed by national or international affairs. He will "Behold your God."

Then the prophet proceeds to compare the living God with the idols which men had conceived and constructed.

To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved (Isaiah 40:18-20).

In Old Testament times men imagined what God looked like, and built idols of wood and precious metals. The prophet derides such foolish attempts to think of God.

God is a living Being who is sovereign in His control of all that happens. So the prophet wrote again,

Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity (Isaiah 40:21-23).

The prophet pictures God: "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth." Some students have wondered whether this expression ought not to be taken to indicate that the earth was round. Isaiah then went on to say, "The inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers." Human affairs are really not so very important.

Almighty God is above all and He overrules the activities of the most important men: "That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity."

Once again the prophet challenged believers to esteem the absolute superiority of God by noting that it is God that has made and controls even the heavens.

To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth (Isaiah 40:25-26).

In view of all these considerations the prophet challenged the common unbelief in Israel. It had become popular to adopt a negative pessimism about God.

Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God (Isaiah 40:27)?

How could anyone doubt God in view of who He is and what He has done? The prophet seemed to be concerned that the remnant should not accept the popular view. Then Isaiah gave expression to a classic tribute to God's faithfulness. After he had said all these things about God to show how great He is, and had challenged Israel because of their unbelief, Isaiah again challenged them.

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isaiah 40:28-31).

This is a remarkable passage.

In this way the prophet portrayed what the remnant should keep in mind when they were thinking about God. Beholding the truth of God would strengthen them to draw nigh to God. As we think over what we have been studying in this chapter, we can see how the prophet had begun by pointing out that God is the Creator, that He made all things. Then Isaiah challenged the people to look out and look up into the stars, that God calls them by name and brings them into existence, and keeps them there.

The prophet then pointed out that God is in control of all the affairs of men; particularly stressing the fact that nations are as nothing. This is very important in a time when the world is impressed by nations and power. We can rejoice that the prophet said to the spiritually minded people "Look up, there is God." God knows all things and God can do all things. He has already created all things, and He controls all things.

Chapter 3 – No Other God (Isaiah 44:6-20; 46:1-13)

Israel was living among pagans. The pagans were prosperous, powerful. These pagans had their own ideas about life and about the world. Paul described the origin of their ideas about God when he wrote:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things (Romans 1:21-23).

As we read about these idols that the pagans had, we may well think that we would never be inclined to accept such ideas. But we shall see as we continue our meditation that we too have our own contemporary idols in our culture. The various nations developed their own ideas, giving their own names to the idols that they conceived. For many generations the pagans who lived around Israel worshipped Baal and Ashtaroah, the god of power and the goddess of pleasure. In the time of Isaiah there were new concepts brought in from the east with emphasis on astrology, occult practices, and so on. When everybody seemed to be accepting such Ideas it was natural for Israel to adopt such views.

The remnant were committed to worship God but the prophet undertook to nourish and strengthen their faith by showing them the fallacy of the popular ideas which dominated the public mind all round about them. Isaiah begins by reminding the remnant that their God is eternal and in control of everything. There is simply no room for any other god.

Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God (Isaiah 44:6).

The prophet pointed out that God can predict what will happen since He is the one doing all things. God has done this in the past as they very well know, and this the idols cannot do.

Isaiah then sketched the procedure followed in making idols. It is all so obviously the work of men's own hands. They should know in all good common sense that these images of wood and metal would not be able to do anything to help anybody.

I am reminded of Paul when he wrote:

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thessalonians 2:8-12).

There will be some who in thinking will be so affected that they will not be able to see the truth even when they are looking for it. Such persons will think they are following good judgment when actually they will be utterly misled.

Isaiah wrote about them:

They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand (Isaiah 44:18-20)?

This is a sad portrayal of persons who are completely deceived by their own actions and no longer are able to use good judgment because they are blind; and they do not know it.

Isaiah chapter 46, verses 1-13 is another portion of Scripture which records the prophet's argument with the remnant to demonstrate the obvious superiority of the true God in comparison to idols. Isaiah began by noting that the evidence of idol worship has dominated public life to where the people are gone into captivity. The prophet then issued a ringing challenge to the remnant to remember what they knew about God. Then Isaiah continued his argument by contrasting the dead lifeless idols with the living God who predicts what He will do, and does it. He is the sovereign God who controls events and brings His will to pass, even by using pagan people to do His will.

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it (Isaiah 46:9-11).

In this way Isaiah emphasized to the remnant the activity and the function of a living God. All the way through in carrying out this argument, Isaiah compared this living God with a stone or a tree or a metal image, pointing out that it is just ridiculous to compare the two.

The prophet continued his challenge to the remnant assuring them that even though they may personally be far from being righteous before God, God will personally bring His righteousness near to them. This is a remarkable line of truth that is brought out by the prophets of the Old Testament. The Old Testament presents a sad story of the failure of man to do the will of God, even when he was blessed, even when he had received the benefits of God. At the time when it would look as though Israel should be completely wiped out, God announces a new thing, variously described, sometimes called the New Covenant, He promises that He is going to do something else. God will send His own Son, His own Messiah, into the world who will actually live righteously, and then God will arrange that anybody who believes in Him can share in the righteousness of Christ, of the Messiah. Thus God will personally bring His righteousness near to them. They could not be righteous in themselves but He will enable them to be righteous.

There seems to be here a promise that God will bring the Gospel to His people for His own glory.

Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory (Isaiah 46:12-13).

This seems to echo a theme which the Old Testament prophets repeated again and again. At a time when Israel had fallen under the influence of the pagans God will do a new thing. You remember a verse in the Old Testament Scriptures when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Lord will raise up a standard against him. Instead of working with Israel to get them to be righteous by their own conduct, God will bring salvation by sending Messiah, the Christ, His chosen Servant, to perform righteousness perfectly and make it available to the remnant.

This in its own way reminds us even in the New Testament of the words of the Apostle Paul when he was writing about the Jewish people and was deploring the fact that they could not see the Gospel.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Romans 10:1-4).

Isaiah has been challenging the remnant to fix their attention upon God as He is the only living true God.

It would be so natural for us to feel that warning about idols belongs to other times and other cultures than ours. "Surely no one worships idols today," but such an impression only reflects that we do not understand what an idol is. What do we have in mind when we refer to God? We have not seen Him. We do not know Him by His looks. Then what do we have in mind? Is it not true that we think of God because of His works? So let us consider this in the problem of creation.

Spiritually minded people understand this very well and they will say simply "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In the book of Hebrews we read:

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Hebrews 11:3).

This is what the spiritually minded person believes.

But all men do not have faith. The problem of creation is before them; and ideas have developed in the minds of unbelieving men by way of theories as to how things came to be as they are. Throughout human history men have proposed various ideas. In our time the dominant popular theory is called "evolution." There are many different forms, but in the main the idea is that the universe has evolved into its present structure as a result of inherent natural forces. Such a view leaves much unanswered. How did it all start, and how was this evolving principle put in there, and how does it work out? Where will it all end? These are questions that are unanswered. But in spite of such obvious loose ends the theory is still held to be true by many people.

Generations ago men worshipped the sun, the stars, the rivers, the trees, and we smile indulgently at what we call their ignorance. They built altars to Baal, the god of natural power. And we smile indulgently. But now men propose evolution and rest their minds in the smug assurance that they know the truth. Actually they are assuming that the universe has made itself what it is.

Recent generations indicated "science" was the answer. Actually science is only a procedure, a point of view. It is the scientist that makes the difference. Despite the fact that no acceptable argument has ever been advanced to support the theory of evolution, this theory is still held by many.

And we live in a time and place where evolution is taught in schools as if it were true. And this is done where the teaching of the Gospel is not even permitted. Do you realize this means that in place of believing in God, people are believing in nature? The spiritual person, and this would be the one that Isaiah would call a member of the remnant, must face this challenge in his own heart that when he thinks with reference to the whole world and says "God", the public says "evolution."

In the matter of achieving satisfaction, spiritual persons are guided by Scripture. "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." A spiritually minded person finds his joy in the Lord, and that is where his strength is. But this is totally ignored by the culture in which we live.

In ancient times people sought satisfaction in the worship of Ashtaroth, the goddess of natural pleasure, sharing in the dances and the ritual procedures that took the worshippers out of themselves by indulging them in the interests of their own appetites and desires. Jesus of Nazareth said, "I delight to do thy will, O God." But our culture that we live in emphasizes natural pleasures.

For many people the pleasures are in satisfying what is often depraved appetite, drinking alcohol, using drugs. For many the pleasures are in satisfying the imagination, thus we have theatres, and now TV. Amusements and sport have become commonly accepted as the way to enjoy yourself. And you can see how different this is from the Scriptures that say, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice."

No doubt there are some who find pleasure in their work, and have built large factories and offices. Only a little reflection will bring to mind how acceptable it is today to play golf instead of going to church, to buy football tickets instead of giving to missions, to work extra hours on the job instead of going to prayer meeting. I am talking about the fact that a person who is a believer today, a spiritually minded person living in the world today, has to fight against these influences. Even as in the days of Isaiah the people of Israel had to fight against pagan influences.

Then there is the problem of security. Spiritual persons trust in the Lord. But we find that for many the human intellect is considered the important thing. Consider the millions our society spends on university buildings and maintenance. Despite the fact that the universities are often definitely anti-spiritual, people will scrimp and save and slave to send their children through college. And this is often done by well meaning parents despite the high casualty rate in ruined faith, which happens so often as we all know so sadly. It is a matter of in whom we trust and how we align our priorities.

Some may even think that religion may make the difference; and so they have religion without having any spiritual content. Thus we have on occasion elaborate church buildings, with extensive programs, and ornate services for people who despise evangelism and who ridicule being born again. On every side people depend upon their own judgment and strength, indulging themselves; while ignoring

the Gospel of salvation, even ridiculing the work of the Holy Spirit.

With all this in mind, we can understand what Isaiah meant when he was arguing with the people that there is no real comparison between God and idols. It is not easy for us to realize, but I want to remind you of this fact, that back in those days the great majority of people worshipped idols. That was the popular thing to do. If you were one in the community and going with them, you would be swept into it. You would think like they thought, and you would do what they did.

A few maintained their faith, these were the remnant. They did not go along with the crowd. They held out. Now consider the present day. What do you think of people today who would not go to a high school football game because that was the evening they had Bible study? Wouldn't you think that was strange? Imagine people who would not go to see a football game because the money they would have spent for that ticket, they had just given to advance the Wycliffe Translation of the Bible in some foreign country. Can you just think what folks would say about that? Well now that is exactly the thing that Isaiah was talking about when he was urging the remnant to keep in mind that their faith was in God, the living God, and not in any idol of human imagination.

Chapter 4 – God's Steady Will (Isaiah 43:26-28; 47:1-11; 48:8, 17-19; 51:17-23)

In our study of these passages from the book of Isaiah we shall be looking at an aspect of truth that is so often neglected. The public generally does not know what is revealed in Scripture. The common approach in seeking to win a soul to Christ is for the evangelist to declare and to emphasize the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who came to seek and to save the lost. We often pass by without comment the primary fact that God is Creator, Sovereign, Judge of all that is. While we rejoice to hold that the cross of Calvary and the empty grave point to the great revelation of the Gospel, we need to remember that the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Great White Throne, are equally real in Scripture. Isaiah wanted the remnant of Israel to remember "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches (Isaiah 43:26-28).

The immediate context, starting at verse 22, is a reminder of how Israel had turned away from God, but earlier the prophet had announced God's plan through Christ.

Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert (Isaiah 43:19).

In other words the Lord is going to do something new and different. In 43:22-24 the word of God distinctly shows how Israel had sinned in ignoring God. But then the prophet reveals these words:

I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins (Isaiah 43:25).

This is the promise of God that points directly and very clearly to the Gospel. The remnant would hear this word which Isaiah is preaching because they listen to God; and so the prophet instructs them.

There is no question about the sin of Israel nor about the judgment of God. We can rejoice to know that grace is available even though sin and judgment are real. In chapter 47 the whole chapter is given over to a message about Babylon, in which the prophet announces the Word of God upon Babylon. Some-

times we wonder whether a minister of the Word of God should ever direct his words to the world in which the true believer lives. Here is a case in point.

Isaiah addresses Babylon directly. He begins by announcing that Babylon will be humbled in the judgment of God. The prophet recounts that God chastened Israel by letting Babylon conquer, but he noted that in conquering the Chaldeans were cruel.

I was wroth with my people, I have polluted mine inheritance, and given them into thine hand: thou didst show them no mercy; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke (Isaiah 47:6).

Babylon was proud in their dominance over Israel and now God will judge them. Again Isaiah spells out this judgment. Speaking to Babylon he says:

For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know (Isaiah 47:10-11).

Isaiah follows this by taunting them to seek help from their pagan religious practices and concludes by saying to them "None shall save thee."

In chapter 48 the prophet reports God speaking to Israel, again pointing out their sin.

Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb (Isaiah 48:8).

Isaiah again focuses attention upon Israel, by reminding them of their sinfulness. God knew that they would be like that, sinful.

We can see the Gospel in all of this. When God created man He knew that Adam made of the dust would sin. He knew that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. His Son was Christ, slain before the foundation of the earth. But He knew too what He, God, would do. He would send His Son to die for the sins of the whole world, so "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is significant that Isaiah wanted the remnant to remember this lest they fall into the snare of trying to qualify for salvation by being good enough. "There is none good, no not one."

When a believer is being blessed out of all proportion of what he actually deserves, he can be tempted to think that this blessing is something he earned, or that it will come upon all men naturally. Now both of these ideas are not true. The remnant will be blessed in the grace of God because they humbly believe in God and praise His holy name. It is the eternal purpose of God to bless His people who have responded to His call.

The prophet describes the blessing Israel could have had if they had only obeyed God's Word.

O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea: thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me (Isaiah 48:18-19).

This is so much like the lament of Jesus of Nazareth over Jerusalem. You will remember in the New Testament we read:

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes (Luke 19:41-42).

The remnant however do know and they are blessed with the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

In 51:17-23 there is again given another version of the glorious Gospel promise. Jerusalem had been chastised by Almighty God the righteous Judge. And God's people should never forget that they were worthy of punishment; but God's plan was to save the remnant to His glory.

Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out. ..These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee? Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God. Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine: Thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over (Isaiah 51:17-23).

And so the remnant was to understand that while the distress of Israel was their due in the righteous judgment of God, and while there was no hope that Israel in their own efforts could ever work out of the predicament that followed the judgment of God, God would do something new, something totally unexpected. He would send His Messiah to save the remnant by perfectly doing God's will and giving Himself as a Sacrifice that the believers might be saved. This was going to be the hope of the remnant.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (I Corinthians 10:11).

This is the way Paul puts it. In another place Paul wrote these words:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4).

With this in mind we look into this aspect of Isaiah's prophecy to learn what it means to believers in Christ.

In understanding anything we make distinctions, and in looking into the Old Testament material, such as the book of Isaiah, we should take note of several different groups of people: first, the pagans, mostly Babylon at this time; second, Israel, the nation as a whole, the historic people of God; and third, the remnant, individuals in Israel who truly, sincerely sought God's blessing by humbly repenting and hearing His Word from His prophets. Malachi speaks of such persons when he writes:

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name (Malachi 3:16).

Ezekiel told how in a vision of Jerusalem he saw the Lord send a man with a writer's inkhorn into the midst of the city with this instruction:

Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house (Ezekiel 9:4-6).

That is the way Ezekiel wrote it. We have these three groups in our midst today. First, the great vast majority of society who make up the world. Second, people affiliated with religious organizations, churches, synagogues, temples. And third, a few spiritual persons who are born again and live in the Spirit.

In Isaiah chapters 40-66 the prophet Isaiah was preaching to those individuals in Judea, in Jerusalem, who sincerely in repentant humility sought the blessing of God in His grace. Such persons live according to their faith. But faith is not some exercise of their will as any person might choose: faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Faith is the matter of knowing the Word of God, the

promises of God, and believing them to be true, taking them as real. The Word of God does have gracious promises for all who repent and respond to the call of God.

But the Word of God also has warnings to the disobedient. We should recognize that God deals with all men. He is the Creator. He made all men. He provides for all men and every man is responsible to God for all the deeds of his body. The law of God applies to each person. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." And Paul goes on to write:

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Galatians 6:8).

Here is stated clearly the great difference in living. One acts as he feels he wants to in his own flesh, his own human nature; whereas the other acts as he is led by the Holy Spirit of God. We need to remember that salvation is not something we achieve nor something we earn. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. But just now in these passages from Isaiah we are impressed to remember that the living God acts with the carnal as well as with the spiritual, though He acts differently.

We are so accustomed to emphasizing how He acts with the spiritual, which is graciously, that we often leave untouched and many times unsaid, how He acts with the carnal, which is in judgment. In the parable of the prodigal son we read the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country and there wasted his substance with riotous living. When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. We should now note that God was active throughout all of this. God does work in grace and in mercy, but it is also true that God works at all times.

God makes beans grow in the garden, yes; but God also makes the weeds grow in the garden. In our telling the Gospel story we rejoice to emphasize His grace, but the Word of God also emphasizes His righteousness. In our time it often happens that a young college student will come from a home where the Bible is read, where prayer is offered, and where the family attends worship services in church. Such habits are an inheritance. In college the student may neglect the Bible reading, may discontinue the praying, and no longer go to church. Without nourishment faith gets weaker and the student no longer believes in God. Other ideas will be entertained. Human theories about the universe, religious ideas from the Orient, occult practices, and self-indulgence leading into addiction to drugs, alcohol, sex abuse will come into the student's life with disastrous results. God is working in this too. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It is true that God blesses but it is also true that God curses.

In the early history of Israel as a nation, the children of Israel were led into the land of Canaan and given strict instructions to stamp out the Canaanites, lest these pagans should mislead the people of God. As events unfolded Israel tolerated some of the Canaanites. Through these the children of Israel were led away from God with pagan practices.

This brought definite action from God.

And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel (Judges 2:10).

That is the way it happened with the children of Israel. There was one generation that was led by Moses and afterwards by Joshua. They knew the great things of God. Their elders whom they had, their leaders from among the people, who knew Moses and Joshua, knew the things of God. But time passes. Moses died, Joshua died, these elders died, and then the record is simple and plain: "There arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord." That means they did not respect Him, and did not appreciate Him. The children of Israel were turned away to worship pagan gods.

And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: that through them I may prove Israel, whether

they will keep the way of the Lord to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua (Judges 2:20- 23).

This is an amazing thing. Yet this is the record, and it emphasizes to our hearts that God is not mocked. Isaiah knew this very well.

In this section which we are studying we have dwelt upon some very sobering thoughts. In the first place God's people may become formal and superficial in their worship practices toward God. We cannot stress it too much, that if I want to have faith, I need to feed it. If I want to be able to rejoice in my faith in God and have the blessing of God, I need my faith to be strengthened. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." We have noted the first thing that Isaiah underscored: God's people may become formal, superficial in their worship of God. God will bring chastening to turn them to Himself. God will allow pagan forces to despoil His people, to rob His people. Yet God will provide salvation for the remnant. Because in all of the experiences that we read about there will always be some people, a few individuals, who will continue to believe in God. These are the remnant, who are to be blessed.

Chapter 5 – The Surprising God (Isaiah 48:1-11; 43:14-21)

As we approach this study it will be helpful to keep in mind the revelation of the New Covenant. There are two levels of reality recognized in the Bible, the natural and the spiritual. One is visible and occurs in time and space, the other is invisible and occurs in eternity and infinity. Paul in discussing the resurrection of the body wrote in I Corinthians these words:

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption (I Corinthians 15:44-50).

Thus we can understand that when God created Adam and fashioned his body out of the dust of the ground, this was not the final phase of His plan for man, since flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. God knew that man would sin, and the Son of God was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

The Scriptures reveal the unfolding plan of God to set up His Kingdom where His will would be done. And so we read:

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Galatians 4:4-5).

Jesus of Nazareth came saying,

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15).

When Nicodemus heard Him preach, he asked how this would ever be possible. And he was told

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

Paul said about this:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (II Corinthians 5:17).

This aspect of God's work of salvation was not manifested in Old Testament times but was predicted by the prophets. Peter wrote:

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the suffering of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into (I Peter 1:10-12).

Jeremiah revealed the New Covenant which would be the basis of this new relationship with God. Jeremiah wrote:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

And this is what Isaiah had in mind when he preached to the remnant the glorious news of the New Covenant which God would reveal in Christ.

The New Covenant is not only new, it is different. The first covenant, the Old Covenant, was based on the law of God: blessing followed obedience. The Ten Commandments were given to guide the willing soul into acceptable conduct. But the covenant failed because of the sinfulness of the flesh. So God reveals His surprising plan. He will set up His Kingdom in His grace in the Spirit. He will send His only begotten Son into the world to fulfill all the requirements of the law and to share His righteousness with "whosoever believeth in Him." Where there was no prospect but doom because of man's incorrigibly sinful flesh, God performs the surprise. He makes blessing available in eternal life as a gift through Christ Jesus.

In Isaiah chapter 48 verses 1-11 the prophet reveals the Word of God to Israel. He reviews what God had done to help Israel keep the things of God in mind, and then reviews the incorrigible aspect of Israel's sinfulness. In spite of all that God had done to help, Israel persisted in departing from God. In view of the hopelessness of the situation God announced that He would initiate a surprise operation as a work of God Himself.

Isaiah spoke to Israel as a people who claimed to belong to God but who were actually far from Him, saying,

. . . which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness (Isaiah 48:1).

One of the evidences of the superiority of God over the idols was His ability to predict the future, and then His action in fulfilling His prediction. This should have helped Israel to draw near to God. Isaiah revealed the Word of God saying,

Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I showed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them (Isaiah 48:4-5).

Yet Israel was not impressed. In spite of this they did not turn to God. And Isaiah goes on to say:

Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb (Isaiah 48:8).

And then comes the surprise. One would expect that God would act in judgment. This would be His usual righteous action, but despite their incorrigible sinfulness He will not destroy them as they deserve.

For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another (Isaiah 48:9-11).

Israel will not get any credit from the testimony of the remnant, their blessedness will be a gift from God by His grace. Spiritual persons are not the consequences of any human efforts. And this is the surprising thing about God. This is what we need to keep in mind when we are thinking along the line of what the Old Testament has to reveal.

The Old Testament shows us in many instances that human beings, even when they have known God, even when God has been dealing with them graciously and kindly, simply do not have it in them to be obedient to God in a way that is acceptable to Him. And this being the case, the amazing thing is that while it is true that the soul that sinneth, it shall die; and that the sentence of death came upon all men, so that all human beings are facing doom, and Israel was included; while this is true, it is also true that God had in mind that He would keep His promise to Abraham. He also had in mind that He wanted to bring mankind through to personal fellowship with Him. This was the purpose of God.

It looked as though with the sinfulness of Israel that God's plans would fail. For this reason, of all the people on the face of the earth, those who knew the most about God were Israel, and they could have, or should have, been able to be pleasing in His sight. But they were not. If God had acted in righteousness and in judgment according to His own integrity they would have been destroyed. This was in the picture.

But there was the aspect of the grace of God. It is surprising in light of the judgment that should have gone out upon Israel. It is an aspect of the grace of God that He provides a way of salvation. This is not another chance. This is a different thing. And we shall be seeing as we go along in our study that He is going to lift them out of the natural into the spiritual. He has in mind that He is going to do something for them beyond anything that they could ever imagine.

There are those who hear the Word of God and those who do not hear. This is like saying that there are the living, and there are the dead. With reference to the Word of God there are some who receive it as for themselves, and there are others who do not receive it.

Jesus of Nazareth warned in His words:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

Each person should soberly face the simple truth and ask a simple question, Which group am I in? Jesus of Nazareth gave a further warning that I fear is often ignored by common consent, when He said,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21-23).

Thus we see the truth, not only that there are two classes of people before God but each class has its own experience and destiny.

People are not divided into the good and the bad, because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no not one. They are divided on the basis of their relationship with Christ, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:12). We can remember the parable of the foolish virgins. This tragic word should be plain to everyone. It is

possible to go through all the motions and still be left out. Holding a pen in hand is not sufficient for writing, there must be ink in the pen.

We should remember that those who are in the blessed group did not get there by qualifying by any virtue or conduct of their own. Being blessed is not something we earn. We must remember the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is what Isaiah is emphasizing to the remnant. They are going to be blessed of God and not because they earned it, but because God planned to glorify Himself through Christ.

This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise (Isaiah 43:21).

God was going to do it and if there was any praise, any glory, in connection with it, that would belong to God. This is a remarkable background to the Gospel. We do not earn our way in, we receive it. It is given to us. All we need to do is to believe in Him.

In our day and time it is very easy to make a mistake in understanding who actually are the people of God. In a general way it is easy to think that it would be the people who are on the church rolls as members. Thus a congregation of 400 members can be looked upon as a company of 400 believers in God, assuming that each church member belongs to the body of Christ. But this would be a false assumption. There are many church members who do not even know the Gospel, let alone believe it.

Some might think it would be those who come to church, but in many cases they would be wrong. People come to church for various reasons, not all of them spiritual. Finally some may think it would be such as are busy in church work, such as Sunday School teachers, circle chairmen, church officers, etc. But this could also be an error. Jesus of Nazareth made this plain. You remember I just read to you, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

In thinking of this passage I wonder whether or not we could just pick it up and hold it before us. This is telling me that just because I am even in church and may even be active in church, just because I share with the other people in the church work, is no evidence, is no basis, for me to think that I am going to have any entry into heaven. I will need to know Him. It is when we know the Lord Jesus Christ that these things come to pass. And yet there are those in the church who truly do belong to God. There are souls who really understand and believe that Jesus Christ died on Calvary's cross for their personal sin, and that He gave His life a ransom for many and for them. They know that Christ died for them to set them free, that He has pardoned them in His grace. They consider they are not their own. They have been bought with the precious blood of the Lamb. They have humbly received the Holy Spirit to be their Comforter and Guide with them forever. They count their citizenship as in heaven. They are looking for the Lord to return to openly establish the Kingdom of God.

You see coming into the presence of God is going to be only on God's terms. God's terms, which He has set out in Scripture. Almighty God has given everything into the hands of His Son, Jesus Christ. Those who belong to Him are in, and those who do not belong to Him do not get there. These genuine believers are the persons who share in Bible classes. They take part in prayer meetings. They seek to win souls to faith. They support missions. They pray for their own family members who do not believe, and who do not serve the Lord. Such persons are often considered narrow. Sometimes they are called fanatics, because their desire to please the Lord in their conduct causes them to act and to talk differently from the majority of others. But these are they that belong, and they are the ones that are in.

Of course there are many in the community as a whole who make no profession of faith in God at all. They may tolerate the Gospel for others, though some actually oppose it, but largely they generally ignore the Gospel. Church members and real believers live in this society and are under the influence of

such popular ideas.

In Isaiah's time the pagans had become dominant. First Assyria overwhelmed Israel, then Babylon had conquered Judah. And now Persia was coming in like a flood. Israel was no match for the power of the pagans. But Isaiah prophesies of God's plan for the remnant. Those who believe in God, who repent of their sins, who look to God for help will be finally brought into blessing.

There was an earthly development that showed how God would overrule, when Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon, and allowed the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. But for our understanding we recognize the Gospel as God's plan to bring His believing remnant, the true believers, into heavenly blessing, into eternal life. I hope that this does not seem to be too complicated.

Remember we are studying now the surprising God, and we are noticing that He is surprising on two counts: there will be people who assume because they were following certain principles of conduct and seeking to establish themselves in some virtuous fashion, that their good intentions would be acceptable to God, and that God would naturally receive them for that reason. That is a false assumption. Almighty God realized that no human being would be able to come into His presence in himself. Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God. And so He sent His Son into this world to be made of flesh and blood and while the Son was here He opened the way for anybody believing in Him to come into the presence of God and become a child of God.

God was a surprising God in that He brought destruction upon the pagans and deliverance to the remnant. When God brought destruction upon the pagans it was not by anything that Israel or anybody else did; but He used His own methods of doing this. As a matter of fact He brought in other pagan power to destroy those who at that time were in control. He brought destruction upon the pagans, and deliverance to the remnant. He is a surprising God today in that He will destroy the worldly who do not obey the Gospel, and save to the uttermost all who believe in Him, even though they have sinned.

Chapter 6 – A Song Of Freedom (Isaiah 43:14-21; 49:24-26; 51:9-11; 52:7-12)

Israel as a nation was blessed of God according to the promise that was given to Abraham and renewed to Isaac and to Jacob and to their seed. Obedience to the will of God was the constant condition of blessing. Israel was surrounded by pagan people who worshipped gods of their own making. These pagans influenced Israel at times to worship their gods. This had happened in the time of the Judges and so we read in the Judges:

And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel . . . And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel . . . And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them (that is that robbed them) (Judges 2:7-14).

When Israel had suffered affliction and cried to God, He sent them a judge to lead them in repentance back to God, and victory and peace. This happened again and again until God gave them a king. But even under the kings, in spite of repeated chastenings, Israel became incorrigible. But God is not mocked. Finally God in His providence brought in powerful pagan nations from the east who destroyed Israel. First Assyria moved in to destroy the northern kingdom, Israel. And now in Isaiah's time Babylon conquered

Judah and was about to destroy Jerusalem. The outlook was very dark and hopeless. But the Word of God through the prophets spoke of something new. There had always been a few true believers who sincerely worshipped God and who were repentant about their sins. God now revealed that it was His plan to call these to Himself on the basis of a New Covenant. He would not deal with them according to the law but according to His grace. In this New Covenant God would Himself be responsible for their conduct. They would be acceptable to Him, not because they were good enough and had earned it, but because He would be gracious enough to receive them and to work in them to bring them into His will. In this way they would be completely and forever free from any bondage to their enemies.

Peter tells about this in his first epistle:

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you. with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into (I Peter 1:10-12).

You will note in reading through this that they prophesied of the grace that should come unto you. Now Peter was writing to people who lived on this side of Calvary, this side of Pentecost. Peter was writing to people who knew what it was that Christ Jesus had died for them, and that the Holy Spirit had been sent to them. This is the salvation that the Old Testament prophets talked about.

It would appear that no one in Israel, not even the prophets, understood about this new thing: this grace that was to come from God. It was revealed to them that they did not write for themselves but they wrote for us. But the grace would come from God later. Peter indicated that the prophets were given to understand it would be revealed later, and further indicated that it was revealed unto us in the preaching of the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. As Isaiah was preaching to the remnant he was sharing with them the blessing of the New Covenant which would be established with them. They did not have it at the time that Isaiah was preaching, but it was going to be done. The remnant would be saved.

It will help our understanding to remember that Paul considered himself as one of the remnant. When the prophets were talking about the prospect that the remnant would be saved, we can be thinking about Gospel times in the New Testament. Salvation which will set the soul free is the work of God done through Messiah, the Christ. It is centered in the amazing event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This operation is as simple as it is profound.

When the believer is crucified with Christ the flesh is reckoned dead because the body of sin is destroyed, and so the believer is set free from sin when he is raised from the dead. Since Christ Jesus gave Himself as a ransom the guilt is taken away, and the believer rejoices in a pardon forever. The details of this operation were unknown in the time of Isaiah. But Isaiah knew in the Word of God that the remnant would be forever free.

Isaiah 43:14-21 can be understood by the two major captivities in Israel's history: the captivity in Egypt when they were slaves, and the captivity in Babylon at this time when Isaiah was living. Deliverance in each of these cases was by the power of God. Israel was helpless but God intervened. This was not any form of natural process, but by the direct intervention of God. The bondage to Egypt was broken at the Red Sea in the destruction of Pharaoh and his army. The bondage to Babylon would be broken by the Fall of Babylon to another power from the east. But now Isaiah predicts an even more profound deliverance.

Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing (Isaiah 43:18-19).

God will completely reverse the natural conditions. We read Isaiah reported:

I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen (Isaiah 43:19-20).

The remnant will belong to God in a very special way. Their very existence is by the personal will of God. When we realize this we have a new appreciation of the salvation that we have in Christ Jesus.

In Isaiah chapter 49, verses 24-26 the prophet revealed that God will deliver the remnant no matter how deeply they may be en- meshed in bondage. In Gospel times we would say that no matter how deeply a soul might be sunk in sin, he can be and will be saved when he believes in Christ. Isaiah said it this way:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isaiah 1:18).

We use these words to this day to promise anybody that he can be washed whiter than snow. In these words it is obvious that deliverance will not be by any wise process on the part of man. Deliverance is the personal work of God Himself. For instance the Word of God reads:

For I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children (Isaiah 49:25).

This whole operation is seen so clearly in New Testament times. If we review the situation the way it is as we have it today, the sinner is doomed to destruction in death; and then God's plan is for the sinner to accept this just sentence from God and die. That would be in the plan of God. But God through Christ, in Christ, and by Christ, can raise the dead to newness of life. Death is universal, but the resurrection is for those who believe. God will raise believers for His own glory because God can raise the dead, and will raise the dead by His power.

And all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob (Isaiah 48:26).

This is the way the prophets revealed it to the children of Israel in their time.

The prophets were talking to people who were actually under the dominance of the pagan forces. Babylon was in control and Israel were captives. The Jews were in Babylon as captives, and they were of course longing to go back to their own country, but that would come later. The prophet told them that one day God would let them go back to their own country, which they did in the course of time; when Cyrus came in, having destroyed Babylon. This song of freedom had been proposed by the prophet, who pointed forward to what God is going to do in His grace and mercy for those who believe, for the remnant.

Deliverance leads into joy. Joy is so commonly expressed in singing. In Israel's historic deliverance from the might of Egypt, the climax occurred at the Red Sea when all the host of Israel had successfully crossed the sea as if on dry land. Moses led them in a song of deliverance saying,

I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him a habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him (Exodus 15:1-2).

Singing has always been involved in spiritual living. When Paul taught the Ephesian believers about how to be filled with the Spirit he included this exhortation:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).

Generally one can get an idea of the spiritual strength of a congregation by the way the members sing. It is notable that great evangelistic meetings feature great things. As Isaiah sees the remnant in their blessing, he hears them and sees them singing.

Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away (Isaiah 51:11).

Living in the world involves affliction and suffering. Sometimes a person is not wise enough and makes mistakes. Because of his blunder he suffers loss and hurt. Sometimes he is selfish without realizing it and then suffers without knowing why. In addition to all these dangers, there are other persons, some human but some spiritual who work against the soul to prevent things working out. In the Bible such are called enemies. We know that Satan is busy to harass the believer in ways that will make the believer suffer to a point of doubting God.

From all this dark gloomy situation which I have described Almighty God works to deliver the believer. We need to remind ourselves that God's way is not to confront evil in any power play to stop the operations of evil. Now that would be the natural thing to want to do. As far as you and I are concerned when we see something wrong we want to stop it, by force if necessary. If we see somebody planning to do something evil we want to thwart him, we want to contend with him, we want to face him down. But that is not God's way. But by yielding as Jesus of Nazareth did in Pilate's courtroom, and then on Calvary's cross we can be assured of the triumphant consequence of being raised from the dead as Christ Jesus was. Of this the remnant can be assured.

Whatever may have been the evil circumstances that caused the suffering, when the soul is raised from the dead there are no more problems. That which was troubled is left in the grave. The new life in the resurrection is beyond any harassment. This is the victory. And in this victory there is exultation and joy. To be free, to be permanently, eternally free is glorious.

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:54-57).

That is the way Paul put it.

It will be helpful to remember that the remnant did know the New Covenant from experience. In the New Covenant God will put His laws in their minds and write them in their hearts so that the believers will truly esteem and worship God. And then we read:

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more (Hebrews 8:12).

Under the Old Covenant the believer would try to obey the law of God. Because of his sin he would come to worship by confessing his sins upon a sacrifice. But in the New Covenant the believer would come directly into God's presence because God had already forgiven him. This is the marvelous significance of the New Covenant. God comes prepared to receive the believer as he is because God has already arranged to carry away his sins. The worshipper in the New Covenant would come rejoicing in a victory already his, because it is given to him by God through the Messiah, through Jesus Christ.

In Isaiah the call goes out to the remnant that they should rejoice in the salvation which God would bring.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! . . . Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward (Isaiah 52:7-12).

These words point directly to the preaching of the Gospel. The very word "Gospel" means "Good Tidings." This preaching does not instruct believers what they should do as much as it proclaims to

them what has already been done. And now this only needs to be believed and received. The remnant could burst forth into the song of victory, not because they had accomplished anything, but because God would give them the victory by His grace in response to their faith.

The marvelous thing with the believer is that he rejoices in Christ Jesus. When a believer has fellowship with God and realizes that he has the marvelous privilege that he can actually walk into the presence of God without any burden of sin, he is kept from having any idea that this is his personal achievement. He does not strut himself with the feeling that he is a good person, because he is in fellowship with God. He is there as a guest. He is there because he has been called in. This privilege has already been provided. The believer had nothing to do with preparing the feast, that was already done for him. All he heard was "Come and dine." Almighty God calls him in to come and share what the Messiah, what Christ has prepared for him. All the praise would belong to God. Believers could burst forth into the song of victory, not because they had accomplished anything, but because God had given them the victory by His grace in response to their faith.

And then the prophet revealed what is to follow after the victory is shared.

Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord (Isaiah 52:11).

Paul told Titus:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men (Titus 3:8).

This is the way in which it is put. These good works will be done, not in order to be saved, but because the believer is already being saved. There is an expression like that in the book of Acts how the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved (Acts 2:47). The word "salvation" does not refer to one single incident, one single split moment of time when the soul passes out of darkness into light. It refers to the process that begins at that moment. It can start just like the beginning of a seed bursting forth to grow. Salvation does have a start, and that start can be associated with much joy and much gladness. But it goes on because God continues to work in the heart that which is well pleasing in His sight.

For it is God which Worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

That is the significance of the word "salvation." It begins in a moment. It may begin in a crisis, and there can be a moment when the soul starts believing in God. Then your heart can rejoice and you can leap and run out and tell the whole world that you are saved.