

PLAIN TALK ABOUT ISAIAH

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The book of the prophet Isaiah is part of the Scripture of the Old Testament, which means that it is part of the Word of God written. Like all Scripture it was written to reveal the truth about Christ Jesus to us.

"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 writing to the Christians at Rome Paul said:

"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).

We should read and study the Bible expectantly, hoping to learn what is in it for us.

The Old Testament is not a history of ancient times. It has many ancient historical items in it, but that is not its primary purpose. It is more than a history of Israel: it is a revelation of the Gospel of God. It is a revelation of the plan of salvation, illustrated in the Old Testament times in God's dealing with Israel, but actually demonstrated in our time in believers by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We are saved by faith, by responding in obedience to the call of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That call of God is shown to us in the Bible. It is important that we know what God has promised because it is believing the promises of God that brings us into the blessing of God.

There is much to be learned from the book of the prophet Isaiah. We should have in mind that the people of Israel were considered to be the people of God because of the covenant with Abraham. God had made a covenant with Abraham, saying that He would bless Abraham and bless his seed, which included the nation of Israel. Also they were looked upon as people of God because they had the law of Moses. Moses had received the law of God on Mount Sinai and had given it to the people of Israel. Another factor in looking upon them as the people of God was the fact that they had the temple worship. The revealed plan of worship was seen first in the tabernacle and afterwards in the temple as it was carried out by the sons of Aaron the Levite. All these considerations made them a distinct group of people. Thus we can see how Israel became the people of God because of the promises they had received; the guidance and instruction which they had received; and the leadership of their priests who brought them to God. They were counted to be the people of God because of their faith which was manifested in their obedience. True, their obedience was spotty, oftentimes imperfect, but generally speaking the nation as a whole was committed to walk in the ways of God.

In the flesh, these people of Israel born naturally as children of their parents were sinful. They were

perverse. When God wanted them to go this way, they wanted to go that way. They were disobedient and self indulgent. In their pride, vanity and sinfulness Israel demonstrated repeatedly that although they were called of God, had the instruction of the law of Moses, possessed the pattern of worship in the tabernacle and were committed to walk in the ways of God, yet they disobeyed Him and were sinful. But the Bible will tell us over and over again that there is hope for sinners in the grace of God.

Man is so helpless in himself, he does not know and he doesn't want to do the right thing; in fact he cannot do right even if he should want to. However in mercy God provided Israel with leaders. Three types of leaders were found among the people of God, called prophets, priests and kings. Each had a function of his own. In the prophet God provided a leader who would declare the Word of God to the people, giving them illumination of mind by the Word of God which he preached to the people. The priest brought the sinner to God by way of sacrifice according to His Word. Through ritual he brought the sinner into orientation with God so that he could look up to God with confident expectation that God would forgive him because blood had been shed on his behalf. The king in obedience to the will of God led the people into dedication through service. Isaiah was a prophet interpreting the Word of God to the people.

Human beings are much the same throughout history. Any child born into this world must learn, must be shown everything. Although the child doesn't have to be shown how to sin, which it can do naturally without any trouble at all, the child must be taught how a sinner can come to God.

As a prophet, Isaiah told the people what the Word of God meant. He explained to them what God wanted them to do, while showing them the sinfulness of their conduct. Preaching as a prophet, he continually encouraged them to repent and to turn to God. He warned them of the dire consequences if they remained incorrigible and wouldn't turn to God. He made it clear that God would not put up with sin forever. The day would come when God would destroy them. Then he predicted that even though the judgment of God would fall upon His people, God would yet in His own grace keep His covenant promise to Abraham and save His people.

Israel as a people looked like other nations, yet actually were different from all others. They were different because they were a kingdom under God. God ruled over them individually, but as a group they were also led by God. God had personal dealings with these people. When the Ten commandments were given to Moses on Mt. Sinai for his people, they were for each individual. Regarding the tabernacle, each person was shown about bringing in the sacrifice. God dealt with each one individually, yet He dealt with them together as He brought them under a king in the kingdom.

To understand Israel we need to understand process: i.e., things happen as they do because of what happened before: one thing leads to another. When there is one result after another that we can see, we call that "process." That is the way trees grow, the way birds fly. And that is the way human beings deal with each other. By process we understand cause and effect relationship. There is also another principle. Process is one, but promise is another. Promise operates in this world because God is a living God, and controls all things. God made the world with process in it, and so there is seed time and harvest. But there is also promise. God reveals that He will do more for the believer than he can ask or think. When the Word of God says "whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life," that is not process: it is promise. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ brings the soul to God and God gives eternal life. He gives it as a promise, by His grace, as a free gift of God. In other words, if I should live my life on the principle that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap, I would find in the course of that process that I would be moving straight forward to death and destruction. But if I should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ according to that promise God will give me what I don't deserve and can't earn: He will give me eternal life. Thus He will give me out of His grace and mercy what I will need to save me. This is the promise of God that operates in grace.

There are different views of what a person will do who is a prophet. Some think that a prophet or preacher should be an interpreter of the *process*. Many preachers explain to the people that what they

do causes the results. If the people will do like this, that will happen. Thus they emphasize the process. They argue that if Christians would be real fine people this world could be good and fine because of the fine Christians.

Some people think the Christian is a product of social processes, so they try to bring up their children to be Christians by teaching them what to do as they live. There is no doubt that training a child in right and wrong, and teaching him in the operation of the law: "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" will serve as a schoolmaster to bring the child to Christ. Such a procedure has its place and its importance but it will never save the soul.

There is another way of understanding who is a Christian. The Christian is a child of God, born again. He is a new creation by the Word of God. When a person receives the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior there immediately comes up in him the inward desire to do things pleasing in the sight of God. This difference in understanding is also true as we view the church. Some think that the church is a group of people, gathered together to do good, as the result of certain sociological processes. Others will say that the church is the Body of Christ; it is the product of the Holy Spirit in the believers and that actually the church is made up of individuals who trust in God through the Lord Jesus Christ and who will do good to please the Lord. This was the view of Isaiah the prophet.

Isaiah was not a popular interpreter of conditions, politics, economics attempting to improve the state of affairs in Israel. He was an authorized preacher of the judgment of God, of the grace of God, and of the promises of God. He was preaching to Israel what God had promised to do for them, and he tried to lead them in the way of righteousness. Just so, there are Christians today who count themselves among those who are the people of God. They realize they must yield themselves humbly in obedience to the will of God. The great truth of the Gospel is that God is a living Being; that souls are blessed by obeying His will. The true function of the preacher or prophet is to declare openly the judgment of God as well as the promise of God so that the hearer can believe it, and thus have God do for him more than he can ask or think.

Chapter 2 – Spiritual Conditions in Israel

The book of the Prophet Isaiah is arranged according to several aspects of the history of Israel. Chapters 1 to 5 deal with the spiritual condition of Israel during Isaiah's time. Chapter 6 tells of the call of the prophet. Chapters 7 and 8 notes the crisis of Syria. Chapters 9 to 12 tell us about Messiah and His Kingdom. Chapters 13 to 35 record messages to nations. Chapters 36 to 39 tell about crises with Assyria. Chapters 40 to 66 set forth messages to the Remnant.

The book opens with an inscription in the first verse that dates the contents during the rule of four kings of Judah. The spiritual condition of Israel in a general way during Isaiah's life is indicated in the next few verses. Isaiah points out that God says He has nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Him. Then He goes on to say "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." The prophet describes this as an infection, a disease, that poisoned the whole nation through and through, as an infection in the blood stream. But even so, although the disease throughout Israel was so widespread and so general, he saw that there would be some true believers, which he speaks of as "a very small remnant."

The secret cause of this ungodly condition in Israel is pinpointed as insincerity in worship. In Isaiah 1:10-15 the actual situation is plainly described. It was not so much that what the people were doing was wrong, but that they did not really mean it. They were not sincere; and their insincere, superficial

formality was offensive to God. In this passage is to be found some of the strongest language of rejection, coming from God to Israel. It was still true, however, that if they would confess and repent they would be forgiven. In Isaiah 1:18 we find one of the most wonderful promises in the whole Bible:

"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."

The promise was there even though God knew that the people were incorrigible. Still it was true that if they would turn to God, He would receive them. God knew how stubborn they were and was planning to act personally to remove the evil from them by judgment, as it is written in the remainder of the chapter.

By His grace and wisdom God planned to bring His people through to their golden future according to His covenant. There is a wonderful description of the glorious future that is awaiting Israel when God will have accomplished His purpose. (Isaiah 2:1-5). But first, before that can happen, He will bring judgment, because of the wicked practices among His people, described in Isaiah 2:6-9. Israel had adopted ideas from the heathen people. They sought wealth and power and put their trust in the works of their own hands instead of depending upon God. This was the common mind of everyone, and this is the way God evaluated them.

The judgment that God would bring would be so devastating that the whole nation would be ruined (2:10-32). In chapter 3 Isaiah shows the reason why God was bringing this judgment upon His people. One of the consequences of the degenerate spiritual state of Israel was that the leadership in the country had so deteriorated that only incompetent persons were in control. This was very significant. It is always true that when the level of public integrity goes down, no one wants to be in charge. Capable persons avoided responsibility so that key positions of authority were given over to weak people, with the results that all were in distress. (3:1-18). Weak leadership resulted in social distress and oppression (3:12-15).

In this time of widespread confusion and disorder the personal vanity of the people prompted extreme fashions in dress and immoral personal conduct among the women even as war and desolation destroyed men. In Isaiah 3:16-26 there is a most amazing indictment upon the whole country.

"As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths. The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people" (Isaiah 3:12-13).

Prevailing social disorder caused family life to disintegrate and polygamy to abound.

"And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach" (Isaiah 4:1).

All this description of confusion and immorality and worldliness and ungodliness, is followed by a most remarkable description of the salvation of God.

"In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. . . . When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence" (Isaiah 4:2-5).

This reminds one of the events in the Exodus when God's presence was indicated to His people. Then comes one of the most remarkable descriptions of the refuge that God would prepare for His people: "And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain" (Isaiah 4:6).

Because Israel had failed to produce fruit to the glory of God, God would bring devastation upon them

because of their sins. Yet, according to His covenant promise, God would also bring help to these people from Himself. All this is recorded in chapter 5. Toward the end of chapter 5 there is a whole series of woes being described. In verse 8: "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field:" referring to people who accumulate wealth, people who take property from other people and gather it together for themselves. Verse 11: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!" This is a description of the boastful life of people who plan for themselves all kinds of exciting occasions of their own willful self indulgence. "And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands."

The prophet goes on to say in verse 13: "Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst." Such is the description of the spiritual distress existing among these people. One cannot be surprised when one reads: "Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it" (Isaiah 5:14). There can be no doubt that Isaiah is warning these people that God was certainly going to destroy them.

"And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: but the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat" (Isaiah 5:15-17).

God will judge the sinfulness of His people but He is going to deal with it in such a way that His Name will be glorified. Things will be different after God has judged His people. The prophet goes on to say: "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: that say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it" (Isaiah 5:18-19)! The people were defiant and impudent toward God. When someone would tell them "God does not approve this," they would say "So what." Also they were perverse: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" When things were evil they actually called them good; the things that were good they actually called evil. This was a mark of spiritual confusion. Isaiah proclaimed: "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" These people were so conceited they felt self-satisfied and self-sufficient. They were both self-indulgent and dishonest: "Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him" (Isaiah 5:22-23)! The prophet warned them of their doom: "Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 5:24).

Reading these things makes us wonder about the very day in which we are living, How often has it been true for many of us that we have had the feeling that right in the very church itself in our day and time, the Scriptures have been ignored! The Bible itself has been set aside. This is the way it was in the days of Isaiah. Look at it again. "They have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

But God is a living God and will not be mocked. "Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets" (Isaiah 5:25). God is not going to overlook this conduct among His people. God is not going to let that kind of thing continue on and on and on forever. He will actually bring judgment upon them. This was demonstrated with Israel in the time of Isaiah. God planned to bring in someone from the outside that would destroy the whole situation. Inside Israel itself

there didn't seem to be anybody who would hold to the things of the Lord. Therefore God would bring in from the outside people who did not know about God at all, people who did not have any interest in Him, and they would come in strong to destroy. They would devastate the nation and smash it (Isaiah 5:26-30). Isaiah describes this enemy "whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind . . . And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof."

Throughout this chapter you can feel the faithfulness of Isaiah. He honestly reminds Israel, "You have sinned against God. You have sinned and sinned and sinned against God. You have been insincere in your worship. Even when you carried on your worship practices in the temple you did not mean it. You were even then actually turning your back on Him, but God isn't going to let that go on forever. The day will come when God will move in on His own people and will destroy them. And you might think then that God will change His promises; that God is going to fail to do His purpose." But Isaiah says, "Oh no, God is going to have a few people that will believe in Him. They will be His remnant. And He is going to take care of them."

Chapter 3 – The Call of Isaiah

God's people are always lead by persons who have had their own experience with God. We study the book of the Prophet Isaiah, trying to understand what took place among the people of God at that time, so that we might learn what will take place among the people of God at any time. We keep in mind that since the record is in the Old Testament those things happened to them for examples and they are written for our learning upon whom the ends of the world are come. Often he who is called to serve is taken out of the very kind of a situation in which he is afterwards to minister. We have just noted that the times in which Isaiah lived are marked by unusually ungodly conditions everywhere, and certainly in Israel. Sin was rampant, as it is written "the whole body was diseased from head to foot." Thus it was very significant that Isaiah's vision of God emphasized the holiness of God and the glory of His presence.

Isaiah was living in the midst of common ungodliness. People were superficial. People acted as if they were worshipping but did not really mean it. From these circumstances he was brought in his vision into the very presence of God. There he saw the holiness of God in such a fashion that he was stricken. He saw the great heavenly beings, the seraphim, covering their faces and not looking at God in His holiness, crying out "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." There was no attempt in the record to describe the appearance of God. We are only told that Isaiah saw Him on the throne, but Isaiah does record the attitude and conduct of those heavenly beings, the seraphim whom he saw in the presence of God. These heavenly creatures were themselves awed by the splendor of the glory of God, and they ascribed all honor and praise to Him.

In chapters 1 to 5 in the book of Isaiah is the description of the wickedness, the sinfulness of the people. The glorious vision of the holiness of God in chapter 6 gave Isaiah insight into his own personal unfitness. When he saw how the angels acted he was unable to look into the face of God. Immediately he confesses: "I am a man of unclean lips." The word "lips" used here means almost the same as our term for thoughts, ideas. The fact is when you are thinking, you're really talking to yourself. So that when you speak about "unclean lips", you actually mean a person whose words are unclean, whose thoughts are unclean. The word "unclean" does not mean just immoral, crude or vulgar. It could mean simply ungodly, unbelieving

or selfish. It could also mean pride, filled with self-esteem. All such would be unclean in the sight of God. The truth is no flesh will ever be able to come into His presence. When Isaiah called himself a man of unclean lips, he meant he was a man who thought like a man, with unworthy thoughts and ideas. And he recognized that his mind which he felt was unclean came out of the sinful human associations among which he lived. He knew that he was a sinner. We are reminded of that case in Luke 18:13 of the sinner who went up into the temple to pray at the time that a Pharisee went, and you will remember that the sinner would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." This is the frame of mind that Isaiah had, and upon his repentant confession of sin Isaiah experienced a remarkable glorious thing – a graphic demonstration of the grace of God.

Isaiah saw one of the seraphim take the tongs, go to the altar, get a live coal and touch his lips. This was the very part of him that he said was unclean, and here was applied the cleansing grace of God. Isaiah was pronounced clean. This meant that his lips were clean, his mind was clean. This points forward to the work of Christ. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). This can imply that reading the Bible, studying the Bible, knowing the Bible, will have the effect of cleansing the mind from human sinful ideas.

The cleansed Isaiah in his vision heard the call of God : "Whom shall I send and who will go for me?" Isaiah promptly volunteered to serve, using the famous classic words: "Here am I: send me." Who is Isaiah now? He is a man who knows Israel. He is a man who has seen himself as a man of unclean lips, dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips. He has confessed this was the truth. But also he is a cleansed man. The seraphim had taken the live coal off the altar and touched his lips, and God had spoken the words of assurance that he was cleansed. So now this cleansed man is bold to offer himself in service of the Holy God, knowing he has been cleansed of his sins by the grace of God.

This is the ground for the confidence that will enable any humble soul to accept such a task as teaching in Sunday School, doing church visitation, preaching the Gospel, or going as a missionary. The common popular idea that people who do such things think that they are good is simply not true. Oftentimes people who feel above all else that they are totally unworthy will undertake these tasks. The fact is they have been made fit to go. It does not follow that these servants feel personally worthy, but rather they have the assurance of personal forgiveness. It is the personal blessing from God that strengthens them to respond to the call. Such a person can always testify, "Once I was blind, but now I see." Wherever they go they can say, "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him out of all his troubles."

The Samaritan woman at the well knew perfectly well that she was not a good woman. The story is clear enough. She wasn't a good woman, but when she had talked to Jesus of Nazareth, she went into her village and told the people: "Come see a Man who has told me all things ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" The woman had no idea about being worthy. All she had in mind was that Jesus of Nazareth had talked graciously to her. Christ Jesus was there for any of them to meet as well.

Isaiah was immediately assigned to a fruitless task. In their present ungodly condition they were under the judgment of God and Isaiah was to tell them this. He was to warn his generation that by their refusing to heed the Word of God, they would fail to believe and thus they would never be saved. They were told that by grace they could be cleansed, even as Isaiah had been. Isaiah could stand up and tell them, "I was a sinner and I was cleansed. You are sinners and you can be cleansed." Then he was to warn them that a continuation of their rebellious indifference would only confirm their doom. The obvious function of such preaching would be to give warning graciously so that these foolish unbelievers should have no excuse.

Even at this present time there is much preaching of the true Gospel, and a great deal of witnessing is being done, but there are many many people who refuse to listen. They will not pay any attention. This ministry is done for them not because they are going to be won, but because they must be told. They must know, and they will stand before God without any excuse. The task of witnessing to such unresponsive people will not be easy nor inspiring. It is wonderful to preach the Gospel when there are people who

will believe. To tell the Gospel story to folks who try to understand and are willing to follow Him is wonderful. But if you tell and no one believes, if you urge and no one responds, such a task would be hard and uninspiring. Many a parent has this to see: a child growing up in the home and moving out totally ignoring what he has been told.

Many a person has to go through this experience of having his own friend pay no attention to his testimony or witness. You may be a believer and you may pray for the others because you really and truly believe the Gospel to be the absolute truth, yet you can have persons in your own family who will pay no attention to what you say, and who will not turn to God. Should you remain silent? Should you hide your light under a bushel? Isaiah would say, No! This is the time when you must tell. You must tell them kindly, gently, but plainly and firmly. It is possible they could turn to God and repent. If they don't turn to God they will be lost.

Isaiah was warned this would not be easy: the people would not listen to him. He asked how long he was to continue: how long was this to last? He was told that he was to continue to preach to the bitter end. Because of their rebellion, Israel would be completely destroyed but the truth of God was to be presented to them nevertheless. They were to be told constantly despite their incorrigible unbelief.

But Isaiah was given a promise: despite all the unbelief there would be some who would repent. This is the place where the dark curtain of doom is lifted in the book of Isaiah. Where there was widespread condemnation, when it looked as though everything was going to be utterly destroyed, then comes this promise: "Yet in it shall be a tenth." Despite general widespread total apostasy there would be some exceptions, there would be some persons who would truly turn to God to receive the fulfillment of promises in His covenant with Abraham.

Here is a wonderful message for us! If everyone else turns away, we do not need to turn away. Suppose no one else believes, we can believe; suppose no one else obeys, we can obey. We may be the only ones who do. But this is exactly what will count. There will always be among God's people some who should be called "the Master's minority." During the Exodus twelve spies were sent into the land of Canaan to spy out the land. They came back and made their report. Ten said that entering the land could not be done; but they were wrong. Joshua and Caleb said it could be done; and they were right. The people did not believe them, but followed the majority. This was a mistake and they suffered. It cost them thirty-eight years of useless wandering in the desert. It is the soul that believes the Word of God that is blessed. The Scriptures record the occasion when Gideon was leading his people against the Midianites. God told him to send everybody home except three hundred men. Gideon and his three hundred won the battle and turned the tide. There is also the incident of David facing Goliath. If ever there was a time when anyone could feel incompetent, totally overwhelmed, it would be this boy, too young to be in the military service and yet here facing this giant, this champion of the opposing forces. What strengthened David was his confidence, in God. Sometimes students looking at this whole incident are inclined to give David credit for being courageous. He did manifest courage. But you and I would make a mistake if we thought this was something in David himself. David did have confidence, but what enabled David to run out to meet this giant was his faith in God. This truth was manifested again when Daniel, as a stranger in a strange land, stood

up before the king and refused to bow down to ungodly worship. He would not take part in the worship of idols. He reserved himself to praise and to worship Almighty God. Consequently Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. When one thinks of Daniel surrounded by lions in the lions' den one should remember, it can happen. The popular opinion in that country which condemned Daniel was wrong. Daniel was right, when he put his trust in God.

In the darkest hour of discouragement there is always the promise that God will bring His will to pass. If everybody else neglects God you can turn to Him. The faithful parent can remember if everyone else would lead the children astray, if everyone else will tempt them to go into the ways of the world, that

parent can hold out for the things of God. You may be all alone, the only one. Being in the minority does not make you wrong. You may be right and there is a promise for you. You may be one of the remnant that will turn back to God. The faithful parent can trust Him. The burdened wife can remember that although everything else would work to take her husband away, she can put her faith and her trust in God and believe 'in Him and pray. God is able to overrule. Any concerned friend should remember God can overrule. God's Word shall not return to Him void. We can learn much in the case of this prophet Isaiah as he was called to his ministry .There would be a fruitless task, a discouraging prospect; but a marvelous promise, a wonderful assurance. Even if nobody turned, God was still God; even if no one received the message, the glory of God was still the glory of God. Isaiah could be faithful to the vision and God would be faithful to him.

Chapter 4 – The Syrian Crisis

There is much to be learned by studying the history of God's people as God was bringing them into His will and into the fulness of His blessing. Israel as a nation had been divided into two parts, Israel and Judah. Judah, the southern nation, was made up of two tribes. Though much smaller Judah had Jerusalem, the capital city, and had the temple, the center of worship. They also had the priests, the Levites authorized by God for this service. Although Judah was small, it was very important. Israel, the northern nation with ten tribes, was much larger, had much more wealth; but they had a man-made religion and man-appointed priests. Judah was more godly, more spiritual, and among them were to be found more seekers after God; whereas Israel though larger in number and more powerful in wealth was more ungodly. Israel professed faith in God, but did not practice it. These nations were located side by side, so it wasn't strange that there was often quarreling between them. Both nations claimed the region beyond Jordan and often went to war with each other about it.

In the region north and east of Israel was the country of Syria. These neighbors of Israel and Judah admitted no faith in God, yet they coveted the territory "beyond Jordan" that belonged to the original nation of Israel. The Syrians were a people with a totally human outlook who yet wanted the possessions of the people of God. Beyond Syria was Assyria, which nation made no pretense of believing in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were militarily powerful and they were pagan. These nations are often referred to by their capital cities. Sometimes Judah is referred to as Jerusalem, while Israel is referred to as Samaria. Jerusalem was the capital city of Judah and Samaria was the capital city of Israel. The names of the two sons of Joseph are also used to refer to these nations. Judah is oftentimes called Manasseh; and Israel is called Ephraim. This was probably because the tribe of Ephraim was in the northern kingdom of Israel, whereas half the tribe of Manasseh was in the southern nation. The result was that in the Scriptural record "Manasseh" is sort of a nickname for Judah and "Ephraim" is a sort of a nickname for Israel. The capital city of Syria was Damascus, and many times the word Damascus is used to indicate that country. The capital city of Assyria was Nineveh and sometimes the nation was referred to as "Nineveh." When Isaiah began his ministry the international situation between these four nations was critical.

We can think of these four nations and their relations to each other in the nature of a parable. Judah can be seen as the spiritually minded people who were in conflict with Israel, the worldly minded people. This is the age old conflict between the spirit and the flesh: between spiritual believers and carnal believers, between godly people and worldly people. In any congregation there will be a small number of dedicated people who want the blessing of God and believe the Bible to be true. Such persons believe in prayer, they listen to the Word and they are anxious to have others won to the Lord. There will also be a larger number

who profess to believe the Bible as the Word, but they never read it. They say that they believe that the worship of God is important, but they don't come to church. They say that they believe in prayer but they never pray. These are people who are not living as Christians. So it was in Judah and Israel where both the spiritually minded and the carnally minded were found.

Syria, the nation that was just beyond Israel, can be seen as the unbelieving neighbors. Any congregation has in it spiritually minded and carnally minded people. There are others in the neighborhood who don't make any profession. They want many of the things that Christians have. These unbelieving neighbors join with the carnal group (Israel) against the spiritually minded (Judah). Oftentimes in the conflict that goes on in a congregation, the spiritually minded few will find that they are over against the many worldly minded with whom the community joins. Judah's strength was astonishing because of their faith in God. They showed amazing strength as they had the temple, the center of worship. They had Jerusalem the capital city. In the time of Isaiah Judah, the spiritually minded group, though greatly outnumbered stood stoutly against Israel, the northern kingdom. But when they heard that Syria was going to join Israel they became very fearful.

Assyria, a great pagan nation farther north than Syria, was the natural enemy of Syria. Judah, the southern nation, was tempted to seek help from Assyria because they were afraid of the large number of Israel and of Syria combined against them. They were fearful that the coalition of Israel and Syria would crush them. "Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz (who was the king) and say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted" (Isaiah 7:3-4). ". . . It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass" (Isaiah 7:7). Isaiah went on to tell the king this coalition would not succeed. This threat would never materialize because of what God would do. "The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria" (Isaiah 7:17). Isaiah used various figures of speech to tell them about this king of Assyria in his invasion of the country. He speaks of him in one place as a fly, implying that he would come as the flies come. You can kill an individual fly but you can't stop them all. Then again he referred to him as the bee. Those who have ever been stung by a bee will know just how frightening it would be to think of bees (referring to Assyria) attacking them. Isaiah also referred to him as the razor, saying that God would use him as a razor to shave the land clean. Finally he was referred to as a river in flood in that he would sweep over everything. But Isaiah was told to take this message to Judah: "Don't get excited, don't get panicky about Israel and Syria joining together, and don't be personally inclined to ask Assyria to come and help you. God will bring Assyria in but you don't have anything to do with it."

Isaiah also proclaimed God's Word to the enemies:

"Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces . . . Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us" (Isaiah 8:9-10).

In this he demonstrated the attitude to be taken so far as the opposition was concerned. Then again the prophet speaks the word to Judah: "Say ye not, A confederacy"; which means to say "Make no alliance with the natural forces: don't join with Assyria. God is going to bring the men to fight for you but don't you have anything to do with them." By way of contrast he urges those believing people: "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:13). When others would claim to have the help of spiritual forces out of their own beliefs, the prophet speaks plainly: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). This whole crisis with Syria contained actually very clear issues. The southern nation, where the temple was, where the true worship of God was, was beset by enemies. The northern nation, Israel, was much bigger, much stronger; Syria joined them and they both were against the south, against this faithful group of believing people. The temptation was there for the south to make an alliance with Assyria, the other foreign power, still bigger and stronger, to get help from them. But the prophet declared

God's Word: "No, don't make any arrangement with them at all. Don't make any kind of association or alliance with those natural people. I will bring them in and they will do the work for you, but don't you be tied up with them at all."

Godly spiritual people have possessions. They have blessings. To be a Christian means that you have peace and joy. Worldly people in the congregation, who don't read the Bible and don't pray, want peace and they want joy. People in the community who don't even believe in the Gospel want peace and want joy. They seek these benefits by natural means. In our day and time people have developed studies in psychology and in social action of various kinds seeking the benefits the Christians enjoy. They turn wholly to psychology and psychiatry in various ways, trying to make sure that they have the peace of God that they have read about, that they have the joy they hear about: trying to find rest, all within the natural approach. It is true today just as Isaiah would have said: "It won't work. Your efforts will come to nothing." Natural attempts to produce the results that believing people have as blessings, by using natural means will always be inadequate. From this Scripture we have a word to the spiritually minded people in any generation: do not turn to natural means to overcome human weaknesses. Put your whole trust in God and in His Word: "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this Word it is because there is no truth in them."

Chapter 5 – Messiah and His Kingdom

In the book of Isaiah, we have a revelation of God's dealing with men and how God will make known His purposes so that His people by faith in Him can share in His plan. Because Isaiah was a prophet he preached the promise of God as it was set forth in the covenant of Abraham. God would bless those who would obey Him. He preached the law of God as it was set forth in the covenant with Moses. He that does these things will be blessed in them, and he that does not do the will of God will be cursed. He preached the judgment upon sin that was based upon the law. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." He preached the incorrigible sinfulness of the people as seen in their fruits. As any other prophet, he interpreted the life of his people around about him and showed them that they were an incorrigible sinful people. He also preached the inevitable judgment of God, because of God's own integrity, even though God did want to bless Israel. God would not tolerate sin and where sin is, God would judge. At the same time, because he was a prophet, Isaiah preached the ultimate triumph of God, because God had a way of overcoming the sin of man through His Chosen One, through the Messiah.

The message of Isaiah is one of judgment and of grace. Man, as he is, is not alone in this world. God is, God is real, and God is active. Man is responsible and sin will be punished. But God will act in grace, and His grace is available to any man, "whosoever" will may receive it: whosoever will commit himself to God and come to God humbly, repentant, believing in God. God is long suffering, but He's no fool. If man is determined not to turn to God, God knows that too and God can deal with him. The sin of His own people brought darkness: it brought the judgment of God. But in grace, God would send His Son who would rule as the Messiah, and who would be able to save man from the judgment of God. Yet this action in grace would not prevent God's judgment. God would judge according to His integrity and according to the sin of man; but God would also act in grace and mercy. This makes Him righteous.

Some time ago this idea was brought to me in a very forceful way. To judge evil and punish it is proper, but if that's all that's done, and nothing else is done, the action is not righteous. When I first heard that, it made me stop and think. What did my friend mean when he said unless there's mercy that judgment is not a righteous judgment? There must be mercy with any judgment and this is what is found

in the Old Testament. This is what is found in the Bible. This is true so far as the whole wide world is concerned. God will punish sin. Sin is everywhere and death is all around; but because God is righteous God will show mercy. God has a way of showing mercy to those who are under His judgment.

Isaiah pronounced the judgment of God upon His people because of their pride. They were so proud, they wouldn't yield to God and with that being the case, God would destroy them. When they refused to accept the chastening that God had sent, but vainly boasted their own ability to overcome their problems, God raised up all their enemies as one against them and through these enemies God effected the destruction of those people. This is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah in chapters 9 to 12. "For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 9:13). Even though God did bring the judgment upon them, they didn't turn to Him. "Therefore the Lord will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day" (Isaiah 9:14). Isaiah tells why: "For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed" (Isaiah 9:16). This is one of the sad facts of life. A group of people can be led in the wrong way, and the consequences will be real: they will be disastrous. "Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one is a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly" (Isaiah 9:17). "For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest" (Isaiah 9:18). "Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother" (Isaiah 9:19). "Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: and they together shall be against Judah " (Isaiah 9:21).

Isaiah went on to declare that the country had become so sinful that the judges, those who administered justice in the land, were actually dishonest people. "To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless" (Isaiah 10:2)! Such injustice was a mark of widespread sinfulness, continued sinfulness, and because this was so, nothing but destruction was possible.

The destruction of God's people was going to come about at the hands of Assyria, the country from away up in the north, with the capital city of Nineveh. Assyria would come down and destroy all the land. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge" (Isaiah 10:5-6). God would actually bring this foreign people, this pagan nation, and use them to destroy His own people. The Assyrians did not think they were being used by God. "Neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few" (Isaiah 10:7). Actually the Assyrians came in with pride in their own power destroying everyone before them, feeling that they were doing this in their own strength. But the prophet knew what God was going to do.

After He had used Assyria to wipe out, to destroy the nation of Israel, then God dealt with Assyria according to justice in the matter. When they did come and abuse the Israelites, as God allowed them to, they did so in their own vanity and pride:

"For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man" (Isaiah 10:13).

This shows the egotism, the vanity, of these people yet God used Assyria to destroy His people.

We are reminded of the Scripture He can make the wrath of man to praise Him. And although this destruction of God's people came at the hands of a foreign pagan nation, that He would use like a rod in His anger; He was not going to approve these people, not at all! And because of their pride, and because of their self-conceit, they too would be judged. "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood" (Isaiah 10:15).

Isaiah pointed out the fallacy in Assyria's attitude. To be sure they would be successful, and they would

be able to destroy Israel, because they would be successful in their wars against them. But this success was by the providence of God and not as they thought, in their own strength. God took note of that. That would be something that God would deal with: "Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; and it shall bum and devour his thorns and his briers in one day" (Isaiah 10:16-17). This whole portion of the book of Isaiah means trouble, trouble, trouble. Israel had disobeyed God. They had continued to disobey God, had continued to provoke Him until finally God said, " All right! Then I'll deal with you according to your desert." So He brought in Assyria and let the Assyrians carry out His plans. The Assyrian did not know that he was doing the will of God. He thought he was promoting his own interests, but God planned to watch him and to judge him.

And now the prophet declares one of the hopeful aspects of the whole matter: when God does judge His people and destroys them because of their sin and their persistent incorrigible sinfulness, there will be some true believers who will turn to God. They're called 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" (Isaiah 10 :20-22).

When Isaiah says the "people of Israel be as the sand of the sea," he is prophesying that a great number would suffer destruction at the hands of the Assyrians, but there would be some that would be brought back. Some would be brought back to God because they would believe in Him.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction. And the Lord of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb" (Isaiah 10:24-26).

The prophet foretells the coming of the promised One of God's own choosing.

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him" (Isaiah 11:1-2).

This is followed by a description of this Chosen One, the Anointed One, the Messiah, that we call the Christ: "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins" (Isaiah 11:4-5). The prophet tells how He will control all things, so that all the forces of conflict and of violence will be taken out of the Kingdom to establish perfect peace.

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

In God's own time, after He has brought judgment upon His people through the Assyrians, and after He has destroyed the Assyrians, God will bring in His Chosen One. He'll bring in His Messiah and this One will rule righteously. This One will set up a government that will be acceptable to God and in Him the remnant will be blessed. They will be gathered together under His gracious rule:

"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people . . . He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth " (Isaiah 11:10-12).

The promise of God that He is going to bring His own people together does not mean the whole nation of Israel. This will be the believing ones, the remnant, gathered from both Israel and Judah, as well as from the Gentiles. These are they among the people of God, who really do seek God and really want to know Him. They will be the ones that God will bless. This section of the book is concluded with a whole chapter of praise to God. "Behold God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid." That is the way the remnant will be able to sing when God has redeemed them.

Chapter 6 – Messages to the Nations

What is God's will about the heathen? Does God have any message to people who are not Christians? If God is the God of all the earth, would He not have something in mind for all men, even for those who do not accept Christ? Is God not dealing with all men now? Should a preacher of the Word of the Gospel not have something relevant to say to everybody? Such questions come readily into the mind of anybody thinking about these things. In our study we shall notice how it was in the time of Isaiah.

Isaiah had a special ministry to God's own people. But we can see in his book that he also had a message to give to other nations. Thus we can get some idea what the message of a minister of the Gospel today should be if he were speaking to people who were not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah has recorded a number of these messages to other nations in chapters 13 to 23 in his book.

The sad truth is that each one of these messages is a message of judgment: a message of destruction. It is true that God has created all men upon the face of the earth, and it is true that the law of God prevails everywhere. Every human being lives in the presence of God under the eye of a just God, according to the law of God. The law of God is very simple: "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." That is easy to grasp. If you do the will of God you will be blessed, and if you do not do the will of God you will not be blessed: the simple word for that is you will be cursed. That's what the Bible says. Some may be very unsatisfied about that and may say, "I just don't believe it." To which I will say very gently: "Do you think it makes any difference whether you believe it or not?" Suppose a man were to say when he is running into a stone wall: "I just don't believe it is there." Any child could tell him that if the wall is there he will find out when he hits it! As far as the world is concerned and living in it is concerned, it may be rough to admit that men do bump into stone walls and when they do they get hurt. But that is just the way it is in this world. The general atmosphere of judgment is everywhere and destruction comes everywhere. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth " all round about you: trees, birds, animals, men – they are all the same. They all go the way of death and this is the way it is in this world; and God is over it all.

In chapters 13 and 14 Isaiah proclaims a message to the city of Babylon, a very great city in those days. He tells the city of Babylon very plainly that the day of the Lord is at hand. "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it . . . And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity . . . And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isaiah 13:9, 11 and 19). So far as the city of Babylon is concerned Isaiah preaches a plain stern message: "Destruction is coming to you." But the prophet has also something else to say: "For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land . . . And the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors. And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve" (Isaiah 14:1, 2, 3). The burden of Babylon, the great city, is

desolation. But as for Israel, there will be blessing.

Many students are inclined to think that Isaiah 14:12 refers to Satan. As a matter of fact it is addressed to one called Lucifer. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" The Scriptures do not anywhere else indicate that this particular passage has reference to Satan. But the pattern is just so true, it may be taken as classic; it will fit sin anywhere. This passage describes Lucifer in such fashion that it shows him to be self-centered and proud. Lucifer it would appear in his pride exalted himself as equal to God. To Lucifer Isaiah brings the message that he shall be destroyed. The fate of the ungodly is emphasized by contrasting the blessing of those who respond to Him in obedience. "What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it" (Isaiah 14:32).

The burden of Moab is set out in chapters 15 and 16. In verses 2 we read "Moab shall howl", in verse 3 "weeping abundantly"; and in this same vein going on in chapter 16:6, "We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so." The prophet declares that God is going to judge Moab, making a very significant statement: "And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail" (Isaiah 16:12). This will be the result of the judgment of God upon this nation of Moab: they will have no power with Him, and even when they turn to God He will not hear them.

Yet in the course of this same message of judgment, there is an opportunity for Moab to find mercy. When the children of Israel would be wandering through that country as fugitives, Moab was to give them shelter: "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them . . . And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness" (Isaiah 16:4-5). Thus Moab has a chance to find mercy if Moab will shelter the outcasts of Judah. As a matter of historical record they didn't do that, thus ignoring the offer of mercy, and so they suffered the judgment of God.

The message of Isaiah to Damascus is very similar. Damascus "shall be a ruinous heap"; there shall be desolation "because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation." Yet a small remnant shall escape: "At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 17:7). Thus it is revealed that when judgment goes out among the nations, there is always a thread of possibility of escape: the Lord would show mercy to anyone who would come to the Holy One of Israel.

The judgment upon Egypt is set forth in chapters 19-20, showing that a particular type of destruction will be brought upon that nation. Egypt will be given over to civil war: "And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians" (Isaiah 19:2). Also a cruel power shall conquer them, drought shall beset them, and the great land of Egypt will be brought under distress. Their own efforts will prove to be fruitless and a perverse spirit shall prevail within them. Yet here again is the promise that if they will turn to the God of Judah they will find some measure of relief (Isaiah 19:22). In chapter 20 Isaiah was told what to do to make this message noticeable to people, "At the same time spake the Lord by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot" (Isaiah 20:2). Isaiah was to act this way because he was a prophet. The manner of his conduct conveyed a message to all who saw him. "And the Lord said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia; so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners" (Isaiah 20:3-4).

It is rather obscure why the prophet predicted destruction to Egypt. Isaiah had no real message of salvation for Egypt; he was simply declaring the Word of God. Egypt was one of the peoples on the face of the earth. One may wonder: Does God have a message to the nations of the world? Apparently He does. Does He have a message to people who do not believe in Christ? He does. Is it possible that sometimes some minister should actually preach to those people? On the basis of this portion of Isaiah it would seem

to be possible. Should the minister try to have his message heard? Apparently he should. Perhaps he should not do it the way Isaiah did, but it would seem that anything he can do to attract attention to the message he should do, because God is the God of all the world and His ways are to be understood and they are to be trusted. In chapter 21 there is more of the same message to different nations: the desert of the sea, a country called Dumah, and a country called Arabia. In each case there will be judgment. The judgment will bring desolation, and God will actually bring in the day of vengeance upon these people.

In chapter 22 Isaiah presents a message to "the valley of vision": "I will weep bitterly . . . for it is a day of trouble" (Isaiah 22:4-5). It is possible here to see the plight of Judah in this time of total overall judgment going out upon all people. God is no respecter of persons and it is written "Judgment must begin at the house of God."

"And he discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armor of the house of the forest. Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many: . . . and ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall" (Isaiah 22 :8-10).

This language makes it clear that the city of Jerusalem, the land of Judah, had also been brought under judgment and allowed to suffer in the general widespread desolation that prevailed everywhere. But Judah was not repentant.

"And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die" (Isaiah 22:12-13).

That's the way they responded. The dire prospect of the wrath of God in judgment should have sobered them. But instead of mourning they turned to gaiety; and this actually was taken up by Almighty God.

"Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Go, get thee unto this treasurer . . . Behold, the Lord will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee . . . And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state shall he pull thee down" (Isaiah 22:15-19).

Isaiah then addresses the city of Tyre, and presents the burden of Tyre. Here again the same pattern is followed all the way through. "Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste" (Isaiah 23:14). The city of Tyre is to be destroyed. It will be just as fateful for Tyre as it was for Egypt. "The Lord hath given a commandment against the merchant city , to destroy the strongholds thereof" (Isaiah 23:11). But here again is the evidence that God does not forget His own people whom He has promised to bless.

"And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the Lord will visit Tyre . . . And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord; it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing" (Isaiah 23:17-18).

Reading chapters 13-23 in the book of Isaiah answers the question: "Is there a message then to the world?" Yes: God will judge according to His law. Nobody will escape with sin; no one will be able to avoid judgment upon his pride; and no one will escape the results of his unbelief. Almighty God is sovereign and He will bring judgment to pass. This is the message that is to be given to the nations. But all the way through there is a ray of hope like a star in the night: there is a beam of light. Any time anybody wants to humble himself and turn to the God of Jacob, to Almighty God, he will find mercy, because in the midst of His judgment God can be gracious and merciful. This seems to be the message to the nations as set forth by the prophet Isaiah.

Chapter 7 – Messages to Judah

Having in mind that God will punish sin wherever it is found, will God deal differently with those who believe in Him, even if they disobey Him?

God is the God of all the earth. He is the Creator of all men. When we say that God is the Judge of all the earth, that His law is eternal, and that He is no respecter of persons, we mean that every human being on earth has to deal with God; and "the soul that sinneth it shall die." Sin has already come into men, so that the sentence of death has passed upon all men. Some will say such an outlook is dreary, but what difference would that make? Is that going to change it any? If you were to step out into the night from a house bright with lights and say, "It's dark out there": that would certainly be true. But even if you do not like the dark, would that change anything? We did not make this world. We have nothing to say about its makeup. If we read in the Scriptures that Almighty God, the Judge of all the earth, has judged man and found him inadequate, has actually condemned him as he is, who is going to say differently? Somebody might say, "Well, I don't like it." Will that change anything?

Some men rebel against God; in fact many people do. Perhaps it would be better to say the majority of people are indifferent to God, they don't even care. However, some people do believe in Him. For those who reject God the Bible says there is no hope. They face only destruction. Some people will give you the impression that God is just so good, He won't destroy anybody. But that is not true! You may ask how do I know what's true? I have the Scriptures. I have the Bible. Someone may say, "Well, I don't believe it!" That will not change one single thing! The plain truth revealed in the Bible is that for those people who reject God there is no hope, only destruction. "There is no man that sinneth not," but there are some people who will admit their sin. They confess their sin, and call upon God even while they are yet sinners. For such there is hope of glorious blessing.

Such is the message of the book of Isaiah in chapters 24 to 27. The prophet points out that judgment will come. "The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word" (Isaiah 24:3). To say "the land shall be utterly emptied," means the blessings that there could have been are gone. This means to say integrity of personal character, morals in personal behavior, home life and personal association – these things are gone. "The land shall be utterly emptied." There is no integrity, no standard of morals, no fellowship in the home without the blessing of God; and when God withdraws His blessing all this is gone. "And utterly spoiled" – "spoiled" is a military word. Not "spoiled" as food may be spoiled when not kept in a cool place, but "spoiled" in the way an army takes "the spoils of war." Actually the word means "robbed." "Utterly spoiled" means "utterly robbed." The benefits they would have received in the blessing of God have been completely taken away. Peace and joy and strength do not happen in a vacuum. These are the results of God working: God brings such benefits. The fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace." These are benefits of the operation of God in the soul.

When Isaiah said with reference to his country "the land shall be utterly emptied," he meant that the blessing's all gone. The prophet goes on to point out ". . . because they have transgressed the laws" (Isaiah 24:5). The people named themselves by the name of God, but they did not do His will. God deals with things as they are. He is not impressed by talk: "They have transgressed the laws." And so Isaiah tells them ". . . all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction" (Isaiah 24:11-12). The language of the prophet is very plain: judgment with destruction, devastation, desolation, will come upon the whole land. This will happen to God's own people, because they have transgressed the laws of God.

Despite the general destruction there will be a remnant: there will be some people who really believe. God will never overlook them. "They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord" (Isaiah 24:14). God will never overlook these. He will never fail to keep His eye on those people who actually do believe in Him. It is true the leaders who have been responsible for this breakdown will be

punished. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth" (Isaiah 24:21). But eventually the Lord will spare the remnant. There will be a few people who believe. "And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously" (Isaiah 24:22-23). There will be a wonderful, marvelous salvation to these people who are the remnant.

The Lord will bring salvation to His glory. "O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things, thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth" (Isaiah 25:1). The prophet rejoices as he goes on in praising God for what God will do for those who trust in Him.

"For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall" (Isaiah 25:4).

This is the way God will deal with those who put their trust in Him, while general destruction will be going out over all men in the way in which Isaiah has been describing it. God will have his eye on those who trust in Him and He will call them. "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things" (Isaiah 25:6). This will actually be offered unto all men.

Jesus of Nazareth told a parable about a wedding feast. When the master sent out the invitation saying, "All things are now ready." This is the way we preach the Gospel. We tell anyone anywhere, "whosoever will may come", and "whosoever cometh shall in no wise be cast out." The Gospel is offered to all men.

"He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it" (Isaiah 25:8).

Salvation is coming. God will bring it to His people.

"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).

This will happen in the same place where all the devastation and the judgment has occurred. God will bring this salvation that will fulfill every hope. In chapter 26 there is recorded a continuation of this remarkable description of the salvation that God will bring.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:3).

These gracious promises were revealed in the midst of the message that announced judgment to those who had been disobedient. The Lord will bring peace to His own. "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us" (Isaiah 26:12).

God will certainly destroy the wicked. Judah will be brought through a chastening cleansing experience, marked by two features: destruction to the wicked and peace to the humble.

"In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan . . . he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea" (Isaiah 27:1).

While it is true that He will destroy the wicked; truly He will keep His own.

"In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment . . . I will keep it night and day. Fury is not in me: who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me. He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit; (Isaiah 27:2-6).

Such are the promises of what God will do. Believers are called to seek the Lord, that they might make peace with Him. In the course of this experience chastening will be done to purge the iniquity of Jacob. The ungodly, the un-believing shall be wiped out: that is to say, they shall be pruned off. We are reminded of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh it away" (John 15:2). Here the prophet has described God dealing with His people and taking away the unbelieving, the ungodly from among them.

The remnant will be gathered one by one to receive the blessing of God.

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel" (Isaiah 27:12).

This is not a blanket promise to the whole country. This is not saying everybody will be saved. "Whosoever will" is singular: "whosoever will" is one at a time.

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem" (Isaiah 27:13).

Isaiah's message is to Judah and to Israel as well as the godly people among the Gentiles: those who really want to do His will.

There will be some people that really want to serve God: they want to be found acceptable to Him. But even among such there will be sin, even among such there will be error. This needs to be dealt with. "God is of purer eyes than to behold evil." While this can be understood as true for the nation as a whole, you and I should take it to heart personally. My heart as a whole may be minded and disposed to do the will of God, and I may really, so far as I know myself, actually seek to do His will, but at the same time what Paul calls "the old man", the "flesh" will be in me. I may be unaware of it. Before I realize what I am doing I can get selfish about things I want, and so wander away from the things of God. I believe in Him, I belong to Him; but I am not always faithful to Him. What a wonderful thing it is to know that God understands.

God will chasten the evil. He will remove out of us who believe that which is displeasing in His sight. It may well be true that this will be done by hardship, by suffering. But for those who truly believe, God will bring them through as He works in them, refines them, burns out the dross, cuts off the dead branches and prunes them. He will bring such through to Himself. The wonderful thing for us to remember is that our prospect is one of a glorious future, when the remnant will be blessed. It's a wonderful thing to realize so far as you and I are concerned, that even though in ourselves there is only a "remnant" of us that truly believes, there is only a part of us that is truly committed to God, God will honor that part, and for the sake of that part He'll deal with the rest. This was seen in the message that Isaiah brought to the remnant. While it was true that the first aspect of God's dealing was judgment, so the first thing that came was death: yet out of it can come eternal life. In the Gospel we know how true it is that the cross comes first, but it is also true that the crown will surely be ours afterward.

Chapter 8 – Messages to Israel

God will deal with any nation or any group of people according to their corporate conduct. But He will deal differently and in a special way with any soul, any individual, who will humbly turn to Him in faith. Just because the nation as a whole has forfeited the good grace of God and so comes under judgment, does not mean that each individual person in it is going to be destroyed. There will always be the opportunity

for the remnant to turn to God. The Northern nation, Israel, had committed themselves in sin to disobey God incorrigibly, and for that they would be destroyed. Yet there were in that nation, even among those northern tribes, some repentant souls who turned to God in faith.

Isaiah preached hopefully to that remnant in chapters 28 to 35 of his book. He referred to their leaders as "the drunkards of Ephraim." He called them proud and "overcome with wine."

"But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they, are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment" (Isaiah 28:7).

Public religious practices of the nation were defiled because the priests were influenced by wine and strong drink, and the prophets erred likewise making mistakes due to strong drink.

We are inclined to think of strong drink as alcohol, but the spiritual truth is that any kind of stimulation that stimulates the mind through personal satisfaction and selfish indulgence will cloud the judgment and dim the sensitivity. This can be true with physical wine, but reading certain writing and entertaining certain ideas could have the same effect. I could, for example, be looking at some play or reading some book, that sets forth certain lustful ideas; and after I am finished looking at that play or reading that novel as the case may be. or sharing in that particular activity; then find it difficult to come and talk to God, I would not be able to think straight. Isaiah said "They err", that is they make mistakes in their outlook; "they stumble in judgment." The prophet went on to show the origin of this tragic state. "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts" (Isaiah 28:9).

The leaders of Israel had refused to hear God's Word because they thought it was too childish for them. And that is where they made their big mistake! The Gospel states this plainly: "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). They made the mistake of thinking a person should be sophisticated. This is a very sobering thought today. Have you occasionally heard someone preach or talk who clouded his ideas in sophisticated language, that would take a very highly trained person to understand? Did you realize that in so doing that person was doing more harm than good? His ideas are expressed in such sophisticated specialized language, that the meaning of his words remains obscure. This happens over and over again.

The man who dares to express his ideas in simple language faces the possibility of being challenged, as against the man who hides his talk in sophisticated language, highly intellectualized language, specialized language, since he was not understood.

Isaiah goes on to point out how far astray the leaders had gone. "Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement" (Isaiah 28:15). Thus it appears their leaders, their prophets and their priests, actually figured and talked and argued and discussed death and hell in such a way that they reached the conclusion that death was not the result of sin: it was no longer to be accepted that "the wages of sin is death." So far as hell was concerned, they entered into an agreement with hell: there wasn't any such thing.

Isaiah pointed out that God had noticed this; that in their sophistication, in their intellectualization of the whole matter, they had removed the threat of destruction. They removed the expectation, the prospect of doom. With this in mind, the people were inclined to become more and more evil. Now the prophet declares that God will come in judgment to shatter all pretence, and expose the error. "And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand" (Isaiah 28:18). How common today is the idea that if you were really up-to-date, and really knew what you were talking about, you wouldn't even mention hell? Israel had reached a point of agreement about it in such a way that they did not even have to think of it. But Isaiah warned them God would come in judgment. He would shatter all that pretence and expose all that error.

The prophet went on to expose the sinfulness of Israel by pointing out that the worship of God had become formal. "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). The worship of God was formal, superficial and oriented in human ideas. What people thought, what human beings thought was what they put into their public worship. Now God would bring judgment in distress, calamity and invasion from the outside, together with utter confusion of mind. Isaiah told them that natural calamities would multiply. "Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire" (Isaiah 29:6). Foreign invasions would be like a nightmare. "It shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty" (Isaiah 29:8). The national leadership would be bewildered because of an inability to do anything; these leaders would be as ineffectual as if they were in a deep sleep. Verse 11, "And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned", who cannot read it because it is sealed; and like a book that is delivered to a man that isn't learned, who cannot read it. These people will be judged. The leaders will try to be devious, but they will be exposed.

"Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay" (Isaiah 29:15-16).

Thus did Isaiah reveal that God will certainly judge them.

But once again the prophet reveals that God will act in grace and mercy to reveal His truth to the unfortunate, to the poor. The reading of this passage brings to mind what is written in the New Testament: "Bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" (Luke 14:21).

"And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity . . . The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice" (Isaiah 29:18-19).

Judgment will come upon insincere leaders, but grace will come to the humble poor.

In rebellion against God the leaders turned to Egypt for help.

"Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me . . . That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth . . . Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion" (Isaiah 30:1-2).

But only shame and confusion will result. The Word of God gave plain warning: "For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still" (Isaiah 30:7). Actually the people gave of their wealth to Egypt, "they will carry their riches . . . to a people that shall not profit them." All the time God had said "if they would just be quiet and sit still, I would help them." But the fact was that the leaders of Israel did not want to hear the Word of God. Today it would be a case of saying they did not want to hear the Bible.

"That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isaiah 30:9-10).

It is not surprising to read then "Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word . . . Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall" (Isaiah 30:12-13). God would judge them and He would not spare. At the same time God gave them a gracious promise, one of the most wonderful passages in Scripture. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15).

This is one of the strange amazing truths revealed in this portion of the Scripture. Evil will be judged,

rebellion will be condemned, and God will destroy in judgment; but all the time His ear will be open to the cry of those who turn to Him.

"And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isaiah 30:18).

Some will humbly turn to Him, and to them He will show His grace. "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction . . . And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:20-21). Even though God will judge, He will not forsake and He will be ready to help those who turn to Him, to lead them.

Isaiah points out how foolish it was on the part of Israel to turn to Egypt. "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit . . . As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem" (Isaiah 31:3-5). They could have had help from God. The real issue was spiritual and the Egyptians could not help about that. But God could help them, and God would help them. He showed this by helping the remnant as the prophet revealed.

The blessing of God would come through His Chosen One, through the Messiah, and in chapter 32 is a wonderful description of the coming King, the One through whom God would bless. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32:17). Throughout this Scripture is set forth the nature and function of the Chosen One of God, the Messiah. "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us" (Isaiah 33:22). This is the cry of the believing ones: "the wicked shall be punished, but righteousness shall prevail, the Lord is our peace." "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion" (Isaiah 34:8). God will really judge but He will also save. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1).

The message of the prophet dwells on two themes. There will be judgment upon the wicked, upon the foolish, those who have made mistakes: instead of turning to God they turned to Egypt. Instead of listening to God's Word, they actually tried to keep prophets from preaching. This drew from God His judgment and He came down upon them in real severity. But at the same time God was keeping in mind that there would be some faithful ones; there would be some believing ones; and for them He would glorify Himself in mercy. The blessing that God would give to His people would be glorious. It would be just as though the whole desert were to blossom like a rose.

"And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isaiah 35:8).

"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10).

In all of this there was the idea constantly pushed forward: human knowledge, human ideas have failed Israel. They would have been wise to have turned to God; but in all their sophistication they demonstrated in their history the bankruptcy of knowledge.

Chapter 9 – The Assyrian Crisis

In the days of the prophet Isaiah, the people of God passed through two major national crises. One of these involved Syria, whose capital city was Damascus; and the other involved Assyria, whose capital city was Nineveh. The Syrian crisis developed in Judah among people who knew of the Lord: in any controversy or conflict of interest they knew they should not seek strength from any human source but should trust God only. In chapters 36-39 of Isaiah is the record of the second great crisis this time with Assyria. This was a great and powerful nation that did not know, nor care, about the God of the Hebrews. At the same time this was a powerful military force. This powerful nation threatening God's people could well serve as a parable to illustrate the rise of science in our modern time.

In the history of the Christian church there was a time when the course of affairs was controlled by priests. There came a time when these priests were not worthy of such opportunity and privilege, and in the succeeding generation came the rise of natural science. It was this rise of natural science that seemed to make the Reformation possible, because it broke the control of the priests over the church. Science itself has now been exploited until it threatens the operation of faith. In fact today science is used to shake the confidence of believers in the Bible and in the Gospel. Personally, I do not think the threat is valid or really true. A real understanding of science and of the Bible will show that there is no actual conflict between them. But the popular issue is very real and must be faced. In chapters 36-39 we will be able to see how both the blessing and the trouble for God's people can come in their attitudes toward these outside forces.

The siege of Jerusalem itself is a dramatic story. Assyria in a campaign of conquest overran Syria with its capital city of Damascus and destroyed it, and then besieged Jerusalem. The record is that they "came up against all the defended cities of Judah and took them." Then they came up to Jerusalem, encamped around it and up against its walls, and sent in an ultimatum asking the surrender of the city. When the defenders did not want to surrender and the Assyrians were pressing hard, the defenders made a request. They asked the Assyrians when they were shouting their demands to speak in the Assyrian language so that the people in the city would not know what was being said. The leaders of Jerusalem could understand the Assyrian language and they didn't want the people to know about the actual state of affairs. But the Assyrian Commander employed what is a very modern tactic in the war of nerves: he shouted out loud in the Jewish language the ultimatum that he was giving to the rulers: they were to yield or else he would destroy the city.

The leaders went to Hezekiah the King and told him about the situation. Hezekiah sent a messenger to Isaiah the prophet, to ask him for advice and to request prayer. Isaiah told him to have no fear, but to stand still and not yield to Assyria. God would take care of the enemy. The Assyrian King then sent a written demand for the surrender of the city. What happened then is so dramatic I think it is worth looking at it, word for word. "And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord" (Isaiah 37:14). There is no way it could have been done any better than that. That is the way a believing man should do. His recorded prayer shows that he is saying to Almighty God: "This is what they threaten to do; and when they're attacking this city and attacking us, they are really attacking Thy Holy Name. Show Thyself strong to defend this city, and prove to the whole world that Thou art God." Such was the faith of Hezekiah and God's answer was remarkable. The record shows that a plague beset the Assyrians so that a whole multitude of them died in one night. The next day they withdrew and went home. When the King Sennacherib himself did get home he was assassinated. This was the ultimate consequence of having attacked the city of God and impudently ignored Almighty God.

This glorious triumph by the power of God was followed later by the unhappy event of the foolish prayer of Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king. He was a good man, and the story of his career would

indicate that he was one of the best kings that Judah ever had. But the record of the acts of this good king shows how though he served God so faithfully, he still could be foolish. The Bible in recording what happened spreads this out in plain view. A good man can be foolish and can suffer because of it.

"In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet . . . came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord" (Isaiah 38:1-2).

He did not want to accept the plan of God. Isaiah told him it was God's will that he should die, but Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, prayed unto the Lord, "and wept sore." God heard him. It wasn't God's will, but God heard him, listened to his request, and granted it.

Perhaps not many persons are on such relationship with the Lord that they can pray with faith to get what they ask for; but some can. Some people have grown in faith to know the Lord so well that they are able to pray the prayer of faith and actually have their own will done. What happened to Hezekiah will show this was not good.

"And said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city. And this shall be a sign unto thee from the Lord . . . Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down" (Isaiah 38:3-8).

This is an astonishing consequence of prayer. Many people might say offhand: "Wonderful! He got what he asked for!" But actually I should say in the very same tone: "Yes! He got what he asked for, that's true! But that wasn't good!" One could ask: "Would God give it to him if it wasn't good for him?" The answer is enough to sober you: "Yes! If you cry and insist on it, when you really do believe in God, you may get what you want." But that is not the whole story.

Because he begged for life God gave Hezekiah fifteen years longer to live. In that fifteen years' time his son Manasseh was born, and Manasseh was the worst king that Judah ever had. God had given him the great sign of having the sundial actually go backward. Hezekiah was profoundly grateful. "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Isaiah 38:17). This was truly grand and wonderful, and Hezekiah rejoiced in it. But the story isn't over!

Delegates came from Babylon to congratulate Hezekiah because the sundial had gone back ten degrees, and Hezekiah waxed proud. He had received a remarkable answer to prayer, and was proud of it! That is dangerous! Being proud of power in prayer is really dangerous. It is so human to be elated and to feel exalted when we get answers to prayer. When these delegates from Babylon came to congratulate him, Hezekiah in his pride made an exhibition of himself. They said in effect, "God's really been good to you, hasn't He?" Hezekiah strutted, "Yes, He certainly has blessed me." "He must have given you many great things." "Yes, He gave me many great things. Come, I'll show them to you." And so he showed them: "There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not" (Isaiah 39:2). Then they went on their way. Just then Isaiah came to Hezekiah and asked him, "Who were those men?" "They came from a far country." "What did they see?" "I showed them everything that I had here." So Isaiah told him: "I'll tell you what's going to happen. All that is in thine house, everything they looked upon, you will lose every last bit of it. It will all be carried to Babylon."

The Word of God about all this is written: "In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon

Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart" (II Chronicles 32: 24-26). Because he had been a good man, God would hold off the judgment till his days was over, and Hezekiah said in effect, "Well, thank the Lord, there'll be peace in my time." The faithful record of Scripture reports that Hezekiah prospered in all his works: "Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (II Chronicles 32:31).

Thus in a rather strange and sad way the records shows both the faith and the folly of Hezekiah, as well as the displeasure and the mercy of God.

Chapter 10 – Messages to the Remnant

The study of Isaiah shows the topical arrangement in the book. In the opening section there is a description of the spiritual condition among the people of God during the time that Isaiah preached, and an account of the call and commission of Isaiah to be a prophet. This is followed by a discussion of national affairs involving the Syrian crisis which served to show how various groups can affect each other: the spiritually minded who generally seek God's will, the carnally minded who generally follow their own interests, and the interested neighbors who covet what the people of God claim as their own possession, and finally the powerful natural forces that have no interest in the people of God or their claims. All of these can be seen in this portion dealing with the Syrian crisis. Throughout this discussion because he was a prophet Isaiah emphasized "judgment" from the Holy God upon sin anywhere, everywhere; "grace" from a merciful God to call sinners to repentance and to provide salvation for such as would turn to Him; and "promise" from the gracious merciful God of a glorious future for the remnant who would heed His call and turn to Him.

The next portion of the book sets forth the truth that the hope of such salvation was based upon the performance of a Chosen Servant, whom God would send to be King of Kings, the Messiah, whom we call the Christ. After a brief description of the character of Messiah and His Kingdom, Isaiah presented messages that were addressed to the nations round about Israel, and then there were messages addressed to Judah, and finally messages addressed to Israel. Isaiah then concluded this portion of his book by dealing again with national matters, now reporting what happened in the crisis with Assyria. The leading person in this report is King Hezekiah, a good man, who put his trust in God and was blessed with a dramatic deliverance from the threat of the great military power of Assyria. Isaiah includes the record of how this good King foolishly asked for personal privilege through prayer, and then fell into the snare of pride, finally to incur the judgment of God. This concludes the first section of the book dealing with the national affairs of Judah under God.

The remainder of the book of the prophet Isaiah is composed of messages addressed to the remnant, who escape the national judgment because they believe in God. Because of their incorrigible sin the people of Judah were to experience destruction in "the day of the Lord" in the judgment of God. Because of His righteousness, God would in grace call "whosoever will" to turn to Him that he might be spared. While the nation would be destroyed, individuals could be saved. Some would repent and turn to God: these are called "the remnant." The covenant promise to Abraham would be fulfilled in God's dealing in grace with these repentant believers, who would now inherit the promises of God.

Chapter 40 opens with the call of God to the prophet to speak to the remnant.

"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 a new note of grace and mercy that will be extended to those who believe in Him. The theme of this whole section is expressed in these words:

"O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain: O Jerusalem, that bringeth 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 the basis of the whole message of Scripture to the believers: Think about God! Behold your God! Isaiah reveals a wonderful description of God's grace and love:

"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).

God will come in judgment, but with His own people He will be gentle and considerate.

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

The remainder of chapter 40 presents emphasis upon the greatness of God.

In chapter 41 Isaiah shows that the same God is great in His sovereignty, to be seen in the way in which He chose Israel to be His own. When the prophet speaks now of Israel he has in mind the remnant, the believing people. They will inherit all the promises originally given to Israel.

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

This is the Word of God for those people who believed in Him at a time when all the nation went down in sin.

In chapter 42 the prophet reveals some wonderful things about the Servant of God, and how God will perform His gracious salvation through His Servant.

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:1).

Isaiah goes on to declare:

"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord" (Isaiah 42:6-8).

This promise that God makes to His own Servant was fulfilled in Jesus Christ who came to be the very Servant of God.

In chapter 43 Israel is to be comfortably assured that they will receive the salvation of God by the grace of God.

"But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine" (Isaiah 43:1).

It is well to remember these words were spoken to the believers, to the remnant. Isaiah was preaching judgment to the nation as a whole, but some persons believed God, and to these Isaiah brought a special message. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isaiah 43:25). These are the words in which God made it known that He actually would bless these people.

Believers today can read through chapter 43 and be greatly blessed to hear the promises of the grace

of God.

43:3 "I am the Lord thy God . . . thy Savior."

43:5 "Fear not . . . I am with thee."

43:7 "For I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him."

43:10 "Ye are my witnesses . . . my servant whom I have chosen."

43:15 "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King."

43:19 "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."

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

These are the promises of God for every believer, for every Christian. And here is a remarkable revelation of the grace of God: "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel" (Isaiah 43:22-23). The prophet reveals that God knew that the people He blessed would not be faithful to Him all the time. They would never qualify because they were good.

"Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance" (Isaiah 43:24-26).

It humbles the heart of the believer to realize that even though he has done wrong and has sinned, God has committed Himself to see him through.

Isaiah declares this gracious salvation will be accomplished because God is a living God.

"Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant . . . For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (Isaiah 44:1-3).

That is what God will do for these believing people because He is a living God.

"Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant; O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isaiah 44:21-22).

One might well marvel and wonder who is going to have such gracious things done to them? This is for those who believe: those who turn to God: those who repent: they are the remnant. Isaiah goes on to reveal that God works in providence as Sovereign. He is in control.

"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7).

He is Almighty! He is really in control of all. The prophet emphasizes God is the only God in all the universe.

". . . who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:21-22).

God is going to bless: He is going to enrich the people greatly who put their trust in Him.

The whole world should know that God is a living God in contrast with the idols of the heathen. He is the Living God that can save. ". . . I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:11). It is true that God's people will be threatened. They will not have an open easy way, but the power that threatens them will be destroyed. At the time of Isaiah the enemy of God's people was Babylon. Isaiah clearly announces the complete destruction of this nation because they opposed God's own people.

Once again Isaiah reveals the riches of God's marvellous grace. God knew that Israel, the remnant,

would not obey Him perfectly, so He arranged to save them by grace.

" . . . I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb. 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" (Isaiah 48:8-10).

God will call His people to Himself. They will not be perfect; they will not do everything He wants them to do; but He will save them by His grace and mercy.

God will perform this salvation through His Messiah whose righteousness will be ascribed to the remnant. "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Isaiah 49:3). The promises given to the Messiah are also given to the remnant. ". . . In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages" (Isaiah 49:8). Despite their sins, God will not forsake His people. ". . . Be- hold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away" (Isaiah 50:1). Isaiah emphasizes the fact that God will actually save His people by His own grace and mercy. The remnant can be assured because God is a wonder-working God.

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens . . . the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment . . . but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished" (Isaiah 51:6).

God can work wonders, and He will do it. All these promises taken together make the whole tone of this portion of Isaiah one continued assurance to these people who turn to God. Remember what qualified these people was that when they heard the call of God, they repented and they came to Him humbly and they trusted in Him. They weren't perfect, but God was going to be able through His Messiah, through Christ, through His Chosen One to save all them to the uttermost who would come unto Him. "Marvellous grace of our loving Lord. Grace that is greater than all our sin"!!

Chapter 11 – The Suffering Servant

The Bible deals with the problem of living in this world. It reveals that man in himself is unable and even unwilling to do what is needed to be done in order that he might be blessed. The Bible teaches us that all in this world is under God. God who created this world and all that is in it made man. He commanded man how he should live in order to be blessed. God judges man and saves man in His mercy. The Bible tells us about this and has a special message to mankind because of man's sin. This is a message of "judgment" because of the sin; of "grace" because of God; and of "promise" because of God's plan. Salvation is the work of God: something that God does for man. The Bible reveals that the salvation of God is accomplished through One Person chosen by God for the task. The fact that He was chosen by God causes Him to be named on occasions "the Anointed One" to whom was given a special responsibility . The phrase "the Anointed One" in the Hebrew is the name "Messiah", in the Greek it is the name "Christ."

Since salvation will be operative in anyone who believes, it is so important that the person should know something to believe. The Bible tells us that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Thus it is very important, as Paul points out, that there should be a revelation of the promise, so that man can believe it and be saved. The promise of God has been revealed in times past by the prophets and in these last days by His Son. The prophets ministered to Israel, who had been chosen as a people to demonstrate the ways of God. Therefore, we can notice the prophets in Israel and learn what God will do with His people.

Isaiah was a prophet who preached the Word of God to Israel. He interpreted Israel's history to show them the promises they had in the covenants with God. He appraised Israel's conduct, and showed them how they were disobeying God and sinning. He reminded them of the covenant promises through which God would bring His people to Himself. Then Isaiah told them what God would do to bring this to pass. In the prophecy of Isaiah, as in the other prophets, we find judgment because of sin, grace because of the mercy of God, and promise because of the integrity of the covenant promise of God. God is going to get His will done.

Judgment would come upon all: forasmuch as, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Grace would be offered to whomsoever would repent and turn to Him. The promise of eternal salvation through the Messiah, the Chosen One, would go out to these people who had turned to Him. It is always important to remember that the law of God is eternal. There will never be any change in the requirements that God makes: "Not one jot nor one tittle will pass from the law till all be fulfilled." But in the law, as revealed by Moses, there was provision for the remission of sin by the substitution of a sacrifice. When the plague of death went through the land of Egypt, the firstborn in every household was to die except where a lamb had been slain and the blood had been put upon the doorpost. This was called the Passover. In the New Testament it is written "Christ our Passover has been slain for us." Isaiah revealed in a wonderful way that the Messiah, the Chosen One of God, would be the Sacrifice who would be offered on behalf of the people.

Peter tells us that the prophets of the Old Testament were puzzled by the revelation of the truth about Messiah, about Christ.

"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).

Apparently the problem which concerned the prophets was the sufferings of Christ and the glory that was to follow. They could not understand how Messiah could suffer even unto death, and at the same time would rule as King of Kings. Some students of the Old Testament, some of the rabbis, in trying to understand this, came to the conclusion that there would be two Messiahs. One of them would come to die, and one of them would come to rule.

This may well account for the inquiry that John the Baptist sent when he was in prison.

"Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matthew 11:2).

The language here does not mean "Art thou he who should have come, and should we now look for another?" No! No! There was never any doubt in John the Baptist's mind that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lamb of God. He said about Him, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." But there was more prophecy in the Bible, than that Messiah would be the Lamb. There was prophecy in the Bible that Messiah would be "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah." What puzzled John and the former prophets was, how could the same Person be the Lamb and the Lion? How could this same Person suffer unto death, and rule in glory forever? In the Book of Revelation where John saw the heaven opened he saw One on the throne. Do you remember who that One on the throne was? It was "the Lamb that was slain." John the Baptist had not seen that vision, and he was without that knowledge. He knew perfectly well that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lamb of God, and that Jesus of Nazareth would die. But John had not seen the resurrection! It is the resurrection that makes possible what John saw on the Isle of Patmos, "The Lamb that was slain and is alive forevermore!" Isaiah presents the most graphic portrayal in all Scripture of the Messiah

as the Lamb of God. "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many as were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men " (Isaiah 52:13-14). This is probably the only place in Scripture where there is any clue as to the personal appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament does not give you any description of Him at all. But here in the Old Testament, this prophet looking forward and seeing this Servant of God said about Him, "His visage," that is His countenance, His face, "was so marred" – that means scarred, smashed, broken up, "more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." We have seen many pictures by artists who tried to express by their art what they consider to be the beauty of holiness in the face of Jesus Christ. They usually picture Him as a very fine looking even handsome person. Remember, that's just a picture, and with all due regard to the sincerity of the artist, you must come back here to Isaiah and get this description. Also it is well to note ". . . He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2).

What evidence there is that may be noted seems to indicate that Jesus of Nazareth Himself, as He was, in all probability was not striking in appearance. The record is that when Judas was going to betray Him, Judas said, "I know where He is going to be, and I will take you there and show you." Judas did not say, "You will recognize Him by this appearance or that appearance or some other way." Actually what he said was "the one I kiss will be the one." What does that seem to imply to you? Is it not that He looked so much like anyone else that you couldn't tell by looking who was He?

Isaiah went on to prophesy:

". . . There was no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:2-3).

This would seem to say that while Jesus of Nazareth was here in this world people round about Him couldn't get over the fact that commonly speaking the public despised Him: even the people who had known something of His actions and His conduct rejected Him. "We esteemed him not." "But" (meaning to say, the truth of the matter was) "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). The prophet reveals this distressing picture of the Messiah, so beaten, broken, rejected, so despised, carrying our sins; and being treated accordingly. In verse 6 we read, "All we like sheep have gone astray" (i.e. we have wandered in different ways). Think of the sheep leaving the sheepfold in the morning and going out to pasture. They do not go in a straight line, they scatter, and this is the idea here. "All we like sheep have scattered; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). That's the way in which it was predicted about the Messiah. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth " (Isaiah 53:7). He was accused, He was mistreated, He was unfairly treated and did not utter a single word of complaint. "He was taken from prison . . . He was cut off out of the land of the living" (Isaiah 53:8). That is exactly what happened to Jesus of Nazareth.

"And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:9-11).

These words point forward to the time when Christ Jesus would see anybody coming to God, trusting in Him: He would be satisfied because that would be what He died for.

This is how Isaiah pictured the Messiah as the suffering Servant. The Son of God would allow Himself to be treated as the Sacrifice. The Old Testament procedure was that a lamb should be brought, killed, and the blood sprinkled in the Temple. The Scriptures are saying that He was going to die for us: that He

would take our place as our sacrifice. When the Scriptures call Christ Jesus the Lamb of God, they are pointing out primarily that He was kind and gentle and harmless. Just as the lamb in the Old Testament was brought in and was killed at the altar, and the blood brought in and sprinkled in the worship in the Sanctuary, so with Christ Jesus. He died for us and shed His blood that we might be able to come into the presence of God. Just as in the time of the Old Testament the priest would come out and announce to the people that their sins were forgiven, so Christians now have Christ Jesus interceding on their behalf and taking their place in the presence of God making it possible for them to be assured from God that their sins have been forgiven.

Chapter 12 – The King in Glory

The prophet Isaiah began his prophecy by pointing out the sins of the people of God, which had become so common and so hurtful. Then he went on to note the way in which God chastens His people to try to incline their hearts unto Himself. The prophet then declared that when His people are sinning and will not be turned from their sin, this will bring forth the judgment of God in the form of total destruction. It is wonderful that God is so patient. It is wonderful that He is so understanding, so sympathetic, and remembers our frame knowing that we are but dust. But God will be nobody's fool! There comes a time when sin can be carried on to the point where God will destroy. But even then at its worst, some individuals did repent, confessing their sins and turning to God to accept His mercy. These Isaiah called the remnant. They were found in Israel, in Judah and elsewhere. Among all the people on the face of the earth, who hear the truth about God, some will turn to Him. The Apostle Paul points out:

"I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid . . . God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew . . . But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:1-5).

All through Scripture the truth is repeated, there will be some who will believe. This is a principle. It's an idea that is always found in God's dealing with His people. Though the time will come when God will bring judgment, and will punish and destroy because of sin, there will always be some who will believe and live.

The first great example of judgment in the history of mankind was the flood, when all human beings were destroyed except those that were in the ark. God knows how to deliver the godly in the day of temptation, and there He delivered Noah and his family. At a time when sin is rampant among God's people, and conduct generally seems to have become incorrigible, there will always be a remnant – the few who repent and turn to God. These are they who inherit the promises of grace. The promises God made to all Israel will be fulfilled to this remnant: to these few who truly believe. To them, God keeps His covenant promises to Abraham and David. The remnant receives the blessing of God. In the New Testament, and even now, the blessing of God comes upon the remnant because of the saving work of the Messiah. God hath chosen His Servant and has anointed Him for this work. From the beginning God had in mind that there would be One coming who would do what was necessary to save the remnant unto eternal life. This One, the Messiah, came to offer Himself as a vicarious sacrifice for these people. He Himself would die for them that they might be forgiven. Thus it is written all through the Scripture and even in this book of the prophet Isaiah. God works in the believers by His grace to change their being from death to life. This is the work of the Messiah. He works for them and on them as their King, so that He can lead them into righteousness and bring them peace and joy.

In the latter chapters of his book, Isaiah sets out with repeated emphasis the prospect of blessedness at the time when the will of God is finally done. This is truly impressive. It is astonishing to see how this book begins with such a dark tone of judgment, presents so much of the harsh consequences of God's treatment of incorrigible sinners, and then comes to the place where there is so much grace and mercy set forth as is found in the latter chapters. It would seem as though God could not inspire enough to be said by the prophet of the good things that God will do for the people who will put their trust in Him. The fact is this remnant, these who do turn to God, will not be perfect. They will not be without sin. They will often act in ways that are contrary to God even after they have turned to Him, but God will not let them go. This is marvellous. It is a truth to be found elsewhere in the Bible, but it is brought out in these chapters so very clearly. These believers are the remnant, and they belong to Him, and He will keep them in spite of what they do.

All this operation of the grace of God will be the work of the One we call "Christ." At this point, so far as Isaiah is concerned, He is to be seen as King of Kings. The blessing of God that He pours out upon mankind does not suspend the rules of justice in a kindly manner, nor fix things so that man can receive what man doesn't deserve. The truth of the matter is so far as man's conduct goes, that the law will prevail. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" because "not one jot nor one tittle will pass from the law till all be fulfilled." But there is another marvelous truth. God sent His Son into this world to be the Servant who would obey the law, who would fulfill the requirements and who would obey His father perfectly and receive from His Father a great blessing, i.e., the privilege of saving to the uttermost those who would put their trust in Him. This is the great truth set forth in Scripture, and we can see all the grace of God.

The latter chapters of the book of Isaiah show this clearly. "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 54:1). The prophet uses this figure to indicate that although there was no natural expectation that these people would be especially blessed, God would favor them and bless them beyond natural expectations and we read along in here to the 10th verse:

"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee . . . And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee" (Isaiah 54:10-14).

This chapter concludes with these marvelous words:

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 54:17).

Throughout this whole chapter the reader will be impressed with the idea that the remnant will be blessed by the unfailing kindness of God.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).

This blessing of God will be free. It will be what they need, and it will be given to them by the grace of God. This is followed by a wonderful promise:

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

This is a marvelous promise! It will be for those that turn to God. It will be for those who seek Him. And here is something wonderful! I can turn to God before I am actually inwardly altogether what I ought to be. If I turn to God and call on Him, then this Scripture applies to me: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way." The wicked would have to turn, that is the only way this could be done: the wicked turns while he is still wicked, but he turns to God! Now these words were spoken to the wicked and the unrighteous, and they were invited to turn to God. This is something one hardly expects to find in the prophets, but here it is in Isaiah. This word goes out to all men, everywhere: the grace of God will be available to anybody, freely, by the Word of God.

In chapter 56 it is written that this blessing will be available to anyone, even among the Gentiles. The sinner need not be of the seed of Abraham in the physical sense. All that is necessary is to believe as Abraham believed.

"Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants . . . Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer . . . for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:6-7).

Anybody can come, and everybody who comes will be blessed.

In chapter 57 there is a warning that those who worship idols will never receive the blessing, but those that are humble will freely and surely receive it.

". . . I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).

Here is the marvelous truth for all believers: what qualifies us for the blessing of God is not our good works, not our noble achievements, not even our good promises, but it is our humility and our repentance. The humble and the contrite are those that will be kept.

"I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners" (Isaiah 57:18).

So all through this latter portion of Isaiah it is written over and over again that God will bless. He will bless freely, He'll bless richly those who humbly repent, and sincerely yield to the will of God. Unconfessed sin, even among this remnant, continuing sin will cut off any help from God, but if the remnant is repentant, if these people that turn to God come sincerely, they will be saved.

This is the work of Messiah, the King. Thinking of the King in His glory, one could expect some description of His surroundings in some glorious fashion: some kind of display of perhaps lights, music and of general human celebration and praise. If one looks for this in Isaiah one looks in vain. The amazing thing about this King of Kings, this Lord of all is that among His own people He moves meekly and humbly and gently and kindly. This is the glory of God, the fulfillment of God's purpose. What God actually wants is a humble spirit and a contrite heart in the believers. When God moves in among His people to turn them to Him, the result will be that they are humbly seeking His face.

The blessing of God will make Jerusalem a glorious place. Those who believe in Him shall be blessed. Salvation will come from the hand of God and will make the remnant great. God will regenerate them. The Apostle Paul could say, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation." And in the closing chapters of the book of Isaiah, you will read that to carry out His purpose, to bless those who put their trust in Him, God will make all things new: a new heaven and a new earth, and He will bring to Himself those who put their trust in Him, and He will destroy all else. All this will be done in and through the Messiah, the Christ, the One who is the King of Kings and the Lord of all.