

THIS IS OUR GOD

Studies in Isaiah Chapters 40–66

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INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF ISAIAH 1–39

Isaiah prophesied in the royal court in Jerusalem 740–686 B.C., and this book is a careful compilation of his collected works. His message was of faith in God (eg **28:16, 30:15**) and the sureness of His promises concerning Judah, Jerusalem and the royal house of David (see Genesis 49:10, Deuteronomy 12:5–7, 2 Samuel 7:8–16). He prophesied at a time when his message was to be decisively rejected: see **6:9–13**. First by the paganising king Ahaz, in the Syria-Ephraim crisis of 735 B.C.—a crucial turning-point in Israel’s history, after which it came under foreign subjection from which it never again emerged (see **7**). Later by the otherwise godly king Hezekiah, in his opening of the kingdom to the grasping and destructive powers of Babylon in 702 B.C. (see **39**). So it was a time of spiritual darkness. Yet in that time God demonstrated time and again His faithfulness to His promises, most notably in the Assyrian crisis of 701 B.C. (see **36–37**). And He gave Isaiah to understand that in the face of

these reversals, God would bring about His purposes of love and redemption (see eg **9:2, 24:23, 25:6–9**). It is clear in this that God’s purposes are not just for Israel, but for all the nations, over which He rules—especially those to whom God’s people foolishly look for help (see **10:24–27, 31:1–3**). [See notes and hear cassettes from 1998 Tuesday Nights Terms 1 and 3.]

Isaiah had been given a sense of foreboding and destruction for the people of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. In chapter **39** he is shown that this will come about through the agency of Babylon (though he is not told when)—which indeed happened over a hundred years later in 586 B.C. What then is to become of the promises of God which Isaiah has been upholding all these years? Chapters **40–66** bring the answer to this fearful dilemma. As we say in the programme summary:

Where do we turn when all of God’s promises appear to end in ashes and darkness? By the end of chapter **39**, Isaiah had been shown the coming destruction of God’s beloved city of Jerusalem, and the end of the family of David on the throne of Judah, because of the determined unfaithfulness of God’s people. In chapter **6** he had been brought from his own personal sense of lostness and uncleanness into the freedom of forgiveness and fitness for ministry. Now in chapters **40–66** we are told how this will happen for all of God’s lost and sinful people: through the ministry and sacrifice of a Suffering Servant, who rescues a whole family of God’s children; how in the person of an Anointed Conqueror God will deal with all our enemies and bring us into His new creation. This is the heart of the gospel of Christ in the Old Testament.

‘COMFORT MY PEOPLE’—**40:1–42:17**

- 40:1–9** Three voices are instructed to bring a message of God’s reliability, eternity and faithfulness.
- 40:1–2** This is the point at which most modern commentators, since Duhm in 1892, say that a new section (chapters **40–55**) begins, written by a later prophet or school of prophecy, during the Babylonian exile 597–538 B.C., whom they call ‘Deutero (Second)-Isaiah’. This is based on their refusal to believe that there could be such a thing as predictive prophecy, or that Isaiah of Jerusalem could have spoken in this way of events which turned out to be over a hundred years later (see **One Isaiah, or three?** above, p. 2). We have already seen there is good reason why Isaiah himself should have written this whole section, and its sequel in chapters **56–66**, as the carefully-compiled and necessary continuation of his brilliant prophetic work. ‘Nothing shall be left’ of **39:6** is characteristically followed by ‘comfort my people’ of **40:1** (compare **1:27–2:5, 3:18–4:6, 6:5–7, 11–13, 8:20–9:5, 10:33–11:1, 24:12–16, 26:16–19, 27:10–14, 29:1–8, 30:15–26, 33:23–24**). Judgement on unfaithfulness surely comes, but God and His promises remain, and will be fulfilled, after the people have forfeited them, by the LORD’s own hand.
- 40:1** ‘Comfort, comfort’: repetition means that this is an intense and heart-felt cry. This command is in the plural, addressed to three ‘voices’ in verses **3, 6** and **9**. We stand again in the reality of **6:1–4**, the LORD among His heavenly hosts, ‘the council of the LORD’, where the prophets hear His word (see Jeremiah 23:18, 22). But we hear a different message from **6:9–13**.
‘says your God’ (imperfect tense): ‘your God keeps on saying’.

- 2 'Speak tenderly...cry to her': not just to give kindly comfort, but as an appeal, courting her in love.
'warfare' *or* 'time of hard service': relating to the time of exile in Babylon (see **38:6–7, 43:14**). Has the sense of hardship with a purpose. This time has now come to an end.
'iniquity...sins': the inner disposition and the outward acts of sin. The pardon is a very thoroughgoing one.
'that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins': sounds like Israel has suffered twice as much punishment from God as was due to her, and that this has paid for her sins sufficiently to bring pardon. But that makes no sense, and misconstrues the true meaning here. The passive 'her iniquity is pardoned (*or* paid for)' (compare Leviticus 26:41, 43) means the punishment of their iniquity has been accepted as satisfactory, by God. It occurs elsewhere in this passive form only with regard to the atoning sacrifices in eg Leviticus 1:4. So the satisfactory payment is not something that has been taken out on Israel, but is something that has been effected by a sacrifice provided, as all true sacrifices can only be (see Genesis 22:13–14, Leviticus 17:11), 'from the hand of the LORD'. This satisfactory payment will be seen to be that provided by God in the sacrifice of the Servant of the Lord (see **53:6, 10**). This is borne out by the use of the word 'double', which implies either a gracious and abundant pardon, or (meaning 'folded double', so that one side matches the other), an equivalent payment that fully matches what is required. Thus careful exegesis brings us from our false and distorted human way of viewing things into the heart of grace in the God-given sacrifice of the obedient Servant.
- 40:3–5** An announcement of God coming in glory (compare Deuteronomy 33:2). Picked up by John the Baptist in John 1:22–23.
'in the wilderness...in the desert': inhospitable terrain, that will be transformed by His coming.
- 3 'straight': God will come surely and directly.
- 4 His coming will not be prevented or delayed by any obstacles.
- 5 'the glory of the LORD shall be revealed': as in Exodus 33:18, 34:6–7—God's covenant-faithfulness, true to His own holy nature.
'all flesh shall see it together': not just as observers, but as participants (see Hebrews 2:10).
- 6–8** The frailty of humankind under the judgements of God is contrasted with the durability and reliability of the word and promised action of God.
- 7 'the breath [Spirit] of the LORD': the controlling factor in all things; see Psalms 33:6, 104:29–30.
- 8 In the face of our physical and moral failure, God's promises will remain constant, and God's word will do what it says (compare **55:10–11**)
- 9–11** An announcement of the action of God, 'the arm of the LORD', in sovereign rule, blessing and care.
- 9 'herald of good tidings' [feminine]: probably not Zion/Jerusalem herself, but as in the first two 'voices', a messenger 'to Jerusalem' (verse 2), in this instance a prophetess who, like Miriam (Exodus 15:20–21—and like the women from the empty tomb in the gospels?) announce and celebrate God's already-accomplished victory.
- 9, 10** 'Behold': thrice repeated, as the excitement mounts: God is in view!

- 10, 11** 'his arm': (see **30:30, 33:2**, also **51:5, 9, 52:10, 53:1**, then **59:16, 62:8, 63:5, 12**). It is the arm of a ruler, a shepherd-king (as David was), which brings victory, reward, protection and loving care to His people.
- 12–31** The great, incomparable, and faithful Creator-God (compare 1 Peter 4:19). As the disaster of the Babylonian destruction and exile is to come upon the people, their hopeless despondency (verse 27) is answered by the reaffirmation of the gracious sovereignty of God as the Creator who will bring his creation to the goal that He has intended for it (see Ephesians 1:3–14). This reality of the LORD as the one and only sovereign Creator is a constant theme of this section (see **43:1, 7, 15, 21, 44:2, 21, 54:5**).
- 12** Echoes of Genesis 1 and 2 are heard in a context which emphasises the vastness of God, and the exactitude and ease with which He accomplishes His task.
- 13** 'the Spirit of the LORD': compare Genesis 1:2, Psalm 33:6. In contrast to the pagan myths, the Lord needs to consult no one but Himself to carry out His work of creation.
- 14** Note that God has 'enlightenment' (He knows what He is doing), 'justice' (right and timely judgements and decrees), 'knowledge' (not just intellectual, but an intimate matter of the heart), and 'understanding' (wisdom and discernment regarding the inner workings). These come from nowhere outside Himself.
- 15** Things which appear big and far-flung to us are infinitesimal compared to God, and infinitely manageable by Him.
- 16** No religious activity or act of worship, no matter how vast and costly, can match His greatness and worth. Yet, by the end of the book, Isaiah will have told us of a sacrifice that fully satisfies all that God is: that provided by God Himself in the Servant of the Lord (see chapter **53**).
- 17** This is not to say that God esteems us as less than worthless, but that 'before Him' we are as nothing. For it is out of this 'nothing' (as in Genesis 1:2, and **24:10**) that He has created us, and recreates us, to be of infinite value in His own image (see Hebrews 11:3, Romans 4:17).
- 40:18–20** Introduces another theme of this section: the ridiculous and demeaning bondage of idolatry. How can a perishable and immobile object manufactured by human hands, however richly and skilfully adorned, be any substitute for the dynamic and eternal Maker of all? Such a delusion can only be a weedy impoverishment of the human spirit.
- 21** Knowing and understanding come from hearing and being told (compare Romans 10:13–18). All of this comes from God. God has never left Himself without witness, either from the things that He has made (Acts 14:17, Romans 1:19–20) or through His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7, Luke 1:70).
- 22** The immensity of God is pictured as requiring the vastness of the sky to accommodate Him (though Solomon acknowledged that even that is not large enough—1 Kings 8:27), and the smallness of earth's inhabitants by comparison (compare Numbers 13:33).
- 23–24** God's greatness involves the actual determining of the rise and fall of nations and rulers (see Daniel 4:34–37, Acts 17:24–27, John 19:11, Acts 4:24–28).
- 25–26** In contrast to the idols (**18–20**), God does what the idols never could (see Psalm 96:5). 'Holy One': the ultimate contrast—how can an idol ever have the relational fullness of moral perfection?

- ‘lift up’: (compare Deuteronomy 4:19) the action of worshipping ‘all the host of heaven’ (see 2 Kings 17:16, 21:3). Babylonian and other religions gave names and powers to the stars (as people still do today), but their real names are known and directed by the Lord (Genesis 1:14–19—no names mentioned! Compare also the way God shepherds His people in John 10:3, 27–28).
- 27** So how can God’s people say that God is disinterested, uncaring or powerless in regard to them and in His undertakings towards them? The true conclusion to this display of the greatness of God is not that we are of no account before Him, but that His concern and care for us is direct, complete and effective.
- ‘Jacob...Israel’: reflects the name-change given to Jacob as he wrestled with God in his disabled weakness and in his covenant-driven determination.
- ‘my way is hid...my right is disregarded’: God cannot see, and doesn’t care—the false assumptions exposed in Israel by their severe reverses.
- 28–29** These are answered by what has been said of God’s power in creation—not by way of overwhelming us with it, but by showing the consistent faithfulness of God’s power and wisdom in the face of human weakness, weariness and failure. Not only that, but how He has ever been the One who shares and imparts the strength and reliability of His own nature to those who relate with Him in patient faith.
- 30–31** Even those at the peak of their fitness and enthusiasm do not have within themselves the innate wherewithal to cope with life that only God has, and that He imparts to us as we relate with Him by faith.
- 41:1–7** God invites all the nations to acknowledge that He rules the world and what happens in it, but they run off with each other to the pitiful refuge of idols.
- 1** After addressing Israel (**40:27**), God now speaks to the nations, to invite them to share in the blessings promised to Israel (as in Genesis 12:3, see also **19:24–25**, **27:13**)—to ‘renew their strength’ as in **40:31**, by coming to Him in worship. But there is first an issue of judgement to be settled: will they acknowledge the sovereignty of God which they have hitherto rejected?
- 2–4** The figure of a conqueror is introduced, whose achievements are seen to be the actions of God. This could be an anticipation of the one who is named as Cyrus in **44:24–45:7**, and of the Anointed Conqueror in **59:15–20** and **63:1–6**, who is the Lord Himself in person, but here he is not named. The point here is that it is the Lord who rules personally in all the events of history.
- 2** ‘whom victory meets at every step’ *or* ‘whom Righteousness calls to follow him’: this conqueror is seen as carrying out the righteous purposes of God.
- ‘he [the LORD] makes them like dust with his [the conqueror’s] sword’: God is the perpetrator of the actions of this one whom He has stirred up.
- 3** ‘by paths his feet have not trod’: so swift and extensive are his victories that his feet seem scarcely to touch the ground.
- 4** ‘calling the generations from the beginning’: God’s actions extend not just to these particular conquests, but across all the ages. All generations are subject to God’s calling, as He declares to them His nature and purposes, announces what is to be, names them as His own, and draws them on to the destiny He has for them, in all His actions.
- ‘I, the LORD, the first, and with the last’: God alone is the one at the beginning, the only source of all that is. But He will not be alone in the end: ‘last’ here is

- plural, indicating that there will be many with Him at the end (see eg **43:5–7**, **53:10–11**, **54:1**, Hebrews 2:10, Revelation 7:9).
- ‘I am He’: God is the one who carries all these things through. He has His being from no one but Himself, and in that He is thoroughly consistent.
- 5–7** In response to the invitation in verse **1**, the far-flung nations come: not in the spirit in which they are called, but seeking refuge with each other in their idolatry, as their defence in life against the strong loving onslaughts of their sovereign creator God. Looking to each other for reinforcement (compare John 5:44), they encourage each other to take courage in the works of their own hands. But unlike God, the idols cannot determine events or bring any deliverance, but remain pitifully immobile.
- 8–20** Three words of consolation follow, addressed to God’s beloved people of Israel in their fear, weakness and poverty.
- 8–13** In the midst of all the faithless nations, God addresses Israel as the one who holds a special place in God’s purposes for the whole world.
- 8** ‘my servant’: not a servile position, but a high calling with extensive powers in the master’s household (see eg Joseph in Genesis 39:1–6, 20–23).
‘chosen’: a slave or servant (as an employee today) is engaged by the master—not the other way round (compare John 15:16, Romans 1:1).
‘my friend’: (compare John 15:13–15) a position of kindred spirit, of intimacy in love (compare 1 John 4:19).
- 9** ‘from the ends of the earth’: indicates God’s sovereignty over all the earth in his calling of this particular family.
‘and not cast you off’: the tense of the verb indicates that this is God’s determined mode of operation.
- 10** ‘fear not, for I am with you...I am your God’: (as in Joshua 1:1–9) God’s presence and commitment to His people drives out fear (see 1 John 4:18).
‘dismayed’: to look anxiously in all directions for help or safety. The one whose faith is in God can be settled and single-minded.
‘victorious [*or* righteous] right hand’: see above on **40:10–11**.
- 41:11–13** A powerfully poetic passage on what will happen to the enemies of God’s people, as their right hand is held by God’s right hand.
- 14–16** Israel, in feebleness as a ‘worm’, is made by God into a shredder and disposer of all opposition.
- 14** ‘you worm...you men’: signifies inherent inability.
‘your Redeemer’: God takes up the role of next-of-kin to these feeble people, shouldering responsibility for all their needs as His own (as in Ruth 3:12–13, 4:1–6).
- 15–16** ‘threshing sledge...winnow’: the harvested grain crop was taken to a flat firmly compacted threshing floor, and a wooden sledge with sharp stones and metal pieces fixed underneath was dragged over it to cut the straw into shorter lengths, then on a breezy day it was all tossed into the air with winnowing forks, and the light chaff was separated out from the heavier grain. Here, with the force of a tempest, the straw is removed without trace.

- 17–20** In a setting reminiscent of the exodus wanderings in the wilderness, and in anticipation of the new creation, God provides for the poor and needy in answer to prayer by virtue of being the Creator.
- 17** ‘poor and needy’: (compare **10:2**) those oppressed by the injustice of others.
- 18–20** In the desert water and shade are provided abundantly in wonderful and miraculous ways (compare Exodus 15:27, Psalm 84:6), with a view to all acknowledging that this is the action of God.
- 21–29** God now turns from Israel to address the other nations again. They would claim also that their gods govern world history. This claim is now to be tested. Can the idol-gods not only predict what is to happen, but also cause it to be, as the LORD has?
- 21** The idolaters and their idols are to be brought into court for judgement.
‘the King of Jacob’: for the purposes of the exercise, the LORD for the time being is content to be ranged with the idols as one national deity among others.
- 22** ‘Let them bring them’: unlike God, who moves with freedom, the idol-gods have to be carried into the courtroom.
‘the former things...their outcome’: can the idols understand the movements of history so as to say where they are leading?
- 23** ‘do good, or do harm’: can they do anything, good or bad, that actually effects something?
- 24** The idols remain silent—they cannot reply. So they are shown up to be non-entities (compare 1 Corinthians 8:4), and those who choose them (contrast **41:9**) become, like their idols, an abomination before God, far short of the glory of the God in whose image they were made to be.
- 25–27** The same test is applied to the LORD: He is the one who will both predict and bring to pass the coming of this conqueror (soon to be named in **44:28** and **45:1** as Cyrus, the deliverer of Israel from exile in 539 B.C.)
- 25** ‘from the north’ (the route of his conquest) and ‘from the rising of the sun’ (the east, his place of origin) are predicted very precisely.
‘call on my name’: while Cyrus in his decree does use the name of the LORD (see 2 Chronicles 36:22–23), the meaning here is perhaps more that he will by all that he does testify to the nature and action of God as true.
- 26–28** None of the idol-gods have had anything to say, nor can claim any rights, in this matter. God alone has brought this message of welcome hope to His people. So there is no one else who can be relied upon for wisdom and sound government of events.
- 28** Thus the idolaters and the idols they make are without order or substance, and can be relied upon for nothing.
- 42:1–9** What is now to be done for these nations that are in such a parlous condition? After ‘Behold, you are nothing’ in **41:24** and ‘Behold, they are all a delusion’ in **41:29** come the words, ‘Behold, my servant’. He is the one who will come with true and sure word and action to be the Lord’s remedy for the world’s evil and empty nothingness.
- 42:1** ‘my servant’: introduced here as such for the first time. By no means a lowly calling, for Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David and the prophets, as well as all the people of Israel, are called ‘servants’ of God in the Old Testament (as is Job also, and even Nebuchadnezzar!). We have already heard Israel as a whole referred to

- as ‘my servant’ in **41:8**. But here the identity of the servant is not disclosed, and it is not proper that it should be at this point.
- ‘whom I uphold’: meaning, whom I hold fast to Myself and will not let go.
- ‘My Spirit’: privy to the innermost things of God (as in 1 Corinthians 2:10–11), and endowed by God’s enabling action.
- ‘justice’: (as also in verses **3** and **4**) right judgement, right action, right instruction, right order, divine truth revealed. This is not something sought out or set up by human beings, but is ‘brought forth’ and ‘established’ from God by His servant.
- 2–3** The nature and mode of his service: not drawing attention to himself, and not putting others down, even when they are far gone in damaged weakness.
- ‘faithfully’: consistent with what is true.
- 4** ‘He will not fail or be discouraged’ *or* ‘he will not burn dimly or be bruised’: picking up the sense of what has happened to those whom he helps in verse **3**. He will be subject to the same pressures they are, but he will not succumb to them.
- ‘established’: the word used for setting God’s law in place at Mount Sinai in Deuteronomy 4:44.
- ‘the earth...the coastlands’: this is for the whole world, to its farthest parts.
- 5** God now addresses the servant personally and intimately.
- ‘thus says the LORD’ (as also ‘I am the LORD’ in verses **6** and **8**): declares how the ministry of the servant derives from and fully expresses the very being of God Himself.
- ‘who created the heavens...’: all that is said of God as Creator and Sustainer of all things in **40:12–31** (compare Acts 17:24–28) is the grounds of His action now in this servant.
- 6–7** From the relationship between the LORD and His servant comes revelatory and liberating action.
- ‘I have called you in righteousness’: the servant, as did the conqueror, comes in the righteous action of God, but in a different way, and of a different order.
- ‘I have given you as a covenant to the peoples’: the servant in his own person embodies the relationship (‘covenant’) in which God stands with the people He has made, and indeed with the whole of His creation. (In Trinitarian terms, God who is relational in Himself will be in determined relationship with all that He has made.)
- 8** No one else can lay claim to the glory God has in this action of His servant.
- 9** ‘the former things’: concerning the conqueror in **41:2–4, 25–27**, which are predicted and happen.
- ‘new things’: the somewhat different matter of the servant, now being revealed.
- 10–12** The whole world and all its inhabitants are called to join in a song of praise to God for what He will do for them in this servant. This shows the ministry of the servant to be one of great and deep significance.
- 13–17** The ‘new song’ is not in order to enhance worship with something novel: it arises from a new revelation and a new appreciation of the action of God. Various images denote different aspects of this saving action.
- 13** A cry of victory.
- 14** A cry of travail, giving birth to new life, after an eternity of awaiting the time.
- 15** A picture of widespread devastation of all that has stood in opposition to God.

- 16 God's personal and compassionate ministry to the 'blind' (as in verse 7, with the servant), who have no other way of knowing where they are going.
- 17 As the blind, who have been brought to see, are led to safety, so those who wrongly persist in saying 'We see' fall by the wayside (compare John 9:35–41).

'I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME'—42:18–44:5

The nation will be redeemed—42:18–43:21

The news of calamity in 39:6 has been followed by the word of comfort: that God by His very nature as Creator of everything and Sovereign over all the events of history will faithfully do all that is necessary to bring His promised purposes through to completion (40:1–42:17). This is now applied particularly to what will be Israel's plight under the coming oppression of Babylon.

- 42:18–25 Israel has been called by God to be His 'light to the nations' (42:6), but it's own blindness and deafness results in their captivity. Even then, they do not see that it is the Lord who has brought this about, and their heart remains unchanged.
- 18 God's appeal goes out to the whole world, deluded by their idols (42:17) into being unable to hear or see.
- 19–20 Israel itself is no less blind and deaf than to heathen nations (compare 30:9–11). It's privileged position as God's dedicated (literally 'reconciled') servant and messenger among all the nations makes this all the more culpable (compare Amos 3:2). So even if Israel is 'my servant' (41:8), Israel in its present condition is not the one who will carry through the servant's calling of 42:1–9.
- 20 (literally) 'you do not observe...he does not hear': I'm speaking to him, but he's not listening—he can't hear me!
- 21 God's choice of Israel was from His own righteous nature for the purposes of making the glories of His law (His very being) known in all the world (as in Deuteronomy 4:5–8).
- 22 But instead Israel in ignominy is to fall prey to the grasping designs of Babylon, and God's protection will be removed (compare 5:1–7).
- 23 When this happens, will there be anyone with the discernment to realise who is doing this?
- 24–25 'Who?', not 'Why?', is the important question. It is God who is dealing with us through all the events of history and our personal lives. And the moral issue of sin, and of His relationship with us, is His whole concern.
- 25 'he did not understand...he did not take it to heart': (compare Revelation 16:8–11) no matter how just and right and timely and appropriate the judgements are, it seems that another different work of God is required to effect the necessary change of heart—the even stranger work of the cross (see on 28:21).
- 43:1–7 In the midst of the 'fire' of the judgements that must come, God undertakes to ensure that it will not consume them. In God's covenant there are cursings as well as blessings, and God carries both through with a view to faithfully bringing about all that He has promised, in His love for His people.
- 1 'created...formed...redeemed...called you by name': each phrase becoming progressively more intimate: from the general act of creation, like that of Genesis

- 1:1, to the specific care of forming, like a potter, as in Genesis 2:7. Then to the act of redeeming one who is considered next-of-kin, as in Ruth 3:13, 4:4–6, and further to the personal relationship of calling by name, even being called by God’s name (as in **4:1**). All of which adds up to, ‘you are mine’!
- 2** Depicts the dangers and trials of going out into captivity and exile: God is still there in protection to limit the damage that can be done (compare 2 Corinthians 4:8–9).
- 3** ‘the LORD your God’: (compare Exodus 20:2) harks back to the exodus deliverance by which God caused them to be His people, at Egypt’s expense. ‘I gave [literally] Egypt...Ethiopia and Seba’: Israel is as much to God as the whole continent of Africa.
- 4** Nothing has changed since then in God’s relationship with His people. So God would give the whole of humanity (*adam*) for them now. Chapter **53** tells us who it is God chooses to give for them.
- 43:5–6** Envisaged here is something much more than just a return from Babylon—rather, a gathering of people from all over the world. ‘sons...daughters’: the relationship God brings people into with Himself through His redemptive action (see Exodus 4:21–23, and **63:16**).
- 7** Recalls the words used in verse **1** to give assurance of future hope.
- 43:8–13** God testifies in court that He is the only one among all the so-called ‘gods’ who can determine a course of action and then carry it through, as He did in the case of the exodus.
- 8–9** God brings His witnesses into court to testify before all the nations to the truth of God’s words and actions—but they are blind and deaf (as in **42:18–20**)! Yet there is perhaps some hope that their eyes and ears will work again.
- 10–11** Israel, as the servant of the Lord, is responsible for bearing this witness, but being still blind and deaf presumably remains silent. So, in answer to the question in verse **9**, God is the one who must bear testimony to Himself (compare John 8:18). Unlike the other ‘gods’, who were related to each other as those who come before and after, the Lord stands alone as Himself for ever, and He alone is the one who can effect deliverance.
- 12** ‘declared...saved...proclaimed’: the order is important—God announces beforehand, then acts, then makes His actions known. This all comes to human beings through revelation—through being told and being caught up into the action—not by them trying to work it out for themselves. So God must be His own witness (see Revelation 19:10).
- 13** God as judge decrees the verdict: He is the one, *el*, the Most High God. ‘henceforth’: has the sense of one who ‘was and is and is to come’ (Revelation 1:8, contrast 17:8).
- 14–21** The specific promise of the overthrow of Babylon and the release of God’s people is given. This will be on the pattern of God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt in the exodus, and will prefigure a transformed creation, in which God’s people have been re-formed by God’s hand to be a credit to Him.
- 14–15** God as ‘Redeemer...Creator...King’ will effect this deliverance for the sake of His people. In both wrath and rescue He remains ‘the Holy One’ (compare Psalm 130:4).

- 16–17** God is still now the God who led out His people from Egypt and put down their enemies.
- 18–19** God’s people are to expect not a repeat of the same thing, but a new action of the same or of even a greater order, ready now to sprout like a germinated seed, in which God will bless and provide for His people as He did in the wilderness.
- 20** In view, however, is a transformation of the created order (compare **11:6–9**), in which the other creatures benefit along with God’s people (as in Romans 8:19–21).
- 21** These very tribulations and actions of God will be the making of God’s people into those who, by what they are, as well as what they say, bring glory to God.

SIN AND FORGIVENESS—43:22–44:23

After the promise of deliverance from Babylon, God now addresses the need for a deeper deliverance—from sin and from rebellious hearts.

- 22–24** After saying what He made His people to be, God now says how He finds them to be, and exposes their sin.
- 22** The emphasis is on ‘me’: ‘It was not Me that you called upon...’ Though assiduous in their religious practice, their service has not been to God as He is (compare Matthew 15:8–9). So the worship that was intended to bring them freedom (Psalm 119:45) has become a wearisome burden to them.
- 23** The emphasis on ‘me’ is to be continued here. It is not that they have failed to carry out these observances (see **1:10–17**), but that they have come in the wrong spirit, perhaps making their ritual performance their means of self-justification before God, rather than through it seeking God’s justification of them. For it is not that these requirements are God’s heavy burden on them; rather they are God’s provision for their liberation. Isaiah, who himself came to freedom before the burning-hot altar in the temple (**6:1–7**), and who looks forward to the newly-rebuilt temple (**44:28**), is hardly likely to be disparaging God’s temple ordinances. But he will be in opposition against those who do not come to God as the Holy One that he saw there.
- 43:24** Those who should have been God’s satisfaction and delight have become a wearisome burden to Him.
‘sweet cane with money’ (*RSV*): ‘fragrant calamus’ (*NIV*)—an ingredient of the anointing oil (see Exodus 30:22–25)
- 43:25–44:5** With out giving any rationale at this point, God turns abruptly from exposing their sin to declare Himself as the one who brings forgiveness and new life in His presence.
- 25** ‘blots out’: as a blotter absorbs a spilled ink blot and wipes it clean away.
‘your transgressions’: not little misdemeanours, but wilful and rebellious disobedience.
‘for my own sake’: this comes simply and only from God’s own nature.
- 26–28** But first Israel must see that they have no redeeming feature of their own, and that all this fearful judgement rightly comes upon what they are.
- 26** ‘set forth your case’: they are brought into court before God to find that they do not have a leg to stand on.

- 27 'Your first father': Adam, Abraham and Jacob are all candidates, for they were all sinners.
'your mediators': your leaders ever since.
- 28 'utter destruction': the fate of those subjected to God's curse, as in Joshua 6:17.
- 44:1–2 Before any untoward conclusions are drawn from this, God makes it clear that, in all this, Israel's position before God as 'servant' and 'chosen' remains unchanged, whether as 'Jacob' ('deceiver') or 'Jeshurun' ('upright'). Whether they have done it well or badly, Israel is a nation living with God.
- 2 'made...formed': they will not be abandoned by the one who has brought them into being and shaped them.
'will help you': not just this time, but continually.
- 3–4 Rain and streams on dry and thirsty ground signify the reality of God's Spirit coming from above upon a wasted and fruitless people to bring abundant life and blessing on generations of families.
- 5 Those who had no answer they could give to **43:26–28** now rejoice in knowing that they belong to the LORD, as each one acknowledges this in his own way.
- 6–20 The glory of God as Redeemer of His people (**6–8**) is contrasted with the inability of idols to move their worshippers out of ignorant delusion and deceit (**9–20**).
- 6–8 Besides the LORD there is no god who can be a Redeemer of its adherents, there is 'no Rock' upon whom any can rely as a sure refuge (as in 1 Samuel 23:25), a trust-worthy foundation (compare Matthew 7:24–27), one who is consistently faithful (**26:4**), and whose actions in history are real and not imaginary (Deuteronomy 32:31–32), who can announce beforehand what He is going to do, and then does it. Particularly in this newly-revealed matter of the removal of sin (**43:25**). This is the truth which Israel is to witness to the world.
- 9–20 While this may appear at first just to be ridiculing idolatry, it is simply descriptive of what actually happens in the manufacture of idols, and makes the point that the idol cannot deliver its adherents from the self-deception and delusion which has given rise to it—at the end of it all they remain unchanged, and unredeemed.
- 9 Idols are unrewarding nothings, yet their adherents are emotionally infatuated by them.
- 10–13 Idols, as human constructs, cannot ever be greater than the human agents that made them—indeed they will be considerably less.
- 14–17 Idols, being made from material substances, can never rise above the material, let alone stand for the divine. It is only by chance that the material used to make an idol does not end up cooking somebody's dinner. That is the level at which it remains. Yet the idolater does not see it as such.
- 18–20 An idol in fact reduces its worshipper to ignorant blindness, unwitting delusion, and impoverished intellect (compare Romans 1:21–23).
'know...discern...considers': heart-knowledge and understanding of the way things really are is denied.
'he has shut their eyes': may refer to God, as in **6:9–10**, but may refer, more pertinently, to the idol itself (compare 2 Corinthians 4:4)—the only power the idol has.
'ashes': what the rest of the wood used to make the idol has become, which might as well be the idol itself.

- 44:21–23** A fitting end to the section that began at **43:22**, reiterating God’s constancy and redeeming care, and calling upon the whole creation to celebrate this in praise.
- 21** The idol has been fashioned by its worshipper, but Israel has been fashioned by the living God.
- 22** Once again, as in **43:25**, the wonder of forgiveness is asserted.
- 23** This has startling implications for all that God has made (see Romans 8:19–21).

DELIVERANCE FROM BABYLON BY CYRUS—44:24–48:22

Isaiah has identified two needs of God’s people: the need to be delivered from the oppression of Babylon, and the need that still is there even after political freedom has come, the need for deliverance from sin. In this section the first of these is addressed, and God’s agent in this deliverance is named as Cyrus, the Persian conqueror who in 539 B.C., over 150 years later, conquered the Babylonian empire and freed the Israelites from exile (along with other nations and their gods)—see 2 Chronicles 36:22–23, repeated and expanded in Ezra 1:1–4.

- 44:24-45:8** The God who has called Cyrus, and the task He has given him, in keeping with His eternal purposes.
- 44:24** ‘Redeemer’: next-of-kin who brings you back into your inheritance.
‘formed you from the womb’: God’s intimate and personal activity from before the people were there.
‘made all things...alone’: God is the sole Creator, who made and sustains all things—a good basis for dependability.
- 25** ‘omens...diviners’: all occult predictions are thwarted by God’s prophetic action. Babylonian oracles that survive from this time are all professional optimistic predictions that people would be willing to pay to hear, not the actual doom that ensued.
‘wise men’: those who seek at the human level to come to the simple key to the meaning of reality, which is the exclusive property of God (see Deuteronomy 29:29).
- 26** God’s purposes in history centre on the well-being of His people, for it is through them that He has chosen to bring blessing on the whole world. The prophetic word of those whom God has sent, in contrast to the pagan ‘prophets’ and philosophers, is the word that will be fulfilled.
- 27** A deliverance analogous to the exodus through the Red Sea is envisaged.
- 28** ‘Cyrus’: many scholars baulk at the notion that Isaiah could have actually named Cyrus so long before, and regard this name as a later insertion, or the whole passage as a later composition, from Cyrus’s own time. Thus we think we can say what God is or is not capable of. Compare the naming of Josiah 300 years in advance in 1 Kings 13:2, fulfilled in 2 Kings 23:15–17. The whole rationale of these passages is that God, in contrast to the idols, actually predicts and then carries through what happens. The clear text needs to be allowed to speak for itself.
‘shepherd’: king or ruler (compare Ezekiel 34, Zechariah 11:6).
‘Jerusalem...the temple’: God’s consistent concern and promise throughout the whole prophecy of Isaiah.
- 45:1** ‘anointed’: (literally ‘*messiah*’) signifying God’s appointment to a special role in His purposes, not necessarily signifying holiness of character (compare Hazael in 1 Kings 19:15). Even so, the Davidic messianic associations of this term may be

the grounds on which the people question this particular designation and action of God in **45:9**.

‘right hand’: taking, empowering, leading. Whether Cyrus is prepared to know it or not, it is God who is bringing him out at this time.

‘subdue...ungird...open’: a good description of Cyrus’s actual conquests. The Nabonidus Chronicle from the time says, ‘the troops of Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle’.

2–3 The LORD is the one who goes before him, opens the way, and gives him the spoil.

‘that you may know’: some argue that this prophecy is false because Cyrus, although he acknowledged the LORD as the God of Israel (2 Chronicles 36:23), he did not become a convert. It is true that Cyrus acknowledged the many gods of the nations—the propaganda of the Cyrus Cylinder attributes his victory to the Babylonian god Marduk. So he played the political game. But, even if he started out not knowing the true God (verse **4**), the prophetic witness was there for him to find out. That he chose not to does not lessen the divine purpose that he should do so.

4–6 God has no qualms about calling and using people without their willing knowledge (compare Assyria in **10:15**), in His ultimate purposes of bringing the blessing of knowing and relating to Him out to the whole world through his chosen nation of Israel.

7 A magnificent, far-seeing and potentially life-changing statement of God’s sovereign good rule in all things, whether pleasant or difficult. Able to be comprehended truly when seeing the glory of God in the darkness and woe of Christ’s cross. Matched and fully explicated in the New Testament by Romans 8:37–39.

8 A prayer that this magnificent deliverance of God from above may meet with a ready and fruitful response from below.

9–13 Possible objections to God using a foreign king to liberate them are answered. While we now know that the nation of Israel needed to be broken open in readiness for the world’s Messiah and the coming-in of the nations, we can appreciate how unwelcome this would have appeared to those who were looking for a national deliverer and an independent state. The reply here is that God does not have to answer to us for any of His actions.

9 A pot is not in a position to enter into a legal dispute over the rights or ability of the potter. ‘Your work has no handles’ (*RSV*) is better translated ‘He has no hands’ (*NIV*), ie He is not capable of doing what He has done.

10 By the same token, we can do nothing to determine or question what someone else is giving birth to. That is entirely their own private and intimate business.

11 So God by His redeeming action in the exodus has placed Himself in such a relationship with Israel as His child (see Exodus 4:22), and has taken personal responsibility for the shaping of Israel’s life as a nation.

‘Will you question me...?’ (*RSV*): the Hebrew is ironical: ‘Ask me...command me!’

12 More than this, God is the Creator and Lord of all the earth, and his dealings with Israel are with a view to His purposes for the whole world.

13 So Cyrus will do what God has said he will do, in the service of God and His purposes.

- 14–17** What, then, is God’s plan concerning the nations and Israel? These verses go on to show the surprising reversal that will take place as a result of what the Lord is doing.
- 14** The very nations that were forcefully belittled in the exodus (see **43:3**) will be at the forefront of those who will now come in willing following, submission and supplication to Israel, without conflict, not in weakness but with all their strength and glory, in recognition of the God of Israel as the only God of all the earth, by virtue of what He has said and done (compare Revelation 21:24–26).
- 15** This grand outcome would indeed not be apparent at the time Israel comes under yet another foreign lord in Cyrus. The revelation of this salvation of the nations by Israel’s Saviour evokes a gasp of surprise, either from those newly come in, or from bemused Israel itself. A fore-glimpse of the wondrous revelation of Christ for all nations in Ephesians 3:1–13.
- 16** If the LORD is thus shown as the only true God of all, then all the other pretenders to god-ness will inevitably be shown up as nothings: ‘idols’ is literally ‘forms’—outward shapes only. Those who do not make their way to Israel will make their way into shame and confusion in the following of their perverse idol-nothings.
- 17** By direct contrast (there is no ‘But’ in the Hebrew), Israel, which now includes those other nations that have come to Israel and Israel’s God, will enjoy shame free salvation that participates in the very sureness and eternity of God Himself.
- 18–25** In the face of those who find surprising this all-inclusive salvation centred on Israel, God reiterates who He is, affirms that this has ever been His declared intention, and sends out the invitation to all.
- 18–19** God’s deliberate order and consistency in making and populating the earth underlies His plan for all peoples which He has made clear in **2:2–4, 9:1, 11:10, 19:23–25, 25:6–9, 27:13, 42:1–4**, and as far back as Genesis 12:1–3. It is only those who deny the action of God in such a one as Cyrus, and in all the happenings of history (**45:7**), who will refuse to see this.
- 20–21** God re-opens the court-case with the idolaters as to where true saving Godhead is to be found.
‘Who told this...?’: ie that the nations would be saved in Israel.
‘suvivors of the nations’: those who have escaped idolatry by joining themselves to Israel and its God.
- 22** ‘Turn to me’: as in Numbers 21:8–9, to the one place where salvation is assured.
- 23** A direct quote from Genesis 22:16: God’s promise to Abraham regarding the nations.
‘every knee...every tongue’: way beyond the national boundaries of Israel.
- 24–25** Those who find their righteousness and strength only in the LORD are those who will come and find their victory and glory (the new expanded Israel), while those who remain opposed will suffer in their shame.
- 46:1–13** The ‘gods’ of Babylon have to be carried on beasts of burden, and will be carried into captivity, in fulfilment of God’s saving purpose for Israel, as the one who has Himself carried Israel all its history, whether Israel has been prepared to acknowledge that or not.
- 1–2** ‘Bel’, also known as Marduk, was the top ‘god’ of the city of Babylon, and his son ‘Nebo’, ‘god’ of wisdom and writing, of the neighbouring city of Borsippa, was particularly honoured by the Babylonian royal family (hence

‘Nebuchadnezzar’). Normally paraded on animals in the New Year procession, they were actually evacuated on beasts by Merodach-Baladan in 703 B.C. when the Assyrian king Sennacherib attacked Babylon in Isaiah’s own day. This becomes a picture of how they are, and what will happen to them in the future. Isaiah the prophet becomes like a commentator at the Christmas pageant: ‘They’re toppling—they can’t keep it up!’

‘they cannot save the burden’: those so-called ‘gods’ who are supposed to bear the responsibility for the city’s security and prosperity cannot sustain this, but themselves become an intolerable burden to those who have been depending on them.

3–4 By contrast, God is the one who actually carries, rather than is carried by, the people whom He has made and formed as a nation.

5–7 This places the saving God in a different league altogether from ‘gods’ who themselves have to be made and carried, and who have no ability to save whatsoever.

8–11 God’s revelation of His Cyrus-plan has provoked objections among those in Israel who look to maintain their own freedom and independence (**45:9–10**). These objectors are now exposed as the ‘transgressors’ they have always been, refusing to hear or believe (compare **6:9–10**). While their fears are well-founded, that Cyrus will turn out to be yet another conquering and ruthless ‘bird of prey’, yet he is the one God has purposed to be the agent of His will in this situation, and this is how it will be. God continues to appeal to Israel on the basis of His constant care through the whole of Israel’s history, as the unique and only God, who has always declared in advance the outcome of His actions, to believe what He says, and trust what He does.

12–13 ‘deliverance’ (*RSV*) here is ‘righteousness’ (*tsedaqah*). So in their wilful opposition and hardness of heart they are not so much far from deliverance as far from God’s rightness: what is right according to God’s nature, purposes and ways. This very rightness God will persist in bringing near to them, whether they understand it, want it, and ask for it, or not, in the form of a salvation that is determined to make Israel His own glory, as He has ever intended His people should be. Thus justification (rightness with God) is by faith in this determined righteousness of God, and not by any rightness or deserving of our own.

47:1–15 God addresses Babylon in her pride as the one that will be conquered by Cyrus.

1–3 She will have her authority taken away, and will be reduced from her refined and dainty condition to the status of a slave-girl, subjected to dislocation, humiliation and violation.

3 ‘vengeance’: exact retribution, without any mitigating circumstances or favourable intervention.

4 This is God in the role of Israel’s next-of-kin, the exodus-Deliverer, the one who rightly moves against all that is unholy wickedness.

5 Babylon will no more be able to speak with authority over other nations, or have any clear idea of where it is going any more.

6 Certainly God gave Israel into Babylon’s hand, but that does not give Babylon licence to act without mercy or with indiscriminate oppression—for this abrogation of human responsibility she will be answerable to the God of all.

7 In her arrogant assumption of unchallengeable authority Babylon did not give thoughtful consideration to any moral consequences or responsibility for her

- actions. But there are such things as ‘crimes against humanity’, and there is One who calls to account.
- 8–9** Widowhood and loss of children meant the removal of all ongoing provision, security and standing in the community (contrast 1 Timothy 5:3–10). This is the exact retribution for one who, as a ‘lover of pleasures’ has cared for no one but herself. Not even her ‘many sorceries and...enchancements’, for which Babylon was renowned, will be able to stave off what is coming to her.
- 10–11** Babylon’s so-called ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ took no account of anyone but herself, least of all God (compare Romans 1:21–22, 1 Corinthians 1:19–21). The wickedness/evil (the same word in both verses) in which she has participated will be brought back upon her, and she will have no way of seeing what is coming or knowing what has hit her.
- 12–15** The multitude of Babylon’s occult practices are no competition with the coming action of God; the confused religious pronouncements of their many gods only wear them down; the expert predictions of those who make horoscopes from studying the stars cannot foretell what God is bringing to pass. These so-called ‘comforts’ serve only to bring all-consuming destruction. The practitioners of false religion are there not to serve their clients but themselves: they end up slave-trading with those who look to them, and then go off in their own direction seeking to save their own skins. In contrast with those who look to the one true God, these are left with ‘no one to save you’.
- 48:1–22** In chapter **47**, Babylon conquered by Cyrus was addressed; now in chapter **48** Israel delivered by Cyrus is addressed. The theme is Israel’s continuing sin in the face of God’s deliverance from Babylon, and of God’s perseverance in His purposes for Israel, according to His own nature as the Holy Redeemer.
- 1–2** Despite the fact that they originate from the source of Israel’s nationhood, call on God’s name, and consider themselves to belong to His holy city, the people of Israel have in fact forfeited any right they had to these things, for in them they have not related with God in a true and right or godly way. But God and His name remains the same as when He brought the undeserving and recalcitrant slaves out of Egypt (see Exodus 3:13–17).
- 3–5** Again comes the argument of God’s predicting and carrying through of events, in a way that idols cannot, as His claim to exclusive Godhead. Here this course of action is specifically related to Israel’s known obstinacy and refusal to acknowledge the truth, in its bondage to idolatry. The documented facts are obvious, if only they will have a heart to see them.
‘former things’: could be events like the exodus, announced beforehand and then carried through, or even the events of the deliverance from Babylon by Cyrus, that have been prophesied here. They are to be seen as the saving actions of God alone.
- 6–7** ‘new things’: the matter of the servant, hitherto hidden in ways that could not be humanly foreseen, but now made known (‘created’) and brought to bear. The sheer unexpectedness of this great grace will forestall Israel’s propensity to say, ‘We knew that already.’
- 8** For God has ever known Israel’s lifelong devious and rebellious resistance to God’s revelation of Himself in relationship with them (see **1:2–3**). In this section of the prophecy, this chapter is a climax of God’s denunciation of Israel in the

strongest terms. This exposes the deep and constant need for the ministry of the servant, to which we return in chapter 49.

9–11 So it is not for Israel’s deserving, or any inherent glory Israel has, that God will act, but out of God’s own nature (‘my name’s sake...my praise...my glory’). And act God will, to ensure that Israel does not suffer the full eradicating force of the wrath that is due to them, but will be spared to participate in God’s holy and loving purposes for them.

‘I have refined you, but not like silver’: if God had been waiting for Israel to come out as silver, then nothing would have been left, for all Israel’s ‘silver’ is all dross (see Ezekiel 22:18). But the Babylonian ‘furnace of affliction’, like the Egyptian one (Deuteronomy 4:20), will be that from which, remarkably, and only by God’s own grace, something wonderfully emerges.

12–13 The grounds for this hope are clearly and broadly set out: in the beginning, when He created all things, God had no constraints but those of His own holy nature, and in the end, there will remain no opposition to His glorious purposes. If He has called the heavens and earth into being, and that has happened, will His calling of Israel be any less sure or effective? Israel is bidden to hear this great call.

14–15 Israel is urged to hear again, in its reluctance to hear or speak of it, the sureness of God’s plan to bring deliverance from Babylon by Cyrus.

16 Now, in the light of that, hear also God’s now plain and open secret of the servant, by whom the even greater and more needed deliverance—from this obstinate sin and rebellion—will be brought about.

‘And now the Lord GOD has sent me and his Spirit’: just at the right time, the servant himself speaks out, consistent with his mission in **42:1–9**, in anticipation of what is said of him in **49:1ff**.

17–19 As ‘Redeemer,’ who brings deliverance, and as ‘the Holy One of Israel’, who must judge sinners in order to bring them to His holiness, God sets out His true and good ways, that alone are the ways of peace and righteousness, of fruitfulness and preservation. But Israel has wickedly refused to walk in them.

20–21 Nevertheless, God will bring about the deliverance He has promised, as He did from Egypt, and will provide and care for them in the days that follow, as He did in the wilderness. Israel is commanded to take advantage of this salvation.

48:22 But the truth is that, even with this deliverance from the oppression of Babylon, the sin of Israel will still remain with them, and so they will still be without the peace they could have had in verses **18–19**.

DELIVERANCE FROM SIN BY THE SERVANT—49:1–55:13

The need for a greater deliverance than simply a political one brings us again to the ministry of the servant (see **42:1–9**), as one who not only bears witness to but in himself actually is God’s light, salvation, covenant and glory, and so is much more than any prophet ever claimed to be. Far more than a political conqueror, he brings people release into the truth, and into newness of heart and mind.

49:1–6 The servant himself speaks (as in **48:16**).

1 ‘Listen to me’: elsewhere in Isaiah used only of God Himself (**41:1, 46:3, 12, 51:1, 7, 55:2**). Compare Deuteronomy 18:18–19, Acts 3:22–23, Mark 1:22, 9:7).

- ‘coastlands...peoples from afar’: the appeal is to peoples of the whole world, to its furthest reaches (compare **42:2, 4–6**).
- ‘from the womb...from the body of my mother’: compare **7:14**, Genesis 3:15.
- ‘named’: literally ‘kept in mind’—the actual naming takes place in verse **3**.
- 2** ‘my mouth’: the topic is the servant’s ministry of word, not any literal weapons of warfare (compare **11:4**, Revelation 1:16, 19:15).
- ‘sword’: effective in close combat; ‘polished arrow’: accurate for far targets. Hence **6**: ‘Israel...ends of the earth’, **57:19**, Ephesians 2:17.
- ‘in the shadow of his hand he hid me...in his quiver he hid me away’: intimacy, and readiness.
- 3** ‘Israel’: the naming—the controversial climax of these verses. Israel, having failed and rendered itself incapable and unfit for the worldwide mission accorded to it in Genesis 12:3, (see **48:1–2, 8**) requires a fit and worthy individual from within Israel to stand in for it.
- ‘in whom I will be glorified’: normally God is glorified in what He does for His people (as in **44:23, 60:21**). Only here is He to be glorified in an individual person—a unique happening.
- 4** the servant, as a real human person, is despondent at the apparent failure of the ministry to which he has been called, despite full expenditure of strength and effort. Yet at the same time, with a real human faith, he looks fully to the Lord for all that is rightly due to him, and for the complete outcome. Compare Matthew 11:20, 25, John 6:66, 12:37–41, 1 Peter 2:23.
- ‘nothing and vanity’: emptiness, devoid of order and meaning or sense, without any substance. Here is one who in this situation can say still, ‘my God’.
- 5** The answer to what the servant feels like saying is what God Himself has said with regard to the servant and his ministry, and all that signifies of God’s relationship with the servant in formation, calling, task, honour and enabling.
- ‘my God has become/has been my strength’: a relationship more intimate than just receiving strength from God.
- Here it is revealed that the servant’s worldwide ministry (chapter **42**) focuses first on the recalling and restoration of Israel back in to God.
- 6** But the nations are to know that it is not to stop there: this servant is to be himself in person God’s own light and salvation to the whole earth. (Hence Matthew 15:24, 28:18–20).
- 7–13** The Lord adds His own testimony and promise to what the servant has said, and again the world is called to the response of joyful singing. This follows a similar pattern to **42:5–13**, and relates to the servant’s task regarding both Israel and the nations (**49:6**). Verse **7** relates to the nations, and **8–12** particularly to Israel. But it needs to be remembered that the servant himself has already been designated as ‘Israel’ in person (verse **3**), the servant’s mission to Israel relates to God’s purposes through Israel for all nations, and that Israel-to-come is an expanded people of God (see on **45:14–17, 20–25**). Hence the singing of verse **13** is all-inclusive.
- 7** Without explaining why or how, the LORD speaks of the servant as despised and repudiated by the nations, and one whom the nations think is at their disposal (as in John 19:10), and yet one whom the nations will acknowledge with worship. The only reason given for this here is God’s own choice of and faithfulness to the servant, as Israel’s Holy Redeemer.

- 8–12** Here the servant again is called uniquely and personally God’s ‘covenant to the people’ (as in **42:6**), and the restoration of the people to the desolated land is promised. Again imagery from the exodus, but also beyond that, is used to depict the return of the people to their heritage in God, the One who compassionately provides for, protects and leads them all along the way.
- 11** ‘my mountains...my highways’: both natural barriers and human constructions belong to God and serve His purposes in the return of His people.
- 12** They come from all directions, and from the farthest parts of the earth. ‘Sinim’ (*Hebrew*, changed to ‘Syene’ or ‘Aswan’ in different translations) is an unknown place with a faraway ring to it: maybe ‘Woop-Woop’ would be the appropriate Australian translation!
- 13** Again see how the whole creation is to be caught up into the joy of the God-effected return of the people of God to their true heritage (as in Romans 8:21). Here ends the second ‘Servant Song’.
- 49:14–55:11** Throughout this section Zion has persisted in unbelieving and despondent complaint (see **40:27**, **41:26–29**, **42:18–20**, **43:22–24**, **44:18–20**, **45:9–11**, **46:8, 12**, **48:1, 8, 22**), despite many declarations of love and promises of strong hope and admonitions to true faith, in joy and peace. Now again **49:14** comes like a wet blanket on all that has gone before, and it is only the responsiveness of the servant, in marked contrast to the unresponsiveness of Israel, that gives any substance to the abundant promises that continue to be given.
- 49:14** There is a contradiction here: how could ‘the LORD’, whose name is synonymous with remembering His covenant to rescue and restore His oppressed people (Exodus 6:6–8), and who as sovereign ‘Lord’ is not constrained by any sinful human considerations, ever be said to have forgotten or forsaken His people?
- 49:14–55:3** In a series of five oracles (see ‘says the Lord’ in **49:18**, **22**, **25**, **50:1**), God affirms His dynamic active saving love for His people.
- 15** We are shocked at the unnaturalness of a mother who ends up denying the intimate bond she has with her child. God’s bond with His people is even closer, and undeniable.
- 16** God bears in His hands the wounds of being committed to His people, in a way that does not become fully clear until John 20:19–20.
- 17** The Masoretic text of the Hebrew has ‘your sons gather to you’ (rather than ‘your builders’ of the Qumran text). This makes better sense in the light of verse **18**, and recalls **43:6–7**.
- 18** The image changes from children gathering to their mother to a bride putting on her ornaments. All of this is the expression of God’s relational love for His people.
- 19–21** This is a miracle: it is not just about a return from Babylon, though it uses that kind of language. Though it might have been otherwise, only a relative few returned when Cyrus gave the word in 539 B.C. Here more come back than ever left, such that there is not enough room for them. How could this be, from one who is ‘bereaved and barren, exiled and put away’, like a not-wanted wife? This is about people returning to God as a result of some mighty work of salvation that God has done (see further **53:10–11**, **54:1–8**).

- 22–23** At a signal from the sovereign Lord of all, the nations which up to now have been used to oppress God’s people will serve to bring them home, and submit to them as those to whom they are spiritually indebted (compare **45:14**, 1 Corinthians 14:25, Romans 15:25–27). This will show that waiting expectantly in faith on the faithful God will be rewarded (as in **40:31**).
- 24–25** ‘tyrant’ (*RSV*, after the Qumran text) is better translated ‘righteous one’ (after the Masoretic text), even though on the face of it it does not make sense. But it is theologically sound: God’s people rightly went into captivity, and God will make it that their rescue does not contravene His righteous nature, in that all the requirements of His righteous law will be fulfilled.
- 26** A sad but inevitable corollary of this will always be that those who persist in their refusal to submit to God and His people will perish (see even **66:24**). Here we see that those who refuse to look to God in all things but seek to feed only from themselves will by that be consumed.
- 50:1** In the face of Israel’s complaint (**49:14**) that their relationship with the Lord has suffered irretrievable breakdown, God challenges whether the divorce proceedings have ever been set in train, or whether God has ever considered selling off His people. The exile must be seen in the context of their strongly continuing relationship.
- 2–3** Far from God forsaking Israel, it is Israel who has refused to make any response to God’s call and approach. (This makes even more poignant the lone response of the servant in **50:4–5**.) And now, will they doubt the willingness or ability of the one who wrought such great deeds for them in Egypt and in the wilderness (see Exodus 14, 7:17–18, 10:21, 23)?
- 50:4–9** The third Servant Song. In contrast to **50:2**, here is one who hears and responds in active and obedient faith the actions and calling of the ‘sovereign LORD’ (verses **4**, **5**: preparation for ministry, **7**, **9**: sustaining through suffering). The servant picks up every point at which Israel has so totally failed.
- 4** Here is a taught disciple whose ear and whole being has been opened by God to hear God’s word, as the essential prerequisite for being able to speak that word to others with all the consolation and strength with which it has come to him. This comes over a long time of ‘morning by morning’ hearing from God—not as a self-adopted discipline, but as a ready response to God’s own daily faithful approach to him. Here is the *adam* that has not tried to hide from the call and approach of God, because he has nothing to be ashamed or afraid of (see Genesis 3:8).
- 5** Here, on one occasion, came a revelation to the servant of a particular calling that would involve the servant in deep suffering. We are not told what this is. The only previous hint of such suffering has been in **49:7**. When it comes, the servant is willing and obedient to carry it through, in a way Israel, and the whole human race, has never been.
- 6** Three forms of suffering are specified together: flogging, malicious torture, and personal humiliation. these are bravely and willingly borne. The servant is not named, but the sign is given by which he can be identified.
- 7** Knowing the present help of the Lord on his side as his Kinsman-Redeemer in this ordeal, the servant faces it unflinchingly, testifies to the truth that he has been upheld, and confidently asserts that he and all that he has stood for will be vindicated as true, substantiated and effectual (compare Mark 14:61–62).

- 8–9** The contest is called, but the fact that God is with the servant on his side is proof positive of the servant’s unassailable righteousness according to the judgement of God, and so no other judgement can stand, or hold any substance.
- 10–11** Not until here is the speaker of the previous verses identified as the servant, who is now held up as a model for all who will walk in the way of faith in God, which is the way of unrelieved darkness (see 2 Corinthians 5:7). Those who try to cope with this experience of darkness in their own alternative way by fabricating their own ‘lights’ will by them be consumed.
- 51:1-52:11** The urgent excitement of these eight oracles is reflected in their poetic form by the doubling up of words and parallel phrases (see **51:1, 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 52:1, 11**), to culminate in the full revelation of the saving work of the suffering servant in **52:13–53:12**. In the first three (**51:1–8**) the Lord speaks of His righteousness and salvation to the remnant of the nation who ‘pursue righteousness’ and ‘seek the LORD’ by following in the way of the servant’s faith (**50:10**). This evokes in them a longing and a prayer for God to awake and act (**51:9–11**), which is met by a reassurance and reminder of God’s nature as Creator and Redeemer (**51:12–16**). God then tells them in the final three oracles (**51:17–52:11**) that they are the ones that need to be wakened, because God’s action is already in train—in His servant.
- 51:1–2** ‘deliverance’ (*RSV*): literally ‘righteousness’, which comes to those who ‘seek the LORD’. We can have no righteousness apart from that in which we participate through a personal and intimate relationship by faith with the God whose very life and nature and action is righteousness. This is the full equivalent of the New Testament ‘justification’ (Galatians 3:6–9, 11, Philippians 3:9).
‘rock...quarry’: not so much a solid and reliable source as something inanimate (‘dead’ Romans 4:19) from which God has brought abundant family life.
- 3** The transformation of desolated Zion into the garden of Eden, with its peace and freedom from the curse of sin, will give rise to joyful thanksgiving and song.
- 4–5** ‘justice...light...peoples...coastlands’: reminders of the ministry of the servant in **42:1–9**; ‘my arm’: looks towards **53:1**—the universal personal saving action of God.
‘deliverance’: again, better as ‘righteousness’ (see verse **1**). The saving action of God will uphold every aspect of God’s righteousness, and the law which expresses it, without demeaning or detracting from its holy requirements in any way (see Matthew 5:17–18, Romans 8:3–4).
- 6** The built-in obsolescence of the created order is contrasted with the eternity of the things of God that we grasp by faith (compare 2 Corinthians 4:17–18).
‘die like gnats’ (*RSV*): better translated ‘die in like manner’—our mortality is little different from that of a moth-eaten garment.
- 7–8** ‘in whose heart is my law’: compare Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:26–27.
‘reproach...revilings’: compare **50:4–9**. Those who follow in the way of the servant will suffer as he does, and their enemies will suffer the same fate as his, in God’s plan of eternal salvation.
- 9–10** Stirred by these promises of God, the faithful (mistakenly figuring that God is asleep!) ask God to be active as He was in the occasion of the exodus.

- ‘Rahab...dragon’: (see on **27:1**) terms of Canaanite and Babylonian mythology that represent the uncontrollable forces in the universe such as the sea, here shown to be subject to the Lord of all creation in the actual historical event of the exodus.
- 11** Compare **35:10**, perhaps here reminding God of that promise—as if He needed to be reminded!
‘shall flee’: literally ‘will have fled’.
- 12** ‘I, I am he’: in response to their ‘Awake, awake’ of verse **9**, God expresses His ever-present readiness to bring His people to that place of strong comfort.
- 12–15** God reminds the people of what they appear to have forgotten: who they are, by virtue of who God is, who made and formed them as His people, against what they are who are opposed to them. So the cowering imprisoned people will be released by the sovereign action of their God, on whom they are totally dependant for such glorious freedom.
- 16** In words addressed to the servant (compare **49:2–3**), the faithful Creator affirms the sureness of the ultimate outcome of all His actions: the making of a people in full relationship with Himself.
- 51:17** Far from the Lord being drowsy, it is Jerusalem that needs rousing—from a drunken stupor (compare **28:7–8**, **29:9–10**)! Brought about in fact by the deliberate and duly measured wrath of God against her iniquity.
- 18–20** The terrible and unrelievable effects of the wrath of God: absence of all knowing the way, removal of all caring companionship, desolation and decimation without condolence or comfort, exhaustion and relentless entrapment with no way of escape. See Romans 1:18–32, Mark 15:34.
- 21–22** Inexplicably, and yet with the full justice of One who sovereignly redeems by acting in a cause that is undeniably just (how could this be?), God has been acting for this one who has rightly been subjected to such a drunken stupor. He has now done something to remove permanently both the hateful cause and its ghastly effects. This cannot be an arbitrary change in God’s policy and favour, according to some fickle whim like the changing of the wind (see Malachi 3:6). So how can this be so? We are being brought pressingly and inexorably to **52:13–53:12** for the full and wondrous revelation to be made.
- 23** Conversely, as the other side of this action of God, as in the case of Egypt (**51:9–10**), Assyria (**10:12–27**) and Babylon (**47:1–15**), the wrath must come on those tormenting oppressors who remain arrogantly opposed to God in their self-sufficiency (compare **50:11**).
- 52:1–2** The picture is one of a woman waking up to find new clean clothes—beautiful royal robes—laid out for her to wear. And as she puts them on, dirt and fetters that have held her down fall from her. God’s wrath that has held her captive has somehow been fully worked through, and has been completely removed (**51:17–23**). The requirements of God’s holiness have now been fully met and satisfied (how could this be?) such that God is now sharing His own holiness with her! The former shameful captive is now ‘the holy city’, no longer to be trampled upon by those who are unfit to belong to God. With repeated injunctions, the bemused Jerusalem is urged to take up her new condition. Compare Colossians 3:9–10.

- 3–6** Repeated declarations of the LORD Himself (verses **3, 4, 5** twice) testify to the truth of what is coming. Every time they have been given into the hands of their enemies, from the time in Egypt to the invasion by Assyria, no money has changed hands. It has been under the sovereign hand of God, and God's people have remained God's property. So they are God's, for God to reclaim them at any time. But language of selling and redeeming implies cost and payment—if it is not by money, how is it? We are still not told—just that it is so. God has bound His name—His very being and reputation—so closely to the destiny of His people, that the wailing and helplessness of their sufferings impinge intolerably upon His very being. So He clearly undertakes to show His true name and nature in action, in a way that he will address them directly in Person, and appear unmistakably before them, in a way that enables them to see Him—and still live!
- 52:7–10** The picture is now of a lone messenger running to the city to report the outcome of a great and decisive battle. The people watching anxiously from the wall see him in the distance. His very appearance, rather than that of the dispirited remnants of a defeated army, give rise to excitement and hope. As he comes near enough to call out, the message starts to come through: 'Peace!'—the conflict is ended, 'Good news!'—no sadness mars the victory, 'Salvation!'—the oppression is broken and the captives are free, 'Your God reigns!'—the victor King has established His good rule over all. The waiting people begin to shout and sing together for joy, for, sure enough, right on the heels of the messenger is the King Himself. All of this applies to the great theme of these chapters since **49:1**: spiritual deliverance from sin and the return of the people to God, for which God has been prepared to roll up His sleeves and personally get stuck into it. The salvation promised to all the nations (**51:4–6**) has come.
- 11–12** A saving action of judgement and liberation has taken place (as at the exodus) and the people, newly clothed in their priestly garments of holiness (**52:1–2**) as in Exodus 19:4–6), are now making their triumphal progress to the promised land, bearing holy things of God (as in Numbers 1:50).
'purify yourselves': has the sense of fitness and readiness, as the 'polished arrow' that the servant is in **49:2**.
- 12** Panic is no more. There is calm and steady progress in the commitment of knowing that God surrounds His people, leading and bringing up the rear.

But we still have not been told how all this is to come about. We have now been brought to the point where we will be shown—if we can receive it.

- 52:13–53:12** In this fourth and final Servant Song, we come to the full revelation and completion of the person and work of the servant. Suffering, alluded to in **49:4, 7**, and named in **50:6**, is shown to be the wounding and bruising of one who bears the sin of others, as the action of God in laying on the servant chastisement that should have been ours, to bring many to peace with God. This has been prepared for by the mounting excitement of the promises of **51:1–3, 4–6, 7–8**, and the blessings of **51:17–23, 52:1–10, 11–12**, with the appeal and reassurance of **51:9–16** concerning the 'arm of the LORD'. Now this marvellous saving action of God is about to be fully revealed.

- 52:13–15** The remarkable exaltation of the servant is matched by a contrasting abhorrence of him by many, which gives rise to a new seeing and hearing of an amazing truth.
- 13** ‘exalted...lifted up...very high’: compare language used of God Himself in **6:1** and **33:10**. Compare also the resurrection, ascension and heavenly session of the Lord Jesus.
- 14** ‘him’: Hebrew ‘you’—very direct.
‘many’: see also **52:15**, **53:11, 12**, referring to all who stand to benefit from the servant’s action (as in Revelation 7:9).
‘astonished’: appalled, shocked, shattered—a very strong word. The disfigurement of the servant is such that he is scarcely recognised as human.
- 15** ‘startle/sprinkle’: the meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain. Motyer opts for ‘sprinkle’: a cleansing and atoning priestly action, applied universally, which then becomes the turning point from revulsion to the dumbfounding realisation of a wonderful truth.
- 53:1–3** The scornful rejection of this one, on account of his unimpressive origins and appearance, highlights the moral and relational bankruptcy of the human observers and the absolute necessity of divine revelation to be able to know this one as God’s own action among us.
- 1** ‘the arm of the Lord’: not just an instrument of God but, according to **51:9, 12, 15, 52:6, 8, 10**, God Himself coming in person to redeem.
- 53:2–3** ‘young plant...root out of dry ground’: the earthly natural origins of this person (compare Mark 6:3, John 6:42, 7:41–42, 52), distinct from God (compare John 10:33), without any outstanding attractiveness, lead to his being mockingly dismissed, without any following, and actively shunned as being of no human value whatsoever. Thus he is a person who becomes familiar with ‘sorrows’, or pains, and ‘grief’, or sickness—not by natural temperament but by what is put upon him. Yet the use of this plant symbolism hints at what Isaiah has already said of the Messiah in **6:13** and **11:1** of the Messiah—Emmanuel, ‘God with us’—as ‘seed’, ‘shoot’ and ‘branch’. This shows up those who reject such a one to be so infected and perverted by sin that only a saving revelation from God can make them see and know him for who he is.
- 4–6** Here is the heart of the revelation, making known to the observers what they themselves could not see: that the griefs and sorrows he suffered were not on his own account, but that he was made by God a substitute for us, to bear our weaknesses and wrongs, and their final reckoning. The background for this is Leviticus 16:15–22, where the high priest makes atonement for the holy place to cleanse away the uncleannesses, transgressions and sins of the people with the blood of one goat, which has been killed, and loads the iniquities, transgressions and sins of the people onto the head of another goat, which is sent out to a solitary place. Both these actions are combined here in the one servant.
- 4** ‘he...we’: the people stand aloof and separate from the servant, who suffers alone, judging him to have deserved all the blows that he receives from God, that he suffers in his person.
‘Surely’: carries a note of surprise and sudden realisation that it is our sickly weaknesses and painful sorrows that he has shouldered as his burden and made his own.

- 5 ‘wounded’: ‘pierced’ as happens to the ‘dragon’ in **51:9**.
 ‘bruised’: crushed or trampled to death.
 ‘for our transgressions...for our iniquities’: on account of our wilful rebellion and crooked perverseness.
 ‘the chastisement that made us whole’: ‘the punishment necessary to secure or restore our peace with God’ (Motyer). Compare **9:6, 48:22, 54:10**.
 ‘stripes’: lacerations laid open and weeping.
 ‘healed’: compare **30:26**—complete healing and restoration, as on that bright day.
- 6 ‘like sheep’: in danger without a shepherd, unable to provide for themselves, perversely lost and wandering.
 ‘laid’: the same word as ‘intercession’ in **53:12**, indicating a meeting point, where here God causes all the converging lines of our iniquity to meet in him, and there he engages with all that limits and deforms our lives. Thus is full satisfaction made and accepted by God.
- 53:7–9** ‘Now...we stand on a very sacred spot indeed, within the Servant’s own consciousness, and we see him, not caught in a web of events, but masterfully deciding, accepting and submitting.’ The emphasis here is on ‘the clear-headed, self-restraining voluntariness with which the Servant approached and accepted what happened’ (Motyer).
- 7 The servant is led out to die. Lambs go to the slaughter and sheep submit to shearing without properly knowing what is happening to them—they blindly and dumbly end up going along with it. The servant’s silence in the face of unjust violence and undeserved suffering here is not of this order. He fully knows what he is undergoing, and willingly submits to it.
 Lambs and other animals were designated by God as substitutes for the offerers in the sacrifices of the Old Testament. They were to be without blemish, and they were accepted by God as holy and effective for bringing the forgiveness, cleansing, peace and fellowship promised by God into the lives of the offerers. But sin is more than just unfortunate failure or moral deficiency, which may be pitied or excused. At heart it is wilful rebellion, which must be confronted and completely turned around, if there is to be any future. This was the true meaning of the Old Testament sacrifices (see Psalm 40:6–8). This was the one thing animals could not supply. ‘Only a consenting will can substitute for a rebellious will’ (Motyer). Isaiah knew in his own person the power of substitutionary sacrifice to bring cleansing and enablement—it was a burning coal from the altar where the sacrifices were offered that brought him freedom from guilt and forgiveness of sin (**6:5–8**). It took a bold leap for an Old Testament person, however, to see that animal sacrifices could never actually deal with sin at its heart (Hebrews 10:4: ‘it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could ever take away sin’), but could only ever point to a greater and all-sufficient sacrifice. Perhaps the suffering Isaiah himself underwent on behalf of his people when given this message (**6:5, 10–13**) prepared him for the revelation that he now imparts. In these verses, ‘Old Testament and biblical soteriology reaches its climax’ (Motyer).
 ‘oppressed’: denotes physical brutality.
 ‘he was afflicted’: literally means he held himself humbly submissive to this treatment—an act of great power, not of weakness.

- 8** The servant is executed. As in **53:1–3**, his contemporaries gave no consideration to him in his sufferings and demise, or to the possibility that it was on their account—for their sins, not any of his own—that he was receiving this fatal blow. ‘my people’: Isaiah’s own identification with God’s people in their uncleanness (**6:5**) matches the anguished identification of God Himself in the action of the servant.
- 9** The servant is buried. There is a mystery surrounding the undeserved death of this one: he is treated as one of the wicked, yet is honoured in his death as a person of wealth and power. This matches the contrast between exaltation and abhorrence in **52:13–14**, and relates to the astounding revelation of **52:15, 53:4–6**. The fulfilment of these details in the death of Jesus (Luke 22:37, 23:32–33, Matthew 27:57–60) is another pointer to him as the true Servant of the Lord. ‘in his death’: literally, ‘deaths’. Why the plural? Could it be an indication that the death he died was not just his own, but also was rightfully the death of the ‘many’ (as in 2 Corinthians 5:14)? There is a Hebrew idiom where the plural denotes greatness or magnification, as in our expression ‘I nearly died a thousand deaths’. It certainly indicates that this was no ordinary death, but one of great stature and significance. ‘no violence...no deceit in his mouth’: the total absence of any physical manipulation (contrast **30:12**), or of ‘unclean lips’ which give vent and expression to the deceit and filth within (e.g. **6:5, 29:13**, Matthew 15:18–19), qualifies this one well to be the true substitute for sinners.
- 10–12** These final verses on the servant gather together all the themes of this song, especially those in **52:13–14** (the exaltation–suffering–revelation) and **53:4–6** (the sin-bearing, healing sacrifice). Verse **10** is a prophetic interpretive report, and in verses **11** and **12** the voice of the Lord Himself pronounces upon the work and worthiness of His servant.
- 10** This verse is bracketed at both ends by ‘the will of the LORD’: first in bringing the servant to this suffering, and then the servant, on account of it, being the one to whom it is given to carry through the will of the Lord. ‘it was the will of the LORD to bruise him...put him to grief’: literally, ‘It was the LORD who willed/delighted/was pleased to bring him to weakness by crushing him.’ This emphasises that above all this was an action of God Himself (compare Mark 14:27, Acts 2:23, Romans 8:3–4, 2 Corinthians 5:21). Not that God’s delight is in inflicting this, but in being able to provide this one who is capable of bearing purely and in love this necessary infliction on behalf of the many. ‘when he makes himself’: the Hebrew is: ‘You make his soul’. There are various possibilities of meaning, each one enlightening, depending on who the ‘you’ refers to: (1) God delights to put His servant in place as the full and satisfactory offering; (2) the servant willingly puts forward his own very being to carry out this work; (3) the individual addressed appropriates the servant’s offering as being for himself or herself, and enters into its benefits. Perhaps Isaiah left it deliberately ambiguous to include all three. ‘an offering for sin’: see Leviticus 5:14–19, where atonement and reparation is made for offences against God and fellow-humans, by both dealing with sin and bringing into acceptance and righteousness. ‘he shall see his offspring’: compare **49:21, 54:1–3, 13**: ‘we stray as sheep (6), we return as children’ (Motyer).

‘he shall prolong his days’: for one who has been ‘cut off out of the land of the living’ (verses **8, 9**) and who ‘poured out his soul to death’ (verse **12**) this must necessarily entail resurrection from death.

‘the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand’: in contrast to the departed rulers in **14:9–17**, mere powerless shadows of their former selves, this one in full-blooded sovereignty has in hand the execution of God’s purposeful will in seeing that the full number of the family is gathered in, against all opposition (compare 1 Corinthians 15:20–28).

11 This family, fully gathered to the Father, is ‘the fruit of the travail of his soul’—it is complete, and thoroughly satisfying, to put it mildly.

‘knowledge’: to be able to do this saving work of God, the servant has needed to know the will of the Lord concerning sin and sinners, and how to carry it through.

‘the righteous one’: fully acceptable to the holy God whom our sins have offended.

‘my servant’: fittingly appointed by God to this task.

‘make many to be accounted righteous’: literally ‘provide righteousness for’, i.e. to clothe them in his own righteousness, so that they participate in his own perfect acceptability before God. This is the achievable goal.

‘bear their iniquities’: the means to the goal, the righteousness that is provided through the bearing and removal of sin.

12 ‘I will divide him a portion with the great...he shall divide the spoil with the strong’: suggests the servant ends up as one among others. A better and more appropriate translation is: ‘I will apportion to him the many’—that is, all the redeemed children will be his—‘and he will apportion the strong as spoil’—i.e. the ‘kings’ and rulers silenced by his action in **52:15** will be at his disposal.

‘because’: the qualifications of the servant amply fit him for this high position: he voluntarily ‘poured out his soul to death’, he personally identified himself with the transgressors, he shouldered their sin and its full entail in his own body, and thus became the one who ‘made intercession’ (see on verse **6**), that is, the one who has interposed himself to become the meeting between sinful offenders and the intimate presence of the offended God, with no barrier remaining (see Mark 15:38, Ephesians 2:14–18).

54:1–17 The immediate outcome of God’s saving work through the servant is proclaimed to all in terms of a family (verses 1–5), a marriage (**6–10**), and a city (**11–17**). These are all taken up in the Book of Revelation as the outcome of the work of the Lamb (Revelation 7, 19, 21). The emphasis here is all on response and readiness to receive a finished work that has been accomplished by Another.

1 This picks up the matter of the ‘offspring’ in **53:10**. Reference to the ‘barren’ and ‘desolate’ nature of this woman indicate her incapability of having children. Compare Sarah in Genesis 15–18. This means that the great number of children born to her (the ‘many’ of **52:14, 53:11, 12**, are now the ‘more’ of **54:1**) could not be by natural means, but by a supernatural act of God (compare John 1:12–13).

2–3 ‘enlarge...stretch out...lengthen...spread abroad’: this ‘tent’ imagery harks back to the early days of Israel’s history, and beyond. In Genesis 9:27 it was envisaged that descendants of Shem would need to extend their tent to make room for nations descended from Japheth. This is consistent with the promise made to the

patriarch Jacob/Israel in Genesis 28:14. Readiness for this enlarging is to be made on the confident basis of a promise of God.

‘strengthen’: the ‘tent’ is not only enlarged, but also secured.

‘possess the nations’: the promise made to the Messiah in Psalm 2:8 is borne out in **53:12**, and becomes the heritage of the children he has brought to birth (compare Genesis 22:17, Revelation 2:26–27).

‘desolate cities’: remember ‘the city of chaos’ in **24:10, 12**.

4 This outcome is sure, because the shameful past has been completely dealt with and put away.

5 All this is from the Lord, who has remained faithful through all to His nature and role as Creator-Redeemer, in a permanent relationship deliberately chosen and carried through as Husband of His people (compare Jeremiah 2:1–3, and Hosea 3:1).

‘God of the whole earth’: not just a name, but a practical reality, pertaining to One who can effect such a deliverance against such odds.

6–10 The background to the ‘wife’ motif is **50:1–3**, where the ‘mother’ was put away from her husband on account of her ‘iniquities’ and ‘transgressions’. These have no mention or remembrance here: they have been taken away, and the separation has been revoked, through the action of the servant. His bearing of our iniquities and of their chastisement that makes our peace (**53:5**) now has brought us into an unshakeable ‘covenant of peace’.

7–9 A settled change has now taken place with God and in God, by which His forsaking has been reconciled in His great compassion, and His wrath and anger worked through and laid to rest in His everlasting love and faithfulness. So peace and reconciliation has really been made through what was laid in the servant, that he willingly bore. This is personal, and passionate.

‘days of Noah...waters of Noah’: both should read ‘waters’ of Noah, i.e. the judgment that came on a world full of evil and violence. The justice effected in the sufferings of the servant is such that anger and rebuke no longer have any place.

10 ‘the mountains may depart’: denotes a shaking and disordering of the whole creation, as in **24:1** (compare Psalm 46:2–3, Revelation 6:12–14).

‘covenant’: the word used elsewhere in connection with marriage (Proverbs 2:16–17, Ezekiel 16:8, 59–63, Malachi 2:13–16) is now mentioned explicitly here. Covenant has always been connected with sacrifice (Genesis 8:20–22, 9:8–17, Exodus 24:4–8, Psalm 50:5): ‘peace’ is secured by the death of the servant. This is from God Himself: to still wrath, effect reconciliation, and secure peace, out of His own heart of love.

11–17 After family, and marriage, comes the image of the city—a theme especially dear to Isaiah (see on **1:1**, also **1:26, 2:2–4, 4:2–6, 12:1–6, 24:10, 25:1–9, 26:1–6, 35:10, 47:1, 52:1, 66:10–14**, compare Revelation 21:1–22:5). This city is established in the righteousness (verse 14) secured by the servant in ,

11–12 Compare Revelation 21:9–21.

13–14 ‘taught by the LORD’: compare the servant in **50:4**, contrast **29:9–12, 42:18–20**. ‘prosperity’: literally ‘abundant peace’ (*shalom*), brought about by the chastisement of the servant in **53:5**.

‘your sons...your sons’: the family of offspring created in **53:10**.

- ‘righteousness’: the city is established in the righteousness from God secured by the servant in **53:11** which then becomes the possession of the city’s inhabitants in verse **17** (‘vindication’ is the same word).
- 15–17** The peace and righteousness secured by God for His people indicate that God no longer has any strife with His people. Attacks will still come, but they will not be from Him. God as sovereign Creator over the weapon, its manufacturer, and the one who uses it, will ensure that any attacks or accusations that now come will be to no avail.
‘servants’: a highly honoured position, for those highly qualified by God.
- 55:1–13** A favourite chapter, with a most heartening message, rich in natural imagery, inviting a personal response of one and all to all the benefits of the servant’s finished work.
- 1** A threefold ‘come’ invites the hearer to a rich feast: refreshing and life-giving water (equated with the Spirit of God in **44:3**, compare John 7:37–39, Revelation 22:17), wine of joyful celebration (as at the feast for all nations in **25:6–9**, where death and the reproach of sin has been removed), and milk (as in the promised land of Exodus 3:8). A corresponding threefold ‘Hearken...Incline your ear...hear’ in verses **2–3** shows that this has to do with hearing and receiving the word of the Lord’s salvation.
‘no money...without money and without price’: highlights the poverty and need of those who come, and the rich freedom of the provision. But the word ‘buy’ tells that this is no hand-out, but a costly transaction, fully paid for in the deep sufferings and death of the servant, and by his victory there.
- 2** Those who come have clearly been wasting their resources on what can never satisfy them: the ‘feeding on ashes’ of idolatry in **44:20**.
- 3** ‘come to me’: this hearing brings the hearers into a personal relationship with God. This is life (compare John 17:3) in the blessings of an ‘everlasting covenant’, constituted as the relationship of God in ‘steadfast sure love’ with his Messiah ‘David’ (compare Psalm 89:1–4, 33–37, 49).
- 4** This ‘David’ is a world ruler. The designation of him as a ‘witness’ (compare Revelation 1:5, 19:11-16), and the call to ‘hear’, identifies him with the servant of **49:1**, **50:4**, **10–11**, see also Psalm 18:49–50. The hearers here are invited to participate with him in his witness and world rule (compare **43:10**, also John 26–27, Romans 4:13, Revelation 1:6, 2:26–27, 5:9–10, 21:7).
- 5** ‘nations that you know not’: compare Psalm 18:43. The attraction is the Lord Himself, in the glory that He has given to His people (compare **49:7**).
- 55:6–10** A three-part call to repentance (verses **6–7**) is followed by three reasons why this call is to be trusted and heeded (**8–9**, **10–11**, **12–13**).
- 6–7** There is a season now where God has made Himself able to be found by those who turn to Him. His ‘mercy’, the love surging in His heart, is freely available. The desperate need still there will be shown in chapters **56–66**. Since ‘there is no peace for the wicked’ (**48:22**), it is necessary for the wicked to renounce their way of life, and the way of thinking that is behind it, and receive God’s objective pardon and forgiveness of sins.
- 8–9** This is not saying that God is mysteriously transcendent. It is saying that there is a great moral gulf fixed, like the vast height of the sky above the earth, between

the ways and thoughts of the holy God and the ways and thoughts of sinful humanity, (that Isaiah became aware of in **6:3, 5**, compare **55:7a**), that can only be crossed by God's atonement and our repentance.

10–11 The image of the sky above the earth is not just one of separation, but also one of blessing and fruitfulness. Both seed and harvest are brought about by rain from above: God is the Giver of all. No less is the word spoken by God (see verses **2–3**) the effective agent of all His purposes, including the bringing back of His people in repentance to Himself.

12–13 The peace and joy of a new inner relationship with God is given, in the context of a renewed creation from which the curse (Genesis 3:17–19) has been removed (compare **41:19, 65:17, 66:22**, Matthew 19:28, Romans 8:19–21, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1), shot through with allusions to the exodus and the return from captivity and exile. This new creation, peopled with transformed human beings, will be a testimony to the name and inner being of God. This will be what has been accomplished through the servant.

Chapters **56–66**, according to Alec Motyer's analysis, constitute a third part of the Book of Isaiah, focussing on an Anointed Conqueror (along with chapters **1–37**, on the King, and **38–55**, on the Servant). Again (see 'One Isaiah, or three?', page 2), there have been attempts by scholars who discount the possibility of predictive prophecy to attribute this to yet a third author or school of writers (called 'Trito-Isaiah'), dating from the period after the return from exile in 539 B.C. (whereas the original Isaiah prophesied around 700 B.C.). This in spite of the fact that, for example, **57:3–9** and **65:2–5** address issues that were extant in Isaiah's own day and not in the later period. If **56–66** relates to any particular historical period, it is after the return from exile in Babylon (see **48:20–22**), addressed to those who are in a position to benefit from the servant's ministry, who are accounted righteous (**53:11**) and are secure against accusation and attack (**54:17**). But by now Isaiah has left far behind specific references, such as those to Ahaz in **7:1**, or to Egypt in **31:1**, or to Babylon in **43:14**. Isaiah is now dealing with broad principles that apply across the whole sweep of God's salvation-history, while still being rooted in contemporary issues of his day. As such, it remains very pertinent to our own situation today.

These final chapters can be divided into three main sections. **56:1–59:13** sees the need for the redeemed people to be rescued from ever-present sin and failure and from the still persisting attacks of their enemies, as they await the final outcome of their salvation. **59:14–63:6** is the Lord's personal and lone commitment to the carrying through of this salvation and its necessary accompanying vengeance. In **63:7–66:24**, God's people, on this basis, rise up to prayer, and are met with the Lord's pledge that He will do all that He has promised, through to the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth.

Does not this match our situation exactly? Who among us, who have been redeemed to God in the Servant, is not painfully aware of the continuing presence of sin, failure, and constant attack? Whom can we rely on to see us through but God Himself alone? And who is not thereby urged to earnest prayer for the ultimate consummation of God's mighty rule among all the nations, as the wonders of that coming kingdom are opened out to us more and more?

THE LORD'S PEOPLE IN SIN AND OPPOSITION 56:1–59:13

- 56:1–8** A wonderfully embracing depiction of the universal covenant people of God, brought into being through the work of the servant. While it is thoroughly inclusive, it is on the basis of a distinctive righteousness in close dependence upon God. Isaiah consistently opposed Israel's decline from this to be involved in compromising alliances with other nations (which inevitably resulted in the practices of **2:5–8**) so that the purity and wonder of Israel's life with their God could be that attraction to the nations that it was intended to be (as in **2:2–4**).
- 1** 'do righteousness...my salvation': literally 'my righteousness' (same word, *tsedaqah*). We are to be and to do as God is, as will be fully revealed (see 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 John 3:1–3).
 'deliverance': the coming of God's righteousness is accompanied by His deliverance from sin, with the wreaking of just judgement on enemies, as we shall see in this whole section.
- 2** 'does...holds...keeps': continuous persevering action (as in Mark 13:13, Revelation 2–3)
 'keeps the sabbath': not in a formal legalistic way, as in **1:13**, but as a positive reordering of the whole of life around worship and obedience to God, and so also refraining from wrong personal behaviour: 'keeps his hand from doing any evil'. The Sabbath was ever meant to be a participation by us in the nature and being and restful action of God (see Genesis 2:3, John 5:16–18).
- 3–6** The blessing in verse **2** is open to all who hold to God's righteousness and deliverance, in other words, who have faith in God in His covenant being and promises and action, and so persevere in faith and obedience. The inclusiveness of this is spelled out here with the test cases of the disfigured and unfruitful eunuch, and the non-Israelite foreigner, where the exclusion of Deuteronomy 23:1–6 (intended to safeguard the purity) is superseded by Genesis 12:1–3 and Exodus 12:48–49 (guaranteeing the inclusiveness).
- 56:5** 'in my house...within my walls': right inside, sharing in the Lord's own 'name' (compare **55:13**).
- 6** 'minister': possibly as equivalent of Levites, as in **66:21**. Not just as an official function, but in a personal loving devotion, such as Isaiah himself had come into at the altar of the Lord (in **6:7–8**).
- 8** 'outcasts of Israel': those of His people who have been far from the Lord. These are now to be joined by 'yet others', as in **49:6** (and John 10:14–16).
- 56:9–12** Suddenly we are in a very different atmosphere: leaders are indulging themselves at the expense of exercising their proper responsibilities. They think they are having the time of their lives, feasting away. But God has already called the wild beasts to feast—on them!
- 9** 'beasts': recalls the desolation under judgment of the 'No Kingdom There' in **34:8–17** (compare Ezekiel 39:17–20, **66:24**).
- 10–11** The leaders are ignorantly unfit for their position: they 'do not know' satisfaction or discernment, they have nothing to say, and they lie down on the job. Nevertheless, they continue to devour resources, with nothing to show for it except their own advantage. These who are meant to be watchful 'shepherds',

- guarding and caring for the flock, end up no better than ‘dogs’, looking after and caring for themselves.
- 12** They console themselves with drinking wine, and thinking all is well. Their ‘Come’ has already been ominously fore-echoed by God’s own invitation to the beasts in verse **9**.
So the present reality is still a far cry from what is to be according to God’s redemptive purpose in **56:1–8**, and the needs are very great.
- 57:1–21** Having looked at the leadership in **56:9–12**, we now look at the people, where the oppressed righteous (verses **1–2**) are seen in the context of the adultery and prostitution of the people’s idolatrous unfaithfulness to God (**3–13**). This is contrasted with the God’s gathering of His people to Himself (**13–19**), and the restlessness of the wicked (**20–21**). The servant has come, with the forgiveness of sins, but the situation of wrong, error, evil and continuing oppression call for specific acts of judgement and deliverance by God. These are the very sins that were extant in Isaiah’s own day, as seen in the earlier part of the book, and do not need the postulation of a later post-exile ‘Trito-Isaiah’ to explain them.
- 1–2** Just as the servant suffered and no one cared or considered him (**53:8**), so the ‘righteous’ (or justified) person (singular) and the ‘devout’ people (plural) of God’s steadfast covenant-love now suffer without regard. Through their death or disappearance, however, they are actually being taken away from calamity before it comes, into blessedness and peace. So death has no terror for them, such is God’s care for them in their uprightness.
- 3–5** 1 Kings 14:23–24 tells of how the people of Judah indulged in the local Canaanite idolatrous fertility practices of ritual prostitution and sacrifice of children from the time of Rehoboam the son of Solomon. In Isaiah’s time those who practiced these things were officially encouraged by the kings Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Kings 16:3–4, 21:3, 6). Here they are called ‘sons of the sorceress’ (engaged in the occult) and ‘offspring of the adulterer and the harlot’—unfaithful to the covenant God. When ‘the will and glory of God in worship’ is replaced by ‘the satisfaction and the excitement of the worshipper’ (Motyer, p. 472), then we are far gone.
- 6–13** The people here are envisaged as the prostitute herself. She ends up giving herself to the equivalent of eroded misshapen slippery rocks in the deep creek-bed. For she blatantly solicits custom publicly, under the guise of true religion (see ‘doorposts’ in Deuteronomy 6:9), just as Judah sought to form illicit military liaisons with the kings of Assyria and Egypt (e.g. Ahaz in 2 Kings 16:7), against the only true security of trusting the covenant God, and sought to strengthen themselves from their own resources. God’s forbearance only resulted in their forgetfulness and lack of holy fear (compare Psalm 50:21, Ecclesiastes 8:11), but when God’s judgment comes, their ‘collection’ (the word ‘idols’ is not mentioned) will not be able to stop them from being blown away.
- 13–19** By contrast, those who by faith take refuge in the true security that is God and His covenant-promises will abide in their true home and come into the presence of God. This is the same ‘high and lifted up’ holy God that Isaiah saw in **6:1–5**, who dwells eternally, but who is not compromised in order for this to happen, but who by some unexplained action of His own being comes to the end of his anger and brings people to new life, healing, comfort and peace.

- 20–21** Meanwhile (compare **48:22**) there is no such peace or rest for the unjustified wicked—only the churning up of their defilement.
- 58:1–14** An exposure of false religion. To understand this, we need to understand the nature and place of the Sabbath in God’s scheme of things (see verses **13–14**). The sabbath rest, of one day in every seven, is given by God as part of the creational mandate (Genesis 2:2–3, Exodus 16:22–30), and in the ten commandments is linked with participation in the holy blessing of God’s own restful perfection (Exodus 20:8–11), and with participation in God’s liberation of the oppressed (Deuteronomy 5:12–15). These two things go together, and lie at the heart of true religion.
- 1** A clarion call is to go out from the prophet to make God’s people aware of their sins.
- 2** It is not as if the people are not religious—they are very much so, and to all appearances rightly so.
- 3–4** Especially are they assiduous in the matter of fasting and self-deprivation, even though there was only one fast day a year prescribed by the law—the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:31, 23:26–32). Here it becomes evident what the underlying motivation for all this religious activity is: not to gladly obey God in a faith-relationship with Him, but by human actions to seek to put pressure on the deity for the advantage of the worshipper. This was the pattern of Canaanite worship, and of all idolatry. Being self-centred rather than other-centred, this inevitably issues in conflict, and has nothing to do with truly calling upon God.
- 58:5** This becomes as formalistic and mechanical as a reed being blown up and down in the wind, and cannot be pleasing to God.
- 6–7** In keeping with God’s own being and action, the sabbath-principle of liberating the oppressed is affirmed, both as broad long-term social policy, and as caring actions that can be carried through immediately, even with members of one’s own family.
- 8–9** This will result in light and healing out of darkness and infirmity, with God’s own righteousness and glory as an all-surrounding protection. and a direct and obliging relationship with God.
- 9–12** Similarly, if this pure social conscience, given full-bodied and costly expression, is accompanied by the removal of all personally obnoxious habits of putting undue pressure on other people, accusation, and malicious gossip, then out of the darkness of confusion and perplexity will come clear guidance, provision and restoration.
- 13–14** The observance of the sabbath is thus affirmed, not as an obligation, not as yet another way of surreptitiously bringing pressure on God by our own action to bring about our own advantage, but as a way of honouring and delighting in God’s will, and in His own person, in keeping with the stature and authority and dignity God ever intended for human beings, and promised to the covenant-descendants of Jacob.
- 59:1–13** A detailing of the transgressions and sins declared in **58:1**: accusations (**1–4**) and description (**5–8**) give rise to confession on the part of those who see and acknowledge their sin (**9–13**).
- 1–2** **58:2–3** made it clear that the religion of the people, assiduous as it was, was a perverse attempt to put pressure on God for the advantage of the worshipper.

- Their wonderings about why this has not ‘worked’ are answered here. It is not that the Lord was unable to act or to hear, but that such self-seeking sin not only unnaturally separates the sinner from God and His ways, but also the offended God personally refuses to show Himself or listen as long as this situation obtains.
- 3–4** The personal defilement of false and sinful actions and words that do harm to others renders them unfit for converse with God, and gives rise to the perverse and hollow public actions that inevitably come from a corrupted heart that is set against trusting the Lord.
- 5–8** The address now turns from ‘you’ in the plural to ‘they’, as the unreliability and destructiveness of such thoughts and actions are exposed. ‘Adders’ eggs’ and ‘the spider’s web’ represent the best that our sinful efforts can provide (see Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Strong as the Sun*, (1994) and *Ah, Strong, Strong Love!* (1993), published by NCPI). For those intent on evil, twisting their own paths, bringing breakdown of order and community relationships, there can never be any peace (compare **48:22, 57:20–21**).
- 9–13** It is ‘we’ who now speak, as Isaiah and those with him once again speak with and for the people (compare **6:5, 53:6**) in repentance for sin.
- 9–10** The darkness is not only the refusal and absence of God’s light (see **2:5, 9:2, 30:26, 42:6, 49:6**), but the sin-engendered blindness and lack of vision that can only be healed by divine intervention.
- 11** The bitter growling at injustice and the deep moaning over the world’s desperate and helpless situation, longing for God’s action, corresponds with the groaning of the Lord Jesus (Mark 7:34, John 11:38), the groanings of a creation dogged by futility, that the redeemed feel within themselves (Romans 8:22–23) and the saving-interceding groanings of the Spirit of God within the believer’s heart (Romans 8:26).
- 12–13** Personal guilt is fully and openly acknowledged, in terms that do not draw back from the inner and outer heinousness of sin.

THE ANOINTED CONQUEROR COMES—59:14–63:6

The foregoing account of the dire condition of the Lord’s world-wide people, attacked by enemies and helpless in sin, sets the scene for the Lord to act who alone can bring salvation to the Lord’s people and vengeance on their enemies. This happens in the appearance of an individual, whose four songs (**59:21, 61:1–3, 61:10–62:7** and **63:1–6**) parallel those of the servant in the previous section (**42:1–9, 49:1–13, 50:4–11, 52:13–53:12**). Each of these songs is followed by an oracle on the coming glory of Zion, as the goal of the anointed conqueror’s work.

- 59:14–20** The personal intervention of the Lord into a helpless situation to bring salvation and just retribution.
- 14–15b** Summary of the situation reached in the preceding passage of the complete moral collapse of justice and truth in public and private life, which leaves no quarter for those who are upright, but rather endangers them.
- 15c–17** We see here God’s personal displeasure and abhorrence at sin, and His recognition of our helplessness in it. The putting-on of His clothing and armour for battle is the showing-forth of who He is within Himself, and his determination and ability to act accordingly.

- ‘intervene’: means to interpose Himself between us and the entail of our moral collapse.
- 18** The day of reckoning that must come between God and those who persist in remaining opposed to Him is here carried through, to the ends of the earth.
- 19** The dominant evil and injustice of **59:14–15b** is thereby replaced with the fear of the Lord, which issues in joyful obedience.
‘for he will come like a rushing stream which the wind of the Lord drives’: an alternative translation could be: ‘When an adversary comes streaming in, the Spirit of the Lord lifts a banner against him’.
- 20** This happens as the Lord comes as Deliverer to embattled Zion, for the vindication of those whose hearts and lives are towards Him.
- 59:21** The first song of the anointed conqueror. At the heart of God’s commitment is His covenant, promised to ‘them’ (plural), and at the centre of this covenant is one whom the Lord calls ‘you’ (singular), who has ‘children’ for whom this covenant is secured. Immediately we think of the likeness of this one to the servant (see covenant references in **42:6**, **49:8**, **54:10** and **55:3**, and **53:10** for the servant’s ‘offspring’). As with the servant (see **42:1–4**, **49:1–2**, **50:4**), here the Spirit is given for a ministry of the word that brings deep comfort.
‘says the LORD’ (said twice): secures the promise with strong emphasis.
- 60:1–22** After this introduction of the anointed conqueror comes a vision of the outcome of his work in terms of a renewed and glorified city to which the nations are drawn (compare **2:2–3**, **35:10**, **45:14**, **19:23–25**, **27:12–13**). In fulfilment of the covenant promise to Abraham and Israel (Genesis 12:3, 27:29), the destiny of the nations now depends upon their response to what God has done among His people (verse 12).
- 1–3** The ‘glory of the LORD’, in His coming to Zion as Redeemer to all who repent, and His placing in their midst the covenant mediator who imparts God’s word and Spirit, becomes ‘your light’: not just that which shines on you, but that which shines from you (compare 2 Corinthians 3:18). This evident work of God in the midst of His people will be what attracts the nations out of their all-pervading darkness, in answer to the invitation in **55:1**. Thus through His chosen people God effects what has ever been His purpose for the whole world.
‘nations...kings’: compare **49:7**, **52:15**.
- 4–5** As in **49:17–23**, this is the response of God’s people to this marvellous influx. Neither distance, nor inability to walk, nor even the oceans, will be an obstacle to this world-wide gathering. Those who come will bring their treasures (compare Revelation 21:24–26), even from ‘the sea’, which may represent all that has been traditionally opposed to God (see **51:10**, Psalm 93).
- 60:6–7** An evocative listing of names of far-flung countries, some formerly enemies of Israel, highlight the streaming of the nations into the city, now bearing acceptable offerings of gold, incense, and sacrificial animals for the worship of God in the temple. The arrival of foreigners from the east with similar gifts at the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:1–12) is a sign of the fulfilment of this prophecy (though no ‘camels’ are mentioned in Matthew!).
- 8–9** If ‘Tarshish’ is indeed in Spain, then from the west as well as the east, from the farthest reaches of ‘the coastlands’ (compare **42:4**) across the seas, these nations will come, as instinctively as homing pigeons. But this is to nothing less than the

- character of God in His holiness and His redeeming and glorifying action (which would mean the letting-go of all that is not that).
- 10–14** On each side of the key verse **12** (see above), the foreigners participate as full citizens, serving in the building up of the city (**10–11**) and submissive in the beautifying of the sanctuary where God dwells in His holiness.
 ‘wrath...favour...mercy’: the attraction is because this city is the one place where the wrath of God that is on the whole sinful human race has been turned to grace and forgiveness.
 ‘Your gates shall be open’: compare Revelation 21:24–27.
- 15–18** Two contrasts denote the change that will occur in the inward and outward condition of God’s people: from abandonment and enmity to honoured and intimate fellowship in the knowledge of God, and from base adornment to that which is highly prized, as oppressive and destructive leadership is transformed to that which makes for peace and righteousness that matches God’s own, in the dependable security of God’s salvation that gives rise to the responsive activity of praise.
- 19–22** Compare Revelation 21:23, 22:5. The fitful coming and going of sun and moon are replaced by the constant beautifying splendour of God’s presence.
 ‘days of mourning’: compare Revelation 7:15–17, 21:3–4.
 ‘righteous...my planting’: anticipating **61:3**. The making, choosing and placing of God’s people in this great company are all the work of God.
 ‘The least one shall become a clan’: compare Leviticus 26:8, a reversal of **30:17**.
 ‘hasten’: may also mean ‘enjoy’, expressing God’s delight in the joy He has brought us to.
- 61:1–4** The second song of the anointed conqueror. As in the second servant song (**49:1–6**), he himself speaks of the ministry God has given him. This entails both the ‘favour’ and ‘vengeance’ of God (verse **2**), as undertaken by God Himself in **59:15–20**. This engagement by the anointed one in the action of God Himself is significant. As in **59:21**, he comes with both the Spirit and the word (verse **1**). These are the words Jesus applied to himself in Luke 4:16–21. As this was at the beginning of his ministry, when he had come to make known the action of salvation, prior to the day of judgement, there he stopped when he got to ‘the LORD’s favour’. His personal engagement with ‘the day of vengeance’ (on the cross) and its final outworking on all who would not take refuge in him, were yet to come.
- 1** ‘the Lord GOD’: asserting the sovereignty of the God who revealed Himself at the time of the Exodus as YHWH, who rescues His people and destroys their enemies.
 ‘broken-hearted...captives’: those suffering from inner or outward oppression.
- 2** ‘the year of the LORD’s favour’: the jubilee of release, see Leviticus 25:10. The ‘year’ as an extended period is contrasted with the ‘day’ of what is quickly done and finished.
- 3** ‘those who mourn’: could be general sadness, but **57:18** makes it more likely to be those who grieve over sin in repentance, who are brought into release and joy.
 ‘ashes’ and ‘garland’ use the same letters in Hebrew: there is a direct substitution.
 ‘oil of gladness’: a sign of refreshed gladness (as in Psalm 23:5); in Psalm 45:7 an attribute of the king (Messiah) himself.
 ‘mantle’: that which totally envelops the wearer.

- ‘oaks of righteousness’: see on **60:21**. Literally ‘big trees’, under which false religion was practised, now transplanted in God’s holy place of true worship, participating in His own active being.
- 61:4** The rebuilding of Jerusalem on return from exile in Babylon is used as a picture of recovery from the ravages of sin and restoration to our God-intended state in the taking up of possession and residence in God’s kingdom.
- 61:5–9** As in what follows the second servant song (**49:7–12**), here is an affirmation by God of the anointed one’s work, in terms of the nations coming under the rule of God and His people (verses **5–7**), and of God’s commitment to the covenant of His own being (**8–9**).
- 5–7** ‘priests’: a fulfilment of Exodus 19:6, which indicates the relationship of Israel to the other nations (see numbers 18, compare Romans 15:27), and looks towards **66:21**, 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6, where those of all nations exercise this ministry towards God with respect to the whole of creation.
- 7** Has a mixture of ‘you’ and ‘they’, ‘their’ and ‘theirs’ in Hebrew, which some translations attempt to harmonise, but which are probably better left as they are, as God speaks for Himself with regard to His people.
- 8** ‘robbery and wrong’: literally ‘robbery with a burnt offering’, i.e. holding back something of what is to be totally devoted to God, when God has devoted Himself totally to us, with no half measures, in His ‘everlasting covenant’.
- 9** This will make such a transforming difference to the people that, in this ‘year of favour’ before the ‘day of vengeance’, they will be so obviously blessed by God as to be an attraction to all who acknowledge God’s action in their midst.
- 61:10–62:7** This third song of the anointed conqueror, like the third servant song (**50:4–9**), focuses on his commitment to God’s cause of salvation and righteousness. It looks towards what will be achieved.
- 61:10–11** In **59:16–17**, The Lord Himself wore these garments of salvation towards us and righteousness in keeping with God’s own being. Now they are entrusted to this one, who wears them to great effect. Not this time as garments of battle, but most strikingly as wedding garments, denoting a covenant action (compare **61:8**), referred to again in **62:4–5**.
The ‘garland’ that the bridegroom wears is in fact a priestly head-dress. The marriage is a holy relationship, with ramifications for the relationship of the whole earth to God.
Spontaneously, according to God’s own nature, and in a cultivated way, according to His assiduous care, is produced the fruit of God’s righteousness in the salvation of a people who testify to His praise (compare **43:21**).
- 62:1–3** This one is committed to unceasing prayer and sustained action to see the blazing brilliance of God’s salvation in His people evident to all the earth, with a new name signifying their new nature and new potential. God’s people are God’s ‘crown’ and ‘diadem’: not worn by Him, but held (kept and protected) in His hand, as the sign that He is King in all the earth.
- 4–5** This new name of ‘My delight is in her’ and ‘Married’ will replace the former appellations of ‘Forsaken’ and ‘Desolate’, as the Lord’s relationship with His people is described again in terms of a wedding and the ensuing honeymoon and life together.

- 6–7** Just as the anointed one himself engaged in unceasing prayer and action, so now he appoints those with him to be with him in this. God has built in to the way He operates that prayer on our part should be an indispensable ingredient in His saving action (compare Revelation 5:8, 8:3–5). Those who pray in this way are the true active guardians of God’s people and purposes (see Luke 2:36–38, 21:36). This praying is to be persistent, day and night, unrelenting, pressing upon God to fulfil His promises right up to the time that it happens. The establishing of Jerusalem as a ‘praise’ in all the earth is the saving of the world.
- 62:8–12** In confirmation of the anointed one’s ministry, God makes an undertaking and issues a summons.
- 8–9** For those used to frequent devastating invasions (such as in Judges 6:1–4), as the people were in Isaiah’s time, this would come as welcome security. Such invasions were an inherent part of the operation of the covenant when this was contravened (see Leviticus 26:16). But now the curse has been removed, and the people are able to feast and celebrate with God, not just in a token way with the first-fruits and peace offerings (as in Deuteronomy 26:1–11 and Leviticus 7:11–15), but as a permanent way of life in God’s presence, encompassing the entire harvest and the whole of life.
- 10–12** The way is clear and unmistakable for the world pilgrims to come in and be welcomed by the inhabitants of Zion as co-redeemed and holy to the Lord, who as their next-of-kin has settled all their debts (compare **35:10**). The message that goes out is that this anointed one is the earth’s salvation in person, bearing with him the full price and fruit of his work, that was previously (**40:10**) in the hand of the Lord (see John 5:22: all jurisdiction given to the Son by the Father). All this is the action of God, who has done all that was necessary to seek out His people and ensure that they would never be alone or abandoned.
- 63:1–6** The fourth and final song of the anointed conqueror, announcing his victory, and his personal involvement in that, of battling with and putting down the resisting powers of evil. Here is the fulfilment of the Lord’s own undertaking in **59:15–19** to come with rescue and retribution (see also **61:2**). We have seen the anointed one’s ministry of relational vindication towards the redeemed. Here the focus is on the day of judgement. We may recoil at this sobering outcome, but we do well to leave it in the lord’s hands. In the wrath of holy love it may not be otherwise, as long as there is entrenched resistance to the reign of grace. Consistently in the New Testament also (see e.g. Matthew 25:46, Revelation 6:15–17, 14:17–20, 19:15), there cannot be a year of salvation without the day of judgement. This, unlike the first three songs, is not followed by a separate prophecy on the coming glory of Zion. This part is played by the rest of the book, which is the third and final part of this section.
- 63:1** The message has gone out that God’s salvation is coming in person, but as in **52:8, 10, 13, 53:1**, the figure that appears is unexpected and unrecognisable. The country of ‘Edom’ (‘red’) and its city of ‘Bozrah’ (‘vintage’) are by now symbols of those who are determined to the end in their resistance to God and His love (see chapter **34**). The watchmen see one striding in vivid array and undiminished strength, more than equal to the task, ‘announcing vindication, mighty to save’.
- 2–3** It is told them that the deep stain on his garments is the defiled blood of those who have been trodden under foot in his just and personal anger and wrath, as he

has executed the judgement in solitary aloneness (as in **59:16**). Here we see that the work of 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 is no sanitised detachment, but a profound engagement in the murky contest (see also Revelation 19:11–21). Yet he himself remains glorious in his righteousness (verse **1**).

4–6 The full story is told, from a heart of fierce love.

‘the year of my redemption’ could mean ‘the year of my redeemed’: this action is for those who have already been redeemed; it is not the action that makes them so, which has already been carried through by the servant. As in **59:16–17**, the anointed conqueror is personally appalled at the horror of unrepentant sin, and is alone in his dealing with it.

‘I made them drunk in my wrath’: compare **51:17, 21–22**.

‘I poured out their lifeblood on the earth’: so that it could not be retrieved. The work of judgement is finished and complete.

THE PEOPLE PRAY, AND THE LORD PROMISES A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH—63:7–66:24

In the light of the promised intervention of the anointed conqueror in **59:14–63:6**, the people are emboldened to pray, as he has appointed them to (**62:6–7**), according to his own prayer (**62:1**), and God responds in the sureness of the promises made according to His own being and action.

63:7–64:12 These are the words of one who has been placed on the walls as a watchman to ‘put the LORD in remembrance’ (**62:6**), for ‘I will recount’ in **63:7** is the same word, literally ‘I will put in remembrance’. The basis of all prayer in the being and known action of God (**63:7–14**) is followed by a prayer of confession and intercession (**63:15–64:12**).

63:7 Bracketed by references to God’s ‘steadfast love’ (in the plural: all-embracing and never-failing, in abundance), are the setting-forth of God’s ‘praises’ (praiseworthy actions), ‘goodness...granted’ (provision for all needs), and His heart-felt ‘mercy’ or compassion (as in **54:7–8**).

8–9 Harking back to the time of the Exodus, God’s choice and election of His people as His own children (Exodus 4:22, 6:7), and His saving of them through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:30) are rehearsed. God being their Father also entails Him as being their Kinsman-Redeemer, as in **63:16**. God’s expectation of them that they would be faithful was to be bitterly disappointed (verse **10**). Nevertheless He identified Himself with them even in their great distress: ‘in all their affliction he was afflicted’ appears to be the better translation (rather than ‘he did not afflict’). ‘the angel of his presence’: a revelation in saving action of God Himself. See Exodus 3:2, 23:20–23, 32:24, 33:2, 14, and Genesis 48:16.

‘lifted them up and carried them’: emphasises the totality of God’s action towards us.

10 The people’s deliberate and hurtful rebellion against this holy and personal heart of God places them in a position of enmity against God, and God in a position of active enmity against them (compare Ephesians 4:30). This is indeed a perilous and apparently intractable situation.

11 In the midst of God’s hostile actions comes the sudden remembrance of His own faithfulness to Moses and his people (as in verse **8**, see also Exodus 2:24). The

words that follow, to the end of verse **14**, would appear to be God's own recollection.

'shepherds': Moses and Aaron (as in Psalm 77:19–20).

'in the midst of them his holy Spirit': perhaps a reference to the presence of God in the tabernacle (see Exodus 29:44–46).

12–14 The passing through the Red Sea, the crossing of the wilderness, and entry to the promised land, beautifully depicted with images of horse and cattle, and the protective and effective leading of God's Spirit.

'a glorious name': Moses and the prophets, as interceders, were well aware that God had staked His reputation on the outcome of His actions with His people Israel, and that if they were no more, there would be no witness to God's 'name', the glory of His being and action.

15 On this basis of who God is, towards such a recalcitrant people, the one who prays speaks now to God in words reminiscent of those used by Solomon in his great covenant prayer at the dedication of the temple (see 1 Kings 8:30).

'holy and glorious habitation': the unimaginable moral and relational splendour of the dimension inhabited by such a God.

'zeal and might': God's determination and ability to carry through His promises.

'withheld': in spite of the people's terrible apostasy and sin, nevertheless the remedy lies with God alone. It is nothing in them that prevents God's compassion and yearning heart from coming into operation, but God's own withholding of them according to the way He operates. On this basis, then, God can be appealed to for a change of action.

16 Not that the people have anything of their own that can commend them. Even their founding patriarchs Abraham and Jacob would disown them. Their hope lies only in God's continuing relationship with them, from His own Fatherhood-Redeemer-Kinship. There is that built into God's Fatherhood from before the beginning that would not let suffering children remain unredeemed but would move out in saving action (compare Matthew 7:9–11). It is to this alone that appeal is made.

63:17 Such is the offence of God's people in hardening their hearts against God, that this has now become God's judgement on them, such that they cannot now know or live in the truth (as with Pharaoh in Egypt, see Romans 9:15–18, compare **6:9–10**). Only a change and relenting on the part of God can reverse this.

'servants...heritage': reminding God of His undertaking in **54:17**.

18 The treading down by the adversaries will be matched by that of the anointed conqueror (**63:6**).

19 A full and honest confession before God of the parlous state of the people.

64:1–3 'O that you would...': reads better as 'O that you *had*...'—if only! How could You have let such a situation become as desperate as this? We may think this sounds presumptuous, but it fits with a true acknowledgment of the full sovereignty of God. There are times when we cannot see why things should have been allowed to get as bad as they have, but it is to God that these issues must be urgently directed, in giving full credence to the destructive and transforming presence of God.

4–5 The burning question is posed: given the way God is, and the persistent sinfulness of the people, is there any way that they could ever be ultimately saved? The answer is by no means a foregone conclusion. We need to know the

nature of this God, who is the only one there is, the one we are faced with: He works for those who remain in faith with Him, He has come to meet those who are glad to do right (compare the tenses of Acts 5:32: ‘the Holy Spirit whom God *has given* to those who *obey* him’), to those whose minds are conformed to God’s ways.

6–7 The unclean filth and decaying deadness of sin are fully admitted, and the casual disinterest and disinclination from which God turns away to hand over or melt down people into the consequences that await them.

8–12 The nature and relationship of God as Father (see **63:16**) is appealed to again. Only God’s consistency and faithfulness as sovereign Creator, who has owned them still as His people, can be any grounds for their hope. The events foreseen in **39:5–7** are envisaged as having already happened. Jerusalem, meant to be mirroring heaven (**63:15**) as the ‘holy and beautiful’ dwelling-place of God among His people, is desecrated and ruined. There is nothing we can do about this any more. The question must be left directed to God, and the outcome is to be entirely up to Him. As He has actively ‘withheld’ (**63:15**) His yearning heart and compassion to bring this about, will He continue to ‘restrain’ (same word) the giving of Himself to their relief and restoration? It is up to Him. That is a good place for it to be, and there is no other.

65:1-66:24 The end of chapter **64** saw the Lord’s penitent people, praying amid the ruins, awaiting God’s saving action. This final section makes it clear that is not where God is going to leave them. Throughout the book of Isaiah we have been aware of the two groups of the faithful and the perverse (see e.g. **1:27–28**, **8:11–20**). Here we see the final polarisation between the Lord’s ‘servants’ (as in **54:17**) and those who determinedly persist in compromise and apostasy, and the final outcome for each: the new heavens and the new earth, with the new Jerusalem for all nations, and the final unending judgement for the perverse.

65:1 The question of the faithful in **64:12** was whether the Lord would continue to hold back His intervention in the face of their affliction. The Lord answers by alluding first not to their immediate relief but to His all-embracing world-wide purpose. This verse, if taken with verse **2** and what follows, may be mistaken as a reference to Israel. However, in Israel there had always been those who called on God’s name or (literal Hebrew) were ‘called by my name’. Our earliest commentator, Paul the apostle, made the distinction clear in Romans 10:20, 21. thus this verse links with **66:18**, where the Lord is ‘coming to gather all nations and tongues’. The initiative and action is entirely His, unlooked-for and unasked-for by any who end up asking and seeking and finding (compare John 15:16, Acts 17:26–27). Here God is coming in Person to give Himself to them. It is for this that the servants have been preserved and secured, and is the guarantee of their deliverance.

2–7 The false religious practices described here are those which were rife in Isaiah’s own days, as in **1:10–20**, **29**. The people’s way of life comes from their wrong thinking (‘devices’), as they brazenly before God (compare Exodus 20:3) indulged in Canaanite religious practices, designed to put pressure on the deity rather than to submit in glad and holy obedience. ‘gardens’: human determination to make our own ‘Edens’, rather than be about taking God’s holy Eden to the ends of the earth (Genesis 1:28, 2:8).

‘bricks’: humanly manufactured religion (contrast Exodus 20:25, Deuteronomy 27:5–6).

‘tombs...secret places’: communing with the dead for guidance, forbidden in Deuteronomy 18:9–14, 15–22, and lone meditational exercises.

‘swine’s flesh...abominable things’: see Leviticus 11:7, 7:18.

‘Keep to yourself...I am set apart from you’: exclusivism in religion, as in Mark 7:1–5, 1 Corinthians 1:10–13, 11:18–19.

It is to these, whose unholy and rebellious actions are offensive to God, that God has been holding out His hands in a gesture of prayer. But his forbearance will come to an end if their refusal to break with the sinful past is maintained, and there will be due and final retribution.

8–10 But for the faithful the judgment (see **63:3**) will be positive, as the Lord takes up a proverb or song of the vintage, to carefully harvest and cellar His choice wine. This relates to the ‘blessing’ promised for all nations to Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3, 7, 15:7), with ‘descendants’ (Genesis 3:15, 22:17, **53:10**), who will possess permanently (contrast **63:18**) the ‘mountains’ formerly used for false worship, now transformed, like a restored ‘Sharon’ (see **33:9, 35:2**) and like ‘Achor’ (a place of harm and trouble: see Joshua 7:24–26) with all troublesomeness removed.

11–12 Meanwhile, those who have taken their chances by trying to beguile the deities of luck and fate, and, instead of being personally responsive to the personal approach of the true God, offensively provoke His distaste, will meet a destiny they look not for.

13–16 Here, side by side, are the blessed rewards of the servants and the cursed punishments of the recalcitrant:. The blessings depicted as in Genesis 22:18, **25:6, 55:1–2**, Revelation 2:17, 3:12, 14:1, and the curse in terms of pain and exclusion.

‘God of truth’: literally ‘God of Amen’ (compare 2 Corinthians 1:20), who is faithful in the keeping of all His promises, and has no place for sins and troubles now been dealt with and removed.

65:17–25 We come to the heart of this section, as the totally renewed creation that God is working towards is unveiled, in the place of all that has gone before (compare Revelation 21. This is what God has had in His mind and His heart since before He first created. God urges the people to join now in the joy that He will have in them then, with all causes of trouble and distress gone, and longevity such that a hundred-year-old person will be considered young. Familiar experiences of this life, such as building and planting, are used to describe what is indescribable in this life to come, and images of peace and security reminiscent of the Messianic world in **11:1–6** are used. Purposive fruitfulness, and intimate relational responsiveness with God, characterise this life. The only thing not changed from the old life is the curse on sin and its perpetrator the serpent, which remains in effect.

66:1–2 In the light of this, the faithful are urged to ‘be the more zealous to confirm your call and election’ (2 Peter 1:10). This begins with God affirming both His greatness and transcendence as Creator, that cannot be contained in anything that is made, and His coming to live among His people, in those who are lowly and repentant, and tremble with eagerness to carry out His word. This is not a denial of the earthly temple, but its fulfilment, in keeping with the consistent Biblical

- witness of 1 Kings 8:12–29, 2 Samuel 7:7, 1 Samuel 15:22, John 2:13–22, Acts 17:24–25, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Revelation 21:22.
- 3–4** The juxtaposition of lawful worship with sinful, meaningless, offensive or idolatrous practices (there are no words here for ‘like’) condemn the compromise by which things abominable were mixed in with the pre-exilic worship of God (see e.g. Ezekiel 8). Such ways arise from hearts set on such things as are detestable to God, but are again an evasion of direct personal responsive relationship with the holy God, and God will now bring upon them their worst fears.
- 5–6** The believers who have suffered from the worldly jibes of others (compare **28:9–10, 36:13–15**, Mark 13:9–13, John 16:2–3, 2 Peter 3:3–4) are reassured as the final recompense comes upon these enemies of God. Those who do not ‘tremble at his word’ will tremble at the coming of His judgment.
- 7–9** Assurance is given that the promised miraculous and painless birth (thus reversing the curse of the fall in Genesis 3:16), not only of a child, but of a whole land and nation (see **49:21, 53:10–11, 54:1**), will not be held back by any unwillingness or inability on God’s part, but that it will happen by His sole action (compare John 1:12–13). This is affirmed as ‘the LORD keeps saying’ and ‘the LORD has said’.
- 10–11** In the reality of this coming Jerusalem, those who love the present Jerusalem and mourn over her sins and sorry state, are to commit themselves fully to her in joyful participation in her present and anticipated benefits.
- 12–14** This is the ‘Jerusalem above’, who is ‘our mother’, of Galatians 4:25–27, Hebrews 11:10, 16, 12:22, Revelation 21. For Isaiah and his little band, living in this benighted little city in the eighth century B.C., this is an amazing vision.
- 15–17** The fire and sword of God’s holiness will bring to an end all abuse and perversion of true holiness and purity.
- 18–21** Having dealt with all such works and thoughts, the time has now come for the great gathering of God’s family (as in John 11:51–52). The Lord Himself comes and shows his glory (see John 1:14), sets a sign among them (see John 12:32–33), and sends out emissaries to the far reaches of the earth to ‘declare my glory among the nations’ (see the shorter ending of Mark 16, following verse 8). Thence will come in by any and every means, all obstacles notwithstanding, ‘your [Gentile] brethren’ from all nations, as a homely yet purified offering to God (see Romans 15:16), in which all may participate and minister.
- 22–23** This undertaking is as sure and eternal as the creation that God has ever purposed will be. And the worship (contrast **1:13**) will be constant, faithful and pure (see **58:13–14**).
- 24** Just as inevitable and on-going is the doom of those on whom the Lord’s wrath has come (see **59:18, 61:2, 63:3–4, 66:16**, compare Mark 9:43–48). Much as we may wish to set aside the doctrine of God’s wrath, as the serpent deceitfully did right at the beginning (Genesis 3:4), nevertheless, this final repelling verse in Isaiah’s prophecy convey the constant reminder that the wages of sin is terrible death. And if the glorious promises and revelations in Isaiah do not work in us the necessary faith, hope and love, then perhaps this will.