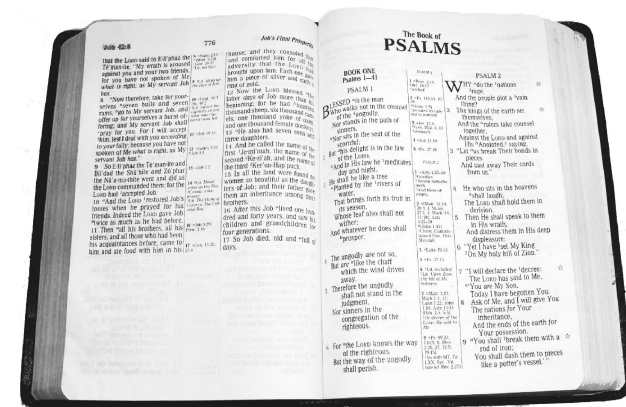


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



August 2020

Bible readings from Isaiah chapters 1 to 25

O LORD, you are my God. I will exalt you

This great and encouraging chapter contains a song of praise for God's people! *O LORD, you are my God. I will exalt you, I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things* (1). We saw yesterday, that even in the day of judgment the redeemed of the Lord will have a song. Why should we have a song?

- Because God has '*done wonderful things*'. His plans of old (before he created the world) will surely come to pass (1). 'A city' (2) here represents all that opposes God. In Isaiah's time it represented cities of nations which oppressed Israel such as Nineveh and Babylon (37:37; 21:9). 'Babylon' is a symbol of the anti-Christian governments and kings of the world who have persecuted God's people through the ages (cp. Revelation chapters 17 and 18). There will be rejoicing in heaven when 'Babylon' is finally destroyed (Revelation 19:1–4). God's hand rests on his people but his foot is on Moab (10).
- Because of our security in God (4). Matthew Henry comments, 'He is a refuge from the storm of rain or hail, and a shadow from the scorching heat of the sun in summer. God is a sufficient refuge to his people in all weathers, both cold and hot, wet and dry.' Are you being battered by stormy trials? Remember that God is your refuge and strength (cp. Psalm 46:1). What a wonderful reassurance!
- Because of what God will do for us. He will prepare a feast for us when the Lord Jesus comes again (6; cp. Revelation 19:9). There will then be no veil of ignorance (7; cp. 2 Corinthians 3:15). We will rise bodily from the grave (cp. 26:19). We will not live for ever as disembodied spirits (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:51–55). God *will swallow up death for ever* and grief will be banished (8; cp. Revelation 21:4); death, our last enemy will be destroyed. **Is it any wonder that we rejoice in our Saviour with great joy (cp. 1 Peter 1:8)? Is it any wonder that we await the return of Christ with glad anticipation (9)?** *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!* (Revelation 22:20).

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They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing

Chapters 24 to 27 are one prophetic utterance which is concerned with the final judgment of the whole world. Divine judgment will come because men and women have corrupted the earth with their rebellion against God's holy laws (1–6). There are two pictures in this chapter, one of despair and the other of hope. The song of the world is silenced (verses 7–12) and the song of the remnant is heard (verses 13–16a). Alec Motyer comments, 'In a collapsing world the people whose joy is in the Lord are secure' (COMMENTARY, pages 196).

If you do not know God, the day of judgment will be a day of despair because there will be no escape from it. All classes of people are included, both rich and poor (1–4, 18–19; cp. Revelation 6:15–17). This judgment also takes in the fallen angels (21; cp. 2 Peter 2:4). If you are a true Christian, you have no need to fear the end. You will have a song of praise to God. *They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing* (14, 16). At this point in his prophecy Isaiah feels distress and ruin because of the wickedness that he sees around him (16).

The Lord will reign in the new Jerusalem (23; cp. Revelation 21:1–8; 22–27). There is something for us to sing about in judgment (cp. Exodus 15; Revelation 15). God will judge everyone for their sin (5, 20) but those who know Christ and his forgiveness have no charge to answer. They will sing of the righteousness of God in judgment. They will see the Lord Jesus and worship and adore him. They will worship him with songs of praise and gratitude (Revelation 5:8–14). There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). **They will have a song in the day of judgment. Will you?**

*Saviour, hasten thine appearing!
Bring, O bring the glorious day
When, the awful summons hearing,
Heaven and earth shall pass away!
Then with golden harps we'll sing,
Glory, glory to our King!*

(Thomas Kelly)

ISAIAH

Isaiah's ministry stretched over a period of some sixty years. He prophesied from before the death of King Uzziah (740 BC) and he recorded the death of King Sennacherib of Assyria (681 BC) – see Isaiah 1:1; 6:1; 37:38. His name means 'The LORD (Yahweh) is salvation.' His wife is called '*the prophetess*' (8:3) and there was prophetic significance in the names of his two sons (7:3; 8:3–4). Jewish tradition holds that he was a cousin of King Uzziah.

Historical Background (see 2 Kings chapters 15 to 21; 2 Chronicles chapters 26 to 32). Uzziah (also known as Azariah) was a good king who enjoyed a long and prosperous reign of fifty-two years. During his reign, however, Judah drifted into spiritual decline which continued through the reign of his son, Jotham. Ahaz, son of Jotham, was a wicked idol worshipper who sought the help of the Assyrians rather than trust in the Lord when Syria and Israel came to attack Judah (chapter 7; cp. 2 Kings 16). The Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC taking the people off into captivity. They re-populated the land with people from other parts of their empire (2 Kings 17). Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, was a godly man who led Judah in spiritual reformation. When the mighty army of Assyria threatened Jerusalem, God brought a miraculous deliverance (chapters 36 and 37; cp. 2 Kings 19; 2 Chronicles 32). Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was the most wicked king ever to rule over Judah. According to Jewish tradition, he had Isaiah sawn in half (see Hebrews 11:37 which may refer to this).

Contemporary Prophets. Micah also prophesied to Judah during Isaiah's lifetime. Hosea prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Isaiah's Message. He repeatedly warned Judah about the folly of their sin and of trusting in political alliances for their security. Looking ahead of his own lifetime to the Babylonian exile, he had a great message of consolation for the exiles. He prophesied of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his sufferings and death more than any of the Old Testament prophets.

Outline of Isaiah

1. Prophecies of Condemnation (chapters 1 to 35)
 - Prophecies to Judah and Jerusalem chs. 1 to 12
 - Prophecies against surrounding nations chs. 13 to 23
 - Isaiah's apocalypse (revelation of last things) chs. 24 to 27
 - The doom of the nations and the redemption of Israel chs. 28 to 35
2. Prophecies to Hezekiah (chapters 36 to 39)
 - Hezekiah's crisis ch. 36
 - Hezekiah's prayer ch. 37
 - Hezekiah's sickness ch. 38
 - Hezekiah's folly ch. 39
3. Prophecies of Consolation (chapters 40 to 66)
 - Deliverance from Babylon chs. 40 to 48
(The comfort of God's greatness)
 - Redemption through suffering and sacrifice chs. 49 to 57
(The comfort of God's grace)
 - Triumph of Jehovah's kingdom chs. 58 to 66
(The comfort of God's glory)

Recommended commentaries on Isaiah:

J. Alec Motyer: *The Prophecy of Isaiah; an Introduction and Commentary*, Published by Inter-Varsity Press.

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones: *God's Way Not Ours — Sermons on Isaiah 1:1–18*, published by Banner of Truth

Dale Ralph Davis: *Stump Kingdom – Isaiah 6–12*, published by Christian Focus.

29 AUGUST

Isaiah 23:1–18

The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to bring to dishonour ...

Phoenicia was a country measuring some 140 miles in length and 15 miles in width, wedged between the Mediterranean Sea and mountain ranges. The Phoenicians were an enterprising people who turned to trade and commerce because they were unable to live adequately from the produce of their poor soil. They built fleets of sea-going ships which travelled to the limits of the world that they knew – the whole of the Mediterranean, the coast of West Africa and even to Britain. Tyre was founded by the merchants of Sidon and became the great trading city and port of the nation. Israel enjoyed a good relationship with Tyre during the reigns of David and Solomon. Solomon sinned however in worshipping the Sidonian goddess Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:5). King Ahab married wicked Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, who established the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth in Israel (1 Kings 15:31).

The first fourteen verses of this chapter are in the form of a poem which describes the destruction of the city of Tyre and Sidon whose people are called upon 'wail' at the destruction that had overtaken them (1,6 and 14). The proud nation are now weak and without hope and in a state of shock and consternation. The prophet reveals that God has brought this catastrophe on the city. *The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to bring to dishonour the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth* (9).

Lord would then visit Tyre and Sidon after seventy years, restoring their prosperity, but they would not change their evil ways. Their gains would not bring them any benefit but would be set apart for the Lord for the use of his people (15–18). Why should such an enterprising people be ripe for divine judgment? They had become very prosperous and smug and had no time for God. There is a message here for countries where God has been forgotten or scorned. Could it be that the economic and social problems around us are also a judgment from the Lord? **If we love God, we will get our priorities right and seek to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. We also know that our hearts will surely follow our treasures (Matthew 6:19–21).**

Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die

There are three prophecies in this chapter concerning Jerusalem (1–14), Shebna (15–19) and Eliakim (20–25). Jerusalem is described as *‘the Valley of Vision’* (1,5) and is rejoicing, whereas Isaiah weeps. He sees what they fail to see, panic, death and capture – ‘the destruction of the daughter of my people’ (1–4). Isaiah is distressed because the people did not look to God to help them in this time of trouble (11). The Lord was calling for them to weep and mourn for their sin, but they were indulging in revelry. Their attitude was, *‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’* (12–13). They did not seek God in dangerous times, but they indulged in feasting and drinking wine. Many still have the same attitude today and they do not seek after God when they are in danger or trouble. The prevailing attitude is, ‘Have a good time while you are able.’ God warned the people of Isaiah’s day of the seriousness of such a sin (14). **To have a frivolous and careless attitude to death is absolute folly (see Proverbs 29:1).**

Shebna held high office as the steward (or treasurer) in the royal household (15). He was full of his own importance and he had built himself an imposing and ornate sepulchre (16). Archaeologists have discovered an inscribed lintel which they believe may have been from this tomb of Shebna. God had a solemn message for Shebna, *‘So I will drive you out of your office’* (19). The Lord said that he would replace him with Eliakim and this prophecy was fulfilled (20–25; 2 Kings 18:18; 19:2). God drove Shebna out of his office because he was not faithful. He was a self-seeker who did not honour God. He was more concerned to have a good funeral and a fine tomb than with his eternal future and laying up treasure in heaven. Where are your priorities?

The Lord said that Eliakim would be *a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, caring for them and supporting them as *‘a peg in a secure place’* on which they could hang (21–23). He also warned him of the dangers of high office, with feckless members of his family bringing him down (24–25).

But Israel does not know, my people do not consider

Isaiah’s ministry began towards the end of the reign of King Uzziah, continuing through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (1). Israel was desolate (7) when the words of this chapter were written, probably following Assyrian invasion in 701 BC. The prophet introduces charges against the southern kingdom of Judah (referred to as *‘Israel’* in verse 3). We have a courtroom scene with God as plaintiff and judge; heaven and earth are called on to support God’s charges against Judah.

There was plenty of religion in the land but it made no difference to the way the people led their lives. They had rebelled against the Lord and forsaken him. They had provoked him to anger by their wickedness (2–4). Corruption had so permeated the nation that it was like a person whose body was covered with evil-smelling, running sores (5–6). Judah had sunk into such sin and degradation that she was likened to Sodom and Gomorrah which God had destroyed hundreds of years earlier (10; cp. Genesis 13:13; 19:1–29).

What lay behind the folly and sin of Judah? Their religion was not thought out nor considered according to God’s Word. They were worse than dumb beasts. *The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not consider* (3). They had all the outward trappings of religion – holy days and festivals, sacrifices and prayers, but it was empty and futile and God hated it all (10–15). They spread out their hands in prayer, but those hands were full of bloodshed and God would not hear them (14–15). **It is so easy for our religion to lack reality and become an empty pretence!**

God had his small remnant who were salt and light in wicked Judah. He withheld judgment for the sake of the faithful few (9). Small remnants are important! If you are in a small church, seeking to remain faithful to God’s Word in these difficult and confusing times, persevere and let your light shine in the darkness around you.

‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD

God had urged the people to forsake their sin and to learn to do good (16–17) and he now makes an appeal to them: *‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool’* (18). This is one of the most astonishing statements found in the Bible! The almighty, sovereign, eternal God who created the vast universe, appeals to *a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers* (4). God had sent prophets to them but they had refused to listen to them. Now he offers to come down himself to reason with them.

Alec Motyer points out, ‘Scarlet and red are the colours of blood-guilt (cf. verse 15) ... Snow and wool exemplify what is naturally white. The Lord’s promise is not only to deal with the stain of sin but with the nature from which it springs.’ (COMMENTARY, page 48).

God challenges his rebellious people to consider the options open to them – obedience which would lead them to blessing, or rebellion which lead to their destruction (19–20). As the prophecy of Isaiah unfolds, we will see the amazing love and goodness of God. The coming of his holy Son as his servant (see the ‘Servant Songs’ which are found in Isaiah (chapters 42:1–9; 49:1–9; 50:4–9; 52:13 to 53:12). The last of the Servant songs vividly describes the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus to save sinners. The message of the gospel shows the amazing grace and love of God. He freely forgives us and cleanses us from sin. He is with us and nothing can separate us from his love; we have eternal life and heaven awaits us. **All this should fill us with awe and wonder so that we worship and serve God with all our heart.**

*Pardon from an offended God!
Pardon for sins of deepest dye!
Pardon bestowed through Jesus’ blood!
Pardon that brings the rebel nigh!
Who is a pardoning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?*

(Samuel Davies)

Watchman, what of the night?

There are prophecies against Babylon (1–10), Edom (11–12) and Arabia (13–17) in our reading today. Isaiah had a distressing vision of the fall of Babylon which was then emerging as a strong power (2). Babylon revolted against Assyria in 710 and 701 BC and was besieged by the Assyrians and their allies, Elam and Media.

There were no spy-satellites in Isaiah’s time. A watchman looked out from his watchtower and was able to warn of any approach from enemy armies. In verses 6 to 12 we see a faithful watchman at his post. He is questioned by Edom (‘*Seir*’). H.C. Leupold suggests in his commentary that ‘*Dumah*’ is a kind of mystery-name for Seir; it means ‘silence’. In the silence of the of the night, the watchman is asked, ‘*Watchman, what time of the night?’* (ESV). Edom was feeling the length of the dark night and was hoping for good news that it would soon end. The watchman replied that he saw signs of morning and of night and that Edom should return for a more definite answer (11–12).

Tema (14) was two hundred miles east of the Red Sea and was situated at an oasis. The Assyrians had fought against the Arabian tribes in this area in 715 BC. Tema is called on to help those who were fleeing from war but Isaiah prophesied that within a year all would be finished for Kedar (16). Judah had the protection of the Lord against the Assyrians but the Gentile nations had no such hope. We live in frightening and increasingly uncertain times, but if we belong to the Lord we can be sure of a bright future **When we pass through difficult times, we know that he cares for us and that he will never leave us nor forsake us.**

*We expect a bright tomorrow;
All will be well;
Faith can sing through days of sorrow,
All, all is well:
On our Father’s love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
Or in living or in dying,
All must be well.*

(Mary Peters)

How shall we escape?

The Philistine city of Ashdod refused to pay tribute to the Assyrians and was taken by the Assyrian commander in chief (described as ‘Tartan’, cp. 2 Kings 18:17) in 711 BC. This short prophecy dates from that time (1). The Lord told Isaiah to dress like a captive, going about barefoot and naked for three years. This was to be a sign against Egypt and Ethiopia whose people would be taken as prisoners and captives (2–4).

What lesson was there for Judah in this strange prophecy? Egypt and Ethiopia were active in stirring up their neighbours against the Assyrians (cp. 18:2). The Lord was using Isaiah to warn Judah that it was folly to trust in Egypt or Ethiopia for deliverance. Those who trusted in them would be put to shame when the Assyrians attacked. They would then say, ‘*How shall we escape?*’ (5–6). How futile it is to trust in men for deliverance. What lessons are there for us here?

- We must always trust in the Lord in uncertain times, in trials and trouble. We should always cast all our care upon him (1 Peter 5:7) and commit our way to the Lord, trusting in him (Psalm 37:5). He will never fail us, nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).
- If you are not a Christian, you must trust only in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sin. He alone can save you through his death at Calvary for sinners (John 14:6; 1 Peter 3:18). If you are trusting in your Christian family or friends, in your church-going, or in your good works for salvation, you will have a shock on the day of judgment. *How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?* (Hebrews 2:3).

In whom are you trusting?

*Have faith in God, my heart;
Trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
Each promise he has made.*

(Bryn A. Rees)

The city of righteousness, the faithful city

Jerusalem was the holy city where God had his temple, where his glory and presence were known (cp. 1 Kings 8:10–13; Psalm 48:1–3). The prophet laments that Jerusalem, ‘*the faithful city*’, had become a harlot by her unfaithfulness to God (21). In the time of David and in the early years of Solomon’s reign, Jerusalem *was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers* (21). The righteousness once found in Jerusalem had been mixed with so much dross that it was worthless; it was like wine that had been so diluted with water that it was insipid (22). The princes had joined with thieves and bribery was rampant, perverting justice for the widow and the orphan (23). The leaders of Jerusalem had turned away from God’s holy law which teaches, ‘*You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous*’ (Exodus 23:8).

God was not indifferent to the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem! He emphasised the seriousness of their sin against him by the use in one sentence, of three of his titles – *Therefore the Lord says, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel* (24). He would come in judgment to destroy the wicked and to purge the city (24–28). *The terebinth trees* (29) were associated with places of idol worship and God warned that these idols, and those who made, them would be burned up together (31).

The Lord is gracious when he warns of judgment; by doing so he gives sinners opportunity to consider their ways and to repent. This passage also contains a promise of restoration and redemption so that Jerusalem would again be called ‘*the city of righteousness, the faithful city*’ (26–27). Jerusalem is a type of the church of Christ (Galatians 4:24–28; Revelation 21:2). Christian, you belong to a righteous city, a holy church! To go after the world is spiritual adultery (James 4:4). **Be sure to keep yourself faithful to God and shun all the enticements of the wicked world around you.**

Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD

Alec Motyer helpfully points out that chapters 2 to 4 speak of:

The ideal Jerusalem (2:2–4).

The actual Jerusalem (2:5–4:1).

Its religious condition (2:5–21) and its social condition (3:1–4:1).

The new Jerusalem (4:2–6). — (COMMENTARY, page 52).

There are two themes in this chapter: *‘the mountain of the LORD’* (2–3) and *‘the day of the LORD’* (12). Verses 2 and 3 are also found in Micah 4:1–2. Godly men differ in their interpretation of verses 2 to 4. H.C. Leupold in his commentary on Isaiah suggests that the scenes depicted in these verses ‘would lie beyond the point of the return of Christ.’ Others understand these verses to refer to the restoration of Israel as a nation ruled by Christ with Jerusalem as the centre of worship for the people of all nations. I agree with Leupold. Judah was restored to their land after seventy years of captivity in Babylon but the ultimate blessing prophesied here is to be found in the church, not in the nation of Israel (Ephesians 3:20–21).

Israel was restored as a nation in the twentieth century, but this cannot be a fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Modern Israel does not acknowledge Christ as the promised Messiah and is hostile to the gospel. Peter, preaching at Pentecost, quotes from Joel and shows that *‘the latter days’* refer to the gospel age (Acts 2:16–17; cp. Hebrews 1:1–2). Prophecies relating to Israel in the *latter days* (eg. verse 2) and of the conversion of Gentiles speak of the church of Christ now (John 4:21–22; Acts 15:16–17; Galatians 4:24–27; 6:16; Hebrews 12:22). This is the view taken by Matthew Henry in his commentary.

The mountain of the LORD was the site of the temple in Jerusalem but the church is God’s temple where he dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; Ephesians 2:19–22). There is a call here to worship, *‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD’* where *‘he will teach us his ways’* so that *‘we shall walk in his paths’* (3). **Let us pray that we will learn the ways of God and walk in his paths each day**

Blessed is Egypt my people

In his prophecy against Egypt Isaiah paints a grim picture of chaos and destruction:

- Egypt’s idols would be useless to save them. They would totter at the presence of God (1). The Egyptians would still rely on their idols however, and would consult sorcerers and spiritist mediums (3). Millions of people still go to occult practitioners who give them false hopes on which they rely.
- There would be civil strife (2).
- There would be economic collapse (5–10).
- The wise men and leaders of Egypt would have no answer to the nation’s problems (11–15).
- There would be fear and terror in the land (16–17).

It is important to see that it was God who brought catastrophe upon the Egyptians, though he used other nations to fulfil his purposes. Notice how his activity is described. *Behold, the LORD rides ... I will set ... I will destroy their counsel ... I will give into the hand of a cruel master* (1–4). *Because of the waving of the hand of the LORD of hosts ... because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts which he has determined against it* (16–17).

The chapter closes with a message of hope for Egypt. They would cry to the Lord who would deliver them. This prophecy looks forward to the gospel age when the Lord would say, *‘Blessed is Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance’* (25). Matthew Henry observes in his Bible commentary, ‘The Gentile nations shall not only unite with each other in the gospel-fold under Christ the great Shepherd, but they shall all be united with the Jews (24).’ During the first century, the gospel spread westward throughout Egypt and northern Africa, and eastward to the land that was Assyria. Let us pray that many in those countries which are now in the grip of Islam will come to faith in Christ. **Nothing is too hard for the Lord!** (cp. Jeremiah 32:27).

The LORD said to me, 'I will take my rest'

The advancing Assyrian army (17:12–14) struck terror and panic into the nations in their path. Ethiopia ('Cush' ESV) is described as the land shadowed with buzzing wings (1) because of its abundance of insects. The Ethiopians had sent ambassadors to Jerusalem offering an alliance with Hezekiah against the common enemy. There was one man who did not panic; he was the prophet Isaiah. What was his secret?

- He had confidence in God who is sovereign over the nations. He knew that God was in control of all his circumstances. The prophet called upon the world to observe what the Lord would do to the mighty Assyrian army (3). *The LORD said to me, 'I will take my rest'* (4). God calmly looked down on the tumult and was quiet. There is never any panic in the courts of heaven. *Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Anointed ... He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision* (Psalm 2:1–2,4). God assured the prophet that he would triumph over the Assyrians and that the astonished Ethiopians would pay homage to him (7).
- He enjoyed fellowship with God. Isaiah listened for the voice of God. *The LORD said to me ...* (4). The prophet was not too busy to have communion with God. Do you pray that God will speak to your heart when you read your Bible and come to hear the Word of God preached? **What a blessing it is to have fellowship with God, and to know his peace and calm in our hearts!** Are you feeling stressed or burdened with care? Oh, come boldly to the throne of grace that you may obtain mercy and grace to help you in this time of need (Hebrews 4:16). *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6–7).

Come and let us walk in the light of the LORD

These verses describe Jerusalem as it was and the prophet appeals to his wayward people to follow the Lord in obedience to his Word: *'Come and let us walk in the light of the LORD'* (5). There is a striking parallel between Isaiah's day and the times in which we live. What were the sins of Judah which are so prevalent in our day and age?

- Turning to heathen practices from the east. *Filled with eastern ways* (6). This could describe Britain in the twenty-first century. New Age religion and therapies, Hindu meditation, yoga, etc. are rampant and are influential in high places in society. Astrologers and fortune-tellers are also in great demand. All these practices are satanic, however harmless they may appear.
- Materialism (7). Looking to silver, gold and earthly treasures for satisfaction rather than to God. Some in Judah loved their superb horses and today many just live for the car. It is a terrible thing to be so taken up with our possessions that we have little time for God.
- Idolatry (8). God hates all forms of idolatry. Good luck charms and talismans are idols. There are also the more subtle forms of idolatry such as covetousness (Colossians 3:5). Idolatry is setting our hearts upon someone or some object rather than God.

'The day of the LORD' (12) is a day of terror for the ungodly (10, 19, 21), for all those who are guilty of the sins described above. The Assyrian invasion of 701 BC was *'the day of the LORD'* for Isaiah's contemporaries (cp. 7:17 to 8:8) as was the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC for the next generation. There is a reference here to the coming again of Christ which is also described as *'the day of the LORD'* which comes suddenly *'as a thief in the night'* (1 Thessalonians 5:2–4). *The LORD alone shall be exalted in that day* (11,17) as he comes in great splendour and majesty to judge the world (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). **Will the day of the LORD be a day of terror for you? Have you been straying from God?** Repent of your waywardness and return to your Saviour who loves you.

Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them

God warned that he would cause Jerusalem and Judah to be in a state of anarchy and distress. He would send famine and deprive them of their military strength, of judge and of prophet, of wise and skilled men. There would be a breakdown of government, of law and order, as they were governed by immature men (1–7). This was probably fulfilled when the Babylonians took King Jehoiachin and such people as described above captive to Babylon in 597 BC (2 Kings 24:13–16). Ezekiel the prophet was also among these captives (Ezekiel 1:1–2).

The people had only themselves to blame for the terrible calamity that befell their nation. They were against the Lord in their words and deeds and they had no shame for their wickedness (8–9). The Lord condemned the men for their wickedness in oppressing the poor, and the women for their pride, their luxurious lifestyles and immorality (13–23). The men would be killed in warfare and the women would lose their menfolk and their finery and be reduced to a desperate search for husbands (3:24 to 4:1). No one is able to despise and oppose God without inviting judgment.

What about the righteous remnant living in times of judgment? There is an encouraging word from the Lord: *'Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them'* (10). Christian, are you anxious about the future? Do you wonder whatever will become of this world with its increasing wickedness, lawlessness, pollution, famine and suffering? **Do not fear! God will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). It shall be well with you.** The Lord Jesus is coming again! There is no future for this present world but the Lord will create new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (65:17; 2 Peter 3:13), and we shall be there!

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!*

Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation

Isaiah begins this chapter with a prophecy against Damascus, the capital of Syria (1–3) but his attention is also directed to Israel, the northern kingdom (4–11). Verses 12 to 14 probably refer to the invading army of the Assyrians which were to surround Jerusalem in the reign of Hezekiah. They were dealt with by God in a night and they never returned again to terrify Jerusalem (14; cp. 37:36).

Israel and Syria formed an alliance against Judah (7:1). Both nations were warned here that they would come to grief under judgment from God. Israel was particularly guilty because she had turned from the Lord to idols which are useless to save (7–9). Why this unfaithfulness? Why was God to punish them? Isaiah told Israel that it was *'because you have forgotten the God of your salvation'* (10). Israel had been repeatedly warned in the past about the danger of forgetting God (eg. Deuteronomy 4:9,23; 8:11,14,19).

We can all be forgetful and we too must be on our guard against the traps that Satan lays for us. We do not mean to forget God, but we neglect prayer and we rush our reading and study of the Scriptures. In all the demands of daily life it is very easy to crowd God out of our lives. When we forget God or forget to rejoice in our wonderful salvation, we will soon lapse into sin. **If you have been forgetting God, repent today. It is folly to put off doing what you know to be right.**

*O thou, my soul, forget no more
The Friend who all thy misery bore;
Let every idol be forgot,
But, O my soul, forget him not.
Jesus for thee, a body takes,
Thy guilt assumes, thy fetters breaks,
Discharging all thy dreadful debt;
And canst thou e'er such love forget?*

(Written by Krishna Pal who was the first convert to Christ from Hinduism through the ministry of William Carey).

I will drench you with my tears

These two chapters contain a grim prophecy of the sudden destruction which was to come upon Moab. The Moabites who were descended from Lot had often been the enemies of God's people (Genesis 19:36–37; Judges 3:12–30). We are presented with a vivid picture of devastated cities (15:1–4) and of refugees fleeing for safety taking with them what possessions they had managed to salvage in their panic (15:5,7; 16:2–4).

Moab was renowned for his pride (cp. Jeremiah 48:29; Zephaniah 2:9–11) but his pride would be turned to wailing (16:6–7). He (the people of the land) would seek his false god in his sanctuary, but his prayer would not be heard (16:12). The idols and gods of false religion are indeed useless (cp. Psalm 115:3–8).

It is possible to identify with the victims to such an extent that we find ourselves taking issue with God and we become bitter and angry against him. We may, however, go to the other extreme and be cold and hard with hearts of stone that fail to be moved by the suffering and plight of those around us. Isaiah was not like that. He was so overwhelmed by the judgment that was to come upon wicked Moab that he wept profusely for them. He said, '*My heart will cry out for Moab*' (15:5) and concerning the Moabite cities of Heshbon and Elealeh, '*I will drench you with my tears*' (16:9).

The Lord Jesus not only had compassion for the crowds that thronged him (Matthew 14:14; 20:34) but he also wept over wicked Jerusalem which had rejected him (Luke 19:41–44). Have you any compassion for those who are lost, who are in spiritual darkness and ignorance? Andrew Bonar, a well-known 19th-century preacher in Scotland, used to cry out as he lay on his bed on Saturday nights and heard the crowds tramping home from the pubs and shows, 'Oh, they perish, they perish!' **Are you concerned enough to pray for the lost and to take the gospel to them? Do you have any compassion?**

The Branch of the LORD

The Lord Jesus Christ is described here and elsewhere in the Old Testament as '*The Branch of the LORD*' (2; 11:1–5; Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12–13). We read here that he is *beautiful and glorious*. There was a time when we saw no beauty in the Lord Jesus that we should desire him (53:2) but the One whom we once despised and rejected is now most precious to us (1 Peter 2:7). The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives has changed our perception of our Saviour whom we now love and adore, whom we praise for saving our souls. *The Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious.*

The daughters of Zion were condemned for their wickedness and warned of judgment coming upon them (3:16–23; 4:1). 'They are now the focus of divine cleansing' (Alec Motyer, COMMENTARY, page 64).

There is also a description of God's people here. They are:

- Known to God – *recorded among the living* (3; cp. Psalm 69:28). If you are a Christian, you should rejoice that your name is written in heaven (Luke 10:20; cp. Revelation 20:15).
- *Holy* (3) – God has chosen us to be holy, separated to himself in order to glorify him in our lives (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15–16; 2:9). We have been delivered from the corruption of the world to lead godly lives (cp. 2 Peter 1:3–4).
- Directed – verse 5 recalls the cloud which led Israel by day and the fire at night when they journeyed from Egypt to Canaan. How wonderful to know that God who made all things guides us!
- Protected (6) – the Lord shelters us in the heat of our pilgrimage to heaven and protects us in the blasts and storms of trial and suffering.

Let us think about the wonderful privileges that we enjoy in Christ and praise him for all that he means to us. He is precious!

*O that my soul could love and praise him more,
His beauties trace, his majesty adore,
Live near his heart, upon his bosom lean,
Obey his voice and all his will esteem.* (William Gadsby)

Wild grapes

These verses record a very moving song of the prophet to his ‘Well-beloved’ (*the LORD of hosts*; 1,7). It is possible that Isaiah visited the people as they were gathering clusters of grapes at the time of harvest and his song would have had a great impact on his hearers. Israel is likened to a vineyard belonging to God and planted on well-prepared, fertile ground. A watchtower was built so that intruders could be seen and driven out (cp. Song of Solomon 2:15). A winepress was constructed in anticipation of a bumper vintage. God *expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes* (1–2). Alec Motyer points out that ‘According to Ezekiel 15:2–5 a vine is either good for fruit or good for nothing, Since the Lord’s people are his vine, the same applies’ (COMMENTARY, page 68).

The song asks, ‘What more could God have done to his vineyard? Why did it fail to yield good grapes as expected? What should God do with such a useless vineyard?’ He would take away its protecting wall and hedge. The vineyard would be left to be overgrown with briars and thorns (4–6). The prophet drives home his message in verse 7 with a clever play on the Hebrew words – *For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel ... He looked for justice* (‘mishpat’), *but behold oppression* (‘mispach’); *for righteousness* (‘tsedaqah’), *but behold weeping*, (‘tseaqah’). **Great privileges bring great responsibilities and, like Israel, we will not be let off lightly if we despise God’s Word (Luke 12:47–48).**

Wild grapes are worthless grapes! Let us close with a comment from Matthew Henry: ‘Wild grapes are hypocritical performances in religion, that look like grapes, but are sour or bitter ... Counterfeit graces are wild grapes ... It is very sad with a soul, when, instead of the grapes of humility, meekness, patience, love, and contempt of the world, which God looks for, there are the wild grapes of pride, passion, discontent, malice, and contempt of God; instead of the grapes of praying and praising, the wild grapes of cursing and swearing, which are a great offence to God.’

For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it

The remainder of this chapter contains prophecies against Assyria and Philistia. The Assyrians were a terror to Judah and her neighbours, but Isaiah encourages the people by pointing to the absolute sovereignty of God over the nations of the world. He reminds us that:

- God’s plans are irreversible. Whatever the plans and strategy of the Assyrians, God’s purposes will surely stand. *Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand* (24). *The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations* (Psalm 33:11). *For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?* (27). **In our uncertain and sad world it is a great encouragement to know that all God’s purposes for us will surely stand and that he is working all things together for good to those who love him (Romans 8:28).**

- God’s power is irresistible. *His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?* (27). Psalm 2 reminds us that it is foolish to oppose God. In the reign of Hezekiah the Lord crushed the arrogant Assyrians in his land (Judah) just as Isaiah had prophesied (25; cp. chapters 36 and 37).

In the year that King Ahaz died, the Philistines sent messengers to Jerusalem seeking an alliance against the Assyrians, but the prophet warned against such an alliance (28–32). God wanted his people to trust in him rather than in military pacts with other nations. His message for the people was *that the LORD has founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall take refuge in it* (32). God is still the same. He is sovereign over all his universe. Christian, are you fearful or anxious? Your heavenly Father knows all about you. Trust in him. He will never fail you.

*The Lord is King! Who then shall dare
Resist his will, distrust his care,
Or murmur at his wise decrees,
Or doubt his royal promises?*

(Josiah Conder)

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer

Isaiah has a word of hope for a later generation who would be taken as captives to Babylon. God would have mercy on them and restore them to their land (1–3). This prophecy was fulfilled after the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon in 538 BC. There follows a song of triumph which celebrates the downfall of the king of Babylon (4–23).

I noted yesterday that Babylon symbolises the world in its opposition to God, whose final doom is spoken of in Revelation chapters 17 to 19. Alec Motyer writes, ‘The more we think of chapters 13–27 as a study of the principles of world history merging forward into eschatology, the easier it becomes to see from the start Babylon carries overtones of the “city of emptiness” (24:10) whose fall is the end of all that opposes the Lord’s rule.’ Motyer goes on to point out that the dead are alive in Sheol. In the Bible, death is never termination but a change of place and of state with continuity of personal identity; in Sheol, there is also personal continuity and mutual recognition, the king being recognised as he arrives (10). – (COMMENTARY, pages 142 and 143).

The king of Babylon is addressed as ‘*Lucifer*’ in verse 12: ‘*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!*’ The name ‘*Lucifer*’ means ‘morning star’, a name given to angelic beings (cp. Job 38:7). The evil personality behind the throne of Babylon was Lucifer (or Satan). He imagined that he could exalt his throne above the angels (‘*the stars of God*’) and that he could be *like the Most High* (13–14). God cast him down because of his pride (cp. 1 Timothy 3:6).

Pride is a terrible sin. Satan tempted Adam and Eve with this sin that had brought his own downfall, promising that they would *be like God* (Genesis 3:5). *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (1 Peter 5:5). **What is the answer to pride? We must seek to have the mind of Christ. He is God, but he humbled himself and obeyed the will of the Father to die a shameful and terrible death to save us from our sins (Philippians 2:5–11).** What a wonderful Saviour! What a glorious Lord! Let us worship him and give him thanks!

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil

Isaiah now describes the wild grapes found in God’s vineyard (Judah) with six ‘woes’ and pronounces judgment against the unbelievers of that day. *Woe to:*

- Greedy grabbers of land and property squeezed from the poor. God will judge them with dreadful harvests and vintages (8–10).
- Drunken revellers who lived for their drink and who failed to acknowledge the works of the Lord. They will be brought into captivity, hunger and thirst (11–17).
- Defiant sinners who challenged God (18–19). The sense of verse 19 is, ‘If there is a God, let him prove himself. Let him do something that we may be convinced of his existence.’ They wilfully refused to see the work of God (cp. verse 12).
- Those with warped values *who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* (20). So called ‘progressive thinkers’ despise the teaching of the Bible and the things that are true, good and pure. They are progressing headlong to hell.
- Conceited men who are wise in their own eyes (21).
- Unjust judges, who pervert justice for a bribe, justifying the wicked and condemning the righteous (22–23).

God is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11) and he punished Judah’s wickedness by sending an earthquake (25) and by bringing the terrifying armies of Assyria and Babylon against his sinning people (26–30). *The LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment and God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness* (16). God is just and he will punish sinners. **How do you think your life appears in the sight of the Lord?**

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne

King Uzziah intruded into the priestly ministry by burning incense to God who struck him with leprosy on account of his presumption; a long reign of 52 years ended in disgrace (2 Chronicles 26:16–23). In the year that Uzziah died, Isaiah had a vision of God in the temple that transformed his life. He writes, *'I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up'* (1). Judah was in spiritual decline and there was apprehension among the people as Assyria become increasingly powerful and belligerent but the prophet was reminded that God is absolutely sovereign. He cannot be toppled from his throne.

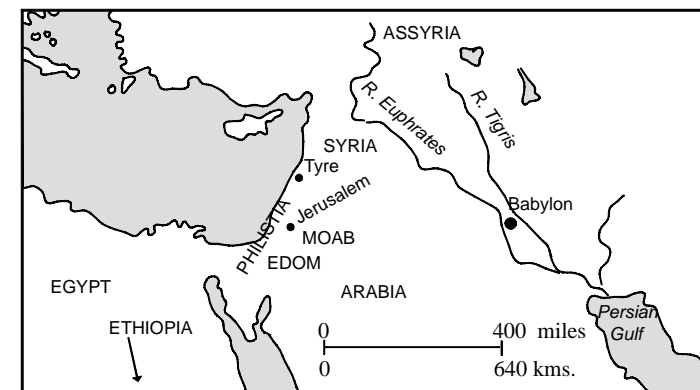
Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God (John 12:41; cp. Hebrews 1:3,8). He was overwhelmed by the majesty and dazzling splendour of the exalted God. He was gripped by the truth of God's holiness, for he repeatedly used the title *'the Holy One of Israel'* when speaking of the Lord (eg. 1:4; 5:19,24; 10:17,20). The seraphim (winged angelic beings) are sinless, yet they covered their faces in the presence of God (2). Isaiah keenly felt his own sinfulness in the presence of the Lord (5). **An appreciation of God's holiness brings a sense of our own sin and unworthiness.** Though we are God's children, the only acceptable way to worship and serve God is *with reverence and godly fear* (Hebrews 12:28). God had a work for Isaiah who needed not only to confess his sin, but also to be cleansed from it (7). If we are to serve God acceptably, we must know the cleansing work of the blood of Christ in our lives (1 John 1:7) and be holy (1 Peter 1:15–16). We must witness with clean lips (7).

Isaiah's commission from God was tough. He would not see great success, but rather experience the heartache of ministering to a people who were dull, lethargic and indifferent to his message (8–11). In the difficult days that were to follow, he would remember that he was serving the eternal King of glory and he would be encouraged to persevere. **Christian, are you discouraged? Remember that you serve the King of all creation. He is in control of all things, and his purposes cannot fail nor be frustrated.**

I will punish the world for its evil

There are prophecies against the nations surrounding Judah in the next twelve chapters of Isaiah. Babylon was not a threat to Judah in Isaiah's lifetime, but within a hundred years of his death Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity. We must never forget that God is in control of the world. It is his world and he is sovereign over every nation. God used the Medes to overthrow Babylon (17) and he describes them as his *'sanctified ones'* and his *'mighty ones'* (3). God *sanctified* (separated) them to himself as an instrument of judgment on Babylon. The prophecy that Babylon would be conquered by the Medes was literally fulfilled (17–22; cp. Daniel 5:30–31).

The word *'Babylon'* (Hebrew = 'babel,' cp. Genesis 11:9) means 'confusion'. We live in uncertain, lawless and confusing times when God's Word is despised and when wickedness is increasing. God has said, *'I will punish the world for its evil'* (11). Babylon is spoken of in Revelation chapters 17 to 19 symbolising everything that opposes God. Early Christians understood those chapters to refer to the Roman Empire. The Reformers understood them to be speaking of the Church of Rome. **There is confusion and opposition to God in the world but he is sovereign and he will have the last word. He will punish evil-doers. Is your heart right with God?**



Sketch-map to show nations in prophecies (chapters 13 to 23)

Wells of salvation

These verses are a hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord which looks forward to the coming of Messiah (*'in that day'*– 1,4; cp. 11:10,11). The word *'salvation'* is found three times in verses 2 and 3. It means deliverance and for the Christian it is deliverance from the tyranny of sin and of Satan in our lives; it is deliverance from God's judgment for our sins through the work of Christ at Calvary. The experience of salvation should cause us to sing God's praises with great joy (2–5). *Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation* (3). Notice that the word *'wells'* (or *'well-springs'*) is in the plural. What are these *'wells of salvation'* which provide spiritual refreshment for the needy, thirsty soul? Among them are:

- A well of pardon. We have forgiveness of sins through the precious blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7).
- A well of purification. We are polluted by our own sin and by the evil influences of the world around us, but the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin (2 Peter 2:20; 1 John 1:7).

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.* (William Cowper)

- A well of peace with God (1; cp. Romans 5:1).
- A well of power. *The LORD is my strength* (2). He empowers us through the Holy Spirit (cp. John 7:37–38), giving us strength to serve him and to fight our spiritual battles (Ephesians 6:10–18).
- A well of God's presence. He is in the *midst* of his people (6; cp. Hebrews 13:5–6). What have we to fear?

What happens when we draw water from the wells of salvation? We are filled with praise to God, we are encouraged to pray and to proclaim his greatness and his goodness (4–6). Be sure to draw water from these wonderful wells of salvation each day. Your life will then be a blessing to yourself and to others.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son

The northern kingdom of Israel formed an alliance with Syria in approximately 734 BC to fight against Judah. Ahaz was a very wicked man and *the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz*. The Edomites seized territory in the south and the Philistines also attacked Judah. Jerusalem itself was in danger and Ahaz sought the help of the Assyrians to drive out the invaders (1–2; 2 Kings 16:1–9; 2 Chronicles 28:16–21).

The Lord sent Isaiah and his son to meet the king who was inspecting the city's water supply (3). He had a message of encouragement for Ahaz telling him to keep calm and not be afraid or lose heart because of these two smouldering stubs of firewood (Israel and Syria). God would thwart their plans and the northern kingdom would soon be no more (5–9). The Lord encouraged the king to trust in him and graciously offered him a sign but wicked Ahaz refused this offer. He replied that he would not test the Lord but he was refusing to trust in God (10–12). Isaiah referred to the *house of David*, through which Messiah would come. Ahaz may have thought it a small thing to weary men (God's servants), but would he also weary God (13)?

The Lord did give the king a sign, however: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name, Immanuel* (14). There may have been a reference to a son to be born to the king. While the child was still very young, the two kings whom Ahaz so dreaded would be destroyed. Ahaz did not realise that his greatest enemy was not Israel or Syria, but Assyria to whom he was turning for help (16–25).

The New Testament shows us that verse 14 looks ahead to the birth of Christ (14; cp. Matthew 1:23). Just as Ahaz did not want this sign, we have a glorious King who is still unwanted and rejected by most people. **If you want Immanuel (God with you), you must embrace Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord. If you reject Christ, you are no better than Ahaz.**

For God is with us

Isaiah's wife, the prophetess, then conceived and bore a son who was called 'Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz' (3). God told Isaiah to take a large scroll and to write upon it the words, 'Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz' (which means 'Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil'). Two witnesses, Uriah the priest (cp. 2 Kings 16:10–11) and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, saw this placard displayed and would be able to confirm that Isaiah had written these words before they were fulfilled (1–2). The Lord continued to warn Ahaz and the people of Judah not to place their confidence in Assyria for deliverance from the armies of Syria and the plunder northern kingdom (here called 'Samaria', 4). The significance of the name was that before the boy was able to speak, the riches of Damascus and Samaria, would be plundered by the Assyrians. Syria was indeed overthrown within a year of the boy's birth (732 BC) and Samaria completely destroyed a decade later.

Judah's water supply from the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, though precarious, was preferable to the bountiful supply of water found in Syria and Israel. Because she was trusting men rather than God, the waters of the River Euphrates would spill over into Judah (6–8). This was a prophetic warning that the Assyrian army would invade Judah which was fulfilled during the reign of king Hezekiah. How foolish of Ahaz to trust in the treacherous Assyrians when God would have been with him had he obeyed and trusted in him!

Those who seek to destroy God's people will themselves be destroyed. All their plans will come to nothing *for God is with us* (9–10). The Hebrew is 'Immanuel' – 'God is with us'. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Immanuel. He came into the world so that we could enjoy God's forgiveness and peace through his death and resurrection (Matthew 1:21–23). **When God is with us, men's counsel against us comes to nothing. We have no need to fear the threats of the ungodly (10–12) but should place our hope and confidence in God (17).** God is with us and for us; who can be against us? What have we to fear (Romans 8:31; Hebrews 13:5–6)?

The Spirit of wisdom and understanding

Isaiah's prophecy contains many warnings of judgment, but it also has many wonderful and encouraging passages. Chapter 11 has the conjunction 'and' repeated again and again to emphasise the greatness of the Messianic reign (not shown in the NKJV but translated in the English Standard Version). This chapter prophesies:

- The coming of Christ (1–5). Christ's first coming is prophesied (1–3) and then his second coming as King and Judge of all the world when he will destroy the wicked and rule in righteousness (4–5). We are reminded of his human descent from the house of Jesse (King David's father). *The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD* was upon Christ (2; cp. 61:1–2; Luke 4:16–22). The Holy Spirit gives us *wisdom and understanding .. knowledge*. His presence in our lives produces reverence and godly fear.

- His kingdom (6–9). **When Jesus comes again, there will not only be a miraculous change in us (Romans 8:23; Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:1–3) but also in creation.** We have here a vivid picture of peace and tranquillity. This is known as '*the regeneration*' (Matthew 19:28) or '*the restoration of all things*' (Acts 3:21). We look forward to a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:10–13; Revelation 20:11; 21:1–5). *For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea* (9; cp. Habakkuk 2:14).

- The gathering of the remnant (10–16). Dale Ralph Davis notes that 'Isaiah describes the restoration of Israel under three scenarios:

1. Gathering the scattered vv 11–12
2. Healing the divisions, vv 13–14
3. Removing the obstacles, vv 15–16'

(STUMP KINGDOM, page 112).

A remnant did return to Israel after the captivity in Babylon (cp. Ezra chapter 1), but I believe that the ultimate fulfilment of these verses lies in the salvation of a remnant of Jews throughout the gospel age, where they are gathered into the church of Christ (cp. Romans 11:5).

The LORD of hosts

These verses were written after the reign of Ahaz. Samaria had already been overrun by the Assyrians (in 722 BC) and Hezekiah was king of Judah. Isaiah's warnings about Assyria had been vindicated and in this prophecy he encourages Judah to trust in God in the face of Assyrian threats. The Assyrians were God's instruments of judgment but they failed to recognise this. They were arrogant and claimed that they owed their success to their own military might (5–14). God warned the axe that he wielded (Assyria) not to boast itself against him, for he would judge them and punish them (15–19). Alec Motyer comments that the thrust of verses 5 and 15 'is clear: the absolute sovereignty of the Lord in the world' (COMMENTARY, page 113).

The Lord encouraged Judah to depend upon him and not to be afraid of the Assyrians. He promised that a remnant would return to the land (20–27). Verses 28 to 32 describe the thrusting advance of the Assyrian army towards Jerusalem but they were to be humbled by God (33–34). God calls himself '*the LORD of hosts*' or '*the Lord GOD of hosts*' five times in this chapter (16,23,24,26,33; cp. 9:7). This title of God, '*the LORD of hosts*' ('Jehovah-Sabaoth') is found throughout the Old Testament and is a great encouragement to us when we face opposition and pressure.

The Assyrians had a fearsome, mighty army, but Judah had '*the LORD of hosts*' (armies of angels) on their side (cp. Genesis 32:1–2; Psalm 103:21; 148:2; 2 Kings 6:15–17). It took only one angel to destroy the Assyrians (37:36). **We have no need to fear men if we fear God and trust in him.** *The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear him, and delivers them* (Psalm 34:7). How wonderful! Let us rejoice in him.

*The hosts of God encamp around
The dwellings of the just;
Deliverance he affords to all
Who on his succour trust.*

(Nahum Tate & Nicholas Brady)

Should not a people seek their God?

The names of Isaiah's two sons, Shear-Jashub (7:3) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:3) were signs to faithless Ahaz and his people (18). God hid his face from them because they had rejected his Word, but there was a remnant of faithful disciples with Isaiah (16). There is a strong warning here against seeking to contact the dead through mediums. *And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?* (19). Many who are bereaved or who are passing through perplexing or troubled times do not turn to the Lord, but to spiritist mediums and other occult practitioners. They mistakenly believe that they are getting in contact with loved ones who have died and are 'on the other side'. They do not realise that at its best spiritism and fortune-telling is trickery; at worst it is dabbling with demonic forces when evil spirits may pose as those who have died.

Some spiritists protest that they worship the same God as we do and that they sing hymns to the Lord. They do not worship the same God as Christians and they reject the teaching of the Bible which contains many warnings against dabbling in spiritism, fortune-telling, sorcery and witchcraft (eg. Deuteronomy 18:9–12; 1 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 22:15). Those who refuse to pay attention to God's Word ('*the law and the testimony*') do so because *there is no light in them* (20). Occult practices lead to *trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish* (22).

When people turn away from God, the vacuum is often filled by the occult. Over one million people in Britain are involved in some form of occult practice. High Street bookshops have lavish displays of occult books and New Age bookshops have sprung up throughout the country. Most newspapers have a daily horoscope and many people are turning to dark powers for help and comfort when they should be seeking God. **How we need to seek God in prayer for those who have been deceived into dabbling with the occult, and work to make known the glorious gospel of Christ!**

His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God

Deuteronomy chapter 18 warns against spiritism and other occult practices and goes on to promise the coming of Christ (verses 9 to 18). We have the same here in Isaiah. The warning at the end of chapter 8 is followed by wonderful verses which prophesy the coming of the Lord Jesus (9:1–7). Zebulun and Naphtali suffered the ravages of Assyrian invasion in 734 BC. They were oppressed and in darkness but they were to be privileged in the future by having *‘the Light of the World’*, to live among them in Galilee (1–2; Matthew 4:12–16). Verses 1 to 4 are in the past tense, the future being written as if it has already happened. God’s promise is so certain that it can be trusted.

How foolish it is to grope in the darkness of the occult when we can walk in the glorious light of Christ (2). Why trust in spiritist mediums and fortune tellers when the Lord Jesus has the government of the world upon his shoulder (6)? Why seek the counsel of spiritists when you can know Jesus who is called *‘Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’* (6)? Some translations do not have the comma after *‘Wonderful’* so that the title is *‘Wonderful Counsellor’*; this is perhaps the best way of rendering the verse.

Verses 6 and 7 clearly show that the promised Messiah is God. He is the *‘Wonderful Counsellor’*. He is wonderful in his Person and in his work of creation and redemption. He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge (25:1; cp. Proverbs 8:14; Romans 11:33–34) and he wisely guides his people (28:29). The Lord Jesus is *‘the Mighty God’* sitting on the throne of David (7; cp. Psalm 89:19–37). His reign is eternal (*‘Everlasting Father’* = *‘Father of Eternity’*). He is *‘the Prince of Peace’* who gives us lasting peace with God *through the blood of his cross* (Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20).

Have you discovered the loveliness and preciousness of the Lord Jesus in your own life? To reject Christ will bring everlasting darkness into your soul. To embrace him as your Lord and Saviour will bring inexpressible joy, light and wonderful peace.

What will you do in the day of punishment?

There are four sections to this passage of Isaiah, each ending with the words *‘For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still’* (12, 17, 21; 10:4). Alec Motyer (COMMENTARY, page 106) points out that these four sections describe Natural disaster (8–12), Political collapse (13–17), Social; anarchy (18–21) and Moral perversion (10:1–4). This prophecy is earlier than that in chapters 7 and 8. According to verse 11 Syria was then at war with Israel and not with her in alliance against Judah. Israel had failed to heed God’s warnings and was ripe for judgment (10–12), hence the repeated statement that the anger of God had not been turned away.

Israel had listened to false prophets who had preached peace and offered comfort to them instead of warning them of the consequences of their sin (15). The leaders of the people caused them to go astray and led them to destruction (16). Israel was guilty of pride (9), indifference to God (13), lack of mercy and of hypocrisy (17), rampant wickedness (18), and injustice (10:1–2). Three questions are used in chapter 10, verse 3 to challenge the people. They also come as a challenge to us:

- *What will you do in the day of punishment?* If you are not a Christian now, it will be too late to repent of your sin after you die. Will you plead ignorance? You will have no excuse for rejecting Christ and for ignoring God’s command to repent now (Acts 17:30).
- *To whom will you flee for help?* If God is against you, no one can help you! *How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?* (Hebrews 2:3). To neglect salvation, all you have to do when challenged to respond to the gospel of Christ is – nothing!
- *Where will you leave your glory?* Your glory (honour and possessions) will be useless in the day of God’s reckoning.

If you are too proud to confess that you are a sinner and if you refuse God’s offers of mercy now, what will YOU do in the day of punishment?