

## STUDIES IN SECOND AND THIRD ISAIAH

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CONSIDERATIONS IN TEACHING  
ISAIAH 40-55 AND 56-66

[Material in brackets is intended only for the teachers, and probably should not be reproduced for class members. The 27 chapters of Second and Third Isaiah are more difficult to divide into 12 or 13 lessons than a short NT book like Hebrews, but the division that follows should probably work fine. Splitting Second and Third Isaiah apart to study them separately doesn't work very well, because Third Isaiah, for the most part, is so contextually bound to Second Isaiah, it would be hard to understand it on its own. On the other hand, to extend the combined study more than 13 weeks runs the risk of the material becoming boring, at least to some of the students.

Since it was long taught and preached in our churches that all of the book of Isaiah was written by Isaiah of Jerusalem in the eighth century BC and that anyone who thought otherwise was a liberal heretic who denied inspiration, it is probably necessary to begin the class with an introduction giving the historical and literary reasons for dividing the book into First, Second, and Third Isaiah.]

### **Part One: Lessons on Second Isaiah (Lessons One Through Eight)**

#### **Lesson One**

1. The book of Isaiah is normally divided into three main sections, which are dated to different historical periods and attributed to different authors.
  - A. First Isaiah consists of chapters 1-39 and contains the genuine oracles and stories about Isaiah of Jerusalem, a famous prophet whose prophetic ministry extended at least 38 years and perhaps as long as 52 years.
    1. According to Isa 1:1, he served under the Judean kings Uzziah (also called Azariah in other texts, 2 Kgs 15:1), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.
      - a) Isa 6:1 dates his prophetic call vision to the year of the death of king Uzziah, which was probably 738 BC, the same year as the disastrous battle of Kullani (Calno, Isa 10:9; Calneh, Amos 6:2), when Uzziah/Azariah's south Syrian anti-Assyrian league was defeated by the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III in north Syria.
      - b) He lived to see the Assyrian king Sennacherib's invasion of Hezekiah's Judah in 701 BC, about which he has a lot to say.
      - c) And he may have lived as late as 686 BC, when Hezekiah probably died. There is a late legend in the Greek pseudepigraphy that Manasseh, Hezekiah's son and successor, had him martyred by sawing him in two.
    2. During his ministry Israel, the northern kingdom, was hostile to Judah, but Judah and Israel's most powerful enemy during this time was the mighty Assyrian empire.
      - a) Ahaz of Judah, when attacked by Aram, Israel, and the Philistines in 735 BC, felt compelled to become a vassal of Assyria, but Isaiah opposed this.
      - b) Under Hezekiah Judah was tempted to ally itself with Babylon and/or Egypt as counter-weights to Assyria, but Isaiah opposed these alliances as well
      - c) During Isaiah's time neither Babylon nor Egypt were popularly considered the enemies of Judah

3. There are some parts of First Isaiah, particularly chapters 24-27, 34-35, 36-39, that were probably not composed by Isaiah of Jerusalem, but since this class is about Second and Third Isaiah, that it a topic for a class on First Isaiah.
- B. Second Isaiah consists of chapters 40-55 and contains only oracles of, no stories about, a prophet who lived in Babylon during the Babylonian exile (597-538 BC) and whose ministry began sometime toward the end of this exile.
1. Second Isaiah twice mentions by name Cyrus (Isa 44:28; 45:1), the founder of the Persian empire, who ruled from 550-530 BC.
    - a) Cyrus was largely unknown until he overthrew his father-in-law, the great Median emperor, and took over his vast Median empire in 550 BC.
    - b) It was Cyrus's brilliant and rapid conquest of the Lydian empire of Croesus in 547/6 BC, however, that most impressed Second Isaiah, who refers to the speed of Cyrus's conquests (Isa 41:2; 45:1-3). Cyrus had swiftly conquered most of Asia Minor to the Aegean Sea, apparently in the process seizing northern Syria and Cilicia formerly controlled by Babylon.
    - c) With this Persian expansion to the east, north, and west of Babylon, it was clear to Second Isaiah that Babylon's days of rule were numbered, and he boldly proclaimed the coming fall of Babylon (Isa 47) and Israel's triumphant return from Babylonian exile to rebuild Jerusalem and the ruined cities of Judah (Isa 51:1-12).
  2. Second Isaiah presupposes--he does not prophesy--the existence of the Neo-babylonian empire and the Judean exile in Babylon, neither of which existed in the time of First Isaiah.
  3. He also presupposes a discouraged Judean audience in Babylonian exile that seemed ready to believe that their God Yahweh had abandoned them or was unable to compete with the great gods of the Babylonian empire.
    - a) They seemed attracted to the pomp and ceremony of the great Babylonian religious processions with their multiple idols.
    - b) Against this discouragement he makes fun of idolatry and argues from the history of prophetic prediction that Yahweh, the creator of the universe, unlike the Babylonian idols, had foreseen the events unfolding before their eyes.
  4. Based on these observations, I would date the main work of Second Isaiah prior to Cyrus' peaceful occupation of Babylon in 539 BC, and Cyrus' edict allowing the Jews to return to Israel and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem that followed no later than 538 BC.
- C. Third Isaiah consists of chapters 56-66 and, for the most part, seems to presuppose a discouraged audience in Palestine **after** the return from the Babylonian exile in 538 BC.
1. For his audience the glorious promises of Second Isaiah about the rebuilding and repopulation of Jerusalem and the ruined cities of Judah seemed far from being fulfilled.
  2. One also detects a major split in the community between those trying to obey the Law and those who had reverted to traditional pagan practices in Palestine. This suggests a somewhat later date during the Persian period, perhaps after the temple rebuilding project of Zerubbabel reflected in Haggai and Zechariah (520-515 BC), and possibly extending as late as the mid-fifth century to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

3. Some of the material in Third Isaiah sounds very similar to Second Isaiah, but much of it has a different tone, and it is possible that the material is by more than one author and is of different dates.
    - a) If the author of Second Isaiah lived to see the return to Israel in 538 BC, he most likely would have taken part in it, and it is possible that some of the material in Third Isaiah is his work, produced in and reflecting that new context.
    - b) Much of it, however, is different enough in tone and style to make one suspect that it is the work of someone else, perhaps a later disciple or disciples.
- II. These are traditional scholarly views, probably the dominant views from the 1950s-1970s, but one should note that there are fluctuations in scholarship just as there are in fashions, and there are no assured results of scholarship. Moreover, just as the most recent avant guard fashion is not necessarily the most attractive fashion, at least for most people, the most recent fad in scholarship is not necessarily an improvement over the scholarship of the past.
- A. In more recent years there has been a growing tendency to date Second and Third Isaiah later, along with another tendency to fragment this material into disconnected fragments. [The Hermeneia commentary of Klaus Baltzer, one of the commentaries I recommended as background reading for this class, represents the first tendency. He is a very fine scholar who has good insights on particular passages, but I find his thesis that Second Isaiah was written in Israel as a drama later in the Persian period totally unconvincing. I don't think there is a shred of evidence that it was written as a drama, and neither the Palestinian setting nor the late date fits the actual content of Second Isaiah, in my opinion. I have not read every recent work on Second and Third Isaiah, nor do I have any intention to do so. The primary text and early translations is where I focus my attention. Much of the secondary literature is drivel, and I am now too old to read through even the thousands of pages of good material that scholars keep churning out. Of the making of many books there is no end, and a good many of them are not worth reading.]
  - B. The second tendency to fragment the material in Second and Third Isaiah may be correct for Third Isaiah, but is not correct for Second Isaiah.
- III. Second Isaiah is marked a series of different motifs that keep reappearing in different patterns throughout the 16 chapters of his material.
- A. The motifs include
    1. The command for different heralds to make certain announcements.
    2. The personification of the cities Jerusalem/Zion and Babylon as women.
    3. The male personification of Jacob/Israel as Yahweh's servant and witnesses.
    4. The motif of Yahweh as the creator of the world to whom the pagan nations are insignificant specks of no more worry to God's power than a little dust on a merchant's scale.
    5. The appeal to the nations to state the case for their gods as the controllers of history and the predictors of Cyrus' victories.
    6. The making fun of idolatry as irrational activity.
    7. The deriding of the incantations against evil that accompanied idolatry as useless.
  - B. These reappearing motifs in altered order often causes the careless reader to regard the material as both disconnected and boringly repetitive, but there is a internal logic to both the repetition and the variation in the structure.
    1. The prophet is trying to convince his discouraged countrymen in exile that Yahweh has not abandoned them. That he remains in control of history, that the time of

- Jerusalem and Israel's punishment has ended, and that Yahweh is about to redeem Israel and Jerusalem and punish Babylonia for its excesses as the agent of God's earlier punishment of his people.
2. As proof of Second Isaiah's claims, he points to the earlier prophetic predictions now being fulfilled, and he adds his own regarding Cyrus's rise to power, and his coming conquest of Babylon, none of which any of the great Babylonian gods like Bel (Marduk) and Nebo (Nabu) had predicted.
  3. In the face of these events, the blind and deaf Israelites were to be Yahweh's witnesses to the nations, and neither the irrational making of idols, nor the incantations to ward off evil for which the Babylonian priests were famous, had any chance of success against Yahweh's power.
  4. As Yahweh had redeemed Israel long ago at the crossing of the Red Sea, so he would once again bring them out of captivity, bringing them through the wilderness where he would supply them with water and safe passage.
  5. Just as Abraham and Jacob had come to Palestine from Mesopotamia, so God would bring his people back from Mesopotamia again, leading them gently like Jacob's flock of sheep.
  6. Against Jerusalem's complaint that she had been divorced and abandoned by God, and that she had suffered the loss of all her children, Yahweh responds that Jerusalem had no divorce papers. Yahweh had only turned away from Jerusalem for a short time because of her sins, but Yahweh was coming back to Jerusalem, and the supposedly barren city would soon learn that she had more children than she could imagine. She would ask in amazement, "Who raised all these children and from where did they come?"
  7. Israel's experience in sin, punishment, exile, and deliverance, was in fact part of Israel's role as God's servant, through which the nations would come to learn of Yahweh's glory and themselves turn to Yahweh for salvation.
- IV. One can illustrate how at least some of these motifs work together by an examination of chapter 40.
- A. In verses 1-8, Second Isaiah begins with a command issued by God to an undefined masculine plural group--the verb is a masculine plural imperative. This group is commanded to comfort God's people.
    1. The group is sometimes identified as prophets, but it is more likely a reference to the angelic members of God's heavenly court, as in 1 Kgs 22:19-23 or the plural "us" of Isa 6:8.
    2. They are to announce to Jerusalem that her time of punishment has ended, her penalty paid, her punishment more than enough for her sins.
    3. Then an unidentified single voice cries out with another masculine plural imperative commanding the group to prepare a road in the wilderness for Yahweh to travel. The group addressed is still presumably angelic members of the heavenly court. The preparation of the road in the wilderness is so that all flesh may see the glory of Yahweh.
    4. Then in v. 6, the single voice gives a command in the masculine singular imperative to a single individual, presumably the prophetic author of the material, to cry out.
      - a) He asks, "What shall I cry?"

- b) The answer, “All flesh is grass,” suggests that human power and glory is very transitory, fading as quickly as a spring flower under a hot wind, while in contrast, God’s promises stand forever. The sense is that no matter how glorious the human power of Babylon may seem, it is as nothing before God’s power.
- B. Then at verses 9-11 there is a command addressed to a feminine singular.
1. This female is commanded to go up a high mountain to act as a single female herald to announce glad tidings. The NRSV correctly translates this as a command to Zion/Jerusalem, personified as a woman, to raise her voice as God’s herald.
    - a) Many translations, including JPS and NIV, mistranslate the text as a masculine plural command to prophets or angels to act as heralds to Zion/Jerusalem.
      - (1) But there is no plural command here at all.
      - (2) And individual angels are never represented in the Bible as female.
    - b) Rather Zion/Jerusalem, which lies at the northern edge of Judah, is personified as a woman who is to act as a herald to the other cities of Judah.
  2. Jerusalem is to announce to the other cities of Judah that God is coming!
  3. Like Jacob coming back from Mesopotamia in Gen 33:1-14, God is bringing his flock gently with him.
  4. These verses are connected to the earlier verses in 1-5, because God is coming on the road constructed through the wilderness by the angelic work crews.
- C. In verses 12-17, the questions in verses 12-14 are intended to highlight the independent, creative power of Yahweh/God, to whom the nations are no more than a drop from a bucket (v. 15).
1. All the wood and animals of Lebanon would not suffice for a sacrifice for God
  2. And the nations are nothing (vv. 16-17).
- D. That in turn introduces the motif of the foolishness of idols and the foreign powers who depend on them
1. Since God is so powerful, how could one possibly compare the real God to man-made idols (vv. 18-10).
  2. According to vv. 21-24, God as the creator of the world brings world rulers (the Babylonians) to nought. Picking up on vv. 6-8, scarcely are these world rulers planted, sown, or sprouted, before God blows on them and they wither.
- E. In contrast, according to vv. 25-26, God has created the whole host of heaven, and by his great power calls them all out by name.
1. Thus according to vv. 27-31, Jacob/Israel should not think that God has abandoned or disregarded his people.
  2. God is the creator of all and everlasting, he does not faint or grow weary, and he renews the strength of the faint and powerless who wait on God. He will overthrow the princes of the world like fading grass, but he will save and renew his people who trust in him.
- V. Conclusion: We are not in babylonian exile like Isaiah’s original audience, but in our own time we have our own disappointments and discouragements as we wait for God’s salvation. The reminder of the power of our creator, and the reassurance that his promised Word will not fail, can renew our strength in these times of discouragement as we wait on the Lord.

## **Lesson Two (Chapters 41-43)--Jacob/Israel, God’s Servant**

1. Chapter 41

A. Verses 1-7.

1. In verse 1 the foreign coastlands and foreign peoples are commanded to keep silence, renew their strength, and draw near to engage Yahweh, the God of Israel, in a judicial trial.
2. They are challenged in verse 2 to identify the one who roused a victor from the east and summoned him, and delivered the nations to him to conquer.
  - a) The reference is to Cyrus and his conquests, as 44:28 and 45:1 make explicit.
  - b) And as verses 3-5 make clear, the correct answer to the question is that it is Yahweh, the first and last, who has done this.
3. As a result the coastlands and the ends of the earth are in a panic.
4. Their inane solution to the frightening conquests of Cyrus is to help one another make idols that they have to nail in place so they won't fall over (verses 6-7). Note the humor at the expense of the idols.

B. Verse 8-16.

1. In contrast, God tells Israel /Jacob, God's servant and chosen one, the seed of Abraham, God's friend, not to be afraid, because God chose you and called you from the ends of the earth.
2. There is an allusion here to the call of Abraham from Mesopotamia and to Jacob's return from Mesopotamia in the patriarchal accounts in Genesis.
3. God promises to help his people, and their enemies will be ashamed, embarrassed, and will perish.
4. By God's power, despite Jacob being a mere worm, Jacob's enemies will perish, and Jacob/Israel like a threshing board will thresh and winnow them, and the storm will scatter them,
5. And Jacob will rejoice in God, the Holy One of Israel.

C. Verses 17-20.

1. At v. 17 the imagery shifts from the defeat of Israel's enemies to Israel's potential hardships on the way back from Babylon to Palestine.
2. If they get thirsty on the way, God will open up springs in the wilderness, and provide the shade of trees, so that they will understand that Yahweh is the divine power behind their return to their homeland.

D. Verses 21-29.

1. In v. 21, Yahweh/God, the king of Jacob, calls upon the pagan gods to approach and explain what is happening and is about to happen.
2. But these mere idols are incapable of doing anything, so anyone who chooses such gods is an abomination (v. 24).
3. It is Yahweh who stirred up (Cyrus) from the north to trample the other rulers, and it was God who brought it about.
4. God's former promises to Zion are coming to pass, and God has given her a herald. Note the allusion back to 40:9-11.
5. The idols in contrast are totally worthless.

VI. Chapter 42.

A. Verses 1-9.

1. In verses 1-4 God introduces his servant and chosen one, upon whom he has placed his Spirit that he might bring forth justice to the nations.

2. Though the servant will neither cry out or lift up his voice, he will prevent a bruised reed from breaking and keep alive the faint flame of a smoking wick until he has brought forth justice to the nations, and for his instruction the coastlands wait.
3. Yahweh, the creator of the world and who gives life and breath to all who are upon it (v. 5), addresses this servant in the second person (v. 6), saying I have called you and taken hold of your hand, fashioned you, and have given you as a covenant to the people and a light to the nations, thereby opening the eyes of the blind, bringing prisoners out of prison (v. 7).
4. Yahweh is the one who has done this, and will not give his glory and praise to idols (v.8).
5. The former predictions have come to pass, and now God is declaring new events to his audience before they transpire (v. 9).
6. This servant is not identified by name in this passage, though in 41:8 God's servant was identified as Israel /Jacob, and the same identification will be repeated in the chapters to come.
7. There will be a separate lesson (Lesson Seven) on the identity of the servant and the so-called servant songs.

B. Verses 10-25.

1. In vv. 10-12 there is a command to the whole world to sing a new song of praise to Yahweh.
2. The reason for this is that Yahweh has now gone forth as a warrior after keeping quiet for a long time.
3. Now, like a pregnant woman when her labor pains come upon her, God will no longer wait (vv. 13-14), but will render his judgment upon his enemies (v. 15).
4. He will also lead the blind on a road that they do not know, lighting the way for them on this straight road (v. 16)--i.e., the same road that the angelic corps of engineers were called upon to prepare in chpt 40.
5. When this happens, those who trusted in idols will be ashamed (v. 17).

C. Verses 18-20.

1. God then identifies these blind and deaf ones, who have seen many things but do not take heed, who have open ears, but do not hear, picking up a motif from Isa 6:9-10, as his servant (Israel /Jacob).
2. God has chosen to glorify his teaching for his own vindication, despite the fact that his people were plundered and despoiled with no one saying, "turn back!" (vv. 21-22).
3. The prophet then asks his audience, "Who among you will pay attention to this (v. 23)?"
4. Who gave Israel up to be plundered? Was it not Yahweh against whom we have sinned (v. 24)?
5. So God punished Israel, but Israel did not understand or take it to heart (v. 25).

VII. Chapter 43

A. Verses 1-8.

1. This chapter continues the argument of chapter 42.
2. God punished Israel for his sin, but now Yahweh, the creator of Jacob and fashioner of Israel, reassures Jacob/Israel, telling him not to fear, for I have redeemed you, and you are mine.

3. Whether going through waters or fire, God will protect Israel, and bring them back from east and west, north and south (v. 6).
  4. They are the people God created, formed, and made for his glory (v. 7);
  5. Though they are the blind people with eyes, and deaf people with ears (v. 8).
- B. Verses 9-14.
1. Again God calls upon the foreign nations to assembly and to announce who has done these things (v. 9).
  2. Israel, on the other hand, is to be Yahweh's witnesses and his servant(s) that they might know and believe God, for there is no other God, and the people of Israel are God's witnesses that it was Yahweh who accomplished these things (vv. 10-12).
  3. There is no other power to rival him (vv. 11-13).
  4. For Israel's sake Yahweh will send to Babylon, break down the bars of Israel's prison there, and turn the Chaldeans' (The Chaldeans were the tribal groups who ruled Babylon in this period) joyous shouts into mourning (v. 14).
- C. Verses 15-21.
1. Yahweh is Israel's creator and king, and just as he made a path in the sea in the days of Moses, destroying chariot and horse, army and warrior, so God will do a new thing even greater, so great that the former deliverance at the Red Sea will be forgotten, because the new deliverance will be even greater.
  2. God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, so that his people might pass from Babylon to Palestine to declare God's praise.
- D. Verses 22-28.
1. This deliverance is in spite of the fact that Jacob had not served God in the past.
  2. They had worn God out with their sins and iniquities, but God forgave them for his own sake, and he remind them that it was the sins of their leaders that led God to subject Israel to the exile.
  3. The argument here is to undercut any complaint from the prophet's skeptical audience that Yahweh had unfairly abandoned and punished his people.
- E. Conclusion
1. Again our situation is far different from the Israelites at the end of the Babylonian exile, but if God could use them as his witnesses to the foreign nations despite their sins, their blindness and deafness to what God was doing in the world and in Israel's history,
  2. It should give us encouragement that God can use us in our time as his servants, even though we often sin and fail to understand what God is about.
  3. Despite these failures, God still is able to use us as his servants.

### **Lesson Three (Chapters 44-45)--Cyrus, the Persian Emperor, God's Messiah.**

#### 1. Chapter 44

##### F. Verses 1-8.

1. But now Jacob/Israel or Jacob/Jeshurun (a name of honor or endearment for Israel), God's chosen servant, should not be afraid, because God will water the ground and cause Jacob's offspring to flourish like grass or willows by streams of water, who will acknowledge Yahweh as their Lord (vv. 1-5).
2. God is the first, the last, and only God (v. 6), and no other god has made the future known as he has, and Israel is God's witness to this fact (vv. 7-8).

G. Verses 9-20.

1. By contrast, those who fashion idols are idiots.
2. They do not consider the fact that part of the wood they use to make a fire to warm themselves, or cook,
3. And part of it they turn into an idol to which they then bow down and ask it to save them, though the idol is nothing but an inert block of wood.

H. Verses 21-28

1. But Jacob/Israel should remember these things, because he is God's servant, and God has forgiven him, therefore heaven and earth should break out in praise for God's act of redemption (vv. 21-23).
2. Yahweh, Jacob's redeemer, is the creator of the world who frustrates the omens of liars and makes fools of diviners--the reference is to the Babylon omen priests and diviners--but God at the same time confirms the word of his servant Jacob, and the predictions of his messengers.
3. God is the one who says Jerusalem will be inhabited again and the cities of Judah will be rebuilt, who dries up the rivers so that Israel may return to its own land,
4. And God is the one who summoned Cyrus, the Persian, to be his shepherd to carry out his purpose of rebuilding Jerusalem and its temple (vv. 24-28).

VIII. Chapter 45.

A. Verses 1-8

1. Yahweh even calls the Persian Cyrus his Messiah, his anointed one (vs. 1)--a title normally reserved for Israel's historical Davidic kings or the expected Davidic king of the future.
2. God promises to open doors before Cyrus and give him hidden treasures so that Cyrus will know that it is Yahweh who gave him his success (vv. 1-3), and that it was for the sake of Jacob/Israel, God's servant, that God did it.
3. God called Cyrus even though Cyrus did not know him, for Yahweh alone is God.
4. And God did it in order that the whole world would realize that Yahweh alone was God (vv. 4-5).
5. God creates everything, and the heavens are called upon to rain down victory (vv. 7-8).

B. Verses 9-25

1. Then the prophet challenges the doubters in his audience, whom he compares to a pot that complains about the way the potter made him, or a child who complains about his parents (vv. 9-10).
2. Israel should not question God about his plans and the way he accomplishes his purposes (v. 11).
3. God chose to use Cyrus as his agent, and Israel has no standing to complain about God's methods.
4. Israel will soon see other nations recognizing that only with Israel is God (vv. 12-15).
5. Those who fabricate idols will be disgraced, but Israel will not be ashamed. The promise is that God did not create the world to be a wasteland, which suggests that God did not intend his people to seek him in an uninhabited wasteland, that is, in a desolate Palestine (vv. 16-19).

6. The remnants of the peoples are challenged to declare who announced this before it took place, and the answer is that it was Yahweh, the only true God, to whom every knee will eventually bend. In him Israel will be vindicated (vv. 20-25).
- C. Conclusion--Like Second Isaiah's audience, we often wonder why God lets the history of the world and his church take such twists and turns that seem to us so hostile toward God's purposes. Second Isaiah reminds us, however, that God's ways are not our ways, that God's way of working his will often seems strange to us. It reminds us that God may use the most unlikely, non-believing pagan agents to accomplish his will. It calls us to trust God and remain patient and faithful, as we await God's salvation.

#### **Lesson Four (Chapters 46-48)--Babylon Versus Jerusalem**

##### 1. Chapter 46

###### D. Verses 1-2.

1. Bel (Lord) was a standard designation for the main Babylonian God, Marduk, and Nebo refers the second major Babylonian God, Nabu.
2. When the prophet speaks of them bowing down and stooping, he is suggesting their defeat. Early in Persia's attack on Babylonia, Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-babylonian empire, gathered up all the divine images from the outlying Babylonian cities to bring them to Babylon to keep them from falling into the Persian's hands.
3. The move was a political disaster, because it demoralized the Chaldean defenders, when their gods abandoned them for safekeeping.
4. They were hauled off on beasts of burden, and the prophet says, the gods were unable to save themselves from being captured by the Persians.

###### E. Verses 3-4.

1. In contrast, Israel's God carried Israel from birth,
2. and will continue carrying Israel until old age.

###### F. Verses 5-7

1. All of this proves how ridiculous idolatry is.
2. Do you want a god you have to carry, or would you prefer the real God who will carry you and save you?

###### G. Verses 8-13

1. Israel's transgressors should remember this, that there is no God but Yahweh who declared his intentions from of old.
2. It is Yahweh who called Cyrus, this bird of prey from the east who will conquer Babylon.
3. God is quickly bringing his vindication, and will give his triumph to Zion, his glory to Israel.

##### IX. Chapter 47

###### A. Verses 1-4.

1. The mention of Zion, leads the prophet to switch from the Babylonian gods, to the city Babylon, personified as a woman (Princess Babylon/Miss Chaldea) like Zion. This royal princess is told to sit on the ground without a throne (or chair--only royalty or the very rich had chairs in this period) like an ordinary poor person.
2. Princess Babylon will no longer have the privilege of rank, but will grind mill like a common working woman.

- a) There are sometimes sexual overtones to grinding, and the references to pulling up her skirt, uncovering her leg, and having her nakedness exposed imply sexual abuse by Babylon's enemies.
  - b) Moreover, Yahweh will neither be intreated or plead with anyone to give her mercy (v. 3).
  - c) Israel's redeemer is Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel (v. 4).
- B. Verses 5-15
- 1. God is about to punish Princess Babylon/Miss Chaldea, because when he was angry with his people and gave them into Babylon's hand, Babylon showed no mercy to them, not even to the aged (vv. 5-6).
  - 2. Babylon never considered that her term would eventually come (v. 7).
  - 3. So Babylon will suffer the same widowhood and loss of children that Zion/Jerusalem experienced (vv. 8-9).
  - 4. Even all the incantations to ward off evil for which Babylonian priests were famous will not be able to save Babylon. Their astrologers will be useless (vv. 10-13).
  - 5. They will burn, and unlike the fire kindled from the wood used to make idols, a fire the Babylonians used to warm themselves and cook food, this fire will not be one to sit by. It will devour them, and none of their trading allies will be able to save Babylon (vv. 14-15).

## X. Chapter 48.

### A. Verses 1-11.

- 1. The prophet then turns from Babylon to address Jacob/Israel, who worship Yahweh, the God of Israel, but not in truth or righteousness (vv. 1-2).
- 2. God foretold to them the former things long ago, and they came to pass, and he did this because he knew they were stubborn, and if God had not done this, the people would claim their idols had done these things (vv. 1-5).
  - a) The reference is to earlier prophecies like those of First Isaiah (8:1-4, 16-18; 30:8-11), which he recorded in writing, sometimes sealed in a scroll with public witnesses like a legal document, so that in the future, when his prophecies came to pass, his opponents could not deny that he had predicted this outcome.
  - b) Isaiah knew that his opponents would try to rewrite history to deny he had ever said any such thing.
  - c) Sounds like modern politics, when politicians deny they ever said any such thing, only to have to backtrack, when video-tapes of their earlier comments are posted all over the web.
- 3. Second Isaiah insists that God is now announcing new things that his audience had never hear of before, because as in First Isaiah's time, the people were still treacherous and rebels, and would claim they already knew, if they thought they could get away with it (vv. 6-8).
- 4. For God's own sake, he controls his anger and does not destroy Israel, but rather refines them in the furnace of affliction--a motif from Isa 1:25--for the sake of his own glory so that God's name will not be profaned(vv. 9-11).

### B. Verses 12-22.

- 1. Yahweh the only God, reminds Jacob/Israel that he alone is God, and that he created and maintains heaven and earth by his own creative power (v. 12-13).

2. God calls upon all Israel to assemble and listen to his message. God loves (Cyrus) and will do his will against Babylon/Chaldea, using his agent (Cyrus) who will accomplish his purpose (vv. 14-15).
  3. God has announced this publicly. If Israel would just heed God's commandments, their peace and vindication would be like a river and the waves of the sea, and their offspring like sand in number (vv. 16-19).
  4. But now (v. 20) they should go out from Babylon and flee Chaldea with joy, because God has redeemed Jacob his servant.
  5. Just as the people under Moses were provided with water in the wilderness, so God will provide the exiles returning from Babylon with water in the wilderness (v. 21).
  6. But there will be no peace for the wicked (v. 22).
- C. Conclusion--There are lessons to be learned for the modern reader whether we put ourselves in the place of Babylon or of Jerusalem/Israel.
1. If we put ourselves in the place of Babylon, we should be reminded that how we treat others when we are climbing to the top or are at the top, has a way of coming back to haunt us when we are on the way down. If we show no compassion to others, we should not be surprised when we receive no compassion.
  2. If we put ourselves in the place of Israel, we should be reminded that God calls his people to obedience. There is promise of salvation to those who respond, but there always remains the threat of no peace and no salvation to the wicked among God's people who refuse to obey.

### **Lesson Five (Chapters 49-51)**

#### 1. Chapter 49.

##### D. Verses 1-6.

1. God's servant, Jacob/Israel, now addresses the foreign peoples, asserting that God had called him from the womb (v. 1), just like Jeremiah had been called to be a prophet from the womb (Jer 1:4-5).
2. God has concealed him like a weapon, through which God would gain glory for himself (vv. 2-3).
3. But despite this promise, Jacob/Israel felt discouraged, because it seemed to him that he had accomplished nothing (v. 4).
4. God, however, reassures him that God was now restoring and gathering Jacob/Israel to himself, and not only was God restoring Jacob/Israel, but Jacob/Israel would become a light to the nations so that God's salvation would extend to all peoples (vv. 5-6).

##### E. Verses 7-13.

1. Though Jacob/Israel was despised, an abhorred nation, and the slave of rulers, God's deliverance of Jacob/Israel will cause foreign kings and princes to prostrate themselves in recognition of Yahweh's glory (v. 7).
2. At the right time God will save Israel, who will not suffer on the return road to Palestine (vv. 8-11).
3. They will come from everywhere, and the whole world will rejoice that God has saved his people (vv. 12-13).

##### F. Verses 14-25.

1. Zion complained that Yahweh had forsaken her (v. 14).

2. But God promises that even if a young mother could forget her baby, Yahweh will never forget Zion, whose walls and layout are forever engraved on his hands (vv. 15-16).
3. Zion's children are quickly coming home, and she will soon be so crowded with them, that she will be utterly amazed, wondering where they all came from. Who raised them (vv. 17-21)?
4. God will raise his hand to the nations (cf. Isa 11:10), and they will bring Zion/Jerusalem's children home. Foreign kings and princesses will care for her children, and they will bow to Zion/Jerusalem, and she will know that Yahweh is truly in charge (vv. 22-23).
5. Discouraged Israel may think that one cannot retrieve the spoil from a warrior empire like Babylon, but Yahweh is about to prove that one in fact can, and God will contend with those who contended against Zion, and will save her sons (vv. 24-25).
6. Her oppressors will be forced to eat their own flesh and be drunk on their own blood (v. 26). This gruesome threat against the oppressor Babylon is apparently based on the fate of Babylon, when Sennacherib conquered it in 689 BC, or when Ashurbanipal captured it in putting down the revolt of his brother Shamash-shum-ukin in 648 BC. The prophet seems to expect a repeat of those bloody conquests of the city, which suggests these words were written before Babylon actually fell to Cyrus. When Cyrus captured the city in 539 BC, Babylon opened its gates to Cyrus as a deliverer, because the citizens of Babylon, led by the priests of Marduk, preferred Cyrus to their own ruler Nabonidus. The city was occupied peacefully, Nabonidus was taken prisoner, and life in the city seems to have gone on much as before, though certainly with the loss of status, since Babylon was no longer the imperial capital of a great empire. Nonetheless, the Persian occupation of Babylon was peaceful; there was no bloodbath as Second Isaiah expected and prophesied before the event transpired.

#### XI. Chapter 50.

##### A. Verses 1-3.

1. Zion's complaint back in 49:14 is taken up by God in verse 1. He asks, "Where is her bill of divorce. There is probably an allusion here to Jer 3:1-3, which plays on the law in Deut 24:4, that forbids a man from taking back his divorced wife who has since married another. God claims that Zion, the mother of Jacob/Israel, was never formally divorced; she never received a writ of divorce. God abandoned and punished her for her sins, but not permanently.
2. It is not that God is unable to save. After all he dried up the sea and darkened the heavens--reference back to the deliverance under Moses (vv. 2-3).

##### B. Verses 4-9.

1. The speaker in vv. 4-9 appears to be the prophet, or perhaps the ideal Jacob/Israel, who endures the insults of unbelievers, because he knows his vindication is near (vv. 4-6).
2. Those opponents will perish, but God will help him (vv. 7-9).

##### C. Verses 10-11.

1. In the light of his experience, the speaker then urges those in the audience who fear Yahweh to listen to the voice of his servant, and lean upon God, even when things seem very bleak (v. 10).

2. V. 11 is very difficult to translate and understand, but it may suggest that one should trust in God's promises, even when the future seems dark, rather than replacing his plan with a substitute plan, with lighting one's own torches. Those who reject God and try to walk by their own light, will lie down in torment.

## XII. Chapter 51.

### A. Verses 1-8.

1. Then the prophet turns back to those who truly seek Yahweh and pursue righteousness. He tells them to look to Abraham from whom they came (v. 1).
2. Abraham was a single individual when God called him, but God blessed him and Sara, and their descendants became very numerous (v. 2).
3. God will comfort Zion, restore her ruins, and make her once again like the garden of Eden, a place of great rejoicing (v. 3).
4. Pay attention, God says, for God's teaching will go forth as a light for the peoples, and his vindication is very near. Heaven and earth will disappear, and its inhabitants perish like gnats, but God's salvation will stand forever. You who pursue righteousness, do not be afraid, for the wicked who reproach and jeer you, will perish, but God's salvation will stand (vv. 4-8).

### B. Verses 9-16.

1. In response to this promise, the prophet calls upon the arm of the Lord to awake with the power it showed at creation and at the deliverance at the Red Sea. God destroyed the sea monster at creation (see Ps 74:12-17) and dried up the waters of the Red Sea for his redeemed to pass over (vv. 9-10).
2. Then, the prophet promises that, in the same way, those redeemed from Babylon will return to Zion with shouting and eternal joy (v. 11).
3. Yahweh then speaks in the first person saying, I am the one who comforts you, so why fear men who die, who are just as ephemeral as grass. You have forgotten your maker who created the world and are afraid of the human oppressor, but very quickly the prisoner will be freed and saved (vv. 12-14).
4. Yahweh asserts that he put his words in his servant's mouth, and hid him in his hand, the same God who created the heavens and the earth, and said to Zion, you are my people (vv. 15-16).

### C. Verses 17-23.

1. Therefore he urges Jerusalem to rise up. The cup of wrath she had drunk that left her without sons, wracked by famine and sword, will be taken from her hand, and she will not drink from it again (vv. 17-22).
2. Instead it will be given to the hand of her tormenters, who trampled her into the street (v. 23).

- ### D. Conclusion--Israel and Zion had suffered seriously for their sins and disobedience, but their time of suffering and punishment has come to an end if only the people will respond to God's invitation. Deliverance is at hand for those who pay heed to God. Our situation is quite different from that of Israel in exile and its ruined cities like Jerusalem back in Palestine, but we too often experience our own loss because of our rebellion against God. There is an opportune time for deliverance from our sins and their consequences, but we must seize that opportunity while it is present. There is never the promise that such opportunities will always be available.

## Lesson Six (Chapters 52-53)

### 1. Chapter 52.

#### E. Verses 1-12.

1. Continuing the thought from the preceding chapter, Zion/Jerusalem is therefore summoned to get up and dress in her best clothes, for the uncircumcised and unclean heathen will never again enter her (v. 1).
2. Her fate will be the reverse of Babylon's in chpt. 47. Jerusalem will sit enthroned, so she should remove her bonds from her neck (v. 2).
3. Jerusalem was sold for nothing and will be redeemed without payment (v. 3).
4. Just as God's people suffered under the Egyptians in the time of Moses, and then under Assyria, and now the Babylonians mock Yahweh and his people (vv. 4-5),
5. So now God will intervene again to save his people, and his people will know God's name, and will realize that God and his salvation are at hand (v. 6).
6. The herald of these good tidings, who says to Zion, your king reigns, who brings this good news, will be greeted with joy (v. 7).
7. The watchmen of Zion will cry out with joy when they see in plain view Yahweh's return to Zion, and the ruins of Jerusalem are called upon to shout for joy (v. 8).
8. Yahweh has bared his arm before all the nations, and they will all see his salvation (v. 9).
9. So the command is given to his people, "Turn away, go out from the midst of Babylon, and keep pure, you who carry the temple vessels of Yahweh back to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity (v. 11).
10. For unlike the flight from Egypt under Moses, when Israel did not have time to let their leavened bread rise, the return from Babylon will not be in flight or haste, for God will serve both as their forward guard and their rear guard (v. 12), as he was in the days of Moses, when the cloud led Israel, but stood between them and the Egyptians to protect them before the crossing of the Sea.

#### F. Verses 13-15.

1. Then God asserts that his servant will prosper and be exalted (v. 13).
2. Where once many were appalled over him because he appeared so disfigured (v. 14),
3. So now many nations will be startled by his success. Foreign kings shall shut their mouths in astonishment, because they will see what they had never been told (v. 15). This radical transformation in what the nations once thought of God's servant, who originally appeared so insignificant to them, but now is seen in all his splendor, is continued in chapter 53.

### XIII. Chapter 53

#### A. Verses 1-9.

1. The speakers in v. 1 appear to be the foreign kings who were so astounded in 52:15. They can hardly believe what they have heard,
2. Because God's servant grew up before God like an insignificant shoot in dry ground. He was not significant nor attractive, but was despised (v. 2-3).
3. The expression in v. 3 translated by NRSV as "rejected by others," *wahādal 'išīm*, could be translated as "lacking in people." If the servant is Jacob/Israel, a collective personified as an individual, but really referring to the nation of Israel, that would

make sense, for a people with a relatively small population is seldom regarded as a major power.

4. This servant suffered and was despised, but these foreign kings now recognize that the servant suffered these things for their sake. He bore their afflictions, though they thought God was simply punishing him. But no, he was pierced and crushed for the sake of the nations. All the nations had gone astray, each in its own way, but Yahweh imposed the punishment for the iniquity of all of them on him (vv. 4-6).
  5. God's servant was oppressed and afflicted, taking it passively like a lamb led to slaughter, or a sheep before the shearers (v. 7).
  6. By a perversion of justice he was taken away, cut off from the land of the living, and found his grave with the wicked, though he had done no violence to deserve it Yet God's servant took it, and was cut off from the land of the living. His grave was with the wicked, though he had done no violence to deserve it (vv. 8-9).
    - a) These last two points may reflect the ritual imagery of the scape goat (Lev 16:22)-just as the scape goat, loaded with the sins of the people, was led out into the wilderness to banish these sins, so Israel as the scape goat for the nations, bearing their sins, was led into the wilderness of exile. And the other goat of the sin offering that was slaughtered (Lev. 16:15) may be behind the language of the sheep led to slaughter. In effect Israel's life became a guilt offering for the nations.
    - b) Moreover, the servant's death and burial appears to be like the death of the people Israel in Ezek 37 (a metaphor for national calamity and loss of national identity). The same verb is used in Isa 53:8 and Ezek 37:11. Cf. the similar death imagery in Isa 55:1ff.
- B. Verses 10-12
1. But the servant's suffering will cause Yahweh's purpose to prosper, and eventually result in making many righteous (vv. 10-11).
  2. Thus the servant will have a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoil, for he exposed himself to death to bear the sin of many, making intercession for transgressors (v. 12).
- C. A fuller discussion of this servant, including the debate over the collective or individual interpretations, the relationship of this debate to the so-called "Servant Songs," and the question of how these fit with a Christian interpretation of this passage will be taken up in detail in Lesson Seven.

### **Lesson Seven (The Servant Songs and the Interpretation of the Suffering Servant)**

One of the major contributions of Second Isaiah to the development of messianic thought was the concept of the suffering servant, embodied especially in Isa 52:12-53:12, which Christians see as fulfilled in the suffering and vicarious death of Jesus Christ.

1. Since the time of the Swiss Old Testament scholar, Bernhard Duhm, in the late 1890s, it has become customary to isolate the so-called servant songs from the rest of Second Isaiah

D. Duhm identified the following texts as servant songs

1. Isa 42:1-4 (5-9, Duhm claims that vv. 5-9 and 50:10-11 were inserted by the editor who inserted the servant songs)
2. Isa 49:1-6
3. Isa 50:4-9 (10-11)

4. Isa 52:13-53:12
- E. According to Duhm, these songs are set loosely in their present context, speak of a different servant than the rest of Second Isaiah, and are by a different author.
  1. He claimed they were inserted into their current contexts wherever the editor could find enough room in the margins of his manuscript
  2. Thus these poems should be interpreted without regard to the larger context
- F. Duhm's views were always challenged, and his opinion that they were composed by a different author than the rest of Second Isaiah has never been that widely accepted, but surprisingly even many of those who rejected such key elements of his theory as this, continue to interpret these texts independently of their larger context
- XIV. In more recent years the Swedish scholar, Tryggve Mettinger, in his book *A Farewell to the Servant Songs* has mounted an even more compelling argument against Duhm's theory
  - A. The isolated songs are not interrelated to one another from the point of view of genre in a way that would suggest an original unity
  - B. Compositionally they represent a variety of different and clearly definable functions within the wider structure of the book--hence hardly a special layer or secondary series of foreign bodies within Second Isaiah
  - C. And the content does not set them off as an independent group
  - D. The contents sound very much like the rest of Second Isaiah
    1. The language used of the servant in these songs is elsewhere used of Israel
      - a) In 42:1, God says, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold," and the same language is used in 41:8-13: "But, you, Israel, my servant....I will uphold you with my victorious right hand"
      - b) In 42:1, God calls the servant, "My chosen," and in 43:20 he refers to Israel as "my chosen people," and in 45:4, he says, "my servant Jacob and Israel my chosen"
      - c) In 42:1, God says, "I have put my spirit upon him," and in 44:3, God says, "I will pour out my spirit upon your descendants,"
      - d) In 49:5, the LORD "formed me in the womb to be his servant," and in 44:1-2, God says to "Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you...."
      - e) In 49:3, God says, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified," and 44:23 says, "For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel."
      - f) Note, moreover, that 49:3, explicitly identifies the servant as "Israel." To save his thesis, Duhm was require to emend that word out of the text
    2. In short, the language of the text suggests that the servant was originally understood as a collective reference to the people of Jacob or Israel, their eponymous ancestor.
- XV. This conclusion, however, raises a number of objections or issues that must be addressed
  - A. The first objection is that the servant in Isa 49:5-6, based on the NRSV and similar translations, has the servant given a mission to Israel. If the servant is Israel, though v. 3 explicitly identifies the servant as Israel, how could he be given a mission to himself?
    1. The problem is one of translation. The Hebrew has three infinitives which the NRSV and similar translations understand as purpose clauses with the subject as Israel.
    2. Scholars like H. Wheeler Robinson and Otto Eissfeld, adopting this translation, nonetheless spoke of "corporate personality" and an "oscillation between the

individual and the collective,” i.e., the mission of the collective may be focused in an individual.

3. But this translation of the infinitives is problematic.
  - a) The same infinitive construction occurs in 51:16, where the subject of the infinitive is clearly God, and even the NRSV translates as “stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth.”
  - b) The same is true of the infinitives in 49:8-9, where God is best understood as the subject of the infinitives, where the JPS translates, “restoring the land, allotting anew the desolate holdings.”
  - c) The same is also true of the infinitives in 42:7, where I would take God as the subject of the infinitives and render, “opening the eyes that are blind, bringing out the prisoners....” It was through God’s bringing Israel out of exile that Israel’s salvation, and hence Israel, bore witness to God’s majesty
  - d) I would translate 49:5-6 as follows: “And now Yahweh, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, has resolved to bring Jacob back to himself that Israel might be restored to him. And I have been honored in the sight of Yahweh, and my God has been my strength. And he said, ‘It is too little, considering that you are my servant, that I should only raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel. I will also make you a light of the nations that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth. Cf. the similar rendering in JPS. Thus there is no mission of the servant to Israel.
- B. The second objection is that the servant suffered for others’ sins, while Israel suffered for his own sins. In response to this objection, one must look at 52:13-53:12 in context.
  1. The prospering of the servant in 52:13 follows naturally from the preceding 52:7-12, where the salvation of Israel is portrayed
    - a) The contrast between what he once was in exile and this deliverance will startle the nations and kings (52:14-15); this points back to 52:10
    - b) It also prepares for the “we” of 53:1; that “we” is the same as “the nations and kings” of 52:15
  2. The description these nations give of the servant fits a collective interpretation
    - a) The fate of the servant (53:2) is like those punished by God--cf. Ps 1 and Jer 17:5-8 for the description of the wicked as a dried-up plant in the desert
    - b) Israel is despised (53:3), cf. 49:7
    - c) The expression “rejected by men,” Hebrew *waḥādāl ’išîm*, literally means “lacking in people/men”--to which one may compare the repeated motif of barren Jerusalem, lacking in children. A nation of very few people has very little weight in international standing.
    - d) The picture of vicarious suffering in 53:4-5 still represents the foreign nations speaking. The ritual imagery of the scape goat (Lev 16:22) probably lies in the background--just as the scape goat was led out into the wilderness, so Israel was led into the wilderness. And the other goat of the sin offering that was slaughtered (Lev. 16:15) may be behind the language of the sheep led to slaughter (53:7).
    - e) Moreover, the death of the servant appears to be like the death of the people Israel in Ezek 37 (national calamity and loss of national identity). The same verb is used in Isa 53:8 and Ezek 37:11. Cf. the similar death imagery in Isa 55:1ff.

3. The paradox of sinful Israel being compared to a sacrifice without blemish is not unparalleled.
  - a) Israel is blind, but nonetheless God's witnesses--Isa 42:18ff.; 43:10
  - b) One should also note how Second Isaiah sometimes distinguishes a select group within Israel (Isa 51:1, 7-8; cf. 50:7-9; one might compare this notion in other prophets like Jer 24:4-17; Ezek 11:14-21; Hab 1:13). Possibly Israel's mission was especially embodied in this select group who sought righteousness.
  - c) Moreover, Jerusalem is said to have suffered double for all her sins (Isa 40:2), so that extra suffering had some purpose, perhaps for the nations
- C. But if Second Isaiah saw the collective Israel as God's servant, how can Christians legitimately claim that these prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ?
  1. Jesus clearly saw his ministry in the light of the suffering servant of Second Isaiah as many passages in the Gospels such as Matt 16:21-23; 17:9; 20:17-19, 24-28; indicate.
  2. He took up and embodied the task of Israel
    - a) The choice of the 12 suggests the restoring of the 12 tribes of Israel
    - b) Just as one can speak of Jesus transcending the royal metaphors of Davidic kingship, which referred to those kings as God's sons, while Jesus was in essence, not metaphor divine, so one can speak of him as transcending the metaphor of national death and resurrection--Jesus really was raised from the dead
    - c) And with the Gospel of Jesus' resurrection, the God of Israel received the devotion of the Gentile nations (cf. Acts 13:46-47)
  3. What kind of real impact did Israel's suffering and deliverance make on the nations in Second Isaiah's time. Not that much. There were some converts to Judaism among foreigners, but even many within Israel remained skeptical of the fulfillment of Second Isaiah's glorious promises long after the return from exile as the texts of Third Isaiah show. In the late Hellenistic period Judaism became more attractive to some people in the Roman Empire, and there were apparently a significant number of converts to Judaism, and it was often to these that Paul first went on his missionary journeys. Nonetheless, it was only with the spread of Christianity, that a large part of the known world embraced the God of Israel as their God, and tried to walk according to his Word.
  4. Perhaps the tension between Israel's guilt and innocence played a role here. When Israel's role was embodied in an individual (Jesus), where personal guilt was not involved, the impact on the nations was made. As a point of fact, however, it was only with the Gospel of Jesus Christ that many nations of the world turned to the teaching of the God of Israel to seek their salvation!

### **Lesson Eight (Chapters 54-55)**

#### 1. Chapter 54.

##### D. Verses. 1-8.

1. Jerusalem/Zion, personified as a barren woman without a husband, is commanded to rejoice and break out in praise, because she has more children than the woman (perhaps Babylon) who has a husband (v. 1).
2. Moreover, Jerusalem/Zion needs to make her tent larger to accommodate all these children, because she will spread out all around, and her seed will inherit the nations, and inhabit former ruins (vv. 2-3).

3. She should not be afraid, because she will no longer be ashamed or embarrassed, and the shame of her youth will be forgotten and the reproach of her widowhood forgotten (v. 4).
4. For her husband/lord and maker is Yahweh of Hosts, her redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole world (v. 5). There is an intentional play on words here, because the word *ba'al* can mean both husband and lord.
5. Like an abandoned wife, bitter of spirit, God had briefly rejected her, but in great mercy he will gather her--the reference is to the return from exile. In his anger, God hid his face from her for a moment, but now he will comfort her (vv. 6-8).

E. Verses 9-14.

1. Just as God in the days of Noah promised to never again send a flood to destroy the earth, so God swears not to be angry again with Zion/Jerusalem (v. 9).
2. Mountains and hills may shake, but God's covenant with Zion/Jerusalem will not fail (v. 10, and compare the very similar imagery in the Zion Hymn in Ps 46).
3. God uses this storm/flood imagery to refer to Zion--it was part of the old Zion Tradition (compare Isa 17:12-14)--but Zion will be founded again in great security with foundations, pinnacles, gates, and walls of very precious stones (vv. 11-12, and compare Isa 28:16-17). This, along with Ezek 47, is part of the background for the description of the new Jerusalem or the heavenly city in Revelation 21-22, especially Rev. 21:15-21.
4. All of Zion's children will be taught of Yahweh, and she will be established in righteousness, far from oppression and destruction (vv. 13-14).

F. Verses 15-17.

1. In the future, if anyone stirs up strife against Zion, it will not be from God, and whoever does it will fail (v. 15).
2. After all, it is God who created the craftsmen who forge weapons, and who created the ravager to destroy, and God promises no weapon that is fashioned against Zion will succeed. Nor will anyone who rises against Zion to press a lawsuit. This is the wonderful inheritance of the servants of Yahweh and their vindication from him (vv. 16-17). This is a promise for the people of God to constantly remember in the dangerous world we inhabit.

XVI. Chapter 55.

A. Verses 1-5.

1. At this point God invites his audience to come to a free banquet, to drink good wine and eat good food free of charge. Why pay money for food that does not satisfy (vv. 1-2)?
2. Come to God, listen to him, and live, and God will make an eternal covenant with you, like the sure promises to David, whom God made a witness and ruler of the nations (vv. 3-4). The reference is to the tradition of God's eternal covenant with David and his dynasty (see 2 Sam 7; 23:1-5; Pss 89:1-4, 20-37; 132:11-12).
3. If God's people listen to God, and accept this covenant, then God promises them (v. 5), "Foreign nations will come to you for the sake of Yahweh your God (cf. Isa 2:2-4; 11:10).

B. Verses 6-13.

1. But time is of the essence, seek God while he is near and can be found (v. 6).
2. Let the wicked repent and return to God, and he will give them mercy (v. 7).

3. For God's ways and plans are not yours, but his word will not go out in vain. It will accomplish his purposes, just like his rain and snow does in nature (vv. 8-11). The motif here underscores that God in his mysterious ways is still at work accomplishing his purposes in the world even when things seem to be going poorly for his people. The Israelites could not understand God's using the Babylonians, a nation more wicked than they, to punish them, God's own people. Nor could they understand God's using the pagan Persians to punish the Babylonians and save Israel. God just does not work the way we expect, so get used to it!
4. If Israel does respond quickly to God's invitation, God promises them, "You will go out (from Babylon) in joy, and be brought home (to Zion) in security, and all of nature will rejoice before you (v. 12).
5. The replacement of thorn and nettle with more valuable trees may be a reference to the changed character of God's people (v. 13). Compare the similar motif in Isa 61:3.

## **Part Two: Lessons on Third Isaiah (Lessons Nine Through Thirteen)**

### **Lesson Nine (Chapters 56-57)**

#### 1. Chapter 56.

##### C. Verses 1-8.

1. Note how the emphasis now, while waiting on God's salvation to come, is on observing justice and doing righteousness, and especially keeping the sabbath (vv. 1-2). The sabbath was not even mentioned in Isa 40-55.
2. Moreover, there is a promise of acceptance to the foreign convert to Judaism, and the eunuch, who may have no descendants, but who will have a monument and an eternal name within God's house (vv. 3-8).
  - a) In the pre-exilic period, eunuchs would have been restricted from access to the temple assembly (Deut 23:1), but after the babylonian exile, when many young Israelite men were turned into eunuchs by their overlords (see Daniel and Nehemiah), the promise of acceptance is offered to these castrated men.
  - b) The promise implies the restoration of temple worship in Jerusalem, where access to worship is now promised to both converted foreigners and pious eunuchs.
  - c) The statement that God's vindication is near suggests that Second Isaiah's glorious promises of the renewal of Zion and the ruined cities of Judah has not gone as well as he predicted, at least not yet.

##### D. Vv. 9-12

1. In contrast to those who do right and who keep the Sabbath, including eunuchs and foreign converts, God now invites the wild animals to come and devour (v. 9), because the community's religious leaders are not devoted to Yahweh.
2. The religious leaders are like blind watchmen, guard dogs that can't bark, and prophets who are asleep at the switch (v.10).
3. The religious leaders are just out for themselves like guard dogs who eat the sheep, and hired shepherds who use them for their own ends (v. 11).
4. The leaders are too busy drinking to do their job, and they just assume that their self-absorbed life will just go on as normal, and perhaps even better (v. 12, compare Isa 5:11-13).

#### **XVII. Chapter 57.**

##### A. Verses 1-2.

1. In the meantime the righteous person dies, and no one takes it to heart. But they do not consider that the righteous is taken away because of evil.
  2. There are perhaps two thoughts here.
    - a) The community loses the benefit of the righteous person because of its evil.
    - b) The righteous person dies in peace so that God may spare that person the harsher judgment that will fall on the evil community.
- B. Verses 3-13.
1. Then the prophet addresses the wicked in the community as children of a sorceress and offspring of an adulterer and a whore (v. 3). The bitterness of this address makes clear that there is a major division within the community.
  2. This is also clear from his reference to his opponents who make fun of the righteous (v. 4).
  3. These opponents are described as being involved in pagan worship under the green trees, child sacrifice in the wadis, and the pouring out of libations to pagan Gods (vv. 5-6). These are the same pagan practices that Israel resorted to in Palestine before the exile, and the returnees have apparently returned to their old ways.
  4. There is a sexual component to this pagan worship, and the sexual imagery in this passage is far more blunt and crude than any English translation expresses. They have made their bed with the foreign gods (vv. 7-8).
  5. Yet despite all their effort to win the favor of pagan gods, that simply wore the wicked out, they refuse to admit the uselessness of their actions, and their lusts were rekindled (vv. 9-10).
  6. “Of whom are you afraid?” and, “Why,” God asks (v. 11), “did you not remember me, nor fear me? Was it because I kept silent too long?” This implies that a lot of time has passed since the return to Palestine without the fulfillment of all the promises Second Isaiah made.
  7. Vindication is coming soon, God says, but it will not help this evil community. Let your idols save you, God says (vv. 12-13). Nonetheless, the one who trusts in God will inherit the land and God’s sacred mountain, Zion.
- C. Verses 14-21.
1. A plural imperative is then given to an unnamed group, perhaps the angelic work crews of Isa 40:3, or possibly righteous members of the community, to prepare the road for God’s people (v. 14).
  2. The high and lofty God will also dwell with contrite and humble to revive their spirits (v. 15).
  3. God will not contend and be angry for ever (v. 16).
  4. God was angry and punished his people, but they kept turning back to their old ways despite his discipline (v. 17).
  5. So God will now heal his people (vv. 18-19), but the restless wicked among them will find no peace (vv. 20-21).

## **Lesson Ten (Chapters 58-59)**

### **1. Chapter 58.**

- D. The chapter begins with a singular command to the prophet to proclaim to God’s people their transgression (v. 1). This is what a true prophet does (cf. Micah 2:8), rather than failing as watchman or guard dog to warn the people.

- E. Then God complains that the people act like they really delight in God's way, though in fact they have abandoned his justice (v. 2).
- F. The people who pretend to seek righteousness complain and want to know why God doesn't reward their fasting, though they spend their fast days pleasing themselves, and they cannot stop oppressing their workmen, or cease from quarreling and fighting (vv. 3-5).
- G. A true fast, a genuine sign of repentance, in contrast to their merely outward rituals of wearing sackcloth and putting ashes on their heads, would be to change their wicked behavior and actually help the poor and oppressed, the hungry and the cold (vv. 6-7).
- H. If they did this, their light would break like the dawn, and God would protect them, and answer their prayers (vv. 8-10).
- I. Then God would lead them, and they would succeed in rebuilding the ancient ruins. If they truly kept the sabbath, they would have great success (vv. 11-14). Note again the great importance of sabbath keeping in this material, and compare this to Neh 10:31; 13:15-22.

#### XVIII. Chapter 59

##### A. Verses 1-8

- 1. It is not that God's hand is too short to save, but the people's sin has caused God to turn away from them (vv. 1-2).
- 2. The people's hands are defiled with blood--a reference to violent offenses against others, violent crimes involving bloodshed--and lies, dishonest lawsuits, and treachery is the norm (vv. 3-4).
- 3. Their plans are like the hatching the eggs of poisonous snakes or weaving a spider's web--the eggs kill whoever eats them, and one cannot clothe oneself with their spider webs (vv. 5-6).
- 4. They run to do evil, and simply do not know how to do good, and their paths are so crooked that no one who walks in them finds peace (vv. 7-8).

##### B. Verses 9-15a.

- 1. That is why justice is far from us--Israel is speaking--and we grope along in the dark, stumbling like a blind person at midday (vv. 9-10).
- 2. That is why we growl and moan, and wait for salvation, but it does not come (v. 11).
- 3. It is because our transgressions are so many, and corruption is so much the order of the day that anyone who turns from evil is robbed by the rest (vv. 12-15a).

##### C. Verses 15b-21

- 1. God saw this terrible situation, and he was both angered and astounded that no one was trying to intervene and do right, so God himself will intervene to set things right (vv. 15b-16).
- 2. God will put on righteousness like a breastplate, the helmet of salvation, garments of vengeance, and a mantle of fury (v. 17). Note that Paul's admonition to put on the whole armor of God in Ephesians 6:11-17 is based on what God himself wears in this passage from Third Isaiah.
- 3. Dressed to kill, God then will punish his enemies as they deserve, so that the whole world, from the east to the west, will fear Yahweh, who comes upon them like a raging flash flood or a devastating storm wind (vv. 18-19).
- 4. But this fearful God will come to Zion as a redeemer, to save those of his people who turn back from rebellion (v. 20).

5. And God's covenant with this remnant is to put his spirit upon them, and put his words in their mouths and in the mouths of their children, and their children's children, from now on and forever (v. 21). Note the parallel to the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34.

### **Lesson Eleven (Chapters 60-62)--Echoes of Second Isaiah?**

#### **1. Chapter 60.**

##### **D. vv. 1-7.**

1. The command is then addressed to Zion (a feminine singular imperative) to get up and shine, for her light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has arisen over her (v. 1).
2. The rest of the world will be covered in gloom, but over Zion God's glory will be seen, and the nations will come to your light (vv. 2-3). Note that this promise picks up on the earlier promises of First Isaiah in 2:2-4 and 11:10.
3. Then Zion is commanded to raise her eyes and look around, because her sons and daughters are coming from far away (v. 4).
4. Zion will see and be radiant with happiness, for the abundance of the sea and the wealth of the nations will be brought to her (v. 5).
5. She will be filled with the camels from far-flung desert nations bringing their gifts of gold and frankincense, and the vast flocks of sheep from Kedar and Nebaioth will be present to be offered upon God's altar, as God glorifies his temple (vv. 6-7).

##### **E. Verses 8-14.**

1. So many foreigners from so many lands are coming to Zion that one asks, "Who are all these people flying like a cloud of doves to the windows of the temple (v. 8)."
2. The coastlands and the ships of Tarshish will come bringing Zion's children from far away, their silver and gold with them, because Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel has glorified Zion in the eyes of the whole world (v. 9). Paul's great contribution taken up among his Gentile churches (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:16, 25-28) for the poor in Judea was probably seen by Paul as a fulfillment of this prophecy.
3. Foreigners will build Zion's walls, and foreign kings will serve her, for just as God struck her down in his wrath, so in his favor he will take mercy on her (v. 10).
4. Zion will be so secure that her gates will always be open, day and night, so that the wealth of the nations may pour into her uninterrupted (v. 11).
5. Those nations that do not serve her will perish (v. 12). Compare this to the promise in Zechariah 14:16-19.
6. The glory of Lebanon will pour into Zion, that is, the precious lumber from the Lebanese mountains will be brought to Zion to make God's temple there, the place of God's feet, magnificent and glorious (v. 13).
7. And the descendants of Zion's oppressors will bow down to Zion and call her, "the city of Yahweh," "the Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (v. 14). Note that the language of this whole passage is in direct address to Zion, in second person feminine singular.

##### **F. Verses 15-22**

1. The direct address to Zion continues with the promise that whereas Zion had been forsaken and hated, abandoned with no visitors, now she will be majestic, and a joy from age to age (v. 15).
2. Zion will suck the milk of nations and know that Yahweh is her savior (v. 16)

3. Her wealth will be the very highest--gold not bronze, silver not iron, bronze not wood, iron not stones--and peace and righteousness will watch over her, while violence and destruction will be a thing of the past (vv. 17-18).
4. Moreover, God, not the sun or moon, will be Zion's light, her mourning will be ended, and all her people will be righteous, the shoot God planted. The least of them a great nation, and Yahweh will accomplish this very quickly (vv. 19-22). One should note the striking similarity of the language and motifs here to that of Second Isaiah.

XIX. Chapter 61.

- A. The chapter opens with the prophetic voice announcing that God has anointed him to bring the good news of salvation to the oppressed and release to the captives, to comfort all those who mourn in Zion, who will henceforth be called the oaks of righteousness and the planting of the Lord (vv. 1-3).
  1. In the portrayal of Israel as God's suffering servant in Isa 52-53, Israel was portrayed as a despised scrawny shoot in dry ground, but now God's planting will be seen as mighty oaks of righteousness.
  2. One should also note that Jesus read this passage in the synagogue at Nazareth and proclaimed that "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. (Luke 4:16-21).
- B. Israel will now rebuild the ancient ruins, and the devastations of many generations (v. 4).
- C. Meanwhile foreigners will tend their flocks and work their land for them, while the Israelites will be priests, ministers of their God, and will eat the wealth of the nations (vv. 4-6).
- D. Because their shame was doubled (cf. 40:2), the Israelites will inherit double (40:7).
- E. Yahweh loves justice and hates wrongdoing, so he will give them their reward and make an everlasting covenant with them, and all the nations will acknowledge that they are a people whom God has blessed (vv. 8-9).
- F. Thus the speaker will rejoice in and praise God, for God has clothed him in salvation like a bride or groom in their most festive clothes (v. 10).
- G. And just as the earth brings forth its shoots, so God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations (v. 11).

XX. Chapter 62

- A. The prophet or an angel (the speaker is not specified) claims that for the sake of Zion he will not keep silent until Zion's vindication breaks forth, and the nations see her glory, and she is called by a new name given by God (vv. 1-2). The reference to Zion's new name may refer back to the promise of the new name for refined Jerusalem in Isa 1:26, and/or it might possibly refer to the promise of Jerusalem's new name in Jer 33:16--Yahweh is our righteousness.
- B. Jerusalem will become a crown of beauty in God's hand, and rather than being called "Forsaken" or "Desolate," the city will be called "My Delight Is in Her" and her land will be called "Married" (vv. 3-4). This last name is the source for the song "Beulah Land," since the Hebrew feminine singular passive participle, *bē'ûlâ*, means "a woman who has a lord," i.e., "a husband," thus "a married woman."
- C. Just as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your "builder" marry you (Zion), and as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you (v. 5).
- D. The speaker (who is still not identified) then tells Jerusalem that he has stationed watchmen on her walls to cry out day and night, in effect to bug God and give God no

rest until God acts to make Jerusalem an object of praise in the earth (vv. 6-7). The motif is similar to Jesus's admonition about the need to pray always in his parable about the widow and the unrighteous judge (Luke 18:1-8). The unrighteous judge, who feared neither God nor man, finally gave the widow justice just to stop her from constantly bothering him. So these watchmen on Jerusalem's walls, whether angels or humans, are to keep after God until he relents to save the city.

- E. Yahweh has sworn by his right hand that he will never again give Jerusalem's food and drink to its enemies, but those who gathered it and worked for it will enjoy it in God's holy courts--the temple courtyards (vv. 8-9).
  - F. Then a masculine plural imperative is given, presumably addressed to angelic work crews, though one could argue that it is addressed to exiles who had returned to Jerusalem, to go through the gates and prepare the way for the people by building up the highway and clearing it of stones. Moreover, those addressed are also commanded to lift up a signal flag for the peoples, summoning them to Zion (v. 10). This picks up on the notion of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion in Isa 2:2-4 and 11:10.
  - G. Salvation is coming to Zion, and his reward is with him (v. 11). Again the imagery is very similar to that of God's coming to Zion with his reward, like Jacob coming back from Mesopotamia with his flock, in Isa 40.
  - H. God's returning flock will be called "The Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord," and Zion will be called "Sought Out," "A City Not Forsaken."
- XXI. Conclusion: These three chapters have so many similarities to the themes and motifs found in Second Isaiah that they may well be the work of that prophet. If he lived to see the return of the exiles to Palestine in 538 BC, he most likely would have taken part in that return which he so vigorously prophesied about and encouraged. It may be that these chapters represent his continuous revisiting of his earlier theme in this new situation back in Judea, when his earlier promises of the glorious rebuilding of Zion and the ruined cities of Judah seemed much slower in being realized than he had expected.

## **Lesson Twelve (Chapters 63-64)**

### **1. Chapter 63.**

#### **A. Verses 1-6.**

1. The chapter begins with a question about the identity of someone coming back from Edom in bright red clothing, and then God answers, "It is I, proclaiming vindication and the might to save (v. 1).
2. The questioner then asks God why his clothes are so red, like someone who has been trampling out grapes in a wine vat (v. 2)?
3. God answers that he trod the wine press alone, because there was no people to help him, but it was the Edomites he trampled, and it is not grape juice on his clothes, but the spattered blood of the Edomites and perhaps other enemies ("peoples" v. 6). This was because it was time for his day of vengeance (vv. 3-6).

#### **B. Verses 7-14.**

1. The speaker then promises to recount the praises of Yahweh for all he has done for his people, the house of Israel (v. 7).
2. God trusted them as his people, as his children who would not deal falsely, so he saved them (v. 8).

3. It was no messenger or angel who saved the people, but God's presence itself all the days of old, from the time of Moses on (v. 9). This motif alludes to the tradition in Exodus 32:1-3, 12-17.
4. Despite that the people rebelled against God, and God became their enemy and made war against them (v. 10).
5. Then the people remembered their past when Moses led them, and God divided the waters before them. led them through the waters to safety, and led them through the wilderness to give them rest, thereby making his name Yahweh famous among the surrounding peoples (vv. 11-14).

C. Verses 15-19.

1. Then the speaker asks God to again look down from heaven and intervene again now. Where is God's former zeal and might and love for his people, for God, the speaker says, is our father even if our ancestors Abraham and Israel does not acknowledge us (vv. 15-16).
2. The speaker even makes God responsible for the people's sins, blaming God for "hardening our hearts," picking up on another motif from the Exodus story, though there it was God hardening Pharaoh's heart (v. 17).
3. The speaker complains that God's servants, the tribes of his heritage, his holy people (all Exodus motifs), took possession of God's sacred sanctuary (Exodus 15:17) for only a little while, but now their enemies have trampled it (vv. 17-18).
4. For a long time Israel as been like a people whom God does not rule, like ones who do not know God's name (v. 19).

XXII. Chapter 64.

- A. The complaint of chapter 63 continues uninterrupted in this chapter. The speaker expresses the wish that God would tear open the opaque veil of heaven and visibly come down with all the dramatic sound and light effects of the appearance at Sinai so that the nations would learn again that Yahweh was God and tremble at his name (vv. 1-3).
- B. For ages no one has experienced a God like Yahweh, who blesses those who wait on him (v. 4).
- C. But God was angry, the speaker says, and we sinned (v. 5). Note the order in which these statements come. As in chapter 63, the speaker is claiming that God's actions, or lack of action (God hid himself), caused the people to sin, as though he hardened their hearts.
- D. The result of God's absence is that the people of Israel have all become as unclean as a filthy rag (literally, a rag used by a menstruating woman to wipe clean the monthly flow). God's people are fading fast, and no one calls on his name (vv. 6-7).
- E. Yet, the speaker reminds God, you are our father and the potter who made us. Don't be so angry, because we are your people (v. 8-9).
- F. Remember that your holy cities and Zion itself has been turned into a wilderness, and the beautiful temple where our ancestors praised you has been burned with fire and turned into ruins. In the light of the foreign nations disrespect of your name, how can you restrain yourself, remain silent, and keep on punishing us (vv. 10-12). In effect, save us, your people, and punish your real enemies, the foreigners who reproach you by destroying your sanctuary, thereby casting reproach on your glorious name!

XXIII. These two chapters sound quite different than chapters 56-59, but they also sound nothing like chapters 60-62 that resemble Second Isaiah. The hatred toward Edom was very strong right after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, because the Edomites cooperated with the

Babylonians, and then took advantage of Judah's defeat after most of the Judean population was taken into exile. In some ways the material sounds like the lament of a people for the destruction of its sacred places, and as such one might be tempted to date this material, not after the return from exile with the rest of Third Isaiah, but early in the exile much nearer the date of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. On the other hand, the temple remained in ruins after the return from exile in 538 BC, and it was not until 516 BC that a new temple in Jerusalem was dedicated, so the chapters could still date to this early difficult period after the return from exile. There is no certainty on this matter, however.

### **Lesson Thirteen (Chapters 65-66)**

#### **1. Chapter 65.**

##### **A. Verses 1-7.**

1. One could take God's opening statement in this chapter as a response to the people's complaint in the preceding chapter. God was waiting, even saying, "Here I am, Here I am!" but no one was calling on his name, and his people remained constantly rebellious (vv. 1-2).
2. Similar to 57:3-13, God complains here about the people being involved in pagan worship, but also eating the flesh of swine and other unclean things, while the participants in this pagan worship claimed a bogus holiness, which burned God's nostrils, and in response God threatens to punish the offenders in full (vv. 3-7).

##### **B. Verses 8-16.**

1. Nonetheless God will not destroy the whole vine (an image often used for God's people in the Old Testament), for his servants' sake (v. 8).
2. God will save a remnant of the descendants of Jacob and Judah, representative of the northern and southern kingdoms, consisting of those who actually seek God (vv. 9-10).
3. But those who desert Yahweh, forget the temple mountain, and turn to pagan worship will be slaughtered, because they did not come when God called (vv. 11-12).
4. The wicked will go hungry, thirsty, suffer shame, and perish, while God's servants will eat, drink, and rejoice. And the name of the wicked will remain as a curse word for the righteous, when people bless and swear by the God of faithfulness, because the former troubles are forgotten. Note the sharp contrast between the fate of the wicked and the righteous (vv. 13-16).

##### **C. Verses 17-25.**

1. For the saved God will create new heavens and a new earth, and the former sufferings will be totally forgotten (v. 17).
2. Jerusalem and its people will become a source of delight and joy for God, and there will be no longer be the sound of weeping or crying in her (vv. 18-19).
3. All of Jerusalem's residents will live to a ripe old age (v. 20).
4. They will enjoy the fruits of their labor, because they and their descendants are blessed by God (vv. 21-23).
5. Before they even pray, God will answer their prayer (v. 24).
6. And there will be peace throughout all of nature (v. 25). Note the parallel between v. 25 and Isa 11:6-9.
7. The promises here have the character of such story endings as "and they lived happily ever after." Such promises of the resolution of all conflicts lead us to a future we may

be able to imagine, but one cannot do much beyond that, because all our narratives of the reality we know demand conflict and strife to drive and motivate the story. We simply reach the end of our understanding with these promises.

#### XXIV. Chapter 66.

##### A. Vv. 1-6.

1. The opening verses seem to reflect the time of the rebuilding of the temple (522-516 BC), and may suggest some religious opposition to the rebuilding. God's throne is the heavens and the earth is his footstool, so what is this house you would build for him? God is more interested in the poor, and the one who trembles at God's word (vv. 1-2).
2. Moreover, those who sacrifice at the temple, but then also engage in pagan practices, will be rejected by God (vv. 3-4).
3. Those who tremble at God's word will be rewarded, but their enemies, who make fun of their faith, will be ashamed (v. 5). Note the sharp division within the community.
4. There is a sound from the temple, the prophet says, of God preparing to hand out punishment to his enemies (v. 6).

##### B. Vv. 7-13

1. Jerusalem/Zion, however, will suddenly be saved, just like a woman who suddenly gives birth. It will be as though a land, a nation, and a city came into existence in a single day (vv. 7-8).
2. But it is God who brings about birth, and he will not close the womb (v. 9).
3. So rejoice with Jerusalem, and drink deeply from her consoling breasts is the admonition God gives to his people (vv. 10-11).
4. For God will give prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of nations will flow into her, and you will find comfort in Jerusalem (vv. 12-13). Remember that these promises were given to those who returned to exile, when Jerusalem was still in ruins. Even after the temple was rededicated in 516 BC, most of the city was still in ruins, and it remained so well into the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, sometime after 450 BC.

##### C. Vv. 14-24.

1. Those who rejoice in Jerusalem will be blessed and flourish, because God is with them, but his indignation will be against his enemies (v. 14).
2. That noise of judgment coming from the temple (v. 7) is Yahweh coming in fire to punish his enemies, particularly those who engage in pagan practices, including the eating of unclean foods like swine flesh, vermin, and rodents (vv. 15-17).
3. God's judgment will also fall on all the foreign nations, who will bring the Jewish exiles from their lands (vv. 17-20).
4. Apparently some of these foreigners will become levitical priests (v. 21).
5. The new heavens and the new earth will remain, however, as well as God's people and the remnants of the nations. And all flesh till come to worship before Yahweh in Jerusalem on the new moon and sabbaths (vv. 22-23).
6. And while they are in Jerusalem they will go out to look at the eternal memorial outside the city, where the corpses of those who rebelled against God are preserved in a continuing state of burning and being eaten by worms, as an eternal warning to all flesh (v. 24). This is the clearest portrayal of hell in all the Old Testament.